

“In the Beginning Was the Word” Apocalypse and the Education of the Soul

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Abstract

In the writings of Bahá'u'lláh the unveiling of all that lay “hidden” both within scripture and within the soul is metaphorically identified with the *húris* or “Brides of inner meaning, “who in their unveiling enact the apocalypse that John of Patmos in the Book of Revelation describes as the New Jerusalem descending as the bride apparelled to meet the bridegroom. Bahá'u'lláh enacts this union as the marriage of the Manifestation with the Maid of Heaven, who releases in the Logos or Word, viewed as masculine, its creative power, viewed as feminine. The Word as uniting within itself its masculine and feminine components acts upon the newly created soul much as the Bahá'í parents in their marriage union act upon their offspring. The relationship between the parents and child in a Bahá'í family thus becomes the human likeness of the divine marriage, which is the apocalypse of Bahá'u'lláh announced in all previous dispensations. The New Jerusalem as the metaphor of the Kingdom of God on earth resides in the mirroring in the human realm of the divine paradigm unveiled by the *húris* in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Résumé

Dans les écrits de Bahá'u'lláh, le dévoilement de tout ce qui était resté «caché», tant dans les textes sacrés que dans l'âme humaine, est représenté au plan métaphorique par les houris, ou «Épouses des significations profondes» qui, en se dévoilant, réalisent l'apocalypse que Jean de Patmos, dans le Livre de la révélation, a décrite comme la nouvelle Jérusalem descendant du ciel, parée telle une épouse allant à la rencontre de son époux. Cette union que réalise Bahá'u'lláh, le mariage de la Manifestation et de la céleste houri, libère dans le Logos (Parole), perçu comme principe masculin, sa force créatrice, perçue comme élément féminin. La Parole, unissant en elle-même son principe masculin et son principe féminin, agit sur l'âme nouvellement créée comme, dans une union bahá'íe, les parents agissent sur leur progéniture. La relation parents–enfant, dans la famille bahá'íe, constitue ainsi le pendant humain du mariage divin, représenté par l'apocalypse de Bahá'u'lláh tel qu'annoncée dans toutes les dispensations du passé. La nouvelle Jérusalem est assimilée métaphoriquement au Royaume de Dieu sur terre, en ce que le paradigme divin dévoilé par les houris dans la révélation de Bahá'u'lláh se reflète, tel un miroir, dans le règne humain.

Resumen

En los pasajes de Bahá'u'lláh, el revelar de todo lo que yacía oculto tanto dentro de los escritos religiosos como del alma, se identifica con las *húris* o “Novias de acepción rcondita,” quienes al revelarse estatuyen el apocalipsis, descrito por Juan de Patmos en el Libro de Revelación como la Nueva Jerusalén descendiendo del cielo ataviada como para encontrar al novio. Bahá'u'lláh establece esta unión como el casamiento de la Manifestación con la Doncella del Cielo, quién desata en el Logos o Palabra, de aspecto masculino, su poder creativo, considerado como femenino. La Palabra, apreciada como uniendo dentro de sí misma sus componentes masculinos y femeninos surte efecto sobre el alma nuevamente creada tal como los padres bahá'ís en su unión matrimonial surten efecto sobre su prole. El parentesco entre padres e hijos en un matrimonio bahá'í se vuelve por ende la imagen de aquel matrimonio divino, el apocalipsis de Bahá'u'lláh anunciado en todos los períodos de autoridad profética. La Nueva Jerusalén como metáfora del Reino de Dios en la tierra se halla al reflejar en el reino humano el paradigma revelado por las *húris* en la Revelación de Bahá'u'lláh.

The *hieros gamos* or inner marriage enacted in some of the tablets of Bahá'u'lláh between the Manifestation and the Maid of Heaven serves as a divine paradigm or model of Bahá'í marriage, which is itself the foundation of the new world community born of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. This article focuses upon this divine paradigm and examines Bahá'í marriage in relation to it. Needless to say, between the divine conception and the human reality falls the shadow,¹ and it is with the shadow that the human reality is perpetually confronted. Indeed, it is by virtue of this perpetual confrontation that we are brought to an unavoidable recognition of our “powerlessness” as opposed to God's “might,” and of our “poverty” as opposed to God's “wealth” (*Bahá'í Prayers* 4).

The recognition of our self-evident limitations carries within it the recognition of a reality by which we are made aware of those limitations as limitations. While we cannot of ourselves overcome those limitations that define and prescribe our human nature, we can submit to them in a creative rather than destructive way. We can offer them up to God as a genuine offering of ourselves. “O God, my God! Look not upon my hopes and my doings, nay rather look upon Thy will that hath encompassed the heavens and the earth” (*Bahá’í Prayers* 8–9) is an offering of ourselves, which contains within it not an abasement or a negation, but a desire for a reality greater than ourselves. “By Thy Most Great Name, O Thou Lord of all nations! I have desired only what Thou didst desire, and love only what Thou dost love” (*Bahá’í Prayers* 9), the Long Obligatory Prayer continues. What therefore may appear to our material nature as “calamity” is to our spiritual nature “providence.” What outwardly may appear as “fire and vengeance” is inwardly “light and mercy” (*Hidden Words* 15).

In Bahá’u’lláh’s enactment of the *hieros gamos* or inner marriage with the Maid of Heaven we are told and shown what Bahá’u’lláh “didst desire,” what Bahá’u’lláh “dost love.” More than that, we are told and shown the suffering that is not simply the consequence of being cut off from that love, but that which, by opening us to our vulnerability and need, renders us accessible to it. “The true lover yearneth for tribulation even as doth the rebel for forgiveness and the sinful for mercy” (*Hidden Words* 15).

Above all, what through “tribulation” is revealed to the “true lover” is the entire creation as the offspring of cosmogonic love. If for a single instant less than “the twinkling of an eye” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 157) this love were to be withdrawn, the entire creation would pass away. What would remain is God alone, “Veiled in [His] immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of [His] essence...” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Hidden Words* 4), contemplating a love (“I knew My love for thee”) upon which God had yet to act.

Bahá’u’lláh invites us to consider this moment: “Consider the hour at which the supreme Manifestation of God revealeth Himself unto men.” He writes:

Ere that hour cometh, the Ancient Being, Who is still unknown of men and hath not as yet given utterance to the Word of God, is Himself the All-Knower in a world devoid of any man that hath known Him. He is indeed the Creator without a creation. *For at the very moment preceding His Revelation, each and every created thing shall be made to yield up its soul to God.* (*Gleanings* 151, emphasis added)

This “very moment” between the end of an old dispensation and the inauguration of a new one, a moment, which is at once a death, a yielding up of the soul to God, and a rebirth, is registered in a manner that remains completely beyond our comprehension, even while it unconsciously conditions or accompanies all our spiritual awareness.

The gap that experientially exists between the divine and the human constitutes the soul’s oblivion of its own reality, an oblivion from which, through its turning to the Manifestation, it is gradually released as from what Bahá’u’lláh calls a “strange sleep.” Assuring us that “the creation of God embraceth worlds besides this world, and creatures apart from these creatures” (*Gleanings*, 152), Bahá’u’lláh declares that “thy spirit, having transcended the limitations of sleep and having stripped itself of all earthly attachment” can, “by the act of God,” traverse them, hidden as they are “in the innermost reality of *this* world” (152; emphasis added).

This article attempts to approach the threshold of what Bahá’u’lláh has unveiled of the divine marriage, which, but for Bahá’u’lláh, would remain “hidden.” This “realm which lieth hidden in the innermost reality of this world” is the spiritual ground of Bahá’í marriage and of all that otherwise remains concealed within it. To open up the hidden, inner dimensions of Bahá’í marriage by relating them to their divine prototype in the marriage of Bahá’u’lláh to the Maid of Heaven is the purpose of this essay. Seeking as it does to approach the divine threshold, as indeed does the seeker as “stranger,” as “transgressor,” as “lowly one,” as “poor creature” in the Long Obligatory Prayer (*Bahá’í Prayers* 10) and so many other prayers, this essay attempts, finally, to explore with all its human limitations the astonishing degree of intimacy that is possible between the individual and Bahá’u’lláh. This intimacy, it may well be argued, is, in some final apocalyptic way, even greater than the intimacy which Christ shared with his disciples, Bahá’u’lláh in his unveiling being closer to us than our “life-vein” (*Gleanings* 185).

The *Mysterium Coniunctionis*: The Mystery of Union of the Masculine and Feminine Components of the Soul
“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). In the “Prophetic Cycle” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 60) from Adam to Muhammad covering a period of some six thousand years, the Word is viewed as masculine. Religion is essentially patriarchal, and the law of primogeniture (father to son) is upheld. Jesus is described as “the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18), and the coming of Bahá’u’lláh is described within a Christian context as the Son returning “in the glory of the Father” (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 94).

At the same time, however, the masculine Word has a feminine component identified with Sophia in the Old Testament, with the heavenly *húrís* in the Qur'án, and, above all, with the Maid of Heaven in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.² Describing the function of the *húrís* or Maids of Heaven in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Bahá'u'lláh identifies them with the “inner meaning,” which is as yet “concealed within the chambers of divine wisdom!” (70). Veiling the Revelation of his own station within his defence of the station of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

How many the *húrís* of inner meaning that are as yet concealed within the chambers of divine wisdom! None hath yet approached them;— *húrís*, “whom no man nor spirit hath touched before” [Qur'án 55:56]. Notwithstanding all that hath been said, it seemeth as if not one letter of Our purpose hath been uttered, nor a single sign divulged concerning Our object. When will a faithful seeker be found who will don the garb of pilgrimage, attain the Ka'bih of the heart's desire, and, without ear or tongue, discover the mysteries of divine utterance? (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 70–71)

The *húrís* are the feminine component of the masculine Word, which, when unveiled, enact in the soul the divine union of masculine and feminine, the fully awakened soul consciously immersed in the ocean of God's presence. The function of the feminine component of the Word thus resides not in what is uttered or divulged by the prophet, but in what yet remains concealed within the Word itself. Since the object of progressive revelation as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh is the announcement of his own station as the prophet of God for this day, the role of the feminine within the Word is to carry within the progressive revelation of the prophets the potential that still remains buried or hidden within it, a potential which a “faithful seeker” can nevertheless attain as “the Ka'bih of the heart's desire” by discovering “without ear or tongue,... the mysteries of divine utterance” (as indeed all the Letters of the Living discovered the Báb) by the more immediate revelation of their own *anima* or feminine soul, personified in the Qur'án as the *húrís*, should they descend within themselves to those inner depths where the *húrís* eternally reside. By *anima*, Jung, for example, refers to the psychic energy that, like an arrow to its target, has direct access to the God image or likeness that is the core of human reality.

That which remains concealed within the masculine Word as “divine utterance” is its feminine component. According to the legends surrounding the veiled Fátimih, daughter of Muhammad, wife of the first Imam and mother of the second (daughter, wife, and mother in one), Fátimih will stand unveiled as she crosses the bridge “Sirát”³ on the Day of Judgment (Nabíl, *Dawn-Breakers* 459 n.2). Thus, in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, the unveiled Maid of Heaven may be identified with the unveiled Fátimih, whose “hidden words” are, like the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, partially unveiled in Bahá'u'lláh's revelation of *The Hidden Words*, written about 1858 on the banks of the Tigris before his public declaration. Initially, *The Hidden Words* was known to the disciples of Bahá'u'lláh as *The Hidden Words of Fátimih*. It is therefore perhaps the unveiled, rather than veiled, Fátimih who, as the Maid of Heaven, comes down in the Book of Revelation from God as New Jerusalem “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2).

In the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, the feminine component of the Word not only is unveiled but also becomes the consort or bride of Bahá'u'lláh. In this divine marriage, called in alchemy, the *mysterium coniunctionis*, the mystery of union of the masculine and feminine within the Word, Revelation culminates with the descent of the Kingdom of God to earth. The divine marriage in which the feminine soul unites with the masculine Manifestation not only raises the sexes on this earthly plane to a condition of absolute equality but also unites the planet itself into one country with all its various peoples the equal citizens of it. “And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying,” John of Patmos writes, “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” (Rev. 21:3).

The marriage metaphor that John uses to enact the Second Coming is the “marriage supper of the Lamb” to which are initially invited the “hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads” (Rev. 14:1). “Let us be glad and rejoice and give honour to him,” John hears the thunderous voice declare,

for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God. (Rev. 19:7–9)

The Bahá'ís are “they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb,” the *húrís* having unveiled in their souls the reality of Bahá'u'lláh “hidden” within the metaphorical language of scripture.

The Feminine Component of the Word: The Role of the Mother

In patriarchal creation myths, the feminine is, initially at least, identified with darkness or the void. The masculine Logos or Word penetrates this darkness as sperm penetrates the womb. Often, as in Gnosticism, the penetration of the Logos is described more as a fall than as a creation. Creation is viewed as a fall; the uncreated world, God alone in the pure contemplation of his immemorial Being and the ancient eternity of his essence, is alone perfect and good. In creating a world other than his own essence resides, for example, the Christian notion that we are conceived in sin and born in corruption, baptism enacting a symbolic and sometimes literal release from nature and the otherwise overpowering demands of the flesh.

Understood in the context of progressive revelation, this view of nature as imperfect or fallen enacts the incomplete or partial Revelation that characterizes the entire “Prophetic Cycle” from Adam to Muhammad, a cycle in which the “Eternal Truth” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 60) latent within it remained concealed. The perfection or completion of nature, that is, resides in the crowning consciousness of it, a consciousness which the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh has bestowed upon humanity as the sign of its coming of age.

The Adamic or patriarchal view of creation, in which Adam himself is identified with what Milton calls “man’s first disobedience” (*Paradise Lost* 1:1), assigns to the prophet figure an essentially sacramental role: the release of the soul from its imprisonment in matter. In this sense, the prophet, in a purely patriarchal context, affirms and perpetuates a psyche/soma (soul/body) split. Thus, in the Gospel attributed to John, the author, drawing upon the creation myth in the opening verses of Genesis, identifies Christ with the Word and describes the originating Word (“In the beginning”) as the “light” which “shineth in the darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (Gen. 1:5). The “darkness” is the “void” of Genesis, “an earth without form” (Gen. 1:2).

In John’s Gospel, the God (Yahweh) who in Genesis “moved upon the face of the waters” declaring “Let there be light” (Gen. 1:2–3) is Christ, the Incarnate Word, who, still unrevealed in Genesis, “called,” “said,” “saw,” “divided,” “made,” “set forth” (Gen. 1:2–7). He is not, that is, the God who “will everlastingly continue to be wrapt in the impenetrable mystery of His unknowable Essence” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 63). He is, rather, the God who chooses to manifest himself in his chosen prophets, none of whom, however, shall ever behold the unknowable God or comprehend his Essence. “Ten thousand Prophets, each a Moses,” writes Bahá’u’lláh,

are thunderstruck upon the Sinai of their search at His forbidding voice, “Thou shall never behold Me!”, whilst a myriad Messengers, each as great as Jesus, stand dismayed upon their heavenly thrones by the interdiction, “Mine Essence thou shalt never apprehend!” (*Gleanings* 62)

Turning from the unknowable God whose Essence can never be penetrated to what in the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh can be and is known, we see in what Bahá’u’lláh describes as “a single moment,” “the twinkling of an eye” (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 157), the fruits of progressive revelation. The “darkness,” “the void,” “face of the deep,” “earth without form,” which in John’s Gospel cannot comprehend the “light” (“and the darkness comprehended it not”), have evolved from uncomprehending formlessness to become the *húrís*, the conscious feminine, the bride of Bahá’u’lláh. Like the wise virgins whom Christ upon his return takes with him into his bridal chamber (“they that were ready went in with him to the marriage” [Matt. 25:10]), the earth, far from fallen (“darkness” or “void”), is itself now the “seat” or “foot-stool” of the long-awaited Kingdom: “Great is thy blessedness, O earth, for thou hast been made the foot-stool of thy God, and been chosen as the seat of His mighty throne” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 30).

In the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, nature is no longer a realm of darkness to be forcibly harnessed to and enslaved by the patriarchal will of humankind. It not only has received the “light” of the Logos, as the lover receives the light of her beloved, but also has become in its reception the feminine enactment of it, an enactment which, as we shall see, is erotically unveiled in Bahá’u’lláh’s passionate embrace of Carmel, the Mountain of God where he has pitched his tent. Far from viewing the creation as a fall, therefore, Bahá’u’lláh, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, unveils its bridal form as a progressively evolving process in which all that lies latent within it achieves its inherent perfection by virtue of the rational consciousness now being bestowed upon it as the divine gift of a newly released insight. This insight constitutes for the first time in human history the union of religion and science, a union unveiled by Bahá’u’lláh.

The implications of this apocalyptic understanding of nature will, Bahá’u’lláh assures us, continue to unfold progressively before our startled eyes throughout the entire Bahá’í Dispensation. At this early stage of its unveiling, the earth, as the Kingdom of God, must, however, remain barely discernible. “Were We to reveal the hidden secrets of that Day,” declares Bahá’u’lláh, “all they that dwell on earth and in the heavens would swoon away and die...” (*Gleanings* 35). “Let the future,” Bahá’u’lláh again writes in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*,

disclose the hour when the Brides of inner meaning, will, as decreed by the Will of God, hasten forth, unveiled, out of their mystic mansions, and manifest themselves in the ancient realm of being. Nothing whatsoever is possible without His permission... His is the world of creation, and His the Cause of God. All proclaim His Revelation, and all unfold the mysteries of His Spirit. (175–76)

What in essence we confront in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the unveiling of the feminine nature of the Word, “the Brides of inner meaning,” which dwell within it and hasten forth as human understanding when “the Will of God” decrees. What we confront is the “marriage supper,” the fully integrated life of the entire planet.

In a more immediate sense, however, the unveiling of the feminine component of the Word is the new equality of the sexes revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and mysteriously enacted in the bridal chamber of what may be called his “marriage” tablets. The more this newly revealed equality is understood, the more we shall realize that Bahá'u'lláh has with his Revelation entered a marriage covenant with the earth itself. More than that: we shall also realize that, in the Bahá'í actuality of the married relationship, we embody on a human level Bahá'u'lláh's divine marriage, which is sometimes (as in alchemy) referred to as the *hieros gamos* or, again as already noted, the *mysterium coniunctionis*.

In Bahá'í marriage, viewed as the human enactment of a divine covenant, it is perhaps essential to understand, however inadequately at this stage, precisely what the divine covenant is, which is to say, what the eternal meaning of marriage is. “Have ye not read,” Jesus reminds the Pharisees,

that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female,

And he said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?

Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. (Matt. 19:4–6)

Viewed archetypally in the context of Bahá'u'lláh's covenant, Bahá'í marriage enacts on the human plane the union of the masculine Word with its feminine component, its *húrís* or bride of “inner meaning.” It thus enacts in the coming together as “one flesh” of male and female the unveiling of a crowning consciousness of that divine unity which is the indwelling law of life. The coming together of man and woman in marriage not only completes the divine process of creation from what may be called the single cell of its beginning but also ensures in and through offspring that this process, now with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh brought to its earthly perfection, will continue.

Perpetuation, however, is, as Bahá'u'lláh points out, not the goal or object of creation. Its goal, rather, is the consciousness of *what* is being perpetuated. The goal is not the animal begetting physical offspring, but the raising of all acts of begetting to a conscious knowledge of the divine purpose inherent in them. The goal is the raising of physical offspring to a true knowledge of who they are, a knowledge, which, Bahá'u'lláh declares, “is the same as the comprehension of Mind own Being” (*Gleanings* 327). The act of begetting is the crowning act of the creation itself.

Because of the role of the mother in the spiritual begetting of her offspring, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá specifies that the “training and culture of daughters is more necessary than that of sons...” (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 199–200, n. 76). The note continues, “If it is not possible, therefore, for a family to educate all the children, preference is to be accorded to daughters since, through educated mothers, the benefits of knowledge can be more effectively and rapidly diffused throughout society.” In the more immediate context of this essay, the mother in her archetypal role belongs with “the Brides of inner meaning.” She carries in her heart, communicating it to her child, the “inner meaning” of what is inherent in and evolving out of the blind, unconscious instinct of the newborn child. She is the instrument of the initial unveiling of all that lies hidden within the infant soul.

More than the father, she enacts at this early stage the astonishing closeness of God that Bahá'u'lláh reveals. Comparing his Revelation to an “ocean in whose depths are concealed innumerable pearls of great price,” Bahá'u'lláh goes on to say that it is “near, astonishingly near, unto you.” “Behold,” he declares, “it is closer to you than your life-vein!” (*Gleanings* 326). The mother in her bonding with her offspring enacts on the human level this divine closeness. Indeed, only the mother who carries the still “concealed” child first in her womb in a surround of amniotic fluid, even as “pearls of great price” are concealed in the ocean depths of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, can fully enact in the initial stages of life what on a mystical level Bahá'u'lláh in his tablets describes.

In these initial stages, whether prenatal or postnatal, the infant has not yet differentiated its body from the body of the mother. Thus, for the unconscious infant, they remain one body. Precisely this primal unity enacts at an unconscious level the divine unity, which, as a conscious being, the offspring is soul-destined to inhabit in this day. When, therefore, the mother brings to the care of her offspring a knowledge of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, she is

able to bring to her bonding with the child Bahá'u'lláh's divine bonding with his creation. The mother is able to repeat consciously on a human level Bahá'u'lláh's divine act of creation. In his references to the "mother letter," "mother word," and "Mother Tablet," Bahá'u'lláh not only stresses the feminine aspect of the Logos but also, at least by implication, reinforces the role of the mother in her human repetition of God's eternal act. "Know thou of a certainty," Bahá'u'lláh writes,

that the Revelation of every other Name is accompanied by a similar manifestation of Divine power. Every single letter proceeding out of the mouth of God is indeed a mother letter, and every word uttered by Him Who is the Well Spring of Divine Revelation is a mother word, and His Tablet a Mother Tablet. (*Gleanings* 142)

Even as the infant is mothered at the breast so are all of us mothered by the Word. Indeed, precisely in this metaphor of mothering resides, when activated in the soul, the life and nourishment that issues from "the Well Spring of Divine Revelation." As souls newly created by Bahá'u'lláh's "Mother Tablet," our capacity to respond to its metaphorical meaning is the very measure of our bonding, which is to say, our faith. The image of Christ as a divine infant at the breast of its mother carries within its symbolic meaning a rich insight into our complete dependence upon the life-bestowing "mother word." This rich insight is encompassed in the image of the divine infant who is at the same time the enthroned king complete with scepter and crown. As the enthroned king crowning the Virgin (the "Coronation of the Virgin"), Christ anticipates or prefigures the inner meaning of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

While both Bahá'í parents recognize what is potentially present awaiting actualization in the primitive, even chaotic, instinctual life of the infant, it is initially the mother's close, moment-by-moment attendance that serves to bind this unconscious instinctual life to spirit. The union of instinct and spirit in the mother, her spirit acting as instinct, her instinct acting as spirit, constellates, often over and beyond her will, the maternal role she in marriage may, God willing, be called upon to play. The archetype (eternal pattern) of this role in its fusion of instinct and spirit as it has from time immemorial been powerfully portrayed as the Madonna and child is an archetype to which we shall have reason to return.

The mother's awareness in her infant of instinct as spirit nascent—a recognition which, as constellated in her self, governs her maternal behavior—allows the mother to repeat on a human level what on a spiritual and mythical level is the creative role of the Logos or Word. In her relationship to her infant, the mother acts as, in the biblical myth, the Word acts upon "an earth without form." Bringing a maternal understanding to bear upon this creation myth, she releases its feminine or "inner" meaning in her treatment of her child. She assumes the role of the *húrís*. In this way, she corrects the onesidedness of a purely patriarchal vision in a manner that renders its matriarchal aspect equally important. She enacts the equality of the sexes decreed by Bahá'u'lláh. In a unique and crucial way, the mother is the human vehicle of divine love in the psychic unfoldment of her child. "Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence," Bahá'u'lláh writes in *The Hidden Words*, "I knew My love for thee: therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty" (4). The love that Bahá'u'lláh in his immemorial essence knew for his creation is the love which in this day the mother is divinely called upon to bestow upon her child. In a manner that is not yet well understood, she, in giving birth to and nurturing her offspring, is enacting on the human level the divine paradigm present in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Biology obviously plays a highly creative role here. Not only does the woman carry the embryo through a nine-month period of evolution, which encapsulates the evolution of vegetable and animal life on this planet, she also carries it, in this day, as a Bahá'í, which is to say, with a consciousness of the "inner meaning" of the embryo's coming of age. What on a physical or literal level is biologically taking place in the womb carries within it as its spiritual reality humanity's coming of age, understood as the coming of age of evolution itself. The perfection of biological evolution enacted in the mother's womb is in this day crowned by a spiritual maturity, a feminine consciousness, which, from the beginning, was inherent within evolution itself. That maturity, primitively anticipated in the myth of Eve struggling in vain to digest forbidden knowledge, is announced in Bahá'u'lláh's invitation: "Haste ye, with sour hearts and souls, and quaff your fill, O Concourse of the realms above!" (*Gleanings* 30). Biology is spiritually raised to become a part of the new planetary revelation of the Word. Spiritually understood, it is the Word made flesh and dwelling among us. It is the physical body, including the human at and as its apex, now become what Shoghi Effendi calls "the earthly heaven." The planet, he writes, "galvanized through the universal belief of its dwellers in one God, and their allegiance to one common Revelation," will "mirror, within the limitations imposed upon it, the effulgent glories of the sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh, shining in the plenitude of its splendor in the Abhá Paradise, and be made the footstool of His Throne on high, and acclaimed as the earthly heaven..." (*Promised Day* 123–24).

This consciousness of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is destined to inform the mother's understanding of what is taking place in her body. The soul, which manifests itself in the various stages of biological evolution, is at the same time now in its newly created state bringing that evolution to a planetary consummation that none of the prophets of old, except to a limited degree, were able to comprehend. The evolution of life from a single cell, which begins in the mother's womb, completes the process of its unfoldment when that life recognizes the divine purpose inherent within it. Bringing this recognition to her relationship to the life she nourishes, the mother in this day ideally enacts in that relationship what Shoghi Effendi calls the "ineffable destiny fixed for [the planet], from time immemorial, by the love and wisdom of its Creator" (*Promised Day* 124).

In this consummating consciousness, which enacts on a human level the marriage of the *húrís* to Bahá'u'lláh, a consciousness that spiritually renders the Bahá'í mother's offspring the child of this divine marriage, can be seen the meaning of the Virgin Birth, which 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirmed. As the human vessel of a divine act of creation, the mother is the virgin, not in the reductive sexual sense, but in the larger spiritual sense of what in and through her is taking place. The child she conceives, hears, nourishes, and educates is the image and likeness of God, created by God to know and worship God. This "virgin" consciousness informs her maternal bonding to her child.

The Masculine Component of the Word: The Role of the Father

While this exploration of the feminine component of the Word has focussed on the mother's bonding with her offspring, it is essential not to equate the feminine with now obsolete, culturally determined gender roles or with notions of female sexuality restricted to those roles. The feminine is first and foremost that component of the Logos or Word which, "in love and holy passion" binds the Logos to the world, rendering the creation the offspring of divine love. The phrase "in love and holy passion" is Wordsworth's; he is announcing in 1800 the apocalyptic theme of his "spousal verse": the mind when "wedded to this goodly universe / In love and holy passion" will find Paradise "a simple produce of the common day" (*The Recluse* 52–57). Wordsworth, as a visionary poet, is anticipating the descent of the New Jerusalem which Bahá'u'lláh actualized half a century later.

The feminine as bride or *húrís* is the soul's relationship to God, a relationship which Bahá'u'lláh identifies with the heart rather than the intellect, though, of course, not excluding the intellect. "Thy heart is My home; sanctify it for My descent" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words* 17). "The one true God," he writes again, "... hath ever regarded, and will continue to regard, the hearts of men as His own, His exclusive possession" (*Gleanings* 206). The genderless feminine, then, as a component of the Word residing in the soul, which Bahá'u'lláh identifies with the heart to make it his "home," obviously cannot be identified with or attributed to the female to the exclusion of the male. The genderless or inner feminine is equally present in the male; as the bride of "inner meaning" it is as manifest in the martyrdom of Quddús as it is in the martyrdom of Táhirih. Both go to their martyrdoms as brides. In the wedding feast of the Lamb in the Book of Revelation, "his wife bath made herself ready" by being "arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (19:8). "One night, whilst Táhirih was staying in my home," the wife of Kalántar related,

I was summoned to her presence and found her fully adorned, dressed in a gown of snow-white silk.... I expressed to her my surprise at so unusual a sight. "I am preparing to meet my Beloved," she said.... (Quoted in Nabíl, *Dawn-Breakers* 622)

A moment before an enraged mob fell upon Quddús, tearing his body to pieces and throwing its scattered members into a fire kindled for that purpose, Quddús raised his voice and said: "Would that my mother were with me, and could see with her own eyes the splendour of my nuptials!" (quoted in Nabíl, *Dawn-Breakers* 413). Both Táhirih and Quddús had penetrated to the "inner meaning" of the Revelation of the Báb, finding there the figure of Bahá'u'lláh. They thus became in this unveiled or apocalyptic state the "Brides" of Bahá'u'lláh as, indeed, were the Báb and all the prophets before him.

One of the greatest dangers now facing both men and women is the false identification of the feminine and masculine with gender, an identification that may virtually paralyze the soul by splitting its spiritual dynamics (as enacted in the divine paradigm revealed in the "marriage" tablets of Bahá'u'lláh) into male and female roles rigidly codified into acceptable modes of conventional social behavior. The reduction of the soul to social mores or institutionalized behavior is, at best, imprisonment and, at worst, murder. Not surprisingly, therefore, worship for Bahá'u'lláh has little or nothing to do with ritualized behavior.

At the same time, however, it must be recognized that gender does exist. The transcendence rather than the repression of its divinely ordained biological limits resides in placing gender at the service of the soul, within which, Bahá'u'lláh declares, "lieth concealed that which the world is now utterly incapable of apprehending" (*Gleanings*

160). Bahá'u'lláh describes this transcendence as the sanctification of the heart that opens it to his descent. This sanctification is the purpose of the spiritual laws of Bahá'u'lláh, which include, among other things, fasting, prayer, chastity, and abstinence from drugs and alcohol. The “fire,” which in the Long Obligatory Prayer “will burn away the veils which have shut [us] out from [His] beauty...” (*Bahá'í Prayers* 8), is a transforming fire which, as in alchemy, turns base metals into gold by releasing the gold nascent within them.

For those, however, whose spiritual identity is reduced to their biologically determined sexual roles, the fire, far from acting as a transformer, is finally destructive. The “fire,” which as divine love set “the whole world ... aflame” (*Bahá'í Prayers* 9), is experienced as destructive rather than creative if it is, as in Freud's theories, reduced to the sexual libido. Addressing those bound to their animal instincts, Bahá'u'lláh writes: “The time for the destruction of the world and its people ... hath arrived.” And again: “The day is approaching when its [civilization's] flame will devour the cities, when the Tongue of Grandeur will proclaim: ‘The Kingdom is God's, the Almighty, the All-Praised!’” (quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day* 3). Sexuality divorced from spirituality, as it now more and more is, becomes a devouring flame. The very energy of creation turns upon itself and devours what it creates (civilization).

The Kingdom of God is not a gender-driven society whose sexuality is, as Freud insisted, its tyrannical God. Belief in such a god, Jung told Freud, “would lead to an annihilating judgment upon culture. Culture would then appear as a mere farce, the morbid consequence of repressed sexuality.” “Yes,” Freud replied, “so it is, and that is just a curse of fate against which we are powerless to contend.” “One thing is clear,” Jung concluded: “Freud, who had always made much of his irreligiosity, had now constructed a dogma; or rather in the place of the jealous God he had lost, he had substituted another compelling image, that of sexuality” (Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* 150–51).

One of the chief secular obstacles standing in the way of the education of the soul archetypally portrayed in the divine model enacted in the tablets of Bahá'u'lláh is the sexual model established by Freud. Defending the spiritual and religious nature of human beings, Jung rejected Freud's reductive model of the soul, which, in his notion of the Oedipus complex, interpreted the bonding between mother and child in purely sexual terms. For Freud, the *húrís* or “Brides of inner meaning” were nothing more than, at worst, repressed sexuality or, at best, sublimated sexuality. As Jung recognized, Freud's hypothesis was an “annihilating judgment” upon spirituality, the cultural and religious manifestations of which, Jung rightly argued, Freud reduced to “the morbid consequences of repressed sexuality.”

The role of the father, as we shall now see, is to affirm and extend the mother's spiritual bonding with the child against what is writ large in Freud's sexual hypothesis: the ever-present danger of spirituality becoming split off from instinct, a split which throughout the Adamic cycle has, as already noted, constituted the unresolved conflict between psyche and soma, soul and body, a conflict built into the very notion of a limited consciousness in which a comprehensive knowledge remains “forbidden.” The role of the father is actively and creatively to assist the child in its necessary break with the mother's body by helping it to discover in the separation the psychic dimension of her bodily and instinctual presence. The father's creative task during and after the weaning period is to support the gradual emergence of the infant's independence from the mother's body, an independence essential to the recognition of that latent identity which transcends infantine needs and desire. ‘The bodily presence of the mother, essential to the earliest stages of life and growth, can, if allowed to function too long at the level of instinctual need, arrest and even distort the greater need of psychic growth, which is initially for the unconscious infant nothing more than blind instinct. The father's task is to assist the child in its crucial development from blind instinct to psychic insight, which is to say, the emergence of soul from its primitive fusion with the mother.’⁵

The nightmare of Freud's sexual hypothesis is thus apparent in his conviction that King Oedipus in Sophocles' tragedy, in unknowingly marrying his mother, was, for all his apparent wisdom (solving the riddle of the Sphinx), the victim of the blind instinct which binds the infant to its mother's body. This blind instinct, Freud suggests, largely controls our human fate unless we recognize in advance that it (blind instinct) is our fate. By unconsciously obeying the oracle in the slaying of his father, Oedipus was cut off from the paternal presence essential to releasing the soul from its infantine identification with the mother's body. Oedipus killing his father is Oedipus marrying his mother. As the unconscious operation of blind instinct, the two acts are essentially one. Oedipus, in Freud's sexual reading of the human condition, fatally (i.e., unconsciously) identified the “one flesh” of marriage with the “one flesh” of the mother and child.

Instructing Adam, Raphael, the archangel in *Paradise Lost*, describes the Great Chain of Being to which ‘Abdu'l-Bahá constantly refers in interpreting the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. “O Adam” Raphael exclaims, fatherly addressing Adam in his assigned function as the masculine component of the Word,

... one Almighty is, from whom
 All things proceed, and up to him return,
 If not deprav'd from good, created all
 Such to perfection, one first matter all,
 Indu'd with various forms, various degrees
 Of substance, and in things that live, of life;
 But more refin'd, more spiritous, and pure,
 As nearer to him plac't or nearer tending
 Each in thir several active Spheres assign'd,
Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
Proportion 'd to each kind. So from the root
 Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves
 More aery, last the bright consummate fiow'r
 Spirits odorous breathes: flow'rs and thir fruit
 Man's nourishment, by gradual scale sublim'd
 To vital spirits aspire, to animal,
 To intellectual, give both life and sense,
 Fancy and understanding, whence the Soul
 Reason receives, and reason is her being.
 (5: 469–87, emphasis added)

As the custodian of the masculine component of the Word “whence the soul/Reason receives,” the father supports the mother in her spirit-as-instinct bonding with the child by aiding the child, weaned from the mother’s body, in its long journey from “body up to spirit” that constitutes the soul’s coming into a consciousness of itself as identical with the comprehension of Bahá’u’lláh’s own being.

Crucial now to this evolution from matter to spirit, from mother to father, is the recognition that they are inherent in each other. The “one first matter” is the seed (“Be”) of creation (“It is”) containing creation in it. The “fruit” of that seed remained throughout the Adamic cycle forbidden because in this early, preparatory stage of its evolution the soul could not absorb it.

This understanding of matter as spirit, crucial to the infant’s healthy and creative bonding with the mother’s body, finds its highest expression in the sacredness of the married relationship symbolically described as “one flesh.” When, therefore, it is suggested that the role of the father is to support the role of the mother, to unite the “heart” with the “intellect” further to sanctify it for Bahá’u’lláh’s descent, the distinction between the masculine and feminine components of the Logos tends finally to dissolve. The father is in his own way as answerable to the feminine component as the mother is to the masculine component. Both mother and father are bound to the Logos or Word; whether together or separate, they are finally answerable as one to the Word in the soul-education of the child. Precisely this constellated union operative in the soul-education of the offspring best describes Bahá’í marriage. “But the marriage of the people of Bahá,” writes ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,

must consist of both physical and spiritual relationship for both of them are intoxicated with the wine of one cup, are attracted by one Peerless Countenance, are quickened with one Life and are illumined with one Light. This is the spiritual relationship and everlasting union. Likewise in the physical world they are bound together with strong and unbreakable ties. (*Bahá’í World Faith* 373)

Independence is never an end; it is always a means to a higher form of dependence, which is ultimately dependence upon the Will of God. The condition of total dependence into which the infant is born therefore serves at the unconscious and instinctual level as the model of the soul’s ultimate spiritual dependence. If, however, the parents betray or abuse the infant’s dependence, if their love is a mask for power, the soul may seek independence as its ultimate goal and view authority in whatever form as a threat to its freedom. Alternatively, it may resign itself to tyranny as the inevitable human condition, tyranny (power masquerading as love) having pervaded the earliest stages of its life.

Freedom is essential to psychic growth, which, in turn, is nourished by love. The infant’s first genuine encounter with freedom is its differentiation from its mother’s body, which is, at the same time, the discovery of a world other than matter, the bonding with which is in some sense negotiable. Freedom resides in negotiating with the Other, understood as a world beyond matter, a negotiating or interacting in which relationship is no longer imposed but constructed. The role of the father is to assist the child in its discovery of this freedom as a creative

rather than a threatening condition. In this discovery of a world beyond and other than the mother's body (matter as mater), the child first encounters what on a conscious level will become volition.

The discovery of volition, that one is free to make choices, can be, if a secure paternal ground has not been laid in infancy, an encounter with the void, a dark world without form.. The father's presence in the weaning of the infant, its removal from the mother's breast, replaces what without his presence might at a still unconscious level be experienced as abandonment. On the archetypal level of the divine paradigm we have been applying, the Logos or Word in its masculine component is symbolically present in the father, the potentiality of its "inner meaning" having already taken root in the infant's instinctual bonding with the mother. The union between the parents ensures the continuity of the child. In that union the child at an unconscious level has its initial experience of God.

The presence of the father opens a new world beyond the breast in which a primitive mode of total dependence gives way to the first, though still unconscious, experience of freedom. "Know thou," writes Bahá'u'lláh,

that all men have been created in the nature made by God, the Guardian, the Self-Subsisting. Unto each one hath been prescribed a pre-ordained measure, as decreed in God's mighty and guarded Tablets. All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition. (*Gleanings* 149)

Though, he continues,

every act ye meditate is as clear to Him as is that act when already accomplished.... This fore-knowledge of God... should not be regarded as having caused the actions of men, just as your own previous knowledge that a certain event is to occur, or your desire that it should happen, is not and can never be the reason for its occurrence. (*Gleanings* 150)

To the degree that the father lovingly embodies on a purely human level the masculine component of the Word, a psychic space opens to the child within which an identity can take shape through the exercise of freedom. In that exercise, both parents recognize that the offspring is gradually moving from the example of the parents to its spiritual source. The offspring is moving toward a recognition of the divine paradigm, which serves as the model of the parents' human behavior. The acceptance of that paradigm, the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, while obviously influenced by the example of the parents, is not caused by the parents. The divine is independent of the human. It can never be totally identified with it.

The parents cannot assume ultimate responsibility for the life of their offspring, for that life in its reality comes from God and returns to God. To assume ultimate responsibility is to usurp the role of God by attributing to themselves the power which is God's, a power which, Bahá'u'lláh declares, God nevertheless abstains from using. Though "all stands revealed before Him; all is recorded in His holy and hidden Tablets," this complete "fore-knowledge of God... should not be regarded as having caused the actions of men..." (*Gleanings* 150). When, therefore, all is said and done, the individual stands free and alone before God. The role of the parents in the education of the soul is fulfilled when their offspring has achieved this freedom and this aloneness before God as God in his manifestation is made known.

Bahá'u'lláh's New Creation of the Soul

In arguing that volition is required to release the soul from its biological life bound to the limitations of matter so that it can align itself with a conscious recognition of the Logos or Word as revealed in this day by Bahá'u'lláh, emphasis has been placed on the evolving relationship of the parents with their offspring. What needs to be examined now is the divine action that creates the soul empowered to mirror it in the manner we have described, a mirroring grounded in the spiritual fact that the soul, created in the image and likeness of God, is equipped by God to know and to worship God. Let us turn, then, from the human response to the divine initiative, which is to say, to the movement of the "most Exalted Pen" upon the tablet of the heart.

"Consider the hour at which the supreme Manifestation of God revealeth Himself unto men," Bahá'u'lláh writes in a passage quoted earlier,

Ere that hour cometh, the Ancient Being, Who is still unknown of men and hath not as yet given utterance to the Word of God, is Himself the All-Knower in a world devoid of any man that hath known Him. He is indeed the Creator without a creation. For at the very moment preceding His Revelation, each and every

created thing shall be made to yield up its soul to God. This is indeed the Day of which it hath been written: “Whose shall be the Kingdom this Day?” And none can be found ready to answer (*Gleanings* 151)

With the completion of the Dispensation immediately preceding a new one, the souls created by and shaped within the old Dispensation expire, are yielded up to God. “The mere contemplation of the Dispensation inaugurated by the Blessed Beauty,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, “would have sufficed to overwhelm the saints of bygone ages...” (quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 99). “Verily,” Bahá’u’lláh again writes, “We have caused every soul to expire by virtue of Our irresistible and all-subduing sovereignty.” He then immediately adds: “We have, then, called into being a new creation, as a token of Our grace unto men” (*Gleanings* 29–30).

The human soul, newly created by Bahá’u’lláh, now inhabits, though still largely unconsciously, an apocalyptic world, a world in which all that remained concealed throughout the Adamic cycle has finally been unveiled. In describing the role of the parents in the psychic growth of their offspring, this essay has attempted to deal on a conscious level with the reality of this day, a reality which, for most, still remains unconscious, despite the overwhelming evidence of a global revolution in the conduct of human affairs. “Is there any excuse left for anyone in this Revelation?” Bahá’u’lláh asks. “No, by God, the Lord of the Mighty Throne!” he replies. “My signs have encompassed the earth, and My power enveloped all mankind, and yet the people are wrapped in a strange sleep!” (quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day* 6).

In radical contrast to this “strange sleep,” this essay has attempted, however inadequately, to describe what in the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh constitutes an awakened state, a state in which adults consciously enter a Bahá’í marriage and consciously apply in their relationship, particularly as it relates to the soul-education of their offspring, the divine model revealed in the tablets of Bahá’u’lláh. Consciousness, in short, is another word for unveiling.

In what now follows, and by way of conclusion, I would like to move directly into the very core of human consciousness: the apocalyptic or unveiled world at the center of which stands the figure of Bahá’u’lláh. In doing so, I will suggest that it is precisely to this apocalyptic world which the soul now inhabits that we must now adjust if indeed we are to survive. The education of the soul, which this essay has attempted to describe, is an education in the apocalypse. The apocalypse enacts the literal reality of the soul. That literal reality is far from apparent to anyone who, like the infant explored in some detail in relation to its parents, is still immersed in and dependent upon the mother’s body, which is to say upon matter or the material world. For such people, “wrapped in a strange sleep,” the apocalypse, like the soul itself, is a delusion, a delusion which Bahá’u’lláh equates with “the drunkenness of their heedlessness” (*Gleanings* 39). For others, “such as God was pleased to guide” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 39), the apocalypse as the reality of the soul is no delusion. Guided by God, or, in the more immediate and human context of this essay, by Bahá’í parents, they have worked “from body up to spirit.” Far from leaving the body behind, they have transformed its life into spirit. The language of apocalypse is thereby available to them. They can embrace metaphor and symbol as the language of the soul, which directly reveals the soul’s literal reality. They can read and digest Bahá’u’lláh’s “Mother Tablet” at a mature, conscious level rather than at an immature, unconscious level. They have actualized as consciousness what as unconsciousness must remain potential in the child. The recognition of Bahá’u’lláh is the conscious actualization of all that remains unconscious or “hidden” in infancy, including the infancy of the race.

The Apocalypse of Bahá’u’lláh

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day,” John of Patmos, the biblical author of the apocalypse, explains at the beginning of the Book of Revelation, the final book of the Bible,

and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,

Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book....
(1:9–11)

The “great voice, as of a trumpet” is the voice of Bahá’u’lláh. “To Him [Bahá’u’lláh],” writes Shoghi Effendi, “the Author of the Apocalypse had alluded as the ‘*Glory of God*’, as ‘*Alpha and Omega*’, ‘*the Beginning and the End*’, ‘*the First and the Last*’” (*God Passes By* 95). “But for Him,” Bahá’u’lláh declares, referring to his own station, “no Divine Messenger would have been invested with the Robe of Prophethood, nor would any of the sacred Scriptures have been revealed” (quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 99). For this reason, Bahá’u’lláh further explains, “None among the Manifestations of old, except to a prescribed degree, hath ever completely apprehended the nature of this Revelation” (quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 99).

Like the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, however, the Book of Revelation contains only a partial unveiling of Bahá'u'lláh as the Ancient of Days. Still hidden, Bahá'u'lláh could therefore say of the Book of Revelation what, as already noted, he did say of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*:

Notwithstanding all that hath been said, it seemeth as if not one letter of Our purpose bath been uttered, nor a single sign divulged concerning Our object When will a faithful seeker be found who will don the garb of pilgrimage, attain the Ka'bih of the heart's desire, and, without ear or tongue, discover the mysteries of divine utterance? (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 71)

When will a seeker be found capable of unveiling the mysteries of the Book of Revelation?

Again as already noted, a primary symbol of unveiling in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh (which is directly related to the Book of Revelation) is the unveiling of Fátimih as the unveiled Maid of Heaven in Bahá'u'lláh's "marriage" tablets. Táhirih, one of the Báb's Letters of the Living, prefigured what these tablets contained in her own bold unveiling at Badasht in 1848 some fifteen years before Bahá'u'lláh declared himself to his chosen followers in the Garden of Ridván. In the context of the Book of Revelation, Bahá'u'lláh's unveiling of what as *húrís* was hidden within him—*húrís* with whom Táhirih identified herself—enacts the apocalypse of the soul, the descent of the New Jerusalem "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (21:2). The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the "marriage supper" of the Book of Revelation.

Precisely as a "bride adorned for her husband," Táhirih bound herself to Bahá'u'lláh, leaving her husband and her children (sealed in an abrogated dispensation as in a tomb) to commit herself to his cause and, in a very literal way, placing herself under his personal care. "The effulgence of the Abhá Beauty hath pierced the veil of night," she wrote in one of her odes addressed in veiled language to Bahá'u'lláh, "behold the souls of His lovers dancing, moth-like, in the light that has flashed from His face!" (Nabíl, *Dawn-Breakers* 286). Preparing in martyrdom "to meet [her] Beloved," she, as the New Jerusalem bride, put on her "gown of snow-white silk" and fasted for three days while chanting odes to Bahá'u'lláh, determined all the while not to break her fast until she was brought "face to face with [her] Beloved." Confronting her Beloved in the guise of her drunken executioners,⁶ she handed them, through the son of Mahmúd *Khan-i-Kalántar*, in whose custody she had been placed, a silken kerchief, the symbol of her unveiling. The kerchief was wound around her neck and tightened until she expired (Nabíl, *Dawn-Breakers* 622–26). That tightening and expiration was her nuptial union with her beloved.

The intimate spiritual bond between Fátimih and Táhirih, which characterizes what Bahá'u'lláh calls the "faithful seeker" who "don[s] the garb of pilgrimage, attain[s] the Ka'bih of the heart's desire, and without ear or tongue, discover[s] the mysteries of divine utterance" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 71), vividly enacts the timeless oneness of the Maids of Heaven in the Abhá Kingdom as Bahá'u'lláh himself displays it in some of his tablets. In his interpretation of the Book of Revelation, 'Abdu'l-Bahá further identifies Fátimih with "the woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (Rev. 12:1). This woman, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains in *Some Answered Questions*, is the New Jerusalem bride who descended to Muhammad as the Law of God (68). The twelve stars, he explains, are the twelve Imams of whom Fátimih was both the bride and the mother. In this sense, therefore, the bride is Fátimih, daughter of Muhammad, wife of the first Imam and mother of the second, who would unveil herself when the Mahdí, the Hidden or Twelfth Imam, returned. This apocalyptic role, Táhirih herself assumed to become in her soul reality at once the bride of Bahá'u'lláh and Maid of Heaven.

Astonishingly enough, 'Abdu'l-Bahá when yet a child of three was sitting one day on the lap of Táhirih when she was staying in the home of Bahá'u'lláh in Tehran. Listening with 'Abdu'l-Bahá from behind the veil to the learned utterances of Vahíd interpreting the verses announcing the advent of the new Manifestation, she suddenly interrupted him by vehemently declaring:

"O Yahyá! Let deeds, not words, testify to thy faith, if thou art a man of true learning. Cease idly repeating the traditions of the past, for the day of service, of steadfast action, is come. Now is the time to show forth the true signs of God, to rend asunder the veils of idle fancy, to promote the Word of God, and to sacrifice ourselves in His path. Let deeds, not words, be our adorning! (Quoted in 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful* 200)

The Maid of Heaven may, then, be identified with the unveiled Fátimih of the apocalypse who, still veiled, continued to yearn for the coming of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the entire Dispensation of Muhammad, a yearning incarnated in the unveiled figure of Táhirih with such intensity that it conducted to the divine marriage of her martyrdom.⁷ This yearning is portrayed, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá suggests, in the spiritual fact that "she [Fátimih] being with child, cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered" (Rev. 12:2). The child she delivered who "was

caught up unto God, and to his throne” (Rev. 12:5) was, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, the Báb (*Some Answered Questions* 69).

In *The Hidden Words of Fátimih*, as *The Hidden Words* was originally known to Bahá’u’lláh’s disciples, Bahá’u’lláh took the “inner essence” of “that which hath descended from the realm of glory, uttered by the tongue of power and might, and revealed unto the Prophets of old,” and “clothed it with the garment of brevity”(3). This “garment,” it may be suggested, is the wedding garment in which New Jerusalem as bride descends to Bahá’u’lláh even as “the woman clothed with the sun” descended to Muhammad as the Law of God in His Day. Thus, while, during the Dispensation of Muhammad, Fátimih remained veiled (even as the “inner essence” of the world’s Scriptures remained “sealed”), with the coming of Bahá’u’lláh, she descends from heaven unveiled as the Maid of Heaven who, in Bahá’u’lláh’s tablets, is now identified as Carmel, the sacred spot where Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant becomes incarnate on earth, the tent which he pitches being the Universal House of Justice. This House of Justice embodies in its male members the masculine component of the Word, even as the Carmel on which it stands embodies the feminine component. In its archetypal configuration, therefore, Carmel and House of Justice enact together the divine marriage, which is the apocalypse itself.

“Haste thee, O Carmel’,” cry aloud “the voices of all created things, and beyond them those of the Concourse on high,”

for lo, the light of the countenance of God, the Ruler of the Kingdom of Names and Fashioner of the heavens, hath been lifted upon thee.

“Seized with transports of joy, and raising high her voice,” at once the New Jerusalem bride and the inner feminine of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation, Carmel now exclaims:

May my life be a sacrifice to Thee, inasmuch as Thou hast fixed Thy gaze upon me, hast bestowed upon me Thy bounty, and hast directed towards me Thy steps. Separation from Thee, O Thou Source of everlasting life, hath well nigh consumed me, and my remoteness from Thy presence hath burned away my soul. All praise be to Thee for having enabled me to harken to Thy call, for having honored me with Thy footsteps, and for having quickened my soul through the vitalizing fragrance of Thy Day and the shrilling voice of Thy Pen, a voice Thou didst ordain as Thy trumpet-call amidst Thy people. And when the hour at which Thy resistless Faith was to be made manifest did strike, Thou didst breathe a breath of Thy spirit into Thy Pen, and lo, the entire creation shook to its very foundations, unveiling to mankind such mysteries as lay hidden within the treasuries of Him Who is the Possessor of all created things. (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings* 14–15)

In this ecstatic exchange between Carmel and Bahá’u’lláh, “the hour at which Thy resistless Faith was to be made manifest” strikes. All that in previous Dispensations “lay hidden” within the feminine soul of Bahá’u’lláh is unveiled.

The unveiling of Carmel as the Maid of Heaven is the descent of the New Jerusalem accompanied by the *húris* who had nourished in secret its long-awaited advent.⁹ One of the most striking outward evidences of this descent of the bride surrounded by her *húris* is the army of feminists demanding the equality that throughout the Adamic cycle was denied them. “You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women!” Táhirih declared from prison while awaiting her execution (quoted in Root, *Táhirih, the Pure* 98).

The consequences of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, whose nature “none among the Manifestations of old, except to a prescribed degree, bath ever completely apprehended” (quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 99), are, like the feminist revolution, still beyond the reach of our gradually expanding comprehension. “Behold I make all things new,” which Bahá’u’lláh also proclaims, in Revelation (21:5) provides some indication of what continues to unfold before our still startled eyes.

As a divine paradigm enacted by Bahá’u’lláh and released into the world as the newly created soul, we are now commanded to actualize on earth what Bahá’u’lláh has already wrought in the Abhá Kingdom. This essay, however tentatively or inadequately, has attempted to explore the process of this actualization in terms of the parental education of the infant soul moving toward a consciousness of itself as identical with the comprehension of Bahá’u’lláh’s “own Being.” Needless to say, many obstacles still stand in the way, most or all of them residing in our situation as what Shoghi Effendi calls “the generation of the half-light” (*The World Order* 168) suspended between “the death-pangs of the old order and the birth-pangs of the new ...” (*Advent of Divine Justice* 11). None of the obstacles, therefore, can be overcome unless the divine model that Bahá’u’lláh in himself at once enacted and revealed is set ever more clearly before us, unless we immerse ourselves in his tablets, there to engage the “Brides of

inner meaning” now become our own newly created souls called, like the *húrís*, to the marriage chamber of his Word. To this engagement arising out of that immersion this essay is dedicated.

Notes

1. See, for example, T. S. Eliot’s “The Hollow Men”: “Between the conception / And the creation / Between the emotion / And the response / Falls the shadow.” Jung uses the word *shadow* as all that consciousness excludes and is unable to absorb and which he identifies with what he calls the “*deus absconditus*,” the dark side of God whose light, when denied, brings destruction to the world.

2. For two valuable discussions of the feminine nature of the Word, see Michael Sours, “The Maid of Heaven, the Image of Sophia, and the Logos” and Paula Drewek, “Feminine Forms of the Divine in Bahá’í Scripture.”

3. According to legend, “Sirát” is “finer than a hair and keener than a sword.” Addressing Mullá Husayn, the Báb explained that the next day thirteen of his companions, all of them called by God to be Letters of the Living, would arrive. “Pray to God that He may graciously enable them to walk securely in that path which is finer than a hair and keener than a sword,” he said to Mullá Husayn (Nabíl, *Dawn-Breakers* 66). The bridge “Sirát” is the bridge between the old and new Dispensation, which the true seeker, unveiled before God, must cross on the Day of God or Day of Judgment.

4. Some insight into the selection of a particular number, though not the number itself, may be provided by the Báb’s selection of his chosen disciples beginning with the Letters of the Living. When he bade farewell to the Letters of the Living, the Báb instructed them to record separately the name of every believer who embraced his religion. These names, he explained, he would classify into eighteen sets of nineteen each, which, together with the list made up of the eighteen Letters of the Living and himself as the nineteenth, would constitute the number of *Kull-i-Shay’*, which means “all things.” This number is 361 (19 x 19) (Nabíl, *Dawn-Breakers* 123). This number, he explained to Mullá Husayn, would, in the sight of God, be recognized as his “chosen and favoured disciples.” Others would “tread the middle way,” while the fate of the rest would “remain undeclared unto the hour when all that is hidden shall be made manifest” (Nabíl, *Dawn-Breakers* 66). Addressing himself to that hour, Bahá’u’lláh writes: “Behold...how immediately upon the completion of the ninth year of this wondrous, this most holy and merciful Dispensation, the requisite number of pure, of wholly consecrated and sanctified souls has been most secretly consummated” (quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 92).

5. The necessity of separating from the mother’s body for the soul growth of the child has given rise to certain “primitive” and still prevailing associations of the *mater* (body of the mother) with evil. The female as witch, as seductress, temptress, *femme fatale* has a long history. Its exploitation for commercial, artistic, and religious purposes shows no signs of diminishing. Crucial, therefore, in the weaning of the child from its radical initial dependence upon the mother’s body is the father’s loving, mature, and spiritual respect for the woman in her role as mother, a respect that is the very core of the marriage bond. Some have argued that the weaning of the daughter differs from the weaning of the son because she perpetuates the mother. In the soul context of this article. the soul being gender free, separation applies equally to both sexes. The equality of the sexes before God, which Bahá’u’lláh has unveiled, requires that both sexes stand in the end as in the beginning alone before God (“male and female created he them” [Genesis 1:27]). Independence of all save God applies equally to both sexes as the necessary condition of true freedom.

6. Calamity really is providence; vengeance really is mercy. Think of the watchman who led the Majnun to his Beloved by chasing him through the streets at night, driving him in desperation to leap over the wall.

7. The gross sensual, not to say sexual, reading of the *húrís*, in the Qur’án and in Arabic and Persian poetry by many Western commentators reveals the fate of the soul when it fails to acknowledge its true nature through its recognition of the Logos or Word as it is progressively unveiled by the Manifestations. In Shelley’s *Alastor* (1815), the “Brides of inner meaning” appear to the poet in a dream as a “veiled maid” (151) whose “voice was like the “voice of his own soul / Heard in the calm of thought” (153–54). When, overcome by sexual passion (“shuddering limbs,” “gasping breath,” “panting bosom” (182–84), he sexually unites with her, she instantly dissolves. “Now blackness veiled his dizzy eyes,” Shelley writes, “and night / Involved and swallowed up the vision; sleep / Like a dark flood suspended in its course, / Rolled back its impulse on his vacant brain” (188–91). Shelley’s poet then undertakes to find awake the *húrís* who visited him in sleep. Failing, he sinks to what Shelley calls an “untimely grave” (Preface to *Alastor* 69). Shelley himself, however, committed himself as a poet to unveiling within himself

the “veiled maid” of Alastor. In the figure of Asia in *Prometheus Unbound* (1819) he achieved his apocalyptic desire. The unveiling of Asia (“Some good change / Is working in the elements which suffer / Thy presence thus unveiled” [II: v.18–20]) thus becomes a Romantic prefiguration of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, a vision of the New Jerusalem descending as a bride to earth, which is, by virtue of her descent, recreated into an earthly paradise. Shelley’s lyrical drama, it is worth noting, was written in Rome among the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla at a time when in Persia among another kind of ruins Shaykh Ahmad was himself composing his own prefigurative works.

8. This unveiling of Carmel and the descent of the *húrís*, should be contrasted with the fate of the Maid of Heaven and the *húrís* in Bahá’u’lláh’s “Tablet of the Holy Mariner,” which reveals Bahá’u’lláh’s grief at the false and warring claimants to the station of the Manifestation that belonged to him alone.

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