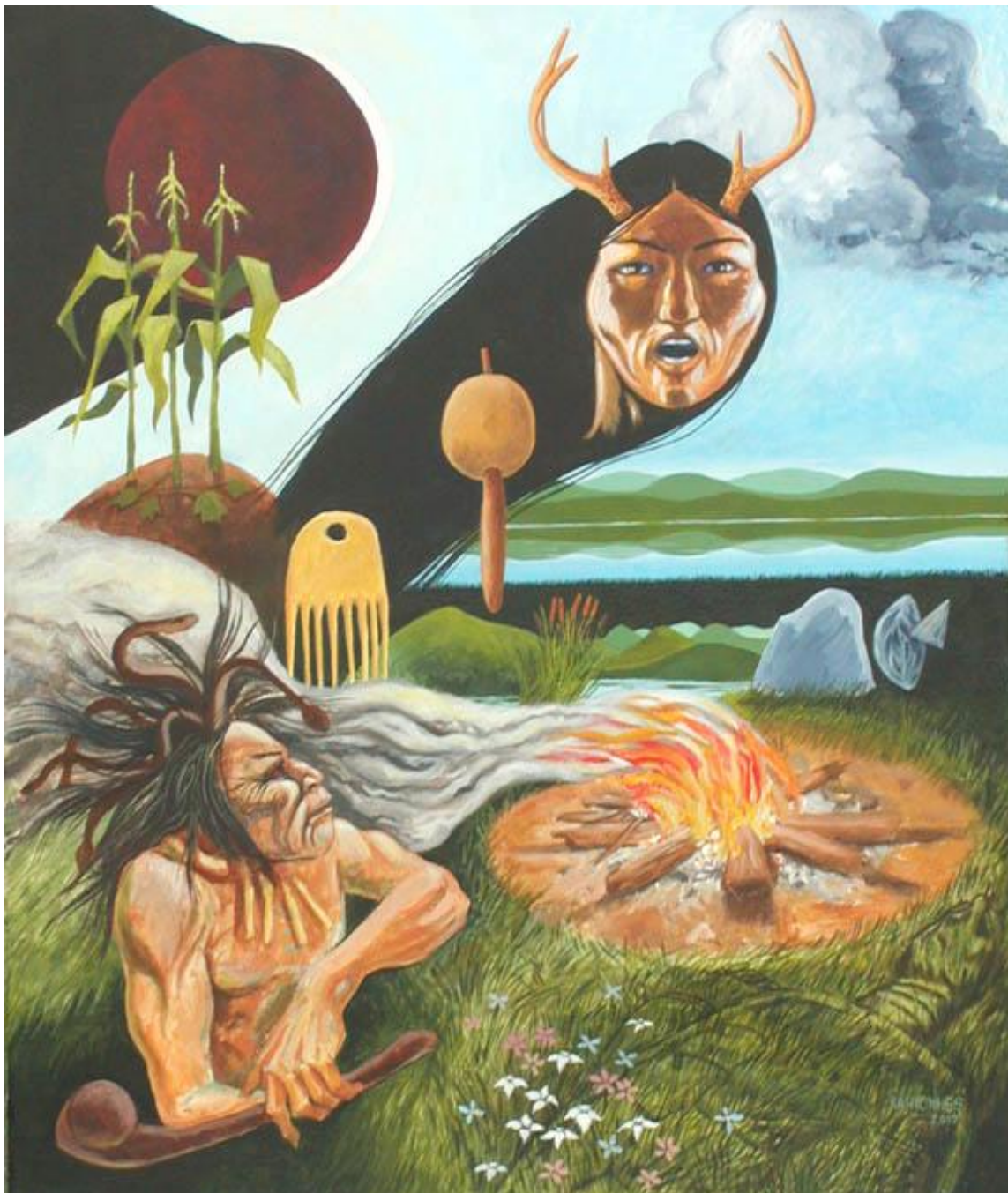


**Volume 1, 2007**



Frontcover: SACRED EPIC OF THE PEACEMAKER Artist: John Kahionhes Fadden (Mohawk). Reprinted by permission.

ARTISTS DESCRIPTION: In the upper left-hand corner is the eclipse of the sun with developing corn. This is when the corn was knee-high in Seneca country, and there was an eclipse of the sun, and this served as a sign in the sky to a reluctant group of Senecas [when the Black Sun persuaded the westernmost Senecas to follow Deganawidah]. The man in the upper middle represents both the Peacemaker [Deganawidah] and Aiionwatha [Hiawatha] singing the Peace Song that helped turn the mind of Atadaho [the cannibal warlord, Atotarho, powerful Onondaga sorcerer with snakes in his hair]. The antlers signify leadership, and the gourd rattles accompany the Peace Song. In the background are clouds representing natural forces at work, and below the clouds is a lake and hills. This symbolizes the People of The Hills/Onondaga, and the lake is Onondaga Lake where the League was formed. In front of the lake are symbols of the original Nations [the Five Nations of the Iroquois League of Nations founded by the Prophet Deganawidah and his first convert, Hiawatha]. From right to left are: People of the Flint (Mohawk), People of the Upright Stone (Oneida), People of the Hills (Onondaga), People of the Swamp (Cayuga), and People of the Great Mountain (Seneca). Just to the left of these national symbols is a bone comb symbol of the removal of the snakes from Atadarhos head [by Hiawatha, whose name means, He Who Combs]. Below the comb is Atadarho [who became Firekeeper, Wampum Keeper and Chief of Chiefs of the League of Nations], and as the Peace Song takes effect, the war club is loosened from his hand. To his right is the symbol of the Council Fire, the gathering place of the Five Nations, of clans, and of family. Below that are further natural elements flowers that grow in the grasses, and beneath these plants can be seen the image of a turtle, representing Turtle Island North America.

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**OJBS: Online Journal of Baha'i Studies,**  
**Volume 1, 2007**  
 Table of Contents

**Editors Introduction**

Ismael Velasco and Christopher Buck	Editors' Introduction	1-3
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**Research Articles**

Nalinie Mooten	The Bahá'í Contribution to Cosmopolitan International Relations Theory.	4-70
Moojan Momen	Messianic Concealment and Theophanic Disclosure.	71-88
Khazeh Fanapanazir	Bahá'u'lláh as fulfilment of the theophanic promise in the Sermons of Imam 'Alí ibn Abí Tálíb: Translation of al ʾTutunjiyya, Iftikhár and Ma'rifat bin-Nurániyyat.	89-113
Vahid Behmardi and Will McCants	A Stylistic Analysis of the Báb's Writings: Abridged Translation of Vahid Behmardi's Muqaddamih-yi dar bárih-yi sabk va siyáq-i áthár-i mubárah-yi haḍrat-i rabb a`lá.	114-136
Todd Lawson	The Authority of the Feminine and Fatima's Place in an Early Work by the Bab	138-170
Necati Alkan	Dreams and their Interpretation in the Bahá'í Religion: Some Preliminary Remarks	171-179
Donald Addison and Christopher Buck	Messengers of God in North America Revisited: An Exegesis of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet to Amír Khán	180-270
Gloria Shahzadeh	Bahá'u'lláh's Four Tablets to Maryam: Lawh-i-Maryam, Maryama Isiy-i-Jan, Hurufat-i-'Alí'in and Ziyárat-Námih-i-Maryam	271-297
Ahang Rabbani	Memories of My Life: Translation of Mírzá Habíbu'lláh Afnán's <u>Khátirát-i-Hayát</u>	298-400

## Essays and Opinions

Jean Marc Lepain	An Introduction to the Lawh-i Haquq'n-Nas	401-404
Mehran Ghassempour	Bahá'u'lláh's Lawh-i Haquq'n-Nas Tablet of the Right of the People, Provisional Translation	405-409
Ismael Velasco	'Abdu'l-Bahá and Mírzá Ghaffár Zanúzí ALM Nicolas's 'Abdoul-Béha et la situation', 1912	410-413
Adel Salmanzadeh	Bahá'í Consultation and Freireian Dialogue in Development A Comparative Perspective	414-444
Guy Sinclair	Mediation, Transformation and Consultation A Comparative Analysis of Conflict Resolution Models	445-461
Ismael Velasco	In Memoriam: Hugh McKinley	462-468
Nozomu Sonda	Bushido (Chivalry) and the Traditional Japanese Moral Education	469-487

## Research Notes and Bibliographia

Bahá'í World Centre	Prayer for Shaykh Kázim Samandar Authorised Translation of Bahá'u'lláh's Múnáját-i-Jináb-i-Samandarí	488-489
Steve Cooney	The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Notes on recent secondary literature, and a memorandum from the Bahá'í World Centre.	490-519
Thomas Linard	Preliminary Bibliography of works in French making mention of the Babí or Bahá'í religions (1945–2000)	520-586
Graham Hassall	Accessing literature on the Bahá'í Faith: emerging search technologies and recent results	587-619

## **OJBS: The Online Journal of Baha'i Studies**

### **Editors' Introduction**

Ismael Velasco  
Tenerife, Independent Scholar

Christopher Buck, Ph.D., J.D.  
Pittsburgh, Independent Scholar

### **The Online Journal of Bahá'í Studies**

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the *Online Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, a new resource of academic, essayist, and artistic perspectives on the Bahá'í Faith, its origins, ideas, and adaptations. The *Online Journal of Bahá'í Studies* is an international open-access peer-reviewed journal within the field of Bahá'í studies.

At the core of Bahá'í studies is the Bahá'í religion itself. As the youngest of the independent world religions, the Bahá'í Faith is attracting greater scholarly as well as popular interest. It is this interest that has given birth to the emergent field of Bahá'í studies. Bahá'í studies is a field of interdisciplinary studies, rather than a discipline with discipline-specific methodologies. As such, the *Online Journal of Bahá'í Studies* will, over the course of its progress and development, benefit from a greater resource pool of reviewers, whose respective areas of expertise will span a broad range of disciplines and arts. As the quality of scholarship and art progresses — not to mention the prestige that these will attract to the Journal itself — the Editors have every confidence that the *Online Journal of Bahá'í Studies* will enrich Bahá'í studies and Bahá'í-inspired art.

The *Journal* aims to broaden the culture and community of discourse of Bahá'í studies, maintaining the best of the established voices but making known new voices, transmitting the excellent work going on in the more developed areas of Bahá'í scholarship (history and scripture), while representing the emergent work that is being done in equally important but less consolidated areas, such as sociology, the sciences, international relations, social and economic development, psychology, business, etc. The *Online Journal of Bahá'í Studies* represents its editors' practical response to the call of the Universal House of Justice to evolve a new paradigm of Bahá'í scholarship, understood in a non-methodologically prescriptive way, with a distinctively dialogic interaction between what Moojan Momen calls the “interior (i.e. scholarship that develops within the Bahá'í community and is based on faith) and exterior (i.e. academic scholarship based on the rationalistic, materialistic methodology of academia).”<sup>1</sup> The fact that Shoghi

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<sup>1</sup> Moojan Momen, ‘[Methodology in Bahá'í Studies](#)’, *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 2001/2002, 10, 75-84.

Effendi described the Bahá'í Faith as “scientific in its method” naturally applies to field of Bahá'í Studies,<sup>2</sup> yet there is no single methodology that comprehends, much less defines, Bahá'í Studies.

The *Online Journal of Bahá'í Studies* is also multi-vocal, combining the best of academic writing with the best of non-academic literary reflection. Work grounded in academic methods, as well as well-constructed work generated from within a faith perspective, will both be welcome, so long as such work is distinguished by excellence and collegiality. The primary criterion for publication in the *Journal* will, first and foremost, be the quality of original research or insight into the emergent field of Bahá'í Studies.

Therefore the *Online Journal of Bahá'í Studies* will publish original peer-reviewed articles, essays, provisional translations, research notes, bibliographical surveys, book and art reviews, as well as poetry, photographs and other visual art. The *Journal* will uphold canons of academic freedom, as refined by academic integrity and tempered by respect for communal values. Art published in the *Online Journal of Bahá'í Studies* will honor artistic individualism as it expressively illumines aspects of the Bahá'í experience. We invite submissions for consideration within four genres for publication:

**Research Articles:** The Journal invites well-researched academic papers in Bahá'í studies, anchored firmly in secondary literature as well as in the primary sources themselves. On submission, each paper will be sent out for peer review. Peer reviewers will then recommend submissions for publication, conditional acceptance (revision required), or publication elsewhere.

**Essays and Opinions:** Preliminary, exploratory papers that open up a field of inquiry to Bahá'í studies or raise important questions that serve as a stimulus to further research have their own contribution to make and are therefore invited as well. Exploratory papers might be relatively underdeveloped in their engagement with the field of study with which they converse, such that a specialist might find minor weaknesses in a discipline-specific sense. Yet such an essay may represent the very first engagement of Bahá'í teachings within an arena of discussion, and thus stimulate further work and more rigorous treatments by scholars with greater expertise in the field and who were previously unfamiliar with such an application of Bahá'í principles.

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<sup>2</sup> Shoghi Effendi, letter dated June 1933 to the High Commissioner for Palestine, Sir Arthur Wauchope, cited in *The Bahá'í Magazine*, 1935, 25(12), 354

Research Notes and Bibliographia: Reports of research-in-progress or literature reviews will provide a useful adjunct for the field of Bahá'í studies as well.

Art and Literary Pieces: Engaging or otherwise well-crafted essays that employ artistically expressive means to evoke insight are welcome. While these essays may primarily have a Bahá'í audience in mind, they should possess such literary merit as to have wider appeal. Visual art is also invited for publication.

Academics, independent scholars, literati, and translators are directed to submit their manuscripts for consideration to the Editor-in-Chief, Ismael Velasco. Starting with Vol. 2, the *Online Journal of Bahá'í Studies* will publish in the mode of “progressive publication,” where articles and art will appear in the sequence in which they are edited. This serial publication mode will allow for more quality control, and will further engage our international readership over the course of each publication cycle. There will also be the opportunity to discuss the papers online in a bulletin board forum.

### The Editors

Active in Bahá'í scholarship for more than a decade, Ismael Velasco lives in the United Kingdom. A graduate of Edinburgh University in history with a professional background in social and economic development, Velasco has published scholarly articles and book chapters on Bahá'í scripture, history and community development. Ismael Velasco publishes an online blog, Bahá'í Epistolary, at <http://bahai-epistolary.blogspot.com>.

Dr. Christopher Buck (Ph.D., *Study of Religion*, University of Toronto, 1996; J.D., *Constitutional Law and Civil Rights*, Thomas M. Cooley Law School, 2006) is an attorney and independent scholar. Author of *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy* (2005), *Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith* (1999), *Symbol and Secret: Qur'an Commentary in Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i Íqán* (1995/2004), and contributor of a lead chapter to the *Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an* (2006), Dr. Buck practices law at the law firm of Pribanic & Pribanic (White Oak, PA). At Michigan State University (2000–2004), Quincy University (1999–2000), Millikin University (1997–1999), and Carleton University (1994–1996), Dr. Buck taught American studies, African American studies, Islamic studies, and religious studies. A number of Dr. Buck's academic publications may be accessed online at <http://christopherbuck.com>.

Guidelines for OJBS contributors are available on the journal's web site <http://www.ojbs.org>.



## The Bahá'í Contribution to Cosmopolitan International Relations Theory

Dr. Nalinie Mooten  
Republic of Ireland, University of Limerick

### Introduction to IR and to the Theme of Cosmopolitanism<sup>1</sup>

“There is no such thing as a perfect theory embodying the final truth, for the truth which it is supposed to embody is in fact a thousand truths which constantly grow and change.”<sup>2</sup>

Crawford shares the view that no intellectual field today suffers more “from the ambiguity of its subject matter, or the contestability of its theories” than International Relations.<sup>3</sup> This ambiguity can be explained by “the age of transition”<sup>4</sup> in which many claim we live in, or by the complex, and thus kinetic nature, of world politics in our times. Germane to this idea is that many processes working below or beyond the limited territory of the modern nation-state are challenging its ethos and so the very foundation of International Relations, thus contributing to a growing sense of “bewilderment”. This sense of bewilderment, which denotes a notion of change in international politics, refers to the weakening of the powers of the nation-state due to the presence of extra-national forces, such as the question of human rights, the environment, increasing migration, modern slavery, and the global economy. This perplexity is, furthermore, linked to these global forces that destabilise the nation-state in its traditionally secure, self-sufficient, and unquestioned authority. Hence, scholars and politicians refer to the complexity of human interactions and relations, which foster a sentiment of confusion.<sup>5</sup> As Paul and Hall claim, “World politics in the twenty first century is likely to be more complex than in previous eras”.<sup>6</sup> In Rosenau’s eyes, such complexity has emerged from the increasing interdependence and interaction of societies, and, therefore, the

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper the initial IR will be used to designate International Relations Theory.

<sup>2</sup> Anwar Hussein Syed, *Walter Lippman's Philosophy of International Politics*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1963), 18

<sup>3</sup> Robert Crawford, *Idealism and Realism in International Relations: Beyond the Discipline*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 1

<sup>4</sup> The concept of the “age of transition” has been expressed by diverse authors such as: Ervin Laszlo, *The Inner Limits of Mankind: Heretical Reflections on Today's Values, Culture and Politics*, (London: Oneworld Publications, 1989); Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970); David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1995); or James N. Rosenau, *The Study of Global Interdependence: Essays on Transnationalisation of World Affairs*, (London: Frances Pinter Publishers, 1980)

<sup>5</sup> “Conceivably we are so confused that even the fact of change perplexes us. Conceivably the forms of world politics have undergone alteration while the underlying structures continue essentially unmodified”. (James N. Rosenau, *The Study of Global Interdependence*, p. 12).

<sup>6</sup> T.V. Paul & John Hall, *International Order and the Future of World Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 11



transnationalisation of world affairs, which brings with it challenges for theorising IR.<sup>7</sup>

The existing sense of perplexity also arises from the fact that the diversity of political thought in the discipline is sometimes prone to bring manifold contradictory assumptions (especially within traditional orthodox IR theory) about human and political behaviours, which are not easily reconciled. These contradictory views are found in the two mainstreams of thought in International Relations, one known as realism or the classical tradition, and the other as liberal internationalism. Some – may be too simply – would say that realism is a pessimistic view of IR, and others that liberal internationalism is the optimistic voice of the subject.<sup>8</sup> If we take the view that liberal internationalism is in strict opposition to realism, it is possible to describe liberalism as an optimistic and progressive viewpoint that considers human nature either as good or as having the potential to overcome its evil components. Liberal internationalism is, however, not the only possible channel through which one can find a voice to express the dissatisfaction with a static/sceptic worldview. Indeed, Persram notes that there is simplicity in the account that there are many theories **‘but really only two’** about the ‘world’.<sup>9</sup> [Emphasis added] Beyond ‘utopia’<sup>10</sup> and reality we find critical theories, including cosmopolitan democracy, critical international theory, feminist approaches, or postmodernism, which offer ‘emancipatory’ views, and call for the reconceptualisation of a world centred upon the fixity of the nation-state and power relations. Since realism offers a myopic vision, which emphasises short-term interests and the inevitability of conflict, I choose to concentrate on the “optimistic” and “emancipatory” voices of IR, which assert that change in international affairs is possible.<sup>11</sup> This relates to the idea that the realisation of the “good life” is not to be locked up within bounded units<sup>12</sup> and is a concern of the main approach scrutinised in this work: cosmopolitanism, or the cosmopolitan tradition. This tradition is used in two ways in this paper: firstly, as a description of the world around us, in particular, the development of transnational processes, and secondly, as a prescriptive or normative view of ‘what the world should look like’.

<sup>7</sup> James N. Rosenau, *The Study of Global Interdependence*, 1

<sup>8</sup> See Ian Clark, *The Hierarchy of States: Reform and Resistance in the International Order*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 49-66 and Robert Crawford, *Idealism and Realism*, 73

<sup>9</sup> Nalini Persram, “Coda, Sovereignty, Subjectivity, Strategy”, in: Jenny Edkins, Véronique Pin-Fat & Nalini Persram, (eds.), *Critical Perspectives on World Politics*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999, 165

<sup>10</sup> Since E.H. Carr’s *The Twenty Years’ Crisis* in 1939, a label has been put on liberal international writers as “utopian” or “idealists”. This body of thought has, thus, been denigrated since the inter-war period. “It is widely held that this critique had a devastating impact on the discipline”. (Peter Wilson, “The Twenty Years’ Crisis and the Category of Idealism in International Relations”, in: David Long & Peter Wilson, (eds.), *Thinkers of the Twenty Years’ Crisis: Inter-War Realism Reassessed*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995, 1).

<sup>11</sup> In this paper, it will be implicitly contended that beliefs can shape and influence our conduct. In other words, in IR, the adoption of a positive and optimistic vision, and the belief that peoples and states are fully able to use the faculty of reflection (belief) enhance the chances of building a more just and equitable world order (conduct/behaviour).

<sup>12</sup> Richard Devetak, “The Project of Modernity and International Relations Theory”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 1995, 24 (1), 38.

This paper, which is based on various extracts of my doctoral work, will scrutinise cosmopolitanism within IR theory; present the Bahá'í model; and correlate it to a cosmopolitan approach in IR. Bahá'í thinking, on the one hand, represents a strong reinforcement of the cosmopolitan tradition of thought, underlining its validity and necessity, and on the other hand, centres on the concept of the 'oneness of humanity' in its belief-system, delineating a rearticulation of ethical cosmopolitan roots.<sup>13</sup> This principle reflects the sameness (which does not correspond to homogeneity, but instead draws on a commonality shared by humanity) of all human beings across the globe. In other words, it emphasises that humanity constitutes one race and a single people. To underline the non-homogenising effects of the oneness of humanity, Bahá'í writings always mention the latter "with its corollary of unity in diversity".<sup>14</sup> The Bahá'í model is not only based on the ethics of oneness, but also on a recommended scheme of global governance that gives practical expression to this principle. Accordingly, the Bahá'í cosmopolitan model supports the idea of moving away from an obsession with state sovereignty, and embraces the broader and more inclusive level of humanity that denounces unjustified division. Bahá'í views add force to the argument that the nation-state, as the primary unit of IR, has had its day, and thereby highlight the need to include more flexible non-state actors. Robert Cox has expressed the same idea when he avers that the state is just one of the forces that shapes the present world, and admittedly not the most important one.<sup>15</sup> The oneness of mankind, thus, needs to be recognised as international politics have accepted the naturalness of political divisions, and a system based on the spatial nature of the world. This principle is useful in highlighting the artificiality of the concept of a closed, homogeneous, and ethically deficient, nation. To another extent, it will be contended that as a sacred approach with origins in the East, the Bahá'í model can significantly contribute to a growing Western secular cosmopolitan approach whilst expanding its focus, thereby demonstrating the universality of the tradition.

### The Nation-State as the Denial of the Oneness of Humankind

"Conceived of as an end in itself, the national state has come to be a denial of the oneness of mankind, the source of general disruption opposed to the true interests of its peoples..."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> This implies the reiteration of the oneness of humankind and universal ethical values. The Stoics stressed the oneness of humankind and the unity of life, and "undermined the assumed natural political divisions between Greek and barbarian". (Derek Heater, *World Citizenship and Government: Cosmopolitan Ideas in the History of Western Political Thought*, New York: St Martin's Press: 1996, 202).

<sup>14</sup> Bahá'í International Community, "[Global Action Plan for Social Development](#)", Contribution to the first substantive session of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations World Summit for Social Development, January-February 1994.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Cox in: Richard Devetak, "Critical Theory", in: S. Burchill, & A. Linklater, (eds.), *Theories of International Relations*, (2nd ed.), Basingtoke: Palgrave, 2001, 169

<sup>16</sup> Bahá'í International Community, "[A Bahá'í Declaration of Human Obligations and Rights](#)", February 1947,

As humankind is a natural unit, cosmopolitanism questions the nation-state, a divisive unit, as the principle actor in IR. In this way, cosmopolitanism challenges the notion of the natural permanency of a world community structured around divided national communities with forever distinct and unvarying populations. In a teleological sense, the nation-state is, thus, problematic on the grounds that it divides the human race, whose “reality” is one, and whose consequent aim is to reside in a world “polity”. Benedict Anderson views the nation-state as an “imagined” and “limited” community as “no nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind”: “the nation is imagined as limited because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations”.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, Eric Hobsbawm notes that nationalism, child of mother nation, represents an exclusive concept, “nationalism... excludes from its purview all who do not belong to its own nation, i.e. the vast majority of the human race”.<sup>18</sup> Since the nation-state divides the human race, and oftentimes constructs aggressive and divisive borders, it cannot be the supreme or final expression of human relationships on the planet, as this would constitute a denial of our integral oneness. The nation-state embodies a citizen-alien relationship that excludes all those who do not reside within, whilst the cosmopolitan ideal ensures that all should have access to human rights (albeit with reference to specificity)<sup>19</sup> enshrined in a cosmopolitan law, which are not dependent on a spatial and limited unit for its application.

Indeed, how can humanity find its natural home in a unit that has given rise to xenophobia, genocide, or nationalism? The notion that the unit of the political state needs a homogeneous cultural nation has, as a consequence, led to excessive exclusivity and jingoistic intolerance. This idea has also encouraged the suppression of what is perceived as threats to a homogeneous community, and which ironically represents a completely illusory notion, a ‘myth’ or ‘artefact’<sup>20</sup> due to the increasing cultural heterogeneity of its population that is caused by migration, diaspora, or multiculturalism. In this regard, the Aristotelian notion of a good life locked within a polis can no longer serve its purpose, and must be transposed onto a more inclusive cosmopolis. Undeniably, the breakdown of the nation-state system entails new conceptions of equality in terms of gender and race, thereby confirming that the oneness of humankind, which works towards the inclusion of vulnerable groups and the recognition of a diversified and yet single human race, should be given greater attention in world affairs.

<sup>17</sup> Anderson Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1991, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Hobsbawm in: Anthony D. Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in the Global Era*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995, 9.

<sup>19</sup> For instance children’s rights or women’s rights will vary in their formulations whilst still part of a broader human rights regime.

<sup>20</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm, “Inventing Traditions”, in Eric Hobsbawm & T.Ranger, (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Here it is important to mention that feminist or postcolonial theories that work toward “equal rights” promote the idea of the deconstruction of dichotomies such as superior/inferior, male/female<sup>21</sup> (with “female” having here an inferior status). They mention the “political presence of newly empowered subjects” underlining diversity, multiculturalism, and environmentalism.<sup>22</sup> Azza Karam notes, “Emancipatory futures are inextricably linked to making the connections between local events and global ones, and doing so through resistance and accommodating difference, thus sharing in the kaleidoscope of power”.<sup>23</sup> These paradigms also contribute to refining the cosmopolitan project not as a ‘totalising’ universal project, but as one that seeks to unite and restore dignity,<sup>24</sup> while preserving an enriching diversity. Booth referred to this revised cosmopolitanism as ‘sensitive universalism.’<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, the nation-state represents a ‘problem’ in present day politics, as it is a confined unit that is given primary importance by IR through realist ideology, while its sphere of jurisdiction and influence have been rendered obsolete by more global processes. The nation-state, a particularistic unit, cannot solve problems which are increasingly global, and which likewise, demand global solutions. Indeed, there is enmeshment and interweaving of processes in terms of economics and culture<sup>26</sup> that cannot be locked within territorial confines. Globalisation<sup>38</sup>, new technologies and the global and instant accessibility of information have transformed the way peoples interact with each other, becoming more integrated and closer than was hitherto possible thereby challenging state sovereignty. The latter, as a case in point, asserts principles of non-intervention that weaken claims to humanitarian intervention, strengthening the dichotomy between us/them and inside/outside. Human solidarity cannot be created within solidified borders: it has to be diffused through porous borders and an inclusive attitude of mind, i.e. a *denkungsart* that is advocated by cosmopolites. Accordingly, the nation-state cannot be treated as the ultimate unit within IR theory.

### The Etymology and Evolution of Cosmopolitanism

The etymological root of “cosmopolitanism” finds its origin in the word “cosmopolis” made up of the words “cosmos” (universe) and “polis” (city). The original Greek definition of “cosmopolis”, thus, refers to the universal

<sup>21</sup> Azza M. Karam, “Feminist Futures”, in: Jan Pieterse Nederveen, (ed.), *Global Futures: Shaping Globalization*, (New York: Zed Books, 2000), 184.

<sup>22</sup> Braidotti, in: *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>23</sup> Azza M. Karam, “Feminist Futures”, p. 185.

<sup>24</sup> “A local community with open boundaries, mutual responsibility...and no will to racial classification is the political key to human dignity, worth, and freedom”. (Kate Manzo, “Critical Humanism: Postcolonialism and Postmodern Ethics” in: David Campbell & Michael J. Shapiro, (eds.), *Moral Spaces: Rethinking Ethics and World Politics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, 177).

<sup>25</sup> Ken Booth, “Human Wrongs and International Relations”, *International Affairs*, 1995, 71 (1), 119.

<sup>26</sup> With the movement of peoples across borders, culture is also carried across borders, which challenges the notion that culture can be kept ‘safe’ in a particular ‘home’.

city of humanity, which requires dwellers to give meaning and life to its existence. The universal city, henceforth, goes hand in hand with a notion of citizenship, and to be more precise, world citizenship. It is also possible to trace the etymological roots of cosmopolitanism to the word “cosmopolite” which means “citizen of the world”. This latter meaning is derived from the ancient Greek “kosmos” (world or universe) and “politês” (citizen). Thus, it is extremely relevant to correlate these two interpretations to the word “cosmopolitan”, one being a political and emotional habitat, or universal city, and the other being the more personal, and not yet legalised affiliation to that sense of belonging, or world citizenship. The Stoics, who conceived of the whole universe as a home for world citizens, conveyed this idea in their teachings. “After all the etymology of cosmopolitan points to the ancient Greek word of the polis, and its members the politeis”.<sup>27</sup>

Cosmopolitanism highlights the limitedness of political communities (the polis was criticised by Stoicism), which now correlates to the inadequacy of ‘reasons of state’ or ‘reasons of political communities’, when their fates are entwined.<sup>28</sup> Cosmopolitanism developed from being merely ethical, to more political in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and present forms of cosmopolitanism make use of both ethical and political arguments, especially with regard to an ‘unequal globalisation’ which must be brought under control if all are to share in its benefits.

Cosmopolitanism has three main principles: individuals (not states) represent the basis of political communities; the equal moral worth of all human beings; and the importance of developing principles which can all be shared with respect to differences.<sup>29</sup> “This larger, open-ended, moral perspective” Held notes, “is a device for focusing our thought, and a basis for testing the intersubjective validity of our conceptions of the good. It offers a way of exploring principles, norms and rules that might reasonably command agreement”.<sup>30</sup> In other words, cosmopolitanism starts from a human perspective, rather than a state or a particular perspective, and positively asserts that as humans we share commonalities and the propensity to build peaceful societies.

Various strands of the tradition can be found in Stoic cosmopolitanism, liberal cosmopolitanism (Enlightenment and modern cosmopolitanism), and critical cosmopolitanism (a revisionist cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment), and share important points of convergence. They are projects of universal emancipation, targeted firstly at the promotion of ‘universal community’ (ethical and/or political), the eradication of war, the

<sup>27</sup> Ulrich K. Preuss, “Citizenship in the European Union: a Paradigm for Transnational Democracy?”, in D Archibugi & D Held & M Köhler, (eds.), *Re-imagining Political Community: Studies in Cosmopolitan Democracy*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998, 145.

<sup>28</sup> David Held, “From Executive to Cosmopolitan Multilateralism”, in: David Held & Mathias Koenig-Archibugi, (Eds) *Taming Globalization: Frontiers of Governance*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003, 168.

<sup>29</sup> David Held, *From Executive to Cosmopolitan Multilateralism*, 168.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

protection of human rights and the environment, the alleviation of world poverty, and the safeguarding of cultural diversity. The project can be regarded as an attitude of mind (a feeling of belonging to a universal society of mankind, and not exclusively to one's nation-state), and as the desire to create 'world citizenship' institutions such as a global parliament, or an assembly of world citizens at the United Nations (UN). The history of these ideas is portrayed in Derek Heater's *World Citizenship and Government: Cosmopolitan Ideas in the History of Western Political Thought*. Cosmopolitanism contains various strands such as a legal cosmopolitanism (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or the International Criminal Court (ICC)), political cosmopolitanism (a global parliament, world government, or global governance), and moral cosmopolitanism, on which these two former notions are said to rest. As contended in this paper, these three "cosmopolitanisms" are interdependent.

Cosmopolitan thinking began with an ethical and philosophical ideal of 'world citizenship' embracing the whole cosmos or universe (and not only the world), and was characterised by the interplay of ideas, namely the ideas that the polis was not a self-sufficient and perfect socio-political unit, that moral considerations sustained by a system of natural law was essential, and that human beings, despite all their variations, constitute a single human species. This ancient cosmopolitanism eventually took another form in the Middle Ages, being transferred to ideas of universal 'religious' empires based, as it was the case with Christianity, on a Christian version of a universal Roman Empire (thoughts of World Empire, however, rarely extended beyond Christian lands).<sup>31</sup> With the demise of the idea of 'universal empire' that accompanied the emergence of an international system composed of confined states, a 'Westphalian system' of world order emerged in which new ideas were conceived to sustain the concept of a religious service to humankind. Even with the rise of states, the cosmopolitan ideal found its niche in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment in secular programmes that were devised to appease relations between states, and which often represented embryonic plans for the United Nations or the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Most of them were, however, dominated by the fallacious notion that these relations were condemned to be between states or between heads of states, and (except for the notable exception of Crucé) were mostly governed by European schemes and the Christian religion. In addition to Crucé's ingenuity, Kant conceived of 'a third level', namely a cosmopolitan law sustained by world citizens that applies to the world as a whole, and not only to civil and international levels.

Cosmopolitanism has, thus, been the interplay of ideas of world citizenship and world state, the latter being predominant in the Middle Ages and Enlightenment, and the former being prevalent in ancient times, in 'Kantian'

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<sup>31</sup> Derek Heater, *World Citizenship and Government*, 182

Enlightenment, and especially in the twentieth century (namely with critical theories such as cosmopolitan democracy). The cosmopolitan ideal has moved from an idea of moral cosmopolitanism, to expansionism based on the rights of rulers, and finally to the notion of the respect of peoples based on their rights and duties in the cosmopolis. As such, "It is highly unlikely that a renewed medieval Roman Empire would have made provision for any effective citizenly participation in the imperial political system." Cosmopolitan democracy theorists argue that global institutions should be governed by world citizens, and highlight the nation-state's limitations as it hinders the practice of global democracy and global values. The protection of human rights advocated by most cosmopolitans represents an activist cosmopolitanism.

Current cosmopolitanism can be illustrated by the inclination (Linklater calls it a 'moral anxiety') to help 'foreigners' on the grounds of a common humanity, due to suffering, starvation, poverty, in other words, a human duty to respect and protect human rights and justice. Indeed, cosmopolitanism undermines the nation-state by intervening beyond its limits, and by diluting the notion of 'foreigner', as it propounds the idea that morality does not end at national boundaries. Cosmopolitanism challenges the predominance of the nation-state on many fronts: firstly, as a result of our global and technological age, and secondly, due to the incapacity of the nation-state to foster morality beyond its boundaries (i.e. caring for 'foreigners' is not as relevant as caring for fellow-citizens). Furthermore, the reality of human oneness calls into question the discriminatory divisions fostered by the nation-state (the nation-state is most of the times a safe haven for citizens, but treats non-citizens in less 'significant categories' such as immigrant, refugee, alien i.e. it creates an other). No longer a philosophical speculation, or we might say an 'ideal', cosmopolitanism has become tangible as testified by numerous non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the movement of peoples and ideas across borders, and the reality of dual and multiple loyalties and citizenships.

International organisations and a supranational unit such as the European Union (EU), and other regional bodies demonstrate the inadequacy of the nation-state, and the advantage to unite not only for common benefits, but also for increasing understanding and communication across porous borders. Cosmopolitanism, in our times, constitutes a reaction against material global interdependence, the impotence of the nation-state to satisfy our needs (functionalism), and the rejection of discriminatory prejudices based on gender, race, class, or nation (a reiteration of the oneness of humankind). We can, indeed, state that we are moving towards a more mature form of cosmopolitanism, namely a more sensitive cosmopolitanism that wishes to be identified with the constituency of the human species. Furthermore, the twentieth century has seen decolonisation (notwithstanding that the pernicious effects of slavery and colonisation have continued socio-political and psychological repercussions on the body of mankind), and technological



and communications revolutions (globalisation), which if managed in an inclusive way, offers inviting conditions for the realisation of a cosmopolis.

It is also relevant to note that the term “cosmopolitan” is presently used to define the reduction of state sovereignty in cases where other institutions collide with the nation-state’s powers to decide.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Mary Kaldor, who speaks in favour of “cosmopolitan theory” and transnational democracy, does not envisage the occurrence of a world state or government, but rather the surpassing of state sovereignty in certain instances. Cosmopolitans argue that the ever-increasing presence and participation of a global civil society, as manifested in the growing number of NGOs or intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), and locally based grassroots social movements, constitute the upcoming signs of a political cosmopolitan reality testifying to the moral and economic interdependence of humanity. Indeed, cosmopolitan political reality now comes from the grassroots rather than from the top, implying that the people, who consider themselves as world citizens should be the true decision-makers. “[World] citizenship operates both ‘vertically’ and ‘horizontally’”. For example, a world citizen may wish to concentrate on campaigning for the reform of the UN or supporting organisations devoted to relieving world poverty”.<sup>33</sup>

Numerous theories have been devised towards an international political system, in the forms of federalism, functionalism, or cosmopolitan democracy, which although differing in their manifold aspects, reflect the need for a cosmopolitan political agenda. Thus, cosmopolitanism is not solely a theory; rather it encompasses all of the theories of International Relations that transcend the nation-state (with or without questioning its existence): a cosmopolitan tradition rather than a theory of IR.

### **Realism, Liberal Internationalism, and Critical Theory**

Realism – *realpolitik*, power politics – can be traced back to the Greek historian Thucydides in the fifth century BCE, or to Renaissance diplomat, historian and playwright Macchiavelli, and later with twentieth century figures such as Morgenthau or E. H. Carr, mostly influenced by the American critic and theologian Reinhold Niebuhr.<sup>34</sup> Realist IR is the most ‘anti-cosmopolitan’ strand of IR theory. Indeed, the unbridgeable gulf between domestic and international politics is a central theme in realist thought, whereas cosmopolitans envisage a form of world political organisation (not necessarily a world government) with universal moral principles.<sup>35</sup> Cosmopolitanism, hence, comes as the antithesis or critique of

<sup>32</sup> Daniele Archibugi, “Principles of Cosmopolitan Democracy”, in: D. Archibugi, D. Held & M. Köhler, *Re-imagining*, (eds.), 216.

<sup>33</sup> Derek Heater, *World Citizenship: Cosmopolitan Thinking and its Opponents*, (London: Continuum, 1992), 5.

<sup>34</sup> Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew Linklater “Rationalism”, in: S. Burchill & A. Linklater, (eds.), *Theories of International*

realist IR (the latter being one of the many theories of IR),<sup>36</sup> and therefore it is essential to review the characteristics of realism.

Several aspects of realist theory can be contrasted with the cosmopolitan tradition. More importantly, realists believe in the irreconcilability of the domestic and international spheres, whereas cosmopolitans envisage the pacifying of international relations through the promotion of the concept of 'humanity', thereby dismissing the relevance of a sound dichotomy between 'domestic' and 'international'. Realists emphasise the anarchic nature of international politics, which is opposed to the sovereign and secure character of the state, the basic unit of analysis in realism. The absence of anarchy in the domestic realm provides for the possibility of progress and security. By contrast, the international is characterised by the "endless competition for power and security in the world of states".<sup>37</sup> Hence, the international system is doomed to be controlled by power politics, which promotes little prospect for change and peace, and which, accordingly, impedes the imagining of a 'post-sovereign' system. In brief, cosmopolitans view international politics as a unified sphere in which the division between the domestic (internal) and international (external) should be reconciled. Indeed, for the cosmopolitan, the domestic and the international spheres are artificial divisions in the face of a common humanity, whereas the realist sees them as fixed in the realm of anarchy. For cosmopolitans, this flawed division prevents the fostering of the means by which a 'post-sovereign' world can be imagined, constructed, and improved upon, whereas for realists, this contention is fallacious as the world is divided along permanent and antagonistic boundaries.

Although the study of International Relations was born within 'idealism' after World War I (WWI), it "had been effectively refounded after World War II on realist premises, and has exerted its dominion as a paradigm in International Relations".<sup>38</sup> With the liberal internationalists claiming that people had a genuine desire for peace, and the power of world opinion would sustain the Wilsonian League of Nations, it was then easy, with the examples of Mussolini and Hitler, to describe these ideas as simply wrong.<sup>39</sup> Liberal internationalism was held to have false perceptions about human nature, and was perceived as a flawed world outlook. In the 1930s, Reinhold Niebuhr reflected on these matters, and argued that liberals exaggerated "the capacities of collectivities of humans to behave in ways that were truly

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*Relations*, London: Macmillan Press, 1996, 93.

<sup>36</sup> These include Liberal Internationalism, the English School, Feminism, Marxism, Critical Theory, Postmodernism, and Green Politics.

<sup>37</sup> Andrew Linklater, *Rationalism*, 93.

<sup>38</sup> Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, 28. The origin of the dissimilarities between the two perspectives can be found in the 'first great debate' between the realists and the 'idealists', which was centred on the possibility of the pacification of international society through a sense of moral obligation to human beings in the world. (Andrew Linklater *Rationalism*, p. 93.) In this debate, cosmopolitan concepts such as collective security, the rule of law, and peace are contrasted with the realist terms 'balance of power', 'anarchy', and 'sovereignty'. (At that time, cosmopolitan IR can be related to liberal internationalism.)

<sup>39</sup> Chris Brown, *Understanding International Relations*, Basingtoke: Palgrave, 2001, 27.

moral”.<sup>40</sup> This statement, thus, supports the realist view that morality is unattainable between collectivities, and stands opposed to the cosmopolitan belief that peaceful societies are attainable.

In the twentieth century, realism has had a great impact on International Relations as an academic subject, but has also influenced many American politicians (for example Kissinger), and can be said to have greatly shaped twentieth century world politics. Donnelly remarks, “Realism should not be ignored. But it should not be allowed to shape the study and practice of International Relations, as it has for so much of the past half-century”.<sup>41</sup> It was mostly E. H. Carr, with *The Twenty Years' Crisis: an Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, who reshaped the discipline along more realist lines at the end of World War II, taking into account what he regarded as the ‘neglected’ factor of power. Carr stated that this work was “written with the deliberate aim of counteracting the glaring and dangerous effect of nearly all thinking, both academic and popular, about international politics in English-speaking countries from 1919 to 1939 – the almost total neglect of the factor of power”.<sup>42</sup> To another extent, at that time, his aim was to discredit the other paradigm of International Relations, which he named utopianism.<sup>43</sup> Carr criticised the normative character of liberal internationalism, and its neglect of ‘power’ as a crucial factor in IR. Liberal internationalists, on the contrary, stressed the concepts of morality and altruism in global politics.

Realism, with the experience of the inter-war years, remained the main paradigm of International Relations, especially at the height of the Cold War and Super Power competition. However, realism did not go unchallenged, and was criticised in the seventies by proponents of the ‘complex interdependence paradigm’.<sup>44</sup> As a response, this paradigm was discredited and opposed by the proponent of neo-realism, Kenneth Waltz, who claimed that the notions of interdependence were extravagant.<sup>45</sup> Kenneth Waltz’s main claim is centred on the belief that states operate in a self-help system (or in an anarchical international system), where no higher form of authority prevails. Moreover, they are only preoccupied with their own welfare and security, and regard other states as potential threats. This self-help system forces them to adjust their power, and to be constantly aware of the power position of other states, which gives rise to a balance of power regulating world affairs in an anarchical system.<sup>46</sup> Whereas Morgenthau in ‘traditional realism’ (as Waltz named it) argues that power is rooted in human nature,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> In: *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>43</sup> For Carr, “utopianism” refers to liberal internationalism. Peter Wilson, *The Twenty Years Crisis*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Chris Brown, *Understanding International Relations*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997, 41. In the seventies, Keohane and Nye, who introduced the notion of ‘complex interdependence’ and the presence of multiple international factors, presented a substantive alternative to realism.

<sup>45</sup> Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, 30.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

“Waltz points to the anarchical condition of the international realm which he claims imposes the accumulation of power as a systemic requirement on states”.<sup>47</sup> The latter treats the international system as a separate domain, whereas the former relies on reductionism. The main ideas of neo-realism are, thus, that anarchy and the distribution of power between states define the international system (as they shape state behaviour), and that states would not abandon egoism and self-interest for international order.

What is here relevant, especially in relation to cosmopolitanism, is that like realism, neo-realism still concentrates on the nation-state as the main unit. This state-centric view is in opposition to cosmopolitan views, which criticise the idea of the nation-state as a permanent and principal fixture of the international system, and which promote a normative international order where human values and acts of cooperation can prevail. There has been, nonetheless, an attempt to render realism more ‘normative’. The English school of realists and rationalists has stressed the importance of international society or a world of states as opposed to universal categories such as humanity or sub-state entities.<sup>48</sup> Although the English school is often seen as part of realism and recognises conditions of anarchy,<sup>49</sup> it ‘acknowledges that the sense of belonging to the community of humankind has left its civilizing mark upon the state and international relations’.<sup>50</sup> This school of thought stresses the concept of international society: “the English school of International Relations shares with realist/neo-realist theorists the importance of anarchy, war, and balance of power, but only as ideas that shape political practice, rather than as laws of nature or unchanging phenomena deeply embedded in the international system”.<sup>51</sup> International society can be depicted as sharing normative standards and rules, in the form, for example, of international law. International society, based on a system of states, can still share common aims, rules of conduct, and organisations – thus blending realist aspects with a more normative outlook.

### **Realism, Human Nature and the Centrality of Territorially Organised Entities**

Realism, even if it acknowledges the potential for change, confirms that it occurs within the limits of the struggle for power enshrined in a static human nature. Gilpin notes that realism is distinguished by its “pessimism regarding moral progress and human possibilities”.<sup>52</sup> Human nature is

<sup>47</sup> Scott Burchill, *Realism and Neo-Realism*, p. 78. The systemic level relates to theories that conceive of causes operating on the international level, in addition to national and individual levels. Reductionist theories, for Waltz, only operate on the national and individual levels. (Ibid., 92).

<sup>48</sup> Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, 52.

<sup>49</sup> Wight, in a very realist fashion, contended that the domain of international relations is “incompatible with progressivist theory”. Martin Wight, in: A Linklater, , *Rationalism*, 94.

<sup>50</sup> Andrew Linklater, *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> James E. Dougherty & Robert L. Pfaltzgraff jr., *Contending Theories of International Relations: A Comprehensive Survey* New York: Longman, 2001, 168.

<sup>52</sup> Gilpin in: Mastanduno, Michael, *Unipolar Politics: Realism and State Strategies after the Cold War*, New York: Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1999, 20.

viewed as inherently pugnacious, is egoistic at its core, and leads to immorality and conflict in international affairs. Morgenthau, for example, observed, “the conflict-ridden international arena” is the consequence of “forces inherent in human nature” and that “the animus dominandi” or a natural will to power characterises human beings. Machiavelli expresses human nature as “insatiable, arrogant, crafty, and shifting, and above else malignant, iniquitous, violent, and savage”.<sup>53</sup> In the early twentieth century, Niebuhr in his *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932) has greatly influenced the realist movement and main realist writers, such as Morgenthau and E.H Carr. Niebuhr took the original sin as the explanation for an evil human nature. In his eyes, “the ultimate sources of social conflicts and injustice are to be found in the ignorance and selfishness of men”.<sup>54</sup>

Change, from the realist perspective, can, thus, either be cyclical or stagnant, whereas from the liberal viewpoint, it follows a unilinear evolution towards progress, whether this is ethical or material.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, realists uphold that since relations between states are sustained by order, a balance aimed at preventing war between nations should prevail, whilst liberals see the necessity of a system of collective security in order to sustain peace. Realists rely, firstly, on clearly defined units represented by states, which are at the centre of their political theory, and secondly, on the notion of sovereignty, which “defines what the state is”.<sup>56</sup> With the emergence of new actors, realists recognise that the nation-state is not the only actor on the international scene, but nevertheless, hold that it is the most important one. Indeed, this view is found in the words of neo-realist, Stephen Krasner (1976): “In recent years, students of International Relations have multinationalized, transnationalized, bureaucratized and transgovernmentalized the state until it has virtually ceased to exist as an analytic construct. This perspective is at best profoundly misleading”.<sup>57</sup> Neo-realists such as Waltz regard states as the “unitary actors with a single motive – the wish to survive”.<sup>58</sup> This point is also stressed by Griffith “Realism conjures up a grim image of international politics. Within the territorial boundaries of the nation-state, politics is an activity of potential moral progress ... Beyond the exclusionary borders of sovereign presence, politics is essentially the realm of survival rather than progress”<sup>59</sup> – a view that denies the cosmopolitan contention that the international realm does not have to be characterised by recurrence, fixity, conflict, and power politics.

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<sup>53</sup> Machiavelli in: Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, 23

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 48

<sup>55</sup> Lucian M. Ashworth, *Creating International Studies: Angell, Mitrany and the Liberal Tradition*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999, 16.

<sup>56</sup> Barry Buzan, *Anticipating the Future*, London: Simon & Schuster, 1998, 388.

<sup>57</sup> Stephen Krasner, in: Michael Mastanduno, *Unipolar Politics*, 21

<sup>58</sup> Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, 52.

<sup>59</sup> Martin Griffith, *Realism, Idealism, and International Politics: A Reinterpretation*, London: New York: Routledge, 1992, p. ix.

It is often put forward that realists see the world as it is and 'idealists' as it should be. It can also be argued that realists only rely on the present, whilst 'idealists' wish to change the latter. In this way, realism seems to be 'stuck' with present events. Furthermore, with the demise of the Cold War, realism has lost its appeal. It is a theory functioning within defined limits: it is taken aback by the occurrence of sudden and unexpected events. Theory should, however, seek to predict and find solutions to the world's problems, rather than lay down a set of negative facts about the reality of human nature, and the presumed ensuing impasse in which world politics finds itself. Indeed, if this were so, there would not be much point writing about International Relations theory as the only contemplation would be the image of a gloomy world doomed to remain static. Realism focuses on present facts, rather than on their development over time, as testified by its attachment to the nation-state system. Accordingly, it focuses on temporality, rather than evolution. Booth states, "the realist tendency to privilege the short term can lead to a kind of myopia in which broader problems are not detected until it is too late to do anything about them".<sup>60</sup> Miller also shares the view that "it is wrong to assume that the only reality is that which presents itself for today or tomorrow."<sup>61</sup> Recently, cosmopolitanism underlines that the conservative nature of realism has neglected the logic of change, the existence of plural actors in world politics, and has been an obstacle to the creation of an alternative world order.<sup>62</sup>

### Cosmopolitanism and Current IR Theory

In the last two decades or so, IR has taken on a new turn, a 'post-positivist' turn, no longer centred upon a state-centric theory, namely that of realism, and allowing for the (re-) emergence of normative International Relations theory, which emphasises the potential transformation of the world through criticism of power politics. This has propelled IR theory into a 'new' perspective, and opened the way for alternative views that are no longer regarded as unfounded, but instead as an enrichment of IR. The rationale underlying theoretical inquiry is no longer solely problem-solving (safeguarding the status quo by legitimising power relations), but more critical (having the imaginative potential to anticipate alternative models of world order). The last two decades or so have seen a clear rejection of positivist assumptions and a return to the normative side of the discipline (how the world ought to be), founded after WWI upon liberal internationalism or 'idealism'. It is held that the IR theorist can no longer be totally detached from the object of enquiry (feminists call this 'embedded knowledge'), and that theory helps construct the world, and is not outside of it (constitutive theory). Robert Cox notes, in this context, that theory often

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p.9

<sup>62</sup> Scott Burchill, *Realism and Neo-Realism*, 90.

'precedes and shapes reality' indicating that theorists cannot stand outside the political and social world they examine.<sup>63</sup>

Cosmopolitanism, as a normative approach, can be found in different forms in many theories in normative IR. It can be liberal, critical, feminist, green, or even postmodern. However, what is certain is that it cannot be realist. Political liberalism is "a universalist doctrine and so is committed to some notion of a universal community of mankind which transcends identification with and membership of the nation-state community" it "has faith in the capacity of human beings to solve seemingly intractable problems through collective action".<sup>64</sup> Cosmopolitanism is enshrined in contemporary liberalism as "liberals have offered a conception of community and identity which spans the entire planet".<sup>65</sup> Its normativity surpasses liberal internationalism, however. It can be found in critical theories, and in some aspects of postmodernism.

Critical theory argues that counter-hegemonic forces challenge prevailing institutional and political arrangements. These counter-hegemonic values are transnational in nature and based on "an alternative set of values, concepts and concerns, coming from organisations like Amnesty International, Oxfam, and Greenpeace".<sup>66</sup> Postmodernists also reinvent International Relations along a new ethics with 'others'. This postmodern cosmopolitanism, as it is here argued, is based on a new 'solidarity with others'. "Postmodernists want to rethink the basis... for notions of morality and ethics, so that they are sensitive and responsive to differences".<sup>67</sup> The label 'critical' is sometimes referred to as feminist, postmodernist and critical international theories, and the term 'critical' shall be employed in this sense in this paper, in other words, as a body of thought in IR which questions the fixity of the prevalent order. This body of thought, thus, intends to 'denaturalise' notions of strangeness and territoriality, which have become increasingly familiar. As Seyla Benhabib observes, "The dogmatism of knowledge is shown to be the dogmatism of a way of life".<sup>68</sup>

The days when realism reigned supreme over IR have drawn to a close. Cosmopolitan approaches are increasingly gaining ground, as together they make a strong case for the validity and contemporary necessity of cosmopolitanism. They highlight growing interactions that strip borders and exclusive political communities of any sound coherence and meaning that they might have enjoyed in the past.

<sup>63</sup> Scott Burchill, "Introduction", in: S. Burchill, & A. Linklater, (eds.), *Theories*, 1st ed., 2.

<sup>64</sup> Jill Steans & Lloyd Pettiford, *International Relations: Perspectives and Themes*, Edinburgh: Pearson Education, 2001, 54.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Seyla Benhabib, in: Richard Devetak, "Critical Theory", 161.



### The Bahá'í Faith as a Cosmopolitan Model

The Bahá'í Faith and Bahá'í cosmopolitan thinking originate from Asia, most particularly nineteenth century Persia, and have, as such, a non-Western origin, unlike most known cosmopolitan perspectives in IR. Heater notes, "Turning to modern times, several writings advocating a world community or a formalised world constitution were produced in Asian countries in the nineteenth century. Of the Asian texts, we may particularly cite the teachings of the Persian prophet Bahá'u'lláh (b. 1817), the originator of the Bahá'í Faith (which has also attracted many adherents in Western countries)".<sup>69</sup>

Indeed, cosmopolitan principles constitute the core of the Bahá'í Faith as "the universality of humankind, including the social and political oneness, are fundamental principles of the Bahá'í Faith".<sup>70</sup> The Bahá'í writings, no less than earlier prophetic religions, concern themselves with governance.<sup>71</sup> Some Bahá'í writers underline that it is a novelty that the founder of a world religion advocates global federation as a means to accomplishing world unity. "Bahá'u'lláh brought, for the first time in religious history, explicit teachings about the need for an international federation capable of harmonizing the affairs of an interdependent world and bringing about world peace".<sup>72</sup> This call for global governance could be explained by the global intent and character upon which the Bahá'í Faith bases its principles.

For its adherents, however, what some might call 'Bahá'í ideas' are not just the enunciation of certain principles, and the attempt at their practical realisation, nor a mere political philosophy that is relevant to cosmopolitan ideas, but rather a whole new divine revelation that answers to the social and spiritual needs of an ever interdependent humanity. In contrast to 'secular' cosmopolitan trends, the Bahá'í writings rely on a historical process that is divine in nature, hence finding several references to the intervention of 'God', (or what some political philosophers such as Kant called 'The Hidden Plan of Nature'),<sup>73</sup> and underline some certitudes about some aspects of the future. However, it is noteworthy that cosmopolitanism, in the Bahá'í ethos, is not just a vague appeal to human brotherhood, but contains clear guidelines on the elaboration of a system of global governance and peace in our times.<sup>74</sup> It is this peace programme, which at its

<sup>69</sup> Derek Heater, *World Citizenship and Government*, x.

<sup>70</sup> Phyllis Sternberg Perrakis, "Bahá'í Universalism", *Dialogue and Universalism*, Warsaw University and Polish Academy of Sciences, 1996, 6, (11-12), 17.

<sup>71</sup> Graham Hassall, "[Contemporary Governance and Conflict Resolution: A Bahá'í Reading](#)", January 2000

<sup>72</sup> Brian Lepard, "From League of Nations to World Commonwealth", in: Charles Lerche (ed.), *Emergence: Dimensions of a New World Order*, London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991, 72. See also Foad Katirai, *Global Governance and the Lesser Peace*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1981, 9, and Nalinie Mooten, Interview with Daniel Wheatley, conducted Via Email, 10 February 2003.

<sup>73</sup> Kant: in David, Hoffman, *The Renewal of Civilization*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1981, 37.

<sup>74</sup> "As indicated by its many social teachings, the religion of Bahá'u'lláh is not just concerned with the spiritual development of the individual. Its broad sweep includes a wide range of social principles and teachings

core revolves around the consciousness of the oneness of mankind, and which calls for more integrated global organisations, that shall be examined.

### Origins of Bahá'í World Order Themes

The Bahá'í Faith is centred upon three main figures – The Báb (1819-1850), Bahá'u'lláh (1817- 1892), and 'Abdu'l'Bahá (1844-1921) – Who, for the first stage of its development guided the Bahá'í community at large. These three figures are not just the leaders of the Faith: for its members, the Báb is a herald-prophet, who along with bringing a whole new message to nineteenth century Iran (the religion He founded is referred to as the Bábí Faith) ushered in the start of a new religious cycle and announced the arrival of the founder-prophet of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh. Bahá'u'lláh appointed His son 'Abdu'l'Bahá to guide the community after His passing.<sup>75</sup> The writings of these three figures constitute the Bahá'í sacred scriptures, as Hindus look to the Vedas and Bhagavad-Gita, Christians look to the Bible, or Muslims to the Koran. Interestingly, and in accord with their beliefs, Bahá'ís consider the aforementioned Holy Scriptures, along with those of the main religions, to be divine in origin, hence refusing to think of their Faith in superior and different terms, but just as a further element in the revelation of the divine process.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh enjoins all to “Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship”.<sup>77</sup> As Udo Schaefer notes, “Such a belief necessarily results in the rejection of exclusivism whereby one religion is regarded as the sole bringer of salvation...The reconciliation of religions is a major goal of Heilsgeschichte (salvation), because it is the foundation of ‘world wide reconciliation’ called for by Bahá'u'lláh, and which is the prerequisite for lasting world peace”.<sup>78</sup>

'Abdu'l'Bahá designated His grandson Shoghi Effendi Rabbaní as the interpreter of the writings, and five years after Shoghi Effendi's passing away in 1957, the Universal House of Justice, the first international permanent institution of the Bahá'í Faith, came into being. This event signalled the start of a new governance system within the Bahá'í community that was no longer based on a single figure. Along with the sacred scriptures of the Faith, the writings and statements of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice constitute the official guidelines and literature of the Faith. 'Abdu'l'Bahá interpreted and clarified the writings of

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that aim to carry forward humanity's collective life on the planet” (Moojan, Momen, *The Bahá'í Faith: A Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999, 63).

<sup>75</sup> Whilst the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are regarded as ‘Messengers of God’, 'Abdu'l'Bahá, in the eyes of Bahá'ís, is a perfect exemplar of their teachings.

<sup>76</sup> See Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991, 119.

<sup>77</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983, 95. This and other statements have inspired the Bahá'í International Community to be pro-active in the Inter-Faith dialogue.

<sup>78</sup> Udo Schaefer, “Bahá'u'lláh's Unity Paradigm: A Contribution to Interfaith Dialogue on a Global Ethic”, *Dialogue and Universalism*, 1996, 6 (11-12), 27-28.

Bahá'u'lláh, and Shoghi Effendi further elucidated the principles of world order that rests on the firm foundation of the oneness of humankind. Shoghi Effendi gave this principle considerable attention during his 'mandate' as Head of the Bahá'í Faith from the time of his designation as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith in 1921 to his passing away in 1957.<sup>79</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh's message of world order and peace is mainly expressed in a series of letters sent to the world secular and religious leaders.<sup>80</sup> Most of the statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá were pronounced during His travels to Europe and Northern America between August 1911 and June 1913. During this journey, 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'warned of an imminent world war and the forces of social dislocation that such a conflict would unleash and elaborated Bahá'u'lláh's principles of global concord'.<sup>81</sup> The writings of Shoghi Effendi on the matter are enfolded in a series of letters entitled the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh written between 1929 and 1936. Indeed, the theme of world order, which he clarifies and expands upon, represents the bulk of his works.

More recently, world order themes are enclosed in the statements of the Universal House of Justice and those of the Bahá'í International Community (BIC). The history of the statements provided by the BIC goes back to the participation of the Bahá'í community with international organisation bodies: the Bahá'í Faith is an active member of the United Nations in the form of the Bahá'í International Community that was registered as a Non-Governmental Organisation in 1948. The involvement of the Bahá'í community with international organisations does not, however, start at this particular point in time, but in 1926, when at the League of Nations headquarters in Geneva an International Bureau was established to serve in League activities. The BIC represents the Bahá'í Worldwide Community, and, as an NGO, is an association of democratically elected national representative bodies called 'National Spiritual Assemblies'. Subsequently, the Bahá'í International Community gained consultative status with **ECOSOC**, **UNICEF**, and **UNIFEM**, has working relations with the **WHO**, and has worked closely with the **UNEP**, the **UNHCR**, **UNESCO**, and the **UNDP**.<sup>82</sup> Among the main goals and activities of the BIC we can find the areas of grassroots participation in sustainable development; advancing the status of women; the education of children; developing a consciousness of world citizenship; the prevention of drug abuse; the elimination of racism; and the promotion of human rights education.<sup>83</sup> The BIC statements that deal with the Bahá'í view of world order reflect the teachings of the sacred

<sup>79</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "In this wondrous Revelation, this glorious century, the foundation of the Faith of God and the distinguishing feature of His law is the consciousness of the oneness of mankind". Bahá'í World Centre Commissioned by the Universal House of Justice, *Century of Light*, New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2001, 49) "It was this vision, for the 36 years of the Guardianship that provided the organising force of Shoghi Effendi's work". (*Ibid.*)

<sup>80</sup> Peter Khan, "Introduction", in: *Peace More Than an End to War*, p. xii.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii. Both the statements of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá relating to world order themes are complemented by other writings They produced.

<sup>82</sup> Bahá'í International Community, "[History of Active Cooperation with the United Nations](#)", 2002,

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

scriptures, and propose both a theoretical and practical foundations on which to base the Bahá'í ethos of international organisation.

### A System of Planetary Organisation

The fundamental conviction in the organic oneness and unity of the diversified elements of humanity is the basis of the belief-system found in both the theoretical and practical aspects of the Bahá'í Faith, and supports its corollary teachings. The requirement of the delineation of a new socio-political system to work along the lines of this assertion is not only a moral corollary, but also a timely and adjusting necessity. For Bahá'ís, this explains that what they believe to be the new divinely sent message has clear universal ramifications and a global intent.<sup>84</sup> Bahá'ís maintain that Bahá'u'lláh's starting Revelation in the mid-nineteenth century (1863) and His arrival in this point of history are consistent with a trend of unification and globalisation of world structures that demand corresponding governing bodies.<sup>85</sup>

Because the Bahá'í Faith is of a religious nature, the intervention of God in history is a given: following the belief in the organic unity of mankind, God sends 'Messengers' according to the needs of the times, and whilst the 'spiritual' message (such as the development of human virtues) does not alter, the social content of each Messenger evolves consistent with the needs and requirements of the time.<sup>86</sup> According to this statement, we encounter one of the main tenets of the Faith, namely the belief that there is only one religion, which is revealed from age to age, and whose social content must be adapted to the evolving and changing nature of society.<sup>87</sup> This new vision of religion is explained by Shoghi Effendi in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, "religious truth is not absolute but relative ... Divine Revelation is progressive, not final".<sup>88</sup> Here we discern a belief in a directional purpose in history: history is not left to itself or to haphazard events, and although the idea of change is paramount ('Abdu'l-Bahá for example stated that, "creation is the expression of motion" or "that old ideas and modes of thoughts were fast becoming obsolete")<sup>89</sup> the latter does not necessarily follow smooth patterns. "Bahá'ís anticipate that the coming of age of humanity and the emergence of world order will be achieved in evolutionary stages replete with strife and chaos".<sup>90</sup> The Bahá'í model of

<sup>84</sup> The Universal House of Justice writes, "Bahá'u'lláh's principal mission in appearing at this time in history is the realisation of the oneness of mankind and the establishment of peace among the nations..." (The Universal House of Justice, Letter: Unity of Nations and the Lesser Peace, 19th of April 2001, Internal Document).

<sup>85</sup> The first permanent organisations that cut across national boundaries, such as the International Telegraphic Union and the Universal Postal Union, appeared subsequently in 1865 and 1874.

<sup>86</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, in this regard, stated, "Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements". (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 213).

<sup>87</sup> Bahá'ís call this phenomenon 'progressive revelation'.

<sup>88</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 58.

<sup>89</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982, 140.

<sup>90</sup> Janet Khan, "New Vision, New Values: The Emergence of A New World Order", *Dialogue and Universalism*, 1996, 6 (11-12), 82

history, hence, simultaneously follows a cyclical and evolutionary content: humanity is on an ever-progressive line composed of cyclical trends of rise and fall leading to its ultimate global unity in all human spheres.<sup>91</sup>

According to the BIC, “Bahá'u'lláh asserts an opposing interpretation of the historical process” with its evolution operating similar to the different stages in the life of an individual, passing through the various stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence, and maturity.<sup>92</sup> The present stage of human evolution is now amenable to the acceptance of the permanent principle of the oneness of humanity, and its practical realisation in institutional terms, which will ultimately lead to the unification of mankind. Indeed, the Bahá'í Faith identifies global unity as the essential goal of human history.<sup>93</sup> Shoghi Effendi explains that the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, “...stands identified with, and revolves around, the principle of the organic unity of mankind as representing the consummation of the whole process of human evolution”.<sup>94</sup> As Laszlo and the BIC explain, “...disunity (stands) as a prelude to, and not as a contradiction of unity”.<sup>95</sup> “The wars, exploitation, and prejudice that have marked immature stages in the process should not be a cause of despair but a stimulus to assuming the responsibilities of a collective maturity”.<sup>96</sup> The tumultuous world condition is regarded as:

“A natural phase in the organic process leading ultimately and irresistibly to the unification of the human race in a single social order whose boundaries are those of the planet. The human race, as a distinct organic unit, has passed through evolutionary stages analogous to the stages of infancy and childhood in the lives of its individual members, and is now in the culminating period of its turbulent adolescence approaching its long-awaited coming of age.”<sup>97</sup>

Hence, for Bahá'ís, the unification of the world does not constitute a utopian goal to be striven for but not to be achieved, or a ‘matter of choice’; rather, it represents the next inescapable stage in the social evolution of mankind,

<sup>91</sup> “Bahá'ís see human life as evolutionary and perceive the rise and fall of civilizations as part of an evolutionary progression from family and tribes to city-states and nations”. (Peter Khan, “Introduction”, p. xi) This view of rise and fall leading upward also appears in Toynbee's view of history. Toynbee notes “The single, finite movement from a disturbance to a restoration of equilibrium, is not enough if genesis is to be followed by growth... there must be an élan which carries the challenged party through equilibrium into an overbalance which exposes him to make a fresh challenge and thereby inspires him to make a fresh response in the form of a further equilibrium ending in a further overbalance – and so in a progression which is potentially infinite”. (Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History*, (Vol. I), London: Oxford University Press, 1935, 128)

<sup>92</sup> Bahá'í International Community, “[Who is Writing the Future](#)”, February 1999, . See also Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 164).

<sup>93</sup> Foad Katirai, *Global Governance*, p. 13.

<sup>94</sup> Shoghi Effendi, in: *The Bahá'í World* (Vol. III), *Appreciations of the Bahá'í Faith*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1941, 5.

<sup>95</sup> Ervin Laszlo, “Science and Prophecy”, *Dialogue and Universalism*, 1996, Vol. 6 ( 11-12), 91.

<sup>96</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Who is Writing the Future?*

<sup>97</sup> The Universal House of Justice, “The Promise of World Peace”, in: National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, *Peace: More Than An End To War: Selections From The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, 'Adbu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice (Compilation)*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1986, 5

however unpersuasive contemporary world events appear to be.<sup>98</sup> Alongside the trend towards maturity lies the underlying concept that the system of human organisation has evolved from family, tribe, city-state, and the nation.<sup>99</sup> The conflicts that plague humankind can be compared to the various crises in adolescence that are necessary to assume the responsibilities of adulthood. Refusing to accept the implications of a new stage of planetary organisation can, thus, only lead to drawbacks and crises that belong to a precedent stage of human evolution, namely that of a world structure based on the nation-state. In this respect, Janet Khan observes:

“Associated with this changing reality (increasing interdependence of a now global society) there is a growing recognition that present day values, worldviews, and administrative structures that were functional and adaptive in the age of self-sufficiency and unfettered national sovereignty, are proving inadequate to meet the challenges posed by the new stage of human history that is emerging.”<sup>100</sup>

The Bahá'í cosmopolitan ethos is also grounded in the belief that the international community should intervene in the affairs of a state, namely in the case of gross human rights violations. The Bahá'í World Centre cites, for example, the breakthrough made in international law following the occurrence of WWII, and the trial of Nazi leaders for crimes committed against humanity. This meant, according to Bahá'í thought, that “the fetish of national sovereignty had its limits”.<sup>101</sup> This acknowledgement explains the favour with which the Bahá'í community welcomes the creation of the ICC.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, this can justify that the Bahá'í community could approve of, and lend its support to the idea of a global federation that endorses macro-policing actions against governments that threaten to commit genocide against their own peoples.<sup>103</sup> Charles Lerche describes the Bahá'í model of human rights as a cosmopolitan model, as the human being stands at the centre of IR, and not at its margins. The BIC, furthermore, observes that, “since the body of humankind is one and indivisible, each member of the human race is born into the world as a trust of the whole”.<sup>104</sup>

In this regard, as testified by the example of human rights, the nation-state merely constitutes a transitional stage in the development of humanity, and has to be transcended by a more encompassing political entity. The state

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Shoghi Effendi explains the concept of a trend toward global unity as follows: “Unification of mankind is the hall-mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation building has come to an end”. (*Ibid.*, p. 202)

<sup>100</sup> Janet Khan, *New Vision, New Values*, p. 77.

<sup>101</sup> Bahá'í World Centre, *Century of Light*, p. 73.

<sup>102</sup> The call raised by the international community to establish the ICC is clearly one that responds to Bahá'í expectations for the fulfilment of greater justice. (The Universal House of Justice, Letter: *Unity of Nations and the Lesser Peace*.)

<sup>103</sup> Nalinie Mooten, Interview with Daniel Wheatley, Conducted Via Email, 10 February 2003.

<sup>104</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point for All Nations*, (New York: United Nations Office, 1995), p. 4.

cannot be the highest authority in globalised conditions. Its destiny is merely “to build the bridge from local autonomy to world unity”.<sup>105</sup> In this regard, Shoghi Effendi wrote that, “Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving to a climax”.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, emphasis in Bahá'í thought is not placed solely on states or leadership, but on peoples. The principle of collective trusteeship demands that the diverse cultures of the peoples of the world, which are essential to their identity, be protected under a system of national and international law.<sup>107</sup> In 1947, the BIC underlined this crucial point, “Both state and people are needed to serve the strong pillar supporting the new institutions reflecting the full and final expression of human relationships in an ordered society”.<sup>108</sup>

If Bahá'ís believe that the unification of mankind is the next stage of its evolution, they do not believe that it will be an easy undertaking, nor that it will occur without hindrances. Although there is recognition of a trend towards global unity, there is similar recognition that barriers ‘stand in the way of its achievement.’<sup>109</sup> Such barriers include: the numerous prejudices based on gender, class, race, nation, religion; ‘degree of material civilization; the lack of educational opportunities and communication among peoples’;<sup>110</sup> civil conflicts, global terrorism, and other destructive processes that do not have any positive effects on the development of society at all levels. The idea that simultaneous negative and positive forces are at work constitutes an integral part of the Bahá'í belief in a dual process intended to bring about world unity. Indeed, the hindrances to global unity are identified by Bahá'ís as ‘disruptive forces’, and those that have a positive influence on global processes are identified as ‘integrative forces’. This dual phenomenon is part of a process that implicates the confusion now prevailing in human affairs. Indeed, this process calls for visions of world unity that Bahá'ís believe are constructive in nature, and it also reposes on opposing forces, which refuse to move beyond national sentiments.

Shoghi Effendi referred to “simultaneous processes of rise and fall, of integration and disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other”.<sup>111</sup> The Universal House of Justice notes that the disintegration process can be identified with the numerous religious, political, racial or tribal conflicts taking place in several parts of the globe; the sudden collapse of civil order that has paralysed several countries;

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<sup>105</sup> Bahá'í International Community, in: Charles Lerche, “Justice as a Theme in The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, in: Charles Lerche, (ed.), *Toward the Most Great Justice: Elements of Justice in the New World Order*, (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), p. 9.

<sup>106</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 202.

<sup>107</sup> Bahá'í International Community, in: Charles Lerche, (ed.), *Toward the Most Great Justice*, p. 10.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9

<sup>109</sup> Janet Khan, “New Vision, New Values”, p. 82.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 72.



religious fundamentalism;<sup>112</sup> the epidemic of terrorism as a political weapon; and among other great disasters, the surge of criminal networks.<sup>113</sup> Among integrative forces we can find, for example, the call raised in favour of an International Criminal Court; world conferences;<sup>114</sup> the realisation that nations are interconnected in the world of trade and finance (a condition that Shoghi Effendi identified as necessary for the development of an organic unified world); and related global aspects that call for a more efficient system of global governance. These two forces, as described by Shoghi Effendi, although clearly opposed in nature, will inevitably lead to the “unity of the human race and the peace of mankind”.<sup>115</sup> In the face of this dual process, peace, Bahá'ís believe, will emerge in stages, and will be characterised by a growing consciousness of world citizenship.<sup>116</sup>

The great differentiation of the Bahá'í Faith is also to be encountered in the statement about the reality of human nature that Bahá'u'lláh claimed is fundamentally spiritual. ‘Spiritual’ in this sense does not literally mean ‘religious’, as we would usually think of the term, but is akin to the formulation of a ‘global ethic’, morality in human affairs, and ‘human values’ in the field of global politics. Schaefer identifies that without “a world ethos, without a minimal consensus concerning durable values, irrevocable standards and fundamental moral attitudes, it is impossible to imagine a ‘new global order’, as envisaged and so urgently enjoined upon by Bahá'u'lláh in the nineteenth century”.<sup>117</sup> The presence of ethics<sup>118</sup> is congruent with the idea of a divine polity being reflected in temporal affairs, and more importantly, it denotes that the relation between the two spheres is a practical one, and not a vague description of a world that is out of reach. ‘Abdu'l’Bahá states, “The spiritual world is like unto the phenomenal world. They are the exact counterparts of each other. Whatever objects appear in the world of existence are the outer pictures of the world of heaven”.<sup>119</sup> ‘Abdu'l’Bahá mentions that heavenly attributes can be compared to the solidarity of mankind or the perfection of justice.<sup>120</sup> The characteristics of this divine polity are, thus, the reflection of high requirements in the governing of human and international affairs, which accounts for the

<sup>112</sup> The Universal House of Justice contemplates that the surge of religious fanaticism testifies to the break up of human values, which were brought by religions themselves. (See The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, 8).

<sup>113</sup> The Universal House of Justice, Ridvan message, April 2000, internal document.

<sup>114</sup> Among others, the World Summit for Children in New York in 1990, the UN Conference on the Environment in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and subsequently in 1993 and 1995, the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, or the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> The House of Justice notes that the concept of world citizenship has emerged as a direct result of the ‘contraction of the world into a single neighbourhood through scientific advances and of the indispensable interdependence of nations’. (The Universal House of Justice, “The Promise of World Peace”, 13).

<sup>117</sup> Udo Schaefer, *Bahá'u'lláh's Unity Paradigm*, p. 30.

<sup>118</sup> “It is now the time in the history of the world for us to strive and give an impetus to the advancement and development of inner forces – that is to say, we must arise to service in the world of morality...” (‘Abdu'l’Bahá, in *Peace: More Than An End To War*, 235.)

<sup>119</sup> ‘Abdu'l’Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 10.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

reference of 'spirituality' in the Bahá'í writings. There is, for example, a reflection of what is physical reality (the global interdependence of nations), and what Bahá'ís consider to be the spiritual reality of the oneness of humankind (the brotherhood and sisterhood of all human beings).<sup>121</sup>

The BIC writes of the nature of the body of thought of Bahá'u'lláh: The mainspring of Bahá'u'lláh's message is an exposition of reality as fundamentally spiritual in nature, and of the laws that govern that reality's operation. It not only sees the individual as a spiritual being, a "rational soul", but also insists that the entire enterprise that we call civilization is itself a spiritual process, one in which the human mind and heart have created progressively more complex and efficient means to express their inherent moral and intellectual capacities.<sup>122</sup>

For Bahá'ís, laying the foundations of a global society that reflects the oneness of humanity is a 'central spiritual issue' facing all the various peoples of the world.<sup>123</sup> In brief, the manner in which the foundations of a system of global governance are established, depends, to a certain degree, on infusing a moral sense in its socio-economic and political structures.

### **Bahá'u'lláh's Exhortation to Political Peace: Framework of the Bahá'í Vision of World Order**

The cosmopolitan trait of the Bahá'í Faith starts with the words of the Báb,<sup>124</sup> Who along with proclaiming the concept of progressive revelation,<sup>125</sup> wrote that, "We have created you from a tree and have caused you to be as the leaves and fruits of the same tree, that haply ye may become a source of comfort to another... It behooveth you to be one indivisible people".<sup>126</sup> The analogy of the 'tree' representing humankind, and the diverse nations and peoples being the 'leaves and fruits' are later re-echoed in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh: "Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship..."<sup>127</sup> 'Abdu'l'Bahá also used images found in nature to elucidate the idea of the oneness of humankind, as it is depicted in the Bahá'í image. This is tantamount to stating that the world of nature does not differ from the 'reality' of the oneness of humankind in the human world. Alluding to the great tree of the human family, 'Abdu'l'Bahá states, "For mankind may be likened to the branches, leaves, blossoms, and fruits of that

<sup>121</sup> Moojan Momen, *The Bahá'í Faith*, p. 63.

<sup>122</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Who is Writing the Future?*

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> French Historian Nicholas described His writings as "powerful and enlightened liberalism". (John Huddleston, *The Earth is but One Country*, Leicester: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976, p. 141).

<sup>125</sup> Comparing the sun to the divine revelations, The Báb wrote, "the process of the rise and setting of the Sun of truth, will thus, indefinitely continue- a process that had no beginning, and will have no end". (The Báb, in: The Universal House of Justice, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1976, 87).

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* p.129

<sup>127</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 288.

tree".<sup>128</sup> He also explains that this image corresponds to the solidarity of the human race.

W. Kenneth Christian notes that, "The chief principle of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings is 'the oneness and wholeness of the human race.' This is the pivotal point of all that He taught... To achieve the unity of the human race was Bahá'u'lláh's compelling life purpose".<sup>129</sup> Indeed, such a statement is confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá ("The basis of the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the unity of mankind")"<sup>130</sup>, Shoghi Effendi<sup>131</sup> and by the statements of Bahá'u'lláh himself. "Let your vision be world-embracing, rather than confined to your own self... It is incumbent upon every man, in this Day, to hold fast unto whatsoever will promote the interests, and exalt the station, of all nations and just governments".<sup>132</sup> Bahá'u'lláh's message aims at the creation of a universal society between nations, the abolition of war, and the foundation of universal peace.<sup>133</sup> "Love for humanity is a central value in the hierarchy of values. All actions should be directed towards the well-being of humankind, its welfare having absolute priority over all particular interests".<sup>134</sup> Likewise, Janet A. Khan notes that Bahá'u'lláh's teachings are intended to encourage 'global unity and world order'.<sup>135</sup>

In line with the conception of a world vision, Bahá'u'lláh speaks of 'just' governments, a concept which was elucidated in the various letters that He sent to the major monarchs,<sup>136</sup> rulers, and religious leaders between 1867 and 1873. These statements represent His advice to the temporal and religious leaderships. In the *Súriy-i Mulúk* (Tablets to the Kings), He addresses all of the monarchs, as He calls on them to abide by the principles of justice and unity, to disarm, to move away from tyranny and oppression, to care for the poor and downtrodden, and describes the accumulation of riches from the peoples by sovereigns as 'grievous injustice'. 'Peoples' are to be a crucial concern of the leadership. Bahá'u'lláh states in the *Súriy-i-Mulúk*: "Do not lay burden on your subjects... The poor are the trust of God in your midst, safeguard the rights of the downtrodden".<sup>137</sup>

The Universal House of Justice says of the *Súriy-i-Mulúk*:

<sup>128</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 16.

<sup>129</sup> W. Kenneth Christian, "Introduction", in: *Ibid.*, p. xi.

<sup>130</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), p. 36.

<sup>131</sup> Shoghi Effendi identifies the oneness of humankind as "the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve." (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 42).

<sup>132</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 95.

<sup>133</sup> Udo Schaefer, *Bahá'u'lláh's Unity Paradigm*, 24.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Janet Khan, *New Vision, New Values*, p. 79.

<sup>136</sup> Although there is a high station in the Bahá'í writings regarding 'kingship', the latter is endorsed if fulfilling several conditions, including the rejection of absolute monarchy, and the endorsement of a republican form of government. (See Ulrich Gollmer, "Bahá'í Political Thought", in Udo Schaefer, (ed.), *Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahá'í Apologetics*, (trans, Geraldine Schukelt) (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000), 449-450).

<sup>137</sup> The Universal House of Justice, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts: Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2002), 36-37.

“It introduces some of the great themes that were to figure prominently in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh over the next two and a half decades: the obligation of ...civil authority to institute the reign of justice, the necessity for the reduction of armaments and the resolution of conflicts among nations, and an end to the excessive expenditures that were impoverishing these rulers' subjects.”<sup>138</sup>

The idea of morality in human affairs is underlined, as well as the notion that temporal government must reflect divine virtues (such as showing justice, and discarding oppression and tyranny) in the management of their affairs and the treatment of the peoples.<sup>139</sup> In the address to Queen Victoria, Bahá'u'lláh praises the Queen for abandoning the practice of slavery on both men and women, and also for abiding by the formulation of a democratic tenet in her government – a point that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was to emphasise in His treatise *The Secret of Divine Civilization* in 1875.<sup>140</sup> Bahá'u'lláh further expounds the principles that constitute the first stage of world peace for Bahá'ís, the Lesser Peace, a political peace among the nations of the world with a reference to the principle of collective security that He was among the first to expound and elaborate on.<sup>141</sup> He writes, “Be united, O kings of the earth... Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice”.<sup>142</sup> Bahá'u'lláh also enjoins leaders to ‘take counsel together’ in a convened international gathering, to show concern for the whole of mankind, and to reflect upon the design of a world political community. He also calls for the reduction of armaments to the extent that they will only be required for internal or self-defence purposes.<sup>143</sup> Bahá'u'lláh stated, “O Rulers of the earth! Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need no more armaments save in a measure to safeguard your territories and dominions”.<sup>144</sup>

Referring to the contents of these Tablets, Shoghi Effendi explains, “the application of the highest principles in human and international relations are forcibly and insistent made, and the abandonment of discreditable practices and conventions, detrimental to the happiness, the growth, the

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* p.iv

<sup>139</sup> The link between divine and temporal leaderships, in the Bahá'í Faith, relates to the belief that temporal leadership must reflect moral (divine) virtues. “A just king is the shadow of God on earth”. Bahá'u'lláh (Súrih-i-Haykal) in: *Ibid.*, 112).

<sup>140</sup> “It would be preferable if the election of non-permanent members of consultative assemblies in sovereign states should be dependent on the will and choice of the people. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990, 24.)

<sup>141</sup> Bahá'u'lláh was also among the first to evoke the phrase ‘New World Order’: “...the prevailing Order appeareth to be lamentably defective... Soon will the present-day order be rolled up and a new one spread out in its stead”. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 7 & 216).

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>143</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, in: *The Universal House of Justice, Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, 90 & 93 and *Gleanings*, 249.

<sup>144</sup> Súrih-i-Haykal, *Summons of the Lords of Hosts*, 93.

prosperity and the unity of the human race, enjoined".<sup>145</sup> The system of collective security propounded by Bahá'u'lláh asserts that political agreements alone are not sufficient to support it.<sup>146</sup> It must stand on a stronger moral consciousness of human values, and in particular, must be grounded in the oneness of mankind. Bahá'u'lláh's counsels to the leaders of His time, which represent the kernel of His exhortation to the Lesser Peace, are at the heart of Bahá'í views on global governance, and constitute the basis of further elaborations provided by His successors and by the BIC.<sup>147</sup>

### The Century of Light

The vision of a system of international interdependence, and the need for interlocking governance underlined by the oneness of humankind have also been expounded by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who advocated that a sine qua non condition for universal peace was universal suffrage, and Who elucidated the writings of Bahá'u'lláh.<sup>148</sup> Of religious, racial, patriotic, or political prejudices, He said that they were the destroyer of the body politic inasmuch as all people have a single and common origin.<sup>149</sup> More interestingly, 'Abdu'l-Bahá called the twentieth century 'the century of light', and records of His statements that international peace would indeed occur in this century were reported in various papers of the early twentieth century.<sup>150</sup> This pronouncement has been sometimes mistaken as being congruent with Him stating that the Lesser Peace in the twentieth century would be a reality. Nonetheless, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá called the twentieth century 'the century of light', or when he referred to the twentieth century as the century of international peace, He alluded to a process of peace that started in the twentieth century, and not to events that took place during that time.

It is fascinating to see that He denoted the potentialities of the twentieth century as containing the embryo and the impetus for the creation of international peace, and the creation of corresponding pending global institutions and outlook. The BIC notes, "The attainment of peace in the political realm is discernible through the workings of a process that can be seen as having been definitely established in the twentieth century amid the terror and turmoil that have characterised so much of this period".<sup>151</sup> The twentieth century had unleashed the capacity for international peace and a

<sup>145</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, in: *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>146</sup> "...the abolition of war is not simply a matter of signing treaties and protocols; it is a complex task requiring a new level of commitment to resolving issues not customarily associated with the pursuit of peace. Based on political agreements alone, the idea of collective security is a chimera". (The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, 14).

<sup>147</sup> This vision of a system of collective security shall be later expounded when looking at the writings of Shoghi Effendi, the Universal House of Justice, and the Bahá'í International Community.

<sup>148</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 134.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* 124.

<sup>150</sup> For example the Montreal Daily Star in 1912.

<sup>151</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Peace Among the Nations*, London: Bahá'í Information Office, 1999, 1.

global era. In ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words, “Inasmuch as this is the century of light, capacity for achieving international peace has been assured”.<sup>152</sup> The Bahá’í World Centre explains that this image refers to the growing “acceptance of the principle of oneness and its implications” and that “the physical unification in our time and the awakening aspirations of the mass of its inhabitants have at last produced the **conditions that permit achievement of the ideal**, although in a manner far different from that imagined by imperial dreamers of the past”. [Emphasis added]<sup>153</sup> It is relevant to see that the twentieth century has witnessed a breakthrough in international thinking, as it has witnessed the birth of ‘representative global institutions, including the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies.’<sup>154</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declared that the ‘unity of nations’ would happen in the twentieth century, meaning that the peoples of the world would have developed a certain consciousness of world solidarity, essential to the establishment of a political union.<sup>155</sup> The Universal House of Justice clarifies that “the unity of nations can be taken as that unity which arises from a recognition among the peoples of the various nations, that they are members of one single family”.<sup>156</sup> One of the core teachings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is that the oneness of humankind stands as the primary principle regulating human life and reality; the main difference is that its realisation is now at hand due to the progress in technology, transport, and communication. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

“In this day, means of communication have multiplied, and the five continents of the world have merged into one... In like manners all the members of the human family, whether peoples or governments, cities or villages, have become increasingly interdependent... Hence the unity of all mankind can in this day be achieved.”<sup>157</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá further reflected the writings of His father as He called for altruistic concerns and the welfare of humanity as a whole, rather than particularistic ones.<sup>158</sup> He also clearly defined cosmopolitanism, as it is enshrined in Bahá’í thinking, stating that some wars are “caused by purely imaginary racial differences; for humanity is one kind, one race and progeny habiting the same globe...These boundaries and distinctions are human and artificial, not natural and original”. Furthermore, He asserts, “This earth is one home and native land. God has created mankind with equal endowment and right to live upon the earth. As a city is the home of all its inhabitants although each may have his individual place of residence therein, so the

<sup>152</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 121.

<sup>153</sup> Bahá’í World Centre, *Century of Light*, 9 & 91

<sup>154</sup> Foad Katirai, *Global Governance*, 48.

<sup>155</sup> The Universal House of Justice, Letter: *Unity of Nations and the Lesser Peace*.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in: Bahá’í World Centre, *Century of Light*, 7.

<sup>158</sup> “... May all your attentions centre in the welfare of humanity...” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 54).

earth's surface is one wide native land or home" for everyone.<sup>159</sup> There is an argument in 'Abdu'l'Bahá's writings for the grounding of a spiritual, physical, and intellectual cosmopolitanism. There is the allusion that all human beings were created by one 'Great Being', as part of a spiritual bond between human beings, a spiritual cosmopolitanism: "racial assumptions and distinctions are nothing but superstition... All mankind are the children of one Father";<sup>160</sup> the intellectual explanation that there is no biological difference between human beings and that we are all part of the same human species, "we are one physical race, even as we are of one physical plan of material body";<sup>161</sup> and the intellectual grounding that physical borders are simply artificially created boundaries, and not a natural state of affairs, "Racial prejudice or separation into nations... is unnatural and proceeds from human motive and ...ignorance".<sup>162</sup> 'Abdu'l'Bahá also mentioned the organic evolution of humanity that is enshrined in all the fields of human science, including politics. He states, "The world of politics is like the world of man; he is seed at first, and then passes by the degrees of the condition of embryo and foetus... the political world in the same way cannot instantaneously evolve from the nadir of defectiveness to the zenith of perfection".<sup>163</sup> Accordingly, the idea that the political realm must pass through different degrees before it can be functional is here alluded to; likewise, an appropriate system of global governance will gradually evolve to become increasingly efficient.

### Human Nature and Peaceful World Order: An Alternative Image

According to 'Abdu'l'Bahá, the aim of the creation of men and women, who have been given the endowment of the intellect and understanding, is not targeted at destruction, but rather constitutes a means by which a peaceful society can emerge.<sup>164</sup> He stated, "I hope that you will use your understanding to promote the unity and tranquillity of mankind..."<sup>165</sup> Bahá'í belief dwells on the fact that "men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization".<sup>166</sup> The purpose in creating humankind is, thus, the achievement of its full potential to do good, and to promote the evolution of society.<sup>167</sup> In this statement, we come across the premise of the Bahá'í idea of human nature, which is not imprisoned in the narrow confines of being inherently either 'good or evil', but constitutes an image that asks for endeavour and accounts for the free will of human beings. For Bahá'u'lláh, each individual represents a 'supreme talisman' and a 'mine

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 118 & 287.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 299 & 468.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>163</sup> 'Abdu'l'Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, 107.

<sup>164</sup> 'Abdu'l'Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 33.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>166</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 214.

<sup>167</sup> "The purpose of the creation of man is the attainment of the supreme virtues of humanity ... the purpose of man's creation is, therefore, unity and harmony, not discord and separateness". ('Abdu'l'Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 4).



rich in gems of inestimable value.' This potential must be developed through proper education, with which each person can optimise the ability to practice 'free will'.<sup>168</sup> Individuals are not left to themselves with a fixed nature.

'Abdu'l'Bahá calls these two sides of human nature the 'lower' and 'higher' natures.<sup>169</sup> This image of human nature can also be captured in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, "Noble have I (God) created Thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou was created".<sup>170</sup> Human beings have to 'endeavour' to let their 'higher nature' dominate: human nature is, thus, a matter of choice. By acting on their lower nature, human beings allow disasters in civilisation, which occur on the grounds that the purpose of creation is not being fulfilled, or that the nobility intended for creation is being ignored. Human reality is that of the 'higher nature'. The Bahá'í concept of human nature portrays, thus, a positive, rather than a negative, image. The complexity of human nature is explained by 'Abdu'l'Bahá:<sup>171</sup> "Man is 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... Not in any of the species in the world of existence is there such a difference, contrast, contradiction, and opposition as in the species of man".<sup>172</sup> In parallel, it is important to make the paramount point that in the Bahá'í image, lower nature is not real, as it is not part of human reality. Evil is the absence of good, as darkness is the absence of light, and in this way, it is crucial to state that the 'lower nature' constitutes an absence of the 'higher nature'.<sup>173</sup> The creation of humankind is reminiscent of a higher nature, leaving no doubt as to the nobility of creation. Gollmer explains:

"The Bahá'í Faith does not have a dualistic image of the world with distinction between believers and infidels,<sup>174</sup> good or evil, saved or unsaved. Its principle is that of unity: metaphysically as the unity of God, the Creator of all human beings and his universal mercy; practically as an ethical standard in all dealings with the people and nations of the world and as a responsibility for the preservation of creation."<sup>175</sup>

Since the capacity for a higher nature does exist, and the attainment of this higher nature is the aim of creation, Loni Bramson-Lerche remarks, "With

<sup>168</sup> Loni Bramson-Lerche, "An Analysis", p. 4. "The reality underlying this question is that the evil spirit, Satan or whatever is interpreted as evil, refers to the lower nature in man". ('Abdu'l'Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1968, 77).

<sup>169</sup> 'Abdu'l'Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 55.

<sup>170</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh* – Part I from the Arabic, (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985), 9.

<sup>171</sup> Bahá'u'lláh quotes the Koran when He states, "Man is My mystery, and I am his mystery". (*Peace: More Than End To War*, 227).

<sup>172</sup> 'Abdu'l'Bahá in: *Peace: More Than An End To War*, 38-39.

<sup>173</sup> "Evil is non-existent; it is the absence of good; sickness is the loss of health; poverty the lack of riches". ('Abdu'l'Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity*, 78).

<sup>174</sup> 'Abdu'l'Bahá states, "Let us never say, 'I am a believer and he is an infidel'". ('Abdu'l'Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 152).

<sup>175</sup> Ulrich Gollmer, *Bahá'í Political Thought*, 443.

regard to the capacity for aggression, the Bahá'í teachings differ sharply from the opinions of the 'realist' school of political science".<sup>176</sup> Hence, this certainly explains why the Bahá'í literature on the subject is often defined as 'utopian', when in fact it claims that human beings were created for a nobler purpose than that of unceasing conflict. Danesh Hossein describes the Bahá'í model of world order as one that asserts the "fundamental nobility of every human being and the ultimate victory of the human spirit".<sup>177</sup> The possibility of achieving a peaceful society is also justified by the fact that the individual is a 'social being' in need of 'cooperation and association'.<sup>178</sup> It is noteworthy that the capacities for building a peaceful society are greater in our age than they were in previous ages, leading us back to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reference to the twentieth century as 'the century of light'.<sup>179</sup> Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh notes that our age is the day "... in which all that lay latent in man hath been and will be made manifest".<sup>180</sup>

The Universal House of Justice maintains that a 'paralysis of will' and 'a paralysing contradiction' have prevailed in human affairs due to the inherent belief in the aggressiveness of human beings. Accordingly, the Universal House of Justice asserts that this has generated self-imposed obstacles to the creation of a just and peaceful social system. The international Bahá'í body recognises, on the one hand, the longing of people for peace and the 'apprehensions tormenting their daily lives', and on the other hand, it challenges the conflicting statement that human beings are inherently selfish and aggressive and incapable of achieving a peaceful and dynamic social order.<sup>181</sup> The need to reassess mankind's true nature is, thus, crucial when thinking of the possibilities that exist within the international community to achieve a more peaceful order. The Promise of World Peace states:

"As the need for peace becomes more urgent, this fundamental contradiction which hinders its realization, demands a reassessment of the assumptions upon which the commonly held view of mankind's historical predicament is based. Dispassionately examined, the evidence reveals that such conduct, far from expressing man's true self, represents a distortion of the human spirit. Satisfaction on this point will enable people to set in motion constructive social forces which, because they are consistent with human nature, will encourage harmony and cooperation instead of war and aggression."<sup>182</sup>

<sup>176</sup> Loni Bramson-Lerche, *An Analysis*, 4.

<sup>177</sup> Hossein B. Danesh, *Unity: The Creative Foundation of Peace*, Toronto: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1986, 118.

<sup>178</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 35.

<sup>179</sup> Similarly, Toynbee views the point of a civilisation's decline as the point at which a rejuvenating 'higher religion' emerges.

<sup>180</sup> Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh: Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, 219.

<sup>181</sup> The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, 5.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

This statement can be linked to the Bahá'í belief that humankind passes through different stages leading to world unity, one of which is an immature stage replete with war, strife, and exploitation.<sup>183</sup> The paralysis of will 'rooted in a deep-seated conviction in the quarrelsome of mankind' has hindered world leaders to move beyond the notion of national sovereignty, and meet the challenge of establishing appropriate world institutions and world mechanisms for the achievement of peace.<sup>184</sup> Henceforth, in the Bahá'í model, all efforts that aim at relieving some of the world's problems cannot be solely pragmatic; they have to be raised to the level of principle. In this regard, the Universal House of Justice states, "the primary challenge in dealing with issues of peace is to raise the context to the level of principle, as distinct from pure pragmatism. For, in essence, peace stems from an inner state supported by a spiritual or moral attitude, it is chiefly in evoking this attitude that the possibility of peace can be found..."<sup>185</sup> This inner attitude grounded in the view that human beings are and were created to be noble, stand at the basis of the Bahá'í image of human nature, and the centrality of the individual and human relationships in a multilayered governance scheme. It, furthermore, disposes of the idea that world order schemes can be founded on political concerns only, without any reference to evoking the moral attitude that lies at the basis of the true reality of man.

### **The Oneness of Humankind and Institutional Cosmopolitanism**

Shoghi Effendi wrote that, "...the principle of the Oneness of Mankind, the cornerstone of Bahá'u'lláh's...dominion implies nothing more nor less than the enforcement of His scheme for world unification".<sup>186</sup> The oneness of humankind, which entails its unity, has its corollary in the socio-economic and political spheres: it propounds that unity is the principle regulating all spheres of human life, including the socio-political realm. As such, the principle is not fated to remain only on ideological and emotional levels, with no institutional and practical implications. If it were the case, the principle would remain on the level of theoretical good wishing.<sup>187</sup> Shoghi Effendi further explained that unless the efforts of world leaders were directed towards giving thought to this system of global governance that was now based on global, rather than national structures, they were bound to encounter setbacks. Shoghi Effendi states:

"The oneness of mankind...is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of

<sup>183</sup> See also Kant, "Idea For A Universal History With A Cosmopolitan Purpose", in: Hans Reiss, *Kant: Political Writings*, 44.

<sup>184</sup> The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, 11

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>186</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 36.

<sup>187</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated, "What profit is there in agreeing that universal friendship is good, and talking of the solidarity of the human race as an ideal?" 'Abdu'l-Bahá further explained that unless these principles were transformed into the world of action, they would be of no use. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 3).

one family. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution...adequate to...demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence. **It implies an organic change in the structure of present day society...** it constitutes a challenge, at once bold and universal, to outworn shibboleths of national creeds – creeds that have had their day...It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarisation of the whole civilised world..." [Emphasis added]<sup>188</sup>

Although it implies the need for unity, the oneness of humankind does not suggest that uniformity is a relevant consideration in its application. On the contrary, the machinery that can best incarnate this principle must be made to reflect the diversity inherent in the human family, and in all the aspects of human life. The Bahá'í Faith is a firm believer in the oneness of humanity, if only sustained by a strong corollary of the preservation and flourishing of diversity. Not only the diversity found in the different shapes and colours of the human family, but also the diversity of thought and opinion. In this instance, 'Abdu'l-Bahá noted, "All are seeking truth, and there are many roads leading thereto...Do not allow difference of opinion, or diversity of thought to separate you from your fellow men".<sup>189</sup> The principle of 'unity of diversity', which stands at the basis of the Bahá'í Faith as an inherent element of the oneness of humankind, does not simply constitute a theoretical and ethical aspect; it constitutes, for Bahá'is, a gift of beauty to mankind, which has been misused for hatred and conflict.<sup>190</sup>

Indeed, the oneness of humankind and unity in diversity, which stand at the very heart of the principles that have shaped the whole process of life are, thus, not just to be applied to the individual, but to the governance system, and have to be the guiding thrust behind the machinery that can best serve the interests of humankind in its structural aspects. It is significant that, in this instance, the Bahá'í Faith upholds the principle of federalism, or that of the commonwealth,<sup>191</sup> when considering a new system of global governance.<sup>192</sup> The BIC, therefore, underlines, "...one of the time-tested models of governance that may accommodate the world's diversity within a unified framework is the federal system". The BIC further observes, "Federalism has proved effective in decentralizing authority and decision-making in large, complex, and heterogeneous states, while maintaining a

<sup>188</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 43.

<sup>189</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 44-45.

<sup>190</sup> See 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, 295.

<sup>191</sup> The commonwealth model takes a more confederal form than the federal model. The federal model has a rule of law, which operates from the federal centre, whereas the commonwealth model can issue sanctions when, for example, human rights are not respected. The commonwealth/confederation model has no legal force over member-states.

<sup>192</sup> Tellingly many grass-roots socio-economic development programmes have proved very efficacious without the need for a central authority to control them, which demonstrates that a governance model certainly does not have to resemble a Hobbesian style government. (Foad Katirai, *Global Governance*, 13).

degree of **overall unity and stability**.<sup>193</sup> Another model worth examining is the commonwealth, which at the global level would place the interest of the whole ahead of the interest of any individual nation".<sup>194</sup> [Emphasis added].

Moreover, these systems of governance were promoted by 'Abdu'l'Bahá, who emphasised in 1912 that centralisation was most likely to encourage despotism and that it was, thus, urgent to find ways to discourage its practice as a system of governance.<sup>195</sup> Here, 'Abdu'l'Bahá's recommendation was further elaborated by Shoghi Effendi. Explicitly, when providing one of the possible examples of 'some form of political unity', as enshrined in the Bahá'í writings, Shoghi Effendi mentioned a 'World Federal State', whilst he acknowledged that its realisation was most likely to be tortuous and induced by sufferings.<sup>196</sup> He, furthermore, explained that 'the establishment of a world commonwealth, a world federal system liberated from... war... in which Force is made the servant of Justice' was the consequential institutional form of the unity of mankind.<sup>197</sup>

Shoghi Effendi, as early as 1954, described the world as a global neighbourhood ('needs of a world already contracted into a neighbourhood') when advocating the option of a world federal government to counteract 'anachronistic conceptions' or the 'obsolescent doctrine of absolute sovereignty'.<sup>198</sup> Indeed, world federalist thinking advocated world federal government, especially in the inter-war years and after WWII, to do away with the outdatedness, and the ill foundation of state sovereignty.<sup>199</sup> In Bahá'í thought, this world federal government devoid of 'anachronistic conceptions' would be a major step towards the establishment of the Lesser Peace and the unification of mankind.<sup>200</sup> The main organs of the world federal government would comprise a world parliament or legislature that is able to create a code of enforceable international law previously universally agreed upon; a world executive, backed by an international force, which would 'carry out the decisions arrived at and apply the laws enacted by the world parliament'; and a world tribunal, whose decisions and judgment would be binding on the parties and applicable to all disputes arising in the universal system. Alongside these main organs of the world federal

<sup>193</sup> Here the use of the term 'overall' is interesting. Many federal states encounter internal separatist movements. (See Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*, Canada: Penguin, 1993, 172-3).

<sup>194</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, p. 7.

<sup>195</sup> "...to cast aside centralisation which promotes despotism is the exigency of the time". ('Abdu'l'Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 167.) It is here helpful to state that global federalism has been influenced by the transformation of the United States at the end of the eighteenth century from a confederal to a federal model. The latter initiated the idea of the individual as a subject of world law.

<sup>196</sup> Shoghi Effendi, in: Helen Bassett Hornby (Compiled by), *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994, 130.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 436.

<sup>198</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1999, 126.

<sup>199</sup> Advocates of a world federal government included: Auguste Forel, Auguste Schvan, and Paul Otlet (during the First World War), Bertrand Russell and Oscar Newfang, Rosika Schwimmer, Maverick Lloyd (in the inter war years). During the Second World War, federal advocates consisted of Ransome, Beveridge, Zilliacus, Culberston and Adler. (Derek Heater, *World Citizenship and Government*, p. 110-112).

<sup>200</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 126.

government, a number of umbrella organisations, including 'a complex transnational network of individuals, private organisations and international agencies' functioning with autonomy.<sup>201</sup> (Significantly, the BIC defines the global governance system as a sum of intricate relationships between individuals and groups who determine how they manage common international concerns, underlining the importance of the input of the global citizenry).<sup>202</sup> This institutional form provides the possible format that can embody the words of Bahá'u'lláh, frequently cited as the 'motto' of the Bahá'í Faith, 'The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.'<sup>203</sup>

Significantly, Shoghi Effendi was not proscriptive when he advocated federalism or the commonwealth as two possible models of world governance, but it is relevant that the BIC reiterated, as soon as 1995, that federalism was a useful structure for some form of global government. In this regard, according to Bahá'í thought, while bearing in mind that federalism is considered the most favourable form for the management of diversity and decentralisation in a global governance system, it is reminiscent that this vision of a world federal government, although a clear destiny in the Bahá'í vision of a future global order, does represent a long-term and drastic project as things now stand.<sup>204</sup> The Bahá'í model calls for incremental steps to be taken in order to reform international institutions, and move towards a new system of global governance. Accordingly, it contains a transformationist paradigm:<sup>205</sup> the nation-state is in a period of change, and will eventually cede some of its influence to world political arrangements. Changes in the political arena will not happen unexpectedly and incoherently, but as a result of expediency and urgency following both the will of peoples and world leaders. The new generation of world federalists has adopted a step-by-step approach, rather than the maximalist approach of the realisation of a world federal government: for example, they advocate UN democratisation through an assembly of world citizens, or have worked for the establishment of the International Criminal Court.

### **The Lesser Peace, or Bahá'í Programme for a Political Unity of Nations**

Bahá'ís believe that peace will come in stages, the first of which concerns a political peace among nations: the 'Lesser Peace'. The Lesser Peace relates to what 'Abdu'l-Bahá named 'unity in the political realm', and is explained by Shoghi Effendi as a 'unity which politically independent and sovereign states achieve among themselves.'<sup>206</sup> The second stage, the 'Most Great Peace', refers to the social, spiritual, and political unification of mankind, a

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.* 94.

<sup>202</sup> Daniel Wheatley, "Global Governance: Has a Paradigm Shift in World Government Theory Brought The Lesser Peace Closer?" in: Babak Bahador & Nazila Ghanea, (eds.), *Processes of The Lesser Peace*, (Oxford: George Ronald, 2002), 244.

<sup>203</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 250.

<sup>204</sup> Bahá'í World Centre, *Century of Light*, 91-92

<sup>205</sup> Daniel Wheatley, *Global Governance: Has a Paradigm Shift*, 237.

<sup>206</sup> Shoghi Effendi, in: Bahá'í World Centre, *Century of Light*, 128.

peace in which spirit and humanity would be infused into the political peace. Daniel Wheatley notes:

“The Bahá'í writings show our self-perception and identity as being one of the major areas of difference between the Lesser Peace and the Most Great Peace. It is only in the Most Great Peace when a man shall travel to any city on earth, and it will be as if entering his own home. The Lesser Peace will see the end of war between nations...but it will not necessarily be accompanied by feelings of universal humanity...”<sup>207</sup>

The political peace, the most immediate peace,<sup>208</sup> has been mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh when He wrote to the rulers, kings, and religious leaders of His age, and was further expounded by ‘Abdu'l’Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. The formulation of a world government based on a federal system of governance and decentralisation is crucial to the Bahá'í model of governance, as it seeks to maintain decision-making at appropriate levels, and functions according to the principle of subsidiarity. The latter represents an element of the ‘Lesser Peace’, the term Bahá'u'lláh used when elaborating on the concept of collective security.<sup>209</sup> Wheatley details:

“As well as calling for disarmament,<sup>210</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu'l’Bahá and Shoghi Effendi laid down guiding principles for a global legislature, international weights and measures, a supreme tribunal, a global peacekeeping force...Shoghi Effendi expands upon the practical necessities of the Lesser Peace. This includes the creation of a global executive, a global legislature, an international armed force in crisis management, a world taxation system, a global currency, global communications networks<sup>211</sup> and a supreme international tribunal...‘Abdu'l’Bahá also speaks of the organisation necessary ... in terms of a ‘Parliament of Man’ and a ‘Supreme Tribunal’.”<sup>212</sup>

The Supreme Tribunal was also defined by ‘Abdu'l’Bahá as a ‘Highest Court of Appeal’, an ‘International Tribunal’, the ‘Great Council’, or an ‘International World Conference’.<sup>213</sup> This tribunal, which would have abiding jurisdiction in international affairs only, would need to be set up so as to prevent war, and would be composed of representatives from each

<sup>207</sup> Nalinie Mooten, Interview with Daniel Wheatley, Conducted Via Email, 10 February 2003.

<sup>208</sup> The Most Great Peace refers to a very distant future, as it is part of an eschatological promise.

<sup>209</sup> The occurrence of a World Federal Government is, according to the BIC, ‘the inevitable destiny of humankind’, but it does, however, ‘represents a long-term picture of a global society’. (Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, 6).

<sup>210</sup> ‘Abdu'l’Bahá held the view that it was essential that disarmament, which was so crucial to the development of international peace, happened simultaneously, as partial disarmament would only cause other nations to be suspicious and increase their armaments as a result. (In: The Universal House of Justice, *Peace*, 20).

<sup>211</sup> Shoghi Effendi wrote in 1936, “A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity”. (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 203).

<sup>212</sup> This vision is alluded to in the statements of the Bahá'í International Community, namely in *Turning Point For All Nations*. See also J. Tyson, *World Peace and World Government: A Bahá'í Approach*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1986, 57 & Daniel Wheatley, *Global Governance: Has a Paradigm Shift*, 229.

<sup>213</sup> ‘Abdu'l’Bahá, in: *Peace: More than an End to War*, pp. 199-203.

nation of the world, whose election would be based on using some form of population criteria. This election would need to be confirmed by the cabinet, the upper house, and the president of the nation, and should have at its basis the sanction of the peoples of the world. 'Abdu'l'Bahá made the following suggestion as to a future world court in the late nineteenth century:

“A Supreme Tribunal shall be established by the peoples and governments of every nation, composed of members elected from each country and government. The members of this Great Council shall assemble in unity. All disputes of an international character should be submitted to this Court, its work being to arrange by arbitration everything which otherwise would be a cause of war. The mission of this Tribunal would be to prevent war.”<sup>214</sup>

This vision of a world judicial system is part of Shoghi Effendi's elaboration of the Bahá'í vision of a future world order. Shoghi Effendi explains that the statement of Bahá'u'lláh regarding His elaboration of collective security are none other than the demand for 'the curtailment of unfettered national sovereignty' and that of a system of a world commonwealth of the nations of the world or the formulation of a system of world government, whose main organs have been above mentioned.<sup>215</sup> Shoghi Effendi details his thoughts, reminiscent of the call for a 'World Federal State':

“Some form of a world super-state must needs be evolved, in whose favour all the nations of the world will have willingly ceded every claim to make war, certain rights to impose taxation and all rights to maintain armaments, except for purposes of maintaining internal order within their respective dominions. Such a state will have to include within its orbit an international executive adequate to enforce supreme and unchallengeable authority on every recalcitrant member of the commonwealth; a world parliament whose members shall be elected by the people in their respective countries and whose election shall be confirmed by their respective governments; and a supreme tribunal whose judgement will have a binding effect even in such cases where the parties concerned did not voluntarily agree to submit their case to its consideration. A world community...in which the fury of a capricious and militant nationalism will have been transmuted into an abiding consciousness of world citizenship – such indeed, appears, in its broadest outline, the Order anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh...”<sup>216</sup>

It is to bear in mind, however, and as briefly mentioned, that this picture of world order represents in the words of the BIC, and of the Bahá'í World Centre, 'a long-term picture of a global society' and a **'radical**

<sup>214</sup> 'Abdu'l'Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 161.

<sup>215</sup> “We see you adding every year unto your expenditures and laying the burden thereof on the people whom ye rule; this verily is naught but grievous injustice.... Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need armaments no more save in a measure to safeguard your territories and dominions...Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice”. (Bahá'u'lláh, in: Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 40).

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.



**restructuring** of the administration of the affairs of the planet'. [Emphasis added]<sup>217</sup> In IR, the use of the very term 'world government' can seem far-fetched, outdated, and out of touch with a plural global governance system advocated in the new conditions of world (dis)order. To some, a 'world government' already exists in the form of unilateralism in international politics and/or the deficit of global democratic input in financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (**IMF**). To others, 'world government' implies the prevalence of political security issues over socio-economic ones. It is essential to stress that the Bahá'í approach differs from those conceptions of world government. Indeed, we can anticipate why the Bahá'í model, which is holistic and based on grassroots values, calls for the principle of 'subsidiarity' and 'decentralisation' in international affairs. Indeed, with centralisation, or the process by which decisions are taken away from those affected by them, people lose their ability to shape their own destiny, and are deprived of the dignity to choose for themselves.

We can discern that the problem with the phrase 'world government' can be one of terminology (i.e. the world government that Bahá'ís believe in does not take the form and rigidity of the world government that is being currently criticised in IR). Indeed, the 'world government' referred to by the Bahá'í writings is not a centralised, undemocratic, and ineffective governance machine. Rather, it is a pyramidal structure, which respects lower levels of governance. In parallel, the BIC promotes the view that in development paradigms, the maxims 'small is beautiful' and 'think globally, act locally' are adequate to tackle economic issues<sup>218</sup> as people feel that they can control their destiny. Here sovereignty, meaning the respect for lower levels of governance, is necessary. As late Professor Claude Ake observes "sovereignty has done little to prevent the majority of countries in the global south being subject to policies **imposed** on them by global financial institutions."<sup>219</sup> [Emphasis added] Indeed, cosmopolitanism does not necessarily equate to the idea of 'bigness' and inefficiency. As Indian writer Arundhati Roy states, "The further and further away geographically decisions are taken, the more scope you have for incredible injustice."<sup>220</sup>

Geoffrey Robertson, in view of the growing importance of global corporations as global actors, contends that it is imperative that international legal mechanisms be created for states and multinationals 'to provide resources, which are available to them ... for basic rights of health, education and social security.'<sup>221</sup> More significantly, he maintains that 'human rights auditing', i.e. the process by which ethical reports are

217 Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, p. 6 and Bahá'í World Centre, p. 91.

218 Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point for All Nations*, 24.

219 Ake in: Charles Lerche, *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, 256.

220 Arundhati Roy, *The Chequebook and the Cruise Missile: Conversations with Arundhati Roy* (interview by David Barsamian), London: Harper Perennial, 2004, 15.

221 Geoffrey Robertson, *Crimes Against Humanity*, 522

produced on behalf of multinationals, should become human rights principles, and not merely 'a public relations exercise'.<sup>222</sup> Shoghi Effendi, who referred to a world parliament as a global law making body, conceived it in cosmopolitan terms, insofar as it would intend to 'satisfy the needs' of all peoples.<sup>223</sup> The second and third generation of human rights define these socio-economic needs as rights. In relation to the latter, David Held also alludes to the idea of a global parliament which would monitor the accountability of global corporations to deal with their social failures. The ICC, which does not as yet include corporate responsibility, has, however, started meaningful and innovative work in implementing human rights on non-state actors, i.e. on human beings.

There is no doubt, for Bahá'ís, that the elaboration of a system of world government is a radical undertaking as things now stand. More importantly, this system of world government would not come into being without the approbation of the members of the human race, who would have developed a strong sense of world citizenship that would have replaced 'a militant nationalism'. In highlighting these aspects, Shoghi Effendi, in 1931, made it absolutely clear that the intentions latent in the words of Bahá'u'lláh do not aspire to replace the existing local or national structures by international ones, nor to substitute our existing loyalties for other ones, but rather seek to supplement humanity with the international structures and loyalties that are necessary to the flourishing and development of society. Similar to the federalist tradition, the Bahá'í ethos does not intend to replace lower levels of governance and lesser loyalties, but rather seek to complement them with the requirements of an interdependent world. It does not call for a vague attachment to the world as a whole, but for evolving and multiple loyalties from the grassroots to the whole. Shoghi Effendi notes:

"Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, it (the meaning of Bahá'u'lláh's intent) seeks to broaden its basis...with the needs of an ever-changing world. It can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men's hearts, so essential if the evils of excessive centralization are to be avoided... It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration that has animated the human race. It insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralisation on the one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity."<sup>224</sup>

The Bahá'í call is based on the belief that it is absolutely necessary to abandon theories that seek to 'deify the state', that are only materialistic in

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 203.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 41.

their aspects,<sup>225</sup> that promote the interests of certain members of the human race to the disadvantage of others, and that do not attempt to adjust themselves to the needs of an increasingly cosmopolitan age. Accordingly, the Universal House of Justice writes:

“...all too many...ideologies, alas, instead of embracing the concept of the oneness of mankind, and promoting the increase of concord among different peoples, have tended to **deify the state**, to subordinate the rest of mankind to one nation, race or class, to attempt to suppress all discussion and interchange of ideas, or to callously abandon starving millions to the operations of a market system that all too clearly is aggravating the plight of the majority of mankind, while enabling small sections to live in a condition of affluence scarcely dreamed of by our forebears.” [Emphasis added]<sup>226</sup>

There is no denial that one of the most firm calls launched by the Bahá'í community is the abandonment of theories and ideas that are standing in the way of the realisation of humankind as one body, that are viewing all of humankind as an interdependent family, and that are still insisting upon nationalistic and divisive claims. It is suggested that we abandon parochial notions, such as racism, which in its extreme can lead to genocide, or nationalism, that has persisted and demonstrated its pernicious effects on the body of humankind. If racism or nationalism cannot generate the prosperity of humankind, it is here suggested that we now start shaping our institutions, our efforts, and our world-view on a more encompassing and humane dimension. Shoghi Effendi embodied this all-important statement in his writings:

“The call of Bahá'u'lláh is primarily directed against all forms of provincialism, all insularities and prejudices. If long-cherished ideals and time-honoured institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution? For legal standards, political and economic theories are solely designed to safeguard the interests of humanity as a whole, and not humanity to be crucified for the preservation of the integrity of any particular law or doctrine.”<sup>227</sup>

### Unity, Diversity and Continuity

<sup>225</sup> The Universal House of Justice highlights the link between purely materialistic doctrines and the belief in the inner aggressiveness of man: “Most particularly, it is in the glorification of material pursuits at once the progenitor and common feature of all such ideologies, that we find the roots which nourish the falsehood that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive”. (The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, 9).

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.* 8-9.

<sup>227</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 42.

It is crucial to state that Bahá'í appeals, which promote a federal structure and decentralisation, only call for additional structures to global governance, and do not advocate the abolition of the nation-state system, as they view governance in an evolutionary, and not adversarial base.<sup>228</sup> In this light, Katirai observes, "While systems founded on an adversarial base may regard compromise as essential because two positions are mutually exclusive, those founded upon an evolutionary base see each stage as a precursor to the next higher and more complex one."<sup>229</sup>

The Bahá'í Faith, thus, presents the image of a transformationalist, and not hyperglobalist model, which signifies that it recognises that the nation-state is in a period of transition, and not about to be extinct. The Bahá'í stance in relation to global governance is clearly between the insinuations of hyperglobalizers, who affirm that the nation-state is going to disappear due to transnational processes and the global economy,<sup>230</sup> and between statist statements, which put forward that the nation-state is not going to be even slightly challenged by the processes of globalisation.<sup>231</sup> Moreover, the Bahá'í Faith highlights the idea of a 'turning point' in international affairs, or a transition between national sovereignty and world unity, which many international theorists recognise.<sup>232</sup> The proponents of cosmopolitan democracy, likewise, although not advocating a federal solution, admit that the fate of the nation-state is outside of its hands. Heater notes, "The political scientists who have devised the concept of cosmopolitan democracy and those of like mind are sometimes dubbed 'transformationalists... they reject the interpretation of the 'hyperglobalists' who foresee the trend of globalization as involving the complete collapse of the nation-state".<sup>233</sup>

Shoghi Effendi did not hesitate to point out the anachronism of the nation-state, as he clearly contended that the leaders of human institutions "...in utter disregard of the spirit of the age, are striving to adjust to national processes, suited to the ancient days of self-contained nations..."<sup>234</sup> More recently, Peter Drucker argues that the nation-state is no longer the self contained unit that it used to be in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, for Drucker, the obsolescence of the nation-state demands the creation of institutions, which would "overlap national boundaries and serve transnational social and economic needs".<sup>235</sup> Toulmin argues that the new age is characterised by adaptability and diversification instead of the old age

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<sup>228</sup> Foad Katirai, *Global Governance*, 23.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>230</sup> See for example, Keichi Ohmae, *The End of the Nation State*. London: Harper Collins, 1995.

<sup>231</sup> Hirst and Thompson think that the processes of globalisation have not perturbed sovereign nationhood to the slightest. (See Daniel Wheatley, *Global Governance, Has A Paradigm Shift*, 236).

<sup>232</sup> See Laszlo, Toulmin, Held or Rosenau.

<sup>233</sup> Derek Heater, *World Citizenship: Cosmopolitan Thinking*, 152.

<sup>234</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'llah*, 36.

<sup>235</sup> Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*, 7.

of stability and hierarchy. The nation-state is currently unable to respond to our needs, and should be complemented by more global institutions. "... We are learning that in an evolving world, institutions must be adaptable to deal with evolving human problems".<sup>236</sup> Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed that the era of the unity of nation had given way to the era of the unity of the world. Indeed, for Bahá'is, the times surrounding each religious dispensation are distinguished by a particular theme, the current one being the unity of humankind. In the evolutionary religious context with which the Bahá'í Faith views all aspects of human life, including social and political aspects, Shoghi Effendi explains that the main theme surrounding the Christian era was that of the individual, and that the era of Islam had been marked by the thematic of the unity of the nations.<sup>237</sup>

Due to the nature of its evolutionary and non-adversarial approach, the Bahá'í Faith recognises that the continued evolution of Christianity and Islam (which does not mean that their messages are questioned; rather it highlights an intrinsic link between religions) signifies that the adoption of a world vision complements individual and national concerns. The present religious theme, thus, is characterised by world unity, as the era of the self-sufficiency of nation-states has come to an end. Bahá'u'lláh refers to the love of one's country as still being a valid, yet insufficient and outdated, notion. He said, "It is not his to boast who loveth his country, but it is his who loveth the whole world."<sup>238</sup> While Bahá'is do advocate 'a universal way of life',<sup>239</sup> universal institutions, and the consciousness of world citizenship, they do not seek to diminish sane patriotic feelings, and the love that one individual may have for his or her culture, language, traditions, provided they do not become more important than wider, more global, concerns. U Thant, Secretary General of the UN from 1962 to 1971, embodied this image as he stated, "I do not criticize national pride. National pride is natural. I say only that the sense of belonging to the human community must be added to, and become dominant over other allegiances".<sup>240</sup> The Bahá'í image of world order is grounded in a holistic, rather than partial world-view, and takes its main insight from the principle that what is of benefit to the whole is of benefit to the part, as humankind is viewed as 'one organically whole entity'.<sup>241</sup> From this principle stems the consequential ideas of continuity, unity, and complementarity. The love of one's country is contained in the love of the world as the whole, continuity depicts different stages from the part to the whole (from the family unit to the world), and all of the parts are contained and act interdependently in this greater whole.

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<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>237</sup> See Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, 196.

<sup>238</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 95.

<sup>239</sup> In 1955, Shoghi Effendi enjoined Bahá'is to "achieve a universal consciousness and a universal way of life". (in: Jan T. Jasion, "The Universalism of the Bahá'í As Reflected In the Writings of Shoghi Effendi", *Dialogue and Universalism*, 1996, 6 (11-12), 105).

<sup>240</sup> In: Foad Katirai, *Global Governance*, 15.

<sup>241</sup> Moojan Momen, *The Bahá'í Faith*, 63.

The Bahá'í vision contains some convictions about the future of humankind, due to its intrinsic religious character; namely Bahá'u'lláh envisions the inevitability of world peace, but warns that this phase will not come unhindered. Bahá'ís are confident, despite all of the world turbulences – which they consider to be a transitional step from a system of national sovereignty to a world commonwealth of nations – that peoples of vision and insight will lead humanity to world peace.<sup>242</sup> In its 1985 statement, *The Promise of World Peace*, the Universal House of Justice explains that flaws in the international system are partly due to the fact that state sovereignty has remained intact, and that this status quo impedes the adoption of relevant solutions to the threatened collapse of the international economic system, the spread of international anarchy and terrorism, or the inability of sovereign nation-states to prevent war.<sup>243</sup> This report proclaims that due to 'unfettered national sovereignty', and the attachment to old patterns of behaviour, the path to world peace could be possibly horrifying. The statement reads, "Whether peace is to be reached only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity's stubborn clinging to old patterns of behaviour, or is to be embraced now by an act of consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth".<sup>244</sup> Furthermore, the House of Justice promotes the idea that 'love of humanity' does not leave out 'love of one's country', and that 'unbridled nationalism', which distinguishes itself from 'a sane patriotism', must be superseded by a love for humanity in general.<sup>245</sup> Shoghi Effendi explains that all that the call raised by Bahá'u'lláh implies and proclaims, is:

"The insufficiency of patriotism, in view of the fundamental changes effected in the economic life of society and the interdependence of the nations, and as the consequence of the contraction of the world, through the revolution in the means of transportation and communication –conditions that did not and could not exist either in the days of Jesus Christ or of Muhammad. It calls for a wider loyalty, which should not, and indeed does not, conflict with lesser loyalties. It instils a love which, in view of its scope, must include and not exclude the love of one's own country. ... It does insist, however, on the subordination of national considerations and particularistic interests to the imperative and paramount claims of humanity as a whole, inasmuch as in a world of interdependent nations and peoples the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole."<sup>246</sup>

<sup>242</sup> Peter Khan, *Introduction*, p. xi.

<sup>243</sup> In the words of Bahá'u'lláh, "signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appears to be lamentably defective". (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 216).

<sup>244</sup> The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, p. 3. This image can be found in the writings of Kant, who thought that nature would eventually lead us to reason and peace. In the Bahá'í approach, we have a choice between reason and nature to attain peace. If not attained by 'an act of consultative will' (reason), peace will be realised by 'unimaginable horrors' (nature).

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13. An 'unbridled' nationalism is exclusive and aggressive (defines itself against an ethnic 'other', and can lead to genocide) while a 'sane' patriotism relates to a sense of belonging to a local/national community, itself part of a wider cosmopolitan community, to which one still belongs.

<sup>246</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, 200.

### **‘The Great Assemblage’: Foundation of Global Governance and the Lesser Peace**

The process of the growing consciousness of world solidarity – which, in Bahá'í thought, constitutes an element and aspect of the twentieth century – was referred to by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as ‘the unity of nations’. The latter is to gradually shed its reflection in the political domain, the Lesser Peace. Indeed, Bahá'í thought maintains that the growing sense of world consciousness can be associated with certain organisational developments in the political domain.<sup>247</sup> The ‘unity of nations’ will, thus, be a crucial stage in the development of a political peace among nations. Bahá'u'lláh expounded on the Lesser Peace in the letters He sent to the major rulers of His age, and advised them to reduce their armaments, and develop a system of collective security. “O rulers of the earth! Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need no more armaments save in a measure to safeguard your territories and dominions...Be united... Should anyone among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against Him, for this is naught but manifest justice”. In another passage, Bahá'u'lláh referred to the Lesser Peace as a gathering of world leaders, at which a system of security, unity, and concord among the nations would be devised. “The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all embracing assemblage of men will be universally realised. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world’s Great Peace among men”.<sup>248</sup>

Shoghi Effendi explains that, “The principle of collective security He unreservedly urges; recommends the reduction in national armaments; and proclaims as necessary and inevitable the convening of a world gathering at which the kings and rulers of the world will deliberate for the establishment of peace among the nations”.<sup>249</sup> This call, reiterated more recently by the Universal House of Justice and the BIC, now addresses itself to the heads of nation-states, who have at this time become the highest-ranking decision-makers, as well as to the global citizenry, who participates and gives input (heard or unfortunately unheard) to these decisions.<sup>250</sup> The Lesser Peace will, thus, be characterised by the delineation of a global order that comprises institutions and laws to which nation-states abide, and endowed with the means with which collective decisions can be enforced, while being

<sup>247</sup> The United Nations can be regarded as one of the world organisational developments.

<sup>248</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 249.

<sup>249</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1999, 216-218.

<sup>250</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, in His time, appealed to ‘kings and rulers’, while more recently the Bahá'í International Community calls on the heads of nation-states to consider the convocation of a world gathering. Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, 4).

substantially supported by civil society organisation and participation.<sup>251</sup> The Bahá'í vision only endorses a programme of global governance if it obtains a consensus from the peoples of the world, nation-states, international organisations, and NGOs, in brief all the major stakeholders.<sup>252</sup> This consensus is “the essential ingredient of any successful system of global governance. It is the cornerstone of the Lesser Peace and the fruits of the ‘Great Assemblage’ of the leaders of the nations called by Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu'l’Bahá, wherein the foundations of a new global order and the unity of the nation-states will be laid as the Lesser Peace”.<sup>253</sup> This consensus would be based on the global acceptance of common core values, and the establishment of a general treaty or international constitution, which would distinguish itself from old ‘cosmopolitan’ notions of world conquest, or universal conquests for personal and authoritarian designs, which did not have at their basis the principle of true justice, and the normative equality of peoples and nations.<sup>254</sup>

The call to world leaders to establish the Lesser Peace and obtain from it the sanction of the peoples of the world have been raised by Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu'l’Bahá, the Universal House of Justice, and the Bahá'í International Community. Bahá'u'lláh called for the convocation of a ‘vast all-embracing assembly’; ‘Abdu'l’Bahá advocated for this assemblage to make of Peace the cause of universal consultation, underlining that it should seek to establish a union of the nations of the world and establish a binding treaty; at the present time, the Universal House of Justice highlights that this convocation is ‘long overdue’. The BIC summons ‘a convocation of world leaders... to consider how the international order might be redefined and restructured to meet the challenges facing the world’, with significant participation and input from civil society. The BIC suggests that this summit, which they propose could be called the ‘World Summit on Global Governance’,<sup>255</sup> could draw on the experience underlying various successful UN conferences.<sup>256</sup> In particular, the Millennium People’s Forum, held by the United Nations in May 2000 and co-chaired by the BIC, was the first of its kind in UN history to be a channel for civil society to forward discussions and ideas to the General Assembly.<sup>257</sup> One of the foundations of peace is that peoples would gradually come to recognise their common destiny (which is also enshrined in the principle of oneness) and would, from this premise, have the will to act together, at least in matters vital to

<sup>251</sup> More importantly, the Universal House of Justice does not believe that a system of collective security will work if only based on political agreements and protocols. The Universal House of Justice calls such as system of collective security ‘a chimera’: it can only work with a strong moral foundation.

<sup>252</sup> Foad Katirai, *Global Governance*, 2.

<sup>253</sup> The Lesser Peace, being the term used by Bahá'ís, to depict a political unity of nations.

<sup>254</sup> “During...long evolutionary process... as ever larger and more diverse populations came under the control of one or another system of government, the temptation of universal empire repeatedly seized the imaginations of the Caesars and Napoleons during such expansion”. (Bahá'í World Centre, *Century of Light*, 91).

<sup>255</sup> The Commission on Global Governance also summoned such a summit, which it called a ‘world conference on governance’. (Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood*, 351).

<sup>256</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, p. 4.

<sup>257</sup> Daniel Wheatley, *Global Governance: Has a Paradigm Shift*, 245.



their concerns.<sup>258</sup> In the context of the Lesser Peace, an integrative process is characterised by growing global cooperation. World conferences, the creation of the League of Nations and the United Nations, the increasing number and participation of NGOs, and the strengthening of regional organisations (such as the EU) are identified as a momentum towards the Lesser Peace.

One of the outcomes of this World Summit, 'Abdu'l'Bahá specified, would be the enunciation of a treaty binding on governments. In particular, all states and nations would have to submit to a body of contract, in which clear principles of international relations and laws are laid down, and consequential agreements and obligations would be ascertained and binding.<sup>259</sup> (These also include, as stated, worldwide disarmament, the delineation of international borders and frontiers, the submission of disputes to binding arbitration or judgement by a world court, and a 'system of collective security to ensure that international treaties are not violated.')<sup>260</sup> The steps leading to the Lesser Peace, according to the Universal House of Justice, are part of this 'integrative process' articulated by Shoghi Effendi, and comprise the features that can be identified as stages towards global unity.

The various world conferences are part of this process that testifies to "an emerging unity of thought in world undertakings".<sup>261</sup> The 'promptitude and spontaneity with which these government leaders have been acting together in responding to a variety of world crises in different parts of the world', 'the cries...for attention to be given to the feasibility of achieving some form of global governance', 'the greater involvement of the United Nations', or 'the call raised for an international criminal court to be established' are some of the signs that Bahá'í contemplate as prerequisites for the Lesser Peace.<sup>262</sup> In addition, the Universal House of Justice identifies important and auspicious steps to world order which have gradually included the creation of the League of Nations, followed by the United Nations whose formation corresponded with the process of the ending of nation-building characterised by the independence of numerous nations. The Universal House of Justice also identifies their involvement with older nations in matters of mutual concern. The international body elaborates on a number of steps that have been taken towards the elaboration of world order: The consequent vast

<sup>258</sup> These values of common concern comprise the elimination of prejudices based on class, gender, race, level of economic and material development, and the right of all to an education, training, and socioeconomic development. (Ulrich Gollmer, *Bahá'í Political Thought*, 431).

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 431

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.* and Brian Lepard, "From League of Nations", p. 91. Shoghi Effendi did not call for a rigid system of collective security, but for a flexible and elastic system. (See Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 191) In this way, the projection of a global order, in the Bahá'í viewpoint, "...does not contain a fixed, static model... It does not present specific future events, but rather presents a vision calling to action, providing guidance for the creation of a more peaceful future..." (Ulrich Gollmer, *Bahá'í Political Thought*, 431).

<sup>261</sup> 'Abdu'l'Bahá also refers to 'a unity of thought in world undertakings'. The Bahá'í World Centre elucidates that this alludes to 'programmes of social and economic development, humanitarian aid and concern for protection of the environment and its oceans'. (Bahá'í World Centre, *Century of Light*, pp. 127-128).

<sup>262</sup> The Universal House of Justice, Letter: *Unity of Nations and the Lesser Peace*.

increase in cooperation among hitherto isolated and antagonistic peoples and groups in international undertakings in the scientific, educational, legal, economic and cultural fields; the rise in recent decades of an unprecedented number of international humanitarian organisations; the spread of women's and youth movements calling for an end to war; and the spontaneous spawning of widening networks of ordinary people seeking understanding through personal communication.<sup>263</sup>

The House of Justice subsequently proposes that the numerous groups that have come together in the form of regional organisations to co-operate in matters of common interest, such as the Association of South East Asian Nations, the African Union, the European Union, or the international congresses that testify to an urge to unity, are reflective of this trend. Mentioning the integrative and disruptive processes, the Universal House of Justice concludes, "Together with the opposing tendency to warfare and self-aggrandizement against which it ceaselessly struggles, the drive towards world unity is one of the dominant, pervasive features of life on the planet during the closing years of the twentieth century".<sup>264</sup>

### **The Bahá'í International Community's Views on International Organisations: Precursors of Global Institutions**

The BIC recognises that the world is not ready for this system of planetary government, and takes an incremental approach to the reform of the international landscape that it recognises has grown in complexity since 1945. As early as 1955, the first decade review of the UN charter, the BIC proposed some guidelines for the reform of the United Nations Organisation,<sup>265</sup> based on the vision articulated by Bahá'u'lláh during His lifetime. These suggestions have been endorsed by the BIC thirty years later, although further expounded and complemented – a sign that not much has changed in regards to the functioning of the UN in the last thirty years. In accordance with its evolutionary mindset, the Bahá'í International Community does not call for UN abolition, but for its reform. The Bahá'í image of world order, furthermore, recognises the transitional period delineating present times. This transition from a world based on national sovereignty to a system of global governance, set around international institutions that will develop into global institutions centred on humanity rather than nation-states, has been termed a 'turning point'.<sup>266</sup>

Highlighting the Bahá'í support for these organisations, the Universal House of Justice notes, "The tentative steps towards world order, especially since

<sup>263</sup> The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, p. 4.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>265</sup> Among these proposals were included the gradual removal of the veto, the references to permanent members, the elimination of the term 'enemy' in any article of the UN Charter, and the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.

<sup>266</sup> Precisely, the Bahá'í International Community entitled its 1995 document on Global Governance 'Turning Point For All Nations'.

World War II, give hopeful signs. The increasing tendency of groups of nations to formalize relationships which enable them to co-operate in matters of mutual interests...prepare the path to world order".<sup>267</sup> While recognising the great achievements of the United Nations, and being active observers of the organisation of the League of Nations, Bahá'í statements seek to reform organisations that embody a world vision while still based on the dated principle of national sovereignty. The BIC accordingly notes, "Each attempt [the League of Nations and the United Nations] sought to address emergent recognition of global interdependence while preserving intact state sovereignty above else".<sup>268</sup> This does not signify that these organisations are not valued by the Universal House of Justice and the BIC; rather, the Bahá'í bodies contend that international organisations should become more global. Indeed, the Bahá'í International Community considers that the intricate agglomerate of institutions and relationships governing the international system, including the defunct League of Nations and the contemporary United Nations, point toward the recognition of an interdependent humanity, and a more adequate future global governance system. Per se, "Often the United Nations most avowed critics have been its most avid supporters".<sup>269</sup> Although the League of Nations and the United Nations are far from being perfect bodies, they represent international processes and organisations, which will eventually become more global. Shoghi Effendi wrote in 1936:

"Though the great outcry raised by post-war nationalism is growing louder and more insistent every day, the League of Nations is as yet in its embryonic state, and the storm clouds that are gathering may for a time totally eclipse its powers and obliterate its machinery, yet the direction in which the institution itself is operating is most significant. The voices that have been raised ever since its inception, the efforts that have been exerted, the work that has already been accomplished, foreshadow the triumphs which this presently constituted institution, or any other body that may supersede it, is destined to achieve."<sup>270</sup>

Moreover, despite all its failures, the League represented the first proper attempt by the nations to 'assume collective responsibility' and 'collective action'. Consistent with the Bahá'í proposition that there is a progression in all aspects of international relations and history in general, the League of Nations, followed by the perfected United Nations, are processes that will eventually lead to a more complete and cosmopolitan system needed for the

<sup>267</sup> The Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*, 11.

<sup>268</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, 2.

<sup>269</sup> Foad Katirai, *Global Governance*, 72.

<sup>270</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 191. 'Abdu'l-Bahá looked down upon the Versailles settlement, which to Him was only capable of bringing about an even fiercer war. Even if the League of Nations had been brought into being and represented a breakthrough in the concept of collective security, it represented the beginning of a long process of international organisations that would eventually lead to the Lesser Peace. However, it was not an effective collective body as such. (See Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 30).

organisation of the planet, namely the long-time picture of a world federal state or world commonwealth of nations based on a cosmopolitan model – where not only states, but peoples are crucial elements. Both the federal and commonwealth models represent alternative routes to world order that would be increasingly centred on humanity, rather than nation-states. According to Shoghi Effendi, the process, which launched the League of Nations, represented the attainment “to that stage at which the oneness of the whole body of nations will be made the ruling principle of international life”.<sup>271</sup> Indeed, Bahá'ís assign a very important role to international organisations as regards their potential to participate in a new design of global governance. Lepard remarks, “...the history of international organisation has reflected a steady evolution towards higher and higher forms of unity and towards the development of a new awareness that the diverse peoples of the earth together constitute a single world community”.<sup>272</sup> Moreover, the idea of process contains a powerful element of optimism, which considers punctual failures (such as the League of Nations or the refusal for an economic unity in Europe) as an impetus towards an improved structural form. As Shoghi Effendi wrote:

“The fierce opposition which greeted the abortive scheme of the Geneva Protocol; the ridicule poured upon the proposal of a United States of Europe which was subsequently advanced, and the failure of the general scheme for the economic unity of Europe, may appear as setbacks... And yet, are we not justified in driving fresh encouragement when we observe that the very consideration of these proposals is in itself an evidence of the steady growth in the minds and hearts of men?”<sup>273</sup>

We can now notice that each of these institutions has been realised, although ridiculed, and then hailed as failures.

### **Ethical Reforms**

Part of the suggestions of the BIC relating to UN reform is based on a reconsideration of human values, and a new starting point for building a new system of global governance. The most important ethical consideration in review is the interdependent relationship existing between the individual and the international community, meaning that the individual unit is a responsibility of the world community as a whole, in which national citizenship or artificial constructed states are absolutely irrelevant. Individual human beings, who are the units that make up humanity, must be protected regardless of artificially constructed states. This is an important aspect of human rights, as these rights originate from the body of mankind as opposed to national communities that often impede their realisation. This notion can be found in Thomas Paine's words “my principles are universal.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>272</sup> Brian Lepard, *From League of Nations*, 79.

<sup>273</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 44.

My attachment is to all the world, and not any particular part".<sup>274</sup> Thomas C. Walker explains, "For Paine, there was a unity between the individual and mankind. Particular national attachments should carry little weight with enlightened men and women".<sup>275</sup> The BIC reiterates this point. Since the body of humankind is indivisible, "each member of the human race is into the world as a trust of the whole".<sup>276</sup> This relationship represents the foundation of human rights, and is an important consideration for reforms to be brought into the international system. Additionally, discussions about the international order must include the generality of humanity, and not only sections of people, usually leaders in all fields of human knowledge. This discussion should involve men and women at the grassroots levels, and should lead to a self-reinforcing process and growing awareness of world citizenship.<sup>277</sup> Finally, reforms pertaining to the United Nations, and other international institutions, can only be envisaged in the light of their future role in the international system. If criticism outweighs praise of the United Nations, it is necessary, according to the BIC, to view the United Nations, not in its present form, but with an 'evolutionary mindset' i.e. with the view of how it might operate within the future international order, and the possible achievements and benefits it might be able to provide.<sup>278</sup>

This cosmopolitan basis is linked to more practical measures to reform the UN body whose functioning operations have remained unchanged for the last fifty years. Indeed, Bahá'í suggested reforms are very much in line with the reforms brought by the Commission of Global Governance.<sup>279</sup> Among many others, a point of common venture would be the call for the adoption of new values along with the development and reform of the international system. The BIC describes the report of the Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood*, as 'one of the most balanced and thoughtful' which 'argues for the widespread adoption of new values, as well as structural reforms in the United Nations system'.<sup>280</sup> The adoption of new values should not just be a theoretical grounding, but according to the Bahá'í viewpoint ought to be enshrined in a Bill of Rights. In 1955 the BIC stated, It is recommended that the United Nations adopt a Bill of Rights, which guarantees to every individual freedom of speech, of the press, of religion, and of thought, as well as freedom from racial and religious discrimination, freedom from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, equality of

<sup>274</sup> Thomas C. Walker, *The Forgotten Prophet*, 60.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>276</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, 4.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.* 7

<sup>279</sup> The BIC also mentions the early work of the lawyers Glenville Clark and Louis B. Sohn, *World Peace Through World Law*, and indicates that this work represented a 'milestone', and was among the 'first solid proposals' in its early advocacy of the abolition of the veto power in the early 1950s. The BIC also quotes works such as the 'Stockholm Initiative', *Common Responsibility in the 1990s* and Benjamin Ferencz's work *New Legal Foundations for Global Survival*. (*Ibid.*, 23).

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3.

sexes, equality before the law, equality of opportunity, and other such basic rights.<sup>281</sup>

The Commission on Global Governance re-echoes this wish by underlining the necessity of elaborating a global Charter of civil society. “We...urge the international community to unite in support of a global ethic of common rights and shared responsibilities. In our view, such an ethic – reinforcing the fundamental rights that are already part of the fabric of international norms – would provide the moral foundation for constructing a more effective system of governance”.<sup>282</sup> Referring to rights and responsibilities such as a secure life; equitable treatment; participation in governance at all levels; equal access to information; equal access to the global commons; the promotion of equity, including gender equity; and the preservation of humanity’s cultural and intellectual heritage; the Commission goes on to state, “We believe this list of rights and responsibilities in the minimum basis for progress in building a more civil global society... Over time, we hope that these principles could be embodied in more binding international document – a global Charter of Civil Society –...”<sup>283</sup>

In 1947, a Bahá'í declaration on Human Rights (soon followed by a Bahá'í statement on Women's Rights) was submitted to the United Nations. After becoming an accredited NGO at the United Nations in 1948, the BIC sent a letter to former Secretary General, Mr Dag Hammarskjöld in 1955, which included proposals for the revision of the UN Charter.<sup>284</sup> In the 1955 statement, the BIC put forward several suggestions regarding UN reform, as it highlighted that ‘real sovereignty is no longer vested in the institutions of the national state because the nations have become more interdependent’, ...‘that the existing crisis is moral and spiritual as well as political;’ ...‘and that the existing crisis can only be surmounted by the achievement of a world order representatives of governments as well as the nations of mankind.’<sup>285</sup> As well as underlining the erosion of national sovereignty, and placing emphasis on moral aspects of governance, this statement joined the advocacy of Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu'l-Bahá when They called for a more adequate representation of ‘peoples’ in governance, in addition to ‘governments’. Both are complementary when it comes to decision-making in the international community. The basis of these considerations was to stand at the heart of practical reforms that demanded the timely readjustment of the *modus operandi* of the UN. In this respect, the Bahá'í International Community suggests a body of proposals relating to the operation of the main organs of the United Nations. These entail suggestions for the reforms of the legislative, executive, and judicial functions of the UN.

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<sup>281</sup> Bahá'í International Community, in: Foad Katirai, *Global Governance*, 124.

<sup>282</sup> Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood*, 56.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.* 57.

<sup>284</sup> In: Foad Katirai, *Global Governance*, 67.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*

The BIC deplores the lack of cosmopolitan ingredient within the structure and functioning of international organisations. Indeed, most of these failures are due to the fact that the United Nations represents an assemblage of nation-states, which often strive to maximise their self interests. Accordingly, the BIC remarks, "The United Nations lacks not only the clear authority but also the requisite resources to act effectively in most instances. Accusations of the United Nations' failures are in fact indictments of member-states themselves".<sup>286</sup> Similarly, the report of the Commission on Global Governance remarks:

"When governments or people speak of reform of the United Nations, they address a process of change that has to begin in national behaviour, not on the banks of the East River in New York. National behaviour is a product of national decision-making and national policies: it is here that strengthening of the UN must begin. Worthwhile reforms of UN structures ought to be pursued, and we propose several in this report, but the greatest failings of the UN have not been structural: they have been collective failings of the member-states... The point cannot be made more emphatically."<sup>287</sup>

### **Structural Reforms: Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Functions of the UN**

In an earlier passage, it was noted that the Bahá'í view of history is a progressive one, namely one that passes through different stages. The collective life of humanity has, thus, been compared with the life of an individual going through childhood, adolescence, and maturity. As this view concerns the common life of humanity as a single body, it applies to international organisations, and their constant improvement. The League of Nations could, hence, be compared to the embryonic stage of the life of international institutions, and Bahá'í reforms concerning the international system are intrinsically linked to the view that evolution is a feature of human life. As such, international organisations are thought to lead to ever-closer integration in the life of humanity, founded upon the growing recognition of the oneness of humankind. The realisation of the oneness of humankind, an ethical foundation, is linked to giving more means of enforcement to the main organs of the United Nations, which are to safeguard the individual from abuse and injustice, and to advance the process of peaceful change. Bahá'ís, thus, view the improvement of the UN as a move towards the goal of human history, i.e. global unity.<sup>288</sup> Structural reforms are also enshrined in the belief that human nature is not inherently aggressive, that transformation is possible, and that the physical integration of humankind is a mirror of the oneness of mankind, as discussed above.

<sup>286</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, 7.

<sup>287</sup> Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood*, 227-228.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*

Insofar as, in the words of ‘Abdu’l’Bahá, the individual is “in need of cooperation and association”,<sup>289</sup> his/her well-being is better served through operations which can optimise this human need, which due to the global stage in which we find ourselves, take the form of intricate global cooperation. Morality and ethics, as it was underlined, are the reflection of more global cooperative and practical efforts, reflected in the proposal for retaining independent functional organisations, which promote global integration, and international peace.

Thus, Bahá'í practical reforms keep in line with promoting a vision of unity sustained by the principle of oneness, seek to maintain and reinforce the spirit of collaboration in an interdependent and single humanity, and stress the importance of the participation of peoples in world affairs. In brief, Bahá'í practical reforms are linked to the more theoretical views of the Faith, as they seek to enhance more peaceful relations central to the vision of human integration and oneness, developed by Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu’l’Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi. It has been argued that the normative basis of the oneness of mankind is also thoroughly linked with the notion of breaking away from the concept of state sovereignty, which by underpinning the centrality of states, fails to recognise the fact of global interdependence, and limits international affairs to an outdated state-centric view. Since “the anarchy inherent in state-sovereignty is moving to a climax”,<sup>290</sup> the United Nations must demonstrate the ability to disregard this concept. This theoretical background is reflected in the suggested reforms for the three main organs of the UN, which are the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the International Court of Justice. The reforms of the UN, as proposed by the BIC, are in line with the vision of Shoghi Effendi, when he referred to the very long-term vision of a world federal government. Namely, he mentioned that the world parliament should create binding law, that an international force should back up the world executive, and that the world tribunal should have binding decisions on the parties and on all disputes that may arise in the international system. Shoghi Effendi, furthermore, noted that the world parliament should be elected by the peoples, and that the supreme tribunal should have ‘a binding effect even in such cases where the parties concerned did not voluntarily agree to submit their case into consideration’.<sup>291</sup> This is reflected, as we shall see in the next section, in the more incremental reforms of the three main organs of the UN.

Starting with the General Assembly, the BIC identifies its main failures with the ‘undue weight to state sovereignty and a mix of anarchy and conservatism’ as well as its inability to enforce sanctions.<sup>292</sup> It, henceforth, calls for a more representative General Assembly, indeed, one that would represent more accurately both the peoples and nations of the world. This

<sup>289</sup> ‘Abdu’l’Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 35

<sup>290</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 202.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>292</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, 8.



call is reminiscent of the advocacy cited in the writings of ‘Abdu’l’Bahá in 1875, “... it would be preferable if the election of non-permanent members of consultative assemblies ... should be dependent on the will and choice of the people...”<sup>293</sup> Indeed, unlike people’s acceptance of national and local legislative bodies, international legislative bodies are likely to entice suspicion insofar as they are not adequately represented.<sup>294</sup> Additionally, the resolutions of the UN should have the force of law, and be endowed with provisions and sanctions, so that they can address the needs of an increasingly interdependent humanity more efficiently, and abandon certain paralysing aspects of state sovereignty. The BIC states:

“In a reformed United Nations, the legislative branch and its voting structure will need to represent more accurately the people of the world as well as nation-states. Second, General Assembly resolutions are not binding unless they are separately ratified as a treaty by each member state. If the current system, which places state sovereignty above all other concerns, is to give way to a system which can address the interests of a single and interdependent humanity, the resolutions of the General Assembly – within a limited domain of issues – must gradually come to possess the force of law with provisions for both enforcement and sanctions. These two shortcomings are closely linked inasmuch as the majority of the world’s people, suspicious and fearful of world government, are unlikely to submit to an international institution unless it is itself more genuinely representative.”<sup>295</sup>

These reforms are suggested so as to promote the image of a single and interdependent humanity, which constitutes the more normative principles of the Faith that have been reviewed previously, and the emphasis that Bahá’u’lláh placed on ‘peoples’ in His recommendations on a global governance system, or the equivalent of a global civil society. For the short-term reforms of the GA, the BIC proposes five measures. Firstly, it suggests that minimum requirements should be raised and determined by the way a government conduct itself towards its peoples:

“Without an unshakeable commitment to regular and periodic elections, universal participation by secret ballot, freedom of expression, and to other such human rights, a member state stands in the way of the active and intelligent participation of the vast majority of its population in the affairs of its own communities. We propose that there should be consequences for member states violating these standards. Similarly, nations seeking recognition should be denied membership until they openly espouse these standards or make recognizable efforts to move in that direction.”<sup>296</sup>

<sup>293</sup> ‘Abdu’l’Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, 24.

<sup>294</sup> This also explains the suspicion shown towards the discussion, for example, of a world government.

<sup>295</sup> Bahá’í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, 8.

<sup>296</sup> Bahá’í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, 8.

The demands for a more democratic representation within the General Assembly, and for raising minimum requirements for membership (this would include, for example, a commitment to human rights) are regarded as foundational in the operations of the General Assembly. Violations of human rights in national systems are most certainly bound to have negative effects on the international system as a whole, as they impede on citizenry participation, which is crucial to the flourishing of international society. The Bahá'í Faith holds no dogmatic views on how population differences would be handled, as long as they are part of a fair system. What is suggested is changing the 'one state, one vote' principle of the General Assembly into 'some form of proportionate representation', which would make the General Assembly a more equal partner with the Security Council.<sup>297</sup> In a letter in 1942, Shoghi Effendi explained that even though 'Abdu'l-Bahá provided a clear vision of global governance, these concerned more fundamental principles than a rigid formula:

"Though it is premature to try and endeavour to foresee on what basis various nations would be represented on any international council, or in any international form of government, it is clear from the Bahá'í standpoint that it could only be carried out on the basis of true justice; and justice does not imply one race having a preponderating vote over some other race's representatives, and thus being in a position to dominate them."<sup>298</sup>

Other proposals relating to the legislative function include the setting up of an International Commission in order to study the question of international boundaries instead of relegating the problem to the World Court. The latter commission would serve as a study-ground and as a practical agency for the assessments of threats against various civil groups, and the results of its research would serve as a warning system for growing tensions among various groups.<sup>299</sup> The 1995 report of the BIC deplores the way in which nation-states were initially arbitrarily designed, a situation that has led to many conflicts, and which highlights the need for a more genuine general reassessment and agreement on national borders. "In order to establish a genuine community of nations **in the long run**, it will be necessary to settle finally all disputes among borders. This research would serve that end".<sup>300</sup> [Emphasis added] This measure aims at providing a short-term remedy for ethnic conflicts, as these conflicts also have to be tackled at the level of principle, that is, by promoting global values that would seek to efface hatred and exclusiveness in the very long-term. If like Mitrany, we could say that this would bring about discord, according to the Bahá'í view, this is a short-term measure (as with most proposals that relate to UN reforms) that could provide a basis upon which ethnic conflicts could be brought to

<sup>297</sup> Jeffrey Huffines, "Bahá'í Proposals", in: Babak Bahador & Nazila Ghanea, (eds.), *Processes*, 19.

<sup>298</sup> Shoghi Effendi, in: Foad Katirai, *Global Governance*, 97.

<sup>299</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, 9. This proposal is reminiscent of the call made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to have a binding treating that would, among other things, be entitled to fix international borders in a more fitting manner.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*

appeasement. As boundaries were mostly arbitrarily designed (the boundaries of the majority of the nations are identical with the boundaries of colonial states established by the European powers), the Bahá'í view contends that there should be an authority to settle boundary disputes adequately. It is in the light of this recognised hindrance to peace and security that the latter proposal is made. That the Bahá'í ethos does not seek to do away with groupings such as the nation-state is mirrored in this BIC proposal, and in the call for reassessing international borders for greater security, and as a preventive measure against conflicts. More importantly, there is recognition that boundaries are artificial and imagined, but since they exist, there must be short-term mechanisms to deal with them.

Anderson's observation that nations are no more than "imagined communities" that require considerable social and political engineering to propagate, echoes 'Abdu'l-Bahá's much earlier description of nations and peoples as "limited unities" which are "imaginary and without real foundation".<sup>301</sup> "The artificial and arbitrary nature of national boundaries, coupled with insufficient mechanisms for handling boundary disputes, has been one of the major sources of inter-national conflict in the past two centuries".<sup>302</sup> Indeed, the Bahá'í model rests on a long term vision, which through intermediary steps, sets to achieve a real unity among peoples. In a time of ethnic hatred, a more adequate reconfiguration of boundaries would serve as a 'warning system'. Though like Mitrany, the Bahá'í ethos seeks to render frontiers 'meaningless', it is more in a sense of feelings, attitudes, and principles. It is clear that the Bahá'í Faith does not simply base its commitment to peace on ideological commitments either. It seeks to promote an active peace, not only based on a political basis, but on the release of the powers of the individual; a new conception of human relationships; the reduction of the gap between extremes of wealth and poverty; and the promotion of sustainable development measures. More importantly, world citizenship education is viewed as a long-term preventive measure against ethnic-based conflicts.

"Consciousness of the oneness of humanity, if taught to the next generation, could protect it from ethnic and religious conflict and encourage processes of collaboration and conciliation. It could generate a desire to base decisions on just principles and lead to the development of laws that are 'universal in both character and authority'".<sup>303</sup>

As regards financial arrangements, which are a great impediment to the successful conduct of UN operations, the BIC underlines that voluntary arrangements would never be sufficient, and suggests that an expert task force should be established to search for new solutions. The BIC adds, "In studying alternatives, the Task Force should be mindful of several

<sup>301</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of the oneness of humankind and the artificiality of boundaries.

<sup>302</sup> Graham Hassall, *Contemporary Governance*.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*

fundamental principles. First, there should be no assessments without representation. Second, in the interest of fairness and justice, assessments should be graduated. Third, mechanisms for encouraging voluntarily contributions should not be overlooked”.<sup>304</sup> In addition to these proposals, the BIC, in line with the writings of Bahá'u'lláh<sup>305</sup> and ‘Abdu’l’Bahá, calls for an Expert Commission to be appointed in order to make a commitment to “an auxiliary international language and script”, whose aim would be to “facilitate the transition to a global society through better communication”. Moreover, reflecting the need for greater global integration, the BIC promotes the establishment of a Commission for the development of an international currency.<sup>306</sup> In view of the federal mindset that the Bahá'í International Community is endowed with, and the weight it gives to the diversity of peoples and the protection of minorities, such a statement does not imply the demise of any culture or language, but rather seeks to supplement the existing world languages. This Bahá'í reform suggests that unity could be structurally realised through the input of an expert task force, which would study and seek to implement a universal auxiliary language. “Such a move”, the BIC states, “would go far toward promoting a spirit of unity”.<sup>307</sup> This is an aspect of the Bahá'í view that theory (unity) and practice (in this case the devise of a universal language) are interrelated; indeed, ‘Abdu’l’Bahá spoke of treading the spiritual path with practical feet.<sup>308</sup>

In addition, the BIC holds the view that the Security Council “suffers from an inability to take decisive action”. Hence, the BIC makes four suggestions for the short term. It proposes “as a transitionary step, measures to be introduced to curb the exercise the veto power to reflect the original intention of the Charter”.<sup>309</sup> Other measures to strengthen the decision-making role of the Security Council and its enforcement powers include the creation of an International Force under the command of the Security Council and Secretary General financed by the General Assembly, whose personnel would come from all parts of the world. “If properly implemented, this Force would also provide a sense of security that might encourage steps towards global disarmament, thereby making possible an outright ban on all weapons of mass destruction”.<sup>310</sup> The BIC adds, in line with the counsels of Bahá'u'lláh to the sovereigns of His time, that states should only need armaments for internal security, and for their own defence.<sup>311</sup> Other proposals related to the strengthening of the Security

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<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>305</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 249-250.

<sup>306</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, 10.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 9

<sup>308</sup> Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1956, 210.

<sup>309</sup> In this regard, the BIC states, “The original intention of the UN Charter in conferring veto power on the five Permanent Members was to prevent the Security Council from authorizing military actions against a Permanent Member or requiring the use of its forces against its will. In fact, beginning with the Cold War, the veto power has been exercised repeatedly for reasons that relate to regional or national security”. (Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, 11).

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*

Council include furthering the concept of collective security to local problems (a concept of human security), as many local threats are 'the result of the complex breakdown of the present-day global order'. "These threats include but are not limited to international drug trafficking, food security, and the emergence of new global pandemics".<sup>312</sup> The value of oneness touches upon the centrality of human rights, and the demand for more solid action to tear apart the concept of state sovereignty. Collective action is not only required in the case of military aggression, but also in the case of human aggression within the state (genocide), and other problems occurring as the result of the breakdown of the global system. Former Secretary General Kofi Annan observed "the collective interest is the national interest ...when we read the Charter today, we are more than ever conscious that its aim is to protect human beings, not to protect those who abuse them".<sup>313</sup> Annan's 'Global Compact' and the emerging norm of a 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) are part of a wider global urge to usher durable changes.

In addition, if the international system is to be based on the normative principles of 'unity in diversity', the concepts of the veto and of the permanent membership in the Security Council clearly jeopardise principles of equality and fairness. The oneness of mankind also justifies that Bahá'í reforms have been suggested as early as 1955 as regards removing the veto and permanent membership in the Security Council, and the importance of democracy in international relations. Laszlo remarks that international organisations are bodies that are not truly global, but international: they still operate within the climate of state sovereignty and self interest as opposed to the global interest.<sup>314</sup> "Such arrangements", Katirai states, "are not just bad governance but in dire contradiction to what the Commission on Global Governance calls the 'principles of universality and the equality of member-states' that so many, including the nation-states, presume should underlie international undertakings".<sup>315</sup>

The BIC, as briefly noted, recognises the great importance of functional-styled executive organisations such as the WHO or UNICEF, bodies with which it closely works. Moreover, the creation of these organisations coincides with the vision of the 'century of light', as it refers to "the growing acceptance of the principle of oneness and its implications". For 'Abdu'l-Bahá, physical integration would advance "the conditions that permit achievement of the ideal" (universal peace), as these organisations are a "reflection" of the "consciousness of world solidarity", crucial to the prelude of the Lesser Peace.<sup>316</sup> Not only do functional organisations embody effectiveness, but they are also based on the moral need for collective action that supports the unity of mankind and the prosperity of its peoples. The

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<sup>312</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>313</sup> In: Rod Rastan, "An International Legal", in: Babak Bahador & Nazila Ghanea, (eds.), *Processes*, 206 & 208.

<sup>314</sup> Ervin Laszlo, *Science and Prophecy*, 99.

<sup>315</sup> Foad Katirai, *Global Governance*, 77.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid*

BIC positively remarks, “As an international organisation, the United Nations has demonstrated humanity’s capacity for united action in health, agriculture, education, environmental protection, and the welfare of children”.<sup>317</sup> Additionally, mentioning the independent organisations in the UN family, and as part of the suggested reforms it proposed, the BIC notes that these successful executive functions (**WHO, UNICEF, The UPU, or the ILO**) should retain and reinforce their independence.<sup>318</sup> These proposals emphasise the functional mindset of the BIC, as they call for expert task forces to search for appreciate solutions. These functional organisations have demonstrated the capacity for “united action in health, agriculture, education, environmental protection, the welfare of children” as well as the “collective moral will to build a better future”.<sup>319</sup> Morality and ethics are here another example of the reflection of more global cooperative and practical efforts, which are found in the proposal for retaining independent functional organisations, which promote global integration, and consequently international peace.

Finally, the importance of the judicial function of the UN is underlined. “In any system of governance, a strong judicial function is necessary to moderate power of the other branches and to enunciate, promulgate, protect and deliver justice... no lasting world civilization can be founded unless it is firmly grounded in the principle of justice”.<sup>320</sup> Emphasising the positive elements of the International Court of Justice created in 1945, such as the diversity of a varied international judicial panel, the BIC calls for the extension of the Court’s jurisdiction and suggests that other organs of the United Nations, not only member states, be given the right to bring cases before the Court. This suggestion is reflective of cosmopolitan propositions that states cannot be the sole actors in international relations and law. As well as expanding the Court’s jurisdiction, the BIC calls for the expansion of issue areas such as international terrorism and drug trafficking. Without doubt, proposals that involve the subject of the International Court of Justice require that it should deliver legally binding decisions. The crucial place of the theme of ‘justice’ in Bahá’í thought justifies its support for the creation of bodies such as the ICC that places human rights over state interests. “Justice”, the BIC states, “is the one power that can translate the dawning consciousness of humanity’s oneness into a collective will through which the necessary structures of global community life can be confidently erected”.<sup>321</sup> Clearly, practicing justice is another facet of the ethical, normative, and cosmopolitan principles of the Faith based on humanity, and not on states. In light of the ‘ethical’ and ‘spiritual’ nature of the Bahá’í Faith, these practical measures to reform the United Nations are not, however, sufficient. The BIC recognises the crucial importance of releasing

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<sup>317</sup> Bahá’í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, 2.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>321</sup> Bahá’í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, 12.

the powers latent in the individual, and providing development paradigms not only with a material, but also a moral and spiritual dimension.<sup>322</sup> The BIC also seeks to instil a closer relationship between peoples and their international organisations in order to invalidate the dichotomy between them and us.<sup>323</sup> Furthermore, the encouragement of the greater participation of women in international affairs – who, in Bahá'í eyes, have an essential role to play in the establishment of Universal Peace – and the promotion of a more just system of global economic justice are important aspects of the BIC institutional reform programme. The BIC, thus, notes:

“Bahá'u'lláh announced the arrival of the time, foretold, in all of the world's scriptures, when humanity would at last witness the uniting of all peoples into a peaceful and integrated society. He said that human destiny lies not merely in the creation of a materially prosperous society, but also in the construction of a global civilization where individuals are encouraged to act as moral beings who understand their true nature and are able to progress towards a greater fulfilment that no degree of material bounty can provide.”<sup>324</sup>

### **The Bahá'í Approach and Cosmopolitan IR**

By way of conclusion, I will now highlight some of the similarities, and yet essential dissimilarities of form between IR and the Bahá'í approach, and how the latter can lend support to a growing cosmopolitan IR. Indeed, Bahá'í principles seem to be closely linked to the negatively labelled ‘idealist’ (‘Wilsonian’ IR), or neo-idealist (Held, Falk, and Archibugi call for the democratisation of international structures, and global civil movements) branches of IR. Indeed, idealists (as they came to be pejoratively called) promoted the ideals of the League of Nations, the concept of collective security, world citizenship, education, disarmament, an international police force, and arbitration. In addition, the respect for human rights, the alleviation of poverty, and the rule of law are strong features of this conceived order. If, however, the ‘idealist’ or ‘liberal’ branch of IR can be criticised for being too universalising, Bahá'í principles emphasise the need for diversity in unity. In other words, as we are ‘one human family’ (oneness), we have different viewpoints, and sometimes grow to adopt different values (diversity), but we are still able to collaborate, and care for each other.

In this respect, and in order to illustrate the inclusiveness of the Bahá'í perspective on cosmopolitanism, it can also be said that the latter represents a departure in sacred thinking as it does not rely on a believer/infidel

<sup>322</sup> “Development should not be confused with the creation of an unsustainable consumer society... Education is the best investment in economic development... Because of the spiritually damaging nature of dependency, schemes which focus solely on redistributing material wealth are doomed to failure in the long run”. Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, 15.

<sup>323</sup> See Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood*, 226-227.

<sup>324</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, 22.

dichotomy, but rather stresses the importance of tolerance and philanthropy. Bahá'u'lláh noted that it was indispensable that the peoples of the world "...observe tolerance and righteousness, which are two lights amidst the darkness of the world and two educators for the edification of mankind."<sup>325</sup> By proclaiming the oneness of humanity, Bahá'u'lláh, in addition, dissolved the dichotomy between believer and infidel. He wrote, "There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, or whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly source..."<sup>326</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in this regard, notes that there is no justification to account for one's own belief as "light and all others as darkness".<sup>327</sup> Bahá'í thinking, therefore, moves away from division (religious beliefs are not a condition to be excluded from the cosmopolis) towards ideas on unity based on the premise that human beings, regardless of gender, race, religion, and class form part of the same, yet diverse, human family. Denominations cannot preclude our common humanity.

It is also relevant to the cosmopolitan tradition that the Bahá'í model does not concentrate on 'events', but rather on the notion of 'process'. Interestingly, it is this focus on events, which discredited the 'idealist' and more normative branch of IR, and promoted the realist tradition through the arguments of the failure of the League of Nations, and the advent of WW2. The Bahá'í model, by focusing on process, sees that 'integrative and disruptive' forces work in opposition to each other, but will eventually lead to peaceful human and state relations. In the very long run, the numerous organisations of civil society and the other organisational consequences flowing from the interdependence of nations can foster cosmopolitan values, and override parochial and conflict-ridden values without undermining the local level and grassroots initiatives often led by women in the so-called developing world. Bahá'í political scientist W. Andy Knight, referring to world disorder as 'disruption' and 'disintegration', writes, "what is clear from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi is that world disorder is a prerequisite for the ushering in of World Order..."<sup>328</sup> This very concept can be linked to this phase of 'transition' and 'transformation' acknowledged by various IR theorists cited at the beginning of this paper.<sup>329</sup> Martin Shaw, likewise, underlines the concept of 'global transition', and propounds the idea that catastrophes (disintegration) often represent a stimulus for transformation: "the gains in the development of international law enforcement have been responses to some of the worst, genocidal episodes among many crimes against humanity, in which millions have suffered."<sup>330</sup>

<sup>325</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 36.

<sup>326</sup> The Universal House of Justice, "To the World's Religious Leaders".

<sup>327</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in: Horace Holley, (ed.), p. 348.

<sup>328</sup> W. Andy Knight, *The New World (Dis)order? Obstacles to Universal Peace*, p. 17.

<sup>329</sup> See, for example, James N. Rosenau, *The Study of Global Interdependence: Essays on Transnationalisation of World Affairs*, London: Frances Pinter Publishers, 1980

<sup>330</sup> Martin Shaw, "Globality", p. 172.



However, the acknowledgment of acute crises does not equate to ignoring, belittling, or blindly accepting the traumatic effects of the disintegration process on the body of humankind and the human suffering this generates. Rather, these conditions call for a process of increased awareness and informed engagement that reinforce the caring ethos of world citizens. W. Andy Knight goes on to state:

“Civil wars and internecine violence exploded in places like Afghanistan, Cambodia, Rwanda, the Former Yugoslavia, Bosnia, and Columbia. The debacle in Somalia, followed by a genocide in Rwanda, ethnic cleansing in Serbia and Kosovo, and the politically-motivated slaughter in places like the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Sudan, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Mozambique, and the continued violence in the Middle East, Chechnya, Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia/Eritrea, Zimbabwe, parts of Central and Latin America, and Asia indicated a persistent adherence to a culture of violence in the latter part of the twentieth century... To this can be added longstanding and continuing problems of unchecked population growth, crushing debt burdens, barriers to trade, transnational crime, drug trafficking, the trafficking in women and children, poverty, famine, natural and man-made disasters, political oppression and corruption, the spread of HIV/AIDS, SARS, Mad Cow Disease...”<sup>331</sup>

The choice of employing cosmopolitanism was, firstly, made in consideration of the ‘reality’ of the oneness of mankind, but also on the grounds that particularistic theories have failed or are failing to manage current world affairs as they foster the politics of human suffering. In addition to its views on IR, Bahá'í ethical cosmopolitanism could be said to represent a contribution to post-positivist, and normative thinking, while retaining the spirit of criticism,<sup>332</sup> and cosmopolitanism in modernity. Bahá'í views contribute to reinforcing the ‘sensitive turn’ taken by cosmopolitanism, which stresses diversity, in the sense of abandoning a domineering and homogeneous universalism. Indeed, Bahá'í views have been anticipatory of the new ‘sensitive’ turn promoted by critical international theory, feminist theory, or postmodernism from the last two decades of the twentieth century onwards.<sup>333</sup> Already in the midst of the nineteenth century Bahá'u'lláh, and ‘Abdu'l-Bahá in the early twentieth century, had promoted the deconstruction of ‘otherness’ as a means to bring about the unity of mankind, and the solidarity of the human race. In the 1910s, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá deplored how the notions of otherness impeded the

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<sup>332</sup> In the Bahá'í Faith, this delineates the importance of thinking independently from cultural heritage and traditions.

<sup>333</sup> These theories proclaim that discrimination on the basis of race, class, gender... do not serve the welfare of humankind. Their cosmopolitanism is enshrined in restoring a sense of denied dignity to members of the human race.

realisation of the oneness of humankind, and hence the achievement of an unbounded global community. He stated, “See ye no strangers.... for love and unity come hard when ye fix your gaze on **otherness**”. [Emphasis added]<sup>334</sup> Lately, these anticipatory views have been advanced in new critical IR theories, with the aim of fostering inclusiveness, and deconstructing strangeness and otherness. In particular, critical international theory holds that, by promoting divisions, the division between inside and outside alienate peoples from one another, erects barriers of strangeness, and directly infringe on more peaceful relations.

Bahá'í views relate, and are not entirely dissociated from the ‘mainstream’ cosmopolitan tradition.<sup>335</sup> Like the latter, they are concerned with the promotion of the common good, the need for more global and peaceful forms of communities, and they seek to discredit the view that human nature is inherently belligerent.<sup>336</sup> Bahá'í views promote global values, the ethos of world citizenship, and the improvement of international institutions (like the United Nations), global institutions (like the International Criminal Court), and the idea of consultation amidst diverse communities. Bahá'í international thinking, indeed, connects to the branch of IR that is concerned with regional and global integration, world order, communities of fate, functional organisations, and the unity of mankind. It calls for the creation of a political, economic, and social system, which will distribute the benefits of interdependence fairly, and not to the advantage of the powerful, thus avoiding extremes in wealth and poverty (here the emphasis is on ‘creation’). Indeed, although the interdependence of nations is a cosmopolitan aspect (in the form of globalisation, as a case in point), the Bahá'í view upholds that it is not sufficient for bringing international prosperity in a natural harmony of interests. Bahá'ís, like cosmopolitans such as Richard Falk and David Held point to the much darker side of globalisation. The democratisation and accountability of global institutions is an important facet of this issue, as has been discussed, with the mounting importance of global civil society. The Bahá'í perspective is, in this sense, not idealistic, but rather normative: “It proposes pursuit of change in desired directions through both intellectual and social engagement and not through intellectual idealization alone.”<sup>337</sup> World order will not simply usher better conditions due to conditions of global interdependence, but global will and intervention, and unprecedented efforts are required. W. Andy Knight clarifies that although the Bahá'í view upholds that peace is ‘inevitable’, it does not view it as “an ephemeral ‘thing’ out there that will somehow fall

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<sup>334</sup> Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 24.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>336</sup> Kant stands as an exception to this, as he upheld human nature to be essentially warlike.

<sup>337</sup> Graham Hassall, *Contemporary Governance*.

from heaven into the laps of humanity...’’<sup>338</sup> In order to be universal and sustainable, peace requires ‘a fundamental transformation of world order’.<sup>339</sup>

Where Bahá'ís depart from IR theories, cosmopolitan or not, is that for Bahá'ís, IR theories are the result of speculation, worked out by the human mind. By contrast, they believe that Bahá'í principles do not flow from an activity of the human mind, but are the result of a fusion of reason (to search and choose principles) and faith (to trust the reality of principles that are beyond the speculations of the human mind).<sup>340</sup> World order is, therefore, the amalgamation of elements of human agency (we decide to intervene) and more revelational elements that belong to a non-human and more mystical plan (even if we decided not to intervene, the unity of humanity remains an aspect of a divine plan for mankind). Human agency can decide upon the means and rapidity by which to achieve a process of unity, but this process has already been set in motion. Bahá'í views are, thus, essentially different, in the sense that they have been advocated by a world religion, which asserts the spiritual nature (ethics) of cosmopolitanism, and not only its material side, i.e. global, technological, and physical interdependence. The Bahá'í model reflects the concerns of the secular cosmopolitan approach, and at the same time remains a non-secular approach: the spiritual destiny of mankind lies in its unity. In this way, the Bahá'í model offers a reconciliation between the more ethical views of cosmopolitanism propounded from ancient times to the Enlightenment, and more recent material approaches propounded, for example, by Mitrany's functionalism.

The Bahá'í model could represent a basis for highlighting the relevance to the welfare of humanity of fulfilling both, basic material needs, and those of a spiritual/ethical nature, animated by an ethos of oneness.<sup>341</sup> Material goals are essential (for example, everyone should have the basic human rights to food and shelter) to fulfil the real purpose of humanity, which is ‘spiritual’ in nature. The reality of humanity is ‘spiritual’ in the sense that human beings potentially reflect the virtues of a ‘higher nature’, an aspect given to the whole of mankind, and not only to privileged categories. (This justifies the notion that achieving the unity of humanity does not represent a utopian goal). In turn, the oneness of humankind is both a ‘material’ (biological/scientific) and a ‘spiritual’ principle (value-laden), which can assist the reinvention of IR along more inclusive parameters. The Bahá'í approach has, thus, reinforced cosmopolitanism through the exposition of a reality that reflects a ‘spiritual’ principle of oneness, and whose direction is geared towards a cosmopolitan path. As Cheshmak Farhoumand-Sims and

<sup>338</sup> W. Andy Knight, *The New World (Dis)order? Obstacles to Universal Peace*, 1.

<sup>339</sup> The basis of faith, for Bahá'ís, lies in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh as a new ‘divine’ revelation for our global age.

<sup>340</sup> It bears restating that the basis of faith, for Bahá'ís, lies in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh as a new ‘divine’ revelation for our global age.

<sup>341</sup> In this sense, the oneness of humankind is useful in highlighting the artificiality of the concept of a closed and homogeneous nation, and the divisive and insufficient aspects of a material cosmopolitanism, concepts which are both ethically deficient.

Charles Lerche note, "In our rapidly globalizing era, relevant models of peace building must envision humanity as a collective whole rather than contending parts, be based on global ethics and more fully incorporate the inward, spiritual dimensions of human experience."<sup>342</sup> Here the Bahá'í model of world order can make interesting inroads into International Relations theory, as the reality it describes is not linked to imposition, but rather to emancipation. Emancipation from the bounds of the limitedness of bounded communities, emancipation from overly materialist views which promote inequalities, and emancipation from discrimination based upon the 'unreal' dichotomies of race, class, gender, age etc.... This order, furthermore, to be justifiable, has to be created through human agency and consent, which is supported by the assistance of a not fully comprehensible divine and mysterious Being ('God').

We can also note that the Bahá'í approach assists in giving cosmopolitan 'purpose' to IR, by advocating the need for a level of principle (the oneness of humanity), and privileging the value of unity. The Bahá'í Faith, through the principle of the oneness of humankind, can lend new lenses to IR on how we can possibly view the world. It builds the bridge between the concept of unity, which is now criticised by postmodernism, because of the ideas of totality, domination, and homogenisation, and the concept of diversity of opinions, ethnic characteristics, gender, which can reinforce, and not threaten that unity. Indeed, Bahá'í views reinforce cosmopolitanism by asserting that diversity has been created to contribute to the 'quality' of unity, and that both are not irreconcilable. They assert possible avenues of communication to reach the stage of common understanding, tolerance, awareness of multiplicity of thinking that reinforces the idea of a 'unity', which is the result of manifold aspects, and not only that of a domineering, same, and imposing element.

Moreover, the 'level of principle' asserts the possibility of solving jingoism, xenophobia, and nationalism (the antitheses of cosmopolitanism) at a spiritual level, and as a basis for unity. This is not only dealt with at a mere theoretical level, but also at a very practical one. 'Principles' can serve as a basis for action and transformation; likewise, it can be argued, theories should serve the welfare of humanity, and should exist for a practical purpose. When people recognise the need for unity through the argument of the validity of the oneness of humankind, they are able to deconstruct images of strangeness propounded by the way the world is shaped (that is a world of divided jurisdictions of sovereign states). The way we look at the world when defined by the oneness of humankind, has the potentiality of transforming parochialism into cosmopolitanism. This shows how the level of principle can assist in promoting cosmopolitan attitudes.

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<sup>342</sup> Cheshmak Farhoumand-Sims & Charles Lerche, "Perspectives on Peace Building", in: Charles Lerche (ed.), *Healing the Body Politic*, 22.

Through this reality of oneness, we can construct an alternative way of building the world, not only because it is possible to do so (a post-positivist view), but because it reflects spiritual/divine reality. The Bahá'í Faith creates another level for the realm of the 'possible' in IR, as opposed to asserting the inevitability of the division of the world into the domestic and international spheres. More importantly, Bahá'í views are not only concerned with deliberating philosophically upon possible ways of looking at the world, but they also impart the will to act upon principles, which can give meaning to action, and which can foster the unity of humanity. Moreover, the spiritual/ethical/divine aspects of the Bahá'í Faith can assist in demonstrating the nature of the non-spatiality of our allegiances. The unity of humanity, in the Bahá'í Faith, reveres a non-spatial view of the world, through the 'spiritual' nature of its principles. It belongs to a non-territorial sphere that collapses ideas of inbred division in creation. IR can, thus, be provided with a new basis for defining human solidarity, as the result of the mystical propensity linked to our nature, which shapes the 'reality' of the unity of the species.

Finally, Bahá'í cosmopolitan views revolve around the non-statist turn in IR, which refuse to treat the nation-state (as well as realism) as a focal point of the discipline, and thereby provide a more ethical and spiritual starting-point for debating cosmopolitanism; for destabilising dichotomies that feed discrimination; and for imagining a world community that is conscious of its oneness. In the words of Shoghi Effendi, theories, including IR theories should constantly adjust to new global world conditions:

“The call of Bahá'u'lláh is primarily directed against all forms of provincialism, all insularities and prejudices. If long-cherished ideals and time-honoured institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution? For legal standards, political and economic theories are solely designed to safeguard the interests of humanity as a whole, and not humanity to be crucified for the preservation of the integrity of any particular law or doctrine.”<sup>343</sup>

The Bahá'í model of world order suggests a transformation in IR, that would reflect flexibility in its approach, the opening of new cosmopolitan avenues, not simply because these reflect the 'reality' of the oneness of mankind, but also because they are of use to the welfare of humanity. Henceforth, theories are not just there for their own sake, but as a prescriptive means, to foster the transformation of a world community

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<sup>343</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, 42.

conscious of its indivisible oneness. The way we look at the world is based on a conception of 'reality' that goes beyond our own minds, where human beings remain principal actors in determining how their world can be constantly improved upon.

## Messianic Concealment and Theophanic Disclosure

Moojan Momen  
Bedfordshire, Independent Scholar

### Abstract

In this paper, I start by discussing a controversy that has erupted recently over the issue of the exact point in time that Baha'u'llah became aware of his mission. The controversy revolves around the translation of a phrase in the writings of Baha'u'llah which appear to state that he does not have any "amr". One side to the controversy claims that the translation of this phrase indicates that Baha'u'llah had no thought of advancing any claim as late as 1857, while the opposing party contends that this is a mistranslation of the phrase and that Baha'u'llah was fully aware of his mission from at least the time of his imprisonment in the Siyah-Chal. I intend to show in this paper that the whole controversy is an illusory one caused by the specific nature of the meaning of the word "amr" and that the phrase that is the subject of dispute proves neither side's case, however it is translated. Evolving out of my discussion of this issue, is a theological schematic of the stages of the evolution of the mission of those persons that Baha'is call Manifestations of God. I then putatively impose this schematic upon the dispensation of the Bab creating a new interpretation of his ministry.

In recent years, a disagreement has emerged among scholars about the exact meaning of a particular phrase in Baha'u'llah's work, the *Sahifih-yi-Shattiyyih* (Book of the River or Book of the Tigris), and the evidence that it might contain about Baha'u'llah's thinking at the stage in his ministry to which this work can be dated.

On the one hand, Cole contends that, from his translation of a certain phrase the Book of the River, it is clear that, at the time that he composed this work (which Cole dates to about 1857), Baha'u'llah "is making no claim to have a divine Cause"<sup>1</sup>. Cole states that he believes that it was not until about 1859 that Baha'u'llah began to put forward a claim and that the Book of the River is evidence that, in 1857, Baha'u'llah had no thought of such a claim. This view is opposed by Saiedi who states that Cole's translation of a particular phrase is incorrect. Saiedi argues that Baha'u'llah was fully conscious of his mission and station during the Baghdad period and rejects any suggestion that Baha'u'llah's consciousness evolved in this regard<sup>2</sup>.

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1 Juan R. I. Cole, "*The Book of the Tigris*"

2 Saiedi, "Concealment and Revelation in Baha'u'llah's Book of the River" *Journal of Baha'i Studies*, 9/3 (1999) 25-56 and *Logos and Civilisation*, Bethesda, 2000, 29-33

The key area in dispute revolves around the translation of a phrase which occurs in the *Sahifah-yi-Shattiyyih*. The sentence in which this phrase occurs may be transliterated thus: "Walakin, chih guyam, kih hich iqbal bih amri nadaram." The first part of this sentence, "Walakin, chih guyam," is in idiomatic Persian formulation expressive of despair or frustration. Saeidi has rendered it "Yet, alas", while Cole has translated it more literally "But what shall I say?" The difference of opinion focusses however upon the meaning of the second half of this sentence. The literally word-for-word rendering of this phrase would be "no approach to any amr do I have". Cole has considered that the word amr has "the connotation of 'divine Cause'" <sup>3</sup> and thus this phrase is an indication that Baha'u'llah, at this stage, had no idea of advancing a claim to a divine mission. Saeidi responds by asserting that this phrase is "a common polite Persian idiom which indicates reluctance or disinclination to approach an issue or engage in a task" <sup>4</sup> Saeidi therefore disputes Cole's conclusion that this phrase indicates that Baha'u'llah conceived of no divine mission at this stage.

Part of Saeidi's argument is that the context within which this phrase appears makes his interpretation the more likely one. In the preceding paragraphs, Baha'u'llah is likening divine revelation to a river and divine omnipotence to the power of a river when it floods. The sentence in question appears at the end of this discourse, just after Baha'u'llah has stated that if it were not for the malice in people's hearts, he would continue his theme and disclose all of the spiritual meanings inherent in this analogy of the river. Saeidi argues that it is clear from the context that Baha'u'llah is using this sentence to terminate this discourse, thus making Saeidi's translation more likely. To demonstrate this argument, I will here give the translations of both Cole and Saeidi of the passage in which the disputed phrase occurs:

"If it were not for fear of the hidden chains in the breasts of the people, I would have continued to mirror forth all divine parables and subtleties of the celestial laws with reference to the very flowing of this physical river. But what shall I say? I make no claim to a Cause. The intensity of the sorrow and grief that have befallen me during these days has left me sorely tried between the Gog of silence and the Magog of speech. I beseech God to send down an Alexander who will erect a protecting wall. Hidden allusions have been concealed in these phrases and sacred letters have been treasured up in these words. Happy are those who have grasped these pearls, have appreciated their value, and have attained their presence." <sup>5</sup>

Were it not for fear of the malice hidden in the hearts, I would have assuredly unveiled all the inmost divine analogies and all the subtleties of the heavenly principles with regard to the course of this outward river. Yet, alas, I am disinclined to approach any matter. On account of the intensity of

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<sup>3</sup> e-mail on H-Bahai list, 20 October 2001

<sup>4</sup> Saeidi, *Concealment*, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Juan R. I. Cole, *Tigris*



My anguish and sorrow, in these days I am sore tried between the Gog of silence and the Magog of utterance. I beseech God to send down an Alexander who will raise an insurmountable barrier.<sup>6</sup>

Cole has recently countered Saeidi's contextual argument by finding another passage in the writings of Baha'u'llah from the same period in which a similar phrase appears: "ma`lum va mubarhan ast kih in bandih az khud dhikri va amri nadarad"<sup>7</sup>. In this passage, Baha'u'llah states that, should Baha'u'llah's name be mentioned, this would not become a cause of contention, because he has not put forward with respect to himself any mention or amr<sup>8</sup>. Cole claims that these two occurrences are cognates of each other and hence refute Saeidi's contextual argument (since the context of the second occurrence is completely different).

Cole has also supported his argument by pointing out that at the beginning of the *Sahifih-yi-Shattiyyih*, Baha'u'llah rejects any claim that he has performed any miracles although he asserts that the claims that the Bab and the Mirrors (*mirat*, a station given by the Bab to some of his leading disciples) of the Babi dispensation performed miracles should not be doubted. Cole maintains that this is evidence that Baha'u'llah was, at this time, subordinating himself to the Mirrors of the Babi dispensation, and is thus further evidence that he was not claiming any station for himself.

Cole's conclusions from all of this is that there is no historical evidence for Baha'u'llah putting forward a claim to a divine mission before 1859 when there are accounts by such people as Fitnih and Nabil-i Akbar that Baha'u'llah intimated such a claim to them<sup>9</sup>. Cole rejects the evidence that Baha'u'llah's account of his experience in the *Siyah-Chal* constitutes an experience of divine revelation (*wahy*), rather he states that "it appears that it consisted more of *ilham* or inspiration than of *wahy* or revelation, and that Baha'u'llah began thinking of *islah* or reform of Babism rather than of making any claim of his own"<sup>10</sup>. Cole thus maintains that the notion of claiming a divine mission did not occur to Baha'u'llah until sometime after about 1857 and before 1859.

Saeidi has presented a number of other pieces of evidence to support his position that Baha'u'llah was aware of his station and mission since at least the *Siyah-Chal* experience and possibly earlier. In affirmation of the fact that Baha'u'llah considered the *Siyah-Chal* experience of 1852-3 to be revelation (rather than inspiration as Cole claims), Saeidi quotes several references to this episode in the writings of Baha'u'llah. Of particular interest is the

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6 Nader Saiedi, "Sahifih-yi-Shattiyyih (Book of the River) Revealed by Baha'u'llah: a Provisional Translation" *Journal of Baha'i Studies*, 9/3 (1999) 59

7 *Ayat-i Bayyinah*, Dundas, Canada: Association for Baha'i Studies in Persian, 1999, pp. 3-4

8 e-mail on H-Bahai list 20 October 2001.

9 Cole, *Tigris*

10 Cole, *Tigris*

reference from the writings of Baha'u'llah which parallels the Tablet to the Shah but instead of referring to "the breezes of the All-Glorious" wafting over him, he uses the phrase "the breezes of Revelation (wahy)"<sup>11</sup>, thus indicating that Baha'u'llah thought that what occurred in the Siyah-Chal was revelation (wahy) rather than merely inspiration (ilham).

Saeidi also cites several instances where Baha'u'llah has stated that his revelation arose in the year Nine, i.e. 1852-3 or the year "after Hin" (after 68, i.e. 1269/1852-3<sup>12</sup>).

Furthermore, Saeidi questions Cole's dating of this work to about 1857. Cole has based this on the fact that one of the Hidden Words is quoted in the *Sahifih-yi-Shattiyyih*, but it is quoted slightly differently than in the form in which it appears in the final form of the Hidden Words. Cole argues from this that the *Sahifih-yi-Shattiyyih* can be dated to a time after the Hidden Words were first revealed but before the final version was distributed, which he considers to be about 1857. Saeidi states however that there are numerous instances of Baha'u'llah quoting his own works slightly differently from the way that they were originally revealed and many years after the work was originally revealed. Indeed in the case of the Hidden Words, one of these is quoted in a slightly different form in the tablet to Nasiru'd-Din Shah. If Cole's reasoning were correct then this tablet would also date from about 1857, whereas it belongs in fact to the late Edirne period.

The correspondence on this issue has been extensive and has gone on over several years, but as far as I am aware, Cole has not responded to any of these latter points that Saeidi has raised.

### **The Meaning of the Word "Amr"**

My purpose in reviving this issue is to raise a further point that has not been considered by any of the numerous persons who has discussed this question on several e-mail lists. It is clear that the original point over which Cole and Saeidi disagreed was the meaning of "hich iqbal bih amri nadaram." Indeed it could be said that the disagreement focussed on the word "amr" - whether this word was being used by Baha'u'llah in the specific and technical sense of "Divine Command or Cause" or whether it was being used in the more general sense of "matter" or "affair". The word amr is also central to the second example that Cole has found - in which Baha'u'llah states: "ma'lum va mubarhan ast kih in bandih az khud dhikri va amri nadarad"

In a paper presented at the Irfan Colloquium in 1999<sup>13</sup>, I have given an extensive analysis of the word "amr" in both the Qur'an and in the *Kitab-i-*

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<sup>11</sup> Saiedi, *Concealment*, 49-50

<sup>12</sup> Saiedi, *Concealment*, 51-5

<sup>13</sup> Moojan Momen, "A Study of the Word 'Amr' in the Qur'an and in the Writings of Baha'u'llah," published in *Lights of Irfan*, Book 1, 81-94

Iqan. I will not here repeat the detailed analysis given there, but it can be stated in summary that in the Qur'an the word *amr* has a complex range of meanings which is not easily translated by a single English word. When used in connection with God, it certainly means the Divine commission or decree which descends upon a Messenger of God in the form of Revelation, as Cole has stated. But it also is used to denote the judgement of God upon the people - those who accept the Messenger of God are saved and rewarded and those who refuse and disobey him are punished. Instances of this latter meaning of *amr* can be found throughout the Surah of Hud, for example (11: 40, 43, 58, 66, 76, 82, 94). Thus the semantic range of the word *amr* involves not only the descent upon the Messenger of God of Divine revelation but also the imposition upon people of an obligation to accept the revelation, such that if they refuse, there is a consequent punishment.

In Baha'u'llah's *Kitab-i-Iqan*, one finds the same range of meanings for the word *amr*. Regarding Noah, for example, it is stated:

When He was invested with the robe of Prophethood, and was moved by the Spirit of God to arise and proclaim His Cause [*amr*], whoever believed in Him and acknowledged His Faith, was endowed with the grace of a new life. (*Iqan* 154)

This meaning of *amr* becomes of significance for Baha'i polemic in the interpretation of Qur'an 32:5 which states:

He [God] establishes al-*amr* from heaven to earth and it will return to Him in a Day, the length of which is one thousand years in your reckoning

If we now take these points back to the disagreement between Cole and Saeidi, the critical distinction that becomes evident in connection with the meaning of the word *amr* is the distinction between that of merely being the bearer of a revelation and that of imposing upon people the obligation of abandoning the previous revelation and accepting the new revelation. Revelation (*wahy*) and *amr* are thus two separate conditions which do not necessarily co-exist. It is possible to have *wahy* without *amr* (although not, I think, *amr* without *wahy*). In other words, it would appear that for a period of time while he was in Baghdad, Baha'u'llah was the conscious bearer of a revelation but that he chose not to openly declare this fact and thus impose upon the people the necessity of choosing whether to accept his new revelation or not. During the entirety of the Baghdad period, therefore, the *amr* of the Bab held sway - the obligation of people was to accept and follow the religion of the Bab.

I assume that both Cole and Saeidi would agree that in 1857 and indeed during the whole of the Baghdad period, Baha'u'llah was not advancing a claim to revelation in such a way as to challenge and oblige those with whom he was in contact (mainly the Babis) to follow him. If there is

agreement on that, then given the full meaning of the word *amr*, he was not putting forward an *amr*. In other words, regardless of whether we accept Cole's claim that Baha'u'llah did not in 1857 envisage advancing a claim to divine revelation and that his thinking only developed later in this direction or we accept Saeidi's contention that Baha'u'llah was fully aware of his station as a revelator of God's Will and was indeed hinting at this in his writings, the phrase "*hich iqbal bih amri nadaram*." has no bearing on this issue. Even if Cole is correct in translating it as "I make no claim to a Cause," this would still be in accordance with Saeidi's view that Baha'u'llah was fully aware of his station and was hinting at it in his writings. Given the full meaning of the word *amr*, even if Baha'u'llah were fully aware of his station, he was not at this time proclaiming it and calling people to follow him. Thus the *amr* - the obligation to follow Baha'u'llah and God's judgement upon them depending on the decision they made - had not yet been laid upon people.

### **Baha'u'llah's Messianic Concealment and Theophanic Disclosure**

Christopher Buck<sup>14</sup>, Juan Cole<sup>15</sup> and others have written of Baha'u'llah's Baghdad period as being that of "messianic secrecy" or of "a messianic secret". This term reflects Baha'u'llah's own description of this period, the "set time of concealment"<sup>16</sup>. MacEoin appears to believe that during this period, Baha'u'llah had no messianic secret and that the idea of putting forward a claim occurred to Baha'u'llah only in about the beginning of 1863. MacEoin believes the accounts of Baha'u'llah's experience in the Siyah Chal (and possibly also the Ridvan Garden) to be a retrospective rewriting of history in order to conform to certain Shi'i and Shaykhi expectations about the year 1269 and 1280<sup>17</sup>. Initially Cole disputed MacEoin's position and asserted that even in Baha'u'llah's earliest works, such as the *Rashh-i `Ama* and the *Qasidah al-Warqa'iyah*, which date from Baha'u'llah's Tehran and Sulaymaniyyah period respectively, Baha'u'llah was signalling that his true station was that of being the bearer of a revelation and a number of individuals realised this station during the Baghdad period<sup>18</sup>. More recently, Cole has gone back from this position and now states that he considers that Baha'u'llah reached a consciousness of a Divine mission in between about 1857 and 1859<sup>19</sup>.

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14 Christopher Buck, *Symbol and Secret*, Kalimat, 1995, pp. 257 ff

15 Cole "The Book of the River" and "Baha'u'llah's Surah of the Companions: An Early Edirne Tablet of Declaration, c. 1864: Introduction and Provisional Translation," *Baha'i Studies Bulletin*, 5(3)-6(1), June 1991, pp. 4-74, see p. 8, 10, 21

16 see Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1970, p. 151

17 MacEoin, "Religious Authority Claims in Middle Babism", paper written for Third Annual Los Angeles Baha'i History Conference

18 Cole, "Baha'u'llah and the Naqshbandi Sufis in Iraq, 1854-1856", *From Iran East and West, Studies in Babi and Baha'i History*, vol. 2, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1984, Series: Studies in Babi and Baha'i History 2, pp. 1-28

19 Cole, *Tigris*

It seems to the present writer that, given the fact that the references to denying an amr are not relevant to this issue, as indicated above, we are left with the supporting evidence that Saeidi has presented (as described above - Baha'u'llah's use of the word "revelation (wahy)" in relation to his Siyah Chal experience and the instances where Baha'u'llah has stated that his revelation arose in the year Nine), which Cole has not countered. Cole's reference to Baha'u'llah denying the performance of miracles at the beginning of the Sahifah-yi-Shattiyyih would not seem to be relevant since Baha'u'llah dismissed the importance of miracles throughout the whole of his ministry. And in any case, if the amr of the Bab still held sway during the whole of the Baghdad period, then it would not surprise us to find Baha'u'llah expressing this fact in various ways.

An additional point that needs to be made here is that, according to Shi'i traditions, the Imams, who receive inspiration (ilham), only hear this inspiration, whereas a Messenger of God (rasul) who receives revelation (wahy), sees the Angel who delivers the revelation<sup>20</sup>. The fact that Baha'u'llah reports seeing the Maid of Heaven is in itself a strong indication that he considered that he was in receipt of a revelation (wahy) rather than merely inspiration (ilham).

There seems to be no good grounds for accepting MacEoin's assertion that this was all rewriting of history by Baha'u'llah and so, unless Cole can produce some grounds for refuting this evidence, it would appear reasonable to accept Baha'u'llah's statements regarding the significance of the Siyah Chal and Ridvan episodes at their face value, which more or less corresponds to the traditional Baha'i interpretation as given by Shoghi Effendi in *God Passes By*. This would then divide the life of Baha'u'llah theologically into three stages:

1. The period before the onset of revelation, which Baha'u'llah describes by the words "I was but a man like others, asleep . . ." <sup>21</sup> and which 'Abdu'l-Baha expounds as meaning that although the Manifestation of God in the Manifestation from birth, his mission is not activated until a particular time <sup>22</sup>
2. The period during which revelation (wahy) is present but no claim had been advanced that represented the imposition of amr upon the people, the messianic concealment.
3. The period during which both amr and revelation are present, the theophanic disclosure, following which the laws of the new religion are given.

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20 see Momen, *Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, pp. 149-50

21 Baha'u'llah, *Proclamation of Baha'u'llah*, Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1968, 57

22 Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions*, Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1990, 155-6.

Incidentally, we have evidence from as early as 1867 that the ordinary Baha'is understood this concept that Baha'u'llah had revealed himself gradually. In a letter written in 1867 by the Baha'i community of Baghdad to the United States Congress, we have the following statement regarding Baha'u'llah: "That wise man revealed himself till he appeared like the high sun in midday."<sup>23</sup>

Although the broad outline of these three stages in Baha'u'llah's life are now clear, the exact dating of these stages is not as clear-cut as one may think. Although the onset of revelation is generally regarded as having started with the appearance of the Maid of Heaven to Baha'u'llah in the Siyah-Chal, sometime between September 1852 and January 1853, this does not fully take into account the episode of Baha'u'llah's meeting with Shaykh Hasan Zunuzi in Karbala in 1851. Nabil Zarandi, who appears to have known Shaykh Hasan personally, records that Baha'u'llah confided to Shaykh Hasan "the secret that He was destined to reveal at a later time in Baghdad"<sup>24</sup> Now it may be that since the claim put forward by Baha'u'llah to Shaykh Hasan was that of being the return of the Imam Husayn this did not necessarily imply a claim to revelation. It does, however, mean that Baha'u'llah was communicating some inkling of a higher station earlier than 1852. Similarly, the date for the end of this period of messianic secrecy is not exactly defined.

It is clear from the statements of Baha'u'llah that he made some form of claim to a small number of his companions in the Garden of Ridvan in April 1863. But at what point in time can it be said that the amr - the obligation to follow Baha'u'llah - had been laid upon the people? Was it in April 1863, when only a small number were informed and there appears to have been no attempt to spread this news, or in 1864 when a few tablets written by Baha'u'llah begin to make his claim to authority clear, or in 1866-7, when he began to send individuals to Iran to propagate his claim to the Babis and at the same time he openly challenged Mirza Yahya, who was widely acknowledged as the head of the Babi community, or should we, for theological reasons, delay this until the period of Baha'u'llah's proclamation to the kings and rulers of the world in 1868-72 (the kings and rulers acting in a sense as proxies for their people)?

During the years when Baha'u'llah lived in Baghdad, he "appeared in the guise of, and continued to labour as, one of the foremost disciples of the Bab"<sup>25</sup> The main thrust of his activities were towards reforming and purifying the Babi community. A significant number of individuals are, however, reported as having come to realise that he occupied a much higher

<sup>23</sup> E-Mail posting by Robert Stauffer, 4 Jun 1997. See also *Persecution and Protection: Documents about Baha'is, 1867, 1897, and 1902*, *World Order*, 2006, 37(3), 31-38

<sup>24</sup> Muhammad-i-Zarandi *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, translated from the Persian by Shoghi Effendi (1932; reprint, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), 32

<sup>25</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 128.

station. These are said to have come to this conclusion either from reading his writings<sup>26</sup> or from meeting him (for example Nabil Akbar, Shams-i Jahan Khanum Fitnih, and Mirza Fath-`Ali Khan Fath-i-A`zam.<sup>27</sup>

Following the open declaration of his mission in 1863-8, Baha'u'llah began to reveal the new laws of his dispensation, most particularly in the *Kitab al-Aqdas*, followed by the new social teachings of his religion, in a series of important tablets revealed after the *Aqdas*. Baha'u'llah himself links the theophanic disclosure and the imposition of the *amr* upon the people with the revelation of a new law in the following passage from the Tablet to `Abdu'r-Razzaq, referring to the rejection of Baha'u'llah by the Azalis:

And when the Cause (*amr*) of God was revealed and the laws, by which the entirety of the Bayan was confirmed and upon which it is dependent, were promulgated, they then pushed these aside, as you have seen and heard.<sup>28</sup>

In summary then, we may discern three periods to the life of Baha'u'llah and two periods to the ministry of Baha'u'llah. There was initially a period when, although there are some hagiographical accounts of wonders in his childhood and youth, there is nothing to indicate that he put forward any claim or was in receipt of any special divine guidance. From 1844 onwards, he acted as one of the followers of the Bab. Then came the first phase of his ministry, a period of messianic concealment, during which Baha'u'llah was in receipt of revelation (*wahy*) but had not yet openly advanced a claim, which would have laid the obligation of acceptance, the *amr*, upon the people. This period lasted from roughly 1852 to 1863, but may, for the Babis of Iran have extended to 1867. During this period also, Baha'u'llah acted as one of the followers of the Bab. The second phase of his ministry, and the third period of his life, was the period of theophanic disclosure, which was initiated with the Declaration in the Garden of Ridvan in 1863 but only gradually attained its full force as Baha'u'llah successively disclosed his claim to the Babi community in 1866-7 and to the rest of the world in 1868-72. This was the period when both *amr* and *wahy* were present.

### The Ministry of the Bab

Having outlined a schema for the life and ministry of Baha'u'llah, I would now like to see in what way this can be overlaid onto the life and ministry of the Bab. In Babi-Baha'i history the start of the ministry of the Bab is usually stated to start from his declaration to Mulla Husayn Bushru'i on the evening

26 see Momen, "A Preliminary Survey of the Baha'i Community in Iran during the Nineteenth Century", in *Iran im 19. Jahrhundert und die Entstehung der Baha'i Religion*, ed. Christoph Burgel and Isabel Schayani, Hildesheim, 1998, p. 34, no.3

27 see also list of twelve persons who became enthusiastic followers of Baha'u'llah in Momen, "A Preliminary Survey," p. 34, n.4

28 Baha'u'llah *Iqtidarāt va Chand Lawh-i Digar*. Cairo: Matba'at al-Sa'adah, c. 1924. Reprinted, H-Bahai: East Lansing, Mi., 2001, 52

of 22 May 1844. The exact equivalent in the life of the Bab to Baha'u'llah's experience of the Maid of Heaven in the Siyah-Chal is however dated by the Bab to have occurred about 2 months before. In the *Kitab al-Haramayn*, the Bab writes:

In truth, the first day that the Spirit descended in the heart of this slave was the fifteenth of the month of Rabi`u'l-Avval [1260, i.e. 4 April 1844]<sup>29</sup>.

This may correspond to the vision that the Bab describes of the severed head of the Imam Husayn. This vision is described by the Bab in one of his writings which is quoted in Nabil's Narrative: In one of His writings revealed in the year '60 A.H., the Bab declares the following:

"The spirit of prayer which animates My soul is the direct consequence of a dream which I had in the year before the declaration of My Mission. In My vision I saw the head of the Imam Husayn, the Siyyidu'sh-Shuhada', which was hanging upon a tree. Drops of blood dripped profusely from His lacerated throat. With feelings of unsurpassed delight, I approached that tree and, stretching forth My hands, gathered a few drops of that sacred blood, and drank them devoutly. When I awoke, I felt that the Spirit of God had permeated and taken possession of My soul. My heart was thrilled with the joy of His Divine presence, and the mysteries of His Revelation were unfolded before My eyes in all their glory."<sup>30</sup>

This vision may also correspond to the episode related by Khadijih Bigum, the wife of the Bab, in which she saw the Bab one night intoning a prayer: "His face was luminous; rays of light radiated from it. He looked so majestic and resplendent that fear seized me." Later the Bab said to her: "It was the will of God that you should have seen Me in the way you did last night, so that no shadow of doubt should ever cross your mind, and you should come to know with absolute certainty that I am the Manifestation of God Whose advent has been expected for a thousand years. This light radiates from My heart and from My being"<sup>31</sup>

The claim that is explicitly made, however, in the first chapter of the *Qayyum al-Asma*, which the Bab wrote in the presence of Mulla Husayn on 23 May 1844 was that of being the Gate to the Hidden Imam. In all of the books written in the early years of his ministry, the Bab never makes any explicit claim to any higher station. He also does not abrogate the law of Islam - indeed he urges his followers to be meticulous in carrying out the Islamic law<sup>32</sup>. Thus just as Baha'u'llah, in his early years, appears to be a reformer and purifier of the religion of the Bab, so the Bab, in these early

29 Nicolas, *Seyyed Ali Mohammed*, Paris: Du Jarric, 1905, p. 206

30 Zarandi, *Nabil's Narrative*, 253

31 H.M. Balyuzi, *Khadijih Bagum*, Oxford: George Rnald 1981, 11-13.

32 Tablet to Tahirih, cited in Asadu'llah Fadil Mazandarani, *Tarikh-i Zuhur al-Haqq* ("History of the Manifestation of Truth"). Volume 3.. Tehran, n.p., 1944. Reprinted, H-Bahai: Lansing, Mi., 1998, p. 334



years appears as a reformer and purifier of Islam. Within the Shaykhi community to whom the Bab and the Letters of the Living predominantly addressed themselves in the early years, the Bab appeared to be a leader in succession to Sayyid Kazim. Even the title of "the Bab" was not exceptional as Shaykh Ahmad and Sayyid Kazim had occasionally been known by this title.

The Bab did not proclaim his full identity as the Mahdi and the revealer of a new revelation until the summer of 1848. At this time, two events occurred almost simultaneously. First, those attending the conference of Badasht heard Tahirih and Baha'u'llah proclaim that the Islamic dispensation had ended. Second, the Bab declared himself to be the Mahdi at his trial before the Crown Prince Nasiru'd-Din Mirza at Tabriz. It was perhaps not the declaration of being the Mahdi itself which was the decisive issue for the matter under consideration in this paper, since Muslims commonly expected that the Mahdi would follow Islam and would not bring a new revelation. It was rather that during the trial, the Bab claimed that he was revealing divine verses, and this was discussed at length by the `ulama present. Immediately after this, the Bab wrote the Persian Bayan in which he abrogated the laws of Islam and promulgated his own laws.

Prior to these episodes in the summer of 1848, many, possibly most, of the Babis thought that the Bab was merely claiming to be an Islamic leader, a leader of the Shaykhi sect, the gate to the Hidden Imam. This was what he appeared to be claiming in his writings and this is the evident meaning of the title of "Bab" that he had taken. There is evidence for this assertion in the fact that when the Bab's full claims became known at the conference of Badasht, there were some who left the Babi movement as a result. Some of those attending the conference apostatised and left and we are told that in Maraghih, where most of the Shaykhis had become Babis, they apostatised when they learned that the Bab had abrogated the laws of Islam<sup>33</sup>

There were also many, however, who realised, before the summer of 1848, that the Bab's claim was far higher than that of merely being a gate to the Hidden Imam. As early as the first year of the Bab's ministry, Sunni and Shi'i `ulama gathered at the trial of Mulla `Ali Bastami in Baghdad perceived that while the text of the Qayyum al-Asma may claim that its author is the gate to the Hidden Imam, the language, through use of such terms as wahy and nuzul, in fact denoted a claim to divine revelation. If Sunni and Shi'i `ulama could discern that there lay a claim to revelation, a claim to a station equivalent to that of the prophet Muhammad, behind the text of the Bab, we can be sure that the leading disciples of the Bab also did. They were, after all, educated in exactly the esoteric tradition of Shaykhism that was most informed about such subtleties. Some of these leading Babis were more explicit in revealing their discovery of his high station (for

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<sup>33</sup> Mazandarani, *Zuhur al-Haqq*, 58.

example Tahirih), while others kept the knowledge hidden. I have discussed this theme in more detail in a paper regarding the trial of Mulla `Ali Bastami<sup>34</sup>

We may therefore see that, just as with Baha'u'llah, when the main body of the Babis during the Baghdad period saw Baha'u'llah as an inspiring leader but still basically within the circle of Babism, so during the early years of the ministry of the Bab, the majority of the Babis probably conceived of the Bab as a Shaykhi leader, as a gateway to the Hidden Imam who is the true Lord of the Age. However, just as there were some leading Babis who recognized, either from meeting him or reading his writings in the Baghdad period, that Baha'u'llah's true claim and station were far higher, so also there were undoubtedly a group of the followers of the Bab in the early years who recognised, either from his writings or from meeting him that his claim was much greater. We could say that just as during the Baghdad period, the amr still lay with the Bab and the people were not yet called upon to believe in Baha'u'llah as the purveyor of a new religion from God, abrogating the religion of the Bab, so from May 1844 to July 1848, the amr still lay with Muhammad and the generality of the people were not yet called upon to believe in the Bab as the bearer of a new religion from God. The period of May 1844 to July 1848, thus become a period of messianic concealment, which ended with the theophanic disclosure occasioned by Tahirih's proclamation at the conference of Badasht and the Bab's declaration at his trial that he was the Mahdi and the author of a new revelation.

Continuing the parallels, we might point out that just as there are statements in the writings of Baha'u'llah during the Baghdad period denying that he was possessed of any amr and appearing to subordinate himself to the authority of the Bab and the Babi hierarchy (as in the *Sahifah-yi-Shattiyyih*), so there are similar statements of the Bab in these early years. There is for example the episode in the *Masjid-i-Vakil* in Shiraz, when his enemies had forced the Bab to issue a recantation of his claims. There are several versions of this episode. Nabil gives the following:

The Bab, as He faced the congregation, declared: "The condemnation of God be upon him who regards me either as a representative of the Imam or the gate thereof. The condemnation of God be also upon whosoever imputes to me the charge of having denied the unity of God, of having repudiated the prophethood of Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets, of having rejected the truth of any of the messengers of old, or of having refused to recognise the guardianship of `Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, or of any of the imams who have succeeded him."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Moojan Momen, "The Trial of Mulla `Ali Bastami: a combined Sunni-Shi'i fatwa against the Bab." *Iran*, 1982, 20, 113-43.

<sup>35</sup> Zarandi, *Nabil's Narrative*, 154

The following is an alternative account of the Bab's words which occurs in a letter written by Sayyid Husayn Katib, the Bab's amanuensis:

O people! Whoever believes in my prophethood (nubavvat), may the curse of God be upon him. Whoever considers that I am an appointed gate (bab-i mansus) sent by the grace of the [Hidden] Imam (upon him be peace), may the curse of God be upon him. I am but a servant, believing in God and in his verses.<sup>36</sup>

And yet another account exists from Haji Mirza Muhammad Sadiq, who was not a believer in the Bab:

O people! Know ye that I have not said anything that my ancestor the Messenger of God did not say. That which Muhammad has made permissible [in the Holy Law] is permissible until the Day of Resurrection (yawm al-qiyama) and that which Muhammad has made illicit is illicit until the Day of Resurrection. As the Immaculate [Imam] (upon him be peace) has said: When the Qa'im arises, that is the Resurrection.<sup>37</sup>

In the *Sahifah-yi 'Adliyyah* and other writings from this period, the Bab also denies any new revelation and commands the people to follow the laws of the Qur'an and the teachings of Muhammad.

The parallels between the Bab and Baha'u'llah can even be extended to the ways in which they made their full claim known - the manner of the theophanic disclosure. Baha'u'llah proclaimed his full station in three ways. First privately to a small group of his followers in the Garden of Ridvan, openly to the Babis in the early years of the Edirne period, and then to the peoples of the world through their kings and rulers in the late Edirne, early Akka period. The full station of the Bab was declared to the Babis at the conference of Badasht and it was proclaimed to the Crown Prince and leading religious figures of Tabriz at his trial. The Bab at this time also wrote to the Shah of Iran and the Prime Minister Haji Mirza Aqasi. There is even a parallel to the private Ridvan Garden declaration of Baha'u'llah in the declaration by the Bab that he was the Qa'im to one of his foremost disciples 'Azim shortly before his public declaration at his trial<sup>38</sup>. The fact that even a leading disciple such as 'Azim, who mixed freely with the Babis in Tehran and Adharbayjan, was perturbed by this claim at this late date is further evidence that the realisation of the full station of the Bab was not very widespread among the Babis prior to the summer of 1848.

In his book, the Seven Proofs, the Bab explains that the need for a period of messianic concealment and the gradual unfoldment of his claims arose out of the lack of capacity among the people to accept his full claim at the start

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in A.Q. Afnan, *Zindigani-yi Hadrat-i Bab* 167

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in A.Q. Afnan, *Zindigani-yi Hadrat-i Bab* 168

<sup>38</sup> Zarandi, *Nabil's Narrative*, 313

of his mission and out of a desire to assist people to gradually come to a full realisation of the magnitude of the his claim:

Consider the manifold favours vouchsafed by the Promised One, and the effusions of His bounty which have pervaded the concourse of the followers of Islam to enable them to attain unto salvation. Indeed observe how He Who representeth the origin of creation, He Who is the Exponent of the verse, 'I, in very truth, am God', identified Himself as the Gate [Bab] for the advent of the promised Qa'im, a descendant of Muhammad, and in His first Book enjoined the observance of the laws of the Qur'an, so that the people might not be seized with perturbation by reason of a new Book and a new Revelation and might regard His Faith as similar to their own, perchance they would not turn away from the Truth and ignore the thing for which they had been called into being.<sup>39</sup>

Baha'u'llah has recapitulated and expanded on this in a tablet written to Aqa Mirza Aqa Nuru'd-Din:

Thou art well aware that the Commentary on the Ahsan al-Qisas (the Qayyum al-Asma of the Bab) was revealed according to what was current among the people (bi ma `ind an-nas) and this was purely out of bounty and grace that haply the people of negligence and error may ascend to the heaven of knowledge (jabarut-i `ilm). Thus most of what is mentioned in that book is what has been accepted as truth among the Muslims (ahl al-furqan). If what was the Will of God had been sent down from the start, no-one would have been able to bear it and no-one would have remained. All of this is out of His grace and bounty towards His creatures. Observe that at the start of his ministry, that holy one revealed himself in the station of gatehood (babiyyat). This was out of consideration that the birds of the hearts of humanity were not capable of flying above that station . . . The people have been and will continue to be immersed in the ocean of idle fancies and veiled from what God doth will, except those whom God has delivered through His Grace and whom He has caused to recognise what He hath revealed through His command . . . Thus out of grace to them, the Sun of Truth occupied himself with uttering trivia and the Ancient Ocean spoke forth only droplets. Thus it is that the Primal Point hath appeared in the name of gatehood (babiyyat), and the people did not accept even this limited station, let alone any mention of guardianship (lordship, vilayat) and such matters. And this despite the fact that all of these stations and those beyond them have been revealed and come into existence by a single word out of the ocean of his bounty and by his command they also return to annihilation and oblivion.<sup>40</sup>

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39 *Selections from the Writings of the Bab*, Haifa, 1976, p. 110.

40 Quoted in A.Q. Afnan, *Zindigani-yi Hadrat-i Bab* 203-4

Finally, in a tablet which appears to date from the Edirne period, the Surat al-Fath, Baha'u'llah restates this theme and draws the parallels between the Bab's gradually unfolding claims and his own initial concealment of his claims. First, he describes the gradual unfoldment of the claims of the Bab:

So recollect, O people! The moment when there came unto you the Revealer of the Bayan with wondrous, holy verses. At that time he said: "I am the Gate of Knowledge (bab al-'ilm) and whoever asserts more than that in relation to me has assuredly invented lies about me and has sinned greatly." Then later he said "I am the Qa'im, the True One, whose manifestation you were promised in mighty, noble scrolls." Then he said, magnified be his utterance, "I, verily, am the Primal Point. And this is, in reality, Muhammad, the messenger of God, the same [person] as thou hast heard and witnessed in the tablets of God, the King, the Ruler." And when the beings of a number of souls had progressed [sufficiently], thereupon, the veils were torn asunder and, from the Dawning-Place of holiness, there rose up [the call]: "I verily am God, no God is there except Me, thy Lord and the Lord of all the worlds." And also: "I, verily, from the beginning which hath no beginning, was a divinity, the One, the Single, the Unique. I did not take unto myself any partner or likeness or deputy. I verily sent the prophets and the Messengers from all eternity and will continue to send them to all eternity" . . .

Then in this tablet, Baha'u'llah comments on the gradual unfoldment of his own claims, mentions explicitly that there was a time during which he elevated the name of his brother and was submissive before the authoritative figures in the Babi movement, and clearly indicates that the amr did not lie with him in those days:

By God, O people! I did not desire any Cause (amr) for myself and followed all the Manifestations of old. I supported the Cause (amr) of God in every way during the days when faces were concealed out of fear of the oppressors. I humbled myself before every soul in the Bayan and lowered the wing of submission before every worthy believer. I safeguarded my brother [Mirza Yahya] . . . and elevated his name among the servants of God . . . There was none of the people of the Bayan for whom I did not reveal a tablet in which I mentioned him with high praise. Every fair-minded and trustworthy person will bear witness to this.<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusion

The thesis of this paper is that the phenomenon of a period of messianic concealment followed by a theophanic disclosure is common to at least the

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41 Based on a translation by Stephen Lambden in "Some Notes on Baha'u'llah's Gradually Evolving Claims of the Adrianople/Edirne Period," *Bulletin of Baha'i Studies*, vol. 5.3-6.1, June 1991, 75-83, see pp. 79-80; here retranslated from the original manuscript, an unnumbered volume from the Iranian Baha'i National Archives, pp. 77-79

Bab and Baha'u'llah (and a case can be made for a similar phenomenon in the life of Jesus and Muhammad). The period of messianic concealment appears to be a period when although the Manifestation is in receipt of divine revelations, these are phrased in such a way as to conceal their identity as revelation. Since no claim to being the bearer of a new revelation and the inaugurator of a new religious dispensation is made by the Manifestation during this time, there is no obligation on the people to follow the Manifestation, although a small number do discern the reality of the Manifestation. During this period, the amr still belongs to the previous Manifestation. At some point however, the new Manifestation discloses his true nature and puts forward the claim to be the inaugurator of a new religion. This disclosure is made both to the followers of the previous religion and to the secular authorities. This theophanic disclosure now puts an obligation on all to follow the new Manifestation. A new amr has begun. Following this the new Manifestation begins to reveal the new laws and teachings associated with his dispensation. Baha'u'llah has given something of the reason for this particular strategy in the case of the Bab and it is probable that much the same applies to the case of Baha'u'llah himself. Baha'u'llah states that the reason for the messianic concealment was that the people of the previous religion were not able to bear the full disclosure of the new Manifestation. Therefore the station of that Manifestation was revealed to them gradually.

### **PostScript: A Note on the Year Five of the Ministry of the Bab**

I have recently been translating for the forthcoming Irfan Colloquium the Bab's commentary on the Verse of Light I was interested to see in this the same prophecy regarding the fifth year of his ministry that also occurs in the Seven Proofs. This prophecy emerges from the Bab's interpretation of the Tradition of Kumayl. In response to the question "What is reality?", the Imam `Ali responded by a series of enigmatic statements.

In both the Seven Proofs and the Commentary on the Verse of Light, the Báb gives an interpretation of this Tradition, emphasising in particular the fifth phrase in this Tradition, which he relates to the fifth year of his ministry. In the Seven Proofs, the Bab merely prophesies that in that year "you will see a light shining from the morn of eternity if you do not flee and are not disturbed." But in the Commentary on the Verse of Light, he gives some indication of what will happen in that year. He begins by quoting the Tradition and then going on to expand on the fifth phrase:

Verily in the first year, there hath appeared the uncovering of the clouds of glory without a sign<sup>42</sup>; then the obliteration of vain imaginings and the dawning of the known; then the rending of the veils for the overthrow of the

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<sup>42</sup> Min ghayr alBishara; "Piercing the veils of glory, unaided" – Baha'u'llah, *Kitab-i-Iqan*, Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1950, p. 164

secret; then the attraction of the primal unity for the attributes of the Divine Oneness; then a light dawning forth from the morn of pre-eternity upon the temples of unity (cf Shoghi Effendi translates a slightly different phrase as "Behold, a light hath shone forth out of the Morn of eternity, and lo! its waves have penetrated the inmost reality of all men." *Iqan* 102). And when it has entered upon the five [?fifth year], its effect is that the fire becomes a light. At that moment, the form is completed and, verily, the form of the five is the form of a human being. Its creation is not completed for five years just as we sent to thee thy form.

The meaning of the passage is not entirely clear, but what is clear is that the Bab was signalling that some process that was begun at the start of his ministry would come to fruition in the fifth year and it would come to fruition in a human form.

Now since the fifth phrase of the Tradition of Kumayl reads: "a light dawning forth from the morn of pre-eternity (subh-i azal)," the Azalis have long asserted that this is a prophecy of the arising of Azal in the fifth year of the ministry of the Bab. However, there are problems with this assertion.

First, it is not at all clear that Azal was ever known as Subh-i Azal until a much later period. Mirza Yahya was addressed as Azal in tablets of the Bab, on account of the fact that his name Yahya and Azal are numerically equivalent (=38). However, I have not seen anywhere that the Bab addresses him as Subh-i Azal, and this statement is supported by Ishraq-Khavari<sup>43</sup>. It is probable that either he himself or, more likely, some of his followers such as the authors of the *Hasht Bihist*, Shaykh Ahmad Ruhi and Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani, began to give him this appellation precisely in order to make him retrospectively fit the prophecy of the Bab related to the Tradition of Kumayl. The *Nuqtatu'l-Káf* perhaps marks an intermediate stage in the development of this line of Azali thought in that, although the link between Azal and the Tradition of Kumayl is made<sup>44</sup> nevertheless, Mirza Yahya is never called Subh-i Azal in this text. He is always referred to as Jinab-i Azal or Hadrat-i Azal.

Second, we have another exegesis by the Bab of the Kumayl Tradition in the *Kitab al-Asma*<sup>45</sup>. Here, referring to the fifth phrase in the Tradition, he states: "Verily, the Primal Point is the Sun of Eternity (azal)." This would indicate that he considered himself to be the referent in this phrase of the Tradition of Kumayl.

<sup>43</sup> see Ishraq-Khavari, `Abdu'l-Hamid. *Qamus-i Iqan*. 4 vols. Tehran: Mu'assasah-i Milli-i Matbu'at-i Amri, 128/1972. PDF Edition digitally republished, East Lansing, MI.: H-Bahai, 2007 vol. 4, p. 1830

<sup>44</sup> Anon, *Kitab-i Nuqtat al-Kaf: Being the Earliest History of the Babis*, ed. E. G. Browne. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1910 p. 208

<sup>45</sup> Iran National Baha'i Archives Private Printing: Tehran, 1976, Volume 29, p. 40. See also Sayyid `Ali Muhammad "the Bab" Shirazi. *Kitáb-i-Asmá'* ('The Book of Names' of All Things) Ms., private hands. Lansing, MI: H-Bahai, 2005.

Following on from my paper on "Messianic Concealment and Theophanic Disclosure", I would venture to suggest that what the Bab was predicting in the Seven Proofs and the Commentary on the Verse of Light was in fact the fruition of his ministry in its fifth year through his open proclamation of the station of qa'imiyat and mazhariyyat (the end of the period of messianic concealment). Thus, in the words of the Commentary, the Divine Light that was pre-existent in Muhammad and `Ali (which is a Shi`i Tradition to which the Bab also refers in this Commentary) will, in the year 5, become incarnated in a human being - the light becomes flesh!



## **Baha'u'llah as fulfilment of the theophanic promise in the Sermons of Imam 'Alí ibn Abí Tálíb**

### **Translation of al ʿTutunjiyya, Iftikhár and Ma'rifat bin-Nuráníyyat**

Dr. Khazeh Fananapazir  
Leicester, U.K., Independent Scholar

#### Translator's Introduction

The Founders of world religions, in Baha'i discourse, the Manifestations of God, relate their claims and their utterances to the language and beliefs of the peoples to whom they come.<sup>1</sup> Thus Jesus Christ stated at the outset of his mission: "Think not that I have come to destroy the Law and the Prophets. I have not come to destroy but to fulfil."<sup>2</sup> The Qur'án repeatedly states that it confirms the Gospel and the Torah, affirming that the Prophet's advent has been mentioned in the Torah and the Evangel. The Bábí and Bahá'í Revelations are also intimately related to their Islamic background and their Judaeo-Christian heritage. As the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, says,

"[The Bahá'ís] must strive to obtain from sources that are authoritative and unbiased a sound knowledge of the history and tenets of Islam, the source and background of their Faith, and approach reverently and with a mind purged from pre-conceived ideas the study of the Qur'án which, apart from the sacred scriptures of the Bábí and Bahá'í Revelations, constitutes the only Book which can be regarded as an absolutely authenticated repository of the Word of God."<sup>3</sup>

But what is most remarkable is the frequent reference to particular verses, particular traditions (ḥadiths), particular tropes of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For example, there are many references to the messianic passages of Isaiah. The passages of Matthew 24 and St John's reference to the Comforter and the Spirit of Truth are frequent in Baha'u'llah's writings<sup>4</sup>. From the Qur'án we have multiple references to the "Meeting with God" on the Day of Judgement, such as Surah 29:5

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<sup>1</sup> For a recent survey of Baha'u'llah's messianic claims see Buck, Christopher, 'The Eschatology of Globalization: The Multiple-Messiahship of Baha'u'llah Revisited' in *Studies in Modern Religions, Religious Movements and the Babi-Baha'i Faiths*, Moshe Sharon (ed), Leiden: Brill, 2004, 143-178 and references therein.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 5:17

<sup>3</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, page 49). See also Stephen Lambden, 'Islam, Muhammad and the Qur'án: Some Introductory Notes', *Baha'i Studies Review*, 1, no. 1 (1991); Moojan Momen, *Islam and the Baha'i Faith*, (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000)

<sup>4</sup> See for example Baha'u'llah, *Gems of Divine Mysteries-Javáhiru'l-Asrár*, (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 2002, 9-10); *ibid*, Tablet to Pope Pius IX in, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* (Haifa: Baha'i world Centre, 2002, 53); *ibid*, Lawḥ-i-Aqdas in *Tablets of Baha'u'llah revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing trust, 1988, 2)

“Anyone hoping to meet God, (should know that) such a meeting with God will most assuredly come to pass. He is the Hearer, the Omniscient.”<sup>5</sup>

In the traditions of the Twelver Branch of Islām or Imāmī Shi'ism in particular, three sermons of the Imām 'Alī stand out as pivotal in their contribution to the Bahá'í writings. These are known as the sermons of Ṭutunjiyyih [the Gulf], *Nurániyyat* [Recognition through Luminousness], and *Ifṭikhár* [Glorification]. They hold tremendous theological importance, and, down the centuries, have had a magnetic effect on Shi'ih religious thought. The author of the book that contains these three sermons, Ḥafiz Rajab al Bursi (died 1411 CE), held a very high view of the station of the Imams<sup>6</sup>, highly evocative of the position held by Shaykh Aḥmad and Siyyid Kazim<sup>7</sup>, the precursors of the Bábi Cause at a later century. At the time of the Safavi renaissance of Shi'ih Islam, Bursi was considered to have exaggerated views of the station of the Imams<sup>8</sup>. But the writings of Shaykh Ahmad-i-Aḥsa'i and Siyyid Kazim Rashti also accorded a very high station to the Imams. The Imams are referred to as "*Maẓaahir*," the "manifestations of God's names and attributes," by Shaykh Ahmad in his *Sharḥ az-Ziyarat*<sup>9</sup>. In this regard Husayn the Son of the Imam 'Alī is addressed to in the Tablet of Visitation revealed by Bahá'u'lláh for him<sup>10</sup> as the One through Whom the Command of the Letters "B" and "E" came to be realised. He is also referred to as the Mystery of Revelation in the World of God's Dominion [*jabarut*]. As far as one can ascertain both the Bábi<sup>11</sup> and Bahá'u'lláh affirm in their writings the validity of these traditions which have their provenance in Bursi.

In the Kitáb-i-Iqán Bahá'u'lláh, in expounding the twin cardinal principles of the Unity of the Prophets and infinity of the Revelatory Process adduces as evidence references which are to be found only in Bursi. Bahá'u'lláh's

<sup>5</sup> For other Qur'anic verses that describe meeting with God cf. 33:44, 6:31, 6:154, 10:45, 13:2, 18:110, 29:5, 30:8, 32:10

<sup>6</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1961, p. 114). "Indeed, the essential prerequisites of admittance into the Bahá'í fold ..., is the wholehearted and unqualified acceptance by them ..., of the legitimacy of the institution of the Imamate, ..." See also Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1988 p. 101)

<sup>7</sup> Baha'u'llah, *The Kitáb-i-Iqán* (trans. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1983, p. 65) "Likewise, there appeared on earth Ahmad and Kazim, those twin resplendent lights -- may God sanctify their resting-place!"

<sup>8</sup> Todd Lawson, "The Dawning Places of the Lights of Certainty in the Divine Secrets Connected with the Commander of the Faithful by Rajab Bursi" in *The Legacy of Mediaeval Persian Sufism* (Leonard Lewisohn (ed), London: Khaniqahai Nimatullahi Publications, 1992, 261-276)

<sup>9</sup> Shaykh Ahmad al-Aḥsa'i, *Sharḥ al-ziyara al-jami'a*, Tehran, n.p., 1276/[1859], volume 1, page 167, in the section commenting on "mah.aalli ma'rifatih".

<sup>10</sup> See Khazeh Fananapazir, '*Lawḥ-i-Ziyarat-Namih-i-Imám Husayn*' (Tablet of Visitation for Imam Husayn), Last accessed April 8 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Todd Lawson '*Coincidentia Oppositorum in the Qayyumu'l-Asam: The terms "Point" (nuqta), "Pole" (qutb), "Center" (markaz) and the Khutbat al-tatanjiya*', *Occasional Paper's in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies*, 5 no. 1, January 2001 Last accessed April 8 2007; Stephen Lambden (in progress), '*The Khutbat al-Tutunjiyya [al-Tatanjiyya] خطبة الطنجية [التنجية]*' ("Sermon of the Gulf") ascribed to Imam 'Alī ibn Abī'. Last accessed April 8 2007.

Writings thus affirm the importance and legitimacy of these utterances of the Imam 'Ali.

Two important quotations from Bursi which Bahá'u'lláh cites in the *Kitab-i-Iqán* and which again emphasise the point of the reliability of Bursi as a narrator are the following (see italics):

Furthermore, among the "veils of glory" are such terms as the "Seal of the Prophets" and the like, the removal of which is a supreme achievement in the sight of these base-born and erring souls. All, by reason of these mysterious sayings, these grievous "veils of glory," have been hindered from beholding the light of truth. Have they not heard the melody of that bird of Heaven<sup>12</sup>, uttering this mystery: "*A thousand Fatimihs I have espoused, all of whom were the daughters of Muhammad, Son of Abdu'llah, the 'Seal of the Prophets?'*"<sup>13</sup> Behold, how many are the mysteries that lie as yet unravelled within the tabernacle of the knowledge of God, and how numerous the gems of His wisdom that are still concealed in His inviolable treasures! Shouldst thou ponder this in thine heart, thou wouldst realize that His handiwork knoweth neither beginning nor end. The domain of His decree is too vast for the tongue of mortals to describe, or for the bird of the human mind to traverse; and the dispensations of His providence are too mysterious for the mind of man to comprehend. His creation no end hath overtaken, and it hath ever existed from the "Beginning that hath no beginning"; and the Manifestations of His Beauty no beginning hath beheld, and they will continue to the "End that knoweth no end." Ponder this utterance in thine heart, and reflect how it is applicable unto all these holy Souls.

Likewise, strive thou to comprehend the meaning of the melody of that eternal beauty, Husayn, son of Ali, who, addressing Salman, spoke words such as these: "I was with a thousand Adams, the interval between each and the next Adam was fifty thousand years, and to each one of these I declared the Successorship conferred upon my father." He then recounteth certain details, until he saith: "I have fought one thousand battles in the path of God, the least and most insignificant of which was like the battle of Khaybar, in which battle my father fought and contended against the infidels."<sup>14</sup> Endeavour now to apprehend from these two traditions the mysteries of "end," "return," and "creation without beginning or end."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Imam 'Ali

<sup>13</sup> This quotation is from Bursi's al-Alfayn cited in Ishraq Khavari, *Qamus-i-Iqán*, Vol. 1, p.17

<sup>14</sup> Both the above quotations indicating utterances of "high Imamology" are from the self-same Bursi in his book *Alfayn* as quoted by the late Ishraq Khavari (Idem).

<sup>15</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Iqán*, 166-168.

What these traditions have in common is their use of the language of the World of Command ['Alam-i-Amr], to attribute the workings of the Will of God [His Primal Will] to the World of Creation. Bahá'u'lláh,<sup>16</sup> on the strength of these traditions, states that this World of Command is sanctified above plurality:

Similar statements have been made by 'Alí. Sayings such as this, which indicate the essential unity of those Exponents of Oneness, have also emanated from the Channels of God's immortal utterance, 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. Thus He saith: "Our Cause is but one."<sup>17</sup> Inasmuch as the Cause is one and the same, the Exponents thereof also must needs be one and the same. Likewise, the Imáms of the Muhammadan Faith, those lamps of certitude, have said: "Muhammad is our first, Muhammad our last, Muhammad our all. (أولنا محمد وأوسطنا محمد وآخرنا محمد)"<sup>18</sup>

#### The Particularity of the Sermon of the Gulf<sup>19</sup>

One reference stands unique in that Bahá'u'lláh Himself calls it the *Qutb*, or "Pivot," around which "all the glad tidings of the past revolve."<sup>20</sup> That is in a passage from a sermon that was delivered by the Imam 'Alí<sup>21</sup> called the "Sermon of the Twin Gulfs," the "*Khutbah*" of "*Tutunjiyyah*."

The title Tutunjiyyih itself is a reference to the passage wherein the Imam says: "I am the One that standeth upon the Two Tutunjs [Gulfs]." Es expounded below, Siyyid Kazim explains that these two gulfs represent the Gulf of Prophethood and the Gulf of Wilayat, or Imamate. This narration was referred to by Henri Corbin in the following terms as the "*prone sur ou entre deux golfes*":

"L'Imám veut dire qu'il est le Pôle (qutb) qui domine les deux golfes et détermine la courbe de leur cercle respectif. Il est celui par qui se manifeste la Miséricorde et par qui se manifeste son antithèse. "C'est en lui que se produit la différenciation des choses; c'est de lui que

<sup>16</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Íqán*, 153

<sup>17</sup> Qur'an 54:50

<sup>18</sup> This is from the [Bih. ar. ul Anwaar](#) [Oceans of Lights])

<sup>19</sup> *Khutbah-i-Tutunjiyyih* or *Khutbatu't-Tutunjiyyah* طنبجيه خطبه

<sup>20</sup> This is in the 35th volume of the [INBA](#) series of Baha'u'llah's Writings. It is available on the internet here: Baha'u'llah refers to this Utterance of the KhT being the qutb around which all language of prophecy revolves

<sup>21</sup> ca.600-661. See IK Poonwala, "‘Alí b. Abí Táleb' , in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (E. Yarshater(ed), London: Biblioteca Persica, 1:838-843)

procèdent l'origine de la béatitude et l'origine de la damnation; c'est par lui que prend réalité la difference de l'une et de l'autre".<sup>22</sup>

"The Imám means to say that he is the Pole (qutb) who rules the two gulfs and determines the curve of their respective circles. It is he through whom Mercy is manifested, and through whom is manifested its antithesis. "It is in him that is produced the differentiation of things; from him it is that the origin of beatitude and the origin of damnation both proceed. It is through him that the difference between them becomes real."

Additionally Baha'u'llah, in a Tablet starting with the words "the essence of praise..."<sup>23</sup> exalts the Sermon under our consideration as the "blessed sermon of Tutunjiyyah" and refers to it as having shone forth from the "dayspring of absolute sanctity and guardianship". He says that it has not been commented on in the wondrous Persian tongue and that the purpose of the Imam 'Ali in this sermon has been the announcement of the Promise "Anticipate ye the Advent of Him Who was the speaker with Moses on Mount Sinai." Bahá'u'lláh then goes on to say that this promise is the Pivot [qutb] around which all wisdom and utterance revolve.<sup>24</sup>

With this precise promise, Bahá'u'lláh affirms, all the peoples have been vouchsafed the glad tidings of the Manifestation of God. Bahá'u'lláh then goes on to say that in this day the Speaker of the Mount is manifest and that the Speaker gives call to this utterance "Verily I am God."<sup>25</sup>

The Sermon of the Twin Gulfs is important for Bahá'í studies on several grounds. It shows how in the pre-Bábí/Bahá'í Era various hermeneutic approaches were needed to overcome the various objections that were raised to its high theophanic claims, and that these interpretative efforts have continued to be needed. Also, as Bahá'u'lláh asserts in the Tablet of Jawhar-i-ḥamd ("The Essence of Praise") and the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, the Tutunjiyyah is a source text for the claims of Bahá'u'lláh to be the Speaker on Sinai<sup>26</sup>.

The Commander of the Faithful (Imam Ali) - peace be upon him - moreover, saith in the Khutbiy-i-Tutunjiyyih: "Anticipate ye the

<sup>22</sup> *Annuaire de la Section des Sciences Religieuses de l'École des Hautes Études*, Paris, 1969-70, p.239. Material in quotation marks is from Corbin's translation of Rashtí. Cf. Lawson, *The Qur'an Commentary of Sayyid `Alí Muhammad, the Bab*, Part II, ch.3

<sup>23</sup> Baha'u'llah, 'Lawḥ-i Jawhar-i Ḥamd' (Tablet of the Essence of Praise) in *Majmu'ih-i Athar-i Qalam-i A'la* ('*Collected Letters of Baha'u'llah*'), (Tehran: Iran National Baha'i Archives (INBA), 35, 165). Reprinted, H-Bahai: East Lansing, Mi., 1999. . Accessed 4th April 2007]. See Lambden, Sermon, op. cit., for extended discussion of the Lawḥ-i Jawhar-i Ḥamd.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Stephen Lambden, 'The Sinaitic Mysteries: Notes on Moses/Sinai motifs in Babi and Baha'i Scripture' in *Studies in Honor of the Late Hasan M. Balyuzi* (ed. Moojan Momen, Los Angeles: Kalimat, 1988, 65-183, Series: Studies in Babi and Baha'i History, 5)

<sup>25</sup> Baha'u'llah, *Jawhar-i Ḥamd*, last two lines. Site accessed in [INBA](#) volume 35

<sup>26</sup> See Baha'u'llah, *Tablets revealed*, 107 (*Ishráqát*), 36 (*Tárázát*), 50, 52 (*Tajalliyát*)

Revelation of Him Who conversed with Moses from the Burning Bush on Sinai. Husayn, the son of Ali -- peace be upon him -- likewise saith: "Will there be vouchsafed unto anyone besides Thee a Revelation which hath not been vouchsafed unto Thyself -- A Revelation Whose Revealer will be He Who revealed Thee. Blind be the eye that seeth Thee not!"

Similar sayings from the Imams -- the blessings of God be upon them -- have been recorded and are widely known, and are embodied in books worthy of credence.<sup>27</sup> Blessed is he that perceiveth, and speaketh the pure truth. Well is it with him who, aided by the living waters of the utterance of Him Who is the Desire of all men, hath purified himself from idle fancies and vain imaginings, and torn away, in the name of the All-Possessing, the Most High, the veils of doubt, and renounced the world and all that is therein, and directed himself towards the Most Great Prison.<sup>28</sup>

### **Siyyid Kazim and the four approaches of the divines before and during the time of the Babi/Bahá'í Revelations**

Siyyid Kazim Rashti showed great respect for this Sermon and wrote a very large commentary on it, which is one of his longest works<sup>29</sup>. He says that the Tutunjiyyih is the pre-eminent instance of the Wisdom that "Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it."<sup>30</sup> He divides the *ulama* into four different groups in relation to this sermon and, interestingly, this subdivision was germane to all religious classes in the fervour of millennial expectation.<sup>31</sup>

- The first group rejects the likes of these traditions and has dropped them from the viewpoint of credibility, saying that these traditions are based on a single line of narration (*akhbaar aḥaad*) and thus cannot be the basis of law or action. These traditions, they say, all are in the book of Bursi and since the latter was charged with extreme views in his day this should militate against their acceptance. Another reason they would be unacceptable in that they attempt to elevate the contingent above the level of contingency. They appear also to assert divine Lordship of a created being necessitating also that the Godhead devolves divine

<sup>27</sup> Here we have perhaps Bahá'u'lláh's most explicit assertion of the reliability of Bursi's compilation.

<sup>28</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1988, 42)

<sup>29</sup> Rashti, Sayyid Kazim, *Sharh khutbat al-tatanjiya*, (Tabriz: n.p., Lithograph, 1270 [1853-4]).

<sup>30</sup> Baha'u'llah cites this tradition in his 'Tafsir-i-Surah-i-Va'sh-Shams' (Commentary on the Surah of the Sun) in *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah* (Shoghi Effendi trans. Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1983, LXXXIX, 176).

<sup>31</sup> Rashti, *ibid.* p.2

powers to the created being all of which would contravene the Qur'anic text which says: "is there any Creator other than God? Show me then what they have created. He is the One Who has created you Who will put you to death and will resurrect you. Does He have any partners?"<sup>32</sup>

- The second position that Siyyid Kazim in his celebrated *Sharh* mentions existed with regard to the hermeneutics of this Sermon. This position suggested one should remain non-judgmental about it on the grounds that these types of utterance exist but that human minds cannot comprehend them.
- The third position in regard to these sermons is the position held by the monists and the admirers of Ibn Arabi in Shi'ih Islam such as Mullá Muhsin Fayd. Fayd-e-Kashani says: "When the effulgences of the Essence of God (*dhat*) overpower any one such that person's entity, actions, attributes are all obliterated in the rays of oneness with the Divine Essence in this state he will see himself one with all Essences. In this state the light of the distinguishing mind becomes subsumed under the Light of Pre-existent Essence and all contingency is lifted up". Then Fayd-e-Kashani says: "This explains the utterance of 'Ali in the Sermon of the Tutunjiyyah: 'I am the First Adam and the First Noah'."
- The fourth group -- and Siyyid Kazim Rashti considers himself of this group -- are those who accept this essential belief: namely they recognise the one being as having many "stations" and these "stations" are the "treasuries" of that entity's existence. "God says: "There is nothing of which We do not have that thing's treasures [*khazaa'in*]."<sup>33</sup> "Our First is Muhammad, Our Last is Muhammad, our all is Muhammad." Siyyid Kazim states that his hermeneutic principle is the verse of the Qur'an: "Creation has many modes [*atwár*] of existence."<sup>34</sup> These include a mode of brevity and expansion; a mode of simplicity and the mode of complexity; and modes of imagination and abstraction. As to the first group, i.e. those who attributed the sermon to the heresy of extremism, Siyyid Kazim says their views are hasty and erroneous inasmuch as there are many similar utterances that are universally accepted by the Shi'ites. Examples are the prayer of the month of Rajab included in all Shi'ite anthologies; acceptance of the innumerable references to the Imams as "Hand of God, the Eye of God, Whose utterances are of God"; and the traditions of

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<sup>32</sup> Qur'an 35:3

<sup>33</sup> Qur'an 15:21

<sup>34</sup> Idem 71:14.



the two Jabirs<sup>35</sup>. The same argument applies to the second group who are hesitating in regard to their acceptance. As to the monistic Sufistic explanations, here too Siyyid Kazim and indeed before him Shaykh Ahmad dispute pantheistic conclusions because rationally their arguments would entail alteration and transformation in the essence or Dhat of God and this position is untenable.

The Báb quoted the famous verse of the *Tutunjiyyah* regarding the anticipation of the Speaker of Sinai in his Seven Proofs<sup>36</sup>

In the writings of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl the Sermon of the two Gulfs is referred to frequently but this matter has not been discussed previously. Thus in his *Fara'id*<sup>37</sup> he writes that the sanctified reality of Most Great Spirit is single and one and it does not ontologically become plural or multiple because the "Mirrors" are multiple nor should it epistemologically be allowed to become so.

### An overview of the Sermon of the Gulf

In this *Khutbah*, the Imam asserts belief in the divine unity and that there is no deity but the One God and the Prophethood of Muhammad, but adds the necessity of loyalty to the Imamate as the repository of salvation. In this context, the Imam 'Ali makes a series of statements all commencing with the pronoun "I": "I am the First. I am the Last. I was with Noah. I am the Builder. I am the destroyer. I am that Agent whereby Jesus spoke in His Cradle. I am the Word through Which all things were consummated." Bahá'u'lláh has explained that these utterances refer to the World of Command or Revelation (*'Aalam-i Amr*).<sup>38</sup> In one of his tablets, Bahá'u'lláh says that the utterances of the Sermon were taught to Imam 'Ali by the Messenger of God (Muhammad) [*tilka kalimatun 'allamahu Rasul'ullah*], so that although Ali utters these statements in fact it is the Prophet who utters them<sup>39</sup>.

In this tablet, Baha'u'llah says:

“Verily My Name ‘Ali gave you the glad tidings and announced to you the Advent of this Day: He said, and His Word is the Truth: Anticipate ye the Advent of the Speaker of Sinai. I swear by God:

<sup>35</sup> Jabir ibn Yazid al-Ju'fi, and Jabir al-Ansari. On the former, a well known Shi'ite historian, see <http://www.al-shia.com/html/eng/books/history/origins-development-shia-islam/29.htm>. On the second Jabir see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jabir\\_ibn\\_Abd-Allah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jabir_ibn_Abd-Allah)

<sup>36</sup> Sayid Ali Muhumad-i-Shirazi, *Dala'il Sabih*, n.d.n.p., XI:13, on-line at <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/areprint/bab/A-F/dalail/sabih046.jpg> LINES 9-12]

<sup>37</sup> Gulpaygani, Muhammad, “Mirza Abu'l-Fada'il “. *Kitab al-Fara'id* (Cairo: n.p., 1315 [1897-8],308)

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Baha'u'llah: *The Kitab-i-Iqan*, p. 153; letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, February 28, 1938 cited in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 270

<sup>39</sup> Baha'u'llah, *Athar-i Qalam-i Álá (Traces of the Supreme Pen)*, (Bombay, 1314 [1896]),p.32



This is He. And this Announcement was taught to 'Ali by the Messenger of God."<sup>40</sup>

The key verse of prophecy that the Manifestation to be anticipated is the Speaker on Sinai, is understood from the Bahá'í writings to be a clear reference to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh as at once the "essence, the promise, the unifier, and the reconciler"<sup>41</sup> of all previous revelations, inasmuch as all the previous Faiths are understood to have spoken of the coming of the "Lord of the Vineyard"<sup>42</sup>, the meeting with God, and the like. In unnumbered passages Bahá'u'lláh claimed his utterance to be the "Voice of Divinity, the Call of God Himself"<sup>43</sup> and his era the "Day that hath seen the coming of the Best-beloved Him Who through all eternity hath been acclaimed the Desire of the World."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid. on-line at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/Q2/q2-37.html#pg32>

<sup>41</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day*, 112.

<sup>42</sup> See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974, 194).

<sup>43</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Íqán*, 180-181.

<sup>44</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, cited in Shoghi Effendi, 'Dispensation of Baha'u'llah' in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974, 106). See for an extended treatment of this theme Khazeh Fananapazir, 'The Day of God (Yawmu'llah) and the Days of God (Ayyamu'llah)' in *Scripture and Revelation* (Moojan Momen (ed.), Oxford: George Ronald, 1997, 217-238).

## Bursi's Three Theophanic "Sermons": A Translation

### Translation of the Sermon of the Gulf<sup>45</sup>

The sermon (*Khutbah*) [delivered by Imam 'Ali] which is designated That of the Gulf (*al-Ṭutunjiyyah*) has an exterior level (*zahir*) which is elegant (*aniq*) and an interior level (*batin*) which is deep (*'amiq*). Let him who reads it beware lest he think ill of it for therein something of the sanctity of the Creator (*tanzih al-Khaliq*) is reflected which no one of the creatures can bear. The Commander of the Faithful [Imam 'Ali] delivered it between Kufah and Medina. He said:

Praise be to God Who hath rent asunder the firmaments<sup>46</sup> (*al-ajwaa*) and opened the atmosphere (*al-hawa*) and suspended the vast expanses of the universe<sup>47</sup> and caused the Splendour (*diyaa*) to shine, and quickened the dead and caused the living to die. I give Him praise such praise as shone and became uplifted, a praise that was radiant and effulgently luminous, a praise that ascendeth to heaven in its sending there and which goeth to the high sphere (*jaww*) unto its equinoctial summit (*i'tidaaluhu*). He created the heavens without pillars (*bila da'aaim*) and set them upright without supports<sup>48</sup>. He then adorned the heavens with light-giving planets and caused to be imprisoned in the spheres many a dark cloud. He created the oceans and the mountains upon the collision of concomitant ever-flowing currents: He opened their gates and their mighty waves were huge! I give praise unto Him and to Him all praise is due. I testify that there is no God but Him and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger and that God chose him from the Supreme Company and sent Him unto the Arab peoples and He was appointed - He that was truly guided Himself - to guide others - He was indeed Talismanic and of the essence (*hulaahilan Telasmiyyan*). Muhammad raised up the evidences and sealed the Messages and Moslems obtained sight from Him. God manifested His Religion through Him, may the salutation of God be upon Him and His Pure Family.

People! turn ye repentantly unto My faction (*shi'ah*) and adhere to a pledge of fealty to Me. Remain steadfast and persevering in the Faith with the best certainty. Adhere steadfastly to the Successor of your Prophet in Whom resides your salvation and in Whose love on the Day of Resurrection is your safe haven! In Me resides the Hope and I am the One to be hoped for. I am the One that standeth upon the Two Gulfs! (*tutunj*) I am the One that looketh

<sup>45</sup> Translation of the Sermon of the Gulf (Al-Khutbah al-Ṭutunjiyyah) of Imam 'Ali as printed in Hafiz Rajab al-Bursi's *Mashariq Anwar al-Yaqin fi Asrar Amir Mu'minin* (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus 1978, 160-170). See also Rajab ibn Muhammad Bursi, *Les orientes des lumieres* (traduit de l'arabe par Henry Corbin, édition établie et introduite par Pierre Lory, Lagrasse: Verdier, 1996).

<sup>46</sup> Qur'an 21:30

<sup>47</sup> Idem 69:12

<sup>48</sup> Idem 13:2, 31:10

unto the Twin Rising-Places [or "Oriens"]<sup>49</sup> and the Twin Setting Places [or "Occidents"]<sup>50</sup>. I truly did see with My own eyes [the Bounty of] God and the Paradise! And this was as the seventh Heaven was moving in its orbit and there in the great surging seas were the stars and their own orbits. I saw also the earth rolled up as a short garment would be rolled up and it was within a shell on the right sided Gulf which faces the East and the Twin Gulfs.

Further out there are the Twin Bays (*khalij*) of water as if they are to the left of the Twin Gulfs and I saw that the Circle that embraces these and the Paradise and all that there is therein were naught but a ring on the finger of Thy Lord. And in truth I saw the Sun when it was setting and it was like unto a bird that seeketh its nest. And if it were not for the friction of the head of Paradise and the mixing up of the Twin Gulfs and the Music of the spheres all that are in heavens and the earth would hear the ebullition of heat caused by the Sun's descent into the Black water - and that is the Warm Fountain<sup>51</sup>. I know of the wonders of God's Work what no one knows but God and I know what has been and what will be and what has been in the First Sprinkling with those who preceded the First Adam<sup>52</sup>. All was disclosed (*kushifa*) for Me<sup>53</sup> and I knew and all was taught Me and I have learnt.

So hearken and do not raise a clamour. Were it not for My fear that you might say: "Ali has become possessed or apostatised from His Faith" I shall disclose unto you what and whereat they are and what you shall encounter on the day of Resurrection. All that knowledge was entrusted unto Me and thus I knew and the knowledge of all this was hidden from all the Prophets except the Lord of this Dispensation (*Shari'ah*)<sup>54</sup> of yours (Peace be upon Him and His Family). He taught Me His knowledge and I taught Him My knowledge.

Verily We are the Warners from immemorial times and We shall be unto everlasting Warners from God<sup>55</sup>. Through Us will perish He that is going to perish and by Us have obtained salvation all that have obtained salvation and you shall not encompass that ability that is Ours. By the righteousness of Him Whose power causeth the seed to germinate<sup>56</sup> and Who breatheth the spirit of life into all things, by Him Who alone hath power and grandeur! To Me have the winds and the air and the birds of air been conquered; the world and all that is therein was presented to me but I turned away from it. I

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<sup>49</sup> Idem 55:17

<sup>50</sup> Qur'an 18:107, 23:11

<sup>51</sup> Idem 18:86[84]

<sup>52</sup> Idem 7:172

<sup>53</sup> There is a variant reading in the Sayyid Kazim version, "All was rendered possible (*kuyyifa*) for Me."

<sup>54</sup> Muhummad.

<sup>55</sup> Qur'an 53:56.

<sup>56</sup> Idem 6:95.

turned upside down the world and it was tilted away from Me. How can subsequent events overcome Me?

I know all that is above the supreme Paradise and that which is below the seventh Ocean, that which is in the highest heavens and that which is between them and that which is below them. All this knowledge is derived from an all-embracing knowledge and not from chronicled knowledge. I swear by the Lord of the Great throne! If I wished I could inform you of your forefathers and all your predecessors as to where they were, and from whom they were and where they are now and how they came to be where they are! How many of you are eating the property of his brother and is drinking of the fountainhead of his father and yet he longeth for him and wishes that they were with him!

O would that you knew! O would that ye knew! When that which is hidden be manifest and that which is in the breasts were attained and conscience were to disclose its hidden things, I swear by God you will have returned to clay, and you will have had your "returns," and how many signs there are between these "returns" how many those that have died or that have been slain. (I know those that are in the claw of birds and those that are in the belly of beasts and all mankind are between those that have already gone and those that are being urged on). And if it were to be revealed to you all that is with Me from time immemorial unto the end that has no end you shall truly see many and wondrous events, many strange handiworks and all that I comprehend.

I am the Master (sahib) of the First Creation before the First Noah, and if you were to know what was between Adam and Noah of wondrous events that I wrought and of nations that I caused to perish. And the true Word of Thy Lord was fulfilled in them and evil is that which they worked" I am the Master of the First Flood!<sup>57</sup> I am the Master of the Second Flood!<sup>58</sup> I am the Master of the Deluge of Iram!<sup>59</sup> I am the Master of the Secret Mysteries! I am the Lord of 'Ad and its gardens!<sup>60</sup> I am the Lord of Thamud and its wondrous signs! I am the One that destroyed it, I am the One that caused the Earthquakes! I am the One that caused their Return and their Perdition! I am the Builder of those civilisations and their Destroyer! I cause their Expiry and I cause them to be quickened! I am the First and the Last! I am the External and Manifest<sup>61</sup> and I am the Internal and Hidden! I am with the Cycle (kawr) before the Cycle began! I am the Companion of the Dispensation (dawr) before the Dispensation started! I was with the Pen before the Pen and I am with the Tablet prior to the Tablet being revealed! I am the Lord of the First Pre-existence! I am the Lord of Jabulqa and of Jabulsa! I am the Master of Highest Stage (rafrāf) and of Bahram! I am the

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<sup>57</sup> Qur'an 7:133

<sup>58</sup> Idem 29:14

<sup>59</sup> Idem 34:16

<sup>60</sup> Idem 44:25

<sup>61</sup> Idem 57:3

One Who organised existence when there was no heaven as you have them now nor earth as you know it now!

The Son of Suwairama said: "Are you, are you indeed that One?!" 'Ali replied: "I am, I am that One! There is no other God But God Who is My Lord and the Lord of all created things. Unto Him belongs the Creation and the World of Revelation (*amr*). He it is Who has ordained all matters in His Wisdom and heavens and earth are upraised in His Power. Methinks the weak ones amongst you are saying; "Is this not the son of Abu-Talib Whom the forces of Syria had overshadowed yesterday and He would not go out to fight them and sent them Muhammad and Ibrahim?" But truly and assuredly I shall fight Syria many times and I shall slay them many times. I shall fight their armies at Siffin and I shall bring a new life unto the believer until that thirst for justice in my chest be allayed. I shall fight for 'Ammar Yassir and for Uways of Qaran many times. Let none say when? How? and in what manner? and with whose assistance? How shall it be when you shall see the Master of Syria saweth men with saws and cutteth them with trowels? But I shall make him taste a painful retribution.

But rejoice now for the cause of all creation reverts unto Me on the morrow. Let not this claim appear extravagant inasmuch as We have been vouchsafed the knowledge of all fates and of all tribulations. and the knowledge of interpretation and of the Revelation and the decisive Discourse (*Faslu'l-Khitab*) and knowledge of all future calamities and catastrophes. There is nothing whose knowledge escapes Us. This is truth and I shall see this One [pointing to Husayn, Peace be upon Him] when His Light shall flow forth of His eyes and I shall be present with Him a lengthy time that shall witness earthquakes and eclipses. They that are believers will revolt in His company from every corner. I swear by God! If I wished I would tell you of their names every one of them and their descent from both parents, until the Day of whose time is promised.

Then 'Ali said: "O Jabir! You are with the Truth now and you shall be with the True One hereafter and in that true Cause you shall die. O Jabir! When the Bell shall cry loud, when the stupor of the Nightmare shall enshroud men, when the Cow shall speak, on that day there shall happen wondrous, exceedingly wondrous Events, when the Fire shall be ignited in My sight, when the Banner of the House of 'Uthman shall appear in the Black Valley, when Basra shall be thrown into confusion and they shall seek to conquer each other and each party shall seek the other, when the armies of Khurasan shall begin to move, and when Shu'ayb the son of Salih of Tamim shall be followed in Taliqan, and Sa'id of Shusha shall be obeyed in Khuzistan, and the banner shall be raised up by the Amalekites of the Kurds, and the Arabs shall seek victory over Armenia and the Slavs, and Heraclitus shall submit to the patriarchs of Sinan in Constantinople, anticipate ye then the

Revelation of the Speaker of Mount Sinai<sup>62</sup>. This will appear with manifest signs visible unto all, clearly perspicuous to them.

O but how many a wondrous sign I seek not to mention and how many indications I have left undivulged! for I cannot find one who can bear them. I am the One Who ordered Satan to bow down Adam!<sup>63</sup> I am the One Who raised Idris<sup>64</sup> to a high station. I am the Agent whereby Jesus was enabled to speak in His cradle while yet a Babe! I am the One who flattens the valleys and Who sets the Earth to order and I am the One Who has divided it into five parts, namely, land, sea, mountains, built, and unbuilt. I am the One Who separated the Red Sea from Tarjim, and separated Aqim from Him. I separated all from all! I am Tirathia, Janbutha, Barhilion, Aliuthoutha<sup>65</sup>. I bring out of the Ocean that which is stored in it that it shall be cleared away by the horses and men. take from it what you desire and leave what you wish to leave.

He then gave 'Ammar-ibn-Yassir 12000 men who loved God and His Apostle and each had 12000 battalions of angels to support them saying: Rejoice for you are the best of brethren to each other for after this there shall be a star (tarfatan) through which ye shall know some of the expounded matter. The Mysteries of Evidence shall become clear to you when Bahram and Keyvan (stars) shall rise together and become conjoined with exactness. When shakings and earthquakes shall succeed each other swiftly and banners shall be lifted up from the shores of Oxus to the Desert of Babylon know ye then that I am the One Who causeth the winds the blow, I am the One Who lifts your oppressions!

I am the Master of the Mount Sinai! I am that Manifest Light! I am that Perspicuous and dazzling Evidence (that light of which an infinitesimal part was disclosed unto Moses) and all that was vouchsafed unto Me by God the Lord Of Glory.

I am the Master of the Gardens of eternal delight! I am the One that causeth the Rivers to flow from the Water that emanates from the divine current, and other Rivers which are of milk, and Rivers of pure Honey, and Rivers that flow with wine, a delight unto those who partake. I am the One that hath overshadowed hell when it was made to blaze and have overlooked its several compartments: firstly the Hell of Sa'ir when it blazeth forth then the Hell of Saqar and its fire and lastly the nethermost Hell which has been preserved for the transgressor all of these have been preserved in the Valley of Desolation. Again I swear by the Lord Who bringeth Dawn, He Who is the Lord of all creation! Within it is kept eternally both Jibt and Taghut and

<sup>62</sup> Note this key utterance: "...anticipate ye then the Revelation of the Speaker of Mount Sinai." This indicates a future revelation or theophany which Baha'u'llah repeatedly identified as manifesting in himself. See fn.24

<sup>63</sup> Or, "I was present when Satan was ordered to bow down to Adam."

<sup>64</sup> See Baha'u'llah, *Tablets revealed*, 148 (Lawh-i-Hikmat)

<sup>65</sup> This sounds very close to Alitheia, "Truth," in Greek. Other terms seem also to be Greek sounding.

their servants and whomsoever disbelieveth in the Lord of this world and the Kingdom on high.

I am the Maker and Sustainer (*sani'*) of all the Regions of this world by the Command of the One Who is the All-Knowing the All-Wise. I am the Word through Which all things are consummated and through which the Universes are brought into being. I am the One Who has made the regions of the earth to be four and the islands to be seven: the Region of the South to be the Depository of all Bounty, the Region of the North to be Powers and Sovereignty, the Region of Sheba to be the Seat of earthquakes, and the Desert Region to be the Seat of many a catastrophe. So Woe unto the cities from those transgressors who will come to destroy and pervert justice. Woe shall be when calamities come to transpire from that Government of eunuchs, imbeciles, and effeminate rulers. On that Day all Regions will bring forth false claimants claiming falsehoods. Oh! On that Day expect eagerly your Supreme salvation and you shall see men accepting it by troops<sup>66</sup>. On that Day God will make of the gravel of Najaf treasures of gold and all of that will be sprinkled where the believer shall step his foot on it and with that same dust of gold the unbeliever and the hypocrite shall be exchanged and bartered. Then shall the value of red ruby be as nothing and similarly other jewels and pearls. This shall be a most evident sign and when it shall transpire the Light of God shall shine and His Glory (*sat' baha'ih*) shall be effulgent and all that you wish for shall be made manifest and all that is your highest desire shall become apparent.

O You who in your desires resemble cattle and the beasts of the field! How shall it be with you when the banners of the sons of Kenan shall come upon you and also that of 'Uthman the son of 'Anbatha in the battle fields of Syria? Know truly that shall never be discerned by one related to Umayya or to 'Ady."

Then He wept loudly (the salutations of God be upon Him!) and later exclaimed; "O alas for the nations! Soon shall some hypocrites say that 'Ali claimed Lordship (*rububiyyat*) for Himself but you should bear witness thus: "'Ali truly is a created Being, a Servant, nourished of divine sustenance and he that denies this let him be accursed of God."

Imam `Ali then descended and said; "I take refuge unto him Who hath the Kingdoms of earth and Heaven! I seek succour from Him Who possesses all Power and Grandeur, all Sovereignty and Authority from all that I fear and pray to avoid!" O people! None shall utter these words but when tribulations and calamities befall him the same will God dissipate through this prayer." Jabir said: "Only those Words?" and the Imam 'Ali added thereunto another thirteen words<sup>67</sup> and left.

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<sup>66</sup> Qur'an 110.

<sup>67</sup> Probably a reference to the Fourteen Pure Ones, Fatimih, Muhammad and the Twelve Imams.

### Translation of the "Sermon of Iftikhár"<sup>68</sup>

The Imám 'Alí said:

I am the brother of the Messenger of God and the Heir to His knowledge, the treasury of His wisdom, and the Companion of His secret. There is not a letter revealed by God in any of His Books whose intention does not point towards me. He hath vouchsafed unto me the knowledge of what was from eternity and what will happen unto the Day of Resurrection. To me hath been vouchsafed the knowledge of past and future generations and their genealogies. And to Me hath been given a thousand keys to a thousand doors. The knowledge of the destinies of all things hath been granted unto me. All these Gifts shall continue to flow through my Appointed Successors (wasi's) as long as day is followed by night and night followed by day and until all things return to God. For verily, He is the True Inheritor of all things.

Unto me, too, hath been vouchsafed the Path, the Balance, the Banner, and the Kawthar. I am the one who shall face the children of Adam on the Day of Judgement and shall bring them to account and shall direct them to their habitations. And verily, I am the punishment of fire meted unto the damned. These are the bounties of God unto me. And should anyone deny that I shall return after the Return<sup>69</sup>, or deny that I shall come back after the Raj'at<sup>70</sup>, or should anyone reject the truth that I shall appear again, even as I have done from the beginning that hath no beginning or even unto the end that hath no end, he, verily, hath denied the truth of all of Us. And verily I say unto you, he who denies any one of Us, hath denied God. I am the one who hath summoned you; I am the companion of your prayers and invocations. I am the Lord of retribution, and I am the Master of the signs and the Lord of the wondrous symbols of guidance. I am cognisant of the mysteries of creation; I am the One who brought the iron unto Men<sup>71</sup>. I am forever new and forever pre-existent, the One who brought the Angels from out of their habitations, the One who pledged an everlasting covenant with your spirits on the dawn of creation and Who, on that day, asked, through the will of God, the Self-subsisting, these words: "Am I not your Lord?" I am the Word of God [Kalimat'u'lláh] which hath been uttered in the world of creation, the Object of the covenant that hath been promised in the prayers and salutations which lie in the reality of all created things. I am the name that hath been invoked by orphans and by widows, the door to the city of knowledge and the refuge of patience and forbearance. I am the upraised flag of God, the companion of the banner of divine praise, the Lord of infinite bounty and of infinite grace. But should I tell you all that I am, you

<sup>68</sup> Original text in Bursi *Masháriq*, 164-166 The author is grateful to Mehdi Wolf for his contribution to the footnotes of this and the following translation.

<sup>69</sup> This is a reference to the name 'Alí-Muhammad (i.e. the name of the Báb

<sup>70</sup> This is a reference to Husayn-'Alí, the name of Bahá'u'lláh, particularly as Raj'at refers to the Return of Husayn. See Baha'u'llah, *Suriy-i-Mulúk* (Surih of the Kings), *Summons*, 204-207)

<sup>71</sup> Súrah of Iron in the Holy Qur'án.



would doubtless disbelieve Me. For I am also the slayer of oppressors, the treasury of divine favours in this world and of the next. I am the master of the believers, the guide of those who seek the way. The truth is Mine and certitude is at My side. Leadership is Mine and the righteous shall follow Me. I am the first to acknowledge faith, the Cord of God that shall not be broken, the One who will raise the world to justice even as it hath been brought low by oppression. I am the companion of Gabriel and the archangel Michael is beside Me. I am the tree of guidance, and the essence of righteousness. I shall gather together the world of creation through the Word of God that gathers together all things. I give life unto humanity and I am the treasury of all divine commands. To Me hath been given the Luminous Pen and the Crimson Camel<sup>72</sup>.

I am the gate-keeper of certitude, the Commander of the Faithful, the friend of Khidir. I am the One who shall conquer Syria and destroy the arrogant. I have existed throughout the past, and, verily, I have never uttered a falsehood. Through a word from Me, truth hath been separated from error, for I speak through divine inspiration and know of the stars and constellations. God hath commanded me to ordain their orbit and vouchsafed unto me their knowledge. With Me are the saffron and crimson coloured flags and I shall remain concealed until the time shall come for My manifestation in a great Cause. Then, shall I grant and withhold as I wish. None can describe Me except Myself, for I shall protect the faith of my Lord. I am the One Whom my Cousin chose, Who was present when His sacred remains were shrouded. I am the Guardian appointed by God, the Most Merciful God, the companion of Khidr<sup>73</sup> and Aaron, and the friend of Moses and Joshua, the son of Nun. I am the Lord of Paradise, He Who hath caused the rain to fall and the earth to quake and the sun and moon to be eclipsed. I am the Object of the creation of multitudes and it is I who shall slay those who do not believe.

Verily, I am the leader of the righteous, the Sacred Fane frequented by all, the upraised firmament, the fathomless ocean. I am the Holy of Holies, the pillar that supports humanity. I am the Possessor of the Greatest Cause. Is there anyone who can speak beside Me? I am fire itself. At a single Word of God, at one utterance of the Prophet, I would put within you My sword's length and send you hurrying unto your next abode. I am the meaning of Ramadán and the night of Qadr<sup>74</sup> mentioned in the Mother Book. My utterance is decisive, for I am the Súrah of Praise<sup>75</sup>. I am the purpose of prayer itself, whether at home or when travelling. I am the purpose of

<sup>72</sup> Oblique reference to the Thamud, their Prophet Salih and the She-Camel so often referred to in the Holy Qur'án (See e.g. 11:61-65).

<sup>73</sup> In Islamic tradition, Khadir was a servant of God who had been taught special knowledge and was sent to be a companion and teacher to Moses (see Qur'án 18:65-82). Khadir may not be a reference to a person, but, rather, to the inspirational Source. In this sermon, the Imám 'Alí is, in a sense, the Muse to all those inspired before, similar to Gabriel in the Qur'án 2:97.

<sup>74</sup> See Qur'án 97:1-3.

<sup>75</sup> The first Súrah in the Holy Qur'án and said to be endowed with amazing powers.

fasting, and the sacred anniversaries in the months of the year. I am the Lord of Resurrection and Judgement, the One who can remove the yoke that lies heavy on the people of Muhammad. I am the Gate through which all shall pass who worship God; I am His worshipper, and one created by Him. I am both the witness and the One witnessed to, the possessor of the green canopy, He Whose name is mentioned in the heavens and the earth, Who is the travelling companion of the Messenger of God throughout the heavens, for with Me is the Book and the sacred Arc. I am the One who befriended Seth, the son of Adam<sup>76</sup>, the companion of Moses and Irám, and all metaphors and analogies pertain unto Me. Who indeed is there to compare with Me? For I am the heaven-sent rain that causeth each blade of green to grow, the Lord of this nether realm Who brings forth the rains when all have lost their hope in its downpour. I am He Who summoneth the mighty lightning and causeth the ocean to rise and swell, the One who speaketh to the sun and causeth the stunning trumpet to blast forth. I am the refuge of all that have obeyed God, and verily, God is my Lord and there is no other God but He. For falsehood offers illusions, but truth giveth thee everlasting sovereignty.

I shall soon depart from amongst you, but be watchful and aware; be on your guard against the tests and tribulations caused by the 'Umayyds and their worldly powers. And after they shall pass away, the kingdom will revert to the 'Abbasids<sup>77</sup> who will bring both sorrow and happiness to mankind. And they shall build a city called Baghdád, which shall be between the Tigris and the Euphrates. Woe betide men in those latter days, for amongst them will rise the oppressors among My people, who shall build palaces for themselves and courts and tabernacles. For they shall seek supremacy through intrigue and impiety. Two score and two kings shall rule among the children of the 'Abbasids, after whose reign shall come to pass the Most Great Tribulation on the surface of the earth. Then shall the True Qá'im rise up once more. Then shall I show My Face amongst men, and it shall be as luminous as the face of the moon amid the other stars. But note well the ten signs associated with my coming. The first sign shall be the inversion of banners on the highways of Kúfa<sup>78</sup>; the second, the abeyance of true worship and the prescribed prayers; the third, the end of true pilgrimage. The fourth sign shall be an eclipse in the lands of Khorásán<sup>79</sup>, the gathering of constellations and the appearance of comets in the sky.

<sup>76</sup> Seth is named in Genesis as the son of Adam, and he lived for 912 years. (See Gen. 4:25-5:8.) Here, however, the reference is to the notion that Companion (Sahib), in a sense, means that the Eternal "I" was with Seth (in Arabic, Shayth, the son of Adam). In Luke, Seth is an ancestor to Christ.

<sup>77</sup> The family of Abbas, the uncle of Muhammad.

<sup>78</sup> A city near the Euphrates River, 177km south of Baghdád. Formerly a Mesopotamian city, Kúfa was re-founded by the Arabs in 638, and was the capital of the Islamic Empire during the caliphate of the Imám 'Alí. For a time, it also served as the centre for the 'Abbasid caliphate. This and the following references are to catastrophes and spiritual reverses in the fortunes of truth.

<sup>79</sup> A mountainous and arid province in northeastern Irán. The territory served as the capital of the eastern provinces of Islám during the time of the early 'Abbasid Caliphs. Khorásán was first invaded by the Oghuz Turks in 1153 and again in 1157. The Mongols devastated the region between 1220 and 1222. Timur invaded in 1383.

There shall be chaos and confusion, massacre, pillage and robbery in the world. Many other signs shall there be too, surpassing all these signs, among which is the sign of wonderment. But when all these signs have passed away, then, verily, shall the Qá'im Himself arise in truth.

O people, sanctify the Lord your God from all similitudes, for every reference to Him fails, and whosoever tries to limit the Creator by description or comparison hath verily disbelieved in His Book, which is the Book of God's Own Utterance.

Then He<sup>80</sup> said: How great the blessedness of those who love Me and who sacrifice their life in My path and who get exiled because of Me! They truly are the repositories of God's knowledge, nor shall they be put to fear on the Day of the Great Terror.

I am the Light of God, Who can never be extinguished; I am the Mystery of God that can not be concealed.

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<sup>80</sup> The Imám 'Alí.

### Translation of Sermon of Ma'rifat bin-Nuráníyyat<sup>81</sup>

This is that which Salmán<sup>82</sup> and 'Abú Dharr<sup>83</sup> related of the utterances of the Commander of the Faithful, 'Alí - Peace be upon Him!' Alí said:

He whose acceptance of my guardianship is based on external reality more than internal truth, he is that one "whose balances will be light"<sup>84</sup> Those whose scale will be light, their souls will be in perdition<sup>85</sup> O Salmán! The faith of no believer will attain perfection unless and until he recognizeth Me with luminousness. If he attaineth unto this, then he hath truly attained faith; he is the one whose heart is tested with true faith, whose breast is dilated in true Islám and whose faith is based on discernment. He who is convicted of shortcoming in this cognition - he will be a doubter, immersed in disbelief.

O Salmán! and O Jandáb!<sup>86</sup> In truth, recognition of Me in luminousness is the recognition of God (*Ma'rifat Alláh*) and Recognition and knowledge of God is indeed knowledge of Me; this is what is meant by sincere devotion.<sup>87</sup> Mankind was not ordered by God to seek naught except to attain unto this unity (*tawhid*). They were commanded to worship but One God.<sup>88</sup> And they have been commanded no more than this: "To worship God, offering Him sincere devotion, being true (in faith), to establish regular prayer; and to practice regular charity; and that is the Religion Right and Straight."<sup>89</sup>

"Worshipping God" is belief in Divine Unity. "Sincere devotion" and "being true in Faith" (*haneef*) is confession of the Prophethood of the Prophet. "Establishing Prayer" is my Guardianship and Friendship (*waláyat* or *wiláyat*) He who pledges fealty and friendship unto Me hath truly established the obligatory prayer. Yet, this matter is hard, exceedingly hard! "Regular charity" in the above verse is confession to the Imámate. All this is the true religion.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Bursi, Mashariq, pp. 160-162

في معرفتهم صلوات الله عليهم بالنورانية وفيه ذكر جمل من فضائلهم عليهم السلام

This hadith is also quoted in full in the *Bihar al-Anwar* (op. Cit.), vol 26

<sup>82</sup> Salmán-i-Farsí (Salmán the Persian), known as Salmán the Good, one of the faithful Companions of the Prophet. Bahá'u'lláh mentions him briefly in the *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, p. 65. The Báb, in the *Bayán-i-Farsí* (Wahíd 5, Báb 11), notes that he was one of only three souls (the other two were `Abú Dharr and Miqdád) who remained truly faithful to the Covenant of Islám.

<sup>83</sup> Jundub `ibn Junadah, known as Abú Dharr Al-Ghifarí, was a shepherd of the Ghafarí tribe which lived in the Waddan valley, near Mecca. He was known for his courage, his calmness and his far sightedness and also for the repugnance he felt against the idols which his people worshipped. Hearing of the new Prophet, he journeyed to Mecca and was taught the new Faith by `Alí and attained the presence of Muhammad. According to tradition, the Prophet had said, "The earth does not carry nor the heavens cover a man more true and faithful than `Abú Dharr." Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle*, 19 calls him "a prince of the nations"

<sup>84</sup> Qur`án 7:9

<sup>85</sup> Idem 23:103 and 101:8

<sup>86</sup> Abú Dharr.

<sup>87</sup> Or "pure religion" (*ad-Dín al-Khális*). See Qur`án 7:29, 39:2, 3, 40:

<sup>88</sup> Qur`án 9:31 and 98:5

<sup>89</sup> Idem 98:5

<sup>90</sup> Arabic: *za`likad dinul qay yimu*. See Qur`án 30:30

The Holy Qur'án hath testified that true Faith is recognition of divine unity and confession to both the Prophet and the Imámate. He who attaineth unto both hath fulfilled his faith. A true believer is the one who does not reject any matter pertaining to Us, for God Himself hath dilated His Breast such that He may accept all. He will not doubt or be mistrustful. He who cavileth why and wherefore becometh a disbeliever. We are, verily, the Cause of God (*Nahnu Amru'lláh*)!

O Salmán! O Jandáb! Verily, God hath made me His Trustee over His creation and His Vicegerent on His earth, in His territories, and over His servants. He hath given Me what no artist can depict and no man of understanding can truly comprehend. If thou wert to know Me in this fashion, thou shalt attain unto true belief (*imán*).

O Salmán! God, exalted be He saith: "Nay, seek God's help with patient perseverance and prayer: it is indeed hard except to those who bring a lowly spirit." "Patient perseverance" is Muhammad and "Prayer" is my *Wilayat*. Thus, that is why God hath declared it is hard. He doth not reveal the Two<sup>91</sup> are hard. In truth, My Guardianship is perplexing only to those who bring a lowly spirit. These latter are they who have sought discernment using the light of My guidance.

O Salmán! We are the Mystery of God (*Sirru'lláh*) that shalt not remain hidden. We are His light that shalt never be extinguished, His Grace that is expected from none other save Him. Muhammad is our first, Muhammad our last, Muhammad our all!<sup>92</sup> He who recognizeth Us in this regard hath, in truth, consummated his Faith.

O Salmán, and O Jandáb! Muhammad and I were the Light that was voicing forth the divine eulogy before any other reality started to praise Him. We were the cause of illumination unto all creation. This one Light was divided by God into two portions, the Chosen "Mustafa"<sup>93</sup>, and His Vicegerent, "Murtada"<sup>94</sup>, and vouchsafed unto creation. God, exalted be His Glory, said to each half, "Be Muhammad!", "Be 'Alí!"<sup>95</sup> It is thus that the Prophet said: "I am from 'Alí and 'Alí is from Me. None can give forth My Trust but Myself and 'Alí."<sup>96</sup> This refers to our unity in the worlds of Light and Spirit. Similar is this divine utterance: "and If He dieth or is slain."<sup>97</sup> "Dieth" refers to the passing away of the Prophet. "Slain" refers to the martyrdom of the

<sup>91</sup> A subtle point is being made here. In the cited verse (2:45), "patient perseverance" is *sabr*, a masculine noun, which requires a masculine pronoun. Yet, "prayer" is *salát*, which is feminine. The pronoun used in the verse (i.e. "it is indeed hard") is feminine, and thus could only refer to the aforementioned feminine noun. 'Alí then proceeds to connote *salát* with acceptance of his *Wilayat* or Guardianship, which, according to this interpretation, is exceedingly more difficult to attain than recognizing the Prophethood of Muhammad

<sup>92</sup> See Baha'u'llah, *Íqán*, 153

<sup>93</sup> He who is chosen as an Envoy (Prophet Muhammad)

<sup>94</sup> He in whom God is pleased (Imám `Alí)

<sup>95</sup> The imperative used in both cases is *Kún*, ["Be" or "Exist"] (i.e. the usage of the letters "B" and "E")

<sup>96</sup> Qur'án 3:61, "Our Selves [*anfusaná wa anfusakum*] ourselves, and yourselves"

<sup>97</sup> Idem 3:144, "Will it be that, when he dieth or is slain".

Successor<sup>98</sup>, for the Two are one Entity, one Signification and one Light. Their unity is in purpose and attributes. They are different in Their corporeal entity and their Names. But in the world of spirit, They are One Spirit. In Spirit, He said, "Thou art the Spirit within My Limbs." In the world of bodies, He saith: "Thou art of Me and I am of Thine. Thou shalt inherit after Me."

Again, there is the Divine Utterance: "Send ye blessings on Him and salute Him with all respect."<sup>99</sup> "Sending blessings on Him" refereth to Muhammad. "Salute Him" refers to the Successor. No benefit shall accrue unto thee if thou sendest blessings unto the Messenger and His Message if they are not coupled with saluting His Successor in His *Wiláyat*.

O Salmán! O Jandáb! Muhammad was the One speaking and I was the One silent. Inevitably, in every Dispensation, there is the One Who speaketh and the One Who is silent.<sup>100</sup> Muhammad is the Master of Ingathering<sup>101</sup> and I am the Master of Resurrection.<sup>102</sup> Muhammad is the Warner<sup>103</sup> and I am the "guide."<sup>104</sup> Muhammad is the Lord of Paradise and I am the Lord of the Return. Muhammad is the Lord of the Pool<sup>105</sup> and I am the One entrusted with the Banner.<sup>106</sup> Muhammad is the Lord of the Keys<sup>107</sup> and I am the Lord of Paradise and Fire. Muhammad is the Lord of Revelation and I am the Lord of Inspiration. Muhammad is the Lord of signs and I am Master of the miracles. Muhammad is the Seal of the Prophets<sup>108</sup> and I am the Seal of the Successors.<sup>109</sup> Muhammad is the Master Who raised the Call and I am the One entrusted with both the Sword<sup>110</sup> and Sovereignty. Muhammad is the Most Generous Prophet and I am the Straight Path. Muhammad is the One mentioned in the verse as "most kind and merciful"<sup>111</sup> and I am the One alluded to as "Most High, Most Great."<sup>112</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Reference to the assassination of Imám `Alí in 661 A.D.

<sup>99</sup> Qur`án 33:56

<sup>100</sup> In the Bahá'í Dispensation, these are Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá, respectively, for the latter rarely took up His blessed Pen during the time of His Father.

<sup>101</sup> Qur`án 42:7 and 64:9

<sup>102</sup> Idem 6:128, reference to the Qur`anic verses that eschatologically there will be a Day of Ingathering and a Day of Resurrection

<sup>103</sup> This alludes to Qur`án 13:7: "But thou art truly a warner, and to every people a guide

<sup>104</sup> Idem 16:89

<sup>105</sup> Lord of the Pool (Arabic: *sáhib al-hawz*) is a well-recognized title of `Alí. "Pool" refers to the pool of refreshing water in Paradise which the sincere believers will drink from. See Qur`án 15:45, 37:45 and 76:5-6.

<sup>106</sup> i.e. the Banner of Victory in the latter days

<sup>107</sup> Qur`án 38:50. See also Qur`án 6:59, 39:63 and 42:12

<sup>108</sup> Idem 33:40

<sup>109</sup> Arabic: *Wasiyy*s. "Seal of the Successors" is another title of `Alí. Most interesting point is made here because, after `Alí, there were, in fact, ten more *Wasiyy*s, or eleven if the Qá'im is included. So clearly, this means that "Seal" does not indicate "last" temporally. On this subject, see Seena Fazel and Khazeh Fananapazir, 'A Bahá'í Approach to the Claim of Finality in Islám', *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 5, no:3 (1993) 17-40; Momen, *Islam*, 34-59.

<sup>110</sup> In the *Súriy-i-Vafá*, Bahá'u'lláh speaks of His Name as the "Sword of His Revelation between heaven and earth ... through which truth is separated from error, even from now until the Day when mankind shall stand before the Lord of the worlds." See Baha'u'llah, *Tablets revealed*, 185-186

<sup>111</sup> Qur`án 9:128

<sup>112</sup> Idem 42:4

O Salmán! God, exalted be He, saith: "He causes the Spirit to descend upon any Servant He willeth."<sup>113</sup> This Spirit but descends unto the One entrusted with the Command and the Decree. I give life to the dead. I know what is in the heavens and what is on the earth. I am, in truth, the Perspicuous Book.<sup>114</sup> I give life unto the dead and with Me is the knowledge of all that is in the heavens and the earth. I am the Perspicuous Book. O Salmán! Muhammad is the Upraiser of the Proof,<sup>115</sup> and I am the Proof of the One True God unto His creatures. It is this Testimony that empowered the Spirit of God<sup>116</sup> to ascend unto heaven. I am the One who enabled Noah to sail his Ark. I was present with Jonah in the belly of the Whale.<sup>117</sup> I argued with Moses in the sea.<sup>118</sup> I caused earlier peoples to suffer loss; I bestowed the knowledge of the Prophets and Saints and Their Decisive Utterance unto them. With Me is the Prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad completed. I caused rivers and oceans to flow and caused fountains to burst forth. I caused the world to be revolutionized and I bring about the Chastisement of the Day of Overshadowing Gloom.<sup>119</sup> I am Khidír Who taught Moses<sup>120</sup>. I taught David and Solomon<sup>121</sup>. I am Dhu'l Qarnayn<sup>122</sup>. I am the One who raised the Firmament<sup>123</sup> and flattened the Earth<sup>124</sup>. I am the Summoner from a near Place<sup>125</sup>. I am the Creature on the Earth<sup>126</sup>. The Prophet addressed Me

<sup>113</sup> Idem 40.

<sup>114</sup> Idem 27:1, 28:2. It is interesting that Bahá'u'lláh confirms these passages in His last major work, the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, by quoting the Imám `Alí as saying: The Commander of the Faithful (Imám `Alí) hath said: "I am He Who can neither be named, nor described." And likewise He hath said: "Outwardly I am an Imám; inwardly I am the Unseen, the Unknowable." Abú-Ja'far-i-Túsí hath said: "I said to Ábí `Abdilláh: 'You are the Way mentioned in the Book of God, and you are the Impost, and you are the Pilgrimage.' He replied: 'O man! We are the Way mentioned in the Book of God,--exalted and glorified be He--and We are the Impost, and We are the Fast, and We are the Pilgrimage, and We are the Sacred Month, and We are the Sacred City, and We are the Kaaba of God, and We are the Qiblih of God, and We are the Face of God.'" Jabír hath said that Abú-Ja'far--peace be upon him--spoke to him as follows: "O Jabír! Give heed unto the Bayán (Exposition) and the Má'ání (Significances)." He --peace be upon him--added: "As to the Bayán, it consisteth in thy recognition of God--glorified be He--as the One Who hath no equal, and in thy adoration of Him, and in thy refusal to join partners with Him. As to the Má'ání, We are its meaning, and its side, and its hand, and its tongue, and its cause, and its command, and its knowledge, and its right. If We wish for something, it is God Who wisheth it, and He desireth that which We desire." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle*, 112-113)

<sup>115</sup> Qur'án 4:174

<sup>116</sup> Jesus Christ.

<sup>117</sup> The story of Jonah is briefly recounted in Qur'án 37:139-148

<sup>118</sup> Idem 18:37

<sup>119</sup> Qur'an 26:189

<sup>120</sup> Idem 18:78. In the *Khutbat-ul-Ifkhar* (The Sermon of Glorification), the Imám claims the station of the companion to Khadír. See fn. 69

<sup>121</sup> Idem 21:79

<sup>122</sup> Idem 18:83. The Arabic phrase *Dhul-Qarnayn* literally means "two-horned one" or "lord of two ages." Anything with duality is suggestive of the two natures of these Immaculate Souls (such as the Imáms); while treading on earth, they walk in the immensity of space and heaven. Bahá'u'lláh writes of such souls: "These ancient Beings, though delivered from the womb of their mother, have in reality descended from the heaven of the will of God. Though they be dwelling on this earth, yet their true habitations are the retreats of glory in the realms above. Whilst walking amongst mortals, they soar in the heaven of the divine presence. Without feet they tread the path of the spirit, and without wings they rise unto the exalted heights of divine unity. With every fleeting breath they cover the immensity of space, and at every moment traverse the kingdoms of the visible and the invisible." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Íqán*, 67.)

<sup>123</sup> Qur'án 55:7

<sup>124</sup> Idem 84:3

<sup>125</sup> Idem 50:41. According to Mírzá `Abú'l-Fadl's *Fara'id*, "The Place Near" is Palestine in relation to Arabia

<sup>126</sup> Arabic *dábba*; it refers to one Who should arise on the earth, although he is not of the earth or from the earth, and lead men to God.

saying: "O 'Alí! Thou art the One endowed with the Two stations. Thou art present both in the Beginning and the End." O Salmán! The One slain with Us will not die. The One Who is in Occultation from amongst Us is never absent. None can compare with Us. I am the One Who spoke through the Utterance of Jesus when He was still cradled<sup>127</sup>. I am Noah. I am Abraham. I am Sálíh Who possessed the She-Camel as His Sign<sup>128</sup>. I am the One Who causeth the Commotion.<sup>129</sup> I am also the Trembling.<sup>130</sup> I am the Protected Tablet<sup>131</sup> and in My possession is all Its Knowledge. I appear in Appearances<sup>132</sup> as God willeth. He that seeth Them seeth Me. He that seeth Me seeth Them. In all truth, We are the Light of God that changeth not and His effulgence that is not extinguished. O Salmán! The honour of every Sent One is through Us, but do not call us Lords; praise Us as thou willeth. Salvation and Perdition both are effected through Us.

O Salmán! He that believeth in all truth as I have expounded it is truly a believer whose heart hath been tested and proven. He that doubteth and hesitateth, he hath reneged on the Faith, although outwardly he sayeth that he believes in the *Wiláyat*<sup>133</sup>. I, and the Guides of My Family, the Imáms, are the Hidden Mystery of God<sup>134</sup> and His Guardians<sup>135</sup>. Our Cause is One, Our Mystery is One and Our Unity is absolute. If thou maketh distinctions, thou wilt be among the ones lost. We appear and have Our Manifestation in every age as the All Merciful willeth. All woe betide the One Who denieth Us! None shall gainsay these except the one whose heart, eyes and hearing are sealed.

O Salmán! I am as the Father of every believer. I am the Catastrophe<sup>136</sup>. I am the Approaching Calamity. I am the Inevitable. I am the Impending One<sup>137</sup>. I am the Deafening Trumpet Blast<sup>138</sup>. I am the Supreme Test. We are the Signs, the Significances and the Countenance of God<sup>139</sup>. When My Name was written on the Throne, It attained Its Serenity. When It was inscribed on the firmaments, They were upraised. When written on the Earth, It was adorned. When It was inscribed on the Wind, It carried with It fruition.

<sup>127</sup> Qur`án 19:30-33

<sup>128</sup> Idem 7:73

<sup>129</sup> Idem 79:6-7: "One Day, everything that can be in commotion will be in violent commotion, Followed by oft-repeated (commotions)."

<sup>130</sup> Idem 99

<sup>131</sup> Idem 85:22. See also Baha'u'llah, *Prayers And Meditations* (Wilmette:Baha'i publishing Trust, 1987,CLXXVI, 265) "This, verily, is the Day wherewith Thy Scriptures, and Thy Books, and Thy Tablets, have been adorned. And He Who now speaketh is, in truth, the Well-guarded Treasure, and the Hidden Secret, and the Preserved Tablet, and the Impenetrable Mystery, and the Sealed Book."

<sup>132</sup> i.e. Theophanies

<sup>133</sup> Guardianship and Vicegerency

<sup>134</sup> Qur`án 26:6

<sup>135</sup> Qur`án 6:61 and 74:31

<sup>136</sup> Qur`án 101:1 and 69:4

<sup>137</sup> Idem 40:18: "Warn them of the Day that is (ever) drawing near, when the hearts will (come) right up to the throats to choke (them)."

<sup>138</sup> Idem 80:33: "when there comes the Deafening Noise: That Day shall a man flee from his own brother."

<sup>139</sup> Among other titles, Bahá'u'lláh refers to the Imáms as "those unquenchable lights of divine guidance". See Baha'u'llah, *Íqán*,144



When written on the Lightning, It caused it to shine. When written on the Oasis, It brought nourishment. When inscribed on the Light, It caused it to be Luminous. When inscribed on the Clouds<sup>140</sup>, It generated Their Outpouring Grace, and when inscribed on the Thunder<sup>141</sup>, it made the Thunder quiescent. That Name caused the Night<sup>142</sup> to be deep in its darkness, and when inscribed on the Day<sup>143</sup>, It made It luminous and radiant<sup>144</sup>.

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<sup>140</sup> Idem 30:48

<sup>141</sup> Idem 13:13

<sup>142</sup> Idem 36:37

<sup>143</sup> Idem 92:2

<sup>144</sup> See fn.110

## **A Stylistic Analysis of the Báb's Writings**

### **Abridged Annotated Translation of Vahid Behmardi's "Muqaddamih-yi dar bárih-yi sabk va siyáq-i áthár-i mubárah-yi ḥadrat-i rabb a`lá"**

Dr. Vahid Behmardi, Assistant Professor of Arabic Literature, Department of Arabic & Near Eastern Languages, American University of Beirut, Lebanon  
Dr. William McCants, Fellow with the Combating Terrorism Center, West Point.

#### **Abstract**

The following is an abridgement of Vahid Behmardi's outstanding article on the style of the Bab's Writings.<sup>1</sup> I have decided to do this for several reasons.

First, there is a striking lack of communication between Baha'i scholars who write in Persian and those who write in English. Of course, much of the Persian writing on the history and teachings of the Faith is, like English writing, highly derivative. There are, however, a few notable exceptions, like the work of Vahid Behmardi and Vahid Rafati, who are engaged in laying the critical foundational work for future studies (by foundational work, I mean sound and detailed philological studies of the Baha'i Scriptures). By making this article accessible to a wider audience, I hope it will advance dialogue between the two scholarly communities while also further the development of Baha'i studies itself.

Second, although the enemies of the Faith and the believers are divided in their assessment of the Bab's style of writing, they do agree on one point: their appraisal of His writings never moves beyond a superficial evaluation – "it's gibberish" or "it's unique." While Dr. Behmardi's article does contain the standard rebuttal of the former charge, his treatment of the Bab's writings is laudable due to his detailed explanation of the reasoning behind the latter assertion. He touches on most of the major stylistic features of the Bab's writings and provides numerous examples from His writings to support his conclusions.

As for the format of the article itself, each new thought is preceded by a number that corresponds with the page number of the article for ease of reference. All footnotes reflect my own commentary unless otherwise specified.

## **A Stylistic Analysis of the Báb's Writings by Vahid Behmardi**

### **Part 1 - Introduction**

The style of the Báb's writings is new and can't be compared with the standards of style of the people in the past. Therefore, the author will use an inductive method to talk about the writings of the Báb. *Sabk* ("style, mode") is a term that is applied to ways and means of speaking and writing with regard to statements and expressions with various phrasings. The Báb uses

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<sup>1</sup> "Muqaddamih-yi dar bárih-yi sabk va siyáq-i áthár-i mubárah-yi ḥadrat-i rabb a`lá," *Khushih-há*, vol. 6, p. 47-67)

the terms *sha'n* or *nahj* for *sabk* in His writings. In the Writings of the Báb, meaning and mode of expression are intimately connected. [Meaning of the term *bayán*] *Bayán* as a technical term of the Báb which He started to use in Mákú. Its meaning is indicated in the following passage by the Báb in tenth *báb* of the second *wáhid* of the *Kitáb al-Asmá'*:

أَنى قَدْ نَظَّمْتُ البَيَانَ عَلَى شَأْنٍ أَن حِينَ مَا يَسْمَعُونَ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ مِنْ عِنْدِهِ فَادَّاءَ كُلِّ يَسْجُدُونَ وَ لَا  
يَتَحَاجُّونَ بِهِ وَ لَا يَجَادِلُونَ وَ لَا يَخْطَرُونَ بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ دُونَ أَمْرِهِ وَ كُلٌّ مِنْ أَعْلَى الْبَيَانِ وَ ادْنَاهُ  
بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ لِيَحْضُرُونَ ثُمَّ لَيْسَجِدُونَ يَقُولُونَ هَذَا مَا وَعَدَنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ ذَاتِ حُرُوفِ السَّبْعِ فِي الْبَيَانِ  
لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ تَنْزِيلٌ مِنْ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

“I arranged the *Bayán* in such wise that when they heard the verses of God from His Presence, they all immediately prostrated and did not dispute with it [the *Bayán*] and did not argue and did not think within themselves [lá yakhtiru bi-anfusihim] save by its/his command. All who propagated the *Bayán* and held it close will attain [yahdurún]. Moreover, they will prostrate while saying, ‘This is that which God and the essence of the seven letters hath promised us in the *Bayán*, “of which there is no doubt,” [Qur’an 2:2] which hath been sent down from the Lord of the Worlds.’”

Behmardi identifies Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest (*man yuzhiruhu'llah*) as that which is attained and the Báb as the “essence of the seven letters” (since the name ‘Alí Muhammad is made up of seven letters). Based on this passage, Behmardi identifies three different meanings of the word *bayán*. First, when the Báb says “I arranged the *Bayán*,” it means the Blessed Cause [i.e. the Bábi religion] in general. Second, “all who propagated the *Bayán* and held it close” are the people of the *Bayán* [i.e. the Bábis]. Third, “This is that which God hath promised in the *Bayán*” means the writings of the Báb. It does not only mean the Arabic and Persian *Bayán* of the Báb, because in other Writings the promise of the manifestation of Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest also appears. It has a general meaning. Of course, the term *Bayán* is used in other places to specifically indicate the *Kitáb-i Bayán*

In the Qur’an, the word *bayán* occurs in 3 places. In Sura Al `Imrán and Sura Rah.mán, it means word and speech. In Sura Qiyáma, the word *bayán* is connected with the unveiling and clarification of the meanings of the Qur’an:

Verily, it is incumbent upon Us [God] to collect it and recite it [qur’ánahu]. If we recite it [qara’náhu], follow thou its recital [qur’ánahu]. Then it is incumbent upon us to explain it [‘alayná bayánahu].” (Q 75:17-19)

The meaning of the three verses is clear. God sent down the Qur'an to Muhammad and after that He will clarify its truths. *Bayán* in Arabic means clarification. The word "then" [which is an *`atf* (conjunction)] in verse 19 indicates that first the Qur'an is sent down, and then the *bayán*. So, according to the verse, God has sent down the Qur'an and promises to send down the clarification (*bayán*). In the context of the Sura, this clarification is to be sent down on the Day of Resurrection. It will be among the signs of that Day. Behmardi asserts that until the time of the Báb, no one had claimed to have the *bayán* of the Qur'an. Further, it couldn't have come to pass in the lifetime of Muhammad since the Qur'an was still being sent down, and the verse says that the *bayán* comes when the Qur'an has finished being sent down.

Although the Báb wrote commentaries on the Qur'an, He did not call His writings "*Bayán*" until signs that are more eloquent than speech came to pass indicating that it is the Day of Resurrection. Then the *Bayán* promised by God in the Sura of Qiyáma was sent down. Because of this, most of the Writings of the Báb have one main difference from the Qur'an with regard to the mode of writing. Unlike the Qur'an, the *Bayán* is in the mode of explication and giving of details, not absolute brevity. For example, the divine Names are mentioned in the Qur'an. However, there is no explanation of the meaning of these names. Because of this, exegetes gave several different possible meanings to these names. The writings of the Báb clarified these names in two ways. First, He compiled the names of the God from the Qur'an and added to them. Second, He explained these names in many of His books and letters. This is one part of the clarification (*bayán*) on the Day of Resurrection made manifest by the Báb, as He says in the *Seven Proofs*:

و نظر کن در فرقان که يك بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم زياده نازل نشده، و در بيان به يك نوع  
بيان كه بيان شده و نازل شده سيصد و شصت و يك بيان آن شده كه قدری از آن در بيان  
نازل شده و زياده بر اين هم ممكن بوده ولی اظهار آن نشده

Notice that in the Qur'an, one more 'Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim' was not sent down [i.e. there is a perfect number – 114 or 19x6], and in the *Bayán*, by means of one type of clarification [*bayán*], it has been clarified and three hundred and sixty [Basmallahs] were sent down [361 or 19x19]. One clarification [*bayán*] is that a certain amount hath been revealed in the *Bayán*. Increasing upon this is also possible, but did not come to pass.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Dalá'il-i Sab'ih*, Tehran, n.d.: 63. In Behmardi's assessment of the term *bayán*, he relates a standard Baha'i explanation of the term as indicating a fulfillment of Qur'anic prophecy. I would certainly agree that the Báb saw his writings as a fulfillment of an eschatological prophecy. However, I disagree with Behmardi's

## Part 2 – The Báb's Eloquence

In several of His Tablets, the Báb characterizes His Writings as eloquent [examples given from *Dalá'il-i Sab'ih*]. Behmardi asks, "What is the meaning of eloquence with regard to the Writings of the Báb?" In order to answer the question, he will look at the standards of those learned in rhetoric, then compare them to the Writings of the Báb.

In the eighth century AH, the orator Qazvíní [666-739/1268-1338] summarized what had been said about eloquence up until that point in his book *al-Idáh. fí 'ulúm al-balágha*. According to him, eloquence of word (*kalima*) lies in the absence of incongruous letters, peculiar words, and abnormal derivation (of words) (*qiyás*). Eloquence of composition (*kalám*) is devoid of weak writing, incongruous words, complex expression and meaning, repetition, and consecutive genitive (*idáfa*) constructions.

The Báb's writings do not measure up to any of the standards listed by Qazvini. For example, there are many expressions in the Writings of the Báb that are known only as Bábi technical terminology, like "ẓilál al-mukfahirrát al-afrídús" ("the shade of the dark clouds of Paradise") in the *Ziyarát-i 'Abd al-'Azím*, or "'abd ath-thá'" in the epistles of the Letters of the Living, and so forth.

With regard to abnormal derivation of words, the Báb does this a great deal, particularly in the formation of adjectives, like *qaydúr* and *qadúr* from the adjective *qadír* and *mu'aylim* and *'alúm* from the adjective *'alím*, or *'azúz* from *'azíz*, and *'azúm* from *'azím*, and *qaydús* from *quddús*, and *muqtadim* and *qadúm* from *qadím*, and so forth<sup>3</sup>

In verb conjugation, the Báb's style is also unusual. For example, he derives the verb *dhawwata* from the noun *dhát* ("essence"), as in the verse:

انا النقطة التي دَوَّت بها من دَوَّت

"I am the Point which He who hath been made an essence [man dhuwwita] hath been made an essence by it (the Point) [dhuwwita bihá]." <sup>4</sup>

In the preamble of the Persian Bayan, the Báb derives the verb *shayya'a* from the noun *shay'*, as in the following:

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assertion that no one claimed to have a bayán of the Qur'an until the time of the Báb. Innumerable authors have described their commentaries on the Qur'an as bayán (or tibyán). Further, Shi'is probably believed that their Imams were the sources of the bayán promised in the Qur'an. Indeed, in one of the earliest Shi'i commentaries on the Qur'an, 'Alí b. Ibrahím al-Qummi clearly states that the phrases "incumbent upon us" ('alayná) refers to the "family of the Prophet" (*Tafsír al-Qummi*, vol. 2, p. 397).

<sup>3</sup> These examples are taken from a letter revealed for Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest. See *Muntakhabat Ayat az Athar Hadrat-i-Nuqtih-i-'Ula*, Tehran, 134 BE, 1-2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid p.14

وكلّ شيء بما قد قدر فيه أو يُقدّر قد شئى بشيئته

“Everything [kull shay’] that He hath ordained and will ordain hath been brought into being [shuyyi’a] by His being [bi-shay’iyyatihi, lit. His quality of being a thing].”

As for repetition, which is frowned upon by the learned, the Báb’s writings are replete with it, especially in the mode of prayers (*du`wát*) and supplications (*munaját*). In most instances, repetition is connected with peculiar words and abnormal derivations.

So, if we accept the standard of eloquence of the literati of the past, then the Báb’s writings clearly do not match this standard. Why then, does He maintain that His Writings are eloquent? The answer lies in the uniqueness of His Writings. Since they are unique, they do not measure up to the standards of the past. Rather, His writings will become the measure of eloquence in the future. The Qur’an itself was unique and did not conform to the standards of the past. The literati took it as a standard, and its style became the standard, which all strived for but fell short because of its inimitability. Further, at the time of its revelation, the Arabs rejected its style because it was not familiar to them and accused Muhammad of working magic.

### Part 3 - Modes of Revelation and a Discussion of the Mode of Verses

The Báb says that His revelation is written in several modes (*sha’n* or *nahj*). Behmardi says that each of these modes has special qualities, which are sometimes mixed. In the first báb of the sixth wáhid and the second báb of the ninth wáhid, He stated that the Persian Bayán is revealed in five modes: verses (*áyát*), supplications (*munaját*), interpretations (*tafásír*), scientific treatises (*ṣuwar`ilmiyya*), and writings in Persian (*kalimát-i fársiyyih*). In the *Sahífih-yi`Adliyyih*<sup>5</sup> and the *Dalá’il-i Sab`ih*<sup>6</sup>, the Báb also says that orisons (*khuṭbát*) are one of the modes of revelation.<sup>7</sup> Further, in the Seven Proofs, the Báb also mentions tablets of visitation (*ziyárát*), prayers (*du`wát*), writings in Arabic (*kalimát-i arabiyya*) and also cryptic esoterica (*ghawámiḍ-i asrár*).

<sup>5</sup> Tehran: n.d.: 9-10

<sup>6</sup> p.27

<sup>7</sup> People generally translate “*khuṭba*” as “sermon,” but this doesn’t make much sense in the Writings of the Báb, since the *khuṭba* usually comes in the form of a preamble to a Tablet and begins with some variation of “Praise be to God” (*taḥmíd*), like in the first sura of the Qur’an (Behmardi will discuss this later on). One might be tempted, therefore, to translate the term as “preamble” or “opening address.” However, the Báb also describes whole Tablets as a *khuṭba*. I have tentatively settled on the term “orison,” since it combines both notion of address as well as prayer.

Verses (*áyát*) have a preeminent position among the different modes. Rather, all the modes are under its shadow, as the Báb says in the first *báb* of the sixth *wáhid* of the Persian Bayán:

و اسم بیان به حقیقت اولیّه اطلاق بر آیات وحده می گردد زیرا که اوست حجت عظمی و  
بینه کبری که دلالت نمی کند الا علی الله وحده و در حقیقت ثاتویه اطلاق به مناجات و  
در ثالث به تفاسیر و در رابع به کلمات علمیّه و در خامس به کلمات فارسیّه می گردد  
ولی کلّ در ظل آیات ذکر می گردد.

Primarily, the name “bayán” is only applied to verses [*áyát*] because they a mighty proof and great testimony that indicate nothing but God alone. Secondly, it is applied to supplications, thirdly to interpretations, fourthly to scientific treatises [*kalimát-i `ilmiyya*], and fifthly to writings in Persian. However, all of these are under the shadow of verses.

However, the Báb is not saying that His writings are only in one mode [i.e. verses], since there are five modes used in the *Panj Sha`n*, four in the *Kitáb al-Asmá*, and three in the *Ṣaḥífh-yi bayn al-Haramayn*.

Behmardi now proceeds to talk about the special qualities of the different modes of revelation, beginning with verses (*áyát*). The term “verses” is generally applied to all divine words, whether Arabic or Persian. This is because the original meaning of the word is “signs.” Therefore, the words from the Messengers are “signs” from God and guide humanity to the Manifestation of His Cause.

Verses are also words which have a special style and, in the Writings of the Báb and Baha’u’llah, are all in Arabic. One of the special characteristics of verses are that they are the words of God Himself flowing through the tongue of His Manifestation to His servants. Sometimes the speaker, who is God, addresses the servants as the sole speaker (first person singular – “I”), sometimes as if he is absent (third person singular – “He”), and sometimes as if there are several speakers (first person plural – “We”). This is probably the meaning of the Bab's statement that verses "indicate nothing but God alone."

Moreover, verses have end rhymes (*fawáṣil*). The end rhyme of one verse is connected with the end rhyme of another. In the Writings of Baha’u’llah and the Báb, this is usually of three types:

1. The letters preceding the final letter (*ḥarf rawíy*) are related to each other. These letters are usually a wáw, an alif or a yá’. For example,

- mubín, `alím and munír all have the letter yá' in them [ie. the long "ī"].
2. The final letters are the same. In literature, this is known as *saj`* [rhymed prose]. For example, `ibád, bilád, and shidád, or muqtadir and muntasi.r. [also the same verb patterns are used]
  3. A rhyme ending in the accusative alif. For example, all of the verses of the *Qayyúm al-Asmá* end in this rhyme, like wahnájá, mustaqímá, hakímá and mastúrá.

Sometimes, the books or epistles have a mixture of different types of rhymes, as in the *Kitáb-i Aqdas* and some of the Writings of the Báb. Some of the suras of the Qur'an also have several types of rhyme.

#### Part 4 - The Mode of Supplications

Supplications (*munaját*) are speech from the Manifestation to the One Who Makes Manifest [i.e. God]. They are in the mode of address (*khiṭáb*) and have sections composed of glorification and exaltation (*tasbīḥ wa tahlíl*), testimony (*tashahhud*), and praise (*taḥmíd*), like those that begin with "subhánaká" ("praise be to Thee") [example of glorification and exaltation], "lá iláha illá anta" ("there is no God but Thee") [example of testimony], "ashhadu annaka allahu" ("I bear witness that Thou art God") [example of testimony], and "naḥmaduka allahumma" ("We offer praise to Thee, O Lord") [example of praise]. With few exceptions, the supplications of the Báb are all in Arabic.

One of the few exceptions is recorded in the *Saḥífiḥ-yi `Adliyyih* (p. 3):

خداوندا چگونہ ثنا گویم مظاهر قدرت حبیب تو را و حال آنکہ بہ ید قدرت خود بر الواح  
افندہ موجودات مسطور فرمودہ ای لا احصی ثناء علیہم کما انت انتہی علیہم

"O Lord! How can we praise the manifestations of the power of Thy Beloved when, with Thy Hand of divine power, Thou didst inscribe upon the tablets of the hearts of all existent things: "I do not consider (my) praise of them to be as Thou dost praise them."

One of the distinctive features of the Writings of the Báb is that in addition to the praise and glorification of God, He also mentions His personal condition and historical issues. For example, in one prayer He alludes to His imprisonment: "Praise be to Thee, O my God! Thou seest my state in the heart of this Mountain."

The Báb decreed that supplications were among the proofs of the theophany. Behmardi cites passage from the *Dalá'il Sab'ih*<sup>8</sup> and the *Sharh.-i Súrat al-*

<sup>8</sup> Bab, *Dalá'il-i Sab'ih*, 26-27



*Kawthar*. The latter example is a reference to a statement by Majlisí in the *Haqq al-Yaqín*, where he asserts that the *Ṣaḥífiḥ-yi Sajádiyyih*, which contains the prayers the supplications of Imam Zayn al-`Abidín `Alí b. al-Husayn, is a proof of the Imam's divine authority (*wiláyat*). The Báb alludes to this in the following passage:

كيف تثبت الولاية بصحيفة ولا تثبت بصحائف معدودة التي ملأت شرق الارض وغربها  
فأي حجة اكبر من هذه النعمة و اى عطية اعظم من هذه القدرة.

“How can the divine authority (of the Imam) be established by a single volume [*ṣaḥífa*] and that which hath filled the East and the West not be established by unnumbered volumes? Which proof is greater than this divine blessing and which gift is mightier than this (evidence of) divine power?”

Prayers (*du`wát*), tablets of visitation (*ziyárát*), and orisons (*khuṭab*) are slightly different from supplications. However, since all of them set forth the powerlessness and need of the supplicant, they can be included in the mode of supplication. One of the differences between supplications and prayers is that supplications are generally in praise and glorification of the Creator, while setting forth the servitude, powerlessness and error of the believer in contrast to the object of worship. However, a prayer is for one object or occasion, or specific time, but it is revealed in the form of a supplication. Shi`i prayers from the Imams that found in collections of prayers and tablets of visitation have the characteristic of being written for some specific object, time or occasion. For example, there is the prayer for granting a request (*tawassul*), or for the removal of difficulties (*faraj*) and a prayer on the day of `arafah [the day before the Feast of Sacrifices], and a morning prayer and prayers for the days of the week, etc.

The Báb has multiplied these types of prayers, like prayers for each one of the days of the week, and prayers of protection, and for granting a request, etc. Therefore, we can say that prayer is for something specific and supplications are general, because supplications only include glorification of God, but do not have a specific occasion on which they are to be said. This rule also applies to the supplications and prayers of Baha'u'llah. For instance, there are prayers for fasting and healing, etc.

Tablets of visitation are also prevalent in the Shi`i world. There are tablets of visitation for the Fourteen Infallible Ones [Muhammad, Fatima, and the 12 Imams] and saints and notables. Most of them are attributed to the Imams, although it is possible that some of them were composed by the `ulama in the time of the Safavids. Those that we can attribute to the Imams

with certainty are found in the *Ziyárát-i Jámí`a* that Shaykh Ahmad commented upon. In these tablets of visitation, the object of the tablets is described with attributes and statements that are similar to statements in the Qur`an, the Hadith, and the traditions of the Imams. In other words, no other Islamic technical terminology is added. However, this is not the case in the Báb's tablets of visitation, where one can find the technical terminology of the Illuminationists and divine philosophy [*ḥikma muta`alliyya*, ie. Mulla Sadra's school], as in Tablet of Visitation for `Abd al-`Azím:

كيف احصى ثنائك يا ابن الشجرة الالهية والورقة المباركة الازليّة والثمرة الجنية اللاهوتية  
و الطلعة الشعشعانية الجبروتية والقمص المشرقة الملكوتية ثم كيف اذكر انتسابك الى  
كينونية ذكر الاول من الازل الذي ركن منه يدل على كينونية المشية بجوهريتها و ركن منه  
على ذاتية الارادة بتجريدتها و ركن منه على نفسانية القدر وسعته و ركن منه على انية  
القضاء و ظهوره

How can I praise Thee, O son of the divine Tree [*ibn ash-shajara al-iláhiyya*], and the blessed, eternal Leaf [*al-warqa al-mubáraka al-azaliyya*], and the celestial Fruit of paradise [*ath-thamara al-janniyya al-láhútiyya*], and the divine, radiant countenance [*aṭ-tal`a ash-sha`sha`ániyya al-jabarútiyya*] and the heavenly, luminous raiments [*al-qumus al-mushriqa al-malakútiyya*]? How, then, can I make mention of Thy relationship to the Essence of the First Remembrance [*kaynúniyyat dhikr al-awwal*] from everlasting, from which a pillar leads to the essence of the Will [*kaynúniyyat al-mashiyya*] through its quality of being an essence [*bi-jawhariyyatihá*], and a pillar from it leads to the essence of Purpose [*dhátiyyat al-iráda*] by its purity (from matter) [*bi-tajarrudiyyatihá*], and a pillar from it leads to the essence of the existential decree [*nafsániyyat al-qadar*] and its power [*sa`a*], and from it a pillar leads to the essence of predetermination [*anniyyat al-qad.á'*] and its manifestation [*zuhúr*]...<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the Illuminationist terminology, the arrangement of this tablet of visitation reflects the Illuminationist philosophy called *`ilm al-mizán* (The Science of Balance). They are statements that compare the physical world (*mulk*) to the spiritual world (*malakút*) and show the parallel between the two. For example, the Ka`ba is an earthly symbol for heavenly realities and a divine throne which is composed of four pillars and a circle of being is placed in the middle. There are Writings of the Báb in His handwriting that are in the shape of a square in the middle of which are several circles, and in

<sup>9</sup> Behmardi's note: In the second section, there are four pillars:

First Pillar	kaynúniyya	mashiyya	jawhar
Second Pillar	dhátiyya	iráda	tajarrud
Third Pillar	nafsániyya	qadar	sa`a
Fourth Pillar	anniyya	qad.á'	zuhúr

some the shapes the names of the four angels (Gabriel, Isráfíl, Michael, and `Izrá`íl) are written in the four corners of a square. These tetrads (tarbî) are clearly evident in the Tablet of visitation for `Abd al-`Azím and in other Writings of the Báb and Baha`u`llah.

As in the other writings of the Báb, sometimes the vocabulary of the Tablets of Visitation is exclusive to the Báb. Another quality of the Tablets of Visitation is that those that are for the great Bábis, like Quddús and Mullá Husayn, are full of very lofty praise and characterization of them. In other places, this praise and characterization would be used by the Báb with reference to Himself. For example, Quddús is described with attributes of God found in the Qur`an and Mullá Husayn is characterized as the creator of the worlds of the seen and the unseen.<sup>10</sup>

Orisons are phrases from verses which introduce epistles and speak of God in the third person [ie. God is not addressed directly]. This is the only difference between supplications and orisons. An orison begins with praise (*tahmíd*) of God in the form of “al-Hamdu li-llah.” Behmardi gives several examples from the Writings of the Báb and points out that there are also orisons in the Writings of Baha`u`llah. In *Ishráqát*, for example, there are two at the beginning, which Baha`u`llah says He has revealed twice, like the orison of the Qur`an was revealed twice (once in Mecca and once in Medina).<sup>11</sup>

## Part 5 – The Modes of Commentaries and Scientific Treatises

Commentaries (*tafásir*) – Regarding His commentaries, the Báb stated in the *Dalá'il-i Sab'ih* that some of His tafsirs on the Qur`an are in the style of verses (*áyát*) and some are in the “technical style of the perfect `ulama [kalimát-i muštalihih bayn `ulamá-yi kammalín]”<sup>12</sup>. An example of the former would be the Báb’s commentary on the *Qayyúm al-Asmá*. A good example of the latter is the Báb’s commentary on the *Surat al-Baqara*, which was revealed before the Báb received His call. It is full of technical terminology and Shaykhí expressions and replete with citations of hadith and traditions from the Imams. In some of the Báb’s commentaries, both styles are used, as in the commentary on *Surat al-Kawthar*, where both styles are used in different sections.

<sup>10</sup> Fāqil Mázandarání, *Zuhúr al-Haqq*, v. 3: 425, 141.

<sup>11</sup> Behmardi’s comments on the Bab’s style in the Tablets of Visitation closely mirror my own conclusions on Baha`u`llah’s style in the same genre, see ‘The Wronged One: Shi’i Narrative Structure in Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet of Visitation for Mullá Husayn’, *Lights of Irfán*, (Wilmette: Irfan Colloquia, 2002, 3.), particularly with regard to the use of quaternaries and hyperbole. I also noted that Baha`u`llah’s style in this genre closely mirrors that of Shi’i Tablets of Visitation in structure and topoi, something Behmardi does not mention. Those familiar with the technical vocabulary of the Illuminationist and Mulla Sadra schools of philosophy will instantly recognize that I have glossed over this terminology in the translation of the passage of the Ziyaratnama of `Abd al-`Azím. Much could be written to explain the relationship between the different levels of this tetrad composed of triads.

<sup>12</sup> *Dalá'il-i Sab'ih*, 27

Here two issues arise. First, the commentaries that are in the style of verses do not conform to the rules of the people. However, the commentaries in the style of the perfect `ulama do conform to the rules, as is clear in the Báb's commentary on Surat wa'l-`Aṣr. Second, all commentaries in both styles begin with an orison.

Scientific modes (*shu'ún `ilmiyya*). This type of revelation is also called *ṣuwar `ilmiyya* and *kalimát ilmiyya*. The meaning of these phrases is that the work does not have the characteristics of verses and supplications and deals with a scientific, philosophical or jurisprudential issue, or kindred subjects. This type of revelation sometimes seeks to clarify an issue and sometimes seeks to reject or accept various opinions or beliefs. These scientific modes are sent down in the form of isolated treatises, like the "*Risála fī Bayán Masá'il ath-Thalátha*" ("A Treatise Explicating Three Questions") or "*Ṣaḥífa Dhahabiyya*" or in the midst of commentaries in the style of the perfect `ulama. The style and content of this type of revelation is direct, scientific, and in no need of interpretation. For example, in his commentary on the Surat al-Qadr, the Báb succinctly clarifies the meaning of three scientific terms: "*as-sarmad* is that which has no beginning and no end, and *ad-dahr* has a beginning but no end, and *az-zaman* is that which is ascertained from the motion of the celestial bodies by means of the rising of the sun and the moon and the appearance of day and night." Behmardi also cites the Báb's response to the proponents of *wahdat al-wujúd* in His *Ṣaḥífa Dhahabiyya* as an example of this mode [the passage concerns God's unity and His disassociation from all things]:

أَنَّ أَكْثَرَ الْحُكَمَاءِ الْإِشْرَاقِيِّينَ وَالْمَشَائِئِينَ وَالصُّدْرَائِيِّينَ وَالْإِلَهِيِّينَ قَدْ زَلَّتْ أَقْدَامُهُمْ فِي بَيَانِ ذَلِكَ الْمَقَامِ وَ قَدْ اسْتَنْبَهَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُ تَجَلِّيَاتِ الْإِبْدَاعِ بِطَلْعَةِ الذَّاتِ وَ لَذَا ذَهَبُوا بِالْقَوْلِ الْبَاطِلِ فِي أَعْيَانِ الثَّابِتَةِ فِي الذَّاتِ لِاثْبَاتِ عِلْمِهِ سُبْحَانَهُ وَ بِذِكْرِ الْبَسِيطِ الْحَقِيقَةِ فِي اثْبَاتِ عَلَيِّهِ الذَّاتِ وَ بِذِكْرِ الرِّبْطِ بَيْنِ الذَّاتِ وَالْأَفْعَالِ وَالصِّفَاتِ وَ بِذِكْرِ وَحْدَةِ الْوُجُودِ بَيْنِ الْمَوْجِدِ وَ الْمَفْقُودِ وَ أَنَّ كُلَّ ذَلِكَ شَرِكٌ مُحَضٌّ عِنْدَ آلِ اللَّهِ ائِمَّةِ الْعَدْلِ لِأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَمْ يَزَلْ كَانَ عَالِماً بِمَا لَمْ يَكُنْ بِمَثَلِ مَا أَنَّهُ كَانَ حَيًّا وَ كَمَا أَنَّهُ لَا يَحْتَاجُ فِي حَيَاتِهِ بِوُجُودِ غَيْرِهِ فَلَا يَحْتَاجُ فِي عِلْمِهِ بِوُجُودِ مَعْلُومٍ...

Most of the Illuminationists [*al-ishráqiyyin*], the peripatetic philosophers, the followers of Mulla Sadrá (*as-Sadrá'iyyin*), and the Theosophical philosophers (*al-iláhiyyin*) have erred in their explanations of this station. The signs of the effulgences (*tajalliyát*) of creation were mistaken by them for the countenance of the Essence [of God]. Thus they went along with erroneous statements concerning the Eternal Archetypes (*a`yan thábita*) being in the Essence [of God] in order to establish His knowledge (praised be He); and with mention of the Uncompounded Reality in order to

establish causality (*`illiyya*) in the Essence [of God]; and with mention of the connection between the Essence [of God] and [His] actions and attributes; and with the mention of the oneness of Being (*wah.dat al-wujúd*) between the Creator (*mújid*) and the non-existent (*al-mafqúd*). All of this is absolute heresy (*shirk mahd.*) in the estimation of the family of God, the Imáms of justice, for God has always been the All-Knowing without the existence of anything in the same manner that He is Living (*bi-lá wujúd shay'in bi-mithli má anna-hu kana hayyan*). Just as He does not need for His being alive the existence of anything other than Him, He also does not need for His knowledge the existence of objects of knowledge.<sup>13</sup>

## Part 6 – The Mode of the Bab's Writings in Persian

Persian writings (*kalimát fársiyya*) – The style of the Báb's writings in Persian is completely without precedent, whether from the standpoint of vocabulary or phrasing. In the Persian *Bayán*, the nouns and adjectives are Arabic and the verbs, pronouns and particles are Persian. In Persian, the foundation of expression is the verb and a sentence without a verb is incomplete. Nouns and adjectives are in the position of details of the verb in the sentence. Therefore, the Persian *Bayán* is a book in the Persian language because its sentences are constructed on the basis of Persian verbs. However, the rest of the characteristics of these Persian sentences are Arabic, whether from the standpoint of words and vocabulary or from the stand point of phrasing or arrangement of the vocabulary. Furthermore, the arrangement of the words is according to Arabic sentence structure, not Persian. To demonstrate this, Behmardi proposes an experiment. First, he will take a verse from the first part of the Persian *Bayán* and separates it into its component parts:

خلق نفرموده / آیه / عرفان / خود را / در / هیچ / ش یی / الا / به عجز / کل شی / از /  
 عرفان او / و تجلی نفرموده / به شیئی / الا / به نفس او / از / لم یزل / متعالی بوده / از /  
 اقتران / به ش پپی / و خلق فرموده / کل شی / را / به ش آنی / که / کل / به کینونیت /  
 فطرت / اقرار کنند / نزد او / در / یوم / قیامت / به  
 اینکه / نیست / از برای او / عدلی / و نه / کفوی /

<sup>13</sup> I have used Moojan Momen's translation of this excerpt from the introduction to his translation of *Baha'u'llah's Tablet on the Uncompounded Reality*. Accessed April 8 2007.. However, Behmardi's manuscript seems to be more accurate and I have adjusted Momen's translation accordingly: "Illuminationists" for "Islamic," and "non-existent" for "the one who has gone astray" [I think this better describes the relationship between the absolute and the contingent implied in the word *mafqúd*]. Further, Momen incorrectly translates one portion as, "without the existence of anything having form and shape" (*shay'un bi-mithl ma inna-hu kana shayyár*), although he notes that this is a tenuous translation. Behmardi's version of the text makes the connection between this sentence and the following sentence clearer: *bi-lá wujúdi shay'in bi-mithli má anna-hu kana h.ayyan* ("without the existence of anything in the same manner that He is Living.")

khalq nafarmúdiḥ / áyat-i / `irfán-i / khud-rá / dar / hích / shay'í / illá / biḥ `ajz-i / kull-i shay' / az / `irfán-i uu / va tajallí nafarmúdiḥ / biḥ shay'í / illá / biḥ nafs-i uu / idh / lam yazal / muta`álí búdiḥ / az / iqtirán / biḥ shay'í / va khalq farmúdiḥ / kull shay'-rá / biḥ sha'ní / kih / kull / biḥ / kaynúniyyat / fit.rat / iqrár kunand / nazd-i uu / dar / yawm-i / qiyámat / biḥ iinkih / níst / az bará-yi uu / `adlí / va nah / kufuwi<sup>14</sup>

“He hath not created a sign of the knowledge of Himself in anything except by the inability of all things to know Him and He hath not manifested (Himself) to anything except to Himself, since He hath always been exalted above association with things and He hath created all things in such a manner that all (of creation) in their essential nature acknowledge in His presence on the Day of Resurrection that He hath no peer or likeness.”

Then Behmardi changes each word into the Arabic equivalent but does not change the syntax of the sentence.

لم يخلق / آية / عرفان / نفسه / في / اى / شئ / الا / بعجز / كل شئ / عن / عرفانه / ولم  
يتجل / بشئ / الا / بنفسه / اذ / لم يزل / كان متعالياً / عن / الاقتران / بشئ / و خلق / كل  
شئ / بشأن / ان / الكل / بكيونيه / الفطرة /

يقرون / لديه / في / يوم / القيامة / بان / ليس / له / عدل / ولا / كفو

lam yakhlūq / áyata / `irfáni / nafsīhi / fī / ayy / shay'in / illá / bi-`ajzi / kullī  
shay'in / `an / `irfánihi / wa lam yatajalli / bi-shay'in / illá bi-nafsīhi / idh /  
lam yazal / kána muta`áliyan / `an / al-iqtiráni / bi-shay'in / wa khalaqa /  
kulla shay'in / bi-sha'ni / anna / al-kulla / bi-kaynúniyyati / al-fit.rati /  
yuqirrána / ladayhi / fī / yawmi / al-qiyámati / bi-anna / laysa / lahu / `adlun  
/ wa lá / kufuwun<sup>15</sup>

The result is that the syntax of the “Persian” of the Báb is actually Arabic syntax. [!] This is the reason Persians cannot understand the Báb’s Persian writings.

<sup>14</sup> *Muntakhibát-i áyát az áthár-i H.ad.rat-i Nuqtih-yi Ulá*, 79.

<sup>15</sup> Behmardi’s note: “khalq nafarmúdiḥ,” “tajallí nafarmúdiḥ,” and “muta`álí búdiḥ” are in lieu of a single, complete Persian verb which are formed from Arabic words with a Persian verb suffix. This is one type of focus on the Arabic language in the Bayán, where Persian verbs are generally one Arabic word with the suffix: “farmúd – kard – namúd – gardíd – gasht – búd – mi-báshad – hast – shud.” [in other words, one looks to the Persian suffix for tense and person, but looks at the Arabic word for meaning.]

If a person knowledgeable of Arabic, but unfamiliar with the Writings, reads an Arabic translation of the Persian of the Báb (without altering the syntax), he would deem it eloquent. However, a Persian unfamiliar with the Writings would not be able to understand the Persian Writings of the Báb. Therefore, we can conclude that the Persian writings of the Báb are outwardly Persian but inwardly Arabic. This is not farfetched, as the Báb seems to allude to it in the *Ṣaḥífa `Adliyya* (p. 4), where He says that “Arabic truths” (*ḥaqíqat `arabiyyat*) have flowed from His “Persian verses” (*áyát-i `ajamiyyih*). Behmardi also remarks that the Báb’s penchant for Arabic nouns and adjectives in His Persian writings is also evident in the Guardian’s *Lawh-i Qarn*.<sup>16</sup>

## Part 7 – The Mode of Cryptic Esoterica

Cryptic esoterica (*ghawámiḍ-i asrár*) – Some of the writings of the Báb are sent down on the basis of the science of letters and numbers and circles and amulets (*hayákil*) and squares because He says in the Seven Proofs, regarding the *Kitáb al-Hayákil*:

از جملهء ادلاء متقنه علم كل شىء است در نفس واحد كه به حد اعجاز است اختراع آن،  
كه در كتاب ه ياكل واحد بيان اين علم مكنون مخزون شده و احدى قبل از اين مطلع نشده.

“Among the conclusive proofs is the knowledge of all things in a single individual, the elaboration of which is on the level of miraculous inimitability (*i`jáz*). This hidden and concealed knowledge has been explained in the *Kitáb-i Hayákil-i Wáhid*, nor was anyone aware of it before this.”<sup>17</sup>

Of course, just because some of the Writings of the Báb are in an obscure style is no proof that this has general applicability [i.e. that everything is cryptic esoterica]. It is only in subjects that don’t concern the general public and are revealed for the Báb’s inner circle [*kháṣṣán*]. Those that are for the general public have an accessible style that clarifies issues. Otherwise, they could not be held accountable for rejecting the Báb’s Message.

If this restriction of cryptic esoterica to things revealed to the inner circle is correct, then we can say that this type of revelation was written in different modes. For example, three different styles are used in one of the Báb’s Tablets for Baha’u’llah in the form of an amulet. First, there are verses

<sup>16</sup> In translating the example Behmardi gives, I have tried to adhere to the syntax of the Persian passage as much as possible in order to give a sense of what is going on in the original. Since it is actually Arabic syntax, it is possible to transfer this word order into English, although it sounds terribly clunky. If the passage were of more Persian syntax, this would be much more difficult since the verb would come at the end of the sentence.

<sup>17</sup> *Dalá’il-i Sab’ih*, 45-6. Translation from Denis MacEoin, *Rituals in Babism and Baha’ism* (London: British Academic Press, 1994, 17). MacEoin argues elsewhere that the *Kitáb-i Hayákil-i Wáhid* is actually the last five sections of the *Kitáb-i Panj Sha’n*. See MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Bábí Doctrine and History: A Survey* (Leiden: Brill, 1992, 89-90).

(*áyát*) in which the speaker is God and there is an end rhyme in the form of an accusative alif. The second portion is in the form of a prayer (*ad`iya*). The third portion of the Tablet is in the form of an orison (*khutab*). Therefore, writings that are considered to be cryptic esoterica, which are different in tone from other writings, do not have a special style. In other words, this type of writing has a specialized content, but not a specialized form. This specialized content is found both in scientific modes (*shu`ún`ilmiyya*) of writing and cryptic esoterica.

## Part 8 – Alteration of Verses

The alteration of verses (*taṣríf-i áyát*) is found in the Qur'an and the Writings of the Báb and Baha'u'llah. Indeed, it can be said that the alteration of verses is one of the characteristics of divine revelation. In Arabic, the word *taṣríf* means changing something from one form (*ṣura*) or mood (*ḥála*) or arrangement (*tarkíb*) to another form or mood or arrangement without changing the essence. For example, the definition of morphology (*`ilm aṣ-ṣarf*) is "a science which investigates the change of a word into different forms in accordance with the intended meaning."<sup>18</sup> For example, a person who exchanges money is called a money changer (*ṣarráf*). It is not only the exchange of one form of money [ie. dollars] for another form [quarters], but it is also the exchange of one type of money for another [pounds for dollars]. Therefore, the meaning of altering the verses of God is changing words from one style or arrangement to another style or arrangement, like changing from supplications to verses, or vice versa, without changing the content. For example, we see that in the writings of the Báb He mentions a subject in which there are numerous instances of alteration, while preserving the original statement, but with a change in the arrangement of the sentences. One well-known example of this is the alteration of the statements in the Dawn Prayer (*du`á-yi saḥar*).<sup>19</sup> In the Tablets of Visitation which the Báb revealed for the night of the halfway point (*laylat an-niṣf*) of the month of fasting,<sup>20</sup> He makes reference to the Dawn Prayer in three places but with three different alterations. The first alteration of the Dawn Prayer is when He says:

<sup>18</sup> Rashíd ash-Shartúní [1864/5-1906/7] *Mabádi' al-`Arabíyah fī al-sarf wa-al-nahw* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1979, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Behmardi's note: The Dawn Prayer is one of the well-known Shi'i prayers that begins with the expression, "O God! I beseech Thee by all of Thy most-glorious lights [as'aluka min kulli bahá'ika bi-abháhi]..." The names of the month for the Badí' calendar are taken from the text of this prayer. The text itself is located in `Abbás Qummí [d. 1941], *Mafátiḥ al-jinán* (Tehran: Cháp-i `ilmí, 1316 AH, 183-85).

<sup>20</sup> Behmardi's note: This Tablet of Visitation is to be recited on the tenth night of the fast. In this Tablet of Visitation, He says that it was revealed for "the Primal Tree and its Branches and whomsoever seeks shade beneath its canopy. Moreover, it is a remembrance for Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest." This Tablet of Visitation is still unpublished.



فانزل اللهم على تلك الشجرة في تلك الساعة في هذه الليلة كل بهاء قد احصيتها علمك و  
كل جلال قد احطت به علمك وكل جمال قد جمّلته في كتابك و كل عظمة قد احصيتها  
بعلمك الخ.

“O God! Send down every light [kull bahá] which Thou hast reckoned in Thy knowledge upon that Tree at this hour and on this night, and every glory [jalál] which Thy knowledge embraceth, and every beauty [jamál] with which Thou hast adorned Thy Book, and every majesty [ʿazama] which Thou hast reckoned in Thy knowledge.”

A second alteration is when He says:

سبحانك اللهم يا الهى لاسئلك من آياتك باعظمتها و من بهائك بلبهاه و من جلالك باجله و  
من جمالك باجمله و من نورك بانوره الخ

“Praise be to Thee, O Lord, my God! Verily, I beseech Thee by Thy majestic verses [la-asʿalunnaka min áyátika bi-ʿazamihá] and by Thy most glorious light [min baháʿika bi-abháhi] and by Thy sublime glory [min jaláluka bi-ajallihi] and by Thy most exquisite beauty [min jamáluka bi-ajmalihí] and by Thy most radiant light [min núrúka bi-anwarihi]...”

And in a third alteration:

انّ من بهاء الله ابهاه و من جلال الله اجله و من جمال الله اجمله و من عظمة الله اعظمها  
ومن نور الله انوره... عليك وعلى من لحقت بك الخ.

“Verily, upon you and upon him who is in thy presence be the most glorious light of God [min baháʿi allahi abháhi] and the sublime majesty of God and the most exquisite beauty of god and the most radiant light God.”

The alteration of the Dawn Prayer is also found in other Tablets of the Báb, such as the following:

و انّ بهاء من يظهره الله فوق كلّ بهاء و انّ جلاله فوق كلّ جلال و انّ جماله فوق كلّ  
جمال و انّ عظمته فوق كلّ عظمة الخ

“Verily, the light [bahá’a] of Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest is above every (other) light. Verily, His glory [jalálahu] is above every (other) glory. Verily, His beauty is above every (other) beauty. Verily, His majesty [‘azamatahu] is above every other majesty<sup>21</sup>

There is another kind of alteration that occurs in the Writings of the Báb, which is the translation of Arabic into Persian or Persian into Arabic. This is also found in the Writings of Baha’u’llah, as in the two sections revealed in the *Ziyárátnámih-yi Hurúfát ‘áliyyát*. One example of this type of alteration are given from Báb’s commentary on the Surat Kawthar:

و انّ العلماء لو ينشئوا ورقة ليتفكروا، و بعد ذلك لما انت تذكر كلماتهم بم ث قول صبی  
يقول بالفارسی پیپه

“Verily, if the ‘ulamá’ compose a page (of writing), they (must) ponder. After that, when you mention their words, its is like the speech of a child saying “pah pah” [bravo!] in Persian.”

The Báb then translates this passage in His *Şahífh-yi ‘Adliyyih*:

كلّ علما بعد از ملاحظهء كتب و تفكرها به چه مشقت ها يك خطبه انشاء می کنند و آخر الامر بعد از آنكه در مقابل این خطبات عظیمه می گذاری بمثل صبیان په په می گوید

“All of the ‘ulamá’, after perusing books and pondering them, with what difficulty they compose a single orison [khuṭbih]. Afterwards, in contradistinction to these grand orisons [those of the Báb], you proceed to say, like children: pah pah.”<sup>22</sup>

Behmardi then quotes a different Arabic passage from the Báb’s commentary on the Surat Kawthar and its Persian translation in His *Şahífh-yi ‘Adliyyih*.

Another type of alteration in the Writings of the Báb is the different modes of expression used to explain historical questions and the Báb’s state without changing the content. However, when a change in style occurs in a single text without interruption and before the point of transition in the subject matter, it is called *iltifát* (“sudden transition”) in literature. This is occurs frequently in the Writings of Baha’u’llah and the Báb. For example, there is a sudden transition from the mode of the orison (*khuṭba*) to the mode of prayer (*du‘á*) in the *Şahífh-yi Makhzúnih*:

<sup>21</sup> *Muntakhabát-i áyát az áthár-i h.ad.rat-i nuqtih-yi ulá*: 110-111.

<sup>22</sup> *Şahífh-yi ‘Adliyyih*: 11

الحمد لله الذي ألهم الخلق توحيده و لو لا الهامه لكانوا من المنس ين - انت يا الهى تبتدع  
بخلق المشيئة لا من شئ ابتداءً و تخترع الاشياء بفاضل مشيئتك اختراعاً.

“Praise be to God who hath inspired [alhama] all created things (with knowledge of) His divine Unity. If He had not inspired them [ilhámuhu], then they would be of those who forget – O my God! Thou dost create by the creative power of the Will [bi-khalqi'l-mashiyya] and from no other thing and fashion things by virtue of Thy Will.”

In the commentary on Surat Kawthar, the Báb changes from the mode of verses to the mode of prayer with no point of transition:

ان الله قد خلقكم بما قبلتم بقدر و كل صغير و كبير فى كتاب مستطر، وان اليوم كل المتقين  
فى جنات و نهر، ثم كل الكافرين فى ضلال و سحر – اللهم انك لتعلم ان الان قد نزل على  
كتاب مسطر، ممن اراد ان يوزن قسطاس العدل بلعجاز نخل منقعر

“Verily, God hath created you, inasmuch as you have obeyed the (divine) decree [qadar], and all things large and small are recorded in the Book. Verily, all those who have attained certainty are in Paradise and the river (of Paradise), and all those who have disbelieved are in error and the flames of hell – O God! Verily, thou knowest that at this moment it hath been sent down upon the recorded Book, from Him who hath desired to balance the scales of justice with ‘uprooted stumps of palm trees’ [Q 54:20].”<sup>23</sup>

## Part 9 – Concision, Disquisition, and Repetition

Both conciseness (ijáz) and elaborateness (tafṣīl) characterize the writings of the Báb. In some places, the Báb explains a subject very succinctly. The *Ṣaḥīfih-yi `Adliyya* is a good example of this. However, the Persian *Bayán* is among the most detailed of Báb’s writings. Among the succinct statements in the *Ṣaḥīfih-yi `Adliyya* is the following:

<sup>23</sup> With regard to alteration by translation, I have translated the two examples as literally as possible to show how the Báb uses Persian to flesh out the meaning of the Arabic. This also occurs in the Writings of Baha’u’llah, such as the *Lawh-i Bahá’*, where Baha’u’llah first reveals the Tablet in Arabic and then fully translates it in Persian. As to the abrupt change from one mode of writing to another without a point of transition (some phrase signaling a shift in style or content), this can be bewildering even for those fluent in the languages and can lead to an erroneous reading of the text.

ممکن نیست وصف ذات مقدّس او لاجل عدم وجود شریعی با او

“It is not possible to describe His sanctified essence due to the non-existence of something in relation to Him.”<sup>24</sup>

هر شریعی که اسم شئیّت به آن اطلاق شود سواى ذات الله خلق اوست

Also: “Everything that is called a ‘thing’, other than the essence of God, is His creation.”<sup>25</sup>

In some of the Báb’s writings, like the Persian *Bayán* and the *Kitáb al-Asmá*, divine wisdom dictates that subjects be explained with prolixity, perhaps so that someone’s doubts may be dispelled. In other words, the essence of the thought is given in great deal and not just alluded to. For example, the phrase given in the *Ṣaḥífiḥ-yi `Adliyya*, “Everything that is called a ‘thing’,” is explained in detail in the Persian *Bayán*:

خداوند نازل فرموده در بیان کلمه ای که جامع کلّ علم است و اون این است، اَتَنی انا الله  
لا اله الا انا و اَنْ ما دونی خلقی ان یا خلقی ایای فأتقون، و هر شئی که اطلاق شئیّت بر  
او می شود ما دون الله خلق اوست در حدّ ابداع و اختراع و انشاء و احداث الخ

“God revealed words in the *Bayán* that are the condensation (jámí) of all knowledge. The words are as follows: Verily, I am God, no God is there but me. Verily, that which is other than Me is My creation. O My creation! Fear God! Everything that is called a ‘thing’, other than God, is His creation at the point of (ḥadd) of origination, and fashioning, and construction, and bringing into existence.” (Sixth *báb*, third *wáhid*)

As explained before, one of the reasons for the revelation of a *bayán* is to clarify and explain in detail. In comparison with the Persian *Bayán*, the Arabic *Bayán* is succinct.

Another interesting aspect in the writings of the Báb is the repetition of words and phrases. In literature, repetition is usually employed for two reasons. First, to place emphasis on the subject. Second, to remind the reader or listener of something, because repetition of a subject or word or phrase several times fixes it in the mind and prevents people from forgetting it.

<sup>24</sup> *Ṣaḥífiḥ-yi `Adliyyih*, 1

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

Since one of the most important things in the writings of the Báb is divine Unity and Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest, there is a lot of repetition when these subjects appear. For example, in order to emphasize absolute divine unity, there is repetition of the names and attributes of God and praise and glorification of His essence, as in the Surat al-Mulk in the *Qayyúm al-Asmá* and in a letter to Mullá Báqir, a Letter of the Living<sup>26</sup>

In the *Qayyúm al-Asmá*, words like *ḥaqq* (Truth), *akbar* (most great), *kitáb* (book), and *nár* (fire) are frequently repeated. Moreover, *aqq* is repeated in most of the verses of the *Qayyúm al-Asmá*. For example, the word *ḥaqq* is repeated in the first Sura (al-Mulk) 47 times, in the second Sura (al-‘Ulamá’) 41 times, in the third Sura (al-Imán) 25 times, in the fourth Sura (al-Madína) 33 times, and so forth until the last Sura (al-Mu‘minín) where it is repeated 50 times, which is more than the number of its verses. Since it has been elsewhere claimed [by Behmardi] that repetition indicates something secret, what is the purpose of repeating *ḥaqq* so frequently?

Of course, the word does not have a single interpretation, but if one looks at other writings, it can illuminate the meaning. In this respect, if we look at Baha’u’llah’s *Tafsír Hurúf Muqatta’a* and the *Lawh al-Ḥaqq*, it becomes clear that the Báb is referring to Baha’u’llah when He uses the word “truth” in the *Qayyúm al-Asmá*, as Baha’u’llah states in the *Tafsír Hurúf Muqatta’a*:

... حينئذ يظهر نداء الاولى عن شجرة القصى عند اشراق الشمس مرة اخرى و هذا ما غنّت الورقاء فى قطب البقاء فى هذه الليلة الاحديّة التى توقد فيها نار الاحديّة من سدرّة السينا فى ظل اسم الاقدميّة والسرّ الازليّة الذى سمى بالحقّ القديم فى قیوم الاسماء ليشهدن كلّ الظهورات فى سرائر القلب بالخفيات بانه هو العزيز المقدر المهيمن المرنّ

“...At this moment the call of the First One is issuing once again from the remote Tree with the rising of the sun. This is that which the dove hath warbled in the midmost heart of eternity on this night of oneness in which the fire of oneness hath been enkindled by the Burning Bush in the shade of the Most Ancient Name and the Eternal Secret, who hath been called “the Ancient Truth” (al-ḥaqq al-qadím) in the *Qayyúm al-Asmá*, in order that all of the manifestations of the secrets hidden within the heart may bear witness that He is the Powerful, the Mighty, the Help in Peril, the Merciful.”

From this explanation we understand that the purpose of repeating the word *ḥaqq* in the *Qayyúm al-Asmá* is to prepare the Bábis and the people of the world to believe in the new manifestation of Truth and to stress the

<sup>26</sup> Mírzá Abú’l-Fadl Gulpáygání and Aqá Sayyid Mihdí Gulpáygání, *Kashf al-Ghitá’* (Beirut): 2, 4-5 [both examples are quoted].

importance of this subject. This is proof that it was mentioned directly and repetitively, not with hints and allusions.

## Part 10 – Ciphers & Tropes<sup>27</sup>

To say that the Báb speaks directly is not to say that His Writings are devoid of allusions and ciphers (*rumúz*). Of course, discerning the meaning of the allusions and ciphers used by the Báb is a task that future Baha'is will undertake. Some of these terms include “He Who has Seven Letters” (*dhát ḥurúf as-sab`a*, meaning `Alí Muhammad), “the Letter Sín” (*ḥarf as-sín*, meaning Mullá Husayn), and the “Kitáb-i Qáf and the Kitáb-i Alif” (meaning the Qur'an and the Gospel [injil]), the Letter Mím and the Letter Fá' (*ḥarf-i mím* and *ḥarf-i fá'*, meaning Moses and Pharaoh [fir`awn]), and so forth. Further, sometimes a string of sentences are dense with ciphers and allusions. For example, in the *Ṣaḥífa bayn al-Ḥaramayn*, the Báb says, “The triple-lettered word (*kalimat at-tathlith*) only refers to His Imam (*walíyih*, i.e. `Alí), and the quadruple-lettered word (*shakl at-tarbî`*) only refers to His Beloved (*ḥabíbihi*, i.e. Muhammad). Verily, the things united in all of grades (of existence) are separated by the manifestation of the union of these two words (i.e. `Alí Muhammad).”

The use of tropes (*majáz*) are another special characteristic of the writings of the Báb. A trope is not a cipher, since a trope goes beyond the external meaning of one word to indicate another meaning that the literal meaning of the word does not possess. However, ciphers are expressions that do have not the intended meaning in themselves. Forms, numbers, and letters can also be ciphers, like the form of the *haykal* represents the human being, and the number seven is a symbol for `Alí Muhammad or Husayn `Ali [because of the number of Arabic letters in their name], and the numbers five and nine indicate the Báb and Bahá', and the number fourteen indicates the Fourteen Infallible Ones, which the ciphers “Face” (*wajh*) or “Hand” (*yad*) represent. Therefore, a trope must be an expression whose outer form is understandable, but the speakers intention is something different. However, a cipher is a word or a letter or a number or a form that does not have the intended meaning in itself and the outer meaning is well-known and clear. The hidden, intended meaning can only be known by familiarity with the

<sup>27</sup> I imagine some people will object to my translation of *ramz* as “cipher” rather than “symbol” and *majáz* as “trope,” rather than “metaphor.” I think, however, that these translations are more in keeping with Behmardi's definitions, since he seems to draw on medieval discussions of these terms rather than modern ones, which would define a *ramz* in more Western terms. As for his definition of trope as something that “goes beyond the external meaning of one word to indicate another meaning that the literal meaning of the word does not possess,” I think it could be stated another way: the power of a trope is its multivalent connotations (its cultural and psychological associations), not its denotations (dictionary definitions). To understand the full implication of a trope, therefore, would require thorough knowledge of the writings of the author and the cultural associations of the readership (something Todd has tried to show in his work on the commentaries of the Báb). A cipher, on the other hand, can only be understood through initiation into the code language of the author(s) either through some sort of key or deciphering the code.

technical terminology used in the text, like the example of the “Letter Sín” seen above.

Among the tropes in the Writings of the Báb are words like “fire,” “light,” and “book” in the *Qayyúm al-Asmá* and “the Sun of Truth” (*shams-i ḥaqíqat*), and “the Tree of Truth” (*shajarih-yi ḥaqíqat*), and so on in the Persian *Bayán*. For example, in the *Qayyúm al-Asmá*, the word “fire” has several meanings. In some places it alludes to the blaze of Mt. Túr [i.e. Mt. Sinai], which is the Manifestation of the Cause of God in each theophany. In other places it alludes to Hell [gives two examples from the Surat as-Sirr and the Surat al-Mulk]. In both cases, the word “fire” has a well-known and clear meaning and can be found in the dictionary. However, that which is intended is something different from that which is in the dictionaries [this is the difference between denotation and connotation].

Sometimes, the Báb clarifies a subject figuratively and allegorically. This way of clarification uses parables, as found in the Persian *Bayán*, where the Báb speaks figuratively and allegorically of the ignorance of the People of the Bayán when Him Who God Shall make Manifest is among them:

و همچنین هر مقعدی محلّ يك نفس سزاوار است كه خالی گذارند زیرا كه دیده می شود  
كه در بیت خود من بطهره الله هم این قسم ظاهر است كه از مقعد آن منع می نمایند او را  
چونكه نمی شناسند او را لاحترام ملاحظه می نمایند ولی يوم ظهور او از او محتجب می  
مانند

“Furthermore, every chair is left empty for one deserving soul, which they have made vacant, since it is seen that in their house, Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest is in the outer section (of the house) because they prevent Him from sitting. They know Him not due to their respect for his name. However, He knows all and He laughs at the believers who, on account of His name, observe this type of flattery and respect, but on the day of the His manifestation they are veiled from Him.”<sup>28</sup>

In summary, the words of the Báb are understandable to everyone, otherwise they wouldn’t be a proof of His prophethood and a means for obtaining guidance. What stands in the way is the style, context, and technical vocabulary which is unfamiliar to most people. There are two reasons for this. Just as in past dispensations, the technical vocabulary of the Writings is initially unfamiliar [like the Qur’an for the Arabs]. The second reason (and in the author’s opinion, the most important), people become familiar with the abstruse and difficult philosophical, mystical and religious writings,

<sup>28</sup> First báb, ninth wáhid

which then become easy to understand. However, if that which they know is a hindrance, then they should turn to the words of God with their inner being so that no obstacles may remain in the way of understanding and recognizing the divine Writings.



## The Authority of the Feminine and Fatima's Place in an Early Work by the Bab<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Todd Lawson<sup>2</sup>

Toronto, Canada, University of Toronto, Institute of Islamic Studies

The power and authority of the millennial or apocalyptic imagination is fully evident in the success of the Babi movement of nineteenth-century Iran. Among the most striking and memorable features of Babism is surely the prominence, prestige, and religious authority acquired by the woman disciple of the Bab known as Tahirih. The famous Babi cleric, poet, martyr, and symbol of Iran's encounter with both its own history and the version of modernity proffered by the West is possibly more noted by posterity than the founder of the Babi movement himself because she represents both an apparent anomaly and a heroic symbol of modern female liberation. Tahirih after all left an unhappy marriage and her children to follow her revolutionary vision for a more just society. She was accomplished in a virtually completely male dominated milieu, the clerical. She traveled widely throughout Iran preaching to audiences of men and women the dawn of a new day, and most dramatically, she threw off her veil in public in direct defiance of social and religious norms. She was also a martyr. After the attempt on the life of the shah in 1851, Tahirih was strangled by her own silk scarf and buried in a well in the courtyard of a religious official in Tehran.

However much the story of Tahirih is appreciated by modern and contemporary feminists and suffragists, it is important to recognize that while her heroism may have inspired many in far-flung salons of Europe and eventually America, she is very much a daughter of her own culture, history, mythology, and religion. This assertion will perhaps be received with cynicism, for how could such a paternalistic and male-dominated religion and culture as Iranian Islam of the first half of the nineteenth century produce such a woman celebrity and champion of women's rights? Indeed, it has never been established that Tahirih was a champion of women's rights<sup>3</sup>. What we know is that she was a deeply religious mystic who felt a new day arising in the world. She was a messianic player. But it was not accidental that she was a woman, and it is not without consequence for the history of the Babi movement, which though it passed from the stage of history more or less a failure, it nonetheless gave rise to several other trends and movements in Iran whose influence may still be felt. Tahirih the

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<sup>1</sup> In remembrance of Elizabeth Martin.

<sup>2</sup> The following is a revised version of an article that originally appeared in *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the Marja' Taqlid*, edited by Linda Walbridge, Oxford University Press: New York, 2001, pp. 94-127.

<sup>3</sup> Susan S. Maneck, "Women in the Baha'i Faith" *Religion and Women*, Arvind Sharma (ed.), Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1994, 211-27.

Babi walked, it seems, right out of the poems, songs, and higher forms of religiocultural literature as the return of Fatima. It was a sacred performance.

Tahirih, whose full name was Fatima Zarrin Taj Baraghani, Qurrat al-'Ayn, was seen by a large number of her fellow Babis as the "return," or reincarnation, of Fatima, the daughter of the prophet Muhammad and wife of the first Imam, 'Ali. Whether this exemplifies reincarnation or transmigration remains to be addressed. It is indisputable, however, that Baraghani was seen by the Babis (and perhaps herself) as the personification of those virtues and attributes that Fatima had come to symbolize for the Iranian Shi'i community. At the most superficial level, her name was Fatima and her cognomen Tahirih was first applied to her holy ancestor, as was the other name by which she is so widely known, Qurratu'l-'Ayn, "Solace of the eyes." As an antitype of the Fatima known and venerated by nineteenth-century Iranian Muslims, she may be expected to be rather distinctive. The Fatima of the Bab's Qur'an commentary is particularly useful as a function of many different factors: she is a bearer of religious authority (*walaya*: see the discussion that follows for a further elaboration of the meaning of this term); she is a focus of religious devotion and meditation, an icon, as it were, without which the spiritual and religious life may be considered incomplete; she is seen as the embodiment of the spiritual reality of the earth itself, a cosmogonic principle, and at the same time a recurrent actor in a historical drama that will lead ultimately to the long-awaited Day of Resurrection. An examination of the Fatima in this commentary, written before the actual formation or founding of the Babi movement, will help us to understand how many of the Bab's contemporaries saw Tahirih (i.e., the nineteenth-century religious scholar and poet) and, perhaps most important, how Tahirih saw herself. On this latter question, Abbas Amanat has offered the following interesting suggestion:

Frustrations in her family life and persecutions in her Babi career both served as impetuses for inspirations that she transposed into a religious paradigm; what she terms "the state of primal truth." By assuming the symbolic role of Fatima, she envisaged a feminine model – a "primal truth," as she called it – that substantially differed from the role assigned to Fatima in the Islamic, more particularly Shi'ite, tradition as the daughter of the Prophet, the wife of 'Ali, and the mother of Hasan and Husayn; the role that guaranteed her sanctitude (sic) by lineage, marriage, and motherly love. Qurrat al-'Ayn's Fatima was one of independent will and action. The leadership she assumed in the 'Atabat and later at Badasht was the realization of this paradigm.... The only solution she saw, for women and men alike, was a break with the past, and as the first step, a deliberate infringement of religious norms. To find her in the forefront of Babi radicalism and an advocate of progressive revelation is only logical. Her initiation in the Letters of the Living, on the other hand, was an

acknowledgment of her equal place with men in the first unit of the ideal Babi order of All-Beings.<sup>4</sup>

This study suggests that it was not so much a break with the past – that is, the past as "primal truth" – as the revivifying of it that is really at work in the rise of the Babi movement and perhaps its most famous proponent, the woman Tahiriḥ. Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad and wife of 'Alī was, according to tradition, something of an activist, such as it could be expressed within the confines of seventh-century Arabia. And it seems clear that tradition honors Fatima for her heroism, a brief outline of which is offered below. In the introduction to his *Persian Bayan*, written after 1848, the Bab specifies that his first followers, the eighteen Letters of the Living, are the return of the Fourteen Immaculate Ones, the Family of God plus the historical four emissaries of the disappeared twelfth Imam, Muhammad ibn Hasan al-'Askari (disappeared in 873-74) who successively represented the highest authority in the Shi'i world from that time until 949-50.<sup>5</sup> Thus Tahiriḥ not only "assumed the role" of Fatima. She was Fatima.

In the course of this article I also demonstrate that the Bab did not invent such doctrines out of whole cloth, but rather his ideas are, in the main, consonant with the general position of Fatima in Shi'i religiosity, piety, and mysticism. Most important is Fatima's recognized status as an equal bearer of religious authority (*walaya*) along with the Imams and Muhammad the prophet.<sup>6</sup> In order to demonstrate more fully how someone like Tahiriḥ could acquire the prestige and power she undoubtedly had within her milieu, I delineate the main features of the doctrine of *walaya* as it had developed within Ithna 'Ashari Shi'ism by the first half of the nineteenth century.

## Walaya

In the course of this examination of the religious authority of Fatima, I clarify that however much the eventual course of the Babi movement was at odds with the religious status quo of mid-nineteenth-century Iran, at its core was a cluster of beliefs shared in common with orthodox Shi'i Islam. The heart of all Shi'ism centers on the strong veneration of the first Imam, 'Alī

<sup>4</sup> Amanat, Abbas. *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844-1850*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989, 331

<sup>5</sup> *The Persian Bayan of Sayyid Ali Muhammad Shirazi, the Bab*, 1.2, tr. Dr. Denis MacEoin, [The Second Chapter of the First Unity: \[H-Bahai\] Translations of Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Texts](#) (July, 1997-)

<sup>6</sup> Such a status is reflected in the words of Ali Shariati: "She herself is an Imam...." ('Ali Shariati, *Fatima Is Fatima*, trans. L. Bakhtiu [Tehran: The Shariah Foundation, (1980)], p. 225. For important recent scholarship on Fatima see the writings of Muhammad Ali Amir Moezzi: "Aspects de l'Imamologie Duodécimaine I: Remarques sur la Divinité de l'Imam", *Studia Iranica*, 1996, 25(2), 193-216; "Cosmogony and Cosmology in Twelver Shi'ism," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. 6, pp. 317-322; (in collaboration with Jean Calmard), "Fatimah, daughter of the Prophet Mohammad," *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. 9, pp. 400-404; *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*. Tr. David Streight. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, passim. The recent lucid discussion of the general development of the religio-literary image of Fatima will also be of interest: Verena Klemm, "Image Formation of an Islamic Legend: Fatima, the Daughter of the Prophet Muhammad," in Sebastian Günther (ed.), *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, Leiden & Boston: E. J. Brill, 2005, 181-208.

ibn Abi Talib (d. 661) (and his wife and the Prophet's daughter, Fatima) as the guardian, protector, and true friend of those who have acknowledged his station as the immediate successor of the Prophet Muhammad. For this reason he is known as *wali*, and the quality of his authority is called *walaya*, frequently (and inadequately) rendered "sainthood."<sup>7</sup> There is in Shi'ism no notion more fundamental than this. It will be seen, perhaps not surprisingly, that the idea was just as central to the Bab's thought, as it is to Shi'ism in general. Also, it will be seen that belief or faith (*iman*) is conditioned by the degree to which one accepts and testifies to the *walaya* of the so-called Family of God (*al Allah*).<sup>8</sup> This family consists of the Prophet Muhammad, 'Ali, and Fatima, and the eleven other Imams. No deed, no matter how meritorious, is acceptable unless it has been performed by one who has fully confessed the truth of this *walaya* as borne by the Family of God. Moreover, such *walaya* has existed from eternity, much like the so-called "Muhammadan light" and numbers among those who have recognized it the prophets Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. As an eternal principle, it remains an imperative for all would-be believers at all times: through acceptance or rejection of this spiritual authority, one determines the fate of one's soul.

*Walaya* is implicated in the fourth of five pillars of belief of traditional Ithna 'Ashari Shi'ism, which are (1) Divine Unity (*tawhid*), (2) Prophethood (*nubuwwa*), (3) the Resurrection/Return (*ma'ad*), (4) the Imamate (*imama*), and (5) Divine Justice (*'adl*). In Shi'ism prophetic authority ended with the death of Muhammad (632), but the Prophet is understood as having two types of mutually complementing authority: the one, connected with the office of prophethood (*nubuwwa*); the other, in some ways a more general, yet at the same time purer (and therefore higher) type of authority connected with the office of guardianship (*walaya*). This teaching is based on the Qur'an, where the noun *wali* occurs in several important contexts. Most important for this discussion are all those Qur'anic verses that describe God as the wall of the believers<sup>9</sup> or the single verse that says that *walaya* belongs to God alone (18:44). The general meaning of *wali* in these instances is "protector," "friend," and "guardian." By extension, and in the context of the most urgent doctrinal need of the Shi'i community, namely to explain the system of distinctive leadership which it developed, *walaya* came to mean "religious authority": believers are bound to obey what God, their best friend and guardian, ordains. The "Family of God," to use the Bab's distinctive terminology, are the only conduits of this divine protective friendship, particularly in the context of the earliest struggles for leadership

<sup>7</sup> This word is sometimes vowelized as *wilaya* and frequently nice distinctions are made between the two spellings in which *walaya* refers to spiritual authority and *wilaya* refers to political authority. Linguistically and etymologically there is no basis for this distinction. One important Shi'i lexicon states that the vowelizing is optional and the word connotes both political/temporal and spiritual power. A. Isfahani, *Tafsir Mir' at al-Anwar wa Mishkat al-Asrar*, Tehran: Chapkhaneh Aftab, 1874/1954, 337-38).

<sup>8</sup> I prefer "Family of God" as a translation for this term to "clan of God" found throughout Amanat, because of the obvious differences in connotation and denotation it carries: nearness, intimacy, and familiarity. These persons are seen as the Holy Family in Shi'ism, not the Holy Clan.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Qur'an 2:107; 2:160; 2:257; 3:68; 6:51; 6:70; 9:112; 13:37; 18:26; 29:22; 32:4; 42:8; 42:9; 42:28; 42:31.

within the Islamic community where one could make the error of choosing the wrong "protecting friend" as a leader. Shi'ism says that this is precisely what happened to those Muslims who chose Abu Bakr and the other two early caliphs as leaders.<sup>10</sup> While prophethood is in some sense superior to guardianship because only a prophet receives revelation through direct inspiration (*wahy*) and the task of a prophet is to establish a code of law (*shari'a*), *walaya* is essential because only through this office or institution can true religious authority be continued beyond the death of the prophet. Furthermore, it is thought to be superior to *nubuwwa* because unlike that institution, it is related directly to God. God is frequently called a *wali* in the Qur'an, but never a *nabi*. In this way *walaya* is seen to be a divine attribute certainly shared by all prophets, with *nubuwwa* representing in some ways a subfunction of *walaya*. Postprophetic guardians (*awliya'*) do not have *nubuwwa*; it is only by virtue of their *walaya* that they have authority in the community to interpret (never reveal) scripture. But their interpretation has the authority of revelation.

Another complementary meaning of the term *walaya* is kinship, closeness, allegiance and, in some ways, intimacy. A bearer of *walaya* is thus seen to enjoy an especially close relationship to, in this case, God. This feature of the word has lent it so well to all those contexts in the Islamic tradition which have to do with sanctity and saintship.<sup>11</sup> To take a recent example, it was on the basis of these factors that Ayatollah Khomeini (d. 1989) formulated the influential and politically astute doctrine known as "The Guardianship of the Jurist" (*Vilayat-i faqih*), through which he demonstrated to the satisfaction of his numerous followers that the decisions and opinions of the godly jurist are guided by the unerring (*ma`sum*) hand of the Hidden Imam and would therefore be identical with His teaching. Furthermore, these rulings and opinions would somehow represent the very presence of God and the Hidden Imam, a figure with almost ineffable sacral and charismatic authority and power. Earlier examples of the usage have been recently singled out as possibly the most important factor at play in the spiritual authority of the Sufi shaykh or *pir* from very earliest times in Islam.<sup>12</sup> It is something of a truism that the Shi'i Imam is the analogue of the Sufi shaykh (or vice versa). One reason is that the basic understanding and function of the term *walaya* seems to be fairly constant across the borders that otherwise separate the two. The point is that concern with *walaya* means concern with power and authority. In the early work by the Bab, there is a great deal of concern with *walaya*. In this study we are interested mainly in the *walaya* and spiritual authority of Fatima. It is with an enhanced appreciation of this topic that the remarkable life of Tahiri,

<sup>10</sup> The most recent scholarly treatment of the key events and personalities in the drama that unfolded after the death of the Prophet is Madelung, Wilferd. *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Hermann Landolt, "Walayah," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, and now the appropriate passages in Amir-Moezzi, *Divine Guide*, index s.v. *walaya*, *wali*, *awliya'*.

<sup>12</sup> Bernd Radtke and John O'Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism*, London: Curzon Press, 1996.

and the religious leadership of women, can be better understood within the context of nineteenth-century Iran.

### Usuli/Akhbari Debate

Before we turn directly to the writings of the Bab on this topic, it is important to summarize, in very general terms, some of the pertinent historical developments in Shi'i legal theory that serve as immediate background to his career. By the time the Bab was writing, which was very close to the time of the fulfillment of the Shi'i eschaton, a thousand years having elapsed since the disappearance of the Twelfth/Hidden Imam, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-`Askari, a long-standing dispute among religious scholars had been rumbling for a number of decades. This dispute had to do precisely with the way religious authority (*walaya*) would be expressed and recognized among the believers and is known as the Akhbari/Usuli debate. Although the Usuli position eventually won the day, it is important to know what was at stake. In one sense, this dispute can be characterized as "reason vs. revelation." The Akhbari position was against the institutionalization of "independent jurisprudence" (*ijtihad*), and the Usuli position upheld it. At stake, then, was not only a more or less abstract legal theory, but also the potentially powerful office of *mujtahid*, independent legal scholar, whose findings in all aspects of religion would be binding upon the believers. These findings were derived through resort to so-called sources (*usul*: roots) by the legal thinker or jurisprudent (*faqih*): (1) Qur'an, (2) Sunna, or (3) Qiyas/Analogy. The process whereby these elements were employed to derive a solution for a legal problem is called *ijtihad* - "independent intellectual exertion." The Akhbaris asserted that there was only one legal authority, namely, the Hidden Imam, the bearer of *walaya* for this time, and that in such a circumstance there was in effect only one *mujtahid* whom the faithful were required to emulate and follow, namely the Hidden Imam. Thus the Akhbari position threatened the social standing of an elite group of highly qualified legal experts by asserting that each believer was to work out their own "salvation" through contemplation of the sources of religion: 1) the Qur'an and 2) the Sunna. The name Akhbari comes from the word used to refer to the thousands of traditions - *akhbar*, sing. *khavar*, sometimes called *hadith* - that preserve the Sunna of not only the Prophet, but the other thirteen immaculate ones, the twelve Imams and Fatima. The Akhbaris taught that each believer had direct access to the truth through reading the Qur'an and this supplementary material. The Usuli position was eventually to lead to the establishment of the important institution known as *marja`-i taqlid*, "one who is to be [blindly] imitated in matters of religion."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> On this topic see Kohlberg, Etan. "Abu Turab." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 1978, 347-52.; "From Imamiyya to Ithna-Ashariyya." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39 (1976), 521-34.; "The Development of the Imami Shi'i Doctrine of jihad." *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgandlandischen Gesellschaft* 1976, 126, 64-86.; Newman, Andrew Joseph III. *The Development and Political*

In the process of winning the battle, Usulis argued heavily against the kind of mystical or intuitive communion with the Hidden Imam that made the Akhbari position feasible. In so doing, they argued very persuasively for the superiority of the rational faculty and the use of reason. One response to this argument would come in the form of the teachings of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i (d. 1826) and his successor, Sayyid Kazim Rashti (d. 1843), who throughout their works cautioned against the elimination of the mystical or intuitional aspects of religion and argued, in compelling language, for an epistemology composed of equal parts of reason and "revelation." The Shaykhi position won many supporters precisely because it rescued, in a reasonable manner, the mystical noetic so dear to the Persian soul.<sup>14</sup> The Bab's writings, especially the ones examined in this article, are perhaps an equally strenuously (if differently) argued mysticism. As we will see, the Bab's source of authority is the Qur'an and the Family of God and no one or nothing else.<sup>15</sup>

### The Bab's Writings

There has been a tendency to regard the *Tafsir surat Yusuf* as the first work of any significance written by the Bab, but this is wrong.<sup>16</sup> The *Tafsir surat al-Baqara* – a work that has been habitually ignored by persons writing on the Babi religion – is really the Bab's first major religious work. It first became known in the West through E. G. Browne, who discussed it and the circumstances under which he received a copy, in an article written in 1892.<sup>17</sup> (It had been sent to him by Mirza Yahya Subh-i Azal, who had

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*Significance of the Rationalistic (Usuli) and Traditionalist (Akhbari) Schools in Imami Shi'i History from the Third/Ninth to the Tenth/Sixteenth Century A.D.* Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Service, 1986.

<sup>14</sup> On the Shaykhi teachings see Juan R. I Cole, "[Individualism and the Spiritual Path in Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i](#)," *H-Bahai Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies* 1/4 (September, 1997).; "The World as Text: Cosmologies of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i," *Studia Islamica*, 1994, 80, 1-23; Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shiite Iran*. Translated by Nancy Pearson, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977. [Hereafter *Corbin*]; Corbin, Henry. *En Islam iranien*. 4 vols. Paris: Gallimard, 1971-72. [Hereafter *EII*]; Rafati, Vahid. *The Development of Shaykhi Thought in Shi'i Islam*. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1979

<sup>15</sup> On the subtle, amphibolous, and powerful relationship between Imam and Text, see Todd Lawson, "[Reading Reading Itself: The Bab's 'Sura of the Bees,' A Commentary on Qur'an 12:93 from the Sura of Joseph-Text, Translation and Commentary](#)" *H-Bahai Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies* 1/5 (November, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Even as recently as 1989, we find the following statement on the date of the *Tafsir surat Yusuf*: "As far as can be verified, up to this time [when he produced the *Tafsir surat Yusuf*] the Bab had not produced any work of significance, and it was only during his encounters with his early believers that he became fully aware of his talent for producing Qur'anic commentaries." Amanat, *Resurrection*, 172-73. Manuscript: *Tafsir Surat Yusuf* by the Bab" (1) Haifa, Baha'i World Centre: (QA)

<sup>17</sup> Edward , 637-710, "A Catalogue and Description of 27 Babi Manuscripts," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1892, 24, 493-99. Azal, like his half-brother Baha'u'llah, had been a follower of the Bab from the early days. As a result of disagreements between himself and Baha'u'llah, he became the leader of the Azali faction of the Babis. Browne received a great number of Babi manuscripts from him. In this article Browne quotes a passage from the *Tarikh-i Jadid* which recounts the conversion of the young Shaykhi Mulla Husayn Bushru'i to the cause of the Bab in May 1844. While Mulla Husayn was visiting the Bab in the latter's home, he discovered a commentary on the *Surat al-Baqara*. Reading some of it, he was impressed by the merits of the work and asked his host who its author was. The Bab said that he in fact had written the work. This story relates that Mulla Husayn was puzzled by one of the passages in the work: "the explanation of the inmost of the inmost" (*tafsir-i batin-i batin*). Mulla Husayn is reported to have said: This appeared to me to be an error, and I remarked, "Here it should

received it from a scribe in Tehran.) By virtue of the number of existing manuscripts of this work that he enumerated, Denis MacEoin rekindled interest in it as a valuable source for the history and doctrines of the Babi movement.<sup>18</sup> Through further research it has become clear that the Bab's *Tafsir surat al-Baqara* enjoys a unique and heretofore unappreciated significance for a study of the growth and development of the Babi religion. MacEoin may have been correct when he suggested that it is much less likely to have been corrupted by partisans of the later Baha'i/Azali dispute because of its status as a preproclamation work.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, such corruption may be a red herring, since a study of a number of manuscripts of the later and much more famous and pivotal *Tafsir surat Yusuf* reveals very little willful tampering with the text.<sup>20</sup> But MacEoin is certainly correct in his assertion that "since this *tafsir* is the only extended work of the Bab's written before May 1844 [when he made his momentous claims public] and still extant, it is indisputably of unique importance as a source of concrete evidence for the development of his thought in the six months or so that led up to the initial announcement of his prophetic claim."<sup>21</sup> Insofar as this first major work was also a *tafsir*, its interest goes beyond the confines of a study of a specific heresy to engage with the greater Islamic tradition itself on the common ground of the Qur'an.

Indeed, it is of some significance that this first major work by the Bab is a commentary on the *Surat al-Baqara*, or Sura of the Cow (in actual fact, it is a commentary on both the *Surat al-Fatiha*, the first sura and the *Surat al-Baqara*, the second sura), a sura sometimes regarded by exegetes as "the Qur'an in miniature" because in it are found many of the same concerns,

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be 'the inmost,' and they have written 'the inmost of the inmost.'" "What can I say?" [the Bab] answered, "the author of the Commentary lays claim to even more than this of greatness, glory, and knowledge. Consider the passage attentively." I did so, and said, "It is quite correct. But I am wearied. Do you read and I will listen." He read for a time, and then, as men are wont, I said, "It is enough. Do not trouble yourself further." Browne, *Catalogue*, 496-97. While this account is important for the history of the *Tafsir Surat al-Baqara*, it raises the question of why Mulla Husayn should have been stopped by such an expression. The *tafsir* does in fact employ it, although Browne was unable to locate it in his manuscript. It also seems logical to assume that Mulla Husayn would have been quite conversant with such language. The writings of both Shaykh Ahmad and Sayyid Kazim contain many allusions not only to the *batin al-batin*, but also to the *batin batin al-batin*, *Whir al-batin*, and so forth. The young Mulla may have wanted to say that this particular passage deals only with the *batin* and should not therefore have been referred to as an explanation of the "inmost of the inmost." It may be that the passage was left out of Browne's manuscript because it was thought to damage the credibility of the Bab. Or it could be an apocryphal tale designed to present the Bab as more learned than Mulla Husayn. *Tafsir surat al-baqara* (ms.) by the Bab, Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad Shirazi, Tehran Bahai Archives 6014C [Baq]. Additional manuscripts: Cambridge University Library, Browne Or. Ms. F8. (C); Leiden University Library, Or.4971 (Ar.2414). Item No. 8. (L); *Majmu'ah-ye Athar Hadrat-i A'la*, 156-410. (1).

<sup>18</sup> Denis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History: A Survey* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 46-47.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>20</sup> Todd Lawson, "Interpretation as Revelation: The Qur'an Commentary of Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad Shirazi, the Bab (1819-1950)" In *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew L. Rippin. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, 223-53.

<sup>21</sup> MacEoin, *Sources*, 47. Extant works that were probably written by the Bab before the *Tafsir Surat al-Baqara* include the short Arabic Risalat fi al-Suluk (on which see MacEoin, *Sources*, 44-45). For a translation and description of this short epistle, see Todd Lawson, "[The Bab's 'Journey towards God': Translation and Text](#)," In *H-Bahai Translations of the Shaykhi, Babi and Bahai Texts* 2/1 (January, 1998b). Manuscript: *Tehran Baha'i Archives*, 6006.C: (S)



ordinances, conceits, and images found throughout the book. A commentary on this sura by any given author would therefore tend to reveal the way he would approach the entire Qur'an. It may be, in fact, that the Bab had intended to produce a commentary on the whole Qur'an at this time. He is said to have later produced no less than nine complete commentaries on the Qur'an during his incarceration in Azerbaijan.<sup>22</sup> Why he would have suspended such a project at this earlier date is open to speculation. We do know, however, that it was shortly after the completion of the commentary on the first part<sup>23</sup> of the Qur'an that Mulla Husayn Bushru'i made his visit to Shiraz, during which time the Babi movement may be said to have been born. Such a dramatic occurrence might possibly have had the effect of deflecting the Bab's attention from such a "merely literary" project to concentrate on newer and more important developments. One of these developments was the composition of another *tafsir* (the *Qayyum al-Asma* or *Tafsir surat Yusuf*) of such a startlingly different nature from this earlier work that the two might be thought to have been written by two different authors, though in reality this is probably not the case.<sup>24</sup>

The radical interpretation of several passages in the *Surat al-Baqara* as speaking directly to the subject of *walaya* is not an innovation of the Bab's but has characterized a strong tendency in Shi'i exegesis from the earliest times.<sup>25</sup> This is clarified in notes in the following text that direct the reader to similar interpretations in classical literature. Of interest here is that such a commentary was written by one who was not a member of the ulama class, but rather a young merchant. The nature of the commentary shows that there was a perceived need to reassert, revalorize, relocate, or perhaps take possession of this cardinal Shi'i doctrine. Why such a need was felt at this particular time and within the Iranian merchant class, has been discussed at length by scholars concerned with the social history of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Iran. The following discussion attests to the degree to which this need was felt, and the consequences it had for the interpretation of scripture. Here we begin to understand why the *Tafsir surat al-Baqara* provides invaluable information about the development

<sup>22</sup> Zarandi, Mulla Muhammad (Nabil). *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Baha'i Revelation*, tr. and ed. Shoghi Effendi. Wilmette, Ill.: Bahai'i Publishing Trust, 1974, 31

<sup>23</sup> Literally *juz'*. The Qur'an is divided in thirty more or less equal parts (*ajza'*) for liturgical purposes, enabling the believer to read equal parts of the text on successive days of the sacred month of Ramadan, for example. The first part includes the first sura, al-Fatiha, the Opening, consisting of seven verses and the first 141 verses of the *Surat al-Baqara*. The *Surat al-Baqara* comprises roughly two and one-half parts. It is the longest sura of the Qur'an.

<sup>24</sup> This much more famous second work, the *Qayyum al-Asma*, appears to be the first work written after the commentary on *al-Baqara*. By its special structure it actually may be considered a commentary on the entire Qur'an. Thus, if it had been the Bab's desire to produce a complete *tafsir* at this early stage, he may be seen as having accomplished this task though in a radically and unpredictably untraditional form. For a fuller description of this second commentary, see Lawson "Interpretation as Revelation."

<sup>25</sup> If the basic conclusion of this paper is correct, namely that the Babi movement represents an efflorescence of themes, motifs, and religiosity associated with the earliest extremist Shi'is, then Halm's statement, referring to the Ahl-i Haqq and the Nusayris, needs to be reassessed: "Descendants of the Kufan *ghulat* have survived to the present time in two mountainous areas of retreat, far from the centres of political power and from Sunni as well as Shi'ite orthodoxy.... The Nusayris are the only Islamic sect to preserve the unbroken tradition of the Kufan *guluw*." Heinz Halm, *Shiism*, trans. J. Watson, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991, 158-59.

of the Bab's religious ideas.

### **Walaya in the Bab's Earliest Work**

The subject of *walaya* is introduced very early in the *tafsir* where reference is made to the *Absolute Walaya* (*walayatuhi al-mutlaqa*) of `Ali. In the following pages, Qur'an citations are presented in small capital letters in order to make as clear as possible the connection between the words of the commentator and the sacred text. In the course of the Bab's commentary on the second verse of the Fatiha, "Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds," the verse is said to be the book (*kitab*) of `Ali, in which God has placed all the principles (*ahkam*) of Absolute Walaya pertaining to it. It is designated here, the Paradise of the Inclusive Unity (*jannat al-wahidiya*), whose protection has been reserved for all those who affirm `Ali's *walaya*.<sup>26</sup>

In this very brief statement, certain important terms are introduced, which play a key role throughout the rest of the *tafsir*. Apart from the word *walaya* (guardianship, friendship), the designation *wahidiya* occurs over and over again throughout the work. It is descriptive of one of the degrees of divinity which constitute the whole hierarchical metaphysical structure of the world. It is the degree immediately inferior to the divine Exclusive Unity (*ahadiya*). Such terminology betrays the influence of the so-called *wahdat al-wujud* school associated with Ibn `Arabi. Suffice it here to say that the *Absolute Walaya* represents a theoretical position at least one remove from the Ultimate. A third ontic level, "existence as an expression of divine mercy," is associated with Fatima. We will return to this presently.<sup>27</sup>

The choice of the word *principles* (*ahkam*) has several connotations. In this short introductory sentence to the *tafsir* on the Fatiha, the Bab characterizes this opening chapter of the Qur'an as containing seven clear verses (*ayat muhkamat*). The hermeneutic polarities of *mutashabihat/muhkamamat* represent one of the oldest concerns of *tafsir* in general and have occasioned much speculation on the part of exegetes of all schools and attitudes. The

<sup>26</sup> Baq., pp. 8 and 1, p. 156: *qad ja 'alaha Allahu zillaha li-man aqarra bi-walayatihi*; C, f.2b: *qad ja'ala Allahu...* Repeated reference throughout this commentary to *ahadiya*, *wahidiya*, *rahmaniya*, and so on constitutes one of its more distinguishing characteristics. The terminology comes originally from Ibn `Arabi (638/1240) and its use here by the Bab offers yet another example of how the work, if not the thought, of one of history's greatest mystics had thoroughly permeated Iranian Shi'i spiritual discourse (*'irfan*) by this time. For a study of these terms as they were received by Ibn `Arabi's student Qunawi and others, see William Chittick, "The Five Divine Presences," *Muslim World*, 1982, 72, 107-28. (See also the critique of this article: Hermann Landolt "Review of W. Chittick, 'The Five Divine Presences- From al-Qunawi to al-Qaysari.' *Studia Iranica*, Suppl. 8, 1985, #488, p. 126.) Briefly, the term *ahadiya* represents the highest aspect of the Absolute about which we can notion (if one may use a noun as a verb) but does not, of course, define the Absolute that must always be beyond whatever occurs about it in our minds- The term *wahidiya* refers to the second highest aspect of the Absolute, the aspect that involves the "appearance" of the divine names and attributes. See also `Abd al-Razzaq al-Kashani, *al-Istilahat al-Sufiyya*, edited by Muhammad Kamal Ibrahim Ja'far, Cairo: al-Hai'at al-Misriyat al-'Amma li'l-Kitab, 1981, 25,47. The proper understanding of this technical terminology has been a subject of scholarly debate in Iran for centuries.

<sup>27</sup> Etymologically feminine, *rahmaniya*, from the Arabic word for "womb," is the abstract noun mercifulness. Ibn Arabi seems to be the one responsible for characterizing the existentialization of creation as an act of mercy, an expression of *rahmaniya*.

primary idea is that the Qur'an contains both ambiguous and unambiguous verses. At the most basic level, these are thought to be divided between straightforward legal prescriptions and the rest of the book. The terminology here is taken from Qur'an 3:7:

He it is who has sent down to thee the Book. In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning) [*muhkamat*]. They are the foundation of the Book [*umm al-kitab*]. Others are allegorical [*mutashabihat*]. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings [*ta'wil*]. But no one knows its hidden meanings [*ta'wil*] except God. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in the Book, the whole of it is from our Lord." And none will grasp the message except those who have understanding.

With this *aya* comes one of the more fundamental differences between the Sunni and Shi'i exegetes who disagree about its grammar and syntax. The above translation represents the "Sunni" reading. A Shi'i reading would be: "And none knows its interpretation save God and those firmly rooted in knowledge" (*al-rasikhun fi'l -'ilm*). These *rasikhun* are of course the Imams, in the first place, and in the second place, at least amongst the Usulis, the *mujtahids*. So understood, the designation of the verses of the Fatiha as unambiguous strongly suggests that the Bab read them as having a positive and binding relationship with a true understanding of the Book. Seen in this light, his statement that verse 2 of the Fatima ordains belief in the Absolute *Walaya* of `Ali must be taken as divine law, binding upon the believer in the same way as legal prescriptions for the terms of inheritance, or even prayer and fasting, are obligatory.

In this same commentary on the seven verses of the Fatiha, we first encounter Fatima. In line with his method and the structure of this section, the Bab designates the third verse, "the merciful the compassionate" (*ar-rahman ar-rahim*), as "the book of Fatima" (*kitab Fatima salat allah 'alayha*).<sup>28</sup> That Fatima is associated with *rahma*, "mercy," is in line with the general idea of existence as mercy and the role of the feminine articulated in the writings of Ibn `Arabi.<sup>29</sup> It should also be noted that *rahma* is a feminine noun constructed on the root *rh**m*, which is also the basis for the word *rahim*, "uterus, womb." Fatima is associated with this verse because it is gender-specific so that grammar reflects reality – a basic axiom of the worldview we are investigating. That it is also the third verse of the sura means that the order: Muhammad, `Ali, Fatima (*ahadiya, wahidiya,*

<sup>28</sup> In the commentary on the rest of the Fatiha, each verse of which is designated as "the book" or writing of one of the fourteen Pure Ones, that is the twelve imams, Fatima, and Muhammad. For specifics on the heptadic structure that reflects the realities of Family of God, see Lawson (1986).

<sup>29</sup> See also Huda Lutfy, "The Mystical Dimensions of Literature" *Alif: Journal of Comparative Politics* Spring 1985, 5, 7-19.

*rahmaniya*) is corroborated both through the gender reference and chronological order of birth.<sup>30</sup> The remainder of the commentary runs:

And God has put in [this verse] all that is hers and all that pertains to her. [This verse] is the Garden of Divine Grace (*jannat al-na'im*). God has ordained its shade for the one who believes in her and loves her after he has recognized her as she deserves (*ba`da ma 'arafaha bima hiya ahluha*), as she appeared to the seeker (or: knower/Gnostic, 'arif) through his own self (*kama tajallat li'l 'arif lahu bihi*). Then this garden will open to him.<sup>31</sup>

While there is no explicit mention of *walaya* here, it is nonetheless assumed throughout the *tafsir* that Fatima is, as a member of the Family of God, one of the fourteen bearers of *walaya*. The Bab, it seems, wishes to highlight various nuances of this religious authority according to the particular bearer/*wali* he is discussing. In the case of Fatima, this religious authority is clearly associated with love (*mahabba*) and knowledge/gnosis (*'irfan*), and as we already saw, mercy. For example, in his commentary on 2:25, the Bab states that Paradise or "the Garden" is indeed the love of the form of Fatima (*mahabbat shabah Fatima*). Before we look further at this material, it may be helpful to offer a brief summary of the general place of Fatima in Islam and Shi'ism.

### Fatima of History

Fatima (11/633), the daughter of Muhammad and wife of the first Imam `Ali ibn Abi Talib (40/661) enjoys an exalted position in Shi'i piety and is thought by some to function for the Shi'a much the same way that Mary functions in the Catholic tradition.<sup>32</sup> She is depicted in the histories as the long-suffering darling of her father, to whom she was born through Muhammad's first wife, the incomparable Khadija. She was married to `Ali, which sources say was a difficult marriage.<sup>33</sup> But while she lived, she was

<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that we find no mention of Fatima at the corresponding place in the eleventh-century classical work by the otherwise influential Shi'i theologian Tusi, Muhammad al-Hasan, al-, *al-Tibyan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Najaf, 1957-63, Vol. 1, 28-30.

<sup>31</sup> Baq. p. 8, 11.4-8. The phrase "Garden of Grace" (*jannat al-na'im*) is determined by Qur'anic usage (see, e.g., 26:85). "Gnostic" translates 'arif. There are other choices: "recognizer," "knower," "seeker."

<sup>32</sup> Ali's nickname Abu Turab is said to have originated because whenever he and Fatima would quarrel, he would leave the house and cover his head with dust, presumably out of the frustration at being married to the Prophet's daughter. Indeed, the Prophet himself bestowed this name upon him (Laura Veccia Vaglieri, "Fatima", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.). For other explanations of the distinctive nickname, see Kohlberg, *Abu Turab*, 347-52; and "The Dawning Places of the Lights of Certainty in the Divine Secrets Connected with the Commander of the Faithful, by Rajab Bursi (d. 1411)." In *The Legacy of Mediaeval Persian Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn, foreword by Javad Nurbakhsh, introduction by S. H. Nasr. London: Khaniqah Nimatullahi Publications in association with the SOAS Centre of Near and Middle Eastern Studies, University of London, 1992, 261-76, cf. 268. One of the key figures in the drama and legend of Tahirih the Babi is one Shaykh Abu Turab. For the most recent and quite penetrating study of this drama, see Negar Mottahedeh, "[Ruptured Spaces and Effective Histories: The Unveiling of the Babi Poetess Qurrat al-'Ayn- Tahirih in the Gardens of Badashat](#)." *Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies* 2/2 (February, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> The bibliography on Fatima remains to be compiled. For this paper I have benefited from Laura Veccia Vaglieri's excellent *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., entry. See now (in collaboration with Jean Calmard), *Fatimah, daughter of the Prophet Mohammad*, 400-404. A study of Fatima in *tafsir* is Jane Dammen McAuliffe's

his only wife. She is venerated as the mother of the second and third Ithna `Ashari Imams, Hasan and Husayn (and by extension all of the Imams). She is held up to the believers by the sources as a model of suffering, patience, generosity, wisdom, and valiant heroism ending in martyrdom. During the Prophet's Meccan and early Medinan period, when the Banu Hashim imposed a ban upon dealings with Muhammad, Fatima is singled out as having endured the privations with great dignity and patience.<sup>34</sup> Of all the Prophet's children, Fatima lived the longest (although she died only a few months after the Prophet's death) and gave Muhammad, who would have otherwise been bereft of male progeny, many descendants. Indeed, one of the many calumnies directed at Muhammad was that he was without male progeny. Such a man was known derisively in this milieu as "cut off" (*al-abtar*).<sup>35</sup> Muhammad was cruelly taunted with this epithet by his fellow Meccans because of the death of his and Khadija's two infant sons, Qasim and Abdallah. Fatima is seen by the tradition as being the one responsible for giving the lie to this cruel insult by providing the Prophet his two grandsons, Hasan, Husayn, and their sisters Zainab and Umm Kulthum.<sup>36</sup> Shi'i religious literature delights in demonstrating how this epithet, recorded in the sura *The Abundance* (Qur'an 108, as it happens, the shortest sura in the book), was turned against Muhammad's enemies because through Fatima Muhammad's lineage not only continued but multiplied greatly in the Imamate that is the institutional sanctuary of *walaya* in Shi'ism.<sup>37</sup> Ironically, it was Muhammad's enemies who were "cut off" (*al-abtar*) by the will of God.

Fatima is greatly venerated by all Muslims who, when speaking of her, typically add the honorific *al-Zahra'* (the shining one, the luminous, the gloriously radiant). Among the Shi'a this veneration reaches its greatest intensity. Two Western scholars, Henri Lammens and Louis Massignon, studied the historical basis for this reverence and reached diametrically opposite opinions: Lammens argued that the historical Fatima was "a woman devoid of attraction, of mediocre intelligence, completely insignificant, little esteemed by her father, ill-treated by her husband....

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brief "Chosen of All Women : Mary and Fatimah in Qur'anic Exegesis," *Islamochristiana*, 1981, 7, 19-28. Surprisingly, much early and later explicitly Shi'i material is ignored in this otherwise interesting article. For example, the very early *Shi'i Tafsir Furat ibn Ibrahim* mentions Fatima in over twenty places. The commentaries of the two famous classical Shi'i exegetes, Tusi and Tabrisi, also mention her at various points in their commentaries. The commentaries of Muhsin Fayd Kashani and others also frequently cite *hadith*, or more appropriately *akhbar*, which mention Fatima's name.

<sup>34</sup> "She is usually depicted in the Shi'i sources as a bitter woman who spent her last days mourning the death of her father and refusing any contact with the outside world Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Ashura' in Twelver Shi'ism*, The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978.,40.

<sup>35</sup> The lack of descendants is a topos in Muhammad's biography and is reflected in the Qur'an as well. This meant that his progeny was destined to issue only from his daughters, which in his society meant that he was without descendants.

<sup>36</sup> A third son, Muhsin, was stillborn.

<sup>37</sup> Later on in his career, the Bab himself would compose a lengthy commentary on this very sura. See Todd Lawson, "Qur'an Commentary as Sacred Performance: The Bab's tafsirs of Qur'an 103 and 108, the Declining Day and the Abundance." In *Iran im 19. Jahrhundert und die Entstehung der Baha'i Religion*, ed. Christoph Burgel and Isabel Schayani. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1998, 145-58.

anaemic, often ill, prone to tears, who died perhaps of consumption."<sup>38</sup> Massignon has made Fatima "sublime, elevating her to a position often reminiscent of that which the Virgin Mary holds among Christians. For Massignon, she represents the beginnings of Universal Islam" because of her care for the non-Arab converts.<sup>39</sup> Massignon's study improves upon Lammens by offering a "psychologico-religious explanation for the origin and development of the legend of the daughter of the Prophet and bridges the gap between legend and reality as Lammens's book fails to do;" however, "[Massignon's work] cannot escape the objection of the historian, who will consider that the author subordinates the facts to beliefs about Fatima which appeared only later."<sup>40</sup> This statement obviously represents a certain historiographical approach. Beliefs, it is clear, have frequently been as crucial to history as facts. Indeed, in this article beliefs are of primary interest; whether or not they represent, in the case of Fatima, "true historical reality" is immaterial. This is so precisely because we can see how much such belief actually influenced the unfolding of radical religious activity in nineteenth-century Iran. But it is also true – and this is a historiographical element of consequence – that Fatima's life was so obscure that Ibn Hisham and the other earlier historians had little occasion to concern themselves with her.

Fatima died in the eleventh year of the *hijra*, six months after the death of the Prophet. Today (because her grave is unknown), Shi'is visit three places in Medina in order to pay homage to her: her house, the Baqi' cemetery, and the space in the Great Mosque between the *rawda* and the tomb of the Prophet.<sup>41</sup> Her nickname, "Mother of her father" (*Umm Abiha*) has several explanations: she learned through a revelation that the name of her very last descendant would be Muhammad, perhaps as a logical inference from the story of her heavenly, luminous origin and birth. Her name Creator (*Fatir*), which is one of the names listed in an eleventh-century source, represents a glorification of Fatima that seems to be characteristic of the extreme Isma'ilis and of "aberrant" sects such as the Nusayris rather than of the Imamis. Have we here a borrowing of the latter from the former? Veccia Vaglieri asks.<sup>42</sup> The belief that Fatima is *Fatir*, Creator, would also help explain her *kunya* *Umm Abiha*. Another explanation for the name is that it became Fatima's as a result of her providing comfort to Muhammad during the darkest times.<sup>43</sup> It has been suggested that because of the connections

<sup>38</sup> Veccia Vaglieri, *Fatima*. Cf. Lammens, Henri. *Fatimah et les filles de Mahomet*. Rome: Sumptibus Pontificii Institut Biblici, 1912.

<sup>39</sup> "La notion du voe et la devotion musulmane a Fatima." In *Studio orientalistici in onore di Giorgio della Vida*. Rome: Instituto per l'Oriente, 1956, vol. 2, 102-26., p. 118f. But see the legend of the heavenly table being removed from the *ahl al-bayt* because they tried to share it with outsiders, Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 44-45.

<sup>40</sup> Veccia Vaglieri, *Fatima*

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> *Dala' il al-Imama* by Husayn ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, Najaf, 1949/1369, 1-58. This source is used heavily by Veccia Vaglieri, *Fatima*. It is, unfortunately, unavailable to me.

<sup>43</sup> 'Ali Shariati, *Fatima Is Fatima*. Translated by Laleh Bakhtiar. Tehran: Shariati Foundation, [1980]. 160-61.

between the cult of Mary among Christians and that of Fatima among Muslims, it is possible that the title arose as a counterpart to that of "Mother of God," especially since the name seems to be found only in later (that is, twelfth-century) sources.<sup>44</sup>

Islam has honored 'Asiyah bint Muzahim, (Pharoah's wife), Maryam bint 'Imran (Mary, mother of Jesus), Khadija, and Fatima as the four perfect women of the world, the best women of Paradise.<sup>45</sup> By the twelfth century, Shi'i scholars had compiled a list of nearly a hundred names and attributes by which Fatima should be honored<sup>46</sup> This veneration may be best seen in three of the titles by which she is most frequently designated: al-Zahra', "the luminous"; *Fatir*, "Creator"; and Umm Abiha, "Mother of her Father." Others include the masculine form *Fatim*, *al-Tahira*, *al-Zakiya*, *al-Muhaddatha*, *al-Siddiqah*, *al-Batul*, and *Maryam al-Kubra*, and especially significant in connection with Tahirih, *Qurrat al-'Ayn* – one of the most common names by which Tahirih the Babi was known. Official occasions for honoring her are her birth (20 Ramadan), marriage to 'Ali, and the public feast of Mubahala (21, 24, 25 Dhu'l-Hijja). This last deserves a special word because it is in connection with the Mubahala that Fatima becomes known as one of the *Ahl al-Kisa'*, "People of the cloak." These are Muhammad, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn, a group that represents an "elite within an elite" in Shi'ism.<sup>47</sup> The anniversary of her death (3 Jumada II and 2 Ramadan) is also befittingly observed. These are all public holy days in Iran and observed around the world. Other holy days, such as the Day of al-Ghadir (18th of Dhu' l-Hijja) and the Muharram observances – tradition has Fatima making a post mortem appearance at Karbala (which the Bab mentions in his tafsir) to lament the cruel fate of her son and his family and companions<sup>48</sup> – are public and private occasions for honoring her memory.

Other events in her life have particular interest here: she is depicted as threatening to remove her head covering twice: on one occasion to protest the treatment of 'Ali after the death of the Prophet,<sup>49</sup> and another time as threatening to remove her head covering in order to stop Abu Bakr and 'Umar from forcibly entering her house after the so-called election of the first caliph.<sup>50</sup> This will bring to mind Tahirih's removal of the veil that so scandalized even the Babis themselves.<sup>51</sup> In another tradition, she is presented as defiantly turning her back to the intruders to express her

<sup>44</sup> Veccia Vaglieri, *Fatima*

<sup>45</sup> See McAuliffe, *Chosen of All Women*; and Ibn Shahrashub, Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin 'Ali. *Manaqib Al Abi Talib*. 4 vols. Beirut: Dar al-Ida', 1405/1980

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Shahrashub, *Manaqib*, vol.3 357-58 cited by Veccia Vaglieri, *Fatima*. For the name Qurrat al'Ayn, "Solace of the eyes," see also Abu'l-Layth al-Samarqandi (d373/983), *Tanbih al-Ghafilin*, 2nd ed. Taqadum Press, 1324/1906, 7-25.

<sup>47</sup> For details on the proper observance of this important day, see 'Abbas Qummi, *Mafatih al-jinan* Beirut: Dar al-Ida', 1407/1987, 350-54. See also the related hadith *al-kisa'*, Qummi, *Mafatih*, 386-89; cf, also Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985, 14.

<sup>48</sup> *Baq*, p. 211 in the course of the commentary on Qur'an 2:76; Veccia Vaglieri, "Fatima."

<sup>49</sup> Veccia Vaglieri, *Fatima*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Mottahedeh, *Ruptured Spaces*

repugnance;<sup>52</sup> she is also seen traveling on horseback with `Ali to ask for the support of the Ansar (who, unfortunately had already committed themselves to Abu Bakr);<sup>53</sup> she is quoted as having challenged 'Umar himself: "You have left the body of the Apostle of God with us and you have decided among yourselves without consulting us, without respecting our rights."<sup>54</sup>

Thus we clearly see the figure of a politically active woman, one who could easily inspire others to similar action. It is curious, in light of this that one of the prevailing images associated with Fatima is that of a sickly and timid victim. Another element in Fatima's political biography is the troublesome Fadak affair. Abu Bakr, according to Shi'i sources, deprived Fatima of inheriting this productive oasis that the Prophet had promised her. This deprivation caused great hardship for her and her family and also deprived the cause of `Ali essential material support. In addition, there is the legend of the *mushaf* of Fatima, the book that Gabriel brought her for consolation after the death of her father.<sup>55</sup> As Veccia Vaglieri points out, the material on Fatima remains to be systematical studied. Once it is, however, it will be most interesting to notice whether or not these conflicting images are the result of confessional influences. In the meantime, the question posed by Veccia Vaglieri, did Imami Shi'ism borrow from Isma'ili Shi'ism in the veneration of Fatima? is quite pertinent to the study of the literature of the Shaykhi school in general. As I demonstrate, it is also pertinent in the study of the writings of the Bab, who, as far as we know, was an Imami Shi'i, born in Shiraz on 20 October 1819 (1 Muharram 1235).

### The Bab's Fatima

Many of the events or topics recounted above are touched upon and elaborated in the Bab's *tafsir*. It is crucial, however, first to establish some idea of what is to be expected. To do this, I rely upon the studies of Henry Corbin, who is the one Western scholar to have penetrated many of the mysteries that this kind of literature holds. In this case, we are particularly fortunate that Corbin devoted an entire book to the study of the spiritual feminine in Iranian religion. In Corbin's distinctive approach, Mazdean religious ideas are connected with Islamic Shiite gnosis, first in the work of Suhrawardi and finally, and more resoundingly, in the corpus of the Shaykhis, a corpus that remains lamentably understudied, though progress has been achieved since Corbin's time.<sup>56</sup> In any case, Corbin saw the founder of the Shaykhi school, Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i (1826) and his

<sup>52</sup> Veccia Vaglieri, *Fatima*

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn Shahrashub, *Manaqib*, vol. 3, 359.

<sup>56</sup> See now Cole, *Individualism*, and *World as Text*, Rafati, *Development*, and parts of Todd Lawson, "The Quran Commentary of Sayyid Ali Muhammad, the Bab (1819-1850)." Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. McGill University, Montreal, 1987. Until the mid 1970s Corbin's was really the only effort in the West, apart from Nicolas' pioneering work (A. L M Nicolas., *Essai sur le Cheikhisme*. 4 vols. Paris: Geuthner and Ernest Leroux, 1910-14), to devote serious attention to this intellectual development of the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century in Iran.



successor, Sayyid Kazim Rashti, as revivers of "primitive Shiite gnosis."<sup>57</sup> It is even more fortunate that part of this book is a study of Fatima in the writings of Hajj Karim Khan Kirmani (1870), the Shaykhi leader who was, in some respects, the Bab's (1850) most bitter opponent. Both had been avid students of the teachings of Ahsa'i and Rashti (as had Tahiri herself). Corbin's reading of Kirmani's works will be shown to resonate with the image of Fatima in this early commentary by the Bab. It is still too soon to determine on what doctrinal grounds they might have differed with regard to Fatima, or indeed, if they differed at all. The main area of disagreement between the two was not a matter for scholasticism.

In this school of thought the Family of God, the Fourteen Very-Pure, function, according to Corbin, in a way "analagous to the *Aeons* of the pleroma in Valentinian gnosis." One of the distinctions between the Suhrawardian and Shaykhi cosmologies is discerned in the shift from a threefold to a fourfold cosmology. For Suhrawardi these were 1) the earthly, human world, "the object of sensory perception"; 2) the world of Soul or Malakut, "the world of imaginative perception" and 3) the cherubic or angelic world of Jabarut, "the object of intelligible knowledge."<sup>58</sup> Consonant with the motif of quaternity by which much of their thought is distinguished, Shaykhism added a fourth realm (as did Ibn 'Arabi), namely the sphere of deity, the world of *lahut*. For the Shaykhis, however, this realm was "occupied" only by the Family of God – not, as it were, God Himself. Fatima is located first and foremost in this supracelestial realm. As Corbin says, using one of his favorite metaphors:

One might say that [Shaykhi thought] allows us to hear the theme of the celestial Earth... in a still higher octave. Each octave is a new world, a new beginning, where everything is rediscovered, but at a different height, that is, in a higher mode of being. This succession of octaves is what allows the *ta'wil*, or spiritual hermeneutics, to be practiced authentically. Moreover, in the transcendent Person of Fatima as a member of the supreme Pleroma, we shall be hearing something like the motif of the *supracelestial Earth* ...<sup>59</sup>

The four universes or realms "symbolize with" each other so that the "historic dimension" is a means of discovering the sacred relationship between and among these worlds.

This will be essentially the esoteric hermeneutic, the *ta'wil*; it will be a discovery of the true and hidden meaning, the spiritual history that

<sup>57</sup> Corbin, 58; "primitive" here is both a formal and a chronological designation. By it such groups as the Nusayris, the early Isma'ilis, and other of the so-called *ghulat* are intended.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>59</sup> The passage continues: "And through this supracelestial Earth, we are led to the idea of a Shi'ite Sophiology, by which we shall perceive afresh something that Mazdean Sophiology already perceived in the Angel of the Earth, but this time at a new and higher level, since the *progressio harmonica* produces the resonance of harmonics which until then had remained silent." Corbin, 59-60).

becomes visible through the recital of external events. It will mean to "see things in Hurqalya.." <sup>60</sup>

In this quaternary world the relationship between male and female is accorded the highest possible value. Hurqalya is, of course, the abode of the Hidden Imam who is alive there and "in hiding" since his disappearance in 260/874. There is ample evidence throughout the works of the Bab, and particularly in the one under study here, that he himself shared a similar, if not identical, approach to history and scripture (although he does not use the word *Hurqalya* here). But we will see more of this later in this essay. <sup>61</sup>

There is no need to dwell further here on Corbin's harmonic rendition of the history of Iranian mythology and religious symbolism <sup>62</sup> whereby he can see the ancient Spendarmat in the Fatima of the Shi'a, except to say that the *apokatastasis*, the "restoration of all things to their primordial splendor and wholeness, to the state in which they were before the invasion of the Ahrimanian Counterpowers" that he perceives in Shaykhism, <sup>63</sup> is very much a feature of the clan of Babism. As we have already indicated, the authority and power of Tahirih (and the other Babis) is a result of three simultaneous events: a fulfillment of the past, a reenactment of the past, and a break with the past.

### Day of the Covenant

One of the more important controlling myths in Islam, whether Sunni or Shi'i, is the drama of God's establishing a covenant (*`ahd, mithaq*) between Himself and humanity through the prophet Adam. The Qur'an tells the story in a characteristically terse passage at Qur'an 7:172. At a time before the creation of the world, God summoned Adam to His presence whereupon he caused the "seeds" (*al-dharr*) of all future generations to come forth from Adam's loins. God confronted Adam – and this vast company thus arrayed before Him – with the question "Am I not your Lord?" (*a-lastu bi-rabbikum*). The immediate response was "Yea, verily!" (*bala*). The Qur'an explains that this was done so that no human would be able to say on the Day of Resurrection, when all would be given their just deserts, that they should be excused for their sins because they were not aware of their

<sup>60</sup> Corbin, 60.

<sup>61</sup> All of this may be found amplified in greater detail at Corbin, 60-73.

<sup>62</sup> Nothing if not baroque, Corbin's interest in the theme of the "celestial earth" (a basic coincidentia oppositorum, it should be noted) went far beyond, yet somehow remained centered, in the figure of Fatima. He offered the metaphor of music, specifically the *progressio harmonica* of the pipe organ, to explain what he saw as a beautiful and compelling Iranian enrichment of intellectual history: "Whoever is somewhat familiar with the organ knows what are referred to as 'stops.'" Thanks to these stops, each note can cause several pipes of different lengths to "speak" simultaneously; thus, besides the fundamental note, a number of harmonic overtones can be heard. Among the contrivances that regulate them, the *progressio harmonica* designates a combination of stops which allows more and more overtones to be heard as one ascends towards the upper register, until at a certain pitch the fundamental note also resounds simultaneously" (Corbin, p. 51).

<sup>63</sup> On this see Todd Lawson, "A 'New Testament' for the Safavids: Interpretations of The Day of the Covenant (Qur'an 7:172) in Safavid Quran Commentary." *Proceedings of the Safavid Roundtable*, Edinburgh (1988), forthcoming.

obligation to God. The "Yea verily!" constitutes humanity's primordial assent to the divine covenant.<sup>64</sup> Within this covenant myth dwells the explanatory theory of all Islamicate religious authority. It has been particularly instrumental in justifying the mediation and negotiation of charismatic power and authority in a Sufi milieu, but no less in the Shi'i milieu.<sup>65</sup>

In Shi'i communities throughout the world, the eighteenth day of Dhu' l-Hijja, the pilgrimage month, is commemorated as the Day of the Covenant (*yawm al-mithaq*) and anniversary of the public appointment by the Prophet Muhammad of `Ali as his successor at a small oasis known as Ghadir Khumm, "the pool of Ghadir." (In Iran, a Shi'i state, this date is an official public holiday.) This oasis was a way station between Mecca and Medina and it was here, during a rest on the way back from his last pilgrimage, that the Prophet made his famous speech, the words of which are preserved in both Sunni and Shi'i books of Tradition:

We were with the Apostle of God in his journey and we stopped at Ghadir Khumm. We performed the obligatory prayer together and a place was swept for the Apostle under two trees and he performed the mid-day prayer. And then he took `Ali by the hand and said to the people: 'Do you not acknowledge that I have a greater claim on each of the believers than they have on themselves?' And they replied: 'Yea verily!' [*bala*] And he took 'Ali's hand and said: 'Of whomsoever I am Lord [*Mawla*], then `Ali is also his Lord. O God! Be Thou the supporter of whoever supports 'Ali and the enemy of whoever opposes him.' And 'Umar [the future second caliph] met him ['Ali] after this and said to him: 'Congratulations, O son of Abu Talib! Now morning and evening [i.e., forever] you are the master of every believing man and woman.'<sup>66</sup>

This passage (along with its several variants) is important for two main reasons; 1) the establishment of the continuance of religious authority by the Prophet "the covenant"; 2) the use of the exquisitely polyvocal term *mawla*, which is a derivative of the root *wly*, upon which the word *walaya* is built. *Mawla* is a particularly interesting Arabic word in that it can mean either "master" or "client" – diametrically opposite denotations, according to usage. As such, it represents admirably the mutuality and reciprocal nature

<sup>64</sup> Corbin, 69.

<sup>65</sup> See, e.g., Bowering, Gerhard, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl At-Tustari (d.283/896)*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980; Kazemi-Moussavi, Ahmad. *Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam: From the Office of Mufti to the Institution of Marja'*. Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1996.; Dabashi, Hamid. *Authority in Islam : From the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Umayyads*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1989; Arjomand, Sayyid Amir, ed. *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*. Albany : State University of New York Press, 1988.; Calder, Norman. *The Structure of Authority in Imami Jurisprudence*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1980; Stewart, Devin J. *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy : Twelver Shi'ite Responses to the Sunni Legal System*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998.

<sup>66</sup> Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, tr. Momen, p. 15.

of *walaya*. But it also gives rise to alternate interpretations of this sermon, as the entire history of Islam will attest. It is as the de facto and de jure establishment of the sacred covenant that this sermon occupies us for the moment. This covenant functions as the *raison d'être* of Shi'ism. Those who recognize, subscribe to, uphold, and defend the appointment of 'Ali as Muhammad's rightful successor and leader – both spiritual and temporal – of the community of Muslims, are faithful to the covenant and may be considered believing Muslims (*muslim mu'min*). Those who acknowledge anyone else as the successor of Muhammad and leader of the community is accounted a breaker (*naqid*) of this covenant and an infidel (*kafir*).

A natural starting place, then, for a detailed examination of the person/figure/symbol of Fatima in the Bab's Qur'an commentary is the Covenant. The Bab draws a comparison or homologue between the Qur'anic primordial *yawm al-mithaq*, the events of which are narrated in Qur'an 7:172, and the Day of al-Ghadir. The first Qur'anic cue for this comparison is in verse 2:8: "Of the people there are some who say: 'We believe in God and the Last Day'; but they do not really believe." The people specified here, according to the Bab, are those whom God will cause to forget faith in 'Ali's *walaya* on the Last Day. They are not believers because their faith is flawed, even though they may consider themselves true believers in 'Ali's spiritual authority:

Whoever knows that `Ali is the sign of God in the station of the Exclusive Divine Unity ... is one of the believers "in God and the Last Day," which is really the First Day, and it is the beginning of the mention of the created thing in the world of contingency, and it is the day God made to shine with light, and it is the light of `Ali. Such a one is one of the believers. And whoever abandons this station enters into the category: "and he is not an exalted believer." May God protect us through Muhammad and his family from entering into this error!<sup>67</sup>

It will become clear below that "the day God made to shine with light, and it is the light of `Ali" is an indirect reference to Fatima, who is the source of all light. The Bab strengthens the connection or homology between the Last Day mentioned here and the Day of the Covenant and the Day of al-Ghadir Khumm by quoting a long hadith from the eleventh Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari's *tafsir*, in which the occasion of revelation (known in some circles as *sabab al-nuzul*) for this verse is established as the *Day of al-Ghadir*. In this verse, the Imam says God was warning Muhammad about those who feigned allegiance to `Ali following the sermon just quoted. The Bab says:

That place of testimony is the same as the "dimension" (*dharr*) of the primordial covenant, when the covenant of lordship was taken:

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<sup>67</sup> *Baq*, 47-48.

whoever was recognized [then] was recognized [for all time]. Indeed, "those possessed of minds" know what happened there by what happened here (Ghadir Khumm), the realm of this world (or "religion" *tashri*) is in accord with the realm of that world (or "divine creation" *takwin*). But this place of testimony (viz. the Day of al-Ghadir) is greater than the first place of testimony, the dimension of the affirmation of Divine Unity, while the second place of testimony is the dimension of the affirmation of Prophethood – nay, rather it is the essence of the Divine Cause. This place of testimony of the Day of al-Ghadir is the third place of testimony and the greatest dimension. The remaining place of testimony is the last: it is the dimension of the Fourth Support, the rising of the Qa'im, may God hasten his glad advent. This occasion of testimony will occur in the beginning of his appearance (or emergence, *zuhur*) and it is the dimension of the affirmation by their Shi'a that the Family of God are the worn of magnification in the midmost sanctity of praise."<sup>68</sup>

Thus the fourfold structure of the Bab's approach. The Bab says that the *shahada*, the true testimony to the truth of this, is none other than the Imams and Fatima.<sup>69</sup> The Bab demonstrates how Fatima is implicated in this covenant in his commentary on Qur'an 2:83. Here he says that the esoteric meaning of the word *kindred* is a clear designation of Fatima, just as the word *orphans* is a reference to al-Hasan and al-Husayn. "God has spoken here about the taking of the *covenant* with all created things in the eight Paradises, in affirmation of the *walaya* of 'Ali"<sup>70</sup> The Qur'anic verse is:

And remember We took a Covenant from the Children of Israel: Worship none but God; treat with kindness your parents and kindred, and orphans and those in need; Speak fair to the people; be steadfast in prayer; and practice regular charity. Then did ye turn your back, except a few among you, and ye backslide even now." [Qur'an 2:83]

In another quaternary interpretation, the phrase: "those who broke the covenant" [Qur'an 2:27] refers to the covenant (*'ahd*) of Muhammad vis-à-vis the signs (*ayat*) of 'Ali. This covenant was instituted in the world of the *Unseen* (*al-ghayb*), the spiritual realm. Although the term *lahut* is not used, nor the word *hurqalya*, it is clear that the realm of *al-ghayb* is a spiritual "space" with its own "time."

These signs were placed within (*fī*) the dimension (*dharr*) of the hearts [which represents] the station (*maqam*) of Divine Unity (*tawhid*), and [in] the dimension of the intellects [which represents] the level (*rutba*) of Prophethood (*nubuwwa*), and [in] the atoms of souls [which represents] the abode of the Imamate (*imama*), and [in]

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 224.

the dimension of the bodies [which represents] the place (*mahall*) of the love of the Shi'a after God imposed this solemn binding upon all created things [which is] faith (*iman*) in Muhammad, `Ali, Hasan, Husayn, Ja'far, Musa, and Fatima.<sup>71</sup>

The first who "broke the covenant" was Abu Bakr.

He broke the covenant of God concerning His friends (*awliya*) in the unseen worlds and he violated the *walaya* of `Ali in its [future] appearances in the visible Imams . . . and he [broke the covenant] by taking the land of al-Fadak away from Fatima after he knew very well that the Apostle of God had specified it for her during his life and forbidden its produce to go to anyone else.<sup>72</sup>

In Kirmani's treatment of the Qur'anic Day of the Covenant when God demanded from the seed of Adam absolute obedience, this drama was originally played out in the realm of *lahut*, "long before" it achieved its first earthly iteration at the time of Adam. Its second, and most important iteration occurred at the pool called Ghadir Khumm when Muhammad appointed `Ali his successor and took a pact with all of the Muslims to this effect.<sup>73</sup> Fatima's response in this divine setting is precisely the "theurgic accomplishment" of becoming the Earth for the production of the cosmos. None can have access or perception of this realm, it is too ratified, powerful in its beauty and luminous beyond mortal ability to perceive. "The beings of the pleroma of the *lahut* are visible only in their apparitional forms [*ashbah*], which are the receptacles of their theophanies."<sup>74</sup> According to Kirmani, Fatima is the Earth of the sacred *lahuti* universe,<sup>75</sup> which is related to the mysterious earth of Hurqalya.

The Bab describes Fatima as the "Universal earth," "heaven" and "the Sabbath." This same idea may be evident in a particularly vivid passage of the Bab's *tafsir*. At verse 60 of *Surat al-Baqara*, for example, the water that

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 94. *kafirun* instead of the Qur'anic "losers" (*khasirun*, all mss.). These seven names are used as a kind of shorthand to represent the Prophet, Fatima, and the twelve Imams because although they are twelve, they may be known by using only these seven names; That is, each of the names Muhammad, `Ali, Hasan, and Husayn may be applied to more than one Imam while the names Fatima, Ja'far, and Musa can apply to only one person respectively. Earlier in this commentary, the Bab ad Qur'an 2:3 (Baq, 22-23), speaks of seven grades of faith (*iman*), taking his cue from *yuminuna*, "those who believe." One grade, the third, is faithfulness (*wafa'*) - a near synonym - associated specifically with Fatima.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>73</sup> For important background to the Shaykhi reading of Qur'an 7:172, see Lawson, *A 'New Testament'*

<sup>74</sup> Corbin, 63. A study of Shi'i *akhbari tafsir* on precisely the subject of the Day of the Covenant reveals that the apparitional forms of the "first" participants is more or less a standard topos. See Lawson, "A 'New Testament.'" This, of course, was one of Corbin's main points: the Shaykhis represent a revivification of very ancient modes of religiosity combined with a terminology that had more recently developed through the works of such important Iranian philosophers as Mulla Sadra (d.1640).

<sup>75</sup> Formed on the Arabic word *ilah* (god), *lahut* refers to the divine realm. Three other similar words are encountered in such discussions: *jabarut*, *malakut*, *mink* to refer to three realms that issue in descending order from the *lahut*. All of these worlds symbolize with each other. A fifth term, *nasut* (humanity, human dimension), is frequently encountered. It is built on the word *nas* and is the polar opposite of *lahut*. Between *lahut* and *nasut* the whole spectrum of cosmic activity and events occurs.

gushed forth from the rock at twelve different places after Moses struck it with his staff, is said to represent the *walaya* of all the Imams. The Bab says that although the water issued from these various places, it was in fact the same water. The station of Fatima is further defined here as that without which *walaya* could not have appeared in the world:

And remember Moses prayed for water for his people; We said: "Strike the rock with thy staff." Then gushed forth therefrom twelve springs. Each group knew its own place for water. So eat and drink of the sustenance provided by God, and do no evil nor mischief on the (face of the) earth. [Qur'an 2:60]

The Bab says, the striker here is Muhammad, the staff is `Ali, and the stone [from which the water came forth] is Fatima. And the springs are the twelve Imams. `Ali, by virtue of *walaya*, is counted among them and by virtue of the rank of staff is also distinguished from them. The point of this Qur'anic passage is that it corroborates the history of Islam. Or, more important, the Bab, through this interpretation, demonstrates that in the eternal word of God, the story of Muhammad and his family had been established or "prophesied." History, according to this approach (as Corbin observed), is best seen as a subject for *ta'wil*: it is symbolic (as distinct from allegorical). God commanded Muhammad to give his daughter Fatima in marriage to `Ali so that all people "at all times" might be able to recognize their Imam, to "eat and drink of the splendours of the knowledge dispensed by your Imam through the grace (*fadl*) of Muhammad."<sup>76</sup> Some sources even suggest that at this marriage (which occurred "first" in the spiritual realm) God himself was *wali* for Fatima.<sup>77</sup> Such a myth nicely supplies a narrative explanation for those verses in the Qur'an, mentioned above, which say that God is a *wali* or protector of the believers.

In the Bab's commentary at 2:29, we encounter another instance of the historical event used as a subject of *ta'wil*. And here we also encounter Fatima as the spiritual reality of a heavenly earth. The Qur'anic verse is: "It is He who hath created for you all things that are on earth; then He turned Himself to heaven, and he gave order and perfection to the seven heavens; and of a[[ things he hath perfect knowledge" [Qur'an 2:291.

Fatima here is described as being this "universal earth" out of which the Imams will appear.

<sup>76</sup> Baq, 192-93. Veccia Vaglieri, "Fatima," noticed this identification of Fatima with the rock "among Isma'ilis and the deviant sects" and says further that she has found no trace of such an idea in the Imami sources. According to Kashani, Muhsin Fayd. *al-Safi fi Tafsir Kalam Allah al-Wafi*. 5 vols. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lami li-l-Matbu'at, 1979-82. Vol 1., 136-37, Moses struck the rock invoking the name of Muhammad and his family; there is no mention of Fatima's being the rock in Kashani or Bahrani, two late-seventeenth-century Safavid works. But see Isfahani, *Tafsir*, 244 where a somewhat rationalistic presentation of this reading is found. Isfahani avoids the extreme personifications and "allegorizing" found in the *tafsir* of the Bab. (n.b the possible connection between *hajar* "rock" and Hagar, the wife of Abraham and mother of the Arabs, as a manifestation of Fatima).

<sup>77</sup> Veccia Vaglieri, *Fatima*

God made the real meaning of this "comprehensive earth" to be Fatima, upon her be God's blessing and peace. And [He made] what was in her to be the Imams, upon them be God's blessing and peace. He is the One who created, through the angels, all that is in the Earth of the Divine Exclusive Unity, which is Fatima, for Muhammad, upon him be God's blessing and peace.

"Then He lifted Himself to heaven," that is, He married her [Fatima] to `Ali and thus she is equated with heaven as far as honor (*sharfa*) is concerned. Thus God made her ... "one of the mighty portents, a warning to mankind, to any of you that chooses to press forward or to follow behind" [Qur'an 74:36-37].<sup>78</sup>

In Corbin's summary of Kirmani, we discern the logic of the Bab's hermeneutic: Since all earthly events are reflections of a pre-eternal order, the earthly marriage of `Ali and Fatima also had its purest and holiest occurrence in the supracelestial realm. The earthly marriage in Medina thus symbolized the original union that was itself "the manifestation of an eternal syzygy originating in the eternity of the pleroma of the *lahut*. The First Imam and Fatima are related to each other in the same reciprocal way as the first two hypostases [of neoplatonism], *`Aql* and *Nafs*, Intelligence and Soul, or in terms more familiar to us (because they go back to Philo): *Logos* and *Sophia*."<sup>79</sup> It is also of some interest to note that Kirmani "finds" Fatima in the Qur'anic verse quoted here by the Bab (74:36-37).<sup>80</sup> An examination of more traditional commentaries discloses that this exegesis is quite old indeed. Thus the interpretations of both the Bab and Kirmani represent in this instance a revivification of ancient religious ideas.<sup>81</sup> Whether the following striking development also has its roots in the early history of Shi'i Qur'an interpretation remains to be established. The Bab continues his commentary on Qur'an 2:29:

<sup>78</sup> *Baq*, 112.

<sup>79</sup> *Corbin*, 64.

<sup>80</sup> *Corbin*, 66

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Bahrani, al-Sayyid Hashim al-. *Kitab al-Burhan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*. 4 vols. Tehran: Chapkhaneh Aftab, 1375/1955. Vol. 4, 402 and the *hadith* transmitted by al-Qummi, *Mafatih*, via the following *isnad*: al-Husayn b. Muhammad ... al-Baqir, the fifth Imam who it seems was the first to interpret the verse as such. The immediate translation for this interpretation would seem to be grammatical. "This is but one of the mighty portents" translates the Arabic: *innaha l'ihda al-kubra* modifies the previous litany of three portents: "the moon, the night, and the dawn." The Qur'an collapse all three in a not-uncharacteristic rhetorical gesture. The tension between plurality and singularity is represented in the grammatical convention that casts nonhuman plural objects in the feminine. The grammatical feminine is thus the exception rather than the rule. To the Shi'i exegete such an anomalous linguistic event is demystified by identifying it with one of the Family of God, in this case the only female member of that Family, Fatima. It should always be remembered in this context that the Arabic word for "earth" – *ard* – is grammatically feminine. That such otherwise superfluous considerations can have irreversible and long-range effects on doctrine is born out of the example from Christianity. It seems certain that the Johannine "In the beginning was the Word/logos" was an adjustment to the Septuagint's preoccupation with wisdom/Sophia, precisely because it was felt inappropriate to refer to Jesus by means of a feminine noun. Note the interesting, if oblique, confirmation of this in the Arabic translation of the New Testament. Here, in the process of changing logos to *kalmia* a change in grammatical gender occurs. Yet, the resistance to referring to Jesus by means of a feminine noun is apparent in the Arabic: *fi 'l-bad' kana 'l-kalima...* rather than the grammatical *fi 'l-bad' kanat al-kalima...* This anomaly is standard in all Arabic translations of the Bible.



So, in reality it was she who turned to the heaven and fashioned them seven heavens that is, the seven proofs who are equal to `Ali, upon him be God's blessing and peace, with regard to their Origination. The seven, when they go through the processes of Origination and Invention become fourteen manifestations of Origination. And they are seven heavens.<sup>82</sup>

The words *fashioned* and *equal* do not convey the exegetical device of paranomasia with which the Bab conveys this interpretation. The Qur'anic *sawwahunna* ("he gave order and perfection") is formed from the same root as the Qur'anic *istawa* ("then He turned Himself"). This root, *sawiya*, can be variously translated as "leveling," "making smooth," "making equal," "ordering." That the world is orderly – cosmos rather than chaos – is a classic Qur'anic argument for the existence and function of God as orderer and sustainer. How this ordering and creation is to be explained is of course controversial. The Bab holds to a distinctive cosmogony entailing twin creative processes;<sup>83</sup> through these the seven heavens are rendered fourteen – the number of the Family of God. This is a perfect example of the otherworldly potency of Fatima's creative status: she is not only the "Mother of her Father" (*umm abiha*) but the creatrice of her own self and the twelve Imams as well. Kirmani, as recounted by Corbin, seems acutely apt in this instance:

Without the person of Fatima there would be neither the manifestation of the Imamate, nor Imamic initiation. For the pleroma of these entities of light is the very place of the divine mystery. Their light is the divine light itself; their transparency allows it to shine through, retaining none of their own ipseity [viz "ego"] ... they are the very substance of pre-eternal Love; they are the identity of love, lover, and beloved, that identity which all Sufis have aspired to live ....<sup>84</sup>

As Corbin summarizes; Fatima is the Soul of creation, the Soul of each creature, "the constitutive part of the human being." Fatima is "the eternally feminine in man, and that is why she is the archetype of the heavenly Earth; she is both paradise and initiation into it, for it is she who manifests the

<sup>82</sup> *Baq*, 112-13

<sup>83</sup> *ibda'* and *ikhtira'*. Briefly, the first is the action of God, and the second is the action of the demiurge. For a concise explanation of this terminology as it was used in a much earlier but apparently perfectly cognate context, see A Altmann & S. M. Stern. *Isaac Israeli, A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century: His Works Translated with Comments and an Outline of His Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958, 152-52. See now Amir-Moezzi, *Cosmogony*, 317-322. This scholar's series of articles, published in various journals and books, entitled "Aspects d'Imamologie Duodécimaine" is essential reading for the present topic. It is hoped that it will be available in a single volume in the near future. See Amir-Moezzi, *Aspects*, 193-216.

<sup>84</sup> *Corbin*, 63-64. See my translation of the Bab's *Risalat fi'l-Suluk* for an explicit mention of this same idea in the same vocabulary Lawson, *Journey*

divine names and attributes revealed in the theophanic persons of the Imams."<sup>85</sup>

The ontological rank of the Soul and the reality of the Soul are the rank of Fatima. The Imams are masculine as agents of cosmogony, since relation is their soul; as authors of spiritual creation they are feminine, since they are the Soul and since the Soul is Fatima.... the theophanic and initiatic function of the holy Imams is precisely their "Fatimic" degree of being (their *fatimiya*, which we faithfully translate as "Sophianity"), and this is how Fatima comes to be called Fatima Fatir, Fatima Creator.<sup>86</sup>

"Without the person of Fatima there would be neither the manifestation of the Imamate, nor Imamic initiation."<sup>87</sup> Corbin points out that it is in the light of such theories the Isma'ili epithet Fatima Fatir (Fatima the Creator) begins to be heard and understood, but this time in a new "key." Fatima, the "queen of women" – a frequent honorific – should really be understood as the "sovereign of feminine humanity" where "feminine" equals "meaning,"<sup>88</sup> or "the totality of the beings of the Possible [*al-imkan*]! All creatures have been created out of the Soul itself, out of the Anima of the holy Imams."<sup>89</sup> The Bab will echo this second idea below in his commentary on Qur'an 2:35. Whether the Bab recognized anything like a Jungian "feminine dimension of humanity" is difficult to say with any certainty at this times.<sup>90</sup>

Kirmanian says the Imams are the brides of the prophet inasmuch as they have been created from the soul or are the soul of the Prophet. As the Qur'an [16:74 and 30:20] says, "He has made wives for you out of your own souls." The real "mother of the believers" is the initiatic function of the Imams. But this "motherhood" ultimately has its source in Fatima. Spiritual birth happens through the "Fatimic" agency of the Imams. The Prophet has said, "I and 'Ali are the father and the mother of this community." The Bab quotes this tradition in his commentary on Qur'an 2:83.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Corbin, 66.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>88</sup> See the cognate idea carried, for example, in the phrase *ara'is al-bayan* (the brides of meaning), the title of an esoteric *tafsir* by the mystic Ruzbehan Baqli (d. 1209). Just as a verse of poetry is called a *bayt* (house, tent), the meaning of the verse is considered the bride waiting within the house or tent.

<sup>89</sup> Corbin, 67.

<sup>90</sup> However 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Baha'i leader and thinker (and presumably influenced by the Bab's ideas), spoke of the "feminization of humanity" as a precondition for the establishment of universal peace: "The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals, or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced" (J. E. Esslemont, *Baha u'llah and the New Era*, 5th rev. ed. Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1987, 149). This could be a perfect example of how such an idea as "equality of the sexes," which appears incontestably modern and Western (i.e., foreign to Islam), is in reality a native outgrowth of Islamic culture.

<sup>91</sup> Corbin, 67-68. The Bab's commentary, on Qur'an 2:83, is as follows: "And when We took compact the Children of Israel: 'You shall not serve any save God; and to be good to parents, and the near kinsman, and to orphans, and to the needy; and speak good to men, and perform the prayer, and pay the alms.' then you turned

At Qur'an 2:65-66 Fatima as the creative element par excellence appears as both the true meaning of "the Sabbath" and the primary principle of creation or "primal command." It is reasonable to ask if Tahirih the Babi was referring to this when she spoke of "the primal truth" mentioned by Amanat. There, she is presented as seeing Fatima as a role model.<sup>92</sup> It is possible that she was referring to Fatima as the cosmogonic principle we are discussing. This is not to say that Tahirih the Babi did not see in Fatima (the mother of the Imams) a role model. But in line with the metaphysical mood of the time and place which our texts reflect, it is probable that she was interested in Fatima's ontological value before her sociological value. We also see in this commentary a reappearance of the idea introduced at verse 3 of the Fatiha above: a soul perceives according to its capacity, through himself. It sees what it is.

The comprehensive or universal dimension of the Fatimid reality is brought out again in the Bab's commentary on 2:37: "Thereafter Adam received certain words from his Lord, and turned towards him; truly he turns, and is All-compassionate" [Qur'an 2:37].

The Bab introduces his discussion by pointing out that words are "single letters that have been combined." The Family of God represent several stations with regard to these letters: Muhammad is the point, Ali, Hasan, and Husayn are each different kinds of *alif* (viz., *layniya*, *mutaharraka*, *ghayr ma`tuf*), the letters that do not change form in the Arabic script (*dal* etc.) represent the remainder of the Imams. Finally, the status of *word* is reserved for Fatima alone, the point being that "meaning" itself is implicated and articulated through the Fatimid reality. The belief in the Divine unity taught by the other prophets is in fact created by God himself from this word. In actual fact, the Bab says, "Adam received certain words" of acknowledgment of the *walaya* of the Tree of the Divine Exclusive Unity that God had forbidden "all other than itself from approaching." But when the visible form of Fatima was manifest to him, by means of his own self, God cast into his soul (his *huwiya*) the likeness of repentance and "He turned to him."

Typically, the Bab here cites, in rapid and skillful succession, a Tradition and another Qur'anic verse supporting his *tafsir*: "The Imam, upon whom be

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away, all but a few of you, swerving aside." The Bab says that God is speaking about His "taking compact" with all created things "in the eight paradises," to recognize the *walaya* of `Ali. The first of these paradises is the Depth of Unity (*lujjat al-wahda*) and is characterized by the command, "You shall not serve any save God ... [and this] without reference [to anything else]." In the second paradise the compact was taken by means of recognizing the *Universal Walaya* (*al-walayat al-kulliyya*) of the "parents," i.e., Muhammad and `Ali who are, respectively, the symbols of universal fatherhood and motherhood. Such recognition, the Bab says, is in reality the good mentioned in the verse, because to do good means to do good to all according to what each merits. The good that these particular parents deserve has only been hinted at, because were the Bab to openly (*bi'l-tasrih*) describe it, the prattling enemies (*mubtilun*) would cavil at it. [*Baq*, 223-24.]

<sup>92</sup> Amanat, *Resurrection*, 331. No source for this statement is given here.

peace, said: "We are the words of God." "God (al-Haqq)," says the Bab, "confirms this statement in His mighty Book with the following words."<sup>93</sup>

Say: 'If the sea were ink for the Words of my Lord, the sea would be spent before the Words *of* my Lord are spent, though We brought replenishment the like of it.' [Qur'an 18:109]

And the "replenishment" (*madad*) is origination (*ibda'*) and invention (*ikhtira'*) which God placed under the grade of their lordship. And this origination is spent before the light of Fatima is spent. "And [this light] is inexhaustible" [*wa ma lahu min nifad* = Qur'an 38:54].

Fatima is also "the Sabbath":

And well you know there were those among you that transgressed the Sabbath, and We said to them, "Be you apes, miserably slinking!" (2:65)

In the presence of the Lord, the meaning (*al-murad*) of Sabbath is Fatima the Resplendent (*al-Fatima al-Zahra*), because she is the Day of the Book. Verily, God has caused all created things to appear through her; this is clear. And verily God knows that the people of the contingent world are not the Family of Muhammad, because their realities are the shadows of her body, according to the degree to which she appeared to them through their own souls (*la-hum bi-him*). But they transgressed what God had taught them concerning true doctrine (*i'tiqad*) [namely, they thought] "our [human] realities are in the station of unity and gnosis (*maqam al-wahda wa'l-ma'rifa*), and thus more exalted than her body." God said to them: "The wage of their [meager] knowledge concerning the gnosis of Fatima is 'Be you apes, miserably slinking.'"

He who claims that the prophets have become unified in the region of their own hearts as the body of Fatima was unified, his Creator has made him, at the very moment of this arrogant claim, an ape. The wage of sin is justice from God for what they claimed.<sup>94</sup>

Kirmanian has elaborated on the epithet *al-Zahra* in a discussion of the Logos/Intellect. Corbin summarizes: The Intellect is the suprasensory

<sup>93</sup> *Baq*, 159-60. On *shabah*: The beings of the pleroma of the *lahut* are visible only in their apparitional forms, which are the receptacles of their theophanies (*Corbin*, 63; cf. Huwayzi, 'Abd `Ali, *al-Kitab Tafsir Nur al-Thaqalayn*, 5 vols. Qum: n.p., 1383/1963-1385/1965, Vol. 1, 56-57, #142-44). The words are a prayer; the names of the six (above) and an invocation of these names. #149: God created the light of Muhammad before the heavens and the earth and the throne and the *kursi* and the tablet and the pen and paradise and hell. 149, (cont. p. 58) contains reference to ring of Solomon (Bahrani, *Burhan*, vol. 1, 86, #2 as Huwayzi #3): Adam was expelled on 1 Dhu al-qa'da, and on the 8th of Dhu al-Hijja Gabriel sent him to Minna. See now Amir-Moezzi, *Cosmogony* cited above.

<sup>94</sup> *Baq*, 198-99. The last two sentences are perhaps a reference to a specific controversy. Unfortunately, the details of this are unknown to me.

calling for visible Form, while the station of Fatima corresponds exactly to this visible Form: "[The logos] is like the archetypal body, the inner astral mass of the sun, invisible to human perception, in relation to the visible Form, which is its *aura*, brilliance and splendor.... this is why Fatima has been called by a solar name: Fatima al-Zahra ... the totality of the universe consists of this light of Fatima...."<sup>95</sup> Fatima is furthermore the soul (*nafs*, "Anima") of the Imams, "she is the Threshold or Gate (*bab*) through which the Imams effuse the gift of their light" she is "all thinkable reality." "Her eternal Person, which is the secret of the world of the Soul, is also its manifestation (*bayan*), without which the creative Principle of the world would remain unknown and unknowable, forever hidden."<sup>96</sup> The Bab's commentary on 2:66 is similar:

"And We made it a punishment exemplary for all the former times and for the latter, and an admonition to such as are godfearing."  
[Qur'an 2:66]

God tells about the evildoers who are opposed [to the true *walaya*] namely, that they allude to God by means of a triple allusion (*isharat al-tathlith*).<sup>97</sup> God says that they are apes referring to those who turn to the sign of their own *tawhid* with worldly eyes (*bi'lnazar al-imkani*).... Those who "fear" what God commanded vis a vis drawing near to [Fatima] by attaining the depth of the Fatimid Exclusive Unity (*lujjat al-ahadiyat al-fatimiya*) without modality or allusion (*bila kayf aw ishara*),<sup>98</sup> and fear what God commanded, namely that none would draw near to her/it [*lujja* is feminine] except by clinging to knowledge of Fatima (*bi'l-i 'tigad fi ma 'rifat Fatima*). This itself is impossible in the contingent world, except to the degree that she appears to whatever is other than her by means of whatever is other than Him. And she is the Primal Command (*al-amr al-awwal*; cf. Amanat's "primal truth"), and nothing else. Therefore God made His admonition compelling for the godfearing.<sup>99</sup>

In his discussion of the various levels of the "return" to God (*thumma ilayhi turja una*, Qur'an 2:28), the Bab says that God created Fatima from the light of His essence (*nur dhatihi*) and that all the prophets have their beginning, and therefore their return in the Depth of the Exclusive Unity which Depth was "invented" (*ikhtira'*) from the light of the body of Fatima. "And as for the generality of believers, God originated them from the shadows of the

<sup>95</sup> Corbin, 64.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>97</sup> Baq, 200. This is possibly an allusion to the first three Sunni caliphs whom the Shi'a consider usurpers of 'Ali's position and breakers of the divine covenant.

<sup>98</sup> That is through pure contemplation, without images or thoughts contaminated by "the world." This is a reference, one of many throughout the work, to the famous *Hadith Kumayl*.

<sup>99</sup> Baq, 199-200.

realities of the prophets (*zill haga'iq al-anbiya*). So their return is to these."<sup>100</sup>

The beginning of the Act (*al-fi'l*) is the Depth of the Exclusive unity (*lujjat al-ahadiya*) and its return is to it. And the beginning of passivity (that which is receptive of act: *infi'al*) is the sea of the inclusive unity (*tamtam al-wahidiya*), and its return is to it. And for each grade there is a station in [the cosmic process of] Origin and Return.<sup>101</sup>

Another interesting appearance of Fatima in this commentary is her identification with the Tree that Adam and Eve were commanded to avoid at Qur'an 2:35. Here the Bab says that the Tree is "absolute contingency – because all of the manifestations (*tajalliyat*) are enfolded in it. "Tree," *shajara*, it will be noted, is feminine, so that the Arabic reads "enfolded in her." This is perfectly analogous to the Imams being enfolded within Fatima as discussed earlier. Continuing, the Bab says, "As for Adam, God created the beginning of his existence from the superabundance of the luminous rays of the body of Fatima."

And a [created] thing may not "draw nigh" to [anything] beyond its origin. So, when Adam "drew nigh" to the Tree of Reality shining forth from Fatima by means of the "drawing nigh" of existence, he disobeyed his Lord, because God commanded him to not to approach it, except through an instance of ecstatic consciousness (*al-wijdan*). At the time of such an experience, the "thing drawn nigh unto" is the Tree itself and nothing other than it.<sup>102</sup>

Adam's disobedience is also related to Fatima in the commentary at Qur'an 2:6: "Verily as for those who disbelieve, it is all the same to them whether ye warn them or ye warn them not, they will not have faith." Adam's repentance after his expulsion from the Garden is the result of his having been made aware of the generosity of Fatima. Adam had shown covetousness, one of the three sources of *kufir* according to Ja'far alSadiq, when he wanted to eat from the Tree.

The first disobedience of Adam was his desire for the Tree of the Divine Inclusive Unity. Indeed, his desire was the very creation of

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 109-110.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 108-9.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 154. Here it is perhaps an affirmation of the agency and efficacy of the specifically Shi'i form of "enlightenment" referred to by Corbin as "instase". Cf., in this regard, Fritz Meier's definition of *wijdan* as "being touched inside". Meier, Fritz. *Die "fawa'ih al-gamal wa fawatih al-galal" des Nagmuddin al-Kubra*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1957 *fawl* 41 & 95; 101 German text. The terms *wijdan*, derived from *wujud* "finding" denotes "ecstasy" in Arabic and "conscience" in Persian. I have combined the two meanings here in "ecstasy of consciousness" – a paradoxical event of awareness in which there is no distinction between object and subject, and therefore – according to the implied syllogism – no awareness. *Wijdan* can also connote an intensification or "thickening" of the experience of being/existence analogous, perhaps, to poetry (*Dichtung*) as a thickening of the experience of language. The language here is also another explicit reference to the *Hadith Kumayl*.

this Tree! Otherwise, he would have remained a dweller in the Divine Exclusive Unity, not desiring anything else. He would not have abandoned the Garden of Muhammad and his Family. At the time of this desire came shirk. And when this desire came about he abandoned the Garden and the Divine Will became attached to the Divine Purpose, and this is Eve and Adam. God created her from the Divine Will for the comfort of Adam. When he disobeyed, he left the Garden of the Divine Ipseity (*huwiya*) and he entered the black sea of this world below-a veritable fire of duality where even the qualities of submissiveness and humility fight with one another. He perceived the generosity (*jud*) of Fatima. Then he lamented and he affirmed to God his belief in al-bada' [viz., the distinctively Shi'i belief that God can change His mind, or "start anew"] and attested to the prohibition of wine and he wept thirty days, then he repented towards God by clinging to the love of the recognition of the Family of God. God accepted his repentance, and thus did Adam become one "of those who do good."<sup>103</sup>

### Love and Authority

We close this survey of Fatima in the Bab's *tafsir* with the subject that opened the study, namely *walaya*, "spiritual authority," and its dimension of love (*mahabba*). At verse 3 of *Surat al-Baqara*, the subject of Absolute Walaya is encountered. Here the Qur'anic statement "those who perform the prayer" is said by the Bab to imply general obedience to Muhammad and his Trustees (or: Legatees, *awsiya*) and his Progeny (*nabt*) through the *Most Great Absolute Walaya* (*al-walaya almutlaqa al-kubra*). While in other statements *Absolute Walaya* was linked to 'Ali alone,<sup>104</sup> here it includes all of the Imams. In the same section *walaya* is identified with *tawhid*, affirmation of the divine unity. The Bab says that the act of prayer (*salat*) "from beginning to end" is the "form for affirming divine uniqueness" (*surat al-tafrid*), the "temple (*haykal*) for affirming the divine unity (*tawhid*)," and the "visible form (or: pre-vivified form, *shabah*) of *walaya*." This being the case, only the actual bearers of *walaya* are able to perform it properly because it is the foremost station of distinction between the Beloved (*mahbub*, i.e., God) and the lover. The Family of God (*al Allah* = Muhammad, Fatima, and the 12 Imams) are the true bearers of the meaning of the divine love mentioned in the famous hadith *qudsi*: "I was a hidden treasure and desired to be known, therefore I created mankind in order to be known." This love (*mahabba*) was manifested (*tajalla*) by God to them by means of their own selves (*la-hum bi-him*), to such a degree of exclusivity

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., pp. 45-46 Cf. Tusi, *al-Tibyan*, vol. 1, pp. 59-60: This verse was revealed about Abu Jahl according to al-Rabi' b. Anis, and al-Balkhi and al-Maghribi chose this; according to Ibn Abbas, it was sent down about the Jewish leaders around Mecca; some say it was sent down about the Arab idolators. Tabari chose Ibn 'Abbas: "We say rather that the verse has a general meaning."

<sup>104</sup> Baq, p. 195.

that this divine love subsists only through them, and pure servitude appears only in them.

The Bab continues to say that the Family of God are the places (*mahall*) where servitude and all lordship (*'ubudiyat and rububiyat*) distinguish themselves, implying that it is through their act of servitude that they have been invested with the rank of lordship in relation to others.

Whoever, then, confesses the truth of their *walaya* in "the region of pure servitude" has in fact performed the prayer according to all the stations of the Merciful One. And he who performs the prayer [this way] also "pierces the veils of glory" (*subuhat al-jalal*) and enters the house of glory (*bayt al-jalal*), where such a one will eternally dwell in the protecting shade of their *walaya*.<sup>105</sup>

At verse 62, the term *Absolute Walaya* is associated again with the entire Family of God, because they are sanctified servants who do nothing of their own wills, but rather the will of God: "Surely they that believe, and those of Jewry, and the Christians, and those Sabaeans, whoso believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness – their reward awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow."

The "works of righteousness" mentioned in this verse therefore are described as being represented, par excellence, by the act of recognizing the *Absolute Walaya* of the Family of God; and "their reward awaits them with 'Ali." In the context of the verse itself, the suggestion is that non-Muslims are implicated in the responsibility of recognizing the authority of 'Ali and the Family of God. This may offer an indication of the way in which "absolute" (*mutlaq*) is to be understood. It should be noted that the last phrase of the above verse is repeated at Qur'an 10:62, where it is specifically "the friends of God" (*awliya' allah*) who will neither grieve nor sorrow. Such cross references and correspondences are most certainly not accidental, particularly in this case where the later verse corroborates this interpretation by virtue of its vocabulary (*awliya'* plural of *wali*).<sup>106</sup>

Love as a synonym for *walaya* is of course not new with the Bab, but it is important that this aspect of *walaya* be constantly kept in mind as a means of holding the other connotations of the term, such as "authority" and "power," in perspective. This equivalence led Corbin to state that Shi'ism is pre-eminently a religion of spiritual love<sup>107</sup> – a very large assertion that must be considered in the somewhat ratified context of Corbin's preoccupations. However, insofar as devotion to the *walaya* of the Imam represents, in essence, an act of love, the assertion seems to stand.

<sup>105</sup> This is perhaps an example of the antinomian motif so prominent in certain so-called extremist Shi'i texts and teachings.

<sup>106</sup> *Baq*, 195-96.

<sup>107</sup> E.g., *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1st ed., i, 285-303 and iii, 210.



In the commentary on Qur'an 2:23, "love" is again associated with *walaya*. The Bab says:

None can attain to the Depth of the Exclusive Divine Unity (*lujjat al-ahadiya*) except by means of his ('Ali's) *walaya*. It is the goal (*maqsud*) of your existence (*wujudi-kum*), because God has made you for the sake of this love (*mahabba*). And He has put His life (*hayat*) and His might (*'izz*) in it, to the extent that such is possible in the contingent world – if only you understood .

Love is related to the idea of knowledge/*ma' rifa* (gnosis), by virtue of the "theosophical" axiom: the more one knows the more one loves, and the more one loves the more one knows. This axiom is represented in the Islamic instance by the *Tradition of the Hidden Treasure*, quoted above: God's love or desire to be known set the terms of spiritual development for "all time." True knowledge is attained through love and devotion, and if this devotion be tested through hardship, the love, and therefore the attendant knowledge (or vice versa) is the purer. All of the Family of God suffered, but perhaps none more than Fatima, who as the mother of all suffers doubly. In his commentary on Qur'an 2:25, the Bab states that "the Garden," that is, Paradise, is indeed the love of the visible form of Fatima (*mahabbat shabah Fatima*).

But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portion is Gardens beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say: "Why, this is what we were fed with before." For they are given things in similitude (*mutashabihan*); and they have therein companions pure (and holy); and they abide therein forever. [2:25]

For the people of inner knowledge "God gave glad tidings to those who believe" in Muhammad and do righteous deeds with regard to his Trusteeship by means of allegiance to 'Ali. For them await gardens, and these [gardens] are the love (*hubb*) of Fatima underneath which are rivers, meaning the two Hasans [ i.e., al-Hasan and al-Husayn). ... the fourth [river] is of red wine, flowing for the fragmentation (*kasr*) of all things and their refashioning (*sawgh*) according to the divine signs and tokens. And by it the love bodies (*al-ajasad ab-mahabba*) of the Shi'a of the Pure Family of God are reddened. And God fashioned in this river the forms of the believers. And God wrote at its head; "Love of the Shi'a of Ali is My fortress (*hisni*). Therefore, he who enters My fortress is secure from My chastisement." Every one who drinks from a river: they say, "This is that" in which God has put all the lights of the four signs [i.e., *tawhid*, *nubuwwa*, *imama*, *shi'a*).... And there for them shall be

spouses purified and virtuous ... And they shall dwell forever in the love of Fatima.<sup>108</sup>

Given the dramatic role played by Tahiriḥ – as the reappearance of Fatima in the formation and development of the Babi religion, such words as these of the Bab's give us an enhanced understanding of the sources of her authority and influence and raise the question, Must a challenge to the status quo entail a break with the past?

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108 *Baq*, 87: "love of the form of Fatima" (mahabbat shabah Fatima). Additional works consulted include: Abu Lawz, Yusuf. *Fatima Tadhhabu Mubakkira ila al-Huqul*. Damascus: Ittihad al-kuttab al-arab, 1983.; 'Adawi, Muhammad Mustafa, *al-Qissat ar-Raha li's-Sayyida Fatima az-Zahra* (Cairo, n.d.). Translated in Jeffery, *Islam: Muhammad and His Religion*, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958, 217-22.; Bani, Omol. *Fatima statt Farah: Erfahrungen einer Frau in der iranischen Revolution*. Tübingen: Iva-Verlag, 1980. Bayat, Mangol. *Mysticism and Dissent: Socioreligious Thought in Qajar Iran*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982, 1-58; Bursi, Rajab al-. *Mashariq Anwar al-Yaqin fi Asrar Amir al-Mu'minin*. Beirut: n.p, 1979. Furat al-Kufi, Furat ibn Ibrahim. *Tafsir Furat al-Kufi*. Ed. Muhammad 'Ali al-Ghurawi Urdubadi. Najaf al Matba'a al-Huyderiya 1353/1934.; Gerstle, C. Andrew. "Text as Performance: Tragedy in Japanese Drama." In *Recovering the Orient: Artists, Scholars, Appropriations*, ed. Andrew Gerstle and Anthony Milner. Singapore: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994, 205-28; Hajajji-Jarrah, Soraya. "Women's Modesty in Qur'anic Commentaries: The Founding Discourse." In *Women and the Veil in North America*, eds. Sajjida Alvi, Homa Hoodfar, and Sheila McDonough. Toronto: Women's Press, 2003.; Hermansen, Marcia K. "Fatimeh as a Role Model in the Works of Ali Shari'ati." In *Women and Revolution in Iran*, ed. Guity Nashat. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1983., 87-96; Khamis, Muhammad Atiya. *Fatima al-Zahra*. Cairo, 1965.; Todd Lawson, Akhbari Shi'i Approaches to Tafsir." In *Approaches to the Qur'an*, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul- Kader A. Shareef. New York and London: Routledge, 1993, 173-210.; Massignon, Louis. "Der Gnostische Kult der Fatima im Shiitischen Islam." In *Opera Minora*. Beirut: 1963a, vol. 1, 514-22."La mubahala de Medine et l'hyperdulie de Fatima." In Louis Massignon, *Opera Minora*. Beirut: Dar el-Maaret Liban, 1963: vol. 1., 550-72. Massignon, Louis. "L'Oratoire de Marie a l'Aqca, vu sous le voile de deuil de Fatima." In Louis Massignon, *Opera Minora*. Beirut: Dar el-Maaret Liban, 1963, vol. 1, 592-618. Massignon, Louis. "L'Experience musulmane de la Compassion ordonnee a l'Universel a propos de Fatima et de Hallaj." In Louis Massignon, *Opera Minora*. Beirut: Dar el-Maaret Liban, 1963, vol. 3, pp. 642-53; *The Passion of al-Hallaj, Mystic and Martyr of Islam*. Translated from the French with a biographical foreword by Herbert Mason. 4 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982; Milani, Fadil Husayni al-. *Fatima al-Zahra umm abiha*. Beirut: Dar al-Ta'rif lil'matbu'at wamuassasa Ahl al-Bayt, 1979; Qazwini, Muhammad Kazim al-. *Fatima al-Zahra min al-Mahd ilal'l-Lahd*, Beirut: Dar al-Sadiq, 1977; Rashti, Sayyid Kazim. *Sharh al-Qasida al-Lamiya*. Tabriz: litho., n.p., 1270; Stumpel, Isabel. "Tahira Qurrat al-'Ain." In *Iran im 19 Jahrhundert und die Entstehung der Baha'i Religion*, ed. Christoph Burgel and Isabel Schayani. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1998, 127-43. Tabrisi, Abu 'Ali, al-. *Mamma' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr wa Dar al-Kitab al Lubnani, 1377/1957.

## **Dreams and their Interpretation in the Baha'i Religion** **Some preliminary remarks**

Dr. Necati Alkan  
Jerusalem, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

### **Abstract**

This paper provides an outline of the importance of dreams and their interpretation in the Bahá'í Religion. After some general remarks on dreams, dreams and dream interpretation in Islam will be discussed, since they provide an archetype for the Bahá'í context. Statements on dreams by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá will be examined. Finally, a dream interpretation by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Ottoman Turkish that contains significant Islamic elements, will be commented on and a provisional translation of it appended.

### **Introduction**

Dreams are a universal phenomenon and dream interpretation is an ancient and universal practice. There are books and scrolls extant on the subject, dating back to Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Ancient Greeks and the Romans. In available sources from Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, in the *Iliad* of Homer, also in the Old Testament and in pre-Islamic Arab peoples, dreams are sources of divination, that is, predictions of future events. In some indigenous cultures dreams are identical with reality or are believed to be fulfilled. In Ancient Greece, dreams were used to provide cures for ailments through divine power. The Greeks called this practice *egkoimesis*, and the Romans *incubatio*. Dream incubation is commonly associated with the cult of Asklepios but is apparently still an institution in the Mediterranean. Perhaps the most famous book on dream interpretation is by the Greek Artemidoros of Ephesos, called *Oneirocritica* (from Greek *oneiros*, "dream").<sup>1</sup>

Overall, messengers and prophets of God have received their first revelations, inspirations, commands or glad-tidings through dreams and visions,- sometimes through angels or other intermediaries,- such as Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Muhammad, the Mormon 'prophet' Joseph Smith or the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Also, scientists claimed to have solutions for intricate problems or inventions, in their dreams.

### **Dreams and their interpretation in Islam**

During the period of classical Islam (9.-14. centuries A.D.) dream interpretation, among the ancient sciences, was passed on to Islam through

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<sup>1</sup>For a general discussion of dreams, see e.g. the entry 'dream' *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* and *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* (ed. Mircea Eliade); for the general Islamic context, see *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (EF<sup>2</sup>, 2. edition), s.v. 'Ru'yā'; *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (EQ), s.v. 'Dreams and Sleep'; Orhan Hançerlioğlu, *İslam İnançları Sözlüğü* (İSS, 'Dictionary of Islamic Beliefs,' İstanbul 1994<sup>2</sup>), s.v. 'Rüyâ'.

translations of Greek and Roman classics. Dreams (sing. *ru'yá*) and their interpretation (*ta'bír*) have had a central place among Muslims.<sup>2</sup> Countless books on dream interpretation in the Middle East are offered - and even on-line interpreters and digital dream encyclopaedias on the internet.<sup>3</sup> Still popular in the Islamic world is also the practice of *istikhára*<sup>4</sup> ('the search for the good') for invoking dreams in order to arrive at a solution of a problem. It is moreover noteworthy that *ta'bír*<sup>5</sup> was utilised for political claims and legitimisation of rulers,<sup>6</sup> the legitimisation of the four Sunni schools of law (*madháhib al-arba'a*),<sup>7</sup> or as a means to evaluate *aḥádíth* (Islamic traditions, sg. *ḥadīth*).<sup>8</sup>

With respect to dreams and *aḥádíth* as a source of authority in Islam, it can be said that so-called 'legitimizing-edifying dreams' were utilised for decision-making, the establishment of preferences, and the approval of ideas. The same type of dreams offered guidelines for right conduct, thoughts and reactions in definite situations in the daily lives of Muslims. 'Legitimizing-edifying dreams' also had an important function in disputes among the Sunni *madháhib* through the way the four jurists were presented in dreams, how these should be understood with regard to the jurists' influence and status in the Islamic *umma* (community), and their value and trustworthiness as the founders of eponymous schools of law.<sup>9</sup>

The revelation of the Qur'an (Q.) itself commenced with a vision or a dream in which the angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad (Sura 96), which is also transmitted in a *ḥadīth*: 'The commencement of the Divine Inspiration to God's Apostle was in the form of good righteous (true) dreams in his sleep.'<sup>10</sup>

The Qur'an itself contains some passages about dreams and their interpretation. The most famous is in the story of Joseph, 'the best of stories' (*aḥsan al-qasas*, Q. 12:3) in the *Súrat Yúsuf* (12. Sura). As in Genesis, all three dream episodes of Joseph are mentioned. The purpose of these is to show that dreams and their proper interpretation are a sign of God's favour.

<sup>2</sup> Seminal works on dreams in Islam are: Helmut Gätje, 'Philosophische Traumlehren im Islam', in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 109 (1959), 258-85, and Gustave E. Grunebaum/Robert Cailliois, *The Dream and Human Societies* (L.A./Berkeley, 1966); Leah Kinberg, *Morality in the Guise of Dreams: Ibn Abī d-Dunyā, A Critical Edition of the kitāb al-manām* (Leiden et al., 1994); Annemarie Schimmel, *Die Träume des Kalifen: Träume und ihre Bedeutung in der islamischen Kultur* (München, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., the websites <http://www.ibnsereen.com>, <http://www.alburaq.net/trabsform.cfm>, and <http://dreams.al-islam.com>

<sup>4</sup> *EF*<sup>2</sup> s.v. 'Istikhára'; *ISS*, s.v. 'Istihâra'; Schimmel, 40-41.

<sup>5</sup> *EF*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. 'Ta'bír'; *ISS*, s.v. 'Tâbir'.

<sup>6</sup> Leah Kinberg, 'Literal Dreams and Prophetic ḥadīths in Classical Islam: a comparison of legitimization', in *Islam* 70 (1993), 279-300.

<sup>7</sup> Idem. 'The legitimization of the madháhib through dreams', in *Arabica* 32 (1985), 47-79. The schools are the Ḥanbalī, Ḥanafī, Shāfi'ī and Malikī.

<sup>8</sup> Idem. 'Dreams as a Means to Evaluate ḥadīths', in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 23 (1999), 79-99.

<sup>9</sup> These founders are Abu Hanīfa (d. 767), Malik b. Anas (d. 795), Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 855), and Muḥammad b. Idris ash-Shāfi'ī (d. 820).

<sup>10</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* (SB), Volume 9, Book 87, Number 111; online at MSA-USC Hadith Database, <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/reference/searchhadith.html>; where necessary, 'Allah' in following *aḥádíth* is replaced by 'God'.

The most significant episode is when Joseph tells his father about his own dream of 'eleven stars and the sun and the moon were prostrating themselves before me.' In the Old Testament this means that Joseph's eleven brothers and his father and mother will one day bow down before him and this will infuriate his brothers. In the Qur'an it is said that his father warns Joseph not to tell his dream to his jealous brothers because of their intentions to kill him. His father's statement 'Thus will thy Lord choose thee and teach thee the interpretation of events' (*ta'wil al-aḥādīth*) (Q. 12:6) alludes to a later episode during Joseph's imprisonment in Egypt when he is asked to interpret the dreams of two men (12:36-42). With these dreams coming true the Pharaoh realises Joseph's ability to interpret dreams and asks him to interpret two dreams of his own after being displeased with his advisors, who admitted that they are not knowledgeable about dream interpretation and labelled the Pharaoh's dreams as 'confused/jumbled dreams' (*aḡhāth aḡlām*, Q. 12:44). Joseph expounds the king's dreams as predictions of his land's future welfare and thus pleases him. As a result, the king awards Joseph by making him his personal servant. Both in Genesis and the Qur'an Joseph's piety and his ability to interpret dreams are a sign of his nearness to God.<sup>11</sup>

Another crucial Qur'anic as well as Biblical episode is that of Abraham's sacrifice of his son, which is Isaac in Genesis and Isma'il in the Qur'an. Abraham receives God's command to sacrifice his son in a dream (*manām*). After telling his son about this, both surrender themselves to God's will (*fa-lammā aslamā*, Q. 37:102-105). This in itself is utter humility and absolute trust and at the very heart of the Islamic faith: a 'muslim' is someone who entirely submits him/herself to God's will (*islām*). Apart from this, another aspect is worth noting here. Although there is no indication that Abraham's dream was divine in origin, he and his son readily accepted it as such.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless Qur'an interpretations emphasise that Abraham saw this dream three times before being certain that it is from God. After the first night he wondered whether his dream is divine or satanic. The subsequent night he had the same dream and knew that it was a divine command. After seeing the dream for the third time, Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son. According to Qur'an commentators Abraham's hesitation is not in agreement with the *ḥadīth* that dreams (*ru'yā*) of prophets are equal to revelation (*wahy*). Hence, if a prophetic *ru'yā* is *wahy*, there is no room for Abraham's hesitation. Also, that Abraham asks his son what he thinks about the sacrifice is in the opinion of some commentators a contradiction.<sup>13</sup>

Four words stand for dreams, visions and sleep in the Qur'an: 1. *ru'yā* appears six times (12:5, 12:43, 12:100, 17:60, 37:105, 48:27); 2. *manām*, occurs four times (8:43, 30:23, 37:102, 39:42); 3. Then there is *bushrā*,

<sup>11</sup> Leah Kinberg, 'Dreams and Sleep', in *EQ*, vol. 1, A-D (Leiden et al. 2001), 546-53; Kelly Bulkeley, 'Reflections on the Dream Tradition in Islam', in *Sleep and Hypnosis* 4:1 (2002), 4-14.

<sup>12</sup> Bulkeley, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Kinberg, *EQ* 547.

meaning ‘good-tidings’ or ‘good news,’ which is used once as ‘dream’ (10:64). While these three terms signify good dreams, the word *hulm* that occurs twice in the Qur’an, means bad dream and is used in the expression *adgháth ahlám*, that is, ‘confused/jumbled dreams’ (12:44, 21:5). Six of all these references deal with the biblical figures Abraham and Joseph; the other references relate to central Islamic issues like the conquest of Mecca that was revealed to Muhammad in a dream prior to the event itself (Q 48:27). For the interpretation of these qur’anic verses the commentators utilise Islamic sayings in canonical *ḥadīth* collections. They deal with the authority of dreams and their use as a means of legitimation. Many interpretive principles are found in the sayings, referring to the practice of dream interpretation, and therefore guide dream practices in contemporary Muslim countries.

Dreams in Islam are usually divided into three categories: 1. True dreams which come from God and are part of revelation or prophetism; 2. Deceitful dreams which are the whisperings of Satan or demons; 3. Dreams which are the result of man’s nature that are not dangerous but also do not bear a significant message.<sup>14</sup> There are other classifications of dreams. The theologian al-Razi (d. 1210) suggested the following: 1. There are dreams with a message and become reality, such as Muhammad’s dream about his conquest of Mecca; 2. Dreams whose message is realised in the opposite way, like Abraham’s dream: he was asked to sacrifice his son but in reality he sacrificed a lamb; 3. Dreams that demand for interpretation, such as the dreams in the Sura of Joseph.<sup>15</sup> Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), the great Muslim learned, on the other hand, talks about 1. Clear dream visions which are from God; 2. Allegorical dreams from the angels, which need to be interpreted; 3. ‘Confused dreams’ from Satan, which are futile.<sup>16</sup> The differentiation between ‘true dreams’ and ‘confused dreams’ is based on the *ḥadīth* “*ru’yá* is from God and *hulm* is from Satan.” As noted above *hulm* denotes bad dreams also in the Qur’an. Dreams are also an integral part of major and minor Islamic *ḥadīth* collections.

### **Dreams in the Babi and Baha’i Religions**

There are Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá classifying dreams into several categories. He endorses some of those categories as a kind of inspiration or foreseeing of what will happen in future. In other Tablets he has given interpretation to believers’ dreams at the request of Bahá’ís that had such experiences.

The Bab’s Revelation commenced with a vision. The Bab dreamt that He drank Imam Husayn’s blood. In a passage in which Shoghi Effendi talks about the first revelations of major prophets we read:

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<sup>14</sup> Gätje, 249-50.

<sup>15</sup> Kinberg *EQ*, 547.

<sup>16</sup> Bulkeley, 10.

The circumstances in which the Vehicle of this newborn Revelation, following with such swiftness that of the Báb, received the first intimations of His sublime mission recall, and indeed surpass in poignancy the soul-shaking experience of Moses when confronted by the Burning Bush in the wilderness of Sinai; of Zoroaster when awakened to His mission by a succession of seven visions; of Jesus when coming out of the waters of the Jordan He saw the heavens opened and the Holy Ghost descend like a dove and light upon Him; of Muḥammad when in the Cave of Hīrá, outside of the holy city of Mecca, the voice of Gabriel bade Him “cry in the name of Thy Lord”; and of the Báb when in a dream He approached the bleeding head of the Imám Ḥusayn, and, quaffing the blood that dripped from his lacerated throat, awoke to find Himself the chosen recipient of the outpouring grace of the Almighty.<sup>17</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh's as well received His first revelation in the Siyáh-Chál through a vision. In a well-known passage He says: ‘One night, in a dream (*dar ‘ālam-i ru'yā*), these exalted words were heard on every side...’<sup>18</sup> He regards sleep and the fact that we can dream as ‘phenomenon’, which is ‘the most mysterious of the signs of God amongst men (*āyat al-a'zam bayna 'n-nās*), were they to ponder it in their hearts.’ He adds that events in a dream during the sleep (*tará fī nawmika*) that become realised ‘after a considerable lapse of time’ (lit.: *ba'da sana aw sanatayn aw azyad*, ‘after a year or two or more’)<sup>19</sup> or ‘after the lapse of many years’ (lit.: *ba'd az bīst sanih aw azyad*, ‘after twenty or more years’).<sup>20</sup>

Elsewhere, Bahá'u'lláh talks about a dream of His own, in which He beheld the Prophet Muḥammad. This dream serves as a confirmation of the removal of the Islamic *jihād*, of ‘holy war’ and His mission of peace:

One day I saw in a dream that I associated with His Holiness, the Apostle (Muḥammad), may the souls of all else but Him be sacrificed for His sake. Words were revealed and utterances were made manifest from that Dawning-Place of God's Book. Thereupon He said: ‘Previously I had said: ‘Paradise is beneath the shades of swords (*al-jannatu taḥta ṣilāli 's-suyūf*).’<sup>21</sup> However, if I were manifest in these days, I would say: ‘Paradise is beneath the shade of the tree of friendliness and compassion’ (*al-jannatu*

<sup>17</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust: Wilmette 1944 (1979<sup>2</sup>), 92.

<sup>18</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 21; *Lawḥ-i Khitāb bih Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī Isfahānī* (*Lawḥ-i Ibn-i Dhi'b*), Baha'i-Verlag: Hofheim BE 138/1983-84), 15; online at the Baha'i Reference Library, <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/ESW/>

<sup>19</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, ch. 79, p. 151-52; *Muntakhabát az Áthár-i Hadrat-i Bahá'u'lláh* (Bahá'í-Verlag: Hofheim BE 141/1985-86), 102-103

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 162/108.

<sup>21</sup> A *ḥadīth*; see *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, Volume 4, Book 52, no. 73: ‘Know that Paradise is under the shades of swords.’; cf. Volume 4, Book 52, no. 2: ‘Once God's Apostle (during a holy battle), waited till the sun had declined and then he got up among the people and said, “O people! Do not wish to face the enemy (in a battle) and ask God to save you (from calamities) but if you should face the enemy, then be patient and let it be known to you that Paradise is under the shades of swords.”’; online at [MSA-USC Hadith Database](http://MSA-USC.HadithDatabase)

*taḥta zıláli sidrati 'l-ulfati wa 'r-raḥma*). Upon hearing this blessed and exalted Word, I declared: 'May the souls of all men be a sacrifice unto Thy loving-kindness, tender mercy and bounty!' Subsequently, the Ocean of utterance spoke that which the Pen was unable to reveal and the ink not capable to make manifest. When I woke up from my sleep I have found Myself filled with gladness for a time, in such wise that it was beyond description.<sup>22</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá, speaking of the immortality of the spirit/soul, reiterates the realisation of dreams. He also states that a problem or question, which one cannot resolve in this 'world of wakefulness is solved in the world of dreams (*'álam-i ru'yá*)' or 'the world of sleep' (*'álam-i kh'áb*). When man is asleep he does not any distance or dimension as in this material world but he embraces the East and the West, and travels 'in the twinkling of an eye'.<sup>23</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá differentiates between two kinds of visions or dreams, which He calls 'spiritual discoveries' (*iktisháfát-i ruḥániyyih*). The first one is 'the revelations of the Prophets (*ru'yá-yi anbiyá*)', and the spiritual discoveries of the elect (*iktisháfát-i ruḥániyyih-i asfiyá*). According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá those of the Prophets are not dreams (*ru'yá-yi anbiyá' kh'áb níst*) but 'spiritual discoveries (*iktisháfát-i ruḥáníst*) and have reality (*ḥaqíqat*)' since it occurs in the state of wakefulness and not during a sleep.<sup>24</sup>

The second sort of 'spiritual discoveries' in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's categorisation are 'made up of pure imaginations' (*awḥám-i širf*), which appear to 'simple-hearted people' as having a reality. In this situation the minds of men discover truths, 'and from this thought and discovery signs and results are produced. This thought has a foundation'. However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá compares these to 'the waves of the sea of imaginations; they have no fruit, and no result comes from them. In the same way, man sees in the world of sleep a vision which becomes exactly realized; at another time, he sees a dream which has absolutely no result.'<sup>25</sup>

What we mean is that this state, which we call the converse and communications of spirits, is of two kinds: one is simply imaginary (*awḥám-i maḥḍ*), and the other is like the visions (*ru'yáhá*) which are mentioned in the Holy Book, such as the revelations of St. John and Isaiah and the meeting of Christ with Moses and Elias. These are real, and produce wonderful effects in the minds and thoughts of men, and cause their hearts to be attracted.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> From the *Lawḥ-i Tabīb*, provisional translation, *Má'idih-yi Ásmání*, (ed. 'Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari), vol. 8, Tehran 129 BE/1972-73, 78;

<sup>23</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 227/ *Mufāwadát-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Miṣr 1339/1920, 2 edition by Mir'at Publications 1998), 160. , cf. *Khiṭābāt Ḥaḍrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 2, Baha'i-Verlag: Hofheim BE 127/1970-71, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. ch. 71, 251-53/176-78.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



At another instance, ‘Abdu’l-Baha classifies dreams into three categories: 1. *ru’yá-yi şádiqih*, “true dreams”: they are as bright as the morning sun and do not need interpretation (*ta’bír*). They come to pass in the same manner as it was seen but most of the people do not achieve this; it needs a heart rid of all attachment and there must not exist idle thoughts in the mind; 2. *ru’yá-yi ta’bírí*, “interpretive dreams”: these are idle thoughts from the heart or mind and need interpretation. Idle thoughts must be separated from spiritual discoveries. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains thus: if you add any colour to a white cloth, it will accept it; but if you add blue to a yellow cloth, it will become green and the truth is distorted. In order to have the true colour, one needs to remove the added colour. 3. *aḡháth ahlám*, ‘confused dreams.’ If man is involved in strife and contention during the day and these events appear to him in his dreams, these cannot be interpreted and are no discovery. Finally, He adds that in the sight of the Prophets *ru’yá* is part of *wahy*, in which they see a celestial figure who tells them to say or to do things.<sup>27</sup>

### ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *Ta’bír* in Ottoman Turkish

As in the case of some other Tablets which ‘Abdu’l-Baha wrote in Ottoman Turkish,<sup>28</sup> this Tablet was also in all probability written to an Ottoman official.<sup>29</sup> He addresses the recipient with ‘his excellency’ (*zât-ı ulyâları*). In the first part of this Tablet ‘Abdu’l-Baha provides a short exegesis (*tafsír*) of a hadith to the same person.<sup>30</sup>

The second part is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s interpretation of the following ‘true dream’ (*riyâ-yi sâdik*): the person saw himself in the holy Ka’ba, the centre of the Muslim pilgrimage in Mecca. He moreover dreamed of the prophet Muhammad riding a camel (*deve*), and Muhammad was casting a sheltering shadow with his hand (*pençe*) on a flock of sheep. However, only ten chosen sheep were particularly protected.

‘Abdu’l-Baha explains what the ‘Ka’ba,’ ‘Muḡammad,’ ‘camel,’ ‘hand,’ the ‘flock of sheep,’ and the ‘ten sheep’ stand for. He concludes by assuring his recipient that Muḡammad has blessed him by revealing to him this dream. What is interesting is that ‘Abdu’l-Baha interprets this dream in favour of the Ottomans by saying that Sultan Abdulhamid II. and the Islamic *umma* were victorious over their enemies, the Greeks. In particular, the Muslim martyrs of the (first) Greco-Ottoman War of 1897,<sup>31</sup> who died for the ‘religion and state’ (*din ve devlet*) receive his special blessings. Here

<sup>27</sup>Quoted in Khosrow Farahani, *Sayrî dar ‘Awâlim-i Ru’yá* (Bahá’i-Verlag: Hofheim, 149/1992), 9-10.

<sup>28</sup>See, e.g., Necati Alkan, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Turkish Commentary of the Sura of the Fig: Introduction and Provisional Translation”, *Bahá’i Studies Review* 10 (2001), 115-129.

<sup>29</sup> *Majmú’a-yi Alwáh wa Munajáthá-yi Turki* (Mu’assasa-yi Millî-yi Matbú’ât-i Amrí, BE 127/1970-71), 142-46.

<sup>30</sup> Necati Alkan, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Commentary on the Islamic Tradition: “God doth give victory to this religion by means of a wicked man” – a provisional translation and notes”, in *Bahá’i Studies Review* 11, 53-57.

<sup>31</sup>See, e.g., Stanford Shaw/Ezel K. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (2 vols.), Cambridge University Press, 1977, 2:206-207; Mehmet Uğur Ekinci, ‘[The Origins of the 1897 Ottoman-Greek War: A Diplomatic History](#)’, M.A. Thesis, Bilkent University, Ankara, 2006

‘Abdu’l-Baha also acknowledges the first three caliphs Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthman as rightly guided and among the ten companions of Muhammad whom He had promised paradise.

### Provisional Translation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *ta‘bír*:

As regards the interpretation of thy true dream (*rüyâ-yı sâdık*): thou hast seen thyself in the holy Ka‘ba. According to interpretation, the Ka‘ba is an impregnable stronghold and divinely safeguarded and protected. For it is a threshold of protection and safety and a refuge and asylum for all beasts and birds.

Thou hast also seen His Holiness, the Prophet (Muhammad) in thy dream. According to the holy tradition ‘Who hath seen Me in a dream, he indeed hath beheld the truth’ (*Man ra ‘ání fa-qad ra ‘á al-ḥaqq*),<sup>32</sup> to see the blessed perfection, our Lord the Prophet (pbuh)<sup>33</sup> in a dream, there is no doubt that it is a real vision and true dream that hath come to pass (*müşâhede-i hakikî ve rü‘yet-i vâkî*). To behold our Lord indicateth attainment of gladness, bounty and blessings.

Furthermore, our Lord (pbuh) hath been envisioned riding a camel (*deve*). In the science of dream interpretation (*ilm-i tâbir*) the camel standeth for the enemy. This vision is a sign for the victory over and subjugation of the extremely rancorous and malicious (lit. ‘vindictive as a camel’) enemies and adversaries by the centre of the caliphate, the exalted Sultan Abdulhamid Khan (II.) and the late lamented *umma* (Tr. ümmet) of Muhammad.

And it has been revealed (*inkîşâf*) in the dream that our Lord (pbuh) hath cast a sheltering shadow with His blessed hand (*pençe*) upon a flock of sheep.<sup>34</sup> The flock of sheep is the *umma* and the hand signifieth the ‘five People of the Cloak (*Hamse-i Âl-i Abâ*),’<sup>35</sup> whose grace and blessings hath been vouchsafed unto the whole *umma*.

Moreover, thou hast seen that His blessed and sanctified hand hath cast its shadow only upon ten sheep of the flock. Those ten sheep are the ‘Ten who have been brought good news’ (*Aşere-i Mübeşşere*)<sup>36</sup> who ...<sup>37</sup> are the manifestations of the sublime grace of the People of the Cloak. However much the mass of the *umma* is blessed by the grace of the sanctified hand

<sup>32</sup> *Man ra ‘ání fa-qad ra ‘á al-ḥaqq*; cited in Ibn Sírín, *Tafsír al-Aḥlâm*, p. 7, www.al-waraq.net.

<sup>33</sup> “peace and salutation be upon Him”.

<sup>34</sup> Or, ‘hath protected with His blessed hand...’.

<sup>35</sup> “... the five ‘People (or Companions) of the Cloak’ (Ahl al-Kisa’ or Ashab al-Kisa’), a name which derived from the famous occasion when Muhammad took ‘Ali, Fatima, al-Hasan and al-Husayn under his cloak and described them as members of his family, an event of immense significance for Shi’ism”; Ian Richard Netton, *A Popular Dictionary of Islam*, Curzon Press: London 1992,, 81, s.v. “Fatima”; Momen, *Shi’i*, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Netton, 18: “Tradition portrays the Prophet Muhammad promising Paradise to ten of his followers. The names on the received lists vary but they usually include the Rashidun.”; Netton, s.v. “al-‘Ashara al-Mubashshara”. These are usually the first four Caliphs Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthman, ‘Ali, and ‘Abdu’r-Rahman ibn ‘Awf, Abu ‘Ubayda, Talha, Zubayr, Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqas, and Sa’d ibn Zayd; see, Hançerlioğlu, *İnanç Sözlüğü*, 35.

<sup>37</sup> The text says *eğer ziyade* (‘should more’) but this does not make sense.

like unto that flock of sheep, only the ten who have been brought good news have fully attained unto the special bountiful gifts and found shelter beneath the extended shadow of the ‘five People of the Cloak.’ In addition, the flock of sheep, which hath been specially chosen by our Lord (pbuh) for sacrifice, represents the martyrs of the *umma*. This is the recent battle. These are the martyrs of the Greek War (*Muhârebe-i Yunan*) who readily laid down their lives for the religion and the state (*din ve devlet*), may God bless them and be pleased with them. That these visions were revealed unto thine excellency, shows the liberal effusions and favours of our Lord (pbuh) unto thee. Peace be upon thee. ‘Abbas

### Latinised Text of the Tablet:

Gelelim gördüğünüz rüyâ-yı sâdıkın tâbirine: kendinizi Kâbe-i Mükerrreme’de görmüşsünüz. Tâbirce, Kâbe, hısn-ı hasîn ve savn-ı himâyet-i İlâhiye’dır. Zîra, dergâh-ı emn ü emân ve kâffe-i vuhûş ve tuyûra melce ve penâhtır.

Bir de Hazret-i Risâlet-penâh Efendimizi rüyâda görmüşsünüz. “Beni gören Hakkı görmüş olur” hadîs-i şerîfinin fehvâsınca, Cemâl-i bâ-kemâl-i Nübüvvet-penâh, aleyhi’s-selâti ve’s-selâm, Efendimiz Hazretlerini görmek, müşâhede-i hakikî ve rüyet-i vâkıf olduğu şüphesizdir. Efendimizi müşâhede etmek, husûl-i inşirâh ve husûl-i feyz ü berekete delâlet eder.

Bir de bir deveye Efendimiz, aleyhi’s-selâti ve’s-selâmın bindikleri müşâhede buyrulmuştur. İlm-i tâbirde, deve düşman demektir. Bu rüyâ, merkez-i hilâfet-i seniyyeleri olan es-Sultân Abdülhamîd Hân efendimiz hazretlerinin ve ümmet-i merhûme-i Mustafavîlerinin şedîdü’l-bağzâ deve kineli olan âdâ ve husemâyâ gâlib ve kâhir olacaklarına delâlet eder.

Bir de, Efendimiz aleyhi’s-selâti ve’s-selâmın bir sürü koyuna mübârek pençeleriyle sâye saldıkları rüyâda inkişâf olunmuştur. O koyun sürüsü ümmettir ve ol mübârek pençe Hamse-i Âl-i Abâ’dır ki bütün ümmete feyz ü bereketleri şâmil olmuştur.

Bir de, mukaddes ve mübârek pençelerinin sâyesi koyun sürüsünden ancak on koyuna saldığını görmüşsünüz. O on koyun Aşere-i Mübeşşere’dır ki eğer ziyâde feyz-i celîl-i Âl-i Abâ’ya mazhardırlar. Sâir ümmet o koyun sürüsü gibi her ne kadar pençe-i mukaddesin berekâtından feyz-mend iseler de, fakat hasâis-i mevâhibe tamâm ile naîl olan zıll-ı memdûd-i Hamse-i Âl-i Abâ’ya sığınmış bulunan Aşere-i Mübeşşere’dır. Bir de Efendimiz aleyhisselâmın tarafından kurbanlığa tahsîs olunmuş olan koyun sürüsü şühedâ-yı ümmettir. Bu yakında gazevât-ı ahîredir. Din ve devlet uğrunda cân-fedâkârâne bezl-i hayât eden şehîdân-ı Muhârebe-i Yunân’dır; aleyhimi’r-rahmet ve’r-ırdvân. Ve o müşâhedât zât-ı ulyâlarına inkişâf olduğu cihetle aleyhi’s-selât ve’s-selâm Efendimiz size bir teveccühât-ı feyz-âyât-ı saâdetleri olduğuna delâlet eder. Ve’s-selâm. Abbas

## Messengers of God in North America Revisited:<sup>1</sup> An Exegesis of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet to Amír Khán<sup>2</sup>

Eugene, Donald Francis Addison, Ph.D.  
Pittsburgh, Christopher Buck, Ph.D., J.D.

### Abstract

The following paper is cast in the form of a conversation between two Bahá'í scholars, Dr. Donald Francis Addison and Dr. Christopher Buck, in an emic/etic

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<sup>1</sup> Dedicated to the memory of Dr. Pauline Tuttle (d. 2007), of partly East Coast Mi'kmaq as well as of African, Irish, and British ancestry and, by marriage, of "the People of the Salmon" — that is, of Stö:ló, Ditidaht, and Cowichan heritage. She was Adjunct Professor of Ethnomusicology, University of Victoria School of Music, author of *The Hoop of Many Hoops: The Integration of Lakota Ancestral Knowledge and Bahá'í Teachings in the Performative Practices of Kevin Locke* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 2002) and other works, having dedicated her life and career to Native cultures and Bahá'í enlightenment. See also Pauline Tuttle, "Beyond Feather and Beads: Interlocking Narratives in the Music and Dance of Tokeya Inajin (Kevin Locke)," *Selling the Indian: Commercializing and Appropriating American Indian Cultures*. Edited by Diana Royer and Meyer Carter Jones (Phoenix: University of Arizona Press, 2001). Formerly, Dr. Tuttle was also an instructor at Malaspina University-College (in Nanaimo, British Columbia), Maxwell International Bahá'í School (at Shawnigan Lake, British Columbia), and the University of Washington (Seattle). She also, among other things, helped to establish and coordinate the Tawacin Waste Win Indigenous Studies Special Interest Group of the Association for Bahá'í Studies.

Dedicated also to the memory of the late Dr. David S. Ruhe (1914–2005), former member of the Universal House of Justice, the international governing council of the Bahá'í Faith. Elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States in 1959, Dr. Ruhe served as its secretary from 1963 until 1968, when he was elected to the Universal House of Justice. His service on the democratically-elected Universal House of Justice extended for five terms of five years each until 1993. Medical doctor, accomplished film-maker, painter, and author, Dr. Ruhe produced scores of medical films, winning the Golden Reel Award (1957), the first Golden Raster award (1967), the Venice Film Festival award, and the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain award for his productions, eventually leading to his appointment as Director of the Medical Film Institute for the Association of American Medical Colleges. Prior to his passing in 2005, Dr. Ruhe was planning to produce a film documentary on Native Americans and the Bahá'í Faith. He personally believed that the Iroquois culture-hero, Deganawidah, was "an astonishing Prophet of Peace" (idem, "A New Evolution: Religious Bonding for World Unity," *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 6.4 (1994-1995): 45–57 [45]), and that the time was ripe for the Bahá'í Faith to formally establish the "category" of Native Messengers of God "at the least" and to recognize "Deganawida as indigenous Prophet at the most" — and that such would be "a great service" to the Bahá'í Faith's outreach to indigenous peoples. (See Appendix Three, *infra*.)

<sup>2</sup> The question of whether Bahá'í doctrine can accept, in principle, the existence of "Messengers of God to First Nations" — on a par with those "Manifestations of God" that the Bahá'í Faith already recognizes — was first addressed by Buck in 1996. In this 2007 joint venture by Buck and Addison, this question is "revisited." This time, the centerpiece of the discussion is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Tablet to Amír Khán* which, in part, declares: "Undoubtedly in those regions [America] the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now." By way of disclaimer, the authors admit that this text is susceptible of multiple interpretations, both for and against the existence of Native Messengers.

As a "spectrum hypothesis," both maximalist and minimalist readings confirm and uphold the divine inspiration of indigenous spiritual traditions. *Maximalist reading*: Great Manifestations of God appeared among the Native Americans and raised directly the Call of God, Their teachings being to some extent forgotten, but Their influence not lost, and restored through Bahá'u'lláh. *Minimalist reading*: The Call of God, proclaimed in the East by the Manifestations of God, was raised among Native Americans through their seers, sages, and holy men, who were inspired by God to impart the light of His teachings unto their people. Both readings sacralise and legitimize Native tradition, and furnish bridges for the cultural appropriation of the Bahá'í Faith into Native spiritual idioms. Both readings delegitimize and undermine colonialist approaches to Native spirituality that place before Native converts an "either/or" choice between their Native traditions and the Bahá'í Faith. In the following paper, Buck and Addison present a *maximalist* reading as an alternative to the *minimalist* reading that seems to prevail in current Bahá'í thinking. The reader is free to agree or disagree with this *maximalist* reading of the *Tablet to Amír Khán*.

Let the reader bear in mind that Buck and Addison are proposing a formal recognition of the "principle" of "Messengers of God to First Nations" and not necessarily the "principals" by name (that is, any purported Native Messengers of God such as Deganawidah and White Buffalo Calf Woman) except insofar as to accord Them recognition and respect, as one important and highly symbolic dimension of the Bahá'í-Native encounter.

(insider/outsider) collaboration that offers a complement of Native/non-Native perspectives. Their work takes the form of an experimental alternative to traditional models of academic discourse — one called “conversive relationality,”<sup>3</sup> broadly defined as follows: “A conversive model of communication and scholarship...firmly rooted within the sacred, emphasizing relationality, intersubjectivity, and collaboration...[to] reinform and transform academic...writing and scholarship.”<sup>4</sup>

The exchange between Dr. Addison<sup>5</sup> and Dr. Buck<sup>6</sup> addresses the critical need to fully transform intercultural interactions between Native American/Native Canadian and mainstream Bahá’í communities, and that this process can renewed through a formal recognition, on the part of the Bahá’ís, of the value and authenticity of Native American spirituality. One way that this can be achieved symbolically is through acknowledging that, in principle, the indigenous peoples of the Americas have their own claim to wisdom traditions, and that these traditions derive from “Messengers of God to First Nations.” This principle is anchored, Buck and Addison argue, in the *Tablet to Amír Khán Áhan*. And while Bahá’ís cannot officially add names of individuals who might otherwise qualify as “Manifestations of God,” they can certainly “recognize” the fact that sacred Indian tradition has. This new rapprochement, if successfully undertaken, will signalize

<sup>3</sup> See Susan B. Brill de Ramírez, “Conversive Relationality in Bahá’í Scholarship: Centering the Sacred and Decentering the Self,” *Journal of Bahá’í Studies* 1995, 7(2), 1–28.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> An elder in the Choctaw community, Dr. Donald Addison has a Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology. He currently teaches Native American Music and African Music courses for both undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Oregon on a part-time basis, having proposed and designed these courses for adoption in the curriculum. He is also instructor of Ethnic Studies and Anthropology at Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon, and teaches at Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Oregon, as well. Dr. Addison is currently earning his second Ph.D. in the Department of Linguistics at the [University of Oregon](#). For the “[Wisdom of the Elders Radio Programs](#)” Series Three (funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, the Oregon Arts Commission, and Spirit Mountain Community Fund, Grand Ronde, Oregon), Dr. Addison hosts “Speaking Native” in the eight, one-hour public radio programs on Native languages of the Lewis and Clark Trail. The “Tribal Rhythms” segments — which introduce Native music through interviews with Native American musicians who share the history and background of the traditional music and dance of featured tribes — is likewise scripted by Dr. Addison. As a team member in the “Wisdom of the Elders Curriculum Project,” Dr. Addison is helping to develop multimedia American Indian curriculum materials for schools in collaboration with the State of Oregon Department of Education’s Indian Education office and other agencies. (See also Donald Addison, “Native Americans and the Bahá’í Faith,” *The Community College Moment*, 2002, 2(1), 68–76.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Christopher Buck is an attorney-at-law and independent scholar. Author of *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy* (2005), *Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Bahá’í Faith* (1999), *Symbol and Secret: Qur’an Commentary in Bahá’u’lláh’s Kitáb-i Íqán* (1995/2004), and editor of *Generation Y Speaks Out: A Policy Guide* (2002), Dr. Buck has recently been admitted to Bar of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. He now works as an attorney-at-law for the law firm of Pribanic & Pribanic (White Oak, PA). At Michigan State University (2000–2004), Quincy University (1999–2000), Millikin University (1997–1999), and Carleton University (1994–1996), Dr. Buck taught American studies, African American studies, Islamic studies, and religious studies. “Religious Myths of America” (2003–2004) and “African American Spirituality and the Conscience of America” (Spring 1999) are among the courses he designed and taught during his ten years as a professor. Dr. Buck has published several contributions to American Indian studies: Christopher Buck, “Bureau of Indian Affairs,” *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society*. Edited by Richard T. Schaefer (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008); “[Never Again: Kevin Gover’s Apology for the Bureau of Indian Affairs](#),” *Wicazo Sa Review* 2006, 21(1), 97–126; “Bahá’í Universalism and Native Prophets,” *Reason & Revelation: New Directions in Bahá’í Thought*. Edited by Seena Fazel and John Danesh (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2002), 172–201; and “[Native Messengers of God in Canada?: A Test Case for Bahá’í Universalism](#),” *Bahá’í Studies Review*, 1996, 6, 97–133. Presented at the 18th Annual Conference, Association for Bahá’í Studies (Aug. 1994, Cambridge MA), and given “Award for Excellence in Bahá’í Studies” by the late Dr. David S. Ruhe, on behalf of the ABS, at that same conference. For another Bahá’í perspective on Deganawidah, see Aram Gomez, “Tree of Peace and the Coming of Bahá’u’lláh,” presented at the Irfan Colloquia, Session #2 (English), Bahá’í National Center: Wilmette, IL (March 25–27, 1994). [Abstract online](#).

the intercultural parity and equality that is needed before the indigenous peoples of the Americas can find inspiration and empowerment in what has been characterized as the sole “specific racial prophecy in all of the Bahá’í scriptures,”<sup>7</sup> which is this: “Attach great importance to the indigenous population of America. For ... there can be no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world.”<sup>8</sup>

[BUCK] *Halito. Chahta iskitini anumpuli li. Chim achukma?* (“Hello. I [now] speak a little Chahta [Choctaw]. Are you well?”). Don, I just downloaded a 2005 Master’s thesis on Aboriginal-Bahá’í relations in British Columbia. I was quite surprised by the author’s findings, and was wondering if you could help me understand? In her thesis, “*As ye have faith so shall your powers and blessings be*”: *The Aboriginal–Bahá’í Encounter in British Columbia*, Chelsea Dawn Horton — who is now a Ph.D. candidate at the University of British Columbia — has chronicled the notable growth of the Bahá’í religion in western Canada.<sup>9</sup> In an online interview, Horton attributes the initial successes of the Bahá’í outreach to indigenous communities to the Bahá’í tradition of “legitimizing, honouring and validating native spiritual prophecies and practices.”<sup>10</sup> Notwithstanding the promising overtures and high hopes, however, Horton concludes: “Relatively few of the over nine hundred Aboriginal people who enrolled in the Bahá’í Faith [in British Columbia] between 1948 and 1992 ultimately became active adherents...”<sup>11</sup> And further: “Despite such empowering impact, however, patterns of non-Aboriginal cultural dominance encountered within the Bahá’í community simultaneously suggest the pervasiveness of the colonial legacy and the potency of contemporary social context; good intentions proved insufficient to fully transform intercultural interactions.”<sup>12</sup> In your experience, has Horton identified a real problem here? *Ak akostinincho.* (“I don’t understand.”)

[ADDISON] Yes, this is a very real problem — one that has not been sufficiently recognized in the Bahá’í community. This is a perfect, although sobering, example of some of the contributions that scholarship can bring in terms of cross-cultural awareness. But first, let’s review the history of the “Aboriginal-Bahá’í encounter,” as Horton terms it. What reasons explain the growth of the Bahá’í Faith among Native Americans? Why do indigenous Bahá’ís find such ready acceptance of their peoples and traditional cultures among Bahá’ís of other cultures and ethnic groups? Why has the Bahá’í Faith steadily grown among Native peoples from its earliest Native converts

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Pemberton-Piggot, *The Bahá’í Faith in Alberta, 1942–1992: The Ethic of Dispersion* (Master’s thesis: University of Alberta, 1992), 34. Cited by Chelsea Dawn Horton, “Beyond Red Power: The Alternative Activism of Dorothy Maquabeak Francis,” *Journal of Bahá’í Studies* 2004, 14(3/4), 35–71 [43].

<sup>8</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan* (Wilmette, IL: U.S. Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1993), 33.

<sup>9</sup> Chelsea Dawn Horton, “*As ye have faith so shall your powers and blessings be*”: *The Aboriginal–Bahá’í Encounter in British Columbia* (Master’s thesis: Simon Fraser University, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Dept. of History, Simon Fraser University, “Making Connections.” [Primary Source](#) 4 (June 2006): 11.

<sup>11</sup> Horton, *The Aboriginal–Bahá’í Encounter in British Columbia*, iii (Abstract).

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

dating back only approximately seven to eight decades? And what characterizes the informal and formal recognition of Native American traditional prophets — which has such enormous symbolic significance for many Native peoples — by adherents and institutions of the Bahá'í Faith?

Like Ms. Horton, I have conducted my own research on these matters for a number of years. Research at the community level for this study stems from individual interviews I have carried out with both Native and non-Native peoples — both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í — over approximately 40 years in both the U.S. and Canada. Such a study poses interesting questions for students of the social sciences and the history of religion. Ever increasing numbers of Native peoples are also watching the mounting instances of Native community involvement in the Bahá'í Faith. Unlike the spread of Christianity within Indian country, the Bahá'í Faith has never been associated with a fortification of colonial occupation, Euro-American assimilation, or forced conversions of Native Americans.<sup>13</sup>

**[BUCK]** Yes, that's quite true. In fact, one notable Bahá'í figure has, in fact, apologized for the devastation that colonialism has visited upon Native peoples. In a joint letter addressed to the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'ís of Canada and the United States, Rúhíyyih Khánum (wife of Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921–1957) expressed some of her concerns following her trip throughout Canada and the United States in the spring of 1960:

Bahá'u'lláh warned us against the evils of civilization when carried to extremes, the Master and particularly the Guardian, elaborated on this theme until at the end of his life. Shoghi Effendi fairly thundered against our civilization — particularly the American variety of it...

I remember when we had the first Japanese pilgrim here, Shoghi Effendi said to him that the majority of the human race was not white and that the majority of Bahá'ís would not be white in the future. As up until very recently the Bahá'ís of the world were almost exclusively white it is only natural that their virtues and their faults should have colored the Faith and its community life. It is illogical to suppose that what we have now is either mature or right; it is a phase in the development of the Cause; when peoples of different races are incorporated in the world-wide community (and in local communities) who can doubt that it will possess far greater power and perfection and be something quite different from what we have now?...

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<sup>13</sup> While my purpose is not to criticize religions or missionaries of any denomination, clarification must be made here. In my many years of college teaching, I am often amazed at how little of the accurate record of the Christian conversions of Indians is either known, understood, or even acknowledged. For example: "Beginning in 1644, Puritans took over Indian communities...which meant that Indians were forced to dress and follow Puritan proprieties and profess Christianity, or else be flogged." Alice B. Kehoe, *North American Indians: A Comprehensive Account* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 1981 [3d edn., 2006]), 234.



Bahá'u'lláh said the black people are like the pupil of the eye and sight is in the pupil: When Bahá'u'lláh likens the Negro race to the faculty of sight in the human body — the act of perception with all it implies — it is a pretty terrific statement. He never said this of anyone else...

I am convinced that if we start mass conversion of the Indians and Negroes, mass conversions of the whites will follow...

*I could see the American Indians straighten their shoulders when I asked their forgiveness for the injustices my race had done them and when I praised their great past.*<sup>14</sup>

These words of Rúhíyyih Khánúm are quite powerful and give pause for thought! From these statements, we can see that the colonial legacy has not only wreaked havoc in “Indian Country” but has greatly conditioned the colonizers as well, with the lingering effects visible in the subtle, perhaps unconscious attitudes of many, if not most of the Bahá'ís within the dominant culture of North America. Yet the fact that Rúhíyyih Khánúm was moved to express a formal apology to American Indians for what her race had done to them is extraordinary. This represents a clearly decolonizing attitude and goes far in explaining how and why Bahá'ís have, despite their cultural conditioning and other limitations, succeeded in crossing racial divides to widen the embrace of the Bahá'í community to include significant numbers of African Americans and Native Americans alike.

[ADDISON] Yes, I'm glad that you cited this extraordinary letter that Rúhíyyih Khánúm was moved to write. Looking back historically, we can see that the early successes experienced by Bahá'ís in their outreach to Native Americans did not go unnoticed by non-Bahá'í observers. Some of the earliest helpful references to Native Americans and the Bahá'í Faith date back to the 1960s. Anthropologist Alice B. Kehoe encountered the Bahá'í Faith among aboriginal peoples and documented this in a pamphlet published in March, 1963, by the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History in Regina.<sup>15</sup> In *Saskatchewan Indian Religious Beliefs*, she describes the influence of traditional Native religions, Christian beliefs, and other movements such as the Native American Church.<sup>16</sup> Not to be confused with some type of eclectic movement, the Bahá'í Faith, she notes, is considered by its members to be a universal faith, not tied to any one particular culture, religious background, language, or even country of origin. She adds that it “does not deny the validity of native Indian beliefs, [and the Bahá'í

<sup>14</sup> Hand of the Cause of God 'Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm, [joint letter 1961 dated to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada](#) (emphasis added).

<sup>15</sup> Alice B. Kehoe, *Saskatchewan Indian Religious Beliefs*. Popular Series No. 7 (Regina: Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, 1976).

<sup>16</sup> The Native American Church is also known as the Peyote religion, a cultural hybrid, representing a synthesis of traditional Indian beliefs and ritual with Christian dogma and symbolism.



Faith]...appeals to many Indians who are seeking a religion that is neither exclusively Indian nor dominated by white values and customs.”<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, in the 39th Annual Report of the Board of Evangelism and Social Service of the United Church of Canada, 1964, William Wuttunee, Chief of the National Indian Council in Calgary, Alberta, writes of the success of the Bahá'ís. He states, in part, that they “are moving along quite quickly. They only started a few years ago and yet one-third of their people [one-third of the whole Bahá'í population of Canada] are Indians. I think they are converting practically whole Indian Reserves<sup>18</sup> which hitherto had been Catholic or some other denomination. Why is it that they are making such headway? Because their attitude is different. Their attitude is this: Your religion [Native spirituality] is correct, the way you worship the great Spirit [Creator or God] is right. You should worship Him that way. But in addition we [the Bahá'ís] have something new to offer you. We have a new Prophet for this era. They are increasing the faith of the Indians, not detracting or replacing [it]. They accept Indians whole-heartedly...and Indians take an equal part [in Bahá'í activities and administrative institutions].”<sup>19</sup> Not only Native writers but some non-Native anthropologists (and other non-Bahá'í sources) have documented the all-embracing manner in which Bahá'ís view indigenous peoples and cultures. Such accommodation is not, as some observers may be tempted to infer, tantamount to syncretism. It is better analyzed as a practical application of a Bahá'í universalism, that all religious truth — insofar as it is truth — proceeds from one source.

**[BUCK]** This is all very interesting. Please understand that I'm not trying to be dismissive of these fine beginnings. Yet the consolidation of Native Canadian Bahá'ís was lacking, and currently it seems that much of that initial work has been undone. As Chelsea Horton observes:

In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, the Bahá'í community of Canada set about realizing a specific racial prophecy concerning the Aboriginal inhabitants of North America revealed in 1916 by then-leader of the Faith, 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Sensing, by mid-century, that the Canadian Bahá'í community was sufficiently established to undertake concerted teaching efforts, the international and national Bahá'í administrations launched calls for a variety of teaching programs within Aboriginal communities that resulted in over fifty-four hundred declarations in Canada, over nine hundred of them in British Columbia, between the years 1948 and 1992.<sup>20</sup> Many, perhaps most, of these Aboriginal enrollments did not translate into

<sup>17</sup>.Quoted in Patricia Verge, *Angus: From The Heart* (Cochrane, Alberta: Springtide Publishing, 1999), 106–107.

<sup>18</sup> An Indian Reserve in Canada is similar to an Indian Reservation in the U.S.

<sup>19</sup>.Quoted in Verge, *Angus: From The Heart*, 106.

<sup>20</sup>. Statistics supplied by Lindsay Slavin (Department of Archives, Bahá'í National Centre), e-mail to the author, 15 Sept. 2004.

active participation in the Bahá'í Faith. Lacking in resources and maintenance procedures, the British Columbian Bahá'í community proved hard-pressed to consolidate new Aboriginal membership, resulting in large-scale drop-off. The significance, however, of the Aboriginal-Bahá'í encounter in the province lies beyond statistics.<sup>21</sup>

Can you give me an honest appraisal of the problems that the Aboriginal-Bahá'í encounter now faces? If, as Horton observes, the “significance...of the Aboriginal-Bahá'í encounter in the province lies beyond statistics,” what challenges confront the dominant Bahá'í community now?

[ADDISON] Horton's observation regarding “the pervasiveness of the colonial legacy” is absolutely most significant here. The history of the West is tainted with the notion that Indian culture (“uncivilized peoples”) must be taught how to be white. Most white Canadians and Americans have no clue with respect to how constantly they reinforce their own cultural assumptions, right or wrong, and pile them upon Indians, never willing or even interested in hearing our own Native view. I agree that the Bahá'ís in Canada and the U.S. have made some good headway in the honoring and validating native spiritual prophecies and principles. However, much more transformation along the lines of intercultural interactions within the Bahá'í international community needs to take place. In particular, I am referring specifically to most (but not all) of our non-Native Bahá'ís who find it impossible to break through the inner barriers of their own Euro-American culture.

Yes, “consolidation” follow-up was lacking in those Native communities, but I think the most paralyzing issue is cultural. When some Native believers were filling a Peace Pipe for Rúhíyyih Khánúm's visit, for example, at one conference where she spoke, lots of non-Native believers acted very disrespectful and treated the Peace Pipe ceremony as satanic. Rúhíyyih Khánúm treated it with the highest degree of love and respect and many believers were very rude to the Native peoples out of cultural ignorance. When all or most of the members of the U.S. and Canadian Bahá'í community are white, without any Indians, and they plan Ruhi study circles, or for a dinner for a fireside, or a public meeting for United Nations Day, all of the programming is white by culture. So what you have is that many white Bahá'ís think that their community life is Bahá'í when, in fact, it is more Euro-American in culture. For example, it is very traditional for most all Native peoples at the beginning of any gathering, whether for praying, singing, eating, etc., to quietly and unobtrusively to go and personally shake the hand and greet any elders in the room. Most Euro-Americans aren't often comfortable doing this because, they assume, “I don't know them, so I don't want to embarrass myself.” This lack of respect for elders — or call it simply a lack of awareness to show such respect —

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<sup>21</sup> Horton, *The Aboriginal-Bahá'í Encounter in British Columbia*, 2.

can extend to other seemingly commonplace situations, where Euro-American cultural assumptions unconsciously dictate behavior.

Accepting Bahá'u'lláh as the Healer — what Bahá'ís call the “Manifestation of God” for this day and age, Who can bring all of humanity together — is the first step. But unfortunately, most Euro-American believers just stop there. They begin a very deceptive process, not out of racism so much, but out of sheer unwillingness to step outside the boundaries of their own cultural assumptions. The reason why most believers in the West view their perception of Bahá'í culture as “universal” in principle — when it really isn't in practice — is because Westerners take it for granted.

[BUCK] Now let me see if I understand you correctly. Your anecdotal account seems to underscore the central problematic in the Bahá'í-Aboriginal encounter, as Horton alternatively frames it: “Patterns of paternalism and non-Aboriginal cultural dominance persisted within the Bahá'í community regardless of intense commitment to the overarching principle of unity in diversity. This suggests both the pervasiveness of the colonial legacy and the potency of contemporary social context. Like religious change, the transformation of intercultural interactions represents a process as opposed to event alone. Throughout the specific time period under consideration, however, good intentions, it seems, proved insufficient to fully achieve this goal.”<sup>22</sup> Is Horton's observation a fair characterization? Let me hasten to add that I don't expect you to go into great detail, as you can paint the current scene in bold strokes, without compromising the Bahá'í ethic against backbiting, as Horton herself observes: “The process of oral history also demands sensitivity to the significance of silence as well as verbal articulation. Given Bahá'u'lláh's prohibition against ‘backbiting,’ which Bahá'ís take very seriously, a number of the consultants that I interviewed proved reticent to discuss potentially controversial issues or engage in critique of past people and events.”<sup>23</sup> So I will respect any reticence that you might have in being too specific in what you are about to say.

[ADDISON] Thank you for commenting on that ethic. Before I address this question, let me first say something about my training and experience, in order to establish the “ethos” (credentials/credibility) needed to inspire confidence in the reader that what I am about to say is borne of sufficient background and knowledge in these rather delicate matters. As you know, my Ph.D. is in ethnomusicology, and I'm currently in the process of acquiring a second Ph.D. in linguistics. The University here (i.e. the University of Oregon) rarely ever allows older students (I'm 64) to return to graduate school to get a second Ph.D. But their diversity policy is very

<sup>22</sup> Horton, *The Aboriginal-Bahá'í Encounter in British Columbia*, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Horton, *The Aboriginal-Bahá'í Encounter in British Columbia*, 17.

strongly enforced here. Also the demand for Indians to work in linguistics (because of so many of our languages dying out as we speak) is so great, that they “invited” me to work toward a second Ph.D. in linguistics. However, the second Ph.D. will simply formalize and validate what I’ve been doing for some time now. I’ve taught Native American languages at the college level for many years, and in our local Native American student programs for the public schools as well. I script some of the “Wisdom of the Elders” programs and curricula projects which are produced for public radio broadcasts all across the country. So I think you’ll agree that what I am about to say comes from extensive experience as well as academic training in terms of framing these problematics and proposing possible solutions.

**[BUCK]** It’s clear that you’re a fellow academic. But there’s something you have that I don’t. Would you elaborate on that?

**[ADDISON]** For a minute there, you were making me feel like an anthropologist, looking from the outside in! This is what we academics call the “etic” approach. But I’m a mixed blood Choctaw. As a “real Indian,” as they say, I offer an “emic” perspective, looking at the inside out. In that sense, I guess you could say that I combine the training of an academic with the worldview of an authentic Native American perspective.

At my age, I’m considered an Elder and I speak four of our Native languages and teach them at the University level. As an Elder, I am authorized to bear the Eagle Staffs in ceremonial processions and offer the Native Prayers for most all the powwows in this area. I always use Bahá’í Prayers in Native languages publicly in these powwows and most all Indians in our area know that I’m a Bahá’í, and we’ve had some rather exciting Native seekers arise and declare themselves also Bahá’í. Elders who are strictly Christian or strictly traditional, likewise, pray publicly when called upon, in their own tradition. There’s no hard-and-fast rule applying to everyone. Any elder, asked to share a prayer at any of our Native community activities, can do so in any language, and from any religious tradition they choose. I can’t tell you the number of other elders and younger Indians who come up to me and say how good it is for them to hear American Indian languages in the prayers — because today, most Indians simply don’t speak their traditional Native language.

**[BUCK]** Don, your credentials are certainly impressive, and your experience as a member of the Choctaw Nation imbues you with authenticity. Now, let’s revisit the problem that Chelsea Horton has raised. Recall her conclusions regarding the Bahá’í-Native encounter in British Columbia, when she wrote: “Despite such empowering impact, however, patterns of non-Aboriginal cultural dominance encountered within the Bahá’í community simultaneously suggest the pervasiveness of the colonial legacy and the potency of contemporary social context; good intentions

proved insufficient to fully transform intercultural interactions.”<sup>24</sup> If this is true, then what went wrong? And, more importantly, what can be done about it?

**[ADDISON]** Whatever problems Horton has identified are really part of a larger set of issues. Patterns of oppression, based upon incorrect Euro-American perceptions of Indians, still exist. Due to the chronic lack of accurate information about our Native cultures, fantasies about Indians and our peoples, as well as our religions — attitudes largely inherited from the colonial past — are still very much with us. They plague the academy. They abound in the media. They are alive and well in society at large, and in the concepts that the general population of the U.S. still maintains about Indians. Many non-Indians, in fact, haven’t got a clue how hurtful it is when Euro-Americans make assumptions about our peoples and our beliefs. And these pompous and grossly inaccurate assumptions continue to abound because so few folks are courageous enough to speak up when a wrong has been committed.

**[BUCK]** How do these attitudes manifest themselves in Bahá’í-Native interactions? Can you give an example of a situation in which well-meaning Bahá’ís might say or do the wrong thing, without realizing it?

**[ADDISON]** Yes, that’s quite easy to do. Here’s a typical scenario that I’ve witnessed and experienced all too well. Remember I had spoken about our elders, whom we hold in the highest respect. At Native gatherings, the elders eat first. They go through the line to get their plates before all the rest of the peoples. Euro-Americans rarely ever do this. And Bahá’ís are usually following the Euro-American cultural prescriptions in community activities, oblivious to Indian mores and culture. So Indians just sit in amazement, hoping some day, “They will appreciate the elders, as we do.” Indians believe the elders have earned that right to be fed first, or go through the serving line first — that they have “paid their dues,” so to speak. I can’t tell you how painful it is to have to tell you that with few exceptions, when focusing Bahá’í teaching efforts among indigenous peoples, most white Bahá’ís are usually unwilling to even consider allowing elders to eat first.

When meeting Indians for the first time, most whites ask far too many questions. Even worse, when a white person thinks or assumes that they might have some Indian blood, to “make friends” with this Indian, that’s the first thing out of their mouth: “You know, I’m part Indian also!” “I have a great great great great great grandmother who was a Cherokee princess in our family ancestry.” Well, that’s actually the worst thing to do! Usually that kind of a statement, without any previous contact with those Indians, is considered phony and “sucking up.” I don’t go up to anyone and ask them “how much French blood do you have”? So why does someone want me to

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<sup>24</sup> Horton, *The Aboriginal–Bahá’í Encounter in British Columbia*, iii (Abstract).

know that they have 1/64th Cherokee blood, and from a princess no less. Why aren't there ever any "princes" out there? Only "princesses"? For a very good reason! Women ancestors pose no threat, but male ancestors represented "the enemy" at one time! And why Cherokee? This is a common joke among Indians: if there truly were as many Cherokee princesses as some folks claim, the population of the Cherokee tribe would equal four times the whole USA!

I believe at the top of this list of cultural misunderstandings among white Bahá'ís is the notion that Native Americans of the whole Western Hemisphere (our Native elders tell us) had genuine divinely ordained Messengers of God. Rarely, if ever, have I seen these Native figures compared to Prophets of other nations and peoples around the globe *on an equal footing*: I agree with scholars Robert Ruby and John Brown when they underscore this lack of recognition based on a want of phenomenological parity:

Unlike the prophets of other religions, Smohalla and Skolaskin needed no credentials from church boards or other governing bodies to prove that their authority came directly from above. Both believed in a "covenant" not unlike that of Judeo-Christianity, to which they owed a debt. This covenant required that, since the Creator nourished his children, they in turn were obligated to use and gratefully protect the bounties so generously bestowed on them. Any threats to the relationship between them and the Creator, be they human or natural, required supplications and appeasements beyond those required of traditional worshipers. It seems ironic that, despite the similarity of the native prophets to those of *Judeo-Christian tradition*, *they were never accepted nor acknowledged as having merit by adherents of those faiths.*<sup>25</sup>

My epistemological basis stands in direct contradiction to the lack of recognition that Ruby and Brown have noted above. As a believer in the Prophethood of Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, I firmly believe in the efficacy and whole-hearted validity of these Native Messengers of God. Bahá'ís believe that all the Manifestations of God, or Prophets of God — these great Spiritual Seers or Teachers, by whatever name one chooses to call them — have appeared to all the peoples on earth at one time or another, and that these Messengers have received guidance from an unseen, otherworldly, divine source. These include Abraham, Moses, Muhammad, Buddha, Krishna, Zoroaster, as well as the Founders of the Bahá'í Faith, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh — *and to this list, I submit that we should include, among others, White Buffalo Calf Woman and*

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<sup>25</sup> Robert H. Ruby and John A. Brown, *Dreamer Prophets of the Columbia Plateau: Smohalla and Skolaskin*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989; Red River Books edition), 2002), 14–15 (emphasis added).

*Deganawidah*. I take the view here that these Prophets deserve acknowledgement of their contributions in their own cultural contexts, and should be acknowledged as such by the “outside world.” Western theologians and historians will advance in their understanding of our Native Prophets once they decide to remove the cultural and religious barriers to understanding that they themselves have constructed in their own minds. Furthermore, without trying to force these Native Messengers or spiritual guides into a mold imposed from any outside perspective, we should not deny the possibility that not only might Native Prophets internally share similar as well as contrasting characteristics with one another, but that their inclusion within a global context is only just and proper.

While Bahá’u’lláh does make statements to the effect that we, as have all peoples, had them, there are still obstacles to this acknowledgement. At a secondary level, many whites have certain superior cultural assumptions that Indians find very difficult to deal with, so some just stop trying. Some believers can’t even discuss the issue without critically taking to task the person that acknowledges that Bahá’ís officially accept the validity of Native Prophets. It’s far too difficult for them to break out of that cultural mold. I think this problem is cultural, not theological.

[BUCK] Are there any theological problems as well?

[ADDISON] Surprising as this may seem to many, if not most Bahá’ís, I would have to say, yes. Again, just as in the intercultural problems that I’ve just described, assumptions lie at the root. One such assumption is that if a Prophet of God isn’t named in some authoritative text, this must be a false Prophet. I don’t think that that is a Bahá’í belief. Rather, I attribute this to the dominant cultural assumptions that a certain view of history is the correct one, that their perception of the Bahá’í Teachings is the only valid one, and that if Native peoples have a different take on things, non-Native believers seem to just brush these aside. “They need a Ruhi study circle!” “Send him to a deepening class!” Third, most all white peoples accept as absolutely binding, the assumption that that Bering Straits theory must be correct because scientists came up with it.<sup>26</sup> For instance, Bahá’í scholar, Dr. Susan Maneck, in her review of your abridged article, “Bahá’í Universalism and Native Prophets,”<sup>27</sup> essentially reads the Bering Straits theory into a statement by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, which we will discuss further in this article:

In terms of Bahá’í scholarship the most significant contribution of this article is bringing to the forefront a Tablet written by ‘Abdu’l-

<sup>26</sup> For a scholarly refutation of the Bering Straits theory from a Native American perspective, see Vine Deloria, Jr., *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact* (Reissue edn.: Fulcrum Publishing, 1997), 67–91.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Buck, “Bahá’í Universalism and Native Prophets.” *Reason & Revelation: New Directions in Bahá’í Thought*. Edited by Seena Fazel and John Danesh. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2002. Pp. 172–201.

Bahá which explicitly addresses the issue of revelation in regards to the Native Americans. This Tablet, addressed to one Amir Khan of Teheran [sic], *acknowledges that at one time there was communication between Asia and America via the Bering Straits, the implication apparently being that they might have received revelation through this means.*<sup>28</sup>

With all due respect to my colleague, this reading of a Bahá'í text reveals more about the cultural assumptions behind the reading rather than the "original intent" of the text itself, since 'Abdu'l-Bahá is simply acknowledging that the Bering Straits theory enjoyed wide currency, although, to be fair, Dr. Maneck can rely on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement in the same Tablet: "There are other signs which indicate communication."

Another thing is that Bahá'ís say, "We love all the Prophets of God," and then when we begin a discussion of specifics about Deganawidah, or White Buffalo Calf Woman, or others, I can see the believers pulling back. I can "hear" their "inner voices" saying, "Is this in the Writings?" Then I can see them pulling back, and disengaging. Physically their rejection can be read on their faces. And then I feel badly. I feel people buddy-up to us with friendship, but they really don't mean that Indians have "real" Prophets or Manifestations of God.

Some non-Native believers, I truly believe, try sincerely to overcome those invisible walls between our peoples, but a huge amount of work is yet to be done, and so far, with a few rare exceptions, it hasn't even begun.

**[BUCK]** Fair enough. But is the Bahá'í Faith taking root in Native American and Native Canadian cultures and contributing to the social amelioration and empowerment of those communities? It seems to me that what Chelsea Horton is saying is that the very question of forging what we might call "decolonizing" relationships is, in fact, a core issue. While we must not lose sight of power dynamics both internal and external to the Faith, Horton has found that the Bahá'í community has nevertheless proved a significant site of (oftentimes empowering) intercultural interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that warrants analysis in terms of its decolonizing achievements and potential. Horton writes:

This very question of forging what we might call "decolonizing" relationships is, in fact, a core issue that I hope to explore in much greater depth through my doctoral research. While we must not lose sight of power dynamics both internal and external to the Faith, the Bahá'í community has nevertheless proved a significant site of (oftentimes empowering) intercultural interaction between

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<sup>28</sup> Susan Maneck, Review of "[Bahá'í Universalism and Native Prophets](#)."



Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that, to my mind, warrants analysis in terms of its decolonizing achievements and potential.<sup>29</sup>

Notwithstanding the potential to achieve ideal intercultural relations, the Bahá'í-Native encounter has experienced some very real challenges. As a researcher directly observing (and also experiencing) these interactions in the course of her field work, Ms. Horton stresses the crucial role that non-Native Bahá'ís can play in bringing about true intercultural parity and reciprocity:

In terms of insights or lessons from my thesis research, perhaps the most painful and disheartening finding of my MA work was that concerning the difficulty Indigenous people continue to face in their interactions with so-called “dominant” society, where even in a context such as a Bahá'í gathering characterized by an open and inclusive atmosphere, the very act of engaging with (even the most well intentioned) non-Indigenous people can serve to invoke sentiments and memories of inferiority, marginalization, and oppression on the part of Indigenous participants. In terms of “relational dynamics” necessary to help balance such unequal power relations, as well as the more overt instances of discrimination and marginalization sometimes encountered in the Bahá'í community, in the context of my research in British Columbia, it was those non-Indigenous Bahá'ís who had committed themselves to Indigenous teaching over the long term, who had lived with Indigenous people and built personal, engaged, sustained relationships with them, who appear to have most effectively contributed to the neutralization of these pervasive power dynamics.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, in light of the central problematic that Horton has identified (i.e. “patterns of non-Aboriginal cultural dominance encountered within the Bahá'í community simultaneously suggest the pervasiveness of the colonial legacy and the potency of contemporary social context; good intentions proved insufficient to fully transform intercultural interactions”), what needs to be done to fully transform Bahá'í-Aboriginal intercultural interactions? Might such a transformation begin with establishing intercultural religious parity between the dominant Bahá'í culture and the indigenous Bahá'í conclaves scattered throughout the First Nations of North America? Could that process begin, both doctrinally and symbolically, with an affirmation of the highest expressions of Native spirituality — that is, in a formal recognition that North America (and, by extension, all of the Americas) were not bereft of their own Prophets (to use an Abrahamic term)?

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<sup>29</sup> Chelsea Horton (Ph.D. candidate, University of British Columbia), e-mail, dated 27 April 2007, in reply to Dr. Christopher Buck and Dr. Donald Addison, cited with permission.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

**[ADDISON]** Yes, this is precisely where the application of an Abrahamic term — prophets — as applied to Native Messengers of God would carry manifest symbolic value. Better still would be to apply Bahá'í terminology — Manifestations of God — to the great Native Wisdom Bearers. At least this should be possible to do in principle, don't you think?

**[BUCK]** Let's explore a solution that begins with a symbolic transformation of the dominant Bahá'í culture's relationship to the Native American and other aboriginal Bahá'í communities. There may be a reading and linguistic argument whereby one could reach this result, such that "Messengers of God to First Nations" may now be presented as a valid Bahá'í principle, anchored in a clear, authoritative text. You'll recall that I had originally proposed the following conceptual scheme in "Native Messengers" article back in 1996:

**PROGRESSIVE REVELATION**  
**Messengers of God to First Nations\***

**Abraham**  
**Krishna**  
**Moses**  
**Zoroaster**  
**Buddha**  
**Jesus**  
**Muhammad**  
**The Báb**  
**Bahá'u'lláh**

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\* Sacred tradition names such Messengers  
as Deganawidah, Quetzalcoátl and Viracocha  
(Iroquois, Toltec, Inca traditions  
in North, Central, and South America).

Let me introduce the teachings of Deganawidah, since he is the first traditional Native Messenger of God mentioned in the note above. His station is clearly that of a Messenger of God:

It is just this, that the Holder of the Heavens, Dehaenhyawa?gih, chose her as the medium through whom shall be born the one he has sent to work here on earth. “Moreover, when he shall be born you two shall name him Deganawidah. And the reason he shall have such a name is that he will travel about on the earth; for he is the principal person both in the skyworld and here on earth. For understand, he brings with him Power, *ga?shasdenhsa?*, and also the Great Law, *gayanebsa?go:nah*, that everything shall become peaceful, *sken:non?*, on earth as well as in the sky-world.”<sup>31</sup>

In Bahá'í theophanology, there is the Messenger and then there is the Message. This roughly corresponds to what systematic theologians term the “Person” and the “Work” of Jesus Christ. In more familiar Christian terms, Christ is both the “Savior” who brings “salvation.” Bahá'ís have universalized that concept (not derivatively, but simply analogously), such that every Messenger of God is effectively a Savior-figure and every

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<sup>31</sup> William Nelson Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse: A Political History of the Iroquois Confederacy* (Norman University of Oklahoma Press, 1998: Series: Civilization of the American Indian, Vol. 223), 85.

corresponding Message effects the process of salvation. In every age and era of history in which a Messenger of God appears, the peoples of that part of the world have a responsibility to investigate the truth of that Messenger's claims. This involves two "twin" duties: (1) recognition of the Messenger of God; and then (2) application of the Messenger's Message (that is, faithful adherence to the laws and ethical teachings revealed by that Messenger of God). Now as for Deganawidah's divine Message, the reader can judge for himself or herself how closely it resonates with the essential teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and also Jesus. This is the essence of Deganawidah's Message:

I carry the Mind of the Master of Life ... and my Message will bring an end to the wars between east and west.

The Word that I bring is that all peoples shall love one another and live together in peace. This message has three parts: Righteousness and Health and Power — *Gáiwoh*, *Skénon*, *Gashasdénshaa*. And each part has two branches.

Righteousness means justice practiced between men and between nations; it means also a desire to see justice prevail. Health means soundness of mind and body; it also means peace, for that is what comes when minds are sane and bodies are cared for.

Power means authority, the authority of law and custom, backed by such force as is necessary to make justice prevail; it means also religion, for justice enforced is the will of the Holder of the Heavens and has his sanction.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Cited by Paul A.W. Wallace, *White Roots of Peace* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Clear Light Publishers, 1994), pp. 39–40, "a publication endorsed by prominent chiefs of the Haudenosaunee." See Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa, Ontario: Canada Communication Group — Publishing, Oct. 1996), Vol. 1, Part 1, Section 4, Sub-section 2, "Iroquoians and the Iroquois," pp. 14 and 58, n. 26. The following are the major versions of the Deganawidah Epic:

1885 Version: Seth Newhouse, *Cosmogony of De-ka-na-wi-da's Government of the Iroquois Confederacy: The Original Literal Historical Narratives of the Iroquois Confederacy*. Manuscript. Public Archives of Canada, folder MG 19 F. 26, Ottawa. American Philosophical Society Library, catalogued as: Seth Newhouse, *Mohawk Cosmogony of De-ka-na-wi-da's Government*, 1885, 1 vol. (302 pp.). Photocopy. Described by William N. Fenton, "Seth Newhouse's Traditional History and Constitution of the Iroquois Confederacy," *American Philosophical Society Proceedings*, 1949, 93, 141.

1897 Version: Seth Newhouse, *Constitution of the Confederacy by Dekanawidah* (1897). Trans. by J. N. B. Hewitt (1937). Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology Archives, No. 3490.

1898 Version: John Napoleon Brinton Hewitt, *Constitution of the Confederacy by Dekanawidah, collected and translated from Mohawk by Chief Seth Newhouse 1898* (Manuscript 1343, Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives, "copied 1936.")

1899 Version: Chief John Arthur Gibson (1899), "The Deganawidah Legend: A Tradition of the Founding of the League of the Five Iroquois Tribes." English translation of text given by John Arthur Gibson to J. N. B. Hewitt. Ed. by Abram Charles, John Buck, Sr., and Joshua Buck (1900–1914). Trans. by William N. Fenton and Simeon Gibson (1941). National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Bureau of American Ethnology, Nos. 1517b and 1517c. Copy in American Philosophical Society Library.

1912 Version: John Arthur Gibson, *Concerning the League: The Iroquois League Tradition as Dictated in Onondaga by John Arthur Gibson. Newly Elicited, Edited and Translated by Hanni Woodbury in Collaboration with Reg Henry and Harry Webster on the Basis of A.A. Goldenweiser's Manuscript* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Algonquian and Iroquoian Linguistics, 1992). Vecsey says that this may well be the "definitive version": "A major, perhaps definitive, version of the story was narrated by John Gibson to Alexander Goldenweiser in 1912." Christopher Vecsey, "The Story and Structure of the Iroquois Confederacy," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54.1 (Spring 1986): 79–106 [80, n. 3]. The original Gibson-Goldenweiser Manuscript in Onondaga is preserved in the Canadian Ethnology Service Archives at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec as Ms. 1252.5. A facsimile of page 4 of this manuscript appears as Fig. 2, opposite p. xi, in *Concerning the League*.

[ADDISON] There may be a connection between the passage you've just cited and Deganawidah's name. First, let me say something about how deeply this name is revered by most Native American who are familiar with the Deganawidah tradition. The Iroquois consider Deganawidah's name so sacred as to be ineffable — that is, out of reverence and profound respect, the name "Deganawidah" should not be pronounced. Instead, Deganawidah is customarily referred to as "the Peacemaker."

The sacred name "Deganawidah" means "two river currents flowing together."<sup>33</sup> This is significant because these "two rivers" could be a metaphor for both Deganawidah and His spokesman, Hiawatha (as His major mouthpiece or speaker, since Deganawidah stuttered). Or it is tantalizing to see this metaphor of "two rivers" in light of the prophecy you've quoted above: that the "two rivers" might refer to the "east and west" in your sentence, "I carry the Mind of the Master of Life ... and my Message will bring an end to the wars between east and west."

[BUCK] Interesting! I hadn't thought of that.

[ADDISON] Now before you develop the notion that Deganawidah is a great Prophet (which is a common, perhaps universal belief among Native Americans who are not predisposed by Christian doctrinal conservatism to believe otherwise), can you say something that might begin to articulate a Bahá'í perspective on Native Messengers of God generally?

[BUCK] Well, while there may be some distance between the ideal and the actual with regard to Native American spirituality by the Bahá'í community at large, the official Bahá'í position is quite clear, so far as it goes. Generally, we can say that the Bahá'í attitude towards Native American religions is — or should be — been characterized by the Universal House of Justice as follows:

The Bahá'í attitude to earlier religions, therefore, is not that they are false or "heathen", but that, at root, they are all true and that these fundamental truths still persist within them. Bahá'ís encourage Indians in South America, for example, to see and reverence the profound spiritual truths which are to be found in both their pre-Christian religions and in the Catholicism which, in later centuries, has to varying degrees supplanted or overlaid their archaic faiths.

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**1916 Version:** Arthur C. Parker, *The Constitution of the Five Nations or the Iroquois Book of the Great Law*. New York State Museum Bulletin, No. 184 (Albany: NY: April 1, 1916). Reprinted in William N. Fenton, ed., *Parker on the Iroquois*, Book III: *The Constitution of the Five Nations* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1968), 30–60.

<sup>33</sup> See Alice B. Kehoe, *North American Indians: A Comprehensive Account*. 3d edn. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006), 227. Or "Two water currents flowing together." A. Parker, "The Traditional Narrative of the Origin of the Confederation of the Five Nations Commonly Known as the Iroquois," in *Parker on the Iroquois*, ed. W. Fenton (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1968) 3: 64, n. 2.

Through the Bahá'í teachings, the inner conflict which many still feel between their ancient religions and Christianity is resolved and, at the same time, they are enabled to understand their spiritual unity with the peoples of other continents, such as Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims with whom they will undoubtedly come into contact with increasing frequency.

An example of the Bahá'í attitude is to be found in the operation of such radio stations as Radio Bahá'í Ecuador, which has a policy of encouraging Indian arts and music and fostering in the Indians pride in their heritage.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, Native Bahá'ís should neither feel — nor be made to feel — “the inner conflict which many still feel between their ancient religions and Christianity.” Moreover, since the source of all spiritual truth ultimately harks back, in Bahá'í belief, to a Manifestation of God, therefore the source of all Native wisdom and spirituality perforce must derive from a Native Messenger (or from more than one Native Messengers of God), as Shoghi Effendi clearly implies, in a text cited by the Bahá'í World Centre:

While the peoples in certain parts of the world hold religious beliefs that are classified as animist, the Research Department has not, to date, been able to locate any clear statements in the Writings about animist spirits. You might be interested in the general guidance contained in the following extract from a letter dated 7 July 1942, written on behalf of the Guardian in response to a question about the status of a number of different religious groups and movements:

“Truth is found everywhere. It would be indeed difficult to find a creed or a doctrine of any sort in this world that did not possess some facet of truth; this is what Bahá'u'lláh believed and taught. But everything has a source or focal centre; the focal centres of truth are not broken up or distributed at random, but, like the sun, are concentrated in one mighty source whom we call a Prophet or Manifestation of God. What we find in each other, and in various creeds, are rays from this source — but the source is the all-important thing, and to recognize and turn to it gives one an infinitely greater degree of strength and enlightenment than to try to find its rays, one here and one there, scattered about among our fellow men.”<sup>35</sup>

Consider the work of Patricia Locke. Recognized as one of the most influential American Indians of the 20th century, Locke dedicated her life to preserving the languages, cultures and spiritual traditions of American

<sup>34</sup> The Universal House of Justice, letter dated 22 March 1988, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly (unpublished). Cited by Universal House of Justice, letter dated 25 March 1997 to an individual Bahá'í. Posted by Brent Poirier on the Tarjuman list, 9 June 2007.

<sup>35</sup> The Universal House of Justice, unpublished letter dated 25 March 1997 to an individual Bahá'í. Posted by Brent Poirier on the Tarjuman list, 9 June 2007.

Indians and other indigenous peoples. This was her abiding passion. Moreover, she helped organize seventeen tribally-run colleges, and influenced changes in federal laws affecting Native Americans. In 1991, Locke was awarded a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. She was also the first Native American woman elected to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States (1993–2001). As a crowning tribute to her life and work, in 2003 Patricia Locke was admitted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.<sup>36</sup> Reflect how this historic document, the *Declaration of Vision*, which Locke was instrumental in facilitating, and which was initially adopted by a near-unanimous vote by the delegates at the 1993 Parliament of World's Religions, yet ultimately nullified by Dr. David Ramage, Jr., Chairman of the Council Parliament, who overruled the vote. The 1993 American Indian *Declaration of Vision* states, in part:

One hundred years ago, during the 1893 Parliament of World Religions, the profoundly religious Original Peoples of the Western Hemisphere were not invited. We are still here and still struggling to be heard for the sake of our Mother Earth and our children. Our spiritual and physical survival continues to be threatened all over the hemisphere, we feel compelled to ask you to join us in restoring the balances of humanity and Mother Earth in these ways:

- A. Acknowledgement of the myriad of messengers of the Creator, the Great Mystery, to the peoples of the Western Hemisphere.
- B. Support in promoting, preserving and maintaining our Indigenous languages and cultures.<sup>37</sup>

Obviously the Bahá'í delegates (Patricia Locke and Jacqueline Left Hand Bull, who is now Chair of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States), had voted in support of this resolution. It seems to me that, if Patricia Locke and Jacqueline Left Hand Bull had advocated that the peoples of the world should ensure “that the myriad of Messengers of God to the peoples of the Western Hemisphere be acknowledged,” then surely the Bahá'í Faith should as well — at least in principle, especially on the clear authority of the Tablet to Amír Khán.

Now, Don, let me ask you: Would this be a welcome way of presenting the Bahá'í Faith to Native Americans and Native Canadians, as well as to the indigenous peoples of South America and Central America? I believe that Chelsea Horton has already predicted that it would, when she writes: “In regards to the question of ‘Messengers of God to First Nations’...[i]f by this you mean the recognition, acknowledgement, and validation of Indigenous prophets on the part of the Bahá'í community (whether officially or at the

<sup>36</sup> See “Patricia A. Locke (1928–2001),” *Women of the Hall*. National Women's Hall of Fame, <http://www.greatwomen.org>

<sup>37</sup> Valerie Taliman, “Parliament's chair nullifies ‘Vision’ as delegates leave” News From Indian Country, September, 1993.

level of praxis), my research in British Columbia has certainly indicated this to have had an empowering effect for Indigenous Bahá'ís.”<sup>38</sup> Do you agree?

**[ADDISON]** Yes! Wholeheartedly yes! Lots of Indians view such recognition of “Deganawidah, Quetzalcoátl and Viracocha” and are deeply thrilled, deep down inside. Like a breath of fresh air! Even some will say to themselves, “Well, this group of names comes from other tribes and indigenous Nations, not my own particular tribe or prophet or spiritual leader (whatever you want to call them). But this list of Native Messengers does contain at least some founders of indigenous religions, and therein is “the miracle” — finally a religion that includes our own! At long last, there’s a religion that came along (the Bahá’í Faith) in which some of its followers and some of its literature includes Native Prophets! Or at least the notion that Native Prophets have existed that must have been inspired by the Divine Creator of us all! Native peoples love this! (Except, of course, those converted Indians who are stuck in the very literalist, evangelical Christian, very closed-minded doctrines, foreign to Native experience and culture. And unfortunately we do have some Indians that have bought that notion, “hook, line and sinker.”) I love it! Yakoke! (Choctaw for “Thank you.”)

As you know, I’m Choctaw. We had a very very ancient prophet whose name was lost. He’s part of our earliest creation/migration story (we don’t call it a “myth” for obvious reasons) and “prophet” is the word used in our Choctaw stories in English. I can even cite publications where “prophet” is the term used. Even though this chart doesn’t include our Choctaw prophet, Choctaw peoples will look at this list and be thrilled! The reason being is this: that previous religious literature and (especially Christian) missionaries actually teach the reverse — that our Native prophets were Satan personified, or were the “anti-Christ” or that they were duping the people. I heard a Christian minister with a straight face once say, “All Native prophets were sent by the devil.” And he was serious! It makes most Native peoples sick when folks say this, but we’re used to it from Christians. But when Bahá’ís include even some Native Prophets, somewhere, anywhere in their presentation of the Faith (whatever form that takes) it is like a huge “Ah-ha!” “Finally!” Then Indians sense that “when these Bahá’ís are saying that they are free of religious prejudices, they really mean it! They ‘walk their talk’.” I have seen other Native people accept the Bahá’í Faith deep down in their hearts (that internal inmost spirit inside each of us) and accept Bahá’u’lláh (Whom they’d never previously heard of) initially because a Bahá’í states that Bahá’u’lláh makes statements along the lines that there is no people on earth to whom God has not sent some prophet or messenger!

**[BUCK]** I have found what appears to be an ethnographic record of the name of your Prophet, which was Chah-Tah: “The name of their principal

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<sup>38</sup> Chelsea Horton, e-mail, dated 27 April 2007, in reply to Dr. Christopher Buck and Dr. Donald Addison, cited with permission.



chief or prophet was Chah-tah, and he was a man of great age and wisdom.”<sup>39</sup>

[ADDISON] I loved your information on “Chah-Tah” being the “name” of the ancient Choctaw Prophet. Somewhere, sometime back, somewhere along the way, it seems to me that I vaguely recall that others have talked about that notion and this idea has been around for a while. I have a tendency to really accept it as valid and accurate, even without “empirical” proof, because it has been very common in ancient times for a Prophet’s name to become the name of a people’s tribe, band, clan or even family, and in this case, we have abundant “hints” that our tribe’s authentic name “Chahta,” came into existence by virtue of “Chahta” being the name of that early Messenger or Prophet of God. He was honored and his memory given great prestige that the tribe was named for him. It was Europeans who changed the spelling, and hence the name, from Chahta to Choctaw. But we still say “Chahta” as our tribal name. So thanks much for finding this. You certainly are constantly amazing me with the wonderful materials you come up with.

[BUCK] Thanks, Don. Let me you ask a question regarding a sensitive issue. I have chosen “First Nations” here, although it is a Native Canadian term. Some have objected to my use of “First Nations” here, arguing that’s it’s a purely Canadian term. Does “First Nations” enjoy some currency today among Native Americans today? If so, is it an acceptable phrase in terms of its accuracy and dignity, or is it used alternatively or even begrudgingly? Is this term appropriate?

[ADDISON] I think “First Nations” is a beautiful term, an honorary term. Its certainly not an “abbreviated” term that divides peoples one from another. Personally, I think it’s more inclusive. I find its use among Bahá’is as highly respectful and shows that Bahá’is are attempting to redress the wrongs of colonial times. Because behind those two beautiful words — “First Nations” — are families, and grandmothers, prayer makers, and loving relationships, one tribe with another, and all the love that my mother put into the red and green grass dance outfit she sewed for me by hand when I was a kid, etc. What is not a “First Nation,” by contrast, is clearly meant the Europeans who came to the Western Hemisphere looking for gold, conquest, converts, lands, etc.

Sometimes the use of “First Nations” is a statement of survival. We’re here still, in spite of 600 years of efforts to eradicate all of us indigenous peoples. I would deeply encourage a more fuller reading of “First Nations” — not to exclude others who have different prophets, or “no” prophets at all — but to

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<sup>39</sup> As reported by Peter Pitchlynn, “[Chief of the Choctaws](#),” *The Atlantic Monthly* Vol. 25, Issue 150 (April 1870).

include all peoples who faced the onslaught of Europeans who had guns, and Natives who only had spiritual beliefs to sustain them.

I'm interested in what you have to say about this Bahá'í text — one that you've effectively rediscovered and brought back to influential life. Do you mean the Tablet to Amír Khán, which you briefly discussed in your lengthy "Native Messengers" article back in 1996?

**[BUCK]** Yes. I should give credit, however, to my dear wife, Nahzy Abadi Buck, who first brought this Tablet to my attention. But there have been some problems associated with this text.

**[ADDISON]** How so?

**[BUCK]** There were discussions about the Tablet to Amír Khán on two scholarly Bahá'í lists — Tarikh and Tarjuman. Unfortunately, these debates generated more heat than light, and I was opposed by several individuals on each list — yet others — that is, those few individuals who have been willing to explore this issue further, to assist in the necessary research, and who have contributed their understanding of the text — have made it all worthwhile. This debate, I should add, has already attracted scholarly attention. On the positive side, Chelsea Dawn Horton<sup>40</sup> notes:

Although there is debate, from an official Bahá'í perspective, as to whether Aboriginal prophets occupy an equal station with such figures as Jesus, Buddha, and Mohammed or are, rather, "lesser Prophets," more significant here are the interpretations of Aboriginal Bahá'ís themselves.<sup>41</sup> In the words of Linda Loft Pappenberger, progressive revelation is not, for many Aboriginal people, "a taking away of anything that they didn't believe before"; "in fact," she continues, "it's even enhanced."<sup>42</sup> Many Aboriginal Bahá'ís from across North America have interpreted the Bahá'í Faith as the fulfilment of prophecies from their respective Aboriginal cultures.<sup>43</sup>

40 Horton, *The Aboriginal-Bahá'í Encounter in British Columbia*, 2.

41 Horton's footnote: On the debate over the station of Aboriginal prophets see Pauline Tuttle, *The Hoop of Many Hoops*, 188. While Tuttle elects not to take a stance on the issue, citing the need for further research and consultation, Christopher Buck, for his part, does so in his article "Native Messengers of God in Canada?"

42 Horton's footnote: Interview.

43 Horton's note: For references to discussion of the Bahá'í Faith as the fulfillment of Aboriginal prophecy in British Columbia see Canadian Bahá'í News, no. 273 (Sept./Oct. 1973), 6; Canadian Bahá'í News, no. 305 (July 1977), 9; "Indian fire warms," [Victoria newspaper], 1977. For discussion from outside the province, see [U.S.] Bahá'í News, no. 148 (May 1962), 11 [Blackfoot]; Canadian Bahá'í News, no. 205 (Feb 1967), 1, 7 [Navajo]; Canadian Bahá'í News, 2, no. 3 (July/Aug. 1979), 12 [Tejas]; Canadian Bahá'í News, 9, no. 8 (Oct 1987), 3 [Navajo]; Canadian Bahá'í News, 10, no. 4 (June 1988), 3; Canadian Bahá'í News, 10, no. 5 (July 1988), 4; Joseph O. Weixelman, "The Traditional Navajo Religion and the Bahá'í Faith," *World Order*, 1985, 20(1), Fall, 31–51; Carolyn Patterson Sawin, *Native Conversion, Native Identity: An Oral History of the Bahá'í Faith among First Nations People in Southern Central Yukon Territory, Canada* (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Washington, 2000), 9–11, 130–138; Tuttle, "Beyond Feathers and Beads," 108, 124–125, 127, 129–130 [Lakota]; Tuttle, "The Hoop of Many Hoops," 78, 318, 325 [Lakota]; William Willoya and Vinson Brown, *Warriors of the Rainbow: Strange and Prophetic Dreams of the Indian Peoples* (Happy Camp, CA: Naturegraph, 1962); Annie Kahn, *Olin*

Lakota Bahá'ís Kevin Locke and Jacqueline Left Hand Bull, for example, consider Bahá'u'lláh the fulfillment “of White Buffalo Calf Woman’s promise to return...”<sup>44</sup>

However, this position has had its detractors. I have my own stories to tell, having directly experienced criticism with the lively (and deadening!) “debate” of which Chelsea Horton speaks.

**[ADDISON]** Yes, I’ve read some of the recent postings that have confronted your postings — as well as to the proposition that drew such opposition. I would say that, while your views did generate some support, they were often resisted by others. What, if any, was your most successful argument against this opposition?

**[BUCK]** Good question. That would be when I posted this argument on 16 May 2007:

Suppose that Bahá'u'lláh had appeared in North America — not in Iran — and that Europe and the rest of the world only had oral religious traditions. Then let us suppose that Bahá'u'lláh, under this hypothetical, had named Manifestations of God who were known to have appeared in the Americas. And then the Faith, instead of spreading from East to West, had spread from West to East.

Imagine how strange it would feel to Europeans if their sacred traditions — based on the oral traditions of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad — were not truly and equally recognized by the Bahá'ís under this reverse hypothetical. And imagine if someone like me or you started to say: “Well, perhaps God did send Messengers to Europe.” But we lack a “clear Text” either way. And let’s suppose further that the Jews, Christians, and Muslims — all without a written tradition under this hypothetical — had to endure the Native-centrism of the Bahá'ís from North America.

The indigenous Europeans would have every reason to feel alienated, since somehow their spiritual traditions were not really being recognized, nor their cultures, etc. And then someone like you or me rises up to proclaim that, yes, perhaps we can aver that God must have sent “Messengers of God to Europe.” And then that person draws all kinds of criticism for doing so! And, far worse, the indigenous European believers were leaving the Faith. Under such hypothetical circumstances, what other choice would you or I have, as scholars, as concerned Bahá'ís, and empathetic to their situation?

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Karch, and Blu Mundy, *Four Remarkable Indian Prophecies of the Navajos, Toltecs, Mayas and Indians of Idaho* (Happy Camp, CA: Naturegraph, 1963). *Buck’s/Addison’s note:* See also Joseph O. Weixelman, “The Traditional Navajo Religion and the Bahá'í Faith,” *World Order* (Fall 1985): 31–51.

<sup>44</sup> Horton, *The Aboriginal–Bahá'í Encounter in British Columbia*, 72–73.

[ADDISON] Wow! Now that's quite a scenario — what you call a “hypothetical” — that almost anyone in the West can relate to. What about the text itself? First, what were the “circumstances of revelation,” as Islamicists would say? Who was the recipient? Who was Amír Khán? And how did his questions regarding the issue of Manifestations of God in North America arise in the first place? What do you think precipitated this sudden and unexpected interest in Native Americans?

[BUCK] On this issue, I think you'll agree when I say that the Tablet to Amír Khán exists in “splendid isolation” (as scholars sometimes refer to a unique text) and is thus a singular and therefore absolutely critical text. As for Amír Khán himself, I'd say that it wasn't so much an interest in indigenous cultures *per se*, but rather a curiosity about the possibility of extra-Semitic and extra-Aryan Messengers of God. Or, more simply, we can say that Amír Khán was concerned over what scholars like John Hinnells have termed, “the salvation of others.” As for the identity of Amír Khán himself, Dr. Iraj Ayman knew him personally. Here is what Dr. Ayman says about him:

Amír Khán of Tehran refers to a Bahá'í known as Amír Khán Áhan. He owned a shop at the beginning of Naser Khosrow Street in Tehran. It had a sign of “Magházeh Áhan.” So he was known in Tehran as Amír Khán-i-Magházeh Áhan. He was importing and selling various hardware items. Amír Khán was famous for his many inventions. He had traveled to Europe and especially to Russia where he had sold some of his inventions. He is the recipient of a famous Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in response to his submission asking His guidance on what line [of endeavor — *s.anáyi*’ (sing. *s.an’at* — variously translated as “crafts/arts/industries”)]<sup>45</sup> he should pursue, due to his many different interests. The Master advises him to concentrate on one line, otherwise his talent and energies will be wasted. Amír Khán was the recipient of several Tablets and he had met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Holy Land. Amír Khán was a close friend of my father. Accompanying my father, I did meet him many times. He was full of fascinating ideas and constantly making new devices and solving technical problems.<sup>46</sup>

I then replied:

Not only have you identified who the mysterious “Amír Khán” was (i.e., Amír Khán-i-Magházih Áhan), you have accurately described the most famous Tablet that the Master had revealed for him. On the basis of Omid Ghaemmaghami's provisional translation of Parts One

45 Dr. Iraj Ayman, e-mail, dated 10 May 2007, in reply to Dr. Christopher Buck, posted on the Tarikh list.

46 This explanatory information was provided by Mr. Omid Ghaemmaghami, e-mail, dated 12 May 2007, in reply to Dr. Christopher Buck, posted on the Tarjuman list.

and Three (based on the Research Department's Memorandum, which I quoted earlier), I was able to match your description of that famous Tablet with this particular Tablet in '*Amr va Khalq* ... Then Omid observed that the presence of an ellipsis indicates that some of the text of this Tablet is missing. Of course, I immediately wondered where the original Tablet in its entirety might be found. You, Dr. Ayman, have now solved this mystery! This is a thrilling moment of discovery for me, after first having encountered a small excerpt from this Tablet many years ago. Naturally you'll expect my next question: Can you provide a facsimile of this complete Tablet so that we can all study it closely?<sup>47</sup>

Dr. Ayman responded in two separate messages, which I combine as follows:

This is the Tablet that I had mentioned in my previous message. This is addresses to Amír Khán that I briefly introduced in that message. If you check this Tablet in the collection of Tablets transcribed and photo-printed by Mírzá 'Alí-Akbar Mílání Rúghín (*Muhibb al-Sultán*) in blue color, the complete name of Amír Khán Áhan is written on the top of this Tablet.<sup>48</sup>

Unfortunately, I do not have access to the collection of the Tablets transcribed and published by 'Alí-Akbar Mílání. I remember very well that the complete text of that Tablet was published in the series of Tablets that he was photographically publishing in blue color. 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian have endorsed the authenticity of the Tablets published by 'Alí-Akbar Mílání. Someone who has access to that collection could leaf through it and find it.<sup>49</sup>

Here, "photographically publishing in blue color" refers to mimeographing or jellygraphing as a form of reproduction, since the publication of Bahá'í books in Iran was outlawed (and still is).

**[ADDISON]** Do you have a provisional translation of the Tablet to Amír Khán?

**[BUCK]** Yes. Here's what we have so far:

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<sup>47</sup> Dr. Christopher Buck, e-mail, dated 12 May 2007, in reply to Dr. Iraj Ayman, posted on the Tarjuman list.

<sup>48</sup> Dr. Iraj Ayman, e-mail, dated 12 May 2007, in reply to Dr. Christopher Buck, posted on the Tarjuman list.

<sup>49</sup> Dr. Iraj Ayman, e-mail, dated 12 May 2007, in reply to Dr. Christopher Buck, posted on the Tarjuman list.

He is God!

O servant of God! You had complained about [your] inability to attain perfection in more than one craft (*dar s.anáyi' muta'ddidih*). A multiple number of crafts cause [one's] perceptions to become scattered. Endeavor in one of these crafts and strive and exert yourself to attain perfection therein. This is better than having a number of crafts (all) remain in a state of imperfection<sup>50</sup>...

In ancient times the people of America (*ahl-i Amrík*) were, through their northern regions, close to Asia, that is, separated from Asia by a strait. For this reason, it hath been said that crossing had occurred. There are other signs which indicate communication.

As to places whose people were not informed of the appearance of Prophets, such people are excused. In the Qur'án it hath been revealed: "We will not chastise them if they had not been sent a Messenger" (Q. 17:15, *mā kunnā mu'adhdhīna h.attā nab'atha rasūl(an)*).<sup>51</sup>

Undoubtedly in those regions the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now.

Undoubtedly, in those regions, the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now (*al-battih dar án s.afahát níz dar azmanih-yi-qadímih vaqtí nidá-yi-iláhí buland gashatih va-lákin hál farámush shudih ast*).<sup>52</sup>

I will supplicate God to confirm you in attaining perfection in one of the crafts.<sup>53</sup> And upon thee be greetings and praise.<sup>54</sup>

[ADDISON] This is a remarkable text! But the first thing that Bahá'í scholars will do is to question its authenticity. Is this text authentic? And is this text an actual "Tablet" or merely a "reported utterance"? I understand

<sup>50</sup> Provisional translation by Omid Ghaemmaghami. Persian text: *'Amr va Khalq*, vol. 3, p. 307.

<sup>51</sup> Transliteration provided by Dr. Necati Alkan (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), e-mail, dated 31 May 2007, posted on the Tarjuman list.

<sup>52</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to Amír Khán Áhan of Tehran*, in Fádíl Mázandarání, *'Amr va Khalq* (Germany: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1985), vol. 2, pp. 46–47.

<sup>53</sup> Provisional translation by Omid Ghaemmaghami. Persian text: *'Amr va Khalq*, vol. 3, p. 308.

<sup>54</sup> Provisional translation by Dr. Khazeh Fananapazir. Based on facsimile of the original Tablet to Amír Khán, provided as an attachment of the Research Department memorandum dated 16 May 1996 (and re-sent by the Universal House of Justice as an attachment in its letter of 8 June 2007 to Dr. Christopher Buck. Although the identity of the recipient of this Tablet is not mentioned in the 16 May 1996 memorandum, Amír Khán of Tehran was identified as the recipient in the Research Department memorandum dated 25 August 1994: "In an email message dated 1 August 1994, Mr. Christopher Buck requests the source of a quotation attributed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá by Fádíl Mázandarání in *Amr va Khalq* (vol. 2, pp. 45–46). This quotation is found in a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's, revealed for a certain Amír Khán in Tíhrán. The section referred to by Mr. Buck is the central portion. Fádíl Mázandarání has also published the beginning and final passages of this Tablet in *Amr va Khalq* (vol. 3, pp. 307–308)."

that this Tablet was introduced as a “*khit.áb*” (discourse or speech), and that this terminology has cast some doubts over the authenticity of this text.

**[BUCK]** The Tablet to Amír Khán Áhan is most definitely a Tablet, for the following five reasons:

1. *Research Department Memorandum*: I just opened up several old boxes and found a stack of letters from the Universal House of Justice, I am happy to tell you that I have at last located the Research Department’s Memorandum in reply to my question regarding the source of Tablet to Amír Khán of Tīhrán:

#### MEMORANDUM

To: The Universal House of Justice  
 Date: 25 August 1994  
 From: Research Department  
 Source of Citation

In an email message dated 1 August 1994, Mr. Christopher Buck requests the source of a quotation attributed to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá by Fádil Mázandarání in *Amr va Khalq* (vol. 2, pp. 45–46). This quotation is found in a Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s, revealed for a certain Amír Khán in Tīhrán. The section referred to by Mr. Buck is the central portion. Fádil Mázandarání has also published the beginning and final passages of this Tablet in *Amr va Khalq* (vol. 3, pp. 307–308).

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This Tablet takes on heightened significance as a textual basis for putting forth the proposition that “Messengers of God to First Nations” is a valid Bahá’í principle, the formalization and application of which would go far in bringing about a symbolic transformation of interracial and intercultural relations — first among mainstream American Bahá’is and Bahá’is of Native American ancestry and identity. Wouldn’t you agree?

**[ADDISON]** I wish the non-Indian believers here in the West were more tolerant of our Native voices and American Indian Prophets. As a Native American, I’m deeply saddened that some Bahá’is of non-Indian backgrounds find it so difficult to cut through their own European cultural barriers that cloud their open acknowledgment of Native American Prophets as Manifestations of God.

Would it be a serious breach of Bahá’í belief or a mistaken misrepresentation of the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh if an enrolled Bahá’í in good standing were to write and publish in print “Bahá’is acknowledge the validity of the Prophethood of Deganawidah”? It seems to me that this

would not detract in any way from the authenticity of Bahá'u'lláh or His Writings, nor does it in any way detract from the validity of all the other Central Figures and the Administrative Structure of this Divinely ordained Faith. This statement, I hasten to add, doesn't in any possible way represent a challenge to the Covenant — God forbid! My statement is fully in accordance with “there being ‘no people to whom a Messenger has not been sent’ and the general doctrinal position that ultimately all religion comes from God,” as you yourself just stated. Why impose a disconnect between the latter and the former?

The Sacred Writings of the Báb, the forerunner, and Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, of even Bahá'u'lláh's appointed successor, His eldest Son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, do not specifically mention any Native American Prophet by name. However, their Writings all clearly imply their existence. Many distinguished Bahá'í writers, scholars, and administrative servants of the Faith, have increasingly been referring to Native Prophets in public talks, in publishes articles, and other media presentations.

**[BUCK]** Quite true. First, note that both Qur'anic and Bahá'í texts that basically state that no people, at some point in its history, has been bereft of divine guidance. Thus, “Unto every nation hath an Apostle been sent” (Q. 10:47; cf. Q. 16:36). In the *Commentary on the Surah of the Sun*, Bahá'u'lláh states that Messengers of God have been sent to every people: “As thou canst see, every nation on earth hath been enlightened by one of these brightly shining Suns. Whoso denieth Them remaineth deprived.”<sup>55</sup>

**[ADDISON]** That's certainly a universalism. For skeptics, however, isn't that a little too general, too abstract, too diffuse? I think that, while practically all Bahá'ís would support this analysis, relatively few of them would be prepared to extend full recognition and parity with the highest spirituality that indigenous cultures have to offer. This is a precious legacy that, if ignored and otherwise devalued, can never combust with mainstream Bahá'í spirituality to ignite the worldwide influence that 'Abdu'l-Bahá has envisioned (and predicted) that the indigenous Bahá'ís of North America might contribute. I recall that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had commented on the fact that America had a great civilization in the past.

**[BUCK]** Yes, Don, in fact it was you who recently brought this to my attention in a recent posting of yours. It was either Friday, July 5, 1912, or July 9, 1912, when Bahá'í artist, Juliet Thompson, took the leader of the Bahá'í Faith, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to visit the American Museum of Natural History. Of particular interest was an exhibit of art and artifacts from early America. Whether pre-Columbian or later is not clear at this time. This

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<sup>55</sup> Adapted from translation by J. Cole of Bahá'u'lláh's *Commentary on the Surah of the Sun* (Ames, Iowa: Omphaloskepsis, 2000) at 10–11



exhibit was probably on the Blackfoot Indians, since anthropologist Clark Wissler (1870–1947) was curator of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City for nearly 40 years, and had published several monographs on the Blackfoot Indians.<sup>56</sup> On seeing this exhibit, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made a comment in passing—recorded in its original Persian in *Mahmud’s Diary*—from which a possible religious significance might be inferred. The authoritative account relates this event as follows:

Today, at the invitation of Juliet Thompson, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá went to a museum near His house. On the first floor there were statues, figures of animals and a collection of relics of early American civilization. On observing these objects, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “From these things it appears that America had a great civilization in ancient times.”<sup>57</sup>

The Persian original reads: “*Az in áthár ma’lum ast kih Amríká dar ayyám qadím dará-yi tamaddún búdiḥ.*”<sup>58</sup> Translated literally, this means: “From these relics, it appears America had a civilization in the days of old.”<sup>59</sup> On the surface, this is a statement of the obvious. Whether it has a deeper meaning — that the rise of a great civilization is necessarily the result of a great religion — is impossible to say.

[ADDISON] I agree. Evidence of a high civilization does not directly imply a Manifestation of God. That’s the problem as I see it. In the vast corpus of Bahá’í Writings, it appears that only one single text been found that might conclusively establish that North America had not only high civilizations but independent Manifestations of God. It that your conclusion?

[BUCK] As far as specific pronouncements on that issue are concerned, I would have to say, yes.

<sup>56</sup> N. C. Nelson, “Clark Wissler, 1870–1947.” *American Antiquity*, 1948, 13(3), 244–247.

<sup>57</sup> Mírzá Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, *Mahmud’s Diary: The Diary of Mírzá Mahmúd-i-Zarqání*. Translated by Mohi Sobhani (Oxford: George Ronald, 1998), 158–159. For an alternative account of this excursion, see Juliet Thompson, *The Diary of Juliet Thompson*, with a preface by Marzieh Gail (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1983), 329–332. However, Juliet Thompson’s date differs from that of Mahmúd, in that she gives Monday, July 9, 1912 (see p. 329). Not only does this date conflict with that given in *Mahmud’s Diary*, but the comment by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as well:

“I have heard a tradition,” I said, “that in the very distant past this country and Asia were connected.”

“Assuredly,” answered the Master, “before a great catastrophe there was such a connection between Asia and America.”

It should be noted that Mahmúd’s account is considered authoritative as it is “regarded as a reliable account of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s travels in the West and an authentic record of His utterances, whether in the form of formal talks, table talks or random oral statements. Mírzá Mahmúd was a careful and faithful chronicler and engaged in assembling and publishing his work with the permission of the beloved Master.” (*The Universal House of Justice*.) Thus this contradiction should be resolved in favor of Mahmúd’s report, and Juliet Thompson’s contradictory narrative regarded with some suspicion here, where she also states that the exhibit was one of Mexican antiquities (not of Blackfoot culture).

<sup>58</sup> Persian text. Mírzá Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, *Badáyi’u’l-Atha’r*.

<sup>59</sup> Provisional translation provided by Dr. Ahang Rabbani, e-mail, dated April 20, 2007, in reply to Dr. Christopher Buck, posted on the Tarikh list.

[ADDISON] Seeing that this text, the Tablet to Amír Khán Áhan, exists in “splendid isolation,” as you say, why don’t we take a closer look at it? It’s this part of the Tablet that interests us:

In ancient times the people of America (*ahl-i Amrík*) were, through their northern regions, close to Asia, that is, separated from Asia by a strait. For this reason, it hath been said that crossing had occurred.

There are other signs which indicate communication. As to places whose people were not informed of the appearance of Prophets, such people are excused. In the Qur’án it hath been revealed: “We will not chastise them if they had not been sent a Messenger” (Q. 17:15, *má kunná mu’ádhhibína hattá nab’atha rasúla<sup>an</sup>*).<sup>60</sup>

Undoubtedly, in those regions, the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now (*al-battih dar án s.afahát níz dar azmanih-yi-qadímih vaqtí nidá-yi-iláhí buland gashtih va-lákin hál farámúsh shudih ast*).<sup>61</sup>

Now I like this statement from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá very much: “Undoubtedly in those regions the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now.” My own people, the Choctaw, had an ancient Prophet whose name no one remembers (unless, as you pointed out, the name of our Prophet was “Chah-tah”). So I think ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is quite accurate here as well. Only a very few Native American Prophets’ names have endured. We have some, identified all the way from the lowliest village elder, healer, traditional singer of prayers, all the way up to “great seers,” “great visionaries,” “spiritual leaders,” to lesser Prophets and Major Manifestations of God — just as in most other societies on earth (although the terms change obviously). With the exception of famous people like Wodziwob, Ganiodaiyo (Handsome Lake), White Buffalo Calf Woman, Deganawidah, we have others who admittedly are problematic. Yet some of our sacred traditions remain. Thus they are “remembered” — not forgotten. They are preserved as living traditions. Does this language of “forgotten” effectively bar Bahá’í recognition of these living traditions?

[BUCK] Again, let’s examine the clause, “...but it hath been forgotten now” (*va-lákin hál farámúsh shudih ast*), closely. Here follow representative texts in which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá comments on how living religious traditions — all of the named exemplars of which are considered “historic” insofar as they are “founded” religions — are functionally “forgotten” even though they are present in the world today.

### **Buddha’s and Confucius’ Teachings Have Been Forgotten:**

<sup>60</sup> Transliteration provided by Mr. Omid Ghaemmaghami (slightly modified by the present writer), e-mail, dated 16 April 2007, in reply to Dr. Christopher Buck, posted on the Tarikh list.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablet to Amír Khán Áhan of Tehran*, 46–47

Buddha also established a new religion, and Confucius renewed morals and ancient virtues, but their institutions have been entirely destroyed. The beliefs and rites of the Buddhists and Confucianists have not continued in accordance with their fundamental Teachings. The founder of Buddhism was a wonderful soul. He established the Oneness of God, but later the original principles of His doctrines gradually disappeared, and ignorant customs and ceremonials arose and increased until they finally ended in the worship of statues and images.<sup>62</sup>

The meaning is that the Buddhists and Confucianists now worship images and statues. They are entirely heedless of the Oneness of God and believe in imaginary gods like the ancient Greeks. But in the beginning it was not so; there were different principles and other ordinances.<sup>63</sup>

### **Moses' Teachings Have Been Forgotten:**

When in San Francisco, I was invited to speak in a Jewish synagogue. I said, "For about two thousand years, between you and the Christians, there have been friction and opposition, owing to the misunderstandings which today have blinded the eyes. You conceive that His Holiness the Christ was the enemy of Moses, the destroyer of the laws of the Pentateuch, the abrogator of the commandments of the Bible. When we investigate the reality we observe that Christ appeared at a time when according to your own historians, the laws of the Torah were forgotten; the foundation of religion and faith was shaken."<sup>64</sup>

### **Christ's Teachings Have Been Forgotten:**

Again, consider how much the principles of the religion of Christ have been forgotten, and how many heresies have appeared. For example, Christ forbade revenge and transgression; furthermore, He commanded benevolence and mercy in return for injury and evil. Now reflect: among the Christian nations themselves how many sanguinary wars have taken place, and how much oppression, cruelty, rapacity and bloodthirstiness have occurred! Many of these wars were carried on by command of the Popes. It is then clear and

<sup>62</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), 165.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, 166.

<sup>64</sup> Originally reprinted from *Abdul Baha [sic] on Divine Philosophy*. Comp. Isabel F. Chamberlain. Boston: Tudor Press, 1916, chapter V: "Abdul Baha Answers Many Questions asked by Theologians of Paris". The original text has been reprinted in Persian in *Khitábát* (Talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá). Rev. ed. Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1984, pp. 737–747. See revised translation Seena Fazel and Khazeh Fananapazir, "['Abdu'l-Bahá on Christ and Christianity](#)", *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 1993, 3(1).

evident that in the passage of time religions become entirely changed and altered. Therefore, they are renewed.<sup>65</sup>

The foundation of the religion of God is one. The same basis which was laid by Christ, and later on was forgotten, has been renewed by His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh.

God has founded religion so that it might be the bond of amity and mutual association between the peoples. His Holiness the Christ did not sacrifice his life so that the people might believe the doctrine that he is the word of God; nay, rather he gave his life so that he might bestow the consciousness of eternal life to the world of humanity. That is why he said, "Jesus, the son of man, is come to give life to the world".

This reality has been forgotten by the people, and the doctrine of the father, son and holy spirit has been substituted. The original foundation has been lost sight of. Christ said, "if one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Is there any relation between this commandment and bloody events taking place today?<sup>66</sup>

### **Muhammad's Teachings Have Been Forgotten:**

Those "kindreds, people and nations" signify those who are gathered under the shadow of the Qur'án, not permitting the Cause and Law of God to be, in outward appearance, entirely destroyed and annihilated — for there are prayer and fasting among them — but the fundamental principles of the Religion of God, which are morals and conduct, with the knowledge of divine mysteries, have disappeared; the light of the virtues of the world of humanity, which is the result of the love and knowledge of God, is extinguished; and the darkness of tyranny, oppression, satanic passions and desires has become victorious. The body of the Law of God, like a corpse, has been exposed to public view for twelve hundred and sixty days, each day being counted as a year, and this period is the cycle of Muhammad.

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

<sup>65</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 166.

<sup>66</sup> Seena Fazel and Khazeh Fananapazir, 'Abdu'l-Bahá on Christ and Christianity' Compare: "The Teachings of Christ were forgotten. The Christly bounties ceased. Divine moralities disappeared. Day ended in night." 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* (ed. Howard MaxNutt, Willmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1992), 55.

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.<sup>67</sup>

### **Generally, The Past Manifestations' Teachings Have Been Forgotten:**

O ye respected souls! From the continual imitation of ancient and worn-out ways, the world had grown dark as darksome night. The fundamentals of the divine Teachings had passed from memory; their pith and heart had been totally forgotten, and the people were holding on to husks. The nations had, like tattered garments long outworn, fallen into a pitiful condition.<sup>68</sup>

My thesis is simply this: "Forgotten" is relative, not absolute. "Forgotten" does not mean that all memory of the Manifestation of God and His/Her Teachings has been effaced from historical memory, without a trace. Rather, "forgotten" primarily means that the Teachings have been displaced, having lost their primacy in actual practice.

[ADDISON] The notion of "forgotten" is a huge issue in Indian country as well. First, most Native peoples will say that we all accept the fact that some of our cultures have been "forgotten," no doubt about it, but the white Euro-American suppression of our peoples, languages, religions, and cultures has not wiped everything away. So lots of Indians are super-sensitive about saying, for example, that our music or that our language is "dead." Rather, since many of our languages that used to be spoken fluently in the 19th century are no longer around, we simply say that these languages "are asleep."

During the most severe repression of our religions in the U.S. and Canada, the languages, dances, stories and the songs were forced underground, or our people said, "put to sleep." Now they can be revived out in the open, those songs and languages that remain, when elders can be found still alive who are willing to remember them and bring them back to the community. Unfortunately, a few of our living elders in various parts of the country have been so deeply hurt by Christian missionaries telling them "your religions and your languages are evil," so much so, that some of these elders actually started believing that. They then refuse to share any of their traditional cultures (today) that they might remember because they don't want "to go to hell when they die." Many parents wouldn't teach their Native language to their kids so they wouldn't suffer what the parents went through with classmates laughing at Indian children who speak in their native tongue. During the Boarding School Era, if you pretended to "forget" your Native religion, it meant you would be beaten by the missionaries much less often!

<sup>67</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 52–53.

<sup>68</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), 252.

That was a means of sheer survival. Some say during those difficult times that “we weren’t dumb, just numb!” To “appear” to “forget,” one has to “go numb,” to “pretend” to “fit in,” so the missionaries wouldn’t beat the kids as much.

“Forgetting” of the past is a much more difficult set of problems. Many of the ancient Native spiritual traditions and “Teachings” have been lost, no doubt about it, from both the ravages of time, cultural migrations and change, and especially from official governmental attempts to cripple our Native religions through the boarding schools, enacting of anti-Indian legislation, English-only programs, forced Christian Church conversions, etc., and when those failed, some of our religions and their ceremonies and their practitioners were persecuted at gun point. The Ghost Dance worshippers, massacred in 1890 at Wounded Knee, and other similar events explains why most of our peoples say “certain ceremonies have been forgotten.” However, many Teachings still remain — such as reverence for the Creator, the importance of prayer, the relationship between sacred lands and sacred traditions, those “ancestors” who are “still associated with the land,” our need to care for this land, the Native prophecies that are still remembered and recorded, our valuable elders and the cultural wisdom they pass on, and above all, the fact that much — but not all — of our sacred beliefs and Teachings, do survive as they are passed on to our young people. These include beliefs from ancient Prophets, some of Whose Names have not even survived into the 21st century, but most all Indians regard their “memories” as sacred, even if we know little more than that about most of them. Native Bahá’ís often, but not necessarily always, enjoy recapturing our Native languages, and learning about our Native belief systems — you see these do not really conflict with the Bahá’í Message.

While many elders talk as if much of the spiritual knowledge of the past still remains, a more accurate appraisal is that “it does, and it doesn’t.” So for Indian religious traditions with which I have spent a life time studying and in which I have participated for many years, “forgotten” — many will agree — is a relative term. I and many other Native Bahá’ís feel that Bahá’u’lláh has “revived” many Native ways and recast some “concepts” that were “lost” and now have been “returned” — from perhaps a different part of the globe, but with the same spiritual energy, creative vigor, and transformative power. I have witnessed first hand how the Bahá’í Faith has already begun to create the rich and loving climate for a “return to Native cultures” while concurrently “stepping into the new world community” brought by Bahá’u’lláh, and seeing these two as complementary, and not competitive in any way.

The “Call of God” mentioned in this Tablet is a most significant metaphor to most Indians who really know their own cultural, spiritual, and Native belief systems. I find this absolutely fascinating.

[BUCK] I'm glad you drew our attention to this metaphor, the explication of which may prove decisive — either way. Here is how I would analyze this figurative expression. Rhetorically as well as logically, the “Call of God” presupposes a “Caller” — one who is doing the calling. In Islamic eschatology, this is a Summoner to the Day of Judgement. Prefigured in the Qur'án (Q. 50:42; cf. Q. 3:193), this future Figure is actually called “the Caller” or “the Crier” (*al-Munádí*), and is a subject of the Last Day. The Caller is thus an actor in the divine drama of the end of prophetic history, which Bahá'í doctrine equates with the beginning of history of prophecy come true (the “Cycle of Fulfillment”). The Caller is eschatologically realized in the persons of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. In the *Tablet of the Son*, for instance, Bahá'u'lláh has identified the Báb as the eschatological “Caller” of the Qur'an.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, in the *Lawh-i Aqdas*: “Say, did ye not hearken to the Voice of the Crier, calling aloud in the wilderness of the Bayán, bearing unto you the glad-tidings of the coming of your Lord, the All-Merciful?”<sup>70</sup> Although the phrase *al-nidá al-iláhi* does not appear in the Qur'án, it would be difficult for anyone familiar with the Qur'án to read the phrase and not think of *al-Munádí*, according to Dr. Moojan Momen.<sup>71</sup>

[ADDISON] That's all well and good. But as you well know, Bahá'ís are not Muslims. The Qur'an, at best, would enjoy a secondary authority at best. What about evidence from the Bahá'í primary sources themselves?

[BUCK] While we would have to verify each text in the Persian or Arabic original, a representative survey of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's various usages of the “Call of God” are all unified by one single referent: the Manifestation of God (primarily, but not exclusively, Bahá'u'lláh) and His message. We can arrive at this determination by examining such exemplars as these:

### Message of The Manifestations(s) of God:

O ye concourse of the Kingdom of Abhá! Two calls to success and prosperity are being raised from the heights of the happiness of mankind... The one is the call of civilization, of the progress of the material world.... The other is the soul-stirring call of God, Whose spiritual Teachings are safeguards of the everlasting glory, the eternal happiness and illumination of the world of humanity... The propagator and executive power of this call is just government... This second call is founded upon the instructions and exhortations of

69 “The Caller has cried out (lit., “the Caller has raised the Call,” wa qad nádá al-munádín) in the sacred plain (*fí barríyyat al-quds*) with the name of ‘Alí-Muhammad (*bi ‘ismi ‘Alí qabli Nabíl*).” Translated by Juan Cole, “[Tablet of the Son \(Jesus\): Letter of the Middle Edirne Period circa 1866](#),” *Translations of Shaykhí, Bábí and Bahá'í Texts*, 2001, 5(2) with transliteration (slightly emended) supplied by Sen McGlinn, e-mail message dated 24 April 2007, and “sacred wilderness” changed to “sacred plain,” as suggested by Omid Ghaemmaghami, e-mail message dated 25 April 2007.

70 Bahá'u'lláh, “[Lawh-i-Aqdas](#),” *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (U.S. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), 12

71 Dr. Moojan Momen, e-mail, dated 23 April 2007, to Dr. Christopher Buck.

the Lord and the admonitions and altruistic emotions belonging to the realm of morality which, like unto a brilliant light, brighten and illumine the lamp of the realities of mankind. Its penetrative power is the Word of God.<sup>72</sup>

### **Message of The Prophets, Christ & Bahá'u'lláh:**

O honoured lady! For a single purpose were the Prophets, each and all, sent down to earth; for this was Christ made manifest, for this did Bahá'u'lláh raise up the call of the Lord.<sup>73</sup>

### **Message of The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh:**

By the term “that true and radiant morn” mentioned in the Hidden Words is meant the Dawn of divine Revelation when the Exalted One [The Báb] manifested Himself in the plenitude of His glory, while the Blessed Tree referreth to the Ancient Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh]... However when the Call of God was raised in the realm of the heart and spirit, mankind remained heedless and inattentive, and therefore was dumbfounded.<sup>74</sup>

### **Message of Bahá'u'lláh, Promulgated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:**

Note ye that when, singly and alone, with none to second me, I upraised the call of God around the world, the peoples thereof rose up to oppose, to dispute, to deny.<sup>75</sup>

### **Message of Bahá'u'lláh, Promulgated by Bahá'í Teachers and Hands of the Cause of God:**

O thou beloved maid-servant of God (Miss Haruko Mori). Praise be unto God, that through the guidance of Miss Alexander thou couldst hear the Call of God. Then strive as far as thou art able to spread the Divine Teachings, so that thou mayest become distinguished with this great Bestowal among the women of the world.<sup>76</sup>

### **Message of Bahá'u'lláh, Promulgated by Ideal Bahá'ís:**

Rest ye assured that if a soul ariseth in the utmost perseverance and raiseth the Call of the Kingdom and resolutely promulgateth the Covenant, be he an insignificant ant he shall be enabled to drive

<sup>72</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 283–284.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet to an individual (on Hidden Words, Persian No. 19), translated from the Persian.

<sup>75</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 230

<sup>76</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Tablet dated August 10, 1920. Translated by Azizullah Bahadur, “Tablets to Japan,” *Japan Will Turn Ablaze!* (Tokyo: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1992).



away the formidable elephant from the arena, and if he be a feeble moth he shall cut to pieces the plumage of the rapacious vulture.<sup>77</sup>

### **Message of Bahá'u'lláh, Promulgated by Ideal Bahá'í Husbands:**

Know thou, verily, the husband is one who hath sincerely turned unto God, is awakened by the call of the Beauty of El-Bahá and chanteth the verses of Oneness in the great assemblies<sup>78</sup>

### **Message of Bahá'u'lláh, Promulgated to Indigenous Peoples:**

God willing, the call of the Kingdom may reach the ears of the Eskimos, the inhabitants of the Islands of Franklin in the north of Canada, as well as Greenland.<sup>79</sup>

### **Hearing The Message of Bahá'u'lláh:**

Happy are ye for this favor, the likeness of which was not seen by the eye of existence, not its similitude heard by the ears of the creatures; because it is the greatest favor on the part of the Lord of the Kingdoms in the world of existence; that is, the greatest guidance, the attainment unto the day of the Lord and listening unto the call of God.<sup>80</sup>

### **Believing the Message of Bahá'u'lláh:**

Hájí Muhammad-Ridá came from Shíráz. He was a man spiritually minded, lowly, contrite, the embodiment of serenity and faith. When the call of God was lifted up, that needy soul hurried into the shelter of heavenly grace. As soon as he heard the summons, "Am I not your Lord?" he cried out: "Yea, verily!" and became as a lamp to the people's feet.<sup>81</sup>

Also among the emigrants and near neighbors was Áqá 'Alí Najaf-Ábádí. When this spiritual young man first listened to the call of God he set his lips to the holy cup and beheld the glory of the Speaker on the Mount. And when, by grace of the light, he had attained positive knowledge, he journeyed to the Most Great Prison, where he witnessed the substance of knowledge itself, and arrived at the high station of indubitable truth.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>77</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 209.

<sup>78</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha Abbas*, Vol. 3, (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1916), 605.

<sup>79</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan* (Wilmette, IL: U.S. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993), 29.

<sup>80</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha Abbas*, Vol. 3, 662

<sup>81</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful* (U.S. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), 117.

<sup>82</sup> *Memorials* 61.

I have perused thy excellent letter which shows that thou art turning thy face unto the living, eternal One and grasping the hem of His Grandeur and thy attraction unto the Call of thy Supreme Lord. Well done! Well done! O maid-servant of God, for thou hast believed in the Glorious Beauty (of El-Abhá) and art confirmed in the manifestation of the Kingdom of God, during this time.<sup>83</sup>

On the basis of this evidence, the expression “Call of God” (Persian: *nidá-yi iláhi*) in Bahá’í texts is a transparent reference to Prophets of God in general, and, in historical-contemporary references to Bahá’í history, to Bahá’u’lláh in particular (as well as the Báb). The expression, the “Call of God,” is thus a stock allusion to revelation, as in Bahá’u’lláh’s poetic description of the Báb’s revelation: “The divine call (*nidá-yi iláhi*) of the Celestial Herald from beyond the Veil of Glory.”<sup>84</sup>

Of all of the *possible* meanings of the phrase, the “Call of God,” the *probable* meaning is that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is speaking of a Manifestation of God and His message. Relying on these exemplars, which both fairly and primarily represent ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s relevant discourse, I conclude that the probable meaning — indeed, the almost certain meaning — of the “Call of God” in the Tablet to Amír Khán of Tehran is a Manifestation of God — such that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá can be understood as confirming the existence of a Manifestation or Manifestations of God to North America.

[ADDISON] What about the place from which the Call of God originates?

[BUCK] Let’s examine this statement closely: “Undoubtedly in those regions the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now.” The words, “Undoubtedly in those regions” (*al-battih dar án s.afahát*) indicates ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s preferred explanation, in favoring the third possibility that Amír Khán must have raised: namely, that one or more Manifestations of God appeared in North America. As stated, the “Call of God” appears to be ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s euphemism for a Manifestation of God and His Message.

Since the whole discussion was about North America in the first place, “in those regions” has to mean North America. Furthermore, it cannot mean Asia, since Manifestations of God had already appeared in Asia. For ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, there is no question but that this must be so, which is why he uses the adverb, “undoubtedly” (*al-battih*). As to place, the words “in those regions” (*dar án s.afahát*) must refer to North America — and not to

<sup>83</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdu’l-Baha Abbas*, Vol 1, (Chicago: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1916), 97.

<sup>84</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán: The Book of Certitude*, tr. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1931/1970) 239; Persian text, Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán: Book of Certitude* (Germany: Bahá’í Verlag, 1980) 186, line 3.

circumpolar Asia — for syntactical as well as semantic reasons, as the previous sentence refers to “places whose people were not informed of the appearance of Prophets.”

“In ancient times the people of America were, through their northern regions, close to Asia, that is, separated from Asia by a strait. For this reason, it hath been said that crossing had occurred. There are other signs which indicate communication.” Here, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá notes the possibility of “communication” between the circumpolar regions of present-day Russia and Alaska, presumably across the land-bridge of the the Bering Straits. It is important to note that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá does not commit Himself to this theory. In saying that “it hath been said that crossing had occurred,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá simply acknowledges a prevailing theory, advanced by some of the leading geologists and anthropologists of the day. While the reader gets the sense — or even the distinct impression — that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá cites this scientific authority with tacit approval,<sup>85</sup> still He entertains the opposite possibility in His response to what appears to have been Amír Khán’s second concern or question.

The land-bridge theory has its attractions for religious reasons, in that it makes it possible for the “Call of God” — the saving Message of a Manifestation of God — to have reached the ancient inhabitants of North America as the missionary by-product of the migration of peoples from East Asia to North America. For this hypothesis to hold, not only would there have to be persuasive evidence of material culture (and some argue that there is), there would also have to be compelling evidence of similar spiritual practices that resist the alternative explanation of having simply reflected parallel developments. In neither case is there a sufficiently strong monotheistic tradition (despite the presence of “High Gods”) that one might expect from a Bahá’í concept of a Manifestation of God.

[ADDISON] Despite the fact that this theory has its attractions for religiously-minded people that measure prophetic authenticity by the yardstick that you’ve trenchantly termed “Semiticentrism” — which term perhaps we could refine as Arya-Semiticentrism (as the Bahá’í Writings acknowledge the non-Semitic, Aryan, Manifestations of God as well) — the Bering Straits theory has its detractors. Indeed, it has the opposite effect on Native Americans. Most Native Americans see that Bering Straights theory of our Native origins as the white man’s conception. You see, that’s not how we view our origins. Each tribal community may have one or more origin

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85 Anecdotal evidence for this exists in the following reported utterance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recorded by Louis Gregory (who was later designated as a Hand of the Cause of God): “But in very ancient times Asia led all the continents in civilization. At this time there was a connection between Asia and America which was lost and entirely forgotten. As to the belief of the American Indians in the Great Spirit, this is explained by the fact that worship is inherent in the nature of man, who must have something above himself upon which he may depend. Even men who are unconscious of this and deny it, depend upon it notwithstanding.” Louis G. Gregory, ‘[A Heavenly Vista: The Pilgrimage of Louis G. Gregory](#)’ (Ferndale, MI: Alpha Services, 1997 [reprint of original edition: Washington. D.C.: Pendleton, 1911(?)]), 13.

story, often called “myths” which is (again) a very insensitive and hurtful term. Why are our Native origin stories “myths”, but the Euro-American or Euro-Canadian “explanation” considered “scientific irrefutable proof”? (In the same light, why are our Native arts called “crafts” or “handicrafts” and “hobbies” and European examples “high art”? and “Fine arts”?)

As a Choctaw, I enjoy our own approaches to science and scientific pursuits. We have them, you know, but about the only folks in the Western Hemisphere that knows nothing about our Native sciences are the Euro-American scientists and scholars. I find academics particularly fond of claiming that our Indian origins are “their” (the white’s) domain of study, and that our own views of our own Native origins, are (by definition) “unscientific,” “unproven,” “legends” and “tales” and unreliable undocumented “myths.”

Our elders say that three “theories” of our origins include the following: (1) first and foremost is that our people emerged out of Mother Earth at a beautiful ancient Choctaw site near Philadelphia, Mississippi, known as “Nanih Waiya” (“Leaning Mountain”). It is a stark soil mound physically, but it is a “beautiful place” for us, spiritually! Inwardly! Ancestrally! It is an earthen mound that is now protected by the state of Mississippi as a state park. We say it is being “protected” from archaeologists that want to dig up anything they can find, if it might contain Indian burials.

In our language, we have a beautiful origin statement: “*Hopaki fibna kask, hattak at atoba ammona kat Nanih Waiyah.*” “The place where man (*hattak*) [meaning all peoples, men and women] came into being a long time ago was Nanih Waiyah.” You see, right there is a good example. In English, “man” is the generic term for “people” — yet it is a decidedly male-dominated cultural matrix out of which English emerged. Not so with most of our Native languages.

A second origin belief (not “myth,” mind you) is that our ancient ancestors came down from ancient American earthen mound civilizations such as Cahokia and migrated into the Southeast. Many of our tribe truly believe that we are descended from Cahokia, but scientists can’t prove or disprove it. And they certainly won’t even countenance our explanation, either. Cahokia flourished from about 400 to 1450 CE and much of it still exists, many earthen mounds in an ancient metropolis whose ruins are located not far from St. Louis, MO and Collinsville, IL. A third possible explanation from our elders states that — instead of migrating from Siberia through the Bering Straights, down through Alaska, Canada to Mississippi — our own ancestors came north from the Maya regions, boating up through the Gulf of Mexico, up into what is now Mississippi untold thousands of years ago.

**[BUCK]** Yes, I see the problem here. These Bering Strait discussions proceed from one major assumption: That the “aboriginal” peoples of North

America were not “original” in that their physical and cultural origins are derivative. That assumption must be looked squarely in the eye for what it really is. And its limitations must be acknowledged as well.

In any event, the indigenous religions of North America have their own history, development, and character — entirely distinct from any Bering Straits hypothesis. In other words, if we bracket the question of origins, it’s quite clear that the subsequent history and development of Native American traditions is an entirely separate matter altogether.

Now let us consider the possibility that “families of religions” had existed independently on continents that, until relatively recently, had little or no contact — and even less possibility of religious influence or syncretism — as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated in the Tablet of the “Seven Candles of Unity”: “Continents remained widely divided, nay even among the peoples of one and the same continent association and interchange of thought were well-nigh impossible. Consequently intercourse, understanding and unity amongst all the peoples and kindreds of the earth were unattainable.”<sup>86</sup> On the basis of Bahá’í texts taken together, we have firm acknowledgement of at least three “families” of religions and Manifestations — and, now, possibly four:

1. **Pre-Semitic:** Melchizedek, Adam, Noah).
2. **Semitic/Abrahamic:** Moses, Jesus, Muhammad.
3. **Aryan:** Krishna, Zoroaster, Buddha.
4. **Native American/Native Canadian:** White Buffalo Calf Woman, Deganawidah (tentatively).

While I won’t say that this list is complete or more representative than previous Bahá’í lists — which consist of Semitic and Aryan Prophets combined — this one widens the circle and further universalizes Bahá’í universalism, I dare say.

**[ADDISON]** I have long been puzzled by so many Bahá’ís who say they are open-minded, but don’t really want to commit themselves to saying Indians had real Manifestations of Gods or at least “Major” Prophets of God! What about a known and named Native Messenger of God, like Deganawidah. Haven’t you presented him as a “test case” for Bahá’í recognition?

**[BUCK]** Yes, I certainly have. But first, let me say a few words about the process of evaluating the qualifications or judging the authenticity of anyone claiming to be a Messenger of God. Discussing the “prophetic credentials” of a claimant is a proper religious and scholarly inquiry. Let me explain. Such an inquiry serves to establish or disqualify the prophetic

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<sup>86</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections From the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1982), 31.

warrants of a claimant according to specified criteria from within a Bahá'í, Christian, Islamic or other perspective. While scholarship cannot stand in the shoes of belief or faith, scholars can certainly discuss what has been called the “phenomenology of revelation” and study how such characteristics are exemplified by any given religious figure. Thus, whether from a scholarly or a religious perspective, we can examine the “prophetic credentials” of a culture-hero such as Deganawidah.

According to Iroquois oral tradition, Deganawidah established the “Great Law of Peace”<sup>87</sup> — arguably the first New World democracy, which one scholar has dated at August 31, 1142.<sup>88</sup> This could well be one of the criteria of Deganawidah’s authenticity from a Bahá'í perspective, since “every Faith has given rise to a culture which flowered in different forms.”<sup>89</sup> History and the problems of dating aside, may I ask how you personally respond to these words of Deganawidah?

I carry the Mind of the Master of Life, and my message will bring an end to the wars between east and west. The word that I bring is that all peoples shall love one another and live together in peace. This message has three parts: Righteousness and Health and Power - Gaiihwiyo, Skenno, Gashedenza. And each part has two branches. Righteousness means justice practised between men and between nations; it means also a desire to see justice prevail.

Health means soundness of mind and body; it also means peace, for that is what comes when minds are sane and bodies cared for.

Power means authority, the authority of law and custom, backed by such force as is necessary to make justice prevail; it also means religion, for justice enforced is the will of the Holder of the Heavens and has His sanction.

It will take the form of the Longhouse, in which there are many fires, one for each family, yet all live as one household under one Chief Mother. Hereabouts are Five Nations, each with its own Council Fire, yet they shall live together as one household in peace. They shall be the Kanonsiónni, the Longhouse. They shall have one

<sup>87</sup> See John Arthur Gibson, *Concerning the League: The Iroquois League Tradition as Dictated in Onondaga by John Arthur Gibson. Newly Elicited, Edited and Translated by Hanni Woodbury in Collaboration with Reg Henry and Harry Webster on the Basis of A.A. Goldenweiser's Manuscript.* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Algonquian and Iroquoian Linguistics, 1992); and Jacob Thomas, *The White Roots of Peace: Reading of the Great Law of Peace* (Brantford, Ontario: Iroquoian Institute, 1992).

<sup>88</sup> The “Six Nations” of the Iroquois is a living confederacy of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora tribes. Today, the Iroquois number more than 60,000 in population across 14 reservations and several urban centers in New York, Ontario, Quebec, Wisconsin, and Oklahoma.

<sup>89</sup> From a letter dated 23 December 1942, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual Bahá'í. Cited by Chris Jones, “[Individual Bahá'í Perspective on Spiritual Aspects of Cultural Diversity and Sustainable Development: Towards a Second Enlightenment](#)” (2005).

mind and live under one law. Thinking shall replace killing, and there shall be one Commonwealth.<sup>90</sup>

I am Dekanawidah and with the Five Nations' Confederate Lords I plant the Tree of the Great Peace....

I name the tree the Tree of the Great Long Leaves. Under the shade of this Tree of the Great Peace we spread the soft white feathery down of the globe thistle as seats for you, Adodarhoh, and your cousin Lords....

Roots have spread out from the Tree of the Great Peace, one to the north, one to the east, one to the south and one to the west. The name of these roots is The Great White Roots and their nature is Peace and Strength....

We place at the top of the Tree of the Long Leaves an Eagle who is able to see afar. If he sees in the distance any evil approaching or any danger<sup>91</sup> threatening he will at once warn the people of the Confederacy.

Thereupon Tekanawita [Deganawidah] stood up in the center of the gathering place, and then he said: First I will answer what it means to say, "Now it is arriving, the Good Message." This, indeed, is what it means: When it stops, the slaughter of your own people who live here on earth, then everywhere peace will come about, by day and also by night, and it will come about that as one travels around, everyone will be related...

Now again [?], secondly I say, "Now it is arriving, the Power," and this means that the different nations, all of the nations, will become just a single one, and the Great Law will come into being, so that all now will be related to each other, and there will

<sup>90</sup> Deganawidah, quoted in P. Wallace, *The White Roots of Peace* 13–14. According to a note archived in the Hewitt Papers, the Great Law is comprised of three dual concepts:

The League of the Iroquois was founded on six basic principles ... But these six principles ... were expressed by (only) three terms, each of which denoted two of these underlying principles. These three terms are: *Ne? Skannon?*, *ne?*, *ga: i?hwiyo*, and *ga?shasdenhsen?*. The first as applied to the body politic denotes peace, tranquility, rest; but as applied to the human or living body of flesh and blood, it denotes health or soundness, normal functional condition. War, strife, contention is the antithesis of the first meaning; and disease, illness, obsession or possession by another personality, especially ... through ... sorcery [is the antithesis] of the second meaning. Here we have the maximum extension and intention in the connotation of a term.

The second term is *ga: i?hwi yo*, which is not so easy of translation into English. Its first denotation is gospel, wholesome doctrine, what is good to be heard, ethical teaching, values, ethics — righteousness. As its second meaning, it denotes justice, right, as formulated in the customs, manners, religion, and ritualistic summations of the past experience of the people. The first is the teaching of a good doctrine; the second is the establishment of the good doctrine in institutional forms.

The third is *ga?shasdensa?*, whose first denotation is force, as expressed in the war power of the people; and its second meaning is the power, force or authority of the *orenda* or magic potency of the institutions of the people. It was at this point only that religion ... exerted its influence on the organic units of the social structure.

The institutions arising from these six fundamental principles or conceptions were together called *Kaenensha?go: na*, or the Great Commonwealth of Law.

John Napoleon Brinton Hewitt, qtd. in William Nelson Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse*, 86. See also Vecsey, *Imagine Ourselves Richly* 113–115.

<sup>91</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Fenton, *Parker on the Iroquois*, Book III: *The Constitution of the Five Nations*, 33.

come to be just a single family, and in the future, in days to come, this family will continue on.

Now in turn, the other, my third saying, “Now it is arriving, the Peace,” this means that everyone will become related, men and also women, and also the young people and the children, and when all are relatives, every nation, then there will be peace... Then there will be truthfulness, and they will uphold hope and charity, so that it is peace that will unite all of the people, indeed, it will be as though they have but one mind, and they are a single person with only one body and one head and one life, which means that there will be unity ... When they are functioning, the Good Message and also the Power and the Peace, these will be the principal things everybody will live by; these will be the great values among the people.<sup>92</sup>

**[ADDISON]** To me, these words are magnificent. They ring as true to me as the words of Bahá’u’lláh Himself. And I know that at least a few other Bahá’ís feel the same way. What does your experience in these matters reveal?

**[BUCK]** Quite true! Why else would Dr. David S. Ruhe publicly proclaim?

To the warring tribes 700–800 years ago there came an astonishing Prophet of Peace — Deganawidah united five, later six, mutually hostile tribal groups in a federal union based on democracy, the first in the Western Hemisphere. He cemented this union with a “Great Law of Peace,” a constitution which propounded one expansive human family... And thus, in God’s Plan, with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson as perceptive mediators, the Bill of Rights and the Constitution were vital steps (after the War of Independence [1775–1783]) toward realising in America the Iroquois concept of the primacy of individual rights as superior to property and power. And of course the Iroquois foreshadowed, in their Longhouse of sky and earth, the planetary Message of the Bahá’í Faith for today.<sup>93</sup>

**[BUCK]** If this new approach might be tried out as an experiment — that is, the recognition, acknowledgement, and validation of Indigenous prophets on the part of the Bahá’í community (whether officially or at the level of praxis) — what social benefits might accrue? What do you foresee?

**[ADDISON]** Alex Poorman, a Cree Bahá’í of the Poorman Reserve, said, in reference to the first National Bahá’í Convention Indians that he had attended in Canada, “[W]hen the diversity of the human race comes together, there’s a tremendous power released. And this was the first time that this had happened in Canada, where we have two different cultures, the

<sup>92</sup> Deganawidah, quoted in John Arthur Gibson, *Concerning the League*, 36–41.

<sup>93</sup> David S. Ruhe, “A New Evolution: Religious Bonding for World Unity,” *Journal of Bahá’í Studies* 6.4 (1994-1995): 45–57 [45].



Native people, and the people that had come from Europe. Two cultures and we came together in the Bahá'í Faith.”<sup>94</sup> A review of research into the growth of the Bahá'í Faith around the world, published in 2000, concludes: “As community after community steadily awakens to the possibility of unity in diversity, the pain caused by centuries of racial and ethnic violence is being openly acknowledged and addressed, and the first glimmerings of healing can be discerned.”<sup>95</sup> This healing process, which is ongoing and ever widening, is also a major contributing factor that will ensure that Native American peoples and cultures, with the flute performances and powwow dancing of culture-bearers such as Kevin Locke, will survive.

[BUCK] Yes. Kevin Locke makes this very point when he said in an interview:

As he [Kevin Locke] explored the history and tenets of the Faith, which teaches that there is only one God and that all of the world's religions, *including many indigenous ones*, are expressions of the same ancient and eternal faith, he decided that many of the prophecies of the White Buffalo Calf Woman had been fulfilled.

“The central prayer of the Lakota is to be sheltered under the ‘Tree of Life,’ and the teachings about the great ‘Hoop of Life’ are that the many hoops of creation, or, peoples of the world are interconnected and destined to come together,” he said, pointing out that one of the titles of Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, is the “Tree of Life.”

“I realized that the teachings of the Woman [White Buffalo Calf Woman] were part of a great process of divine revelation that all peoples have taken part of, and that it has reached its culmination in the Bahá'í Faith,” he said. “I also realized that what the Bahá'í Faith teaches does not detract from or in anyway negate my own traditional religion. Many people ask me, ‘How does the Bahá'í Faith tie in with your Indian spiritual traditions?’ Because there is an assumption that people get from their experience with Christianity, at least as practiced here, that you have to renounce your former practices when you join a new religion.

“But the Bahá'í writings say that all peoples have received a portion of the divine bounty, and that this bounty is all from the same source,” he said. “In other words, the truly valid and beautiful spiritual traditions are from one source and they all have prophetic traditions that point to the same point of unity and to the same glorious future for humanity, which is the unfoldment of an all-

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<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Patricia Verge, *Angus: From The Heart*, 75.

<sup>95</sup> The Bahá'í World Centre, *The Bahá'í World 1998–1999: An International Record* (Haifa, Israel: World Centre Publications, 2000), 89.

embracing world civilization. So there is no need to deny or negate or invalidate each other's spiritual heritage."<sup>96</sup>

Note here that this official Baha'i publication (*One Country* is the "Newsletter of the Bahá'í International Community") goes on record to state that the Bahá'í "Faith...teaches that there is only one God and that all of the world's religions, *including many indigenous ones*, are expressions of the same ancient and eternal faith." Not many Bahá'ís are actually aware of this representation — this crucial nuance — of the Bahá'í doctrine of "Progressive Revelation."

[ADDISON] Please elaborate on this line of reasoning.

[BUCK] The Bahá'í teachings embody what has been termed a "theory of civilization." In fine, the Bahá'í perspective, as I understand it, inextricably links social evolution with spiritual evolution. In other words, civilization cannot progress without Progressive Revelation. Social evolution would have no generative force were it not for the regenerative forces released by these charismatic spiritual geniuses — Native Messengers of God, Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Christ, Muhammad, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh, to name a few — who punctuate history to create the moral and social foundations for the advancement of civilization.

Kevin Locke also speaks of the prophecies of White Buffalo Calf Woman as having been fulfilled by the advent of Bahá'u'lláh. How, then, are Native prophecies possible without Native Prophets?

[ADDISON] Point well-taken!

[BUCK] For each and every Lakota Bahá'í I've read about or met, White Buffalo Calf Woman is clearly a Messenger of God. Would you agree?

[ADDISON] Yes, absolutely.

[BUCK] The presence of Lakota Bahá'ís is part of the diversity that so greatly enriches the Bahá'í world community. Yet there exists some real confusion on the part of many Bahá'ís, who are either at a loss as to how to integrate the rich religious diversity that Native Americans bring to the Bahá'í experience of unity in diversity. Some Bahá'ís are locked into an "Arya-Semiticentric" — to coin your improvement of my neologism, "Semiticentrism," Don — worldview, such that no authentic Prophets can have ever existed (unless "unnamed" and therefore unproblematic) outside of the Semitic (i.e., Judaism, Christianity, Islam) and Aryan (i.e., Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism) families of religions. How do we clear up this

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<sup>96</sup> "[Hoop dancing and world citizenship: meet Kevin Locke](#)" *One Country* 8.2 (July–Sept. 1996). (Emphasis added.)

confusion, Don? What insights do you have to offer, from a Native perspective?

[ADDISON] Well, for one thing, don't the Native American religions represent another distinct "family of religions," just like the Semitic and Aryan religions, as you have rightly pointed out? I think you had previously made that point in your 1996 "Native Messengers" paper. But let me talk about the "extended family" of Native peoples worldwide.

More broadly, the consciousness of interrelatedness of all indigenous peoples would quickly clear up this confusion. This interrelatedness of Native peoples has inspired some films done by our late Bahá'í brother, and my Choctaw brother, Phil Lucas, who just passed away in Issaquah, Washington. Watch those films. He, for example, links up the Seri of Tiburon Island (Mexico), with the Kwakiutl of Canada's Northwest Territories, with the Maori of New Zealand, with the Aborigines of Australia. He called them, "Storytellers of the Pacific Rim," and this film documentary was broadcast on "Identity"<sup>97</sup> — which I use in all the cultural anthropology classes I teach.

I believe what Bahá'u'lláh says about the Prophets of God must include Native Prophets. This should pose no threat to Bahá'ís who carry more traditional views. I can tell you that I was physically present when I heard Jacqueline Left Hand Bull (now Chair of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States) refer, almost as a side note, that, to her, Bahá'u'lláh represents the "Promised Return of the White Buffalo Calf Woman." She made no further issue of it at all! In fact, I personally witnessed Jacqueline say that she believes Bahá'u'lláh is the Return of White Buffalo Calf Woman at two Bahá'í events: once when she spoke at an Association for Bahá'í Studies conference, and a second time at a Native Bahá'í gathering at the Brighton Creek Conference Center grounds near Yelm, Washington.<sup>98</sup> I should highlight the fact that her comments at both events were very natural, that she didn't go into any further detail about this statement, that she didn't appear to sense that anyone in either audience would object. It was a very matter-of-fact statement. Since she saw no need to explain or defend it, she didn't offer any further discussion or "proof." She just made a simple statement of faith and personal conviction — as if all in the hall would understand — and that was that! I've never heard other Lakotas (whether Bahá'í or not) try to "fill in the blanks" and get others to acknowledge that White Buffalo Calf Woman was a real prophet! It's almost irrelevant.

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<sup>97</sup> See *Storytellers of the Pacific*: Identity (1996).

<sup>98</sup> See also a published statement to this effect: "[The Return of the 'White Buffalo Calf Woman': Prophecy of the Lakota](#)," interview of Counsellor Jacqueline Left Hand Bull by U.S. National Spiritual Assembly member, Patricia Locke (Lakota) in 1989.

Bahá'ís in every community trace their descent to any number of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In fact, the lack of any one dominant cultural community or perspective in the Bahá'í Faith clearly illustrates its all-embracing nature, and Native Americans quickly notice this characteristic of Bahá'í communities. At the international level, Amoz Gibson,<sup>99</sup> who descended from Native American, African American, and Scottish Irish ancestry, was elected, at the Royal Albert Hall in London in 1963, to the first Universal House of Justice, which has established its Seat on Mount Carmel in Israel.<sup>100</sup> Native peoples were elated and deeply moved when this happened, because Gibson's election to that august institution became a clear and powerful demonstration that Bahá'ís were putting the Bahá'í teachings into practice.

More importantly, most American Indian Bahá'ís are more invested in the discussions of how we can help our Euro-American Bahá'í brothers and sisters better appreciate the gifts that we (Natives and Euro-Americans) can contribute together to the accomplishment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's great prophecy.

**[BUCK]** Let's talk about the importance of cultural diversity as a shared communally shared value. Article 1 of UNESCO's *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* states: "Cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature." Would you agree when I say?: "Cultural diversity is as necessary for the Bahá'í community as it is for humanity at large."

**[ADDISON]** How could I not? Listen to this interview with Jacqueline Left Hand Bull:

*Patricia Locke:* How many Indians do you estimate are Bahá'ís in the Americas?

*Left Hand Bull:* There are probably over 200,000 Indian Bahá'ís in the Americas. Most — the vast majority — are in South America, where there are very large populations of Indians, many who don't even speak Spanish. But Central America also has quite a few thousand, especially among the Mayan Indians.

*Patricia Locke:* Why do you think so many indigenous people have become Bahá'í?

*Left Hand Bull:* I think indigenous people are initially attracted to the Bahá'í Faith for two or three reasons. For some, it is the fact that the teachings of the Faith emphasize the importance of preserving Native cultures. We know that we, and all Indians, have been under tremendous pressure to assimilate into non-Indian ways, so it is a

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<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Verge, *Angus: From The Heart*, 101.

<sup>100</sup> The Universal House of Justice is the nine-member, internationally elected administrative institution that is the governing body of the Bahá'ís throughout the globe.

confirmation for many to learn that a Messenger of God brought this particular teaching over a hundred years ago.<sup>101</sup>

I really appreciate this statement: “For some, it is the fact that the teachings of the Faith emphasize the importance of preserving Native cultures.” It should become a more pronounced — and practiced — Bahá’í principle. Not everything in our indigenous cultures should be preserved. But, here, unity should stress cultural preservation (survival), not assimilation (extinction), even though a “world culture” will likely emerge, coefficient with the kind of world unity that Bahá’ís have been advocating all along.

[BUCK] In keeping with what you have said, there has been an official or semi-official Bahá’í endorsement of precisely this perspective. In fact, the Canadian Bahá’í pamphlet, *The Right to An Identity*, is one of the most remarkable Bahá’í documents I’ve seen. It states, in part:

Our hope is that Canada will be the first nation on earth to give practical force to the most fundamental right of all: the right of every citizen to be what God has made him.

Some of the steps which can contribute to such a breakthrough are:

- Recruitment of native Canadians as teachers and teaching assistants.
- Kindergarten and some primary instruction in the native language of the children.
- Development of courses of study covering the entire religious heritage of mankind.
- Involvement of Indian youth in Canada’s overseas aid programs.
- Inclusion of the right to a cultural identity in any civil rights entrenched in the Constitution.<sup>102</sup>

Note here the proposal for a new constitutional right to be added to the Canadian Constitution! Also note the recommending of the “[d]evelopment of courses of study covering the entire religious heritage of mankind” — which presumably adumbrates Native Canadian and Native American religions. Does it stand to reason that whatever the Bahá’í community proposes for adoption as a fundamental right — whether under constitutional law or under international law — the Bahá’í community ought to accept for itself? What do you think, Don?

[ADDISON] I am currently using copies of *The Right to an Identity* with all my summer semester students at the University of Oregon! I made copies

<sup>101</sup> Jacqueline Left Hand Bull, “[The Return of the ‘White Buffalo Calf Woman’: Prophecy of the Lakota](#)” (South Dakota, 1989) See also: Counsellor Jacqueline Left Hand Bull Delahunt, “Bahá’í,” in *A Parliament of Souls: In Search of Global Spirituality*. Interviews with 28 Spiritual Leaders from Around the World, ed. M. Tobias, J. Morrison, B. Gray (San Francisco: KQED Books, 1995), 22.

<sup>102</sup> *The Right to An Identity* (Toronto: The Canadian Bahá’í Community National Office, n.d.), 9. Color copy of this pamphlet provided courtesy of Chelsea Dawn Horton.

for every single student! They loved it! As for striking a symmetry between between our own practices and those which we propose that governments, such as Canada, ought to adopt, it seems perfectly obvious to me that we are obligated to practice what we preach. So, we ought to recognize “the right to a cultural identity” as a Bahá’í principle and we ought to develop “courses of study covering the entire religious heritage of mankind” — curricula that recognize and include Native Canadian and Native American religions. Imagine — when a Bahá’í community like Canada takes a visible position of advocacy for Native rights and recognition of Native religions — how else can we escape a charge of ideological duplicity unless we ourselves model such noble principles as these! Isn’t that what you and I are partly endeavoring to accomplish in this collaboration of ours?

[BUCK] Dr. Addison, friend and colleague, yes, I wholeheartedly agree. I guess that’s why this conversation has been important. We should probably bring this discussion to a close. I can tell you that I am certainly not alone among Bahá’í scholars in reading ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amír Khán as providing independently sufficient warrant for “Messengers of God to First Nations” as a valid Baha’í principle. For instance, let me introduce my friend and colleague, Dr. Necati Alkan, who is currently a visiting scholar in Bahá’í studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In 2004, Dr. Alkan successfully defended his doctoral dissertation, *The Bábí and Bahá’í Religions in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, 1844–1928*, at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum. In 1998, he completed his Master’s thesis, *Die Bahá’í-Religion und ihre Beziehung zu den islamischen Reformbewegungen am Ausgang des Osmanischen Reiches, 1860–1922*.<sup>103</sup>

Dr. Alkan, what is your reading of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amír Khán? In your professional and personal opinion, and based on your knowledge of the Bahá’í source languages of Persian, Arabic, and Turkish — together with your investigation of ancillary, authoritative Bahá’í statements that bear on the question that we now have before us — is this a clear Text?

[ALKAN] As to the text in the Tablet to Amír Khán, for me it sounds clear that Prophets must have appeared in America in ancient times. Otherwise why would ‘Abdu’l-Bahá say “the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times”? Who else, if not a Prophet/Messenger, raised the “Call of God”? I do not see a problem when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that the “must have been raised” and, on the basis of this clear statement, effectively admits Native American Messengers of God into the line of “our” Prophets. You discuss this all in your article clearly.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>103</sup>Dr. Alkan’s [curriculum vita](#) may be accessed at online and a list of his [publications](#) is also available.

<sup>104</sup>Dr. Necati Alkan, e-mail, dated 27 May 2007, in reply to Dr. Christopher Buck. Slightly edited and cited with permission. The statement, “You discuss this all in your article clearly,” refers to the article, Christopher Buck, “*Native Messengers of God in Canada?: A Test Case for Bahá’í Universalism*.” idem, “*Bahá’í Universalism and Native Prophets*.”

My reading is based both on the Persian reading and English translation. Only a Prophet/Messenger can “*nida-yi ilahi buland gashtih*” — raise the Call of God! And I checked Shoghi Effendi’s translation of the word “*al-battih*”: he translates it as “without doubt”, “no doubt”, “of a certainty”, “unfailingly”, “surely”, “most certainly”, etc.<sup>105</sup> I really do not know what the problem is with stating that there were Prophets sent to the First Nations. I would base my arguments on the following reasons:

1. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement in the Tablet to Amír Khán is unambiguous. Who else than Prophets or Messengers can raise the Call of God?
2. According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, only 28 prophets (*anbíyá*) are mentioned in the Qur’an by name. There are many others who are unnamed.
3. The Qur’an says: “And there never was a people, without a Warner having lived among them (in the past).” (Q. 35:24); and “... to every people a guide” (Q. 13:7).
4. Shoghi Effendi states that the nine religions that Bahá’ís regularly speak of is sufficient yet not exhaustive. Consider this statement: “The number nine, which in itself is the number of perfection, is considered by the Bahá’ís as sacred, because it is symbolic of the perfection of the Bahá’í Revelation which constitutes the ninth in the line of existing religions, the latest and fullest Revelation which mankind has ever known. The eighth is the religion of the Báb and the remaining seven are: Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islám, and the religion of the Sabaeans. These religions are not the only true religions that have appeared in the world but are the only ones still existing. There have always been Divine Prophets and Messengers, to many of whom the Qur’án refers. But the only ones existing are those mentioned above.”<sup>106</sup>

This statement must not be read dogmatically and exclusively, for Shoghi Effendi hastens to add: “The Guardian feels that with intellectuals and students of religion the question of exactly which are the nine existing religions is controversial, and it would be better to avoid it. He does not want the friends to be rigid in these matters, but use their judgment and tact, sometimes one statement is exactly the right thing for one type of mind and the wrong thing for another.”<sup>107</sup>

5. Therefore, in my opinion, Bahá’í doctrine can recognize — at least in principle — the existence of other Prophets, such Native American Messengers of God. In response to a believer who

<sup>105</sup> Dr. Necati Alkan, e-mail, dated 28 May 2007.

<sup>106</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian* (New Delhi: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1973), 51–52.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*, 52.

raised this issue, Shoghi Effendi explained: “Regarding your question: the only reason there is not more mention of the Asiatic Prophets is because their names seem to be lost in the mists of ancient history. Buddha is mentioned and Zoroaster in our scriptures — both non-Jewish or non-Semitic Prophets. We are taught that there have always been Manifestations of God, but we do not have any record of their names.”<sup>108</sup> This same reasoning can certainly be applied to the question of whether Bahá’í doctrine can accept the existence of “Messengers of God to First Nations,” as you say.<sup>109</sup>

These ancillary texts provide strong support for the argument based on the Tablet to Amír Khán. To be honest, in light of this clear Text that has now surfaced and come to light, I fail to see why some Bahá’í scholars still object to the idea of Native American Prophets.<sup>110</sup>

In conclusion, it is my professional and personal opinion that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet to Amír Khán provides a sufficiently clear text to warrant “Messengers of God to First Nations” as a valid Bahá’í principle. I will be happy if you would extract my comments from my e-mails and add it to the conversation between you and Dr. Addison.<sup>111</sup>

**[ADDISON]** Yakoke! Dr. Alkan, for providing this independent attestation!

**[BUCK]** Dr. Addison, let me recapitulate what I understand to be our collaborative and conversive thesis and reasoning here. In the Tablet to Amír Khán, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is speaking about two distinct, yet interrelated subjects: the question of migration and then the question of revelation. Although we do not have the exact questions posed by Amir Khan, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reply should be accounted as an answer to the question of crossing and communication, including the issue of whether there was any religious influence as a result of this migration. I agree with you, Don, that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is simply acknowledging the currency of this theory without endorsing it. First, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá acknowledges that a migration across the Bering Straits has been postulated by scholars. I would concede that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá cites this theory with tacit approval, but only to the extent that migration may well have occurred. Forgive the pun, but the Bering Straits have little or no “bearing” on Native American religions.

**[ADDISON]** In fact, the Bering Straits theory is reductive, not productive. I might add that other Native scholars say much the same thing. Lakota

<sup>108</sup> From a letter, dated 10 October 1950, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi. *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*, comp. H. Hornby, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988), 503.

<sup>109</sup> Dr. Necati Alkan, e-mail, dated 29 May 2007, in reply to Dr. Christopher Buck. Slightly edited and cited with permission.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Dr. Necati Alkan, e-mail, dated 3 June 2007, in reply to Dr. Christopher Buck. Slightly edited and cited with permission.



author and scholar, Vine Deloria, Jr., has written extensively on this in *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact*.<sup>112</sup> So has Devon Mihesuah, associate professor of American Indian history, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, and member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, who states that the stereotype that “Indians arrived in this hemisphere via the Siberian land bridge” is simply not what Indians, on the whole, believe. The reality, she says, is that “Indians believe that they were created in this hemisphere.”<sup>113</sup>

[BUCK] Yes, the Bering Straits theory treats Native American spirituality as a genetic question. In focusing almost exclusively on origins, it practically excludes the question of development, doesn't it? In any event, simple logic rules out genetic arguments that would suggest that Native American religions are derivative as a consequence of the Bering Straits migrations. Consider:

Despite truth-claims of Mormon doctrine to the contrary, scholars have found no trace of Western religious influence — whether that of Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, or Islam — on the American continent before the European conquest and colonization of the Americas. Nor, for that matter, are there any pre-Columbian relics or doctrinal vestiges of the so-called Eastern religions, such as Buddhism, to be found in the Americas.

The verb “forgotten” (*farámush shudih ast*) in the Tablet to Amír Khán, therefore, is not related to those religions, for the simple reason that the utter lack of evidence clearly shows that these religions did not enter the Americas — whether in antiquity or in the medieval period — prior to the European conquest and colonization.

[ADDISON] This is an argument from silence, with which I agree.

[BUCK] Yes, the silence is resounding, isn't it? In addition to this *argumentum ex nihilo*, we also have Qur'anic arguments and terminological arguments as well.

Now let's revisit the Qur'anic text that 'Abdu'l-Bahá adduced. In citing the verse of the Qur'án, “We will not chastise them if they had not been sent a Messenger” (Q. 17:15), 'Abdu'l-Bahá invokes traditional Islamic reasoning to register a key point: By implication, this verse implies that North America has been the scene of the advent of Native Messengers of God

<sup>112</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr., *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact* (Reissue edn.: Fulcrum Publishing, 1997), at 67–91, and *passim* at xi, 6, 31, 33, 47, 55, 93, 94, 95, 161, 196–197, and 211. Deloria underscores the absolute lack of Indian oral tradition about such a migration at pp. 81–83, and suggests alternative theories at pp. 33–34 and 59–60, not to mention the general lack of evidence for the Bering Straits theory at pp. 58–62, 70–73, and 91, with topographical factors in opposition to such a migration at pp. 72–76.

<sup>113</sup> Devon A. Mihesuah, *American Indians: Stereotypes & Realities* (Regina, Saskatchewan: Clarity Press, 1998), 46.

since other Qur'anic passages, in relation to this verse, clearly testify that God has sent a Messenger to *every* nation (*ummah*) (Q. 10:47; cf. 35:24). Thus a whole-to-part deduction obtains here. This doctrinal evidence from the Qur'án necessitates the advent of the Native Manifestations of God specifically for the “people of America” (*ahl-i Amrík*), as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explicitly indicates in the Tablet to Amír Khán.

Bahá'u'lláh points to Qur'anic universalisms as well, as Dr. Alkan has already noted. We can extend this reasoning geographically and historically, even though this is a religious argument rather than an archaeological or historical one. In His *Commentary on the Surah of the Sun*, after explaining that by *al-shams* (“sun”) is meant the Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh affirms the truth of Q. 10:47 and parallels: “Then, in another station, it referreth to the Prophets and Pure Ones of God, for They are the Suns of His names and attributes amidst His creation. Were it not for Them, no one would have been illumined by the mystical knowledge of God. As thou canst see, every nation on earth hath been enlightened by one of these brightly shining Suns. Whoso denieth Them remaineth deprived.”<sup>114</sup> In this statement, Bahá'u'lláh declares that Messengers of God have appeared to every one of the peoples of earth, although in sundry times and places. Obviously this includes, *inter alia*, Native Americans and Native Canadians, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá clearly affirms in the Tablet to Amír Khán.

[ADDISON] This traditional Islamic argument, as made by both Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, makes eminent sense as well. Note that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá applies this reasoning specifically to North America.

[BUCK] In addition to arguments from silence and Islamic reasoning, we can point to a terminological argument as well. We’ve already demonstrated that the “Call of God” (*nidá-yi iláhi*) is a Bábí and Bahá’í euphemism for Manifestations of God, or, derivatively, in reference to belief in or promulgation of Their teachings. By the phrase of the “Call of God” is definitely meant the advent of “Manifestations of God” — or, derivatively, recognition and promulgation of Their Teachings — as I’ve demonstrated in the various Bahá’í texts that we’ve previously adduced. The Bahá’í meanings attached to this term are all unified by reference to divine Manifestations or the divine Teachings that emanate from Them.

Thus, in this Tablet, the phrase, “the Call of God” is not referring to the Call of God raised by the promulgators of previous religions, because their adherents never reached the Americas in pre-Columbian times in the first place. If such were the case, then we would expect to find a few vestiges, at least, of such cultural influences, even admixed with superstitions. Yet this expectation has never been met.

<sup>114</sup> Adapted from translation by J. Cole of Bahá'u'lláh's *Commentary on the Surah of the Sun* (Ames, Iowa: Omphaloskepsis, 2000) at 10–11

[ADDISON] Yes, the fact is that we have precious few artifacts that suggest such religious influence should indicate that Native American religious possess their own distinctive character.

[BUCK] Yes, in our argument from silence, we've already noted that there is no trace of such putative religious influence from Siberia on North America, except perhaps for shamanism. This can just as easily be explained as a *parallel development*. In any case, no prior influences are sufficient to account for the teachings of Deganawidah, which are remarkable in that they are as original as they are fully consonant with Bahá'í teachings. Would you agree?

[ADDISON] Deganawidah's religious teachings are quite advanced — a far cry from the inauthentic, to be sure.

[BUCK] Quite so. Now let's review our geographical argument: Reflect on this emphatic statement by 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "Undoubtedly in those regions the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now."<sup>115</sup> The words, "Undoubtedly in those regions" (*al-battih dar án s.afahát*) indicates either North America in particular or the Americas in general (and so, both). This phrase obviously cannot mean Asia, since Manifestations of God had already appeared in Asia.

[ADDISON] 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reference to North America is explicit textually and patent contextually.

[BUCK] I'd say that you are living proof of that point, Don! Now let's review another argument from silence: diminished influence. The verb "forgotten" (*farámush shudih ast*) scarcely means obliterated. Rather, in most cases, "forgotten" means diminished influence, not total disappearance. That having been said, I must concede a sad fact of history: It is true that some Native religions have become extinct whenever language and culture were eradicated, which is a tragic outcome of much of the history of Indian Country. Nevertheless, I believe that what 'Abdu'l-Bahá primarily means here is that the teachings and influence of these Native Manifestations of God has waxed and waned. They longer possess the currency and influence that They once enjoyed.

[ADDISON] Yes, I've already spoken of how some of our Choctaw traditions have largely disappeared, although the cultural values and wisdom that these have imparted are woven into the fabric of who we are as a people.

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<sup>115</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, [Tablet to Amír Khán Áhan of Tehran](#), This text appears at the top of the page at 2-47

[BUCK] Now let's recap our exegesis with a rhetorical argument: 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses the adverb, "undoubtedly" (*al-battih*) with such rhetorical force that we cannot doubt His word that the "Call of God" was raised in America. If our interpretation that the "Call of God" essentially means "Manifestation of God," then 'Abdu'l-Bahá's rhetorical use of "undoubtedly" raises the the appearance of Native Manifestations of God to a level of doctrinal certainty!

[ADDISON] Yes. We cannot take this statement lightly. It is definitive. I cannot escape this conclusion in my reading of this Tablet.

[BUCK] And so, in light of our informally logical, Islamic, terminological, and rhetorical arguments, here is the interpretive challenge: Is the Tablet to Amír Khán this a "clear Text" or not? Although whatever 'Abdu'l-Bahá is stating is stated forcefully, I concede that no consensus has yet emerged as to whether 'Abdu'l-Bahá is referring to Native Manifestations of God or otherwise. Eleven years ago, in 1996, this Text was admittedly not "clear" enough for the Universal House of House to make an official pronouncement (either way) at that time.

[ADDISON] Times can change. What about now, in 2007?

[BUCK] Perhaps in the near future, God-willing, the the Universal House of House might revisit this question in light of a fuller analysis by the Research Department of the Tablet to Amír Khán — possibly in reference to the detailed textual and contextual analysis that you and I have offered here.

[ADDISON] So the question is still open? Certainly this issue is still alive.

[BUCK] Well, we can at least proceed from the fact that the House says, in its letter cited after the English translation, that while there is nothing in the Writings that definitively establishes "Messengers of God to First Nations," there is nothing in the Writings to deny it.

[ADDISON] I'd say that what we are proposing is relatively new and controversial — yet of far-reaching and profound importance for Native teaching. This question again stands before us as a Bahá'í community, and deserves our serious reconsideration, rather than brusque dismissal, which is what I've seen in recent discussions of this question online, where you were more or less pilloried in cyberspace.

[BUCK] That comes with the territory of presenting anything that's novel and new. Still, in covering new doctrinal territory, and in pushing the frontiers of Bahá'í universalism, you and I have stood our ground.

[ADDISON] Are you as certain of your reading of the Tablet of Amír Khán in 2007 as you were in 1996 when your "Native Messengers" paper was

first published, or as you were in 1994 when you first publicly presented it at the Association for Bahá'í Studies conference at Harvard?

[BUCK] Yes. And Dr. David S. Ruhe, who was there and came to my defense during the vigorous discussion that followed, inspired in me even greater confidence.

After serious study of this text for well over a decade, I have scholarly and spiritual certitude that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's use of the term, the "Call of God," is a clear reference to Manifestations of God, since every single text where this expression occurs warrants — if not compels — the conclusion that the "Call of God" (*nidá-yi-iláhî*) is clearly a Bábí and Bahá'í euphemism for Manifestations of God, or, derivatively, for a belief in or promulgation of Their teachings, as I've previously stated.

In fine, the Tablet to Amír Khán is, in my estimation, a sufficiently clear text that enunciates what amounts to a newly-discovered Bahá'í teaching that Native Manifestations of God have definitely appeared in the Americas. On its surface, the Tablet to Amír Khán appears to be a piece of correspondence of relatively minor importance, yet which, in actuality, is a unique text. For out of the entire corpus of Bábí and Bahá'í sacred Texts, this is the only definitive and authoritative Bahá'í statement on the issue of Native Manifestations of God raised up in the Americas.

[ADDISON] And how does this all tie in with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's "sole racial prophecy" (as Chelsea Horton has characterized it) of the destiny of American Indians to enlighten the world?

[BUCK] As you well know, another singular text is the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: "Attach great importance to the indigenous population of America. For these souls may be likened unto the ancient inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula, who, prior to the Mission of Muhammad, were like unto savages. When the light of Muhammad shone forth in their midst, however, they became so radiant as to illumine the world. Likewise, these Indians, should they be educated and guided, there can be no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world."<sup>116</sup> Underscoring the fact that this statement is without parallel in other Bahá'í texts, the Research Department concludes: "The Master's likening of the indigenous Americans to the pre-Islamic Arabs, which is described in His *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, is not noticed in His other works."<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Revealed on April 8, 1916, in the garden outside the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, and addressed to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan* (Wilmette, Illinois: U.S. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1993) 33.

<sup>117</sup> See Appendix One, *infra*.

Since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá compared the American Indians to the ancient Arabs, then the appearance of Native Manifestations of God — such as Chah-Tah,<sup>118</sup> — the Prophet of your people, the Choctaw Nation — White Buffalo Calf Woman, and Deganawidah — would complete the analogy, as counterparts to Hud, Sálíh, and Muhammad.

**[ADDISON]** You’re not suggesting that Deganawidah is the New World Muhammad?

**[BUCK]** No, except that Deganawidah may be a figure of comparable influence in the New World.

**[ADDISON]** Granted. But where does this line of reasoning lead?

**[BUCK]** Bear in mind that we are basically arguing for recognition of a Bahá’í *principle* of First Nations Manifestations, not necessarily a concomitant recognition of the *principals* (names of these Manifestations), even though we can certainly acknowledge and honor their mention, such as that of Deganawidah, just as the late Dr. David S. Ruhe stated, which I quote once more: “To the warring tribes 700–800 years ago there came an astonishing Prophet of Peace — Deganawidah united five, later six, mutually hostile tribal groups in a federal union based on democracy, the first in the Western Hemisphere. He cemented this union with a ‘Great Law of Peace,’ a constitution which propounded one expansive human family... And of course the Iroquois foreshadowed, in their Longhouse of sky and earth, the planetary message of the Bahá’í Faith for today.”

**[ADDISON]** I concur, my good friend, wholeheartedly. And Dr. Ruhe’s words are worth repeating. But his words never rose to the level of recognized Bahá’í doctrine, unfortunately.

**[BUCK]** You make a good point here. Whether the Bahá’í Faith can formally recognize Native Messengers of God is as open a question as it is a vexed question. In her dissertation, Pauline Tuttle (to whom this paper is also dedicated, along with Dr. David S. Ruhe), wrote:

It is important to note a from a [sic] Bahá’í perspective there is some question as to whether White Buffalo Calf Woman was a ‘Prophet’ of the same station as Bahá’u’lláh or a ‘lesser Prophet,’ whose reachings [sic] were inspired by the spiritual impulses of the Manifestation of Her day as defined by Shoghi Effendi (1923–57: 156). The Universal House of Justice has consulted at length about extensive research which Patricia Locke, Jacqueline Left Hand Bull, and Kevin Locke have conducted on the station of indigenous

<sup>118</sup> “The name of their principal chief or prophet was Chah-tah, and he was a man of great age and wisdom.” As reported by Peter Pitchlynn, “[Chief of the Choctaws](#),” *The Atlantic Monthly* Vol. 25, Issue 150 (April 1870)

Prophets and to date it has been determined that further research is required before a decision can be rendered in relation to this particular question, a factor which Christopher Buck does not seem to be cognizant of in his discussion of this topic (Buck 1996).

Patricia Locke suggests that in light of the guidance from the Universal House of Justice, the term Holy Souls is preferable to that of Messengers when speaking of indigenous Prophets (Interview in *Wakpala* July 1999, Tuttle Collection 99.47-MD). Although I use the terms Messenger and Holy Souls interchangeably I do so with the understanding that the words themselves do not hold particular meaning beyond that construed by the reader and elucidated in the body of the text. What is important for purposes of this dissertation is what is found in the Sacred Texts on this issue and how the individual Lakota Bahá'ís I have worked with interpret both the station and teachings of White Buffalo Calf Woman. Rather than arguing the point one way or another, as Buck chose to do, I fully concur with the conclusion that further research is required before a *de facto* stance can be taken regarding this issue.”<sup>119</sup>

**[ADDISON]** Is Chelsea Horton correct here?

**[BUCK]** She's entitled to her view, of course. But let me speak in my own behalf. Just for the record, in my "Native Messengers" paper I did cite a letter from the Universal House of Justice (in reply to my research questions) that a pronouncement was impossible to make in the absence of a "clear Text." So, with all due respect (sincerely so), I think Pauline missed the point with respect to my "Native Messengers" paper. It represents some of the "further research" that the House rightly said needed to be undertaken. And, now, our exegesis of the Tablet to Amír Khán presents both still further research and a "clear Text." Whether our elucidation of this Text will be sufficiently clear remains to be seen.

**[ADDISON]** I get the sense that what we are doing here is potentially historic?

**[BUCK]** Whether or not this a historic moment remains to be seen. This is what we have done: We have argued that the principle of "Messengers of God to First Nations" is based on a sufficiently "clear Text." We can say this partly on the basis of the close textual analysis proffered by Dr. Necati Alkan, among others with whom you and I have previously consulted.

So is with measured confidence that we can say that the Tablet to Amír Khán promulgates a clear teaching that Native Manifestations of God

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<sup>119</sup> Pauline Tuttle, *The Hoop of Many Hoops*, 188, note 177.

appeared in the Americas. In so saying, we prescind from making any authoritative pronouncement, as we clearly have no authority to do so.

**[ADDISON]** Yes, we need to make this disclaimer abundantly clear. What we claim argumentatively, we disclaim as having any authority. Adoption or formal recognition of our findings would have far-reaching implications for presenting the Bahá'í Faith anew to Native Americans and Native Canadians — and potentially to all of the indigenous peoples of the Western hemisphere. In so saying, we are not stating this definitively, as only the Universal House of Justice — in its role in elucidating the Bahá'í Writings — could ever authoritatively validate such a pronouncement on behalf of the Bahá'í community at large.

**[BUCK]** Yes, in law, we call cases that have no precedential authority merely “persuasive” precedent (also persuasive authority).

**[ADDISON]** Not binding, right?

**[BUCK]** Right. Yet the implications of our argument are quite clear, wouldn't you say?

**[ADDISON]** Yes, indeed. Let me say, on a formal note, that the application of our thesis has obvious implications for the Bahá'í teaching work — with Native American and Native Canadian communities of interest in mind — as our finding permits an open declaration that Bahá'ís can now proclaim that Native Manifestations of God are not simply a valid inference from Qur'anic universalisms, but that Bahá'ís, on the authority of the Tablet to Amír Khán, can and should — without an ontological commitment to specific names and personages *per se* — affirm and honor the central role that these Wisdom Bearers and Lawgivers have had in the finest traditions of Native spirituality. And, on a personal note, I have to say that I, along with many other native American Bahá'ís, have waited for Bahá'í validation of what we always knew to be true.

**[BUCK]** Yes, and the implications of all this for the future course of the Bahá'í-Native encounter are nothing short of profound! But, in so doing, aren't you and I — or I myself at least — vulnerable to the criticism that we are somehow co-opting Native American spirituality — that, indeed, Bahá'ís who wish to recognize, integrate, or even assimilate elements of Native sacred tradition are engaging in something that is not only spiritually inauthentic, eclectic, and syncretistic, but is tantamount to spiritual imperialism?

**[ADDISON]** By way of a disclaimer, I think it vital to add that Bahá'ís are *not* engaged in the ugly business of co-opting Native American spirituality. I want to make this point very clearly — mainly for the sake of American Indian readers who know nothing about the Bahá'í Faith. Let me assure our



Native American readers that Bahá'ís are definitely not stealing American Indian beliefs, rituals, doctrines, ribbon shirts, drumming practices, and transforming them into some hybrid or amalgam of Bahá'í and Native religious experience as some other religious movements have done in the past, like the Ghost Dance, or the Peyote Religion, or the Shaker Church — all of which are syncretic movements of both Christian and Native provenance.

Most importantly, as Bahá'ís, we are not a community of Indians and non-Indians who pretend to speak for Native Americans regarding their own sacred traditions. I can tell you that an ongoing controversy has raged among scholars in the academic Study of Religion over this very issue for some time now, precisely because Euro-American or other non-Indian scholars have assumed that they have a scholarly prerogative or “right” to study any American Indian religion that they want and to conclude what they will as a result of their investigations. Worse still, some non-Native scholars act as if they themselves are *the* quintessential experts on indigenous religions — not Native Americans ourselves! In fine, this “academic freedom” has, in the transgressive extremity of its overreaching, led to a certain cultural imperialism borne of overweening academic hubris. Scholar Lee Irwin has edited a thought-provoking collection of essays on this scholarly debate, entitled, *Native American Spirituality: A Critical Reader*.<sup>120</sup>

I should hasten to add this critical disclaimer. Under no circumstances are Bahá'ís ever doing these things or fawing and foisting such grandiose claims on others. As Bahá'ís, we are not embroiled in or otherwise tainted by this controversy in any way, and I think it is absolutely vital that we clarify this for the non-Bahá'í Native American reader — whether a practicing member of a Native American religion or not. American Indian scholars sometimes speak of these practitioners as “white shamans” (also spelled as one word, *whiteshamans*). Steven Leuthold, assistant professor in Syracuse University’s School of Art and Design states in his monograph, *Indigenous Aesthetics: Native Art, Media, and Identity*, explains that “whiteshamans” basically manufacture “invented traditions” out of their own appropriation of Native spirituality, and the result of such transmuting of sacred traditions is a hodge-podge and a monstrosity

I want to add I believe the term “whiteshamanism” is admittedly a racist term and that Bahá'ís don’t use that term. Bahá'ís will want to understand why the practices that led to the birth of this term are so offensive to Native Americans. By the same token, Native Americans need to understand that Bahá'ís do not in any way condone what these “whiteshamans” are doing. The problem with these offensive “whiteshamans” is that they typically

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<sup>120</sup> Lee Irwin, *Native American Spirituality: A Critical Reader* (Lincoln, NE & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

refuse to give up their appropriation of Native practices or their pretense of being (magically) “authentic” Native spokesmen or so-called “spiritual guides.” Bahá’ís, under no circumstance, would ever condone the offensive behavior of these “whiteshamans.” Nor would we condone the misuse of any other religious ceremony, nor would we want Native peoples to ever think that Bahá’ís (Indian or not) take on Native Americans beliefs, ceremonies, ritual art or artifacts, in order to incorporate these into Bahá’í beliefs and community life. Bahá’ís have done nothing to merit being called “whiteshamans,” in fact. That would be quite unfair and grossly inaccurate.

Conversely, a word of caution is important here. A Native American Bahá’í, on the other side of the coin, is not “co-opting” Native beliefs if she or he sings, for example, an authentic Native American spiritual song at a Bahá’í event. I, and many other Native Americans, share Native prayers and spiritual songs at Native and Bahá’í gatherings. This does not compromise the great respect that we have for the prayers or beliefs of any other religious tradition on the planet. Bahá’ís maintain respect for all other religions. Therefore a clear distinction must be made here, so that (non-Bahá’í) Indians don’t confuse membership and active participation of genuine American Indians in Bahá’í community activities as cultural imperialism or misappropriation of Native spirituality.

No tribal tradition forbids the respectful sharing of Native prayers or songs or drumming, if genuine elders and respected authentic Native spokesmen do not object to it. As an elder, I’ve often been asked to share Native prayers at Bahá’í events and I’ve found these prayers always honored and respectfully received, and never “stolen” by Bahá’ís. I have, however, been very careful about imprudently sharing Native spiritual beliefs when they wouldn’t be honorably received. My point here is that Bahá’ís do not practice what Native Americans find so objectionable in the behavior of so-called “whiteshamans.”

**[BUCK]** Very important points you’ve made, Don. However, not every non-Native who recognizes and appreciates the importance of Deganawidah is a “whiteshaman.” Take the U.S. Congress, for instance, which holds that the Iroquois Confederacy, founded by Deganawidah, helped to shape American democracy. The Iroquois influence thesis holds that the U.S. Constitution was largely modeled on the Iroquois Confederacy. This thesis sparked a vigorous scholarly debate.<sup>121</sup> While its historical merits and

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<sup>121</sup> See Donald A. Grinde, Jr. and Bruce E. Johansen, *Exemplar of Liberty: Native America and the Evolution of Democracy* (Los Angeles: Native American Studies Centre, UCLA, 1991); J. Barreiro (ed.), *Indian Roots of American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Northeast Indian Quarterly, 1988); “Iroquois Great Law of Peace and the United States Constitution: How the Founding Fathers ignored the Clan Mothers,” *Native American Law Review* 16 (1991): 497–531; cf. P. A. Levy, “Exemplars of Taking Liberties: The Iroquois Influence Thesis and the Problem of Evidence,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 53.3 (July 1996): 588–604; S. B. Payne, “The Iroquois League, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 53.3 (July 1996): 605–620; D. A. Grinde, Jr., “Sauce for the Goose: Demand and Definitions for Proof regarding the Iroquois and Democracy,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 53.3 (July 1996): 621–636; W. A. Starna and G. R. Hamell, “History

demerits continue to be weighed in the balance of historical scrutiny — which any historical thesis must withstand — the fact remains that Deganawidah is now part and parcel of the legacy of America.

That it enjoyed some popular support as well is reflected in a Congressional resolution, passed in 1988. On September 16, 1987, Senator Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii) introduced S.Con.Res. 76. On July 11, 1988, similar legislation was introduced by Representative Morris Udall (D-Arizona) in the House of Representatives as H.Con.Res. 331. On October 4, 1988 the House passed H.Con.Res. 331<sup>122</sup> — *A concurrent resolution to acknowledge the contribution of the Iroquois Confederacy of Nations to the development of the United States Constitution and to reaffirm the continuing government-to-government relationship between Indian tribes and the United States established in the Constitution* — by a vote of 408–8. By voice vote, the Senate agreed to H.Con.Res. 331 on October 21, 1988.<sup>123</sup>

In 2007, U.S. Representative Joe Baca and U.S. Senator, Daniel Inouye, respectively introduced H.R. 3585 and S. 1852: *Native American Heritage Day Act of 2007*, “A bill to designate the Friday after Thanksgiving of each year as ‘Native American Heritage Day’ in honor of the achievements and contributions of Native Americans to the United States.” This proposed legislation, in its current draft, acknowledges the contribution of the Iroquois League of Nations: “Congress finds that ... the Founding Fathers based the provisions of the Constitution on the unique system of democracy of the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, which divided powers among the branches of government and provided for a system of checks and balances.”<sup>124</sup>

**[ADDISON]** If the U.S. Congress has recognized the legacy of Deganawidah, why can’t we as Bahá’ís?

**[BUCK]** I quite agree. Let’s see what our readers have to say! I believe that the *Online Journal of Bahá’í Studies* invites reader responses.

Dr. Addison, I can say that my contact with your culture has enriched me. And our collaboration would not have been possible were it not for our contact having transpired through an inspired vision of intercultural unity, founded on the bedrock of mutually recognized cultural integrity (that is, sovereignty, as regards First Nations).

**[ADDISON]** Yakoke! It’s been wonderful collaborating with you, too. Let me explain the framework within which I see our work, which is the work

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and the Burden of Proof: The Case of Iroquois Influence on the U.S. Constitution.” *New York History* 77 (1996): 427–452.

<sup>122</sup> See <<http://www.senate.gov/reference/resources/pdf/hconres331.pdf>>.

<sup>123</sup> See <[http://www.senate.gov/reference/common/faq/Iroquois\\_Constitution.shtml](http://www.senate.gov/reference/common/faq/Iroquois_Constitution.shtml)> and <<http://140.147.249.9/cgi-bin/bdquery/D?d100:55:/temp/~bdcHxQ:@@L&summ2=m&>>.

<sup>124</sup> Text available online at <<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=h110-3585>>.

of all those who share the same interests and vision: A mandate for building bridges with Native peoples was given by Shoghi Effendi, who wrote: “Nor should any of the pioneers, at this early stage in the upbuilding of Bahá’í national communities, overlook the fundamental prerequisite for any successful teaching enterprise, which is *to adapt the presentation of the fundamental principles of their Faith to the cultural and religious backgrounds*, the ideologies, and the temperament of the divers races and nations whom they are called upon to enlighten and attract.”<sup>125</sup> Here, we have done just that, in adapting “the presentation of the fundamental principles” of the Bahá’í Faith to the “cultural and religious backgrounds” of Native Americans and Native Canadians in particular, and to indigenous peoples in general. We have also done our best to completely avoid “a purely mercenary approach to religion.”<sup>126</sup>

But not only have we attempted, in good faith, to do that fine and necessary work. We have also tried to educate ourselves and our peers — for our own enlightenment — to see that the wisdom of Native peoples (which must have derived, at least in part, from Native Messengers of God in the distant past) is very much on a collective par with the established world religions. The problem of identifying Native Messengers is not that cut-and-dried by any means.

Fundamentally, Native religions, unlike Bahá’í Faith and in Abrahamic and Aryan religions generally, are not “written” traditions. Our religions are oral traditions and because of this, the passing on of a Native Prophet’s “words” are typically found in oral tribal histories, in ceremonial “texts,” “songs,” and, symbolically, in tribal rituals and the like. And these are held extremely sacred, with tremendous respect and even protocol associated with them. Yet at least we have established — or endeavored to establish — recognition of “Messengers of God to First Nations” as an authentic Bahá’í principle grounded in the Tablet to Amír Khán and in other sacred Bahá’í texts.

As you say, my good friend and colleague, the Bahá’í teachings adumbrate the *principle* of “Messengers of God to First Nations” — without making an ontological commitment to which *principals* are within the class of Native Messengers. Let us hope that the powerful resonances between Native wisdom and Bahá’í wisdom transcends the issue of “names” and that their harmonics ring true in the inner ears of the person who sees both traditions as part and parcel of one universal Message.

We are wisely counseled by Shoghi Effendi with respect to the Bahá’í-Native encounter — about which Chelsea Dawn Horton has written with

<sup>125</sup> From a letter dated 5 June 1947 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá’ís of the West (emphasis added), in “[Teaching Among Aboriginal and Indigenous People](#).”

<sup>126</sup> From a letter dated 29 April 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, *ibid.*

such great sensitivity and insight — “We should meet them as equals, well-wishers, people who admire and respect their ancient descent, and who feel that they will be interested, as we are, in a living religion and not in the dead forms of present-day churches.”<sup>127</sup> As I understand it, this admonition applies not only to the Bahá’í-Native encounter individually, but collectively as well. This is where some kind of highly symbolic — and real — recognition of Native Messengers of God becomes the litmus test of our own universality and authenticity. Maybe we need to begin to look at other peoples’ religions as being just as good as our own — and perhaps this will bring some much needed understanding and appreciation for spiritual traditions from a wide variety of the world’s diverse religions. I can think of no better line, in stark contrast to Western exclusivity that is so toxic, that describes this more clearly than a passage from a prayer of Baha’u’llah: “I yield Thee such thanks as can ... fulfill the needs of the peoples of all religions.”<sup>128</sup>

And let’s not forget the importance of the Bahá’í-Native encounter, which should assume more importance than it now has: “He attaches the greatest importance to teaching the original inhabitants of the Americas the Faith. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself has stated how great are their potentialities, and it is their right, and the duty of the non-Indian Bahá’ís, to see that they receive the Message of God for this day.”<sup>129</sup> This is described as a “right” that Native peoples possess — to preserve their respective cultural and spiritual identities within the global framework of an emergent world civilization that the Bahá’í world community is now establishing.

Consider this profound parallel: “The Master has likened the Indians in your countries to the early Arabian Nomads at the time of the appearance of Muhammad. Within a short period of time they became the outstanding examples of education, of culture and of civilization for the entire world. The Master feels that similar wonders will occur today if the Indians are properly taught and if the power of the Spirit properly enters into their living.”<sup>130</sup> By God! How utterly amazing is this vision! Has the Bahá’í community forgotten? Has it largely, although not completely, neglected the sole “specific racial prophecy in all of the Bahá’í scriptures,”<sup>131</sup> which is this: “Attach great importance to the indigenous population of America. For

<sup>127</sup> From a letter dated 21 September 1951 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Comité Nacional de Enseñanza Bahá’í para los Indígenas, in *ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> Baha’u’llah, *Prayers and Meditations*. Translated by Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1938; reprinted 1998), 331.

<sup>129</sup> From a letter dated 29 July 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia, in “*Teaching Among Aboriginal and Indigenous People*.”

<sup>130</sup> From a letter dated 22 August 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Central America and Mexico, in “*Teaching Among Aboriginal and Indigenous People*.”

<sup>131</sup> Andrew Pemberton-Piggot, *The Bahá’í Faith in Alberta, 1942–1992: The Ethic of Dispersion* (Master’s thesis: University of Alberta, 1992), 34. Cited by Chelsea Dawn Horton, “Beyond Red Power: The Alternative Activism of Dorothy Maquabeak Francis,” *Journal of Bahá’í Studies* 14.3/4 (Sept.–Dec. 2004): 35–71 [43].

... there can be no doubt that they will become so illumined as to enlighten the whole world,”<sup>132</sup> as you have already mentioned.

I’d like to close with excerpts from a column I published in the *Eugene Weekly* in 2004:

I’ve noticed an increasing interest in Native American cultures, languages, and especially spirituality today, which has translated into full classes wherever I am teaching courses on these subjects.

I, myself, am Choctaw Indian. I am grateful to be Native American, but it wasn’t always something one wanted to state publicly in the past. A fresh new spirit abounds today, and many American Indians are tracing their roots, learning about their cultures, and getting acquainted with their indigenous languages. A recent local powwow is a good illustration of this return to one’s Native cultural roots. As I looked around the crowded hall, I saw rows of Native youth eager to participate. When the drumming and singing began, the dancing commenced and our spirits soared into the sky.

Many Native American spiritual leaders over the centuries foretold this phenomenon we are privileged to see today. White Buffalo Calf Woman, a Lakota, spoke of a great spiritual renewal. Other American Indian prophets expressed a dream that Indian and non-Indian would someday come together in unity. Deganawidah, Peacemaker of the Iroquois Confederacy, long ago promised he would “return,” and other great messengers left similar prophecies that a great teacher would come, as the Navajos believe, from the East.

Bahá’u’lláh, the prophet-founder of the Bahá’í Faith, did come from the East and Native Americans are increasingly joining his faith, because they believe Bahá’u’lláh has fulfilled these prophecies. The Hopi, for example, foresaw a time when the Indian and the Euro-American would join together in unity. Bahá’u’lláh proclaimed this, saying, “Ye are the flowers of one garden and the leaves of one tree.”

Unity in diversity characterizes Native communities today. We Indians enjoy comparing notes on how languages, music, and customs differ in some cases, and appear similar in others. Bahá’í teachings encourage unity in diversity — the coming together of all peoples. However, Bahá’u’lláh never said Native Americans must give up their cultures or languages. Kevin Locke, Lakota musician, dancer and educator says that “the Bahá’í Faith actually enhances” his Native beliefs and culture.

The resurging interest in Native spirituality is not without controversy, and Native American Bahá’ís are quick to point out their

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<sup>132</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, 33.

beliefs are not being compromised or misused by the Bahá'ís. On the contrary, in 1916 Bahá'u'lláh's son, 'Abdu'l-Baha, gave a most splendid prophecy about a glorious future for Native Americans.

I believe I am lucky to be Bahá'í — it gives me answers to today's problems, it requires religion and science agree and if they don't, science without spirituality can become materialism and religion without science can become superstition. American Indians have always had "science" — our's just developed differently than European sciences. Natives see science as spiritual.

The Bahá'í prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh for believers to use do not preclude using prayers of other religions, including those of indigenous religions in American Indian languages. Bahá'ís believe in the same God as Native Americans, Christians, Jews, Muslims and the other world religions. We have beautiful prayers for unity, marriage, the morning time and the evening hour, for assistance, and for children. And when life on life's terms gets difficult, I look up a powerful prayer Bahá'u'lláh revealed to be read in times of tests and difficulties: "Armed with the power of Thy Name, nothing can ever hurt me, and with Thy love in my heart, all the world's afflictions can in no wise alarm me."

Many folks ask about the sad things that happened to Indians over the last 600 years. Those things really did happen, so let us learn from those experiences and teach our children to look at all peoples as members of the same family, enjoying the beauty of all our cultures and languages. The Bahá'í Faith gives me this hope.

What the Bahá'ís express about unity can also be summed up in probably the most famous American Indian expression one can find around the country today: "*Mitakuye Oyasin*." Though it is Lakota, this phrase is used by Indians from many different backgrounds; it means "all my relations" or "all my relatives." In other words, we are all related in one family. So we must put hatred and prejudice behind us because one must not hurt one's own relatives. *Mitakuye Oyasin!*<sup>133</sup>

My dear friend and colleague ("Dr. Buck, I presume?"), you and I — as an emic/etic team — have engaged in "conversive relationality" whereby both of us have been transformed. We hope that our readers, too, may experience some of this reciprocal enlightenment that can result from a truly relational and potentially transformative dialogue among equals. Furthermore, the implications for further research are patently obvious: If generalizable, our hypothesis and argument invite research on the issue of Indigenous Manifestations of God among Oceanic, Australasian, African, and other indigenous peoples.

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<sup>133</sup>. Don Addison, "[Mitakuye Oyasin! We are All Related](#)" *Eugene Weekly* (2004).

**Appendix One****Facsimile of Tablet to Amír Khán & Research Department Memoranda**

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**THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE****DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT**

Bahá'í World Centre • P.O. Box 155 • 31001 Haifa, Israel

Tel: 972 (4) 835 8358 • Fax: 972 (4) 835 8280 • Email: [secretariat@bwc.org](mailto:secretariat@bwc.org)

8 June 2007

Transmitted by email: [buckc@msu.edu](mailto:buckc@msu.edu)

Dr. Christopher Buck

U.S.A.

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your email letters of 25 April and 22 May 2007, inquiring about the recipient of a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, have been received at the Bahá'í World Centre and forwarded to the Research Department for study.

The Research Department confirms that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's original Tablet, part of which was published in *Amr va Khalq*, volume 2 (Hofheim: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1985), pages 45 and 46, was addressed to Amír Khán of Tíhrán. A copy of that Tablet was sent to you as an attachment to a memorandum dated 16 May 1996 written by the Research Department at the instruction of the Universal House of Justice. An additional copy of that material is enclosed for your study.

As the name of the recipient of the Tablet is not cited in the above-mentioned memorandum, you may wish to change the wording of the source of your published footnote to read, "An attachment of the Research Department memorandum dated 16 May 1996".

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Enclosure with attachment

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**MEMORANDUM**



**To:** The Universal House of Justice  
**Date:** 16 May 1996  
**From:** Research Department

**Tablet of the Holy Mariner;  
the “Call of God” and Native Messengers**

In his electronic mail messages dated 15 November 1995 and 22 November 1995 to the Universal House of Justice, Mr. Christopher Buck requests certain materials concerning the Tablet of the Holy Mariner and raises questions about an extract from a Tablet revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to which reference is made in memoranda prepared by the Research Department on 25 August 1994, 24 May 1988 and 22 October 1995. We respond as follows.

**1. Tablet of the Holy Mariner**

As Mr. Buck requested, we attach a photocopy of the original of the section of this Tablet that was revealed in the Persian language together with a short list of references from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from *God Passes By*, and from letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi concerning the Tablet of the Holy Mariner. To date, no English translation of the Persian section of this Tablet is available at the Bahá’í World Centre. However, a brief summary of the contents of this Tablet may be found in Adib Taherzadeh’s *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*, rev. ed. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1988), volume 1, page 243.

**2. Tablet Revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *Amr va Khalq*, volume 2, pages 45-46**

We attach for Mr. Buck a copy of the original of the Tablet revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, part of which is published in *Amr va Khalq*, volume 2, pages 45–46. As noted in our memorandum of 25 August 1994, the beginning and final passages of this Tablet are published in *Amr va Khalq*, volume 3, pages 307–308.

The English translation of the section of the Tablet that appears in volume 2, pages 45-46 is as follows:

In ancient times the people of America were, through their northern regions, close to Asia, that is, separated from Asia by a strait. For this reason, it hath been said that crossing had occurred. There are other signs which indicate communication.

As to places whose people were not informed of the appearance of Prophets, such people are excused. In the Qur'án it hath been revealed: "We will not chastise them if they had not been sent a Messenger."

Undoubtedly in those regions the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now.

As Mr. Buck observed, the final paragraph of the Tablet is cited in the Research Department memorandum of 24 May 1988. The first and last paragraphs are quoted in the letter dated 7 July 1988, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, which was attached to our memorandum of 22 October 1995, and phrases from the final paragraph are also cited in the October 1995 memorandum.

### 3. The "Call of God" and Native Messengers

Mr. Buck states that he regards the phrase "Call of God", mentioned in the extract above, as a technical term which "is very clearly a reference to the teachings that originate from Manifestations of God". He also indicates that this Tablet appears to provide "a textual basis for establishing in principle but not in name — the existence of Manifestations of God sent to the aboriginals of North America, and possibly, by extension, to other indigenous peoples as well". He, therefore, proposes that

... the Faith officially proclaim that God, in addition to sending the named Manifestations of God that we already have accepted, has sent "Messengers of God to Indigenous Peoples" as a principle grounded in *Amr va Khalq* (vol. 2, pp. 45-46). We should at least be able to assert that there were "Messengers of God to First Nations", as we say in Canada.

Further, Mr. Buck's understanding of the Tablet leads him to question whether the Research Department used excerpts from the Tablet to support two conflicting views. Before considering this question, it is, as Mr. Buck says, important to address the issue of the meaning of the term "Call of God".

#### 3.1 The "Call of God"

The Persian term translated as "Call of God" in the above Tablet is "*nidáy-i-Iláhí*". This term appears frequently in the Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá with differing shades of meaning. By way of illustration, we provide the following examples from *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), each of which contains the expression "*nidáy-i-Iláhí*", though the English translations differ:

- Section 15, page 31: "... for this did Bahá'u'lláh raise up the call of the Lord".

- Section 195, pages 234–235: Referring to the influence of opposition to the Faith on its dissemination, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asks: "How else could His summons have been heard in the continents of America and of Africa the dark?"

- Section 219, page 274: "Although ye dwell in western lands, still, praise be to God, ye did hear His call from out the east and, even as Moses, did warm your hands at the fire kindled in the Asian Tree."

- Section 225, page 283: Describing the "Two calls to success and prosperity", 'Abdu'l-Bahá indicates that the second "is the soul-stirring call of God", which, He explains, "is founded upon the instructions and exhortations of the Lord and the admonitions and altruistic emotions belonging to the realm of morality which, like unto a brilliant light, brighten and illumine the lamp of the realities of mankind. Its penetrative power is the Word of God."

From these several examples, it is suggested that while the "Call of God" is clearly "founded" upon the teachings of the Manifestation of God, being in the physical presence of the Manifestation is but one means by which people become informed of "His summons".

### 3.2 Native Messengers

With regard to whether the excerpt from the Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá cited above enunciates a general principle that permits the conclusion that God sent His Messengers to indigenous peoples, specifically to the Americas, we wish to note, that, to date, the Research Department has not been able to locate any authoritative interpretation of the Master's Tablet in the Bahá'í Teachings, nor have we found a text which clearly indicates that Manifestations of God have appeared in the Americas. We offer the following points for consideration:

#### The Tablet

It is not clear from the context of the Tablet that the reference to raising the "Call of God" presupposes the presence of a Manifestation of God in the Americas.

The Master's Tablet appears to be a response to a question about the fate of people who live in "places" which have not been penetrated by the call of the Prophets. If this be so, then 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement about the raising of the "Call of God" could simply imply that "the people of America" were "informed about the appearance of Prophets" as a result of the contact and "other signs which indicate communication" that occurred "in ancient times"

between the peoples of America and Asia. In this regard, the following extract from a letter dated 25 November 1950, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer is of interest:

It is possible the Indians of the Americas were influenced in the remote past by Prophets in Asia. But again, as there is nothing in our teachings about it we cannot do more than speculate.

### **Statement in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, page 289**

In one of His talks published in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is reported to have stated:

The East has ever been the dawning point of the Sun of Reality. All the Prophets of God have appeared there. The religions of God have been promulgated, the teachings of God have been spread and the Law of God founded in the East. The Orient has always been the centre of lights.

The principle enunciated in this statement is confirmed in the published letters of Shoghi Effendi. For example, in his letter addressed to the Asian Intercontinental Teaching Conference in October 1953, the Guardian refers to the “Asiatic continent” as “the cradle of the principal religions of mankind”. And, in his letter entitled “America and the Most Great Peace”, Shoghi Effendi reiterated the principle and actually cites this and other similar passages from *Promulgation* on the same subject.

### **Prophetic Figures**

While we are unable to locate a text which clearly indicates that Manifestations of God have appeared in the Americas, the Bahá’í Teachings and the Qur’án recognize the possibility of individuals’ being centres of divine guidance for their own people, without occupying the station of Major Prophethood. In a letter dated 21 December 1986, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, the House of Justice states:

... there are also other prophetic figures who are under the shadow of the Manifestation, and personages, such as sages, seers, and divine men of learning, who because of their wisdom and guidance, profoundly influence the lives of people in certain parts of the world.

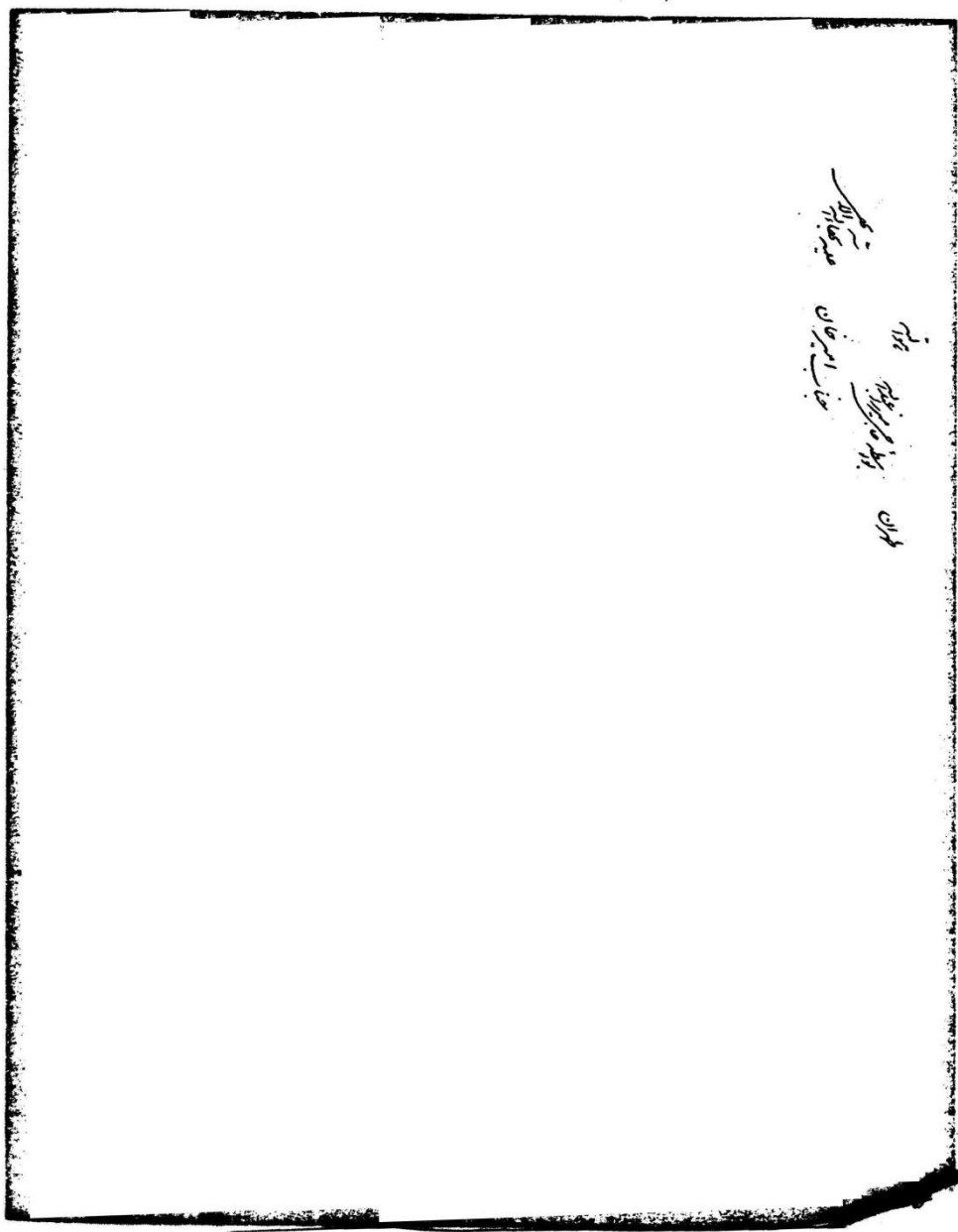
#### **4. Two Conflicting Views?**

Mr. Buck refers to Research Department memoranda dated 24 May 1988 and 22 October 1995, which, he believes, use the statement from the

Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá about the “Call of God” to support two opposing points of view. He states that, while, in one memorandum the passage argues the possibility of two Manifestations of God on earth at the same time, in the second, it is used to argue against the possibility of Native Manifestations in the Americas.

In our memorandum of 24 May 1988, the Department was addressing, among other things, the question of whether, in the past, it was possible that two Manifestations of God could have lived at the same time. In commenting on this question, we called attention to the fact that the Bahá’í Teachings contain no exact information about the dates of Dispensations prior to Muhammad, that our Writings and the Qur’án indicate that Manifestations and other prophetic figures have been sent down to mankind from the beginning of time, and that the records concerning many of these personages have been lost. Since we were not able to find any clear guidance in the Bahá’í Teachings concerning the possibility of two Manifestations of God having lived at the same time, our tentative conclusion — that it was not possible to rule out such a possibility — was based on the fact that the Teachings affirm that the traces of many such personages had been lost. The statement from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was cited in this connection, rather than to argue for the presence of Messengers in a particular place, i.e., the Americas. This usage is consistent with our reading, as outlined above, of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement as an affirmation of the fact that “In ancient times the people of America” had been “informed of the appearance of Prophets”, but that “it hath been forgotten now”.

With regard to the citation of the Master’s statement about the “Call of God” in our memorandum of 22 October 1995, we wish to note that reference to this passage was included because it is one of a small number of texts and authoritative statements which, when considered in relation to each other, help to provide insight into the question of whether or not Messengers of God have arisen in the western hemisphere. Based on these materials, it is our view that evidence for the advent of Messengers of God in the Americas does not appear to be very strong. However, we have found no text which explicitly rules out the possibility.



**Figure 1:**  
Facsimile of Tablet to Amir Khan, courtesy Bahá'í World Centre (digital artifacts removed).

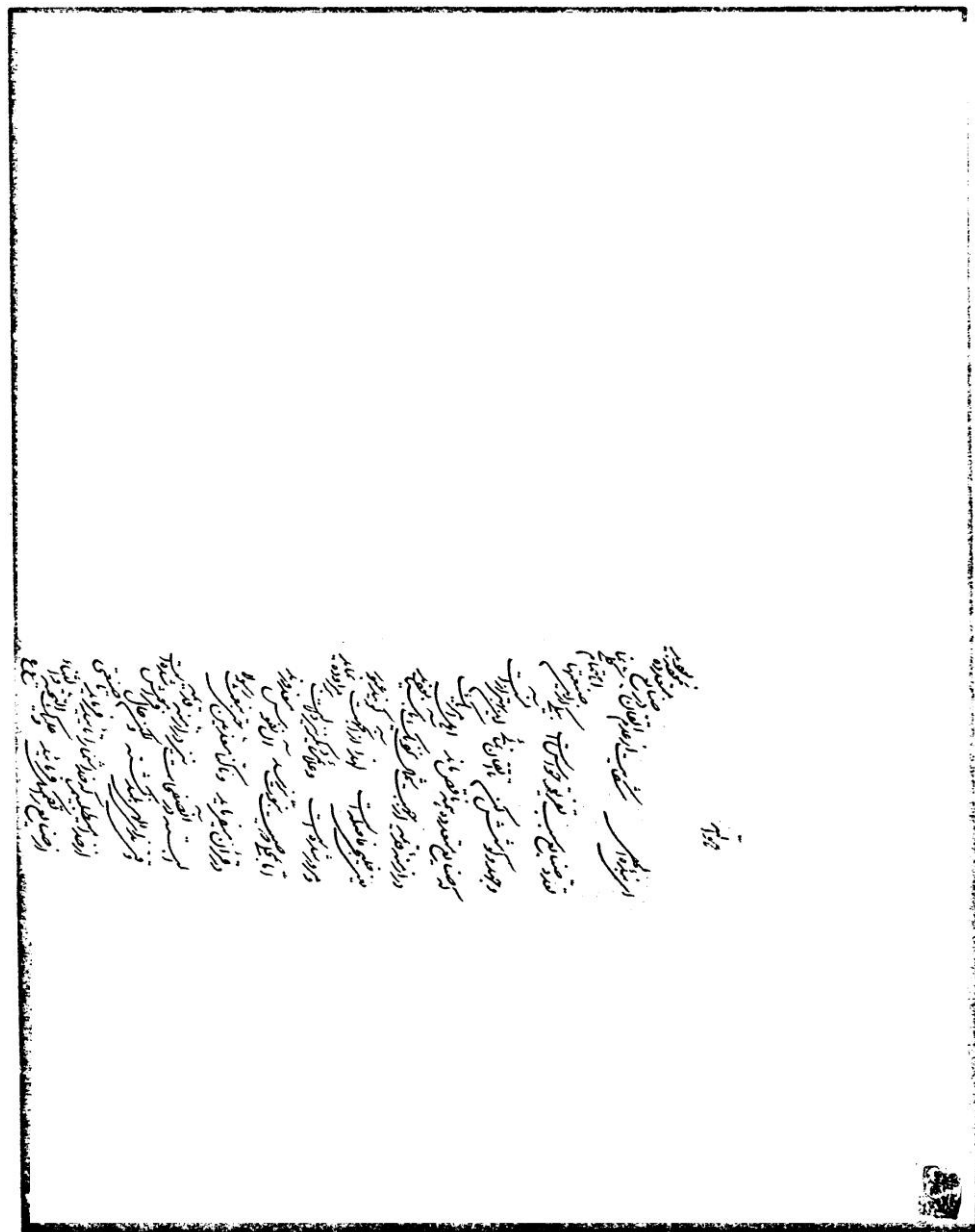


Figure 2: Facsimile of Tablet to Amir Khan, cont.

## M E M O R A N D U M

**To:** The Universal House of Justice  
**Date:** 6 August 2007  
**From:** Research Department

### Tablet to Amír Khán and Related Questions

The Research Department received a copy of Mr. Phillip Tussing's email letter dated 25 May 2007 and studied the matters that he has raised in his message. The following is our response to his questions:

1. The text of the Tablet is correct. In response to his request, the facsimile of the original Persian text is attached. The Research Department is not aware of whether a copy of the Tablet also exists in the handwriting of Mírzá 'Alí Akbar Milání.
2. As indicated in the attached facsimile, the Tablet was revealed in honor of a certain Amír Khán, about whom we have no information. Therefore, we can not verify the biographical information provided by Dr. Iraj Ayman and quoted in Mr. Tussing's email. The Archives Office at the Bahá'í World Centre so far has no evidence regarding the questions that Amír Khán submitted to the Master.
- 3.a. The Research Department is not aware of any other Tablets, textually similar to that of Amír Khán, in which the question of the "Call of God" being raised in North America is discussed.
- b. The terms "Call of God" and "America", of course, appear in a number of Tablets of the Master in various other contexts unrelated to the text of the Tablet to Amír Khán. As Mr. Tussing has indicated in his letter, the term "Call of God" in the Bahá'í texts relates to God's voice and His summons, messages and teachings.
- c. The literal meaning of the Persian term "*farámúsh shudih ast*" is "forgotten", as it appears in the English translation of the Tablet. The Research Department is not in a position to interpret the term beyond its literal meaning.
4. The Master's likening of the indigenous Americans to the pre-Islamic Arabs, which is described in His *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, is not noticed in His other works.

Attachment

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## Appendix Two.

### Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to Badí'u'lláh: Parallels to Bahá'í Teachings by Native American Messengers of God

Donald Francis Addison, Ph.D.

Christopher Buck, Ph.D., J.D.

*Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to the countenance of truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the tree of humility. Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet to Badí'u'lláh<sup>134</sup>.*

- ***Be generous in prosperity, and***

Then Tekánawíta said, "Who is helping you to guard the field?" Thereupon the man came there, and then Tekánawíta said "Are you the person who guards this field?" and the man answered, saying, "It is I, indeed, I am the person who stands guard at night at the cornfield;" then Tekánawíta said, "How do you do it, customarily?" and the man said, "This, generally, is how: when it just dawns, I am roaming about all over the field; sometimes I find corn cobs lying on the ground and I pick up as many as I can find. ***Then I take them back to the chief's house, and that is how we do it throughout the harvest. Actually everything is owned jointly, and when the task is done, the way our chief distributes it is in equal shares for them to receive it, all of the people in the settlement.***" Thereupon Tekánawíta said, "Now I understand what your work is, so this shall be your name, they will address you calling you Kanuhkwe'yotu' [Growing Corn Cobs] ***and that is what everyone will live by.*** This is

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134

what your work will be now, the newly arriving Good Message and the Power and the Peace.” — Deganawidah<sup>135</sup>

- *...thankful in adversity.*

Thereupon Tekánawíta stood up, saying, “The Great Power came from the sky, and now it is functioning, the Great Power that we accepted when we reached consensus. So now our house has become complete. Now, therefore, we shall give thanks, that is, *we shall thank the Creator of the earth*, that is, he who planted all kinds of weeds and all varieties of shrubs and all kinds of trees; and springs, flowing water, such as rivers and large bodies of water, such as lakes; and the sun that keeps moving by day, and by night, the moon, and where the sky is, the stars, which no one is able to count; moreover, the way it is on earth in relation to which no one is able to tell the extent to which it is to their benefit, that is the people whom he created and who will continue to live on earth. *This, then, is the reason we thank him, the one with great power, the one who is the Creator, for that which will now move forward, the Good Message and the Power and the Peace, the Great Law.* — Deganawidah<sup>136</sup>

- *Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and*

[Then Tekánawíta stood up in front of the whole group and said:] “Thirdly, this is what ‘Peace’ means: now it will stop, the massacre of humans and the scalping and bloodletting among themselves, specifically, among the people of the various nations. Now as to that, it will end, the human slaughter, because the Great Spirit never planned for humans to hurt one another nor to slaughter one another. So now it will end, the warpath, and everywhere it will become peaceful; *the different nations’ villages are as neighbours and as to the localized families and their children*, what will happen is that they all will be very close relatives; and it will come to pass that they will become just like one family which will encompass every nation and every language. And this: when everyone can travel from village to village, then it will end, the danger and terror, and everything will be peaceful, and they will rejoice by day and by night as the family continues on, there being no end to peace; that is what it means, the Great Law of Peace, and everyone will be united; now I am finished.” — Deganawidah<sup>137</sup>

- *look upon him with a bright and friendly face.*

Thereupon Tekánawíta prevented them, saying, “You will stop it because it is sinful for people to hurt one another; you especially, for

<sup>135</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Gibson, *Concerning the League*, 193–196.

<sup>136</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Gibson, *Concerning the League*, 294–296.

<sup>137</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Gibson, *Concerning the League*, 105–108.

you are all relatives, and so it is necessary for you to be kind to one another, as well as to other people, those you know, and those people you do not know; ***and you should respect them equally — all of the people — you should be kind to everyone.***” — Deganawidah<sup>138</sup>

- ***Be a treasure to the poor,***

Thereupon Tekánawíta said, “Moreover, I decree that if this is what will happen to the coming generations, ***if they are going to be impoverished, our grandchildren***, then these chiefs are to look for there very biggest tree, the large elm, which is tall and has huge branches and roots, all of them extending equally into the depths, and if they find such a large tree with long branches and roots extending equally deep, they will have good luck in generations to come, our grandchildren; in that place they will collect their heads, all of our Nations of our League, all of us will place our heads there, and there we will hide our heads as long as it will last, the earth which is beneath the sun. This is where it will be possible for them to be happy for they will continue to hold on to that which protects the group, that is the Good Message and the Power and the Peace and the Great Law; there the fire will be rekindled, our fire of our League which will keep burning and the smoke will keep rising, piercing the sky where all of us share our beliefs.” — Deganawidah<sup>139</sup>

- ***...an admonisher to the rich,***

***The man who is a skillful hunter, and whose wife is alive to her opportunities, makes many feasts***, to which he is careful to invite the older men of his clan, recognizing that they have outlived their period of greatest activity, and now love nothing so well as to eat in good company, and to live over the past. The old men, for their part, do their best to requite his liberality with a little speech, in which they are apt to relate the brave and generous deeds of their host’s ancestors, finally congratulating him upon being a worthy successor of an honorable line. Thus his reputation is won as a hunter and feast-maker, and almost as famous in his way as the great warrior who has a recognized name and standing as a “man of peace.”<sup>140</sup>

- ***...an answerer of the cry of the needy,***

Whenever a specially important matter or a great emergency is presented before the Confederate Council and the nature of the matter affects the entire body of the Five Nations, threatening their utter ruin, then the Lords of the Confederacy must submit the matter

<sup>138</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Gibson, *Concerning the League*, 27–28.

<sup>139</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Gibson, *Concerning the League*, 482–484.

<sup>140</sup> Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), *The Soul of the Indian: An Interpretation* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1980 [1911]), 100–101. Cited as an exemplar of traditional Native American religion, with wisdom handed down from unnamed Native Messengers and sages.

to the decision of their people and the decision of the people shall affect the decision of the Confederate Council. This decision shall be a confirmation of the voice of the people. — Deganawidah<sup>141</sup>

Should a great calamity threaten the generations rising and living of the Five United Nations, then he who is able to climb to the top of the Tree of the Great Long Leaves may do so. When, then, he reaches the top of the tree he shall look about in all directions, and, should he see that evil things indeed are approaching, then he shall call to the people of the Five United Nations assembled beneath the Tree of the Great Long Leaves and say: “*A calamity threatens your happiness.*” *Then shall the Lords convene in council and discuss the impending evil.* — Deganawidah<sup>142</sup>

- *...a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge.*

All Lords of the Five Nations Confederacy *must be honest in all things*. They must not idle or gossip, but be men possessing those honorable qualities that make true royaneh. It shall be a serious wrong for anyone to lead a Lord into trivial affairs, for the people must ever hold their Lords high in estimation out of respect to their honorable positions. — Deganawidah<sup>143</sup>

- *Be fair in thy judgment, and*

De-ka-na-wi-da and Hai-yo-hwat-ka’ then added: “In the first place, *the chiefs must be patient, long-suffering, and courageous in the cause of right and equity*. This applies to the chiefs and the war-chiefs who shall fill these offices. All this must be done for the sole object of peace and quietness. We are bound also to carry this Law around and show it to all the nations, and we will name it the Great Law — *the Great Law of Equity*.” — Deganawidah and Hiawatha<sup>144</sup>

- *...guarded in thy speech.*

“*Guard your tongue in youth*,” said the old chief, Wabashaw, “and in age you may mature a thought that will be of service to your people!”<sup>145</sup>

<sup>141</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Arthur C. Parker, [The Constitution of the Five Nations or the Iroquois Book of the Great Law](#), Article 93.

<sup>142</sup> *ibid*, Article 61.

<sup>143</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Arthur C. Parker, *The Constitution of the Five Nations or the Iroquois Book of the Great Law*. New York State Museum Bulletin, No. 184 (Albany: NY: April 1, 1916). Reprinted in William N. Fenton, ed., [Parker on the Iroquois, Book III: The Constitution of the Five Nations](#) (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1968), Article 27.

<sup>144</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in J. N. B. Hewitt, “Legend of the Founding of the Iroquois League,” *American Anthropologist* 5.2 (1892): 131–148 [140–141].

<sup>145</sup> Chief Wabashaw, qtd. in Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), *The Soul of the Indian: An Interpretation*, 90. Cited as an exemplar of traditional Native American religion, with wisdom handed down from unnamed Native Messengers and sages.

He believes profoundly in silence — the sign of a perfect equilibrium. Silence is the absolute poise or balance of body, mind, and spirit. ... If you ask him, “What is silence?” he will answer: “It is the Great Mystery!” “The holy silence is His voice!” If you ask: “What are the fruits of silence?” he will say: “They are self-control, true courage or endurance, patience, dignity, and reverence. Silence is the corner-stone of character.”<sup>146</sup>

- ***Be unjust to no man, and***

The chiefs of the League of Five Nations shall be mentors of the people for all time. The thickness of their skins shall be seven spans, which is to say that they shall be proof against anger, offensive action and criticism. Their hearts shall be full of peace and good will and ***their minds filled with a yearning for the welfare of the people of the League.*** — Deganawidah<sup>147</sup>

- ***...show all meekness to all men.***

Then Tekánawíta stood up in front of the whole group and said, “You shall listen well, for you wanted to ask questions so as to understand what it means, ‘Good Message’; this is what it means: ***people respect each other as though they are one person***; also everybody is related among the various nations, so that now they will stop, the sins and activities of evil people; now everyone will repent, the old people and the young people; ***now everyone will respect one another among the nations***; and just this is what will operate again, the good, and that is what the ‘Good Message’ means.” — Deganawidah<sup>148</sup>

The *wakan* woman [White Buffalo Calf Woman] then touched the foot of the pipe to the round stone which lay upon the ground and said: ... “Every dawn as it comes is a holy event, and every day is holy, for the light comes from your Father *Wakan-Tanka*; and also you must always remember that the two-leggeds and ***all the other peoples who stand upon this earth are sacred and should be treated as such.***” — White Buffalo Calf Woman<sup>149</sup>

- ***Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness,***

With endless patience they shall carry out their duty and their firmness shall be tempered with a tenderness for their people. Neither

<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*, 89–90.

<sup>147</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Arthur C. Parker, *The Constitution of the Five Nations* Article 24. See also Deganawidah, qtd. in Bruce E. Johansen, *Forgotten Founders: Benjamin Franklin, the Iroquois and the Rationale for the American Revolution* (Ipswich, MA: Gambit, 1982), Chapter Two, epigraph. Cf. Gibson, *Concerning the League*, 698.

<sup>148</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Gibson, *Concerning the League*, 103–104.

<sup>149</sup> White Buffalo Calf Woman, qtd. in Black Elk, *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Seven Sacred Rites of the Oglala Sioux*. Recorded & edited by Joseph Epes Brown (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989 [1953]), 7

anger nor fury shall find lodgement in their minds and all their words and actions shall be marked by calm deliberation. — Deganawidah<sup>150</sup>

- *...a joy to the sorrowful,*

Thereupon he said, Tekánawíta did, “Moreover, I decree that these the clear minded, shall take care of all of it. When the day comes, when they go to bury him, these, the clear minded ones. I will choose a man to be their speaker. Now this one will direct his words towards the other side of the fire, **towards the bereaved, raising their spirits, the survivors** — the chiefs and also the deaconess of the title name and the whole group — he will raise all of their spirits; and this represents everything he will speak about to strengthen the spirits of the survivors.” — Deganawidah<sup>151</sup>

- *...a sea for the thirsty,*

**Public giving is a part of every important ceremony.** It properly belongs to the celebration of birth, marriage, and death, and is observed whenever it is desired to honor any person or event. Upon such occasions it is common to give away to the point of utter impoverishment. The Indian in his simplicity literally gives away all that he has, to relatives, to guests of another tribe or clan, **but above all to the poor and the aged, from whom he can hope for no return.** Finally, the gift to the “Great Mystery,” the religious offering, may be of little value in itself, but to the giver’s own thought it should carry the meaning and reward of true sacrifice.<sup>152</sup>

Orphans and the aged are invariably cared for, not only by their next of kin, but by the whole clan.<sup>153</sup>

- *...a haven for the distressed,*

Thereupon Tekánawíta said, “In relation to that I have decided to extend a pole from which we will hang a pouch made of [spotted fawn hide]. Thereupon we will drop into it strands, the short strands called Atu’takshe’. As to that, it shall be ours jointly. Moreover, if, in some particular place one will come to be a mourner, thereupon it will be the clearminded ones who will take down the pouch. Thereupon a man will bend down near the wall where he will pick it up, the object made of [spotted fawn skin] and, throwing it on his back, take to the road, walk to the place where one is mourning, and at the edge of the ashes he will stop, kneel down [?] and **then he will speak up, this one, using gentle words, for it would not be fitting if he were to use strong language when one is, actually, grieving.**

<sup>150</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in William N. Fenton, ed., *Parker on the Iroquois*, Book III: *The Constitution of the Five Nations* 37.

<sup>151</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Gibson, *Concerning the League*, 495.

<sup>152</sup> Charles A. Eastman (Ohiyesa), *The Soul of the Indian: An Interpretation*, 102–103

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*, 101.

Moreover, he will use the thirteen matters for clearing the mind, indeed, the thirteen strands of wampum [the Condolence Wampum]. Moreover, when he completes the rite in which *he will raise the spirits of the mourners again, these, as soon as they recover, will follow again the path of the Great Law.*” — Deganawidah<sup>154</sup>

- *...an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression.*

Moreover, this also I decree: if the wind blows this way, coming from the east — or possibly coming from the west, or possibly it will come from the south, or possibly it will come from the north — if this wind comes, hitting the growing tree we have planted, and the tree falls over — or hits where we are holding each others arms — nevertheless it ought not break it; and this means that it could come from anywhere, the trouble that causes us to die, or perhaps, attempts to break our power; *even if, say, it happens that way to only one person, we shall stand up as one, protecting ourselves and shielding all of the people, so that they will survive, and the families will continue on.* Moreover, I decree that a single family we shall become, our various nations. — Deganawidah<sup>155</sup>

- *Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts.*

Moreover, and most importantly, one is going to assemble in meetings where it will be announced that *all of mankind will repent of their sins, even evil people, and in the future, they will be kind to one another, one and all.* When they are functioning, the Good Message and also the Power and the Peace, moreover, these will be the principal things that everybody will live by; *these will be the great values among the people.* — Deganawidah<sup>156</sup>

- *Be a home for the stranger,*

Roots have spread out from the Tree of the Great Peace ... and the name of these roots is the Great White Roots of Peace. If any man of any nation outside of the Five Nations shall show a desire to obey the laws of the Great Peace ... they may trace the roots to their source ... and they shall be welcomed to take shelter beneath the Tree of the Long Leaves. — Deganawidah<sup>157</sup>

- *...a balm to the suffering,*

Thereupon Tekánawíta said, “Moreover I decree that if she is not able to get ready by the third day, she may postpone it to the tenth

<sup>154</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Gibson, *Concerning the League*, 534–537. Cf. pp. 646–648.

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*, 307–309.

<sup>156</sup> *ibid.*, 40–41.

<sup>157</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in William N. Fenton, ed., *Parker on the Iroquois*, Book III: *The Constitution of the Five Nations*, 9.

day, which is the time indicated in mourning ordinary persons - when they have someone who dies, and the families (lineages) and clans grieve at their separation by reason of that persons death — so the time has passed, ten days, then she will cook one more meal, and this one is called the Dead Feast.

This is how it is done when an ordinary person has died, and so similarly, when the time has passed, the ten days, then the matron of the title name will prepare a Dead Feast upon the death of a deceased chief, and their at the feast all Three Brothers chiefs (the mourners) will assemble. Thereupon the other side of the fire, the clear minded ones, now they will go to the door of the bereaved, and they will clear the mourners minds, the Three Brothers, Indeed, that is to say, the Mohawk and the Seneca and the Onondaga, and what will get used to accomplish it are thirteen matters, which we shall call *Atu'takshae'*, the thirteen strands of wampum, which will always get used *to raise the mourners' spirits.*" — Deganawidah<sup>158</sup>

- *...a tower of strength for the fugitive.*

Then Deganawidah said, "So then what is the reason that you are stirring about here?" The men replied saying, "***Actually we are fugitives.***" Then Deganawidah asked saying, "What is the reason that you are running away, for surely there is nothing amiss now?"

The men said, "Understand that it so happened that where we lived our village was destroyed. So really we do not know the state of affairs there." Then Deganawidah inquired, "Who are these people who have destroyed your village?" The men answered, "It is indeed that person who continually harms us named Dehononhsahenhwa?, "He whose house obstructs the path."

Now then Deganawidah affirmed, "Now as for that, from now on that kind of work shall stop. Indeed understand that such an intention was not in the mind of the Creator of the earth and the skyworld.

Moreover, it is also my aim to put a stop to the killing of one another — that too should cease.<sup>159</sup>

Moreover, I am putting down inside of the area you are surrounding the arrow-bundle which signifies a single mind; ***for this bundle, made of five arrows, is impossible to break***, and it is impossible to bend it; but if someone were to pull out one arrow, it will weaken its power, and if someone should pull out two arrows, thereupon it will

<sup>158</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Gibson, *Concerning the League*, 501–504.

<sup>159</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in William Nelson Fenton, *The Great Law and the Longhouse: A Political History of the Iroquois Confederacy*, 87.



become bent, and if sometimes only two arrows remain, thereupon it is no longer strong and it has no power. Thereupon it will get broken, and it will come to pass that just about anyone will be able to bend it back and forth; but if all the arrows separate, now as to that, it will be easy for someone to break it, and so it is with your power: it should not get broken, nor should it get bent. This therefore, is what I decree: we shall have only one body, and only one head, and only one life. — Deganawidah<sup>160</sup>

- ***Be eyes to the blind, and***

Moreover, at present it [*the Great Law*] is *young as the day is when the sun is rising and lights up the earth*; just as it causes warmth all over the earth for all the people, we will help the people of every nation. And just as all of the many things grow on earth and sustain the people, *the newly arriving Great Law will come to shed light on the minds of the people*, the elders and the younger people, everybody, even the children, and this is what you will work at: everyone shall become related to one another, so that it will become a single family consisting of every tribe; and they will be kind to one another, all of the people, and this is what will unite them: the Good Message, and the Power, and the Peace. — Deganawidah<sup>161</sup>

- ***...a guiding light unto the feet of the erring.***

It shall be the duty of all of the Five Nations Confederate Lords, from time to time as occasion demands, *to act as mentors and spiritual guides of their people and remind them of their Creator's will and words*. They shall say:

“Hearken, that peace may continue unto future days! “Always listen to the words of the Great Creator, for he has spoken. “United people, let not evil find lodging in your minds. “For the Great Creator has spoken and the cause of Peace shall not become old. “The cause of peace shall not die if you remember the Great Creator.”

Every Confederate Lord shall speak words such as these to promote peace. — Deganawidah<sup>162</sup>

- ***Be an ornament to the countenance of truth,***

Then the Spirit-woman pointed to the other scout, who trembled before her, and she said, “Go, tell your People what you have seen here. Tell them to build an altar of sage and cherry branches, and also

<sup>160</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Gibson, *Concerning the League*, 305–307.

<sup>161</sup> *ibid.*, 127–129.

<sup>162</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Arthur C. Parker, *The Constitution of the Five Nations or the Iroquois Book of the Great Law*, Article 26.

to put up a great tipi, and I will come tomorrow from where the sun sets. Tell them I have a great gift to give them, a gift kept in this sacred Bundle.' And she told him, 'Tell them just what I have said. Don't make more than what it is and don't make less than what it is!' — White Buffalo Calf Woman<sup>163</sup>

- **...a crown to the brow of fidelity,**

Thereupon Tekánawíta said, "Stand-up," and the man stood up in front of the chiefs. Thereupon Tekánawíta said, "Now the task is done, and *it is you who are the first one they have crowned with antlers*. Moreover your title shall be Thatotaho', which is what they will call you, the people living on earth. *Moreover, this is what will protect them, all of the people of future generations, your grandchildren*. Moreover, now it will function, that which we will call the Great Law. So this is what we will begin to do in relation to you who are chiefs: from now on we shall have as symbols of our status, antlers for us to wear." — Deganawidah<sup>164</sup>

- **...a pillar of the temple of righteousness,**

Righteousness means justice practised between men and between nations; it means also a desire to see justice prevail. — Deganawidah<sup>165</sup>

- **...a breath of life to the body of mankind,**

Now in turn, the other, my third saying, "now it is arriving, the Peace", this means that everyone will become related, men and also women, and also the young people and the children, and when all are relatives, every nation, there will be peace as they roam about by day and also by night. Now, also, it will become possible for them to assemble in meetings. Then there will be truthfulness, and they will uphold hope and charity, so that it is peace that will unite all the people, indeed, *it will be as though they have but one mind, and they are a single person with only one body and one head and one life, which means that there will be unity*. — Deganawidah<sup>166</sup>

- **...an ensign of the hosts of justice,**

<sup>163</sup> As recounted by Arvol Looking Horse (the 19th Generation Keeper of the Sacred White Buffalo Calf Pipe), *The Native Voice* (Rapid City, S.D.) 5.13 (Oct 1–Oct 15, 2006): p. D1. "She [White Buffalo Calf Woman] told the remaining scout to go back, tell what he had seen, but not to make more of what it is or make less of what it is. These words are also a teaching of staying with truth." Chief Arvol Looking Horse, "Response to Eagle Hunter," *Lakota Journal*, 2004, June 18–25, A5.

<sup>164</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Gibson, *Concerning the League*, 238–239.

<sup>165</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Paul A.W. Wallace, *White Roots of Peace*, 39–40 See Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal, Vol. 1, Part 1, Section 4, Sub-section 2, "Iroquoians and the Iroquois,"* pp. 14 and 58, n. 26.

<sup>166</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Gibson, *Concerning the League*, 38–40.

Power means authority, the authority of law and custom, backed by such force as is necessary to make justice prevail; it means also religion, *for justice enforced is the will of the Holder of the Heavens and has his sanction.* — Deganawidah<sup>167</sup>

- *...a luminary above the horizon of virtue,*

A broad dark belt of wampum of thirty-eight rows, having a white heart in the center, on either side of which are two white squares all connected with the heart by white rows of beads shall be the emblem of the unity of the Five Nations. [**Ed. note:** This is the Hiawatha Belt, now in the Congressional Library.] The first of the squares on the left represents the Mohawk nation and its territory; the second square on the left and the one near the heart, represents the Oneida nation and its territory; the white heart in the middle represents the Onondaga nation and its territory, and it also means that the heart of the Five Nations is single in its loyalty to the Great Peace, that the Great Peace is lodged in the heart (meaning the Onondaga Lords), and that the Council Fire is to burn there for the Five Nations, and further, it means that the authority is given to advance the cause of peace whereby hostile nations out of the Confederacy shall cease warfare; the white square to the right of the heart represents the Cayuga nation and its territory and the fourth and last white square represents the Seneca nation and its territory. *White shall here symbolize that no evil or jealous thoughts shall creep into the minds of the Lords while in Council under the Great Peace. White, the emblem of peace, love, charity and equity surrounds and guards the Five Nations.* — Deganawidah<sup>168</sup>

- *...a dew to the soil of the human heart,*

Thereupon Tekánawíta said, “Now, moreover, I decree that you chiefs of the Five Nations, that is to say, the Mohawk and the Oneida and the Cayuga and the Seneca and the Onondaga, who have the Good Message and the Power and the Peace and the Great Law, this is what I decree: do not ever disagree, thus there shall always be unanimity! It will be like a single person; you will have one body, and one head, and one heart, which means that as it became one family, when unified, creating relatedness and kindness, *each person will now be kind to one and all.* Moreover, we have completed all matters that follow in the family through generations, and these shall last as long as the earth exists, and as long as they are going to grow, the grasses and also the various weeds, as long as the shrubs keep growing wild, the various shrubs, and as long as they [keep growing wild], the trees, all kinds of trees; *and as long as springs emerge the*

<sup>167</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Paul A.W. Wallace, *White Roots of Peace*, 39–40.

<sup>168</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Arthur C. Parker, *The Constitution of the Five Nations or the Iroquois Book of the Great Law*, Article 60.

*water of rivers will keep flowing, also the large rivers and the various lakes*; and as long as the sun keeps rising and setting and the moon keeps up its phases, and in the sky the stars do the same, and the wind is stirring on the land, and the heavenly bodies continue to provide light by day and by night; *thus, it shall last, the task we are completing, the Great Law, and these two will cooperate, the earthly land and the other one, the heavenly land.*” — Deganawidah<sup>169</sup>

- *...an ark on the ocean of knowledge,*

Nineteen generations ago the beautiful spirit we now refer to as Pte-san win-yan (White Buffalo Calf Woman) brought the Sacred C'anupa to our People. She taught the People the Seven Sacred Rites and how to walk on Mother Earth in a sacred manner. She said, “Only the good shall see the Pipe ... the bad shall not see it or touch it.” — White Buffalo Calf Woman<sup>170</sup>

- *...a sun in the heaven of bounty,*

Thereupon Tekánawíta said, “It will turn out well for us to do this: we will say, ‘We promise to have only one dish among us; in it will be beaver tail and no knife will be there.’ Thereupon the chiefs confirmed that so it should happen.” Thereupon Tekánawíta said, “Now we have completed the matter; *we will have one dish, which means that we will have equal shares of the game roaming about in the hunting grounds and fields, and everything will become peaceful among all of the people*; and there will be no knife near our dish, which means that if a knife were there, someone might presently get cut, causing bloodshed, and this is troublesome, should it happen thus, and for this reason there should be no knife near our dish.” — Deganawidah<sup>171</sup>

- *...a gem on the diadem of wisdom,*

She warned, “You must have a good heart and a good mind to go to the ceremonies. Honor the Sacred Places, the Sacred Ceremonies and the Sacred Sites. Each Sacred Site is an altar to the Great Spirit. Gather there often and pray the prayers and sing the songs I have taught you. *In time you will understand the meaning of the Seven Sacred Rites* that come with this sacred Bundle.” — White Buffalo Calf Woman<sup>172</sup>

- *a shining light in the firmament of thy generation,*

<sup>169</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Gibson, *Concerning the League*, 474–478.

<sup>170</sup> As recounted by Arvol Lookinghorse. *The Native Voice* (Rapid City, S.D.) 5.13 (Oct 1–Oct 15, 2006): p. D1 (2 pp.).

<sup>171</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Gibson, *Concerning the League*, 458–460.

<sup>172</sup> As recounted by Arvol Lookinghorse. *The Native Voice* p. D1

Moreover, *at present it is young as the day is when the sun is rising and lights up the earth*; just as it causes warmth all over the earth for all the people, we will help the people of every nation. And just as all of the many things grow on earth and sustain the people, *the newly arriving Great Law will come to shed light on the minds of the people*, the elders and the younger people everybody, even the children, and this is what you will work at: everyone shall become related to one another, so that it is what will unite them: the Good Message, and the Power, and the Peace. — Deganawidah<sup>173</sup>

- *...a fruit upon the tree of humility.*

She [White Buffalo Calf Woman] said, “When you put the C’anupa s bowl and stem together, you connect the world above and the world below. The only time the C’anupa is put together is when you are in prayer. *And when you pray with the C’anupa, humble yourself.* Present your prayers to all four Sacred Directions, and then pray to the Great Spirit above and Mother Earth below. Sing your songs and pray for life, peace, harmony and happiness.” — White Buffalo Calf Woman<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Deganawidah, qtd. in Gibson, *Concerning the League*, 127–129.

<sup>174</sup> As recounted by Arvol Lookinghorse. *The Native Voice* p. D1.

Appendix Three  
**Letter from Dr. David S. Ruhe on Native Messengers of God / Deganawidah**

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14 July [2001]

Dear Christopher —

It was a happy thing to find that you are now at Michigan State — a university affiliation which I've been too busy to develop as an alumnus — and have lost classmate contact — thus being an active Bahai and physician!

The ms<sup>175</sup> is coming by separate posting.

If you can bring off the “category” idea at the least, and Deganawida as indigenous Prophet at the most[,] it will be a great coup and a great service. A Bahai Indian woman, with tearful eyes, said that the Bahais gave her no respect as an Indian — a sorry thing.

Your mission = to bring respect for spirituality of the original Americans and perhaps much more — pride in Founders of their spiritual systems.

Nuff said, and thanks for chance to see your thorough scholarship once again —

Warm greetings to Nazy [Nahzy] from —

Dave & Meg Ruhe

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<sup>175</sup> Manuscript, i.e. Dr. Ruhe's critical comments on “Native Messengers of God in Canada?: A Test Case for Bahá'í Universalism” prior to its abridgement and republication as: Christopher Buck, “Bahá'í Universalism and Native Prophets.” *Reason & Revelation: New Directions in Bahá'í Thought*. Edited by Seena Fazel and John Danesh. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2002. Pp. 172–201.

## **Bahá'u'lláh's Four Tablets to Maryam**

**Lawh-i-Maryam, Maryama Isiy-i-Jan, Hurufat-i-'Ali'in and Ziyárat-Námih-i-Maryam**

Gloria Shahzadeh  
Dubai, United Arab Emirates

“In one of the older neighbourhoods in Tihran, there exists a beautiful, large house, which belongs to the relatives of Mirza Buzurg-i-Nuri. A young woman, by the name of Maryam -- who is well endowed with beauty and perfections -- is the bride of the household. An Immortal Beauty, Whose luminous Countenance can easily steal the hearts of the world's inhabitants and Whose blessed heart can attract all those around Him, has been released from the darksome and stench-filled prison of the Siyah Chal, and, freed from the heavy chains that had been weighing on Him, lies in His sickbed in that house. He slips in and out of consciousness as He rests in bed gravely stricken with ill health.

Maryam, enthralled with love, circles moth-like round that Peerless Flame and weeps tears of anguish. She sings out with heavenly melodies the odes of love that stream forth from the pure plains of her delicate heart as she circles in adoration around His Blessed Person and attends to his ails. She sees the luminousness of His Countenance, discerns the Glory of His majesty and grandeur, and recognises in His Countenance the all encompassing transformations derived from divine inspiration!”<sup>1</sup>

These are the words by which Furugh Arbab introduces her short chapter on Maryam, Baha'u'llah's cousin, sister-in-law, friend, and faithful follower. Unfortunately other works by other historians such as Malik-Khusravi, Bayda'i, and Ishragh-Khavari present even shorter accounts on the life of Maryam. In a maximum of two pages, they all introduce her ancestry and outline her relationship to Baha'u'llah; assert that she lived a short life of pain and agony; indicate that beautiful Tablets were revealed in her honour by the Pen of the Blessed Perfection; refer to the great bond of love and devotion between her and the Ancient Beauty; and mention the month she spent nursing Baha'u'llah back to health – with the help of Assiyih Khanum -- after His release from the Siyah Chal.

Reading these short chapters, one is left thirsting after the truth of this woman's existence. The mystery behind her unbearable life of hardship, her character, her obscurity, and her station as a historical figure so closely

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<sup>1</sup> . Furugh Arbab, *Akhtaran-i-Taban* v1, p109

associated with the Person of Baha'u'llah all leave one question mark after another in the reader's mind!

Who was this woman other than being the daughter of Mirza Karim-i-Namadsab and Maliku'l-Nisa Khanum, Baha'u'llah's paternal aunt? Or the sister of Fatimih Khanum (Mahd-i-'Ulya), Baha'u'llah's second wife?<sup>2</sup> What other social status did she hold than being the wife of Baha'u'llah's half brother, Mirza Rida-Quli who was a Haji by his pilgrimage to Mecca and a physician?<sup>3</sup> And what purpose did she serve in the history of a Faith she had espoused so early in its development?<sup>4</sup> What services did she render surrounded by a husband who tried his best to conceal his association with Baha'u'llah and sister-in-laws who were staunch supporters of Mirza Yahya and who tried everything in their powers to keep her mute in praise of her Lord and to make sure that she was not to attain her heart's desire of attaining the presence of Baha'u'llah after His exile from Iran.<sup>5</sup>

The dates of her birth and death are not conclusively clear from any of the aforementioned historical works; however what can be fairly decisively assumed from them is that she – in most probability – died around the year 1868 or 1869 at around the age of 41 or 42. It is also said that she married Baha'u'llah's brother Mirza Rida-Quli a couple of years before the Declaration of the Blessed Bab at around the age of 15; which makes her about 10 years younger than Baha'u'llah.<sup>6</sup>

There is no indication anywhere of her formal education, but since she was obviously literate, it can be assumed that she received some sort of home-schooling. Regardless, however, of the sort of training she received, her poetry is testimony to the fact that she was not only eloquently literate; but that she was also knowledgeable in matters of religious history, theology and classical poetry.

One of her poems reads:

“A rare heart -- bewildered and bleeding -- is my lot;  
Flowing out rivers -- Euphrates and Tigris -- from the crimson sea  
that is my heart.

There once was a time when peculiar I found Majnun's tale;  
In my heart now two hundred Layli and Majnun epics prevail.

To the wilderness, withdrew His tent from this town, my heart's  
Desire;

<sup>2</sup> . Muhammad-'Ali Malik-Khusravi, *Iqlim-i-Nur* p137

<sup>3</sup> . H.M. Balyuzi, *The King of Glory* p13

<sup>4</sup> . Adib Taherzadeh *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah* v1, p12

<sup>5</sup> . Adib Taherzadeh *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah* v3, p212

<sup>6</sup> . Furugh Arbab *Akhtaran-i-Taban* v1, pp110, 112



And so -- enamoured as the mad Qays -- to the wilderness is set my gaze.

One luminous Moon may have had doleful Zulaykha in captivity;  
What I have in bondage are two hundred suns shining brightly.

Nine heavens shall I burn to naught;  
Should I tell of all the world's ails that lie in my heart.

At the Ka'ba of the Beloved, I held refuge for many years;  
Yet I am now separated from Him by more than a journey of a hundred years.

O thou whose abode is now set across from the deep sea;  
My heart's vessel do Thou witness, so filled with Thee.

So grieved I am with pain of separation from thee;  
That saddened I shall make the hearts of all maidens -- both angels and houris.

Untold doth remain my heart's secret, though to its end the page hath arrived;  
Oh, how I lament this blazing fire that within the core of my being remains enwrapped."<sup>7</sup>

In the first four verses of this poem, she unveils her inner knowledge of such subjects as the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which, in addition to being geographical elements, have profound theological significance and deep roots in religious history; her knowledge of poetical epics such as the story of Layli and Majnun; her knowledge of the name of Majnun, the mad "Qays"; and her knowledge of the Qur'anic account of Yusuf and Zulaykha.

One may assume -- at first glance -- that her usage of such metaphors may simply be out of a common familiarity with popular epics and stories; however, a deeper study of this and her other poems and a systematic analysis of the context in which she uses these familiar words or names will prove her deep understanding of their place in history; their symbolism in religion; and their effects on society.

Her poems are, however, generally written with the fire of her devotion for her Lord and with the tender eloquence of a handmaiden wholly enthralled with the love of God.

Lovers' melodies echoed thoroughly enchanting;  
Flames of love filled the world wholly energizing

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<sup>7</sup> . Bayda'i, *Tadhkariy-i-Shu'aray-i-Qarn-i-Avval-i-Baha'i* v3, p337

The lover's plight perceiveth not, but a lover's mind;  
For a lover's plight is of a peculiar kind

A fare so splendid wherein kings of the day;  
Like unto beggars bare and forlorn at its way

So enticingly played Love's flute;  
Liberating my soul from both worlds' loot

Ah! If only Love's scorching blaze;  
Bestirred me at every breath with its flame ever more  
ablaze<sup>8</sup>

Fascinating as Maryam's poetry may be, however, the purpose of this paper lies in the introduction of her character and identity as portrayed by Baha'u'llah in His four Tablets addressed to her; for given the brevity of all historical accounts on her life, the answers to the questions pertaining to this blessed handmaiden may only be attained in these Tablets.

### The Tablet of Maryam

One of these Tablets, known as "the Tablet of Maryam", is the one that is translated in part by Shoghi Effendi and starts with "O Maryam! The wrongs which I suffer have blotted out the wrongs suffered by My First Name from the Tablet of Creation". It is written in the same poetic language as the other Tablets addressed to her and – like all the other ones – it is clearly indicative of the most tender affection cherished by the Manifestation of God for this cousin and obviously loyal friend and trusted confidant.

This Tablet is a heartrending account of Baha'u'llah's pre-exile trials in Tihiran and of the actual exile from Tihiran to Baghdad, as well as what befell him during His sojourn in Sulaymaniyyih, the details of his being discovered and His return to Baghdad. It recounts His triumphant victory in reviving the perishing Babi community of Baghdad in the mid 1850s, and the sufferings He endured at the hands of those from within and outside of His own community. And ultimately, it reveals the adversities that are yet to come and His further banishment to remote lands.

Baha'u'llah cries out in this Tablet with eager affection, confiding His heart's ails in a devoted relative, a cousin, a sister-in-law, a friend and a faithful believer. He shares His agonies almost as if seeking comfort in her unquestionable understanding and her absolute willingness to be party to

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<sup>8</sup> . Bayda'i, *Tadhkariy-i-Shu'aray-i-Qarn-i-Avval-i-Baha'i* v, p 336

His sufferings, and bestows upon her the ultimate bounty of sharing in His own tribulations

**Maryama Isiy-i-Jan [O Maryam, the Spirit of life ascended to the domain of placelessness...]**

The date of the Revelation of this Tablet has not yet become clear, and therefore one cannot conclude with certainty where it was revealed; although Adib Taherzadeh alludes to the fact that all the Tablets addressed to Maryam -- except the Tablet of Visitation -- were revealed in Baghdad.<sup>9</sup> This Tablet, like the other ones, speaks of clamours and afflictions in the path of the Beloved, however it seems rather different in tone to the other Tablet in that it appears to have been revealed by Baha'u'llah mainly to comfort Maryam in times of adversity, perhaps soon after His settlement in Baghdad and in appreciation of her tireless efforts in nursing Him back to enough health for Him to undertake the journey, and while she must have been agonizing over the separation.

**Hurufat-i-'Ali'in [Exalted letters]**

Another tablet, which in reality is a prayer because it is entirely addressed to God, is Hurufat-i-'Ali'in or Hurufat-i-'Aliyat (Exalted Letters] or Musibat-i-Hurufat-i-'Aliyat, which means the sufferings of the Exalted Letters. This tablet was revealed by Baha'u'llah in 8 sections first in Arabic and then translated by Himself into Persian. In a prologue to the tablet, He explains that at the request of some believers He translated the tablet into Persian; but that the translation is that of the essence, because a word for word literal translation would not have been seemly.<sup>10</sup>

The tablet was dedicated to the memory of Mirza Muhammad-i-Vazir, Maryam's brother. Mirza Muhammad and his wife Havva (Baha'u'llah's niece from one of His half sisters from His mother's side) were both devoted believers. In fact according to Adib Taherzadeh, Mirza Muhammad may have been the first in Baha'u'llah's family who was converted by Him to the Cause of the Bab in 1844.<sup>11</sup>

Mirza Muhammad died in Nur when Baha'u'llah was still in Baghdad, and the Blessed Beauty revealed this Tablet in his honour and sent it to Mirza Muhammad's sister (Maryam) and his wife (Havva) to console them in their time of sorrow.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah v1*, p12

<sup>10</sup> Baha'u'llah, *Ad'iyiy-i-Hadrat-i-Mahbub p.?*

<sup>11</sup> Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah v1*, p122 [He was presumably the first in Baha'u'llah's family to be converted by Him to the Cause of the Blessed Bab after Mirza Musa]

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

Adib Taherzadeh and John Walbridge both explain the contents of this tablet in very similar words;<sup>13</sup> but both explanations are minimal in the extreme. The tablet covers a whole array of things in a unique tone, and although the general purport of the tablet is about life -- and it paints a vivid picture of the journey from pre-conception to death (or the destruction of the temporal body as the tablet explains it) -- it touches on so many various aspects along the way.

It praises God; recounts the bounties of God showered upon the believers from the moment of creation; explains the soul and its eternal nature, elucidates the nobility of man and his being created in God's own image, and speaks of the greatest bounty bestowed upon man which is his ability to recognize God's Manifestation and gain eternal life.

The tablet also speaks of the believer's path towards certitude and how he is to endure tremendous sufferings and persecutions in the path of God, renounce the world and become wholly detached from all else except Him.

After an elaborate and eloquent description of the station of the soul, Baha'u'llah speaks of the physical death and the afflictions that befalls the human temple upon its destruction after death. He also explains how this physical destruction can be mournful to the loved ones who are left behind; but ultimately His attention reverts in several part of the tablet to the limitless sufferings with which the believer is afflicted in his path toward eternal glory.

The last section of the tablet was revealed specifically for Maryam and Havva, where Baha'u'llah ever so tenderly and lovingly showers these women with the utmost of affection and consoles them in the loss

### **Tablet of Visitation**

The Tablet of Visitation revealed by the Pen of the Blessed Perfection in her honour can certainly serve as a comprehensive introduction to the life and character of Maryam; one that defines her beginnings, her life, and her end well beyond the confines of parental ancestry and social standing. It speaks of time immemorial, pre-existence, the beginnings of love, of her being a sign of love, and much more.

In the prologue to this tablet, Baha'u'llah states that it was revealed for one who was named Maryam, and who was ablaze with the fire of the love of her Lord before the flames even touched her.

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<sup>13</sup> Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah v1*, p122 – John Walbridge, *Exalted Letters, The Overview* (published in *Sacred Acts, Sacred Space, Sacred Time*, pp267-8

The analogy of being lit without coming into contact with the light or fire goes back to the Qur'an, where in Surih 24:35 it is said:

“Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth.  
The Parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche  
and within it a Lamp: the Lamp enclosed in Glass:  
the glass as it were a brilliant star:  
Lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive,  
neither of the east nor of the west,  
whose oil is well-nigh luminous,  
though fire scarce touched it:  
Light upon Light !  
God doth guide whom He will to His Light (*núr*):  
God doth set forth Parables for men: and God doth know all  
things.”<sup>14</sup>

And so Bahá'u'lláh says that the Fire scarce touched Maryam, and yet she was ablaze with the Fire and thus she was one whom God hath willed to guide.

Bahá'u'lláh indicates in the prologue that Maryam's station had remained concealed throughout her life time, but that after her death God unveiled her (through this Tablet of Visitation, it may be assumed) and revealed her to His servants. The prologue also states that should one wish to pay homage to Tahirih, one can do so with this same Tablet.

It is most interesting that the same tablet is for both Tahirih and Maryam: the first woman so well-known in Babi/Bahá'i history, so bold in character and so revolutionary in nature; while the second woman so obscure, so subtle and so concealed.

Nevertheless, if one were to paint a portrait of the lives of these two women, it would almost be the exact same drawing, but done in different colours. Here are two women who were both instantly confirmed believers – both poetesses. They were both married, while in both cases, they were not in the least supported by their husbands in their acceptance of their newfound Faith.

They each lived their lives for their Beloved and would give it up in a twinkling of an eye for Him. They both died at a young age: Tahirih died a martyr's death, while Maryam, dying after a lifetime of anguish, was named by Bahá'u'lláh Himself “a martyr in the path of Bahá”.

They were both persecuted by their relatives, and kept at some point captive in their own homes against their will.

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<sup>14</sup> . Yusuf Ali translation

However, within all these similarities there exists the stark difference in their lives and character.

Tahirih was very much famous for her poetry; while Maryam's was written in the seclusion of her home and chanted out as a means of soothing her own bereaved heart. Tahirih's fame of scholarship, poetry, lectureship, faith, bravery and martyrdom were almost instant and far-reaching; resulting in her celebrity status throughout time and beyond the geographical limits of Iran. Her poetry has been translated into other languages. She lives in many homes across the globe, while Maryam is pretty much still envisioned in that same beautiful house on Khadim Street, where she looked after her noble Guest -- her Lord -- for a short time, and where she died in her longing desire to be near Him.

The study of the differences between these two women and that of the common thread between them -- which is their reciprocated love for their Lord -- makes for a very interesting discussion. However, since the focus is intended to be on Maryam alone here, space does not afford the present writer a further examination of this matter.

What stands out, however, and is addressed by Baha'u'lláh Himself in His prologue is her obscurity. Baha'u'llah says that her station was concealed throughout her lifetime and revealed by God only upon her death! So, according to Baha'u'llah, this Tablet of Visitation is in fact a discovery of her life and station which was concealed prior to her death -- perhaps in order to protect her from even further jealousy and hatred by her unfaithful relatives.

This Tablet of Visitation is not dated; however it had to be revealed in Akka, because it was revealed after Maryam's passing to the Realm on High, which was about the year 1868-69. Therefore, depending on how soon after her death Baha'u'llah revealed this Tablet; it could very well have been while He was still inside the Prison Cell within the barracks. The Tablet is written in a poetic and highly symbolic style, and consists of three distinct parts with three distinct addressees.

Baha'u'llah starts out by addressing the "Supreme Pen". This in itself -- at the very first sentence of the Tablet -- is at once captivating.

In the Suratu'l-Qalam (the Tablet of the Pen), Baha'u'llah asserts that the divine blessings were bestowed upon the Exalted (or Supreme) Pen (Qalam-i-'Ala) before the creation of letters and words and that of the kingdom of names and attributes, and before God's mighty Tablets were revealed.<sup>15</sup> In Islam, The Supreme Pen is of the highest station. It is the station of "the

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<sup>15</sup> . Kavian Milami and Nafeh Fananapazir, *A Study of the Pen Motif in the Baha'i Writings*, March 1999

reality of realities” [Haqiqatu’l-Haqa’iq]; or the reality of Muhammad as the Prophet of God. In Surah 96:1 of the Qur’an it is said:

“Read, in the name of your Lord, who created. He created man from an embryo. Read, and your Lord, Most Exalted teaches by means of the pen.”<sup>16</sup>

The Pen is then a symbol for the creative forces of the manifestation of God. And here Baha’u’llah -- a captive in the great citadel of Akka -- is calling out to “The Supreme Pen” to console It for the calamity of Maryam’s death.

Turning His attention to Maryam herself, Baha’u’llah laments her death and confers upon her the title of “Crimson Leaf”.

Baha’u’llah referred to His male off-springs as “branches” and to the females in the family as “leaves”; however many outstanding women outside the family were also honoured by being addressed by Him as a leaf. In the case of Maryam and Tahirih, they were both blessed with the title of “*crimson leaf*”! The word crimson appears frequently in Baha’u’llah’s Writings -- and is symbolic of all things pertaining to Baha’u’llah’s Own Dispensation -- such as the Crimson Ark<sup>17</sup> (His Cause), the Crimson Book or Scroll<sup>18</sup> (The Book of His Covenant), the Crimson Spot<sup>19</sup> (the Most Great Prison), the Crimson Wine<sup>20</sup> (His Revealed Word), The Crimson Cup<sup>21</sup> (one’s portion of God’s Decree), the Crimson Light<sup>22</sup> (testimony-evidence of the His Revelation), the Crimson cloud<sup>23</sup> (Throne of Revelation), the Crimson Ink<sup>24</sup> (the blood shed in His path – martyrdom). And of course “the shores of the crimson seas” which in the tablet of the Holy Mariner is identified as a “sacred strand” from where those upon the Ark of God can attain a station (ethereal invisible station):

“... Wherein the Lord hath in the Flame of His Beauty appeared within the deathless tree.”

“...Wherein the embodiments of His Cause cleansed themselves of self and passion.”

“...Around which the glory of Moses doth circles with the everlasting hosts.”

<sup>16</sup> Baha’u’llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, translated by Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, Bahai Publishing, 1988), 32.

<sup>17</sup> . Baha’u’llah, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p215

Baha’u’llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p135, 139

<sup>18</sup> . Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p238

<sup>19</sup> . Baha’u’llah, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p56

<sup>20</sup> . Baha’u’llah, *Suriy-i-Haykal*

<sup>21</sup> . ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Baha’i World Faith – ‘Abdu’l-Baha Section*, p440

<sup>22</sup> . Baha’u’llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah*, p282

<sup>23</sup> . Baha’u’llah, *Tablets of Baha’u’llah*, p182

<sup>24</sup> . Baha’u’llah, *The Arabic Hidden Words*

“...Wherein the Hand of God was drawn forth from His bosom of grandeur.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus a “crimson leaf” may be characterised by any and all things for which the aforementioned stations stand: A leaf belonging to the new Dispensation and so cherished as belonging to the Tree of God, moving by the Will of God -- a leaf signifying the crimson blood and a martyr’s life, and a leaf who has attained to a station of utter servitude, utter annihilation and eternal glory.

Baha’u’llah honours her in this Tablet with such appellations as: “an adorning sign of guidance on the faces of women” and “a light unto the brow of piety”!

Through her, Baha’u’llah affirms, the veils of superstition were rent asunder from the eyes of women and their beings were adorned with the remembrance of the Lord of earth and heaven, and characterises her as:

Someone who upon hearing the call of God hesitated – not even for a moment, but hastened towards Him detached from all else save Him.

Someone who embraced Him and His great signs and recognised the manifestation of God in His Days.

Someone who was a stranger in her own land and a prisoner in her own home! One who was far from the presence of His Holiness even in her eagerness to be near, and forbidden to attain His presence even in her fervid desire to behold Him.

Someone who was moved by the winds of the will of God in such way as was desired and willed by Him.

Someone who had no movement or rest save by His command and permission.

Someone who annihilated her own will in the will of her Lord and her desire in His Decree.

Someone whom the whisperings of the stirrers of sedition failed to keep back from the Daystar of the world; and whom the opposition of the promoters of sedition deterred not from the Lord of the Day of Reunion.

Someone who remained firm in the Covenant on a Day in which the eyes of men were stilled with bewilderment.

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<sup>25</sup> . Baha’u’llah, *The Tablet of the Holy Mariner*



Baha'u'llah's Pen is moved again and again in this Tablet by the calamities that had befallen Maryam, and He is transported back to pre-existence, poetically relating a great shock as a result of Maryam's sufferings.

He expresses sorrows at the death of this friend in poetic hyperbole of cosmic catastrophes such as the disconnections of the letters at the beginning of the surih of the Qur'an and the essence of being taking the form of the temple and becoming a historic Manifestation. He speaks of multiple existences coming about from a primal state of unicity, of the words of negation and affirmation ("La-Ilaha Illallah"), of the most great colourless river being divided into four rivers and acquiring various shades and earthly limitations; of the Primal Point becoming all letters and words; and of the point of knowledge being multiplied by the ignorant.

This differentiation of multiple existences, coming forth from a primal state of unicity, is clearly explained in 'Abdu'l-Baha's *Tafsir-i-kuntu Kanzan Makhfiyan* [Commentary on "I was a Hidden Treasure..."] where He considers the "dot" [a mere point] and how all the letters and words are concealed within this mere "dot". But all these letters and words are within the dot in absolute annihilation. By looking at the dot, no trace can be discerned of these words and letters and there is no difference between them.

In the same way He explains that the names and attributes of God are also absolutely and entirely obliterated and annihilated in the station of Primary Oneness.<sup>26</sup>

And it is thus that as humans we are exhorted to attain the utmost of self-effacement and submit to complete self annihilation in order that – according to 'Abdu'l-Baha in the same commentary -- one may shine forth from the dawning place of perpetual existence.

So in understanding the poetic hyperbole of Baha'u'llah's words describing the shock of the agonies suffered by Maryam, one can merely begin to imagine this essence of detachment in her annihilation of a pre-existence shining forth from the Dawning Place of perpetual existence as Baha'u'llah Himself has described her in His Tablet of Visitation for her!

Concerning the station of love, in the same aforementioned Commentary, 'Abdu'l-Baha states that this station is over and above the world of estimation or description, and that the power of intellect and reasoning can

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26 . Makatib-i-Hadrat-i-'Abdu'l-Baha, v2. p4 [Tafsir 'Kuntu Kanzan Makhfiyan'](#) "Tafsir 'Kuntu Kanzan Makhfiyan'" (Commentary on the Saying 'I was a Hidden Treasure.' *Makatib Hadrat 'Abdu'l-Baha*, Vol. 2 (Cairo: Matba'at Kurdistan al-Ilmiyyah, 1330 A.H./1912). Reprinted, East Lansing, H-Bahai, 1998. [a provisional translation of this commentary is available by Moojan Momen, "[Abdu'l-Baha's Commentary on the Islamic Tradition 'I was a Hidden Treasure.'](#)" *Baha'i Studies Bulletin* vol. 3, no. 4 (December 1985), pp. 4-64.

never attain an understanding of this station. He calls it an eternal mystery. This eternal Mystery, He says, is identical to the Essence of the Absolute and is the origin of all love and affection.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, these cosmic catastrophes are expressed by Baha'u'llah poetically at the shock of the sufferings inflicted upon a leaf who was touched by the origin of all love and affection – or rather a leaf who was ablaze by the fire without the fire even touching it!

The last section of the Tablet is a prayer in which Baha'u'llah, while extolling God's attributes, confers even greater blessings upon His cousin Maryam.

### Postscript

Upon her death, Maryam was survived by one, sole, faithful relative, that being her daughter, Zahra Khanum, who was referred to by 'Abdu'l-Baha as Thamarieh [thamarieh literally meaning fruit]. Zahra Khanum gave birth to three children two daughters and one son. One of the daughters passed away at an early age, and when the son passed away as well, the other daughter, Zibandih Khanum came to be the only surviving member of the family who remained faithful to the Cause.

Like her mother and grand-mother, Zibandih Khanum was surrounded by relatives who were mostly followers of Azal. According to Furugh Arbab, who actually had the privilege of interviewing her, Zibandih Khanum survived their oppression and persecution and was able through a loving approach to reduce their animosity to some degree.

In one of His Tablets addressed to Zibandih Khanum, 'Abdu'l-Baha writes:

...Hadrat-i-Thamarieh [thamarieh literally being fruit], in whose bosom thou wert reared, was the one blessed fruit and the only shell of steadfastness in the Covenant, and a brilliant star favoured and distinguished at the Holy Threshold....<sup>28</sup>

Zibandih Khanum had heard stories of Maryam's incredible love for Baha'u'llah from her mother and knew of the calamities she had suffered in her life. She often retold those stories to other friends.

From a very early age, Zibandih Khanum – like her grandmother -- was consumed with a burning desire to move to the Holy Land and to live in close proximity to 'Abdu'l-Baha and the Holy Family; but her father would not grant her permission. According to Furugh Arbab, from as early as age 9

<sup>27</sup> . Ibid

<sup>28</sup> . The complete Tablet is quoted by Furugh Arbab in *Akhtaran-i-Taban* v2, p2

she had increased her desperate pleas for permission to go and had wept uncontrollably, expressing her longing desire to undertake the journey; but still her father had not given consent for the trip.

Eventually in later years, she was finally able to realise her own desire – as well as her grandmother’s desire -- of travelling to the Holy Land to visit ‘Abdu’l-Baha and the Holy family; however she arrived after ‘Abdu’l-Baha had passed away.

Although in great pain while mourning the loss of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, the Greatest Holy Leaf rushed out to meet her. Welcoming her, the Greatest Holy Leaf told Zibandih Khanum that they were all awaiting her arrival.

She was in the Holy Land for 19 days, and then she was to leave like all other pilgrims; however, she went into the presence of Shoghi Effendi and with great longing said that she did not want to go. She was given permission to stay for another 19 days. Finally after 85 days she left the Holy Land deeply touched with the loving affections of Shoghi Effendi and the Greatest Holy Leaf who referred to her as “Dokhtar-Amih” [paternal cousin]. Shoghi Effendi also referred to her as “Mansub-i-bavafa” [the loyal relative] and a “reminder of Hadrat-i-Thamarih”.

At age 35, she married Sani’ ‘Ata’i [Sani’us-Sultan]. Her husband passed away in 1322, leaving her a good inheritance, which she left for the Baha’i community after her death at age 100.<sup>29</sup>

### **Tablet for Cousin Maryam: Provisional Translation**

O Maryam! The wrongs which I suffer have blotted out the wrongs suffered by My First Name (the Bab) from the Tablet of Creation, and showers of tribulations have rained from the clouds of God’s decree upon this Manifest Beauty. My banishment from My home was prompted by naught else but the love of the Beloved, and My exile from My land for none other reason than attaining the good pleasure of the Desired One.

Like a candle, I remained radiant and luminous before the biddings of His decrees, and stood as firm as a mountain in the face of divine tribulations. I was even as a torrent of rain amidst the revelations of the tokens of His Grace, and a flame of fire in staying the enemies of the Sovereign Lord of Eternity.

The manifold evidences of My might gave way to the envy of the enemies, and the revelations of My wisdom brought forth their malice and perfidy.

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<sup>29</sup> All the information on Zibandih Khanum is drawn from Furugh Arbab’s *Akhtaran-i-Taban*, v2. pp 1-

Not for one night did I rest in a place of safety, nor did I lift my head from my couch on any morn with ease. I swear by the beauty of the True One that Husayn wept at my meekness and the Friend of God (Ibrahim) cast Himself into the fire for My afflictions. Shoudst thou observe plainly; thou shalt witness that the Eyes of Majesty are shedding tears beneath the Tabernacle of Purity, and the men of glory are wailing in the Realm of Grandeure; to which beareth witness the Tongue of Truth and Glory.

O Maryam! From the land of Ta (Tihiran), after countless afflictions, We reached 'Iraq at the bidding of the Tyrant of Persia, where after the fetters of Our foes, We were afflicted with the perfidy of our friends. God knoweth what befell Me thereafter. Until such time as I renounced My home and all therein, and my life and all its attachments; and unaccompanied and alone chose to set out into retirement. I roamed the wilderness of resignation, travelling in such wise that in my exile every eye wept sore over Me, and all created things shed tears of blood because of My anguish. The birds of the air were My companions and the beasts of the field My associates.

I traversed the mortal world in a flash of the sprit, and for two years or rather less, I shunned all beside God, and closed Mine eyes to all except Him, that haply the fire of hatred may die down and the heat of jealousy abate.

O Maryam! It is not befitting to divulge the divine mysteries, nor is it seemly to reveal heavenly secrets; and by this is meant the mysteries enshrined within the treasury of My being and naught else! As God is My witness, I endured what the oceans, waves and fruits -- and all that hath ever been or will ever be -- could never bear to endure.

During this period of retirement, none from amongst my brothers or others ventured to enquire into this matter; nor did they seek to understand it, whilst this was a matter greater than the creation of the heavens and the earth. By God! One moment of this journey is far greater than pious worship in both worlds. Although this journey was a most great testimony and the mightiest and clearest evidence; yet it requires a man of insight to behold the scene of His Transcendent Glory. He, who is bereft of insight, perceiveth not even his own beauty; what recourse does he have then of attaining the most sacred Divine Beauty.

What can the shadow discern of the object who sheddeth the shadow; or a handful of clay perceive of the subtle reality of the heart?

At length, divine providence prompted some of His spiritual servants to think of this Canaanite Youth, and they set out with a bundle of letters to search Me out everywhere and from everyone, until they discovered a trace of this Traceless One in a cave of a mountain. And He guideth all things unto the straight, sacred, path.

I swear by the Sun of Divine Reality that this poor forsaken One was so utterly amazed and mystified by their arrival that this Pen is unable to recount. Perhaps a keen Pen must needs step forth from within the eternal realm to rend asunder the veils and reveal all the mysteries with absolute sincerity and utmost certitude, and to speak with such tongue that would draw out the heavenly pearls from the shell of silence. And this indeed would not be difficult for Him.

At last, the Hand of Glory broke the seal of mystery; but alas, ignorant remained the wise, save those who were truly detached.

Then, the Day-star of the World returned to Iraq. We found no more than a handful of souls, faint and dispirited; nay utterly lost and dead. The Cause of God had ceased to be on any one's lips; nor was any heart receptive of its message.<sup>30</sup>

Hence, this Servant, arose to safeguard the Cause and exalt it to the heights of glory in such wise as though a new resurrection had come to pass. The loftiness of the cause became so evident in every city and so manifest in every land that all sovereigns conducted themselves with forbearance.

O Maryam! Arising before all enemies of different sects and tribes by this Servant, increased the fire of jealousy of Our foes, to such degree that is not possible to mention; nor is it imaginable -- thus hath it been decreed by the Exalted, the Almighty.

O Maryam! The Pen of Him who is the Ancient of Days sayeth that the greatest of all deeds is to purify the heart from all else but God. Sanctify thy heart then from the ungodly, that thou mayest be worthy of the Realm of Eternal Reunion.

O Maryam! From the limitations of vain imitation, step thou into the vast immensity of the realm of detachment. Purify thy heart from the world and all that is therein, that thou mayest attain unto the sovereign Lord of faith, and not be deprived of His Divine Sanctuary. Rent asunder the veils of idle fancies through the power of detachment, and enter thou into the sacred court of certitude.

O Maryam! Though a tree may bear a hundred thousand leaves and harvest a hundred thousand fruits; yet all these leaves and fruits shall disappear and be destroyed with one movement of the autumn breeze or the cold of the winter. Waver not away thy gaze then from the very Root of the Divine Tree and of the branches of the Tree of Transcendent Oneness. Witness thou the

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<sup>30</sup> This and the preceding sentence translated by Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, (Willmette::Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1944),126

sea abiding secure in its spot with the utmost poise and dignity; yet how innumerable shapes and figures form on its surface through the stirring of breezes of the will of the Everlasting Beloved. All these waves appear to be different one from another and run contrary to each other; yet the people are all busy with the waves and are veiled from the sovereign Might of the Sea of Seas, from Whose movement have appeared the signs of the Unconstrained.

O Maryam! Seek thou companionship with the Self of the All-merciful, and, barring thyself from association with evil, abide under the unerring protection of the Most Bountiful; so that perchance the Hand of divine blessings may draw you away from the path of selfish desire to the vast immensity of exaltation and glory.

O Maryam! From beneath the shadows of mortality repair thee unto the Sun of Eternal Glory. All shadows remain and move about by reason of the existence of the sun; in such manner that -- were the sun to withhold its bountiful rays for only a moment -- all created things would return to utter nothingness.

Alas, how pitiful and regrettable that one should busy oneself with the manifestations of the mortal world and remain deprived of the Dawning-Place of Sacred Immortality.

O Maryam! Cherish thou these days, for soon thou shalt not see the Celestial Youth in the earthly pavilion, and shalt behold the signs of grief in all things. They shall bite their fingers' end in wonder and regret; yet they shall not find the Youth even if they were to search for Him to the uttermost limits of the heavens and the earth. Thus hath it been revealed from the Kingdom of Exalted Glory.

Yea, soon thou shalt see thyself biting thy fingers' ends, and endeavour to seek Him in all the heavens and the earth; but alas thou shalt not attain the presence of the Youth.

In short, such was ultimately the state of affairs that this Servant decided to leave from amongst the stirrers of sedition, separated from all except for a few women who perhaps have to remain with this Servant. I shalt not even take with me the maids of the household; until such time as God may desire otherwise.

This Youth begins His journey, whilst My tear drops are My only comfort; the sighs of My heart are My only companion; My pen is My only friend; My Beauty is My only solace; My army is my reliance and My people are my trust. This is what I divulged unto thee from the mysteries of the Cause, that thou mayest be of them that are endued with understanding.

O Maryam! All the seas of the world and the rivers that flow out from them are pouring down from the eyes of the Youth that hath appeared as a cloud and is weeping at His Own meekness.

Alas, this Life and this Head, We offered in the path of the Friend from all eternity to all eternity, and shall be wholly resigned to whatever that may transpire.

At one time this Head was raised on a spear; and at another time it was delivered to the hands of Shmr. I was cast into the Fire at one time, and suspended in the air at another time. And this is that which the infidels have wrought against Us.

And thus, O Maryam, We named this Tablet with wondrous wailings and showers of tears; and dispatched it towards thee; that thou mayest bewail with ease and share with the Ancient Beauty in His anguish.

Furthermore, since Jinab-i-Baba was in our presence in the first year, he is aware of certain matters. God willing, the Holy Spirit will inspire his tongue to speak of the undoubted truth, and cleanse the world with a dewdrop from the story of the Youth.

#### **Tablet for Maryam on Sorrow and Love: Provisional Translation**

O Maryam, The Spirit of life ascended to the domain of placelessness; the Cage of Being was bereft of its Ever-blessed Cageling; the Bird of eternity took its flight to the wilds of evanescence; and the Divine Nightingale let out its cry on the Celestial Tree. The Tabernacle of Glory was rent asunder; and the Phoenix of Grandeur winged its way from the boughs of delight.

Spheres, lofty and transcendent, descended on the darksome dust; and ailing hearts let out clamours of affliction. Wholesome waters were turned into blood, and with blood was tinged the Courtyard of the All-highest Paradise. Yea, the gleaming hearts of the friends are alone befitting of the darts of His decree, and the throats of those that love Him are alone yearning for the mesh of limitless anguish.

Wherever a spear flies, it strikes the breasts of the friends; and wherever sorrow is dispelled, it descends on the hearts of the companions.

Wells of tears are the eyes of the lovers, whilst charming indifference is the response of the objects of their desires. Shouldst the lover cry out with pain hundreds of times over, the beloved shall only add to the anguish of the lover. Shouldst thou desire to drink of the Cup of Reunion, thou must submit to evanescence; and if thou wishest to partake of the Wine of His beauty, thou must enter the valley of privation.

O Maryam, taste thou joy in sorrow and drink thou anguish from the cup of gladness. Shouldst thou desire to advance into the wilderness of search, endure patiently and do not tear away at thy face. Shed thou not tears from thine eyes and be not of the anxious ones. Put on the robe of submission and quaff from the wine of acquiescence; and sell the entire world for a mere derham<sup>31</sup>. Give thy heart to God's irrevocable decree and submit to that which hath been ordained for thee.

Open thine eyes of discernment and turn away from all else but the Friend, for erelong we shall gather round together at the Court of Eternal Holiness and gain admittance to the Presence of the Lord of Mercy. We shall hear the Harp-Player of Persia sing out in the melodious language of Hijaz, and come together with the Friend. We shall speak of the unspoken, behold the unseen, and give ear to that which is unheard.

We shall bring to dance the Tabernacle of Spirit with the hymns of light and array the sanctuary of the heart with a delightful feast. We shall obtain the Chalice of Beauty from the Cupbearer of Glory and drink from its Matchless Wine in the memory of the Countenance of the Lord of Majesty.

Dry up thy tears then, sanctify thy soul from sorrow, free thy heart from anguish, and sing out with thy melodious voice:

Should there be swords raining down in the path to the abode of the all Beauteous; Our necks we shall offer on their edges at the behest of the all Glorious!

### **Exalted Letters: Provisional Translation**

Verily, Thou seest, my best Beloved, how trials and tribulations have appeared from the horizon of Thy will. The fury of Thy wrath is pouring in from all sides, and the winds of sorrow have begun to blow. Numerous the lives that were sacrificed in the path of the Friend, and countless the illustrious heads that were hung on gallows. Neither a moment's repose was attained; nor a night's fete possible. The rope of Thy love has firmly fastened the necks of such as have recognized Thee, and the darts of Thy affection have been fired into the breasts of Thy lovers.

Fourteen years have elapsed since tranquillity ceased and the means of comfort were sealed. Not one pleasure did they embrace from the favours of the world; nor a breath did they inhale from the merciful breezes of the spirit. At times, they were afflicted with the degradation of captivity and, at other times, with banishment in the plains of remoteness -- cast out from every home, exiled from every land, and debarred from every comfort.

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What indissoluble bonds were torn apart, and what cords of constancy were rent asunder!

Deprived they remained of every portion of their lot, and empty handed they persisted of their share. Blessings of the lands were turned into pernicious vengeance; the orb of the dayspring of divinity was veiled beneath the twilight of obscurity; the light of omnipotence was held hidden within the lamps of men's hearts; the eternal flame was concealed within the tree of mystery; the everlasting pearl lay sheltered in the invisible shell; and the dawning place of Thy Godhead was enwrapped within the veil of holiness.

How then can the pen move or the tongue recount? O Thou my Lord and my Master, thou knowest of the sufferings inflicted upon this Servant and the afflictions heaped upon this Wronged One. Not for a fleeting moment did I rest in an abode of safety; nor did I secure a refuge at any time. I quenched not My thirst but with the blood of My heart, and received not for sustenance but a token of the lamentations of My soul.

At times, I roamed the cities, captive in the hands of the unbelievers; yet, at other times, I was accompanied by chains and fetters. And in these days, I have, in particular, become a target for the arrows of both parties [Shi'ites and Azalis] and the object of retribution from both sides. Friends glory in My abasement and rejoice in My sorrow; whilst foes have their hearts' fill of ill-will for My existence. Ample is the malice concealed in their breasts and plentiful the animosity hidden in their hearts.

Having left the outward dungeon, I was taken captive in the prison of the ungodly. Shafts of idle fancies are flying from all sides, and swords of rivalry are rushing-in like torrents of rain. Yet in the face of all these trials and adversities and weighty afflictions, may there be no pause in servitude; may the steps not waver from steadfastness, and the eyes take stand in service in place of the feet. At this time when tears are flowing from My cheeks, and crimson blood is pouring out from My heart, I call on Thee to cause My anguished heart to turn away from all things except Thee, and to fix it wholly upon Thyself; so that it may be severed from all else and enter in Thee. For he who holds fast unto Thee will never be put asunder, and he who is accepted by Thee will never be scorned. A king shall he remain even if condemned by mankind; victorious he shall be rendered even if no-one cometh to his aid; and dearly cherished shall he prevail even if he be an outcast. Then shall the flame of oneness be set ablaze; the tabernacle of divine unity shall shine forth from the mirror of singleness; and the pipe of the Persian shall sing out in the Arabic tongue the verse "all things shall perish, except His countenance";<sup>32</sup> inasmuch as the out-stretched arms of those that have recognized Thee are wanting and Thou art securely established upon the exalted court of glory. The longing hearts of those who

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<sup>32</sup> Qur'an 22:88

thirst after Thee are perplexed, and Thou art ever-abiding with absolute sovereignty upon the repository of grandeur.

How then can mortal conception find its way to soar in the vast immensity of Thy firmament; or the mind advance into the realm of sacred evanescence? How can the vain imaginings of men, tarnished with dark and dreary clouds of dust, ever touch the hem of Thy sanctified and holy vesture; or narrow vision ever settle on Thy most luminous Countenance? Thou hast ever been and shall ever remain unfathomable, even though Thou art more manifest than any manifestation. And Thou shall remain veiled for eternity, even though Thine evidence is more evident in every object than the object itself. Thus Thou art unseen in Thy revelation and manifest in Thy concealment. Aye, O my beloved, not every breast is deserving of Thy love; nor is every heart worthy of Thy affection. Thy love is a burning flame and the bodies of men are like unto firewood. How can firewood remain unmoved in near proximity to the flame, unless Thy eternal bounties are sent forth to hoist the banner of peace and to move the Almighty pen across the luminous tablet of the heart with Thy tender affection? Such is Thy ancient grace, for Thou bestowest unto thy servants whatsoever Thou willeth.

I swear by Thy majesty, O my Lord, that these calamities are sweeter than the sweetest nectar, and more desirable than the breath of life; for unless those longing after the Ka'ba of reunion transcend the limits of grandeur, they shall not delight in the joy of the manifestation of Thy beauty. Unless they quaff their fill from the chalice of selflessness, they shall not enter the threshold of immortality. Unless they attire themselves with the garb of poverty in the path of Thy good pleasure, they shall not be blessed with the exalted cloak of riches. Unless they are afflicted with the ailment of fervid love; they shall not discover the abode of healing. Unless they renounce their earthly home, they shall not ascend to the land of divine holiness. Unless they die to the perpetual desert of desire, they shall not attain life eternal. Unless they take refuge in the land of abasement, they shall not find the path to the heaven of exaltation. Unless they taste of the venom of separation, they shall not savour the sweetness of divine presence; and unless they traverse the wilds of remoteness and bereavement, they shall not abide secure in the cities of nearness and reunion.

Although, O my Lord, calamities have surrounded all thy loved ones, two of Thy handmaidens -- one by the name of Havva and the other by the name of Maryam -- have, in this day, been especially afflicted with extreme adversity. This great calamity was heaped upon them whence Thy handmaidens had no mother to tear away her garment in despair and throw dismal dust upon her head for their anguish. They had no companions to dry up their cheeks from their tears and shield their tresses from gloomy tarnish; nor did they have loving friends to console their sadness and fill

their hearts with gladness. And they had no confidant to offer affection, or to brush their locks and tinge their hands after their loss.

They drank their fill from draughts of blood and took their sustenance from provisions of grief; inasmuch as Thou didst purpose for them that which was willed by Thee, and ordained upon their fate Thine all-compelling behest in whatsoever thou didst desire.

Thus, O my best Beloved, clothe them with the garb of patience and constancy, and with the attire of mercy and forbearance; that their eyes may be illumined by Thy new-found bounties and their hearts may be consoled by Thy boundless blessings. Enter them into the rivers of nearness and cities of reunion; and shelter the homeless within the precincts of Thy mercy and under the pleasant shadows of Thy forgiveness and grace. Comfort these bewildered ones in Thy sacred assemblages and give these thirsty ones a taste of the unseen streams of Thy life-giving waters and the preserved wine that is life indeed. Let the breezes of the city of Thy love waft over them, and cause them to enter the everlasting lands of Thy affection; so that they may stray far from all else and draw nigh unto Thee, and busy themselves in the glorification of Thy name and take pleasure in remembrance of Thee. Plant the tree of Thy affection in the luminous fields of their hearts and nurture it with the waters of Thy love, so that its branches may grow, develop, and bear fruit; and so that they may remain steadfast in Thy love, walk upon the land of Thy good pleasure, lay in the cradle of Thy divine presence, traverse the plains of Thy reunion; soar in the firmament of Thy nearness; renounce the tokens of worldly limitations and be ennobled by entering Thy gatherings of divine singleness; and inhale the breezes of unity in the realm of detachment. Thus they may close their eyes to all and open them to Thee, flee from aught else and seek Thy presence.

Then bestow upon them and upon Thy newly-arrived guest, O my Lord, all that hath been described herein and all that hath been set aside, and everything that belongeth neither to the former nor to the latter.

The day is soon approaching when Thou shall grant that which is implored of Thee, for such are Thy all-embracing favours that have encompassed all Thy creatures, O my God.

### **Ziyárat-Námih-i-Maryam: Provisional Translation**

This Tablet was revealed for one who was named Maryam. Verily she was ablaze with the fire of the love of her Lord, before its flames approached her. And We concealed her station during her life time. Upon her ascension to the realm on High, God unveiled her and revealed her to His servants. Should one desire to pay homage to the Great “Ta” [Tahirih], who was martyred in the years passed, he may do so with this Tablet of visitation.

In the name of God, the Exalted, the Most High

O Supreme Pen, joyfulness did not take hold of Thee in the days of Thy Lord, the Exalted, the Most High, whereupon Thou didst sing with the melodies of Bahá upon the twigs of the divine Lote-tree; yet there descended upon thee a great calamity that hath caused the lamentation of those between heaven and earth. Speak out therefore of that which befell Thee from the rulings of His decree, that the tears of all in the oceans of names may begin to flow for a calamity that hath caused the trembling of heaven, the quaking of the earth and the agitation of the inmost essence of being; and hath brought tears to the Eye of Grandeur on the Throne of His Mercifulness.

And say: May the first outpourings of the showers of bounty that descended from the clouds of the Will of God -- the Most Exalted, the All-Glorious -- and the first glimmerings of light that dawned from the Horizon of Eternity; and the first salutation that was revealed from the Tongue of Grandeur in the Kingdom of His irrevocable decree rest upon thee O thou great sign, exalted word, luminous pearl and countenance of unity [*tal'at-i-ahadiyyih*] in the dominion of His decree.

How can I make mention of thy afflictions, O thou Crimson Leaf! I swear by God that through thy fall from the Tree of the Cause, the leaves of the divine Lote Tree fell; the twigs of the tree of eternity were severed; the branches of the Tree of Blessedness were seared; the hearts of His loved ones were sorely afflicted; the faces of the chosen ones of God were bereft of colour; and the hearts of the godly were torn apart in the highest paradise. Gabriel [*Ruhu'l-Amin* – the Faithful Spirit] wailed in the Court of Grandeur, and the inhabitants of earth and heaven cried out:

O thou who were an adorning sign of guidance on the faces of women and a light unto the brow of piety. Through thee, the veils of superstition were rent asunder from the eyes of women, and their beings were adorned with the remembrance of the Lord of earth and heaven.

Thou art she who – upon hearing the call of God – hesitated not, even for a moment, but hastened towards Him detached from all else save Him. Thou didst embrace Him and His great signs and recognised the Manifestation of the Self of God in His days, while all that were in heaven or on earth were terror stricken except for those who were aided by the hand of the Will of God and saved from the abyss of self and desire. Thou wert a stranger in thine own land and a prisoner in thine own home; one who was far from the Presence of Holiness even in her eagerness to be near and forbidden to attain His presence even in her fervid desire to behold Him.

Thou wert moved by the winds of the will of thy Lord, the All-Merciful, in such way as was desired and willed by Him. There was no movement or

rest for thee save by His command and permission! Blessed art thou for annihilating thine own will in the Will of thy Lord, and thy desire in His Decree.

Thou art she whom the whisperings of the stirrers of sedition failed to keep back from the Day-star of the world; and the opposition of the promoters of sedition deterred not from the Lord of the Day of Reunion.

Verily, thou didst remain firm in the Covenant on a day in which the eyes of men were stunned with bewilderment and the sinners fled from the presence of the Manifestation of the Self of God, the Unconstrained -- except for a few amongst the righteous.

Ah, ah, for thy calamity, the Pen ceased in its flow and breezes of sadness wafted over the inhabitants of paradise. The foundations of His all-encompassing Word were torn asunder and its members appeared as isolated letters at the beginning of the surihs of the book [Qur'an], through which understanding accepted the decree of limitation in the world of God's command, and the Essence of Being was dressed in the form of the Temple in the kingdom of God's irrevocable decree.

By God, O eternal leaf, perplexing indeed it is for Me to witness the world and not behold thee; and to hear the voice of the heavenly dove and hear not thy sweet melodies in praise of thy Lord, the Exalted, the All-Glorious. As God is my witness, by thy afflictions all who have come into being in the kingdom of creation were stricken with sorrow, and all in the kingdom of names robed themselves with black garments. How I recall, O beloved of Bahá, the days in which thou wert engaged in singing the praises of the All-Merciful with thy sweet melodies upon the boughs and branches; within which was raised the voice of the Tree of Utterance, the cooing of the dove of understanding, the melodies of the waters of life, the whisperings of heavenly breezes and the song of the bird of heaven!

Thou art she with whose song of praise all created things arose in glorification of the All-Loving God. And after thee, the dove crept away in silence, the winds remained still, the lights of salvation were extinguished, and the waters of prosperity stood frozen.

Blind be the eye that beholdeth not in thy face the beauty of the Countenance of the Lord, and shedeth not tears of anguish for the sorrows that befell thee; and mute be the tongue that doth not make mention of thy name in the world of being.

Hail unto the days, during which thou wert rustling upon the tree singing verses of the unity of God; thereby was attracted the heart of every submissive woman who desired to turn to her Lord with a countenance

joyful and radiant. How sad were the days, in which thy face was veiled and thy revelation was hidden, and nearness to thee was not possible.

Ah, ah, O leaf of singleness, O primal word, O imperishable essence, O divine fruit, O effulgent beauty, O celestial sign and heavenly soul! By the calamities that were heaped upon thee, the oceans were banned from surging forth their waves, the trees from bearing fruit, verses from being revealed, words from carrying meaning, the sky from its ornaments, the earth from its vegetation, the water from running forth, and the wind from blowing. And were I to describe thy tribulations, the world of being would turn to utter nothingness, and the shrill voice of the Pen of the Ancient of Days would raise its cries.

I know not which of thy calamities I should make mention of before the Concourse on High: those that were heaped upon thee by thy friends or those that came from the enemies of God. Thou art she who suffered in the path of thy Lord what no other faithful woman could bear to suffer; through which came to flow the tears of maidens in the celestial chambers, the huris of heaven fell upon the dust in prostration, and heavenly countenances shorn their heads of the tresses.

O Crimson Leaf, through thy calamities, the face of Revelation was changed, joy was overturned, the foundations of the frequented fane were shaken, and the outspread roll was rolled up. Then alas, alas, by the calamities that befell thee all created things both visible and invisible accepted death and the Primal Will donned the robe of names and attributes.

When thy tribulations were poured into the most Great River, which was sanctified of all colour, it divided into four rivers and acquired various shades and earthly limitations. And as they [the calamities] were released onto the primal pillar of the word of piety, the letter of affirmation delayed in its sorrow, while the letter of negation raced ahead, from which appeared what set the heart and soul of Bahá afire. And no sooner were [thy calamities] recited unto the Primal Point than it let out a cry and was seized with perplexity and agitation, thereupon letters were revealed and appeared over the pages.

When the Point of Knowledge heard of thy calamities, it began to wail and cry and became scattered and disconnected, from which there appeared diverse sciences and various exponents, through which the learned manifested pride towards God on a Day whereon all created things bore witness to the truth that the dominion belongs to God, the Almighty, the All-Compelling.

By God, on account of that which was heaped upon thee by thine enemies, His mercy was well-nigh overtaken by His Justice, and His bounties -- which have transcended all created things -- by His wrath!

Ah, ah, O word of Baha, and martyr in the path of Baha, how many a night didst thou shed tears on thy pillow in thy eagerness for nearness to Bahá; and how many a day wert thou consumed with the fire of desire for reunion with Bahá and fixed thy gaze on the Countenance of Glory, in which naught else could be beheld but God, the exalted, the Most High, and desired naught from its Countenance save the Countenance of thy Lord! To this bear witness the inhabitants of the Concourse on High; nay those of the realm of Eternity. Blind be the eye that beholds not in thee the sign of His oneness and the manifestations of His singleness, O thou who hast been mentioned by the tongue of Bahá. As God is my witness, the station of womanhood is abashed to be bestowed thee, O thou who art the pride of all men.

Blessed art thou O manifestation of beauty. Blessed art thou indeed, for God hath – from time immemorial -- sanctified thee from the idle fancies of the people of perdition, and protected thee from wavering. Verily, He is the Best-Beloved, the All-Glorious, and onto Him shall return the realms of the beginning and of the end.

I bear witness that thou wert a leaf that was moved only by the breezes of the Will of God; and that the vain imaginings of the people of sedition -- who broke the Covenant of God and turned against Him who is the Lord of the Day of Judgement -- did not take hold of thee.

Blessed is the woman who attained thy companionship and hearkened to thy praise, and held fast unto the robe of thy love, and drew nigh unto thee and unto the Lord thy Maker and Creator. Verily, he who did not recognise thy love -- wholly for the sake of God -- remained deprived of the special favours which God had purposed solely for thee. Paradise is for him, who hath turned unto thee, shed tears for thee, and visited thee after thy death. O thou who art hidden within the layers of the earth, verily thy corpse is a trust of God, the All-Bountiful, latent beneath the earth while thy soul hath ascended to the All-Glorious Horizon and the realm of the Most High.

O God I beseech thee to confer Thy bounties upon whomsoever gazeth with affection upon her, and to turn away from whomsoever ariseth against her. Aid thou whomsoever cometh to her aid; and ordain for whomsoever cometh to visit her the good of this world and of the next and all that hath been decreed for those of thy creatures who are near unto Thee and those of Thy servants who are wholly devoted to Thee. Verily Thou art the King of Kings and One whose mercy is bestowed upon the down-trodden. In Thy grasp are the kingdoms of earth and heaven. Thou doest as Thou wilt. None other God is there but Thee, the Lord of the Throne on High and of the earth below; the Lord of this world and of the next.

Holy and sanctified art Thou, O my God. I entreat Thee by the Manifestation of Thine Own Self -- the Exalted, the Most High -- and the revelation of Thy wondrous signs; and by Thy manifold evidences which have encompassed heaven and earth, and by this grave which Thou hast designated as the home of Thy love and the resting place of a leaf from the leaves of Thy Tree of Revelation, not to turn me away from Thy Gate and not to deprive me of that which hath been decreed for Thy chosen ones.

O God, I beg of Thee by Thy Name, and by her name, and by the revealers of Thy Names not to leave me to myself and not to number me amongst those that have turned aside from Thee and repudiated Thee on the Day Thou didst seat Thyself upon the Throne of Thy Mercy and revealedst Thyself with all Thine attributes unto all created things.

Give me to drink then O my God from the soft-flowing waters of Thy knowledge and the heavenly rivers of Thy loving kindness, so that I may become independent of all things except Thee and turn towards the Sanctuary of Thy divine presence and nearness. Thine is the authority to do as Thou pleasest. There is none other God but Thee, the Most Exalted, the Almighty, the Most Bountiful.

O God, I beg of thee by the fire which was set aflame in the heart of this handmaiden -- who was stirred by the breezes of Thy Will and gave utterance to Thy praise -- to set ablaze the hearts of Thy servants by the fire of Thy love; that they may sever themselves from those who are numbered amongst the infidels and may turn towards Thy Countenance.

Send down then O God upon me and upon those of Thy servants who are detached from all things and are Thy steadfast friends, the good of this world and of the next.

Forgive us then and forgive our fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and our dear ones; and forgive those who have believed in Thee and in Thy signs, have testified to Thy Oneness, have acknowledged Thy Unity, have obeyed Thy behest and have spoken out in Thy praise.

Verily Thou art Him who hast been from everlasting and wilt ever be the Supreme Ruler. No name shall ever hinder Thee from another name and no attribute from another attribute. All names serve Thine own Self, circle around Thy Holy Threshold, are submissive to Thy Sovereignty, are lowly before the revelation of the evidences of Thy Might, and humble before the glimmerings of the light of Thy Countenance.

Verily Thou hast forever been and wilt forever be sanctified from Thy creation and Thy servants. And to this beareth witness my soul, and every atom of my being and that of all who are between heaven and earth. There



is none other God but Thee, the Almighty, the Most-High, the Most-Exalted,  
the All-Bountiful.

## Memories of My Life

Translation of Mírzá Habíbu'lláh Afnán's Khátirát-i-Hayát<sup>1</sup>

Ahang Rabbani  
Houston, Independent Scholar

In the name of God, the Most Glorious, the Most Luminous.

Recently, I received a letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran – may God always sustain its pillars. It urged me to write an autobiography detailing what I have witnessed in life and to present it to that sanctified Assembly.

What I have written below is a brief sketch of the 74 years of the Bahá'í life of this ephemeral servant, Habíbu'lláh Afnán-i-A'lá'í. My purpose is to offer, from memory or notes I have kept, a summary of my recollections and of what I have heard or seen. This particularly relates to the period during which I was reared through the loving-kindness of the illustrious wife of the Báb and her sister [Zahrá Bagum], and the hallowed time that I spent in the presence of the Blessed Perfection and the Center of His Covenant.

God willing, I will endeavor to offer a short history of the Blessed House of the Báb – the site of pilgrimage for all the denizens of the Supreme Ark.

### Childhood and Early Life in Shiraz

My name is Habíbu'lláh<sup>2</sup> and I am the fourth child of Áqá Mírzá Áqá, who was honored by Bahá'u'lláh with the title Núrí'd-Dín [the Light of Religion]. I was born on 1 Muharram 1292 A.H. [7 February 1875], in the

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<sup>1</sup> Additional sources used in translation of this work include Abadi'i, Mírzá Qābil; *Tarikh-i-Abadih va Tavabi'*; MS, n.d. Manuscript in private hands. Hamadani, Mírzá Husain. *The Tārīkh-i-Jadīd, or New History of Mírzá 'Alī Muhammad the Báb*. Translated by Edward Granville Browne. Cambridge: The University Press, 1893. *Iran National Bahá'í Manuscript Collection* [INBMC]. 103 vols. Tehran: Mu'assasih-'i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, [1970s]. Note: This is a limited set of Xeroxed manuscripts produced from copies in the Archives of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran. Ishráq Khavari, 'Abd al-Hamid, ed. *Má'idih-'i Ásmāni*. 9 vols. Tehran: Mu'assasih-'i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, 128-129 B.E. [1971-1973]. Nicolas, A.L.M.; *Seyyed Ali Mohammad dit le Báb*. Paris, 1905. Táhirzádeh, Habíb. "Dr. Youness Afrukhtih." *Bahá'í World* (Wilmette) vol. 12, 1950-1954 (1956), pp. 679-681

<sup>2</sup> His given name was Muhammad-'Alí. Bahá'u'lláh addressed him in Shiraz by this name in one of His Tablets; Bahá'u'lláh. *Majmu'ih Athar-i Qalim-A'la*. Vol. 51. *Iran National Bahá'í Manuscript Collection*. Tehran: Mu'assasih-'i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, [c 1977] 353-4, no. 362. INBMC 51: While on pilgrimage, as a sign of respect, Núrí'd-Dín asked Bahá'u'lláh to give his young son a different name, so that he would not be a namesake of Bahá'u'lláh's son, Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí (1853-1937). Granting his wish, Bahá'u'lláh named the young pilgrim, Habíbu'lláh [Beloved of God]. From then on, he was known by this name and it was used in all subsequent Tablets by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

city of Shíráz, and raised by the loving and compassionate hands of the wife of the Báb<sup>3</sup>.

I was no more than four years old when Shiraz was plunged into turmoil as a result of the martyrdom of the illustrious [Áqá Mírzá Muhammad-Husayn], the Mahbúbu'sh-Shuhadá [the Beloved of Martyrs], and [Áqá Mírzá Muhammad-Hasan], the Sultánu'sh-Shuhadá [the King of Martyrs], in Isfahán.<sup>4</sup>

At that time, the Qajar prince Farhád Mírzá, the Mu'tami'd-Dawlih, was the governor-general<sup>5</sup> of Fárs, and he was especially antagonistic towards the Cause. There was great commotion in Shiraz. The merchants in the bazaar and custom offices, as well as the shopkeepers and traders, spoke constantly of the events in Isfahán. The elders of the Bahá'í community were particularly concerned since, only a short time earlier, three believers in Shiraz had been martyred by the enemies. A number of friends gathered and consulted about the difficult situation. They concluded that, among the believers, my father, Áqá Mírzá Áqá, was the most renowned as a Bahá'í. Therefore, if the foes plotted to commit injustices against the community, they would certainly be directed against him. They said, "From the very beginning, because of his devotion to the Faith, Áqá Mírzá Áqá has allowed everyone to learn of his attachment to this Cause. Should trouble now be directed against him, others would suffer as well." Each one of them spoke in a similar manner, until they unanimously resolved that it was best for my father not to remain in Shiraz, but to leave immediately for Búshihr and head to Bombay [India].

Afterwards, the entire consultative body<sup>6</sup> came to our house and informed my father of its decision. They noted that, in light of the turmoil in Shiraz and all the talk among the people, it would be wise for him to depart immediately for Búshihr.

Within 24 hours, my father left for Bombay. He entrusted our mother and sister, and us five brothers, to the joint care of Hájí Mírzá Abdu'l-Qasim-i-

<sup>3</sup> See Balyuzi, Hasan M. *Khadíjih Bagum, Wife of the Báb*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1981. for a biography.

<sup>4</sup> The martyrdom of these two brothers took place on 17 March 1879. For details see: Ishráq Khávarí, 'Abd al-Hamíd. *Núrayn-i-Nayyirayn*. Tehran: Mu'assasih-'i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, 123 B.E. [1966].; Nur, 'Izzatu'llah. *Khatirat-i Muhajiri az Isfahan dar Zaman-i shahadat-i Sultan ash-Shuhada'va Mahbub ash Shuhada'*. Tehran: Mu'assasih-'i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, 128 B.E. [1972].; Mázandarání, Fadil Mírza Asadullah. *Tarikh-i Zuhur al-Haqq (History of the Manifestation of Truth)*. Vols.1-9. Digital facsimile. East Lansing, Mich.: H-Bahai, 1998-1999., vol. 5, pp. 242-8 ; and in English, Balyuzi, Hasan M. *Eminent Bahá'is in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh: With Some Historical Background*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1985, pp. 33-51.

<sup>5</sup> The term governor-general will be used throughout to refer to civil ruler at the provincial level.

<sup>6</sup> On the election of the first Spiritual Assembly of Shiraz in 1908, see *In the Land of Refuge*, (forthcoming), chapter 16. Before this Assembly was formed, as bidden by Bahá'u'lláh, the community benefited from an unstructured consultative body, where the elders and prominent believers discussed local affairs and advised the friends. For example, see Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to Núri'd-Dín dated 4 Rabí'u'l-Avval 1301 A.H. [2 January 1884] in *Núri'd-Dín Collection of Tablets*, p. 70, in which each locality was asked to form a consultative body to assist the believers.

Afnán, the older brother of Khadíjih Bagum, and our paternal grandmother [Zahrá Bagum], a sister of the aforementioned Hájí.

### Khadíjih Bagum

The wife of the Báb was a maternal aunt to my father and a paternal aunt to my mother [Maryam-Sultan Bagum]. As such, she was intimately concerned with our upbringing. She tried her utmost to ensure that, from the earliest age, we would flourish under the canopy of God's Cause. This was the greatest blessing of our lives. Whatever spiritual perspicacity I may possess, the faith that I consider to be the source of my salvation, the blessing of beholding the Countenance of God [Bahá'u'lláh], and all the other blessings of this life that have unfailingly been the lot of this lowly servant are all due entirely to the favors and care of the esteemed wife of the Báb. That link to the Most Great Infallibility [the Báb] remained faithful to the Covenant of God until her final breath. I beseech her to intercede on behalf of this servant for the confirmations of the Concourse on High.

At the age of seven [circa 1882], I was sent to the traditional elementary school in Masjid-i-Naw<sup>7</sup>, Shiraz, along with my older brother, the late Hájí Mírzá Buzurg-i-Afnán. There, we were taught by the respected Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Sádiq, who was a great admirer of the Báb and ranked among the most esteemed of the city's recognized citizens.

During this time, the wife of the Báb became severely depressed due to her disappointment over not being able to visit Bahá'u'lláh. Shortly after, as a result of contracting dysentery, she passed on to the Abha Kingdom, thus depriving us of her infinite loving-kindness and unsurpassed spiritual qualities. After the ritual washing [of her body] at the Hammam-i-Khayri (otherwise known as Guldastih), her earthly remains were interred in a sacred shrine.

Addressing my late father, Áqá Mírzá Áqá, Bahá'u'lláh revealed a special Tablet of Visitation in the ever-brilliant memory of Khadíjih Bagum, which extols her exalted station and bestows the grace of God upon her. ...<sup>8</sup> From these exalted Words [of Bahá'u'lláh], her brilliant station is most evident.

<sup>7</sup> A prominent mosque constructed during the rule of Ibn-i-Zangi of the Atabakan dynasty. This classroom is located on the eastern corner of the mosque.

<sup>8</sup> At this point, Mírzá Habib quotes portions of this Tablet of Visitation. However, the Bahá'í World Centre has indicated that they will publish a translation of this Tablet in due course. Bahá'u'lláh. "Lawh-i-Ziyarat-i Khadíjih Bagum." (Tablet of visitation for Khadíjih Bagum) In *Khándán-i-Afnán sadra-yi Rahmán*, by Muhammad-'Alí Fayzí. Tehran: Mu'assasih-'i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, 127 B.E. [1971], pp. 184-6. Bahá'u'lláh. "[Tablet of Visitation for the Wife of the Báb, Khadíjih Begum.](#)" *Translations of Shaykhi, Bábi and Bahá'í Texts*, Ahang Rabbani, (East Lansing, Mich.) no.9 (Oct. 1997.)

### The Báb at the Masjid-i-Vakíl

Several years after Khadíjih Bagum's passing, when I was 13 years old and still studying under the tutelage of the late Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Sadiq-i-Mu'allim, the honored `Andalíb<sup>9</sup> arrived in Shiraz from Yazd. I remember well how that `Andalíb would set out for his afternoon walk around [my school at] Masjid-i-Naw. Because he was a poet, calligrapher and accomplished gilder, and had become renowned throughout Shiraz, our teacher invited him to our class one day. As was customary at the time, upon arrival, he sat next to the Hájí on the floor. Because of our close kinship to the Báb, our teacher treated my brother and I with the utmost consideration throughout our school years, and he used to seat us near him in the front row of the class. As a result, we could hear clearly everything that was said. On that day, I was particularly attentive to what passed between the honored `Andalíb and my late teacher.

Our teacher lit the waterpipe and offered it to `Andalíb, and the conversation between the two of them began. For a while, they spoke of various topics. At first, their discussion revolved around the art of poetry and the late Mu'allim, [as a sign of respect], insisted that `Andalíb should teach the science of prosody and rhyme to his son Mírzá Muhammad, who was talented in calligraphy and occasionally composed verses as well. `Andalíb showed humility, however, and eventually directed the conversation to teaching the Faith. On that day, I realized that our teacher had a particular fondness for the Báb and referred to Him reverently as the Jináb-i-Mírzá [the honored Mírzá].

Our teacher then related the story of the day when the Báb arrived at the Masjid-i-Vakíl. He stated:<sup>10</sup>

I was about 25 years of age or perhaps a bit older, already engaged in my occupation as a teacher in this same school, and had heard something about the call of the Jináb-i-Mírzá. I was uncertain as to the truth of the matter though. The learned `ulamá, especially Shaykh Abú'l-Qásim, the brother of the Imam-Jum`ih<sup>11</sup>, and Shaykh Husayn-i-Zalim [the tyrant], were terrorizing and tormenting [the seekers]. In the streets, bazaar and mosques, they would sully people's minds about Him at every opportunity by saying, "As this

<sup>9</sup> `Andalib [Nightingale] (d. 1920) was the sobriquet of Mírzá `Alí-Ashraf of Lahijan in the Caspian province of Gilan. `Andalib was a poet of superb accomplishment and an eloquent teacher. A collection of his poems, filling over 760 pages, was published in 1969 `Andalíb, `Alí Ashraf Láhijání, Mírzá. *Díván-i-`Andalíb*. [Tehran]: Mu'assasih-i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, [1969]. For a biography, see Sulaymání, `Azizu'lláh. *Masábih-i-Hidáyat*. 9 vols. Tehran: Mu'assisih Milli-yi Matbu'át Amri, 124-32 B.E. [1967-1975], vol 7.

<sup>10</sup> See Nabíl-i-A`zam (Mullá Muhammad-i-Zarandí). *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*. Translated and edited by Shoghi Effendi Rabbani. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970, 1974., pp. 153-4, for a brief reference to this incident.

<sup>11</sup> Shaykh Abu-Turab, a son of Shaykh Mufid, was a great admirer of the Báb and belonged to the same learned, extended family as Siyyid Yahya Vahid-i-Darabi; see Rabbani, Ahang. "The Family of Vahid Darabi." *Research Notes in Shaykhi, Babi and Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1 (April 2004).

claim is fundamentally a source of the destruction of Islam, it must be eradicated.” They even conspired to slay the Jináb-i-Mírzá in Shiraz. However, as Shaykh Abu-Turab, the Imam-Jum`ih, did not agree with their plans, they schemed to invite the Jináb-i-Mírzá to the Masjid-i-Vakíl<sup>12</sup> so that, upon seeing a large multitude and the circle of the `ulamá, He might become frightened and renounce His claim. Eventually, they conspired with Husayn Khán, the Nizamu’d-Dawlih, the governor-general of Fárs, to realize their plan. It was a Thursday when the public crier announced [throughout the city] a call for all the citizens to gather the following day, three hours before sunset, at the Masjid-i-Vakíl to witness the Siyyid-i-Báb renounce His false claims.

From the morning of that day, the entire courtyard, the cloisters, the roofs and even the minarets of the mosque were thronged with onlookers. There was no one who had not come to see and hear the Jináb-i-Mírzá. I, too, went to the mosque at about an hour past noon and, with great difficulty, reached a spot near the pulpit, designated for the government officials and the `ulamá. I was keen to meet Him and hear His words. There was a great deal of noise because people were busy talking about the Person and claim of the Siyyid-i-Báb. The `ulamá entered the mosque and the officials and dignitaries were present also [sitting in the cloisters, near the stone pulpit<sup>13</sup>].

Three hours before sunset, a great commotion occurred near the entrance of the mosque and we heard, “He is coming!” At once, all tumult in the mosque subsided and there was absolute silence. Not a whisper could be heard from anyone. I witnessed `Abdu’l-Hamíd Khán, the Darúghih [the sheriff], enter the mosque, followed by five farrashes [attendants], then the Jináb-i-Mírzá, followed by yet another group of five farrashes.

The Jináb-i-Mírzá wore a black turban, a green sash [signifying His holy lineage], and an `abá on His shoulders. His hands extended beyond the sleeve of the `abá. When He approached the spot where the officials and `ulamá were seated, without paying the slightest attention to anyone, He inquired of the governor-general [Husayn Khán], “What is your purpose in summoning Me to this place?” Shaykh Husayn, the Nazimu’sh-Shari`ih, known as Zalim [the tyrant], responded with much vehemence, “The intention is that you should ascend this pulpit and repudiate your false claim!”

I looked very closely at the countenance and appearance of the Jináb-i-Mírzá and noted that the presence of the vast multitude, the

<sup>12</sup> The name derives from the fact that Karim Khán-i-Zand (d. 1779), whose capital was in Shiraz, had built this structure.

<sup>13</sup> This pulpit is carved out of a single piece of marble and has 14 steps.

authority of the officials and the might of the `ulamá did not have the least influence on His dignified bearing. Oblivious to all, He proceeded to the pulpit, ascended the third step and stood there. Shaykh Husayn said to the governor, "Instruct Him to go to the top of the pulpit so everyone will hear Him." Husayn Khán said, "Siyyid, go up so all will see you." His Holiness ascended to the top of the pulpit and began to recite a homily on the divine unity with such eloquent Arabic as I had not heard until that day. It was truly magnificent and wondrous. The concourse of people, high and low, learned and illiterate alike, were in total rapture as they listened attentively and fascinated.

When Shaykh Husayn noticed that His power of utterance had absorbed all there, he said to Husayn Khán, "The Siyyid is casting a spell on the assemblage with His enchanting speech. Instruct Him to say what He intended to say." With great vehemence, Husayn Khán shouted, "Siyyid! Say what you are supposed to say. What is this idle chatter?" The Jináb-i-Mírzá remained silent for some two minutes and then said, "O People! Know this well and be informed. I say unto you what My Forefather, the Messenger of God, spoke twelve hundred and sixty years ago and I do not speak what He did not." He then quoted the following hadíth, "What Muhammad made lawful remains lawful unto the Day of Resurrection and what He forbade remains forbidden unto the Day of Resurrection. Thus said the Immaculate One: 'When the Qá'im appears is, verily, the Day of Resurrection'<sup>14</sup>."

Having recited this Tradition, He then descended the pulpit. Shaykh Husayn, who appreciated the significance and meaning of this proclamation, raised his walking-stick, out of sheer hostility, to strike Him on the head. Mírzá Abú'l-Hasan Khán, the Mushiru'l-Mulk<sup>15</sup>, quickly brought forward his shoulder to ward off the attack, and his shoulder sustained the blow.<sup>16</sup>

After relating this story, our late teacher commented, "I still have not understood the implications of His saying, nor comprehended the reality of His meaning, 'I say the same that My Forefather, the Prophet, has said.'" "That is rather surprising," `Andalíb responded, "as you yourself testify that the Primal Point stated, 'Whatever the Messenger of God spoke, I speak

<sup>14</sup> In numerous places, the Báb identifies the Day of Resurrection with His own Advent; see, for example, *The Persian Bayán* 2:3 The Báb. *Inna al-bayán*. [Tehran?, s.n., 1947]. [*Kitáb-i Bayán-i Fársí*].

<sup>15</sup> He and his father, Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí, the first Mushiru'l-Mulk, were the viziers of Fars, in succession, over a period of 40 years; see Afnán, Mírzá Habíbu'llah. *Tarikh-i Amri-yi Shiraz: History of the Cause in Shiraz*. East Lansing, Mich. H-Bahai, 2000. Translated and Annotated Ahang Rabbani, *In the Land of Refuge: Genesis of the Baha'i Faith in Shiraz*, Series: Witnesses to Bábí and Bahá'í History Vol 1., 2007. One of the daughters of the renowned Bábí martyr, Hujjat (Mulla Muhammad-`Alí Zanjani, 1812-1850), had married Mírzá Abú'l-Hasan Khán; see *In the Land of Refuge*.

<sup>16</sup> With some minor differences, the author reports this event in two manuscripts *Khátirát-i-Hayát* and *Tárikh Amrí Fárs va Shiraz*; see *In the Land of Refuge*.

also.' Consider that the same sufferings that Muhammad endured were indeed sustained by the Báb, and that the same Call that the Messenger of God raised was also proclaimed by the Báb."

### Leaving Shiraz

In 1307 A.H. [1890], my maternal grandmother, Zahrá Bagum, the sister of the Báb's wife, passed away. Only a few months later, Bahá'u'lláh instructed our family to proceed to the Holy Land. My father wrote to us [saying] that our oldest brother, Mírzá Jalál, was to remain in Shiraz to protect, and serve at, the august House of the Báb. The rest of the family was to join him in Port Said, where he was engaged in commerce [and from there, to proceed to `Akká]. As a result, Mírzá Jalál married and established himself in a residence next to the sacred House of the Báb.

At the beginning of the month of Safar 1308 A.H.<sup>17</sup>, we left Shiraz with a caravan, traveling on horses and mules. Our group consisted of the following: my mother, Maryam-Sultan Bagum; the mother of Áqá Mírzá Hadiy-i-Afnán [Zivar Sultan Khánun]; my brothers, Áqá Mírzá Buzurg and Áqá Mírzá Diya'u'llah; my sister, Tuba Khánun; myself; and an attendant named Áqá Muhammad `Alí, who was a Bahá'í from Káshán. At that time, I was 16 years old.

Experiencing great hardship, we traveled the near-impassible and difficult roads and arrived in Búshihr. The weather was oppressively hot and we all fell ill. My sister was seriously ill and her condition was worse than the rest. We languished like this for over 30 days, until a ship arrived from London destined for Port Said. During our time in Búshihr, we stayed at the house of one of our relatives, the late Hájí Mírzá `Abdu'llah-Khán, the uncle of the Múvaqqaru'd-Dawlih. He was the Governor of Búshihr and the southern ports, and the representative of the British government for commerce and political affairs. He had been instrumental in freeing Muhammad Khán-i-Balúch from trouble in Shiraz.<sup>18</sup>

After we left Búshihr and were on the high seas, difficulties intensified and we were assailed from every direction by tremendous hardship, distress and suffering. At one time, near the port of Masqat, we faced severe storms that lasted about ten hours and our ship had to weather the huge waves of an angry sea. That incident was not quite over and we had not had any rest, when a hole developed in the side of our ship, which nearly caused her to sink. And then, for the third time, the ship's engine caught fire. But eventually, through the infinite grace and bounty of the Ancient Beauty, we reached Port Said unscathed and our ship anchored.

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<sup>17</sup> Circa 16 September 1890

<sup>18</sup> See *In the Land of Refuge*.



When we disembarked, we did not know where to go or what to do, so we stood perplexed in a corner and occupied ourselves in conversation. Then my older brother, the late Áqá Siyyid Áqáy-i-Afnán, who was fluent in English and Arabic, arrived and greeted us warmly. After several years of separation, we were seeing each other again. He took us to his home and, on the way, we saw our father, who was on his way to welcome us. Tenderly, he embraced each one of us and showered us with his love and affection. At long last, the grace of God had surrounded us and the hardship of the journey was over.

### First Pilgrimage: In the Presence of Bahá'u'lláh

We stayed in Port Said for seven months, until my late father wrote to Bahá'u'lláh seeking permission for us to attain His presence. Permission was granted.

### Arrival at Haifa

We left Port Said on 7 Dhi'l-Hajjih 1308 A.H. [14 July 1891], spent the next day aboard the ship and, that evening, arrived at the port of Haifa. At dawn on 9 Dhi'l-Hajjih, the ship anchored at the port of Haifa, and, with intense eagerness and anticipation, we got ready to disembark. [The prospect of fulfilling] our life-long desire to place our brow at His Most Holy Threshold and gaze on the Countenance of the Beloved of the world overjoyed us. The thought of being able to kiss the ground He walked on - an act that was the highest aspiration of the bygone Prophets and saints - caused our beings to tremble with extreme delight. With great humility, we called to mind that we were about to set foot on a land that the spirit of the Holy Ones, Prophets of old, and Manifestations of past ages circumambulated in adoration. Tears of joy flowed uncontrollably from our eyes. My brother [Áqá Siyyid Áqá], who, along with our father, had attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh<sup>19</sup> before, was constantly counseling us about how we should behave in the presence of the Blessed Perfection. He emphasized that, at His Threshold, we must be the essence of submissiveness and reverence.<sup>20</sup>

Eventually, the first believer to welcome us came on the boat. It was the late honored Manshádí<sup>21</sup>. In accordance with the Blessed Beauty's instructions, he arranged for our landing, guided us through customs and, from there, led us to the tent of Bahá'u'lláh, which was pitched at the foot of Mount

<sup>19</sup> In the eleventh leaf of *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih*, Bahá'u'lláh announces the arrival of the Núrí'd-Dín and his son, "Recently the Afnáns and Amin – upon them be My glory and loving kindness – attained Our presence and beheld Our countenance." Bahá'u'lláh. "Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih (Words of Paradise)." In *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice and translated by Habíb Taherzadeh, with the assistance of a committee at the Bahá'í World Centre. 1st pocket-sized ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988, p. 73

<sup>20</sup> Portions of Mirzá Habíb's recollections of Bahá'u'lláh have previously appeared in Balyuzi, Hasan M. *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1980. chapter 41.

<sup>21</sup> During the time of Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá, Siyyid Taqiy-i-Manshadi lived in Haifa where he served in many capacities.

Carmel. For this unique visit and as a sign of respect, a special Arabic custom was prepared for us. But there was no time to change and we went along in our European-style clothing. I well remember that the sun had not quite come up over the crest of the mountains, and the air was particularly fresh and vivifying. [As we waited by His tent], the honored Manshádí was asking about Shiraz and the friends. Suddenly, Mírzá Mustafa, [later] known as Abu Hurayrih<sup>22</sup>, an attendant of Bahá'u'lláh who in later years broke the Covenant<sup>23</sup>, appeared and guided us to His house<sup>24</sup> and to the blessed Presence. Our one ardent wish was realized! He held aside the curtain and we saw the Blessed Beauty standing in the middle of the room. When we saw His sacred Figure and luminous Visage, we became utterly oblivious of all else, as tears poured from our eyes. Overwhelmed, we circumambulated His blessed Person.

Bahá'u'lláh invited us to sit. He sat on the mandar. With the utmost respect, we four brothers sat on the floor on our heels. On our right, Mírzá Áqá Jan was in attendance and the samovar was brewing tea in front of him. Bahá'u'lláh said, "Pour tea for the young Afnáns. They have just come ashore." Then the Tongue of Grandeur spoke these sweet words, "O flowers of the rose-garden of the honored Afnán! You are welcome; you are welcome. Your departure from Shiraz was very difficult and tiring. The divine will and the resoluteness of the honored Afnán brought you to this threshold of holiness. During your sea journey, dangers beset you and God protected you. Consider, this very day several thousand people are treading the ground between Safa and Marwih [on one foot].<sup>25</sup> The Beloved of the world of being is present in this land, but they are oblivious. All are heedless; all are unaware; all are uninformed. You are the true pilgrims." Three times He repeated, "You are the true pilgrims!" At that moment, as I sat enraptured and listening attentively to the utterances of the Desire of the world, these lines of Rúmi<sup>26</sup> came to my mind:

O pilgrims on pilgrimage, where are ye, where are ye?  
the Beloved is here, come hither ye, come hither ye.

The Beloved is your neighbor, wall by wall;  
why in the wilderness lost are ye all?

<sup>22</sup> Named after a fickle follower of Prophet Muhammad. He was the son of Mírzá Mustafay-i-Naraqí (d. 1867), who became a martyr in Tabriz; see Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*, pp. 204-5 and 237-8.

<sup>23</sup> After the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, he became a follower of Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí. He lived towards the end of his life near Tiberias, on a property belonging to Mírzá Majdi'd-Din (d. 1955), a nephew of Bahá'u'lláh.

<sup>24</sup> During Bahá'u'lláh's sojourns in Haifa, houses in the German Templar colony would be rented for Him.

<sup>25</sup> The Festival of Sacrifice ('Id-i-Qurban) occurs on the tenth day of Dhi'l-Hajjih. Part of the rites of pilgrimage includes traversing seven times the distance between two mounds where, according to traditions, Hagar ran back and forth seven times, seeking a spring to quench her son's thirst.

<sup>26</sup> Maulana Jalali'd-Din Rumi (1207-1273) was the most renowned of all mystic poets of Iran. Jalál al-Dín Rúmi. *The Mathnawí of Jalálu'ddín Rūmī*. Edited and translated with commentary by Reynold A. Nicholson. 8 vols. London: Luzac, 1925-1940.

At that very moment, the blessed Countenance turned to this servant and said, "The mystics have also had something to say on this matter." Once again, He ordered more tea for us. After that, we left His presence.

### **With Bahá'u'lláh in Haifa**

The house next to His blessed residence was rented for us. We lived in close proximity to the house of the Abhá Beauty. Attaining His blessed threshold, meeting the believers living in the Holy Land and consorting with the veterans of the Faith had blotted everything else from our minds. The sweetness of living and the spiritual ecstasies that we experienced in those days lie beyond description. The pen is unable, and the words inadequate, to convey those feelings.

Haifa was hot during these days. We were not familiar with, or accustomed to, its climate and had a very difficult time, often falling ill. But the bounties of our beloved Lord were measureless and the sea of His grace and munificence was ever billowing. I remember well one day when we were called to His presence at three o'clock in the afternoon. I had a very bad fever. My brothers dressed and prepared to attain His presence. I also got up [from my bed] to accompany them, when my oldest brother tried to stop me from going. He said, "Perhaps you are not allowed to attain Bahá'u'lláh's presence in such a feverish condition." I replied, "He is aware of my condition." I went into His presence. The Blessed Perfection turned to me and said, "You have a fever," at which I bowed my head. He continued, "Fever is a product of this land. Whoever comes here must suffer from it." Then He ordered tea to be given to us. Immediately I began to perspire so much that my clothes were soaked. Then the Blessed Perfection said, "Go and change your clothes. Fever will not trouble you again." Throughout the remaining nine months we spent in the Holy Land, I did not suffer from fever again.

After 15 days, my brother [Áqá Siyyid Áqá] returned to Port Said and my father came [to Haifa]. My father was the recipient of infinite bounties and kindness from the Blessed Perfection.

During these days in 1308 A.H. [1891], the episode of the seven martyrs of Yazd took place. When the news was brought to Bahá'u'lláh, it caused Him tremendous sorrow and anguish.<sup>27</sup> For nine whole days, verses were not revealed from the heaven of divine knowledge and no one was allowed into His presence.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of this tragic event, which was brought about by Mas'ud ibn Nasiri'd-Din Zillu's-Sultan (1949-1918) and his son, Husain Mirzá, Jalalu'd-Dawlih (1870-1913), in the spring/summer of 1891, see: Bayda, Abú'l-Qásim. *Tarikh-i-Bayda*. Manuscript in private hands. ; Mazandarani, *Tarikh Zuhuru'l-Haqq* vol 5, pp 404-26; Málmíri, Hájí Muhammad Táhir. *Tárikh-i shuhadá-i-Yazd*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Karachi: Mu'assasah-i Matbú'át-i Pákistán,[1979].; and Momen, Moojan. *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1981, pp. 301-5.

On the ninth day, the friends were all summoned, and we had that honor too. The deep grief that surrounded His Blessed Person was indescribable. He spoke extensively about the Qájárs and their misdeeds. Afterwards, He mentioned the events of Yazd. Sternly, the Tongue of Grandeur spoke of the Jalálu'd-Dawlih<sup>28</sup> and Zillu's-Sultan: "Zillu's-Sultan<sup>29</sup> wrote Us a letter in his own handwriting and gave it to Hájí Sayyah<sup>30</sup> to bring. He asked Us to help him, with [the support of] the Bábís, to destroy his Sháh-Bábá<sup>31</sup>. 'If You do this', he wrote, 'I will give You liberty; I will give You official recognition; I will help and support You; I will make amends for the past. Whatever Sháh-Bába did, I will do just the opposite.' The entire letter was full of such statements. The answer We gave him was this: 'Praying for the Sháh is obligatory for both you and Us. Never again write to Us in this vein. Never again put such requests to this Wronged One. We have arisen to improve the morals of a number of people wronged in this world. If We were after leadership, what authority would have been better than holding the position of a minister in Iran?' When he received this answer from Us, he despaired of Us, and is now behaving in this manner. Were We to send his letter to Nasiri'd-Din Sháh, he would skin him alive. But God is the Concealer. He draws veils over the deeds of His servants." Then He said, "Do not be sad; do not be downcast; do not let your hearts bleed. The sacred tree of the Cause of God is watered by the blood of the martyrs. Unless watered, a tree does not grow and bear fruit. Before long, you will see the name of the Qájárs obliterated, and the land of Iran cleansed of the filth of their existence and the odor of their names."

Regarding the Jalálu'd-Dawlih, the Blessed Perfection said, "This ungrateful one has done what has caused the eyes of the denizens of the Supreme Concourse to shed tears of blood." Just 32 years from that day, the rule of the Qájárs came to an end and they were overthrown. After nine days, the first Tablet revealed from the heaven of divine will was the Lawh-i-Dunyá [Tablet of the World]<sup>32</sup>, with which our father was honored. That reference to the oppression of the Jalálu'd-Dawlih can be read in this Tablet: "*The tyrant of the land of Yá (Yazd) committed that which has caused the Concourse on High to shed tears of blood.*"<sup>33</sup> That night, Bahá'u'lláh gave a copy of the Tablet of the World, in the handwriting of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin,

<sup>28</sup> Sultan-Husayn Mírzá, the eldest son of Zillu's-Sultan, was made the deputy governor of Fars at the age of 13. In 1888, he was appointed the governor-general of Yazd and, to amass a personal fortune, killed a large number of people, including seven believers. He was dismissed from the office in 1892, but re-appointed to it in 1903 when, once again, he launched a Bahá'í pogrom in which nearly 100 believers perished. During the Constitutional Revolt of 1905-11, he sided with the revolution and the despotic Muhammad-'Alí Sháh (1872-1925) imprisoned him for a while, ordered him stripped of his estate, and eventually exiled him to Europe. For a biography, see *Sharh-i Hal-i Rijal-i Iran* 2:77-80.

<sup>29</sup> For a biography, see *In the Land of Refuge*.

<sup>30</sup> Hájí Muhammad-'Alí-i-Sayyah-i-Mahallati (1836-1924) was an attendant of Zillu's-Sultan and his autobiography is published under the title, *Khatirat Haji Sayyah*, edited by Hamid Sayyad.

<sup>31</sup> His father, Nasiri'd-Din Sháh (r. 1848-1896), had not selected Zillu's-Sultan as the heir to the throne.

<sup>32</sup> Bahá'u'lláh. "Lawh-i-Dunyá (Tablet of the World)." In *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Pp. 81-97.

<sup>33</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 85.

to my late brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg. He commented, “At the beginning of this Tablet, mention has been made of your father, the Afnán. We therefore bestow it upon you.”

### With Bahá'u'lláh in `Akká

Fifteen days after my father arrived and the days of our attainment were drawing to a close, an epidemic of cholera broke out in Syria and Lebanon. The government set up quarantine around the borders. My father asked for permission to leave, but Bahá'u'lláh did not grant it, remarking: “While the epidemic rages, you are not to leave.” For us, this was the supreme felicity. Autumn came and the air of Haifa and `Akká improved. The Blessed Perfection moved from Haifa to the Mansion of Bahjí. We were provided with a small house next to the blessed Mansion<sup>34</sup>. Our house was situated so that we had a good view of His blessed chambers. When we got up at dawn to say our prayers, most of the time we saw that His chamber was lit and Tablets were being revealed. The Blessed Perfection was pacing the room and the amanuensis was busy writing. I do not remember anyone other than Mírzá Áqá Jan taking down the revealed Words in those days.

During that time, the late Mírzá Yúsuf Khán-i-Vujdání<sup>35</sup> and the late Áqá Siyyid Asadu'llah-i-Qumí<sup>36</sup> were tutoring the Aghsán in the Mansion. The Blessed Perfection instructed my brothers, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, Hájí Mírzá Diyá' and myself to attend their lessons too. The late Mishkin-Qalam taught us calligraphy. Every day, we went to the room on the ground floor of the Mansion set aside as a classroom. There we received our tuition, and we passed our precious days oblivious of all our blessings. Our father constantly admonished us, so that we would never act improperly in the presence of the Blessed Beauty or in the Mansion.

On the first day of Muharram 1309 A.H. [7 August 1891], the Blessed Perfection celebrated the festival [of the anniversary of the birth of the Báb by the lunar calendar]. He called together all the friends, and we attained His presence as well. My father was corpulent and suffered from rheumatism. He could not sit on the floor. The Blessed Perfection said, “Bring a chair for the Afnán,” and one of the attendants provided a chair for him. Bahá'u'lláh then said, “Bring chairs for his sons as well,” and so we were all seated on chairs. The entire company of resident believers and pilgrims were in His presence.

<sup>34</sup> The date of Bahá'u'lláh's first arrival at the Mansion of Bahji is given as September 1879 in *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*, p. 362. However, in a Tablet dated 11 Rabi'u'l-Avval 1298 A.H. [11 February 1881], Bahá'u'lláh tells Núri'd-Dín that it had been only a month since He arrived at the Mansion; see *Núri'd-Dín's Collection*, p. 43.

<sup>35</sup> Previously, a mystic of the `Alí-Allahy order (also known as Ahl-i-Haqq). He was a renowned teacher of the Faith from Kirmanshah.

<sup>36</sup> A trusted believer who served in the Holy Land with distinction during the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá.

On that day, His blessed utterances mainly concerned division and disunity in religion. He stated, "Islam was a good religion, but they destroyed it. Differences arose from the beginning of the Dispensation and, after the ascension of the Prophet, the foundation of Islam was shattered. Division first appeared in the house of the Prophet. When the Messenger of God [Muhammad] was ill and His companions<sup>37</sup> gathered about His deathbed, He asked for a pen and paper to write His Will. 'Umar said, 'He is delirious.' His Holiness 'Alí responded, 'Sickness and fever have no effect on the condition of the Prophets; they are always inspired. Present Him with writing materials and see what guidance He gives.' 'Umar responded, 'The Book of God is sufficient unto us.' Those same words became the cause of division, and the world and Islam have suffered since. The same words 'the Book of God is sufficient unto us' broke the back of the Prophet's daughter. The same words 'the Book of God is sufficient unto us' resulted in the slaying of 'Uthmán. The same words 'the Book of God is sufficient unto us' brought about the Battle of Camels<sup>38</sup>. The same words 'the Book of God is sufficient unto us' split 'Alí's forehead. The same words 'the Book of God is sufficient unto us' precipitated the episode of the land of Taf and the martyrdom of Husayn ibn 'Alí. The same words 'the Book of God is sufficient unto us' sent the House of Immaculacy<sup>39</sup> into slavery and scattered it in all directions. The same words 'the Book of God is sufficient unto us' ultimately assailed the holy breast of the Exalted One [the Báb]. He then raised His hand and stated, 'Our enemies are also in Our sleeve.'"

Afterwards, the Blessed Perfection, Himself, distributed baqlavá [baklava]<sup>40</sup> to the friends present. He said, "This is the day on which Hadrat-i-Mubashshir<sup>41</sup> set foot in this nether world and illumined it with His dazzling brilliance. There is every reason to rejoice." He then dismissed us all. After that, the friends gathered in smaller groups in the surrounding grounds of the Mansion beneath the Spruce and fir trees and, with tremendous excitement, repeated Bahá'u'lláh's words to ensure that they remembered them accurately.

The next day, the second day of Muharram, was the anniversary of the birth of the Lord of Days and the World of Being<sup>42</sup>. In the morning, all the pilgrims, visitors and resident believers were summoned to the presence of the All-Knowing One. Bahá'u'lláh spoke about the sublimity of His advent, the power of the Most Exalted Pen, the circumstances of His exile, and the arrival at the Most Great Prison. Then He spoke extensively about the

<sup>37</sup> The Islamic traditions maintain that four believers were present: Abu Bakr, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, 'Uthman ibn Affan and 'Alí ibn Talib; see Taherzadeh, Adib. *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1992., p. 156.

<sup>38</sup> A watershed battle led by 'Ayyishih, a wife of Muhammad and a daughter of Abu-Bakr, against Imam 'Alí and His companions, marking a division within Islam.

<sup>39</sup> The descendants of Muhammad and 'Alí; implies the Imams and Their families.

<sup>40</sup> A traditional sweetmeat

<sup>41</sup> lit. His Holiness, the Herald (the Báb)

<sup>42</sup> Bahá'u'lláh's birth took place on 2 Muharram 1233 A.H./12 November 1817.

aggression and transgressions of the tyrants and divines. He said, “Nasiri’d-Din Shah and ‘Abdu’l-‘Aziz both transgressed against Us and harmed the body of the Cause of God, but the tyranny of ‘Abdu’l-‘Aziz was by far the more severe, because he banished, without any reason, the Wronged One of the worlds to the Most Great Prison. Nasiri’d-Din Sháh, however, because of the ignorant action of the believers in the early days of the Cause, whenever he strokes his limbs and feels the pellets under his skin<sup>43</sup>, is roused in anger to commit these harsh deeds and adopt tyrannical measures against the friends, spilling the blood of innocent people. Notwithstanding all these injuries inflicted upon them by the Sháh and the government, the friends do not stop practicing their Faith openly and do not observe wisdom. You cannot blame them, because two great festivals have been joined into one<sup>44</sup>, foreshadowing a brilliant future for the Cause of God in all corners of the world.” Then the Blessed Perfection spoke these two verses<sup>45</sup>:

“These times more bitter than venom shall pass,  
And once again, times as sweet as sugar shall come our way.”

When He finished His blessed words, He graced us with sweetmeats and we left His presence.

The glad tidings uttered on that day by the Author of the Cause were realized not long after, when the hand of His believers raised the banner of God’s religion in various corners of the world: the Western countries, the provinces of India, ‘Ishqábád, and many other territories of the globe. In the early years of the ministry of the Center of the Covenant, the first group of American pilgrims, with utmost humility and indescribable gratitude, arrived in the Holy Land and attained the presence of the Appointed Beauty.

I have already mentioned that our house was adjacent to the blessed Mansion. Our practice was to wake at dawn to carry out our devotions, recite Tablets of Visitation and perform our daily obligatory prayers. One morning, before sunrise, an attendant came with the news that the Blessed Perfection was coming to our house. In this way, He placed the crown of everlasting honor upon the heads of these humble servants. The tidings made us weep uncontrollably with joy and we hurried out [to welcome Him]. We saw His blessed Person coming towards our house with great majesty and glory. We all prostrated, kissed His feet and made the earth trodden by His blessed feet the kohl of our eyes. Each one of us in turn was favored with His tender blessings and was given a share of His infinite generosity. He went inside our house and, in doing so, conferred upon us an everlasting honor. I offered Him a cup of tea. The Tongue of Grandeur stated, “Well

<sup>43</sup> See *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 599-600.

<sup>44</sup> Regarding the celebration of the Báb’s Birth and His own, in *Questions and Answers*, question 2, Bahá’u’lláh has revealed, “*These two days are accounted as one in the sight of God.*” Bahá’u’lláh. *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*. Haifa: Bahá’i World Centre, 1992, p. 105.

<sup>45</sup> These lines are by Hafiz.

done!” He drank half of it and gave the rest to me. He also gave me a black rosary made of dark olive-wood that He was carrying. I kissed His hands. That rosary, which has been as dear to me as life itself, is now placed in the Archives of the House of the Báb in Shiraz.

Again, I have mentioned that His blessed chamber was visible from our house. We saw Him several times at dawn and early morning while He spoke the revealed Word. Mírzá Áqá Jan wrote it down as He uttered it. Mírzá Áqá Jan used to have several reed pens well cut and pointed, with ink and paper ready. The flow of divine verses from the heaven of Revelation was swift. It was like a surging ocean. Mírzá Áqá Jan wrote as quickly as he could - so quickly that, at times, the pen slipped out of his hand. He would promptly take up another pen. There were times when he could not keep up and would say: “I can’t write.” Then the Blessed Perfection would repeat what He had spoken.

The Blessed Perfection instructed my brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, to make a copy of *Qasídiy-i-‘Izz-i-Varqá’íyyih*<sup>46</sup>. When he had finished the task and presented it, he received much commendation and praise from Bahá’u’lláh, and was favored with a pen-case made in Isfahán, which held a silver inkstand. That pen-case is now held in the Archives of the Blessed House [of the Báb].

On another occasion, Bahá’u’lláh called me by myself and, after showering His indescribable blessings on me, stated, “We have asked Mírzá Yúsuf Khán and Siyyid Assadu’llah to pay particular attention to your lessons and instructions.” I bowed down. With His blessed hands, He gave me a bottle of rose-water saying, “This rose-water comes from Qamsar of Káshán. It has taken 40 days to reach this land. God has created this rose-water for such a day as this, which is the Prince of days.” He then dismissed me. I had the bottle of rose-water until not long ago, and some of the friends would use it to perfume their faces and hairs. Now I deeply regret not having saved what was given to me by the Hands of the divine sovereignty of the Blessed Perfection.

One evening, Abu-Hurayrih announced that the Beloved of the world had decided to visit the Garden of Junaynih<sup>47</sup> on the following morning and had asked all pilgrims and resident believers to accompany Him. I speak the truth when I say, the joy of knowing that we would be in the presence the Blessed Beauty for several hours the next day kept me awake that night until morning. At times, I was rapt in supplication and prayer, and at other moments filled with euphoria and excitement. The night passed in this way and, at early dawn, I faced His blessed chamber offering prayers of

<sup>46</sup> A poem of 127 verses composed by Bahá’u’lláh in Sulaymaniyyih; see Bahá’u’lláh. *Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A’lá*. 7 vols. Tehran: Mu’assasih-‘i Milli-yi Matbu’at-i Amri, 1963-1968, vol. 3, pp. 196-215. Bahá’u’lláh. *Ode of the Dove (Qasídiy-i-Varqá’íyyih)*. Translated by Juan R. I. Cole. [s.l.]: Bahá’í Library Online, [n.d.].

<sup>47</sup> Known also as Bagh-i-Jamal, it is situated close to the Mansion of Mazra’ih.



thanksgiving and praise. Before sunrise, we all gathered by the gate of the Mansion. An hour later, Bahá'u'lláh came downstairs. A white donkey was brought for Him to ride on it. This donkey was a gift of the late Áqá Ghulam-`Alí-i-Káshí and Áqá Muhammad-Hashim-i-Káshí. The rest of the friends followed Him on foot towards Junaynih. Hájí Khavar<sup>48</sup>, a resident of the Holy Land for many years and a fairly tall man, held an umbrella over the head of Bahá'u'lláh to protect Him from the sun. The air was extremely fresh and invigorating. We sensed that, from the pleasant air of `Akká, the spirit of the poet of Shiraz had soared with the verse:

The morning breeze is fragrant as ambergris today,  
As my beloved moves towards the meadow.

Eventually, we reached the Garden, which had been prepared by attendants and believers. They had assembled all the items necessary for receiving the Blessed Perfection and the other friends. The Garden paths were very charming and attractive. The trees, grass, flowers and orchard danced with joy in the breeze, while the sweet-singing birds were crying out in ecstasy and merriment, all praising the grace and blessing of the presence of their Beloved. On that day, the Countenance of the Blessed Perfection radiated with the greatest joy and He paid tribute to and commended each of the friends. In such an atmosphere, lunch was served.

After lunch, all the believers were present at yet another spiritual gathering in Bahá'u'lláh's presence. It was then that `Abdu'l-Bahá arrived from the city [of `Akká] and the Ancient Beauty commanded us: "The Master<sup>49</sup> is coming. Hasten to welcome Him." I should note that a similar event occurred on several other occasions. I will describe the details at a later stage. It was evident that, from that time, the Blessed Perfection was planting in the spirit and hearts of the friends seeds of humility, submissiveness, mindfulness of the Covenant and faithfulness towards Him Whom God hath purposed [ `Abdu'l-Bahá]. He would always teach the believers about the exalted station and hidden reality of the beloved Master.

And so we went out to welcome `Abdu'l-Bahá and, in His company, once again attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. With extreme humility and attention, `Abdu'l-Bahá sat in His presence and gave permission for the pilgrims to sit as well. Then, the Tongue of Purity spoke words with this meaning: "The garden was not pleasant enough this morning. But now, with the arrival of the Master, it has become most pleasant." Then, turning towards `Abdu'l-Bahá, He observed, "It would have been exceedingly good if you had come this morning." `Abdu'l-Bahá replied, "The Mutasarrif Pasha and some other of the city's inhabitants sent word that they were coming. On Your behalf, I had to receive them and offer them hospitality."

<sup>48</sup> An attendant of Bahá'u'lláh's household.

<sup>49</sup> The word 'Áqá' has been used throughout the original as the term Bahá'u'lláh used to refer to `Abdu'l-Bahá. This has been rendered as 'the Master.'

The Blessed Perfection smiled and said, "The Master is Our shield and the shield of everyone else. All live at ease, all know utmost comfort and tranquility. Associating with men such as these is very, very difficult. It is the Master who stands up to everything and supplies the means for the well-being and peace of all the friends. May God preserve Him from the evil of the envious and inimical." "One day in Baghdad," Bahá'u'lláh continued, "a beggar asked for alms. We gave him one majídí<sup>50</sup> and he told Us: 'Go in peace, young man; may Hadrat-i-'Abbás<sup>51</sup> give you support.' He prayed for Us – it was a good prayer."

In short, on that day, the blessings of Bahá'u'lláh towards all [of us] were extremely generous. About an hour before sunset, the Sovereign of the world decided to return to the Mansion and, as in the morning, we all walked back. At the gate, we were dismissed from His presence.

The distance between the city of 'Akká and the Mansion is about four to five kilometers. The Bagh-i-Jamál is one of the gardens on the outskirts of the city, near the Mansion. When you pass by this garden, one comes within full view of the Mansion. The door to the chamber of the Blessed Perfection opened this way. Whenever 'Abdu'l-Bahá approached by this route on a steed, He would dismount as soon as the Mansion came into view and walk the rest of the way to the Mansion with the utmost humility and reverence.

One day, all the friends and the Aghsán were in Bahá'u'lláh's presence. I well remember that among them were the following: Nabíl-i-A'zam, Afnán-i-Kabír, Áqá Ridá [Qannád] Shírází, Ustád Muhammad-'Alíy-i-Salmání<sup>52</sup>, Mishkin-Qalam, my late father, and attendants such as Áqá Muhammad-Hasan of the Pilgrim House. Suddenly, the Blessed Perfection turned round to look at the plain and, seeing 'Abdu'l-Bahá approaching the Mansion, said, "The Master is coming; go and welcome Him." We all hurried out and attained the presence of "Him round Whom all names revolve"<sup>53</sup> and, in His company, went back to the presence of the Blessed Perfection.

On that day, Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí<sup>54</sup>, the other Aghsán, Mírzá Áqá Jan, Siyyid 'Alíy-i-Afnán, and [Mírzá] Madjíd-Din<sup>55</sup> were present. At a later

<sup>50</sup> A currency of the Ottoman Empire, installed by Sultan 'Abdu'l-Majid (1823-61).

<sup>51</sup> 'Abbas (d. 680), a brother of Imam Husayn, was the standard-bearer on the plain of Karbala and the last of His men to stand with his Brother. Subsequent to his martyrdom, he has been greatly revered and extolled by the Shi'i community. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was named 'Abbas after His grandfather, Mírzá 'Abbas-i-Nuri (d. 1839).

<sup>52</sup> A poet and native of Isfahan and Bahá'u'lláh's barber. He is the author of an important narrative, translated Salmaní, Muhammad-'Alí. *My Memories of Bahá'u'lláh*. Translated by Marzieh Gail. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1982. The original text is published electronically as [Sharh-i Hal](#). East Lansing, Michigan: H-Bahai, 1997.

<sup>53</sup> One of the titles of 'Abdu'l-Bahá given in the Tablet of the Land of Bá (Beirut); see Shoghi Effendi. *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955., p. 136. Bahá'u'lláh. "Lawh-i-Ard-i-Bá (Tablet of the land of Bá)." In *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Pp. 225-228.

<sup>54</sup> During Bahá'u'lláh's ministry, Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí was known by the title Ghusn-i-Akbar (the Greater Branch). After he broke the Covenant, believers referred to him as the Naqid-i-Akbar (the Arch-Covenant-breaker), a title Mírzá Habib uses for him throughout the text. However, for clarity, his given name is used in this translation.

time, however, these same people were among the Covenant-breakers and, with the greatest vehemence and infidelity, rose against the Cause of God. After the ascension of the Blessed Perfection, this servant himself witnessed their treachery, betrayal, hypocrisy and imposture. During that period, which outwardly constituted Bahá'u'lláh's final days in this nether world, His words mostly focused on the issues of the protection of the Covenant and firmness in the divine Testament. On that occasion, He fervently admonished the people of the world to remain loyal to the Covenant and not to raise the standard of discord in the Cause of God. Then He raised His blessed hand and, pointing to the Aghsáns and Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí, said, "Should one of Our Aghsán ever for a moment pass out from the shadow of the Cause, he will cease to be of any consequence." These words, emanating from the Source of compassion and the Heaven of divine will, were spoken so forcibly and with such a strong resonance that all in His presence were thunderstruck and shaken to their very core.

Another day, when we were in the presence of the Blessed Perfection, Mírzá Diyá'u'lláh<sup>56</sup> came in to ask, "Áqá seeks permission for us all to go with the friends to the Garden of Junaynih." "Who has said this?" Bahá'u'lláh inquired, to which Mírzá Diyá'u'lláh replied, "Áqáy-i-Ghusn-i-Akbar." Sternly, Bahá'u'lláh said, "There is only one Áqá; all the others have names. That one Áqá is 'Him round Whom all names revolve', the Ghusn-i-A'zam."<sup>57</sup> Throughout those days, the blessed Person of the Ancient Beauty used various statements and means to educate the friends on the sacred station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and warn them against breaking the divine Covenant. He constantly affirmed the unique and exalted station of the beloved Master so that the satanic whispers and intrigues of the enemies of God's Cause would not lead those clinging to the Sure Handle<sup>58</sup> away from the straight path, or cause the inhabitants of the Crimson Ark to drown in the sea of neglect and ignorance.

One late afternoon, we were in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh in the Garden of Ridván. The air was very fresh and redolent, and it was raining lightly. He spoke about the days in Baghdad and the harm inflicted upon the Cause of God by the Azalis<sup>59</sup>. He said, "Consider how unfair and truly void of faith they are. Because of the Mu'tamu'd-Dawlih's supplications in Isfahán, the Primal Point took the sister of Rajab-'Alí [Qahyir] as a wife so that she could look after His household needs. After the great Martyrdom and the most mighty Tragedy<sup>60</sup>, notwithstanding the explicit Text forbidding

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<sup>55</sup> A notorious Covenant-breaker of later years. He was a son of Mírzá Musa Kalim (d. 1887), Bahá'u'lláh's faithful brother.

<sup>56</sup> Bahá'u'lláh's son from a second marriage.

<sup>57</sup> See Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'is at the Time of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 163.

<sup>58</sup> An allusion to the religion of God; see, for instance, Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>59</sup> The text refers to the followers of Mírzá Yahya Azal (1831-1912) as "Yamutiha" (literally: the dead).

<sup>60</sup> The martyrdom of the Báb took place on 9 July 1850.

marriage with the Báb's wives<sup>61</sup>, with utmost impudence, Azal at first took her as a wife and then, having absolutely no sense of shame or compunction, gave her to Siyyid Muhammad-i-Isfahání.<sup>62</sup> This act resulted in the mother of the Báb refusing to give her allegiance to the Faith for some time." As He spoke these words, the sorrow on His Countenance was evident and the friends, especially my father, were greatly affected and wept bitterly. Then the Blessed Perfection said, "Do not grieve. Praise be to God, the mother of that Blessed Being came to believe at the end. Their station is well above the conception of peoples and the understanding of Our servants."

Then, He continued to recall the days of Baghdad: "One day, several of the clergy came to visit Us. One of them asked, 'Where are you from?' 'We are from `Amá'<sup>63</sup>, 'We responded. He asked further, 'Where is `Amá? What sort of place is that?' We replied, '`Amá has a pleasant, heavenly air; the trees are fruitful; the plain is lusciously green; the rivers are flowing; its inhabitants are spiritual people.' He asked, 'Is it possible for us to go there?' We responded, 'No, it is impossible. Your place is not there.'"

He then related, "The day We left Baghdad, We moved to the Garden of Najíb Pasha and stayed there for 12 days. Each day, scores of the city's inhabitants came to visit Us and bid Us farewell. One day, among those who came was a group of the learned theologians. After attaining Our presence, one of them said, 'We were anticipating the appearance of the promised Mihdí, and the Siyyid-i-Shirází came forward with a claim. A number became His followers, gathered around Him, and did certain things. After that, we expected the manifestation of Husayn, and now You claim that Station. What are we to do now?' On that day," Bahá'u'lláh continued, "We told them what they were to do and said to them, 'You are to continue reading *Sharh-i-Lam`ah* and *Saybawayh*<sup>64</sup> until you return to where you belong.'"

<sup>61</sup> The Text of the Báb's injunction has not been located so far. However, there is a Qur'anic verse (Surah al-Ahzab) that provides for this restriction: "Nearer of kin to the faithful is the Prophet, than they are to their own selves. His wives are their mothers."

<sup>62</sup> During the Báb's six-month sojourn in Isfahan, He married Fatimih (1822?-1916), the sister of Mulla Rajab-`Alí-y-i-Qahir, a prominent Bábí of that city. Some time after the Báb's martyrdom, she traveled to Baghdad, where she came under the influence of Siyyid Muhammad Isfahani and Mírzá Yahya Azal. Despite the Báb's injunction forbidding marriage with either of His wives after Him, Azal married her. A month later, however, after protests from his other wives, Azal divorced Fatimih and gave her in marriage to Siyyid Muhammad. She died in December 1916 in Tihiran, aged 84. For further details, see Balyuzi, Hasan M. *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith*. London: George Ronald, 1970, pp. 34-5 n. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Rendered typically as 'eternal,' 'immortal,' or 'divine,' this term has many connotations, which all mean 'that which pertains to God'. An Islamic hadith maintains that Muhammad was asked, "Where is God?" and He responded, "In `amá."

<sup>64</sup> Both texts are used in the Shi'i seminarian training. The complete title of *Sharh-i-Lum`ah* is *ar-Rawdat al-bahiyyah fi sharh al-lum`ah al-Dimashqiyyah* and was authored by Shaykh Zaynu'l-'Abidin Shahid ath-Thani (1506-1559). It is an exposition of *al-Lum`ah ad-Dimashqiyya* by Shaykh Muhammad ibn Makk Shahid al-Awwal (1333-1380). The text is used today in the madrassih for teaching jurisprudence (*fiqh*) at the secondary (*sutuh*) level. The second reference, *Saybawayh*, is named after a Shirazi jurist whose resting-place is located in Sang-i-Siyah, near the Masjid-i-Mushir (see Fasa'i, *Tarikh Farsnamih-i-Nasiri*, vol. 2, pp. 1021-3).

On another day, the Blessed Perfection mentioned the days of Baghdad and the tyranny and oppression of Shaykh `Abdu'l-Husayn [Tihrani]<sup>65</sup>, saying, "With the aid of Nasiri'd-Din Sháh and [Sultan] `Abdu'l-`Aziz, Shaykh `Abdu'l-Husayn tried hard to extinguish the light of God's Cause. But the effulgence of the Faith of God has illuminated the East and the West, and the vengeance and victory of the religion of God has made the necks of sovereigns bow down in humility. Before long, you will see all systems rolled up, and the peoples and nations of the world gather under the shade of the canopy of the Cause of God."

He then said, "Another day in Baghdad, a learned divine came to see Us. He had a tall, heavy frame and thick beard, was quite corpulent and was wearing a large turban. He greeted Us with a guttural tone and, when he sat down, began to recite convoluted and incomprehensible Arabic verses. We said to him, 'Kindly introduce yourself so that We might learn something about you.' He said, 'I am the seal of the ecclesiastics.' We responded, 'Insha'lláh, insha'lláh.'" On that day, the Blessed Perfection was extremely joyous and smiled frequently. He said, "Pray that God does not create another sect like the Shi'i."

On another day, Bahá'u'lláh spoke of Mullá `Alí-i-Sabzivari<sup>66</sup>, saying, "When Mullá `Alí was led to the place of his martyrdom, he instructed the executioner to open one of his veins. When a bit of his throat was cut, with his own sacred blood, he dyed his white beard red, calling out to the crowd, 'O people! On the day of His martyrdom on the field of Karbalá, Husayn ibn `Alí spoke these words: "Is there anyone truly capable of dispensing victory who will come to aid me?" But I say unto you, "O people, is there anyone truly capable of seeing who will come to behold me?"'" Bahá'u'lláh repeated several times: "What weighty words did that man speak, and how he bore witness to the truth of this Faith with his precious blood! People witnessed it but were not moved, and barbarously put to death that innocent soul." He then added, "All these strange events support the greatness of this blessed Cause. They will all be recorded in the pages of history and future generations will feel proud of them."

The late Háji `Abú'l-Hasan [Bazzaz] Shirázi<sup>67</sup> was present and asked Bahá'u'lláh, "After the martyrdom of Husayn ibn `Alí, the sovereignty of

<sup>65</sup> Known as Shaykhul-'Iraqayn (d. 1869), he was a close ally of Mírzá Taqí Khán, the Amir-Kabir (d. 1852). He was sent by Nasiri'd-Din Sháh to the `Atabat to regild the dome of the Shrine of Imam Husayn and to cause trouble for Bahá'u'lláh.

<sup>66</sup> One of the seven Bahá'is martyred in May 1891 in Yazd. Earlier, he had asked Bahá'u'lláh for this high station and, in a Tablet, was told to seek his heart's desire in Yazd. Forty days later, he attained his wish. For details, see Malmiri, *Tarikh-i-Shuhaday-i-Yazd*, pp. 32-56.

<sup>67</sup> In 1844, he had traveled on the same vessel with the Báb and Quddus, when They were going on pilgrimage to Mecca. He later recounted many details of that historic journey to Mírzá Habib; see Rabbani, "The Báb in Shiraz: An Account by Mirza Habibu'llah Afán", *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 2004, 91-127 (See also Afán, Mírzá Habibu'llah. "[The Báb in Shiraz](#)." Translated by Ahang Rabbani. *Translations of Shaykhi, Bábí and Bahá'í Texts* (East Lansing, Mich.) no.11 (January 1998). ). He attained full certitude during the Báb's appearance at the Masjid-i-Vakil. He was the father of Mírzá Muhammad-Baqir Khán-i-Dihqan, a very influential Bahá'í in the administrative apparatus of Fars (see *In the Land of Refuge*).

Yazid lasted no more than three years. Why is it that, 50 years after the martyrdom of the Exalted One, Nasiri'd-Din Sháh still rules with full powers, inflicting day and night much injury on the Faith; and God has [seemingly] spared him?" Bahá'u'lláh replied, "God has given him this clemency because of the error of some believers in the early days and their assassination attempt on him. But he too will have his day. You will see."

### Departure from the Holy Land

Our stay in the Holy Land had been nine months long. Each day, we had been showered with new favors without deserving them. The infinite grace of God had surrounded us. The happiness of our good fortune was the wish of all the Prophets and saints of the past. The spread of cholera and illness had subsided and the day for us to leave was quickly approaching.

One afternoon, we were summoned to the presence of the Blessed Perfection in the Mansion of Bahjí. His blessed Person was standing in the middle of His chamber when we entered. Immersed in deep grief and sorrow, we circumambulated His Person and prostrated ourselves at His feet, as tears like spring-showers streamed uncontrollably from our eyes. With our emotions and words, we expressed our heart-felt gratitude for the glorious days we had in His presence. Then the Tongue of Purity spoke these sacred words: "Do not be sad; do not lament. If you attained Our presence once, your attainment was complete. Be assured that, under all conditions, We are with you. Why are you downcast? Port Said is very near. Whenever We call, you will hear Us. Do not be sorrowful; do not grieve. Be confident. The divine favors have surrounded you and will continue to envelop you." Again, He repeated, "If you attained Our presence once, your attainment was complete." Then He added, "For no other pilgrims were the blessings and circumstances as complete as they were for the Afnáns. Be happy; be thrilled; be radiant. The grace of God has surrounded you and will continue to embrace you everlastingly."

He sat down and invited us to sit also. With His blessed Hand, He passed to us the sacred Tablets that He had revealed for each one of us.<sup>68</sup> We reverently kissed His fingers and read the Tablets. They venerated and glorified each one of us. After nine months of being in His presence, we were now bidden farewell with these words: "God be with you."

From there, we went to `Akká and attained the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá. With tearful eyes and hearts set on fire, we anticipated our coming separation. We prostrated at His feet and, clinging to the hem of His robe, begged for His help with divine favors and confirmations. His blessed Being

<sup>68</sup> The Tablet bestowed upon Mírzá Habíb on that occasion is in Bahá'u'lláh, INBMC, *Majmu'ih Athar-i-Qalam A'lá*, vol. 51, p. 354, no. 363; the original is kept in the Bahá'í Archives of the House of the Báb. A translation appears as the frontispiece of the publication.

lifted us from the ground and, kissing the brow of each of us, bid us farewell.

While these ephemeral servants were in `Akká, the Blessed Beauty called our mother and sister into His presence and showered them with much admiration and untold praise. As they were leaving, my mother kissed His blessed hand. The thought came to her that, if His ring were given to her as a means of attracting divine blessings and as a source of healing, all her wishes in this world would be realized. Shortly after, when they were in the presence of the Greatest Holy Leaf, one of the maidservants came in to present the ring as a gift, saying, “Bahá’u’lláh told me to present you with this ring.” For this divine favor, my mother cried out in joy and gratitude. She then bid farewell to the Khánúm, the other Varaqát<sup>69</sup>, and the wife of Bahá’u’lláh<sup>70</sup>. The ring of the Blessed Perfection is now held in the Archives of the House of the Báb. It has been a source of pride and joy for this family and our descendants.

Afterwards, my mother and sister attained the presence of `Abdu’l-Bahá one last time. Then, filled with deep sorrow, we all left the sacred city of `Akká for Haifa.

Outside the city gate, our much-loved companions, who had been friends to my father and our spiritual comrades for nine months, had gathered. With deep affection we all embraced and kissed each other farewell. They helped us board our carriage and we left for Haifa. In Haifa, the late Manshádí, along with our father, secured our boarding pass from the Namsavi Shipping Company. About an hour before dusk, accompanied by the honored Áqá Siyyid Taqí, we were on our way by boat to the destined ship. Our ship left [the Bay of Haifa] at about sunset. It is impossible for me to describe the feelings we experienced at that time and how the fond memories of those days overwhelmed us.

This was a brief summary of the memories of the days we beheld the countenance of God, which have remained with me after 50 years. God willing, I will now give my recollections of visiting `Abdu’l-Bahá and what I observed next.

One thing we came to realize after the ascension of the Blessed Beauty was that, at the moment we left, He had twice said to us, “If you attained our presence once, your attainment was complete.” The meaning of this blessed utterance was now clear: we would never be worthy to see His blessed

<sup>69</sup> Literally ‘leaves;’ signifies the women of the Holy Household.

<sup>70</sup> Navvab (Asiyyih Khánúm) had passed away in 1886. Therefore, this reference is to either Mahd-i-`Uliya or Gawhar Khánúm and, most likely, to the former.

countenance in this world again; outwardly He would be hidden behind veils, and His passing was near.<sup>71</sup>

### Education and Commerce in Egypt

The headquarters of my late father's commercial enterprise was in Cairo and he also had a branch office in Port Said. The late Áqá Ahmad [Yazdí]<sup>72</sup> and my older brother, the late Áqá Siyyid Áqá, were responsible for its affairs and supervised the branch office.<sup>73</sup> A few days after arriving in Port Said, we traveled to Cairo, where my late father had a room in Saray-i-Jawahiri. In that city, once again, he was immersed in business activities. While we assisted him in his daily work, we also continued our education, to develop a strong command of the Arabic language.<sup>74</sup>

In those days, several of the eminent friends in Cairo were engaged in commerce. This included men such as the late Hájí Mírzá Hasan-i-Khúrásání, Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-i-Afshár<sup>75</sup>, Mírzá `Alí-Muhammad-i-Shirází, Hájí `Abdu'l-Karim-i-Kaziruni, Hájí Lutf-`Alíy-i-Namaziy-i-Shirází, Hájí Muhammad-i-Yazdí<sup>76</sup>, the late Hájí Niyyaz<sup>77</sup>, and several others that were either related to these individuals or worked in their place of business. The Iranian Consul-General<sup>78</sup> at that time was the late Mírzá Ridá Khán, the Bananu'l-Mulk<sup>79</sup>, the father of Áqá Mírzá Fadlu'lláh Khán-i-Banan<sup>80</sup>.

Before the ascension of the Blessed Beauty, Mírzá Hasan-i-Khúrásání and Hájí Niyyaz were given permission to go on pilgrimage and had left for the Holy Land.

<sup>71</sup> Though the date of the Afnáns' departure is not noted, it is estimated to be in late March 1892. The ascension of Bahá'u'lláh occurred on 29 May 1892.

<sup>72</sup> The fourth and youngest son of Hájí `Abdu'r-Rahim-i-Qannad-i-Yazdi, he had married Munavvar Khánum, the youngest daughter of `Abdu'l-Bahá. Years later, both husband and wife broke the Covenant.

<sup>73</sup> When he arrived in Egypt, Núri'd-Dín established an import-export company called Shirkat-i-Ruhaniyyih.

<sup>74</sup> In a Tablet, `Abdu'l-Bahá instructed Mírzá Habib: "At nighttime, you must put effort into your studies and learning languages. Likewise, make an effort to learn as much about sciences and literature as you can. Since the divine confirmations render the Afnán victorious and triumphant, soon you will advance in all areas". `Abdu'l-Bahá. *Majmu'ih Makatib-i-Hadrat-i-`Abdu'l-Bahá*. Vol. 52, *Iran National Bahá'í Manuscript Collection*. Tehran: Mu'assasih-`i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, [c 1977], 348, no. 390, [Hereafter INBMC 52].

<sup>75</sup> A native of Yazd, he is best known for an important proof treatise known as *Risalih-i-Afshar* or *Bahru'l-'Irfan*.

<sup>76</sup> The father of `Aziz Yazdi (1909-2004), a Counsellor member of the International Teaching Centre during 1973-86.

<sup>77</sup> A native of Kirman and a travelling jewelry salesman.

<sup>78</sup> The Iranian Embassy was in Istanbul, with various branch consulates throughout the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>79</sup> His name was Rida Mustawfi. He was often referred to as Hakim-Banan. In 1884, he was given the title Bananu'l-Mulk and, four years later, was appointed as the chief of staff for the Zillu's-Sultan, the Governor-General of Isfahan. However, in 1890, out of fear for his life, he left Iran and took residence in Egypt. In the middle of 1892, he was appointed to the consulate in Cairo. After a while, he was dismissed from office and returned to Isfahan, where he passed away; see Bámdád, Mahdí. *Sharh-i Hál-i Rijál-i Irán dar Qarn-i 12, 13, 14 Hijri*. 4 vols. Tehran: Kitabfurushi-i Zuvvar, 1347-1353 Sh. [1968-1974]., vol 2, pp. 1-2.

<sup>80</sup> The secretary of the Spiritual Assembly of Shiraz during much of the 1930s and 1940s; see *In the Land of Refuge*.



### News of Bahá'u'lláh's Ascension

The great calamity and the supreme tragedy of the ascension of the Blessed Beauty – may my life be a sacrifice to the dust of His Sacred Threshold – happened two months and a few days after we left the Holy Land. With broken hearts and spirits and consumed by the fire of His separation, tears of sorrow, anguish and lamentation poured from the eyes of every denizen of the Crimson Ark and dweller beneath the tabernacle of His Cause. He Himself is my witness, I can never describe the unbearable pain brought on by knowing that I could not once again behold His blessed Countenance on this plane of existence! God alone knows that this pen is utterly incapable of recounting what happened during those dark days!<sup>81</sup>

The late [Mírzá Hasan] Khúrásání and Hájí Niyyaz were in `Akká at the setting of the Sun of Truth in the Holy Land. Also present was the honored Áqá Mírzá Taraz-i-Samandari, son of the illustrious Samandar, who had been among a group of pilgrims from Iran. He had arrived in the Holy Land a few months before the ascension and remained there for a while after that event. As a token of Bahá'u'lláh's grace, the bonds of our friendship and fraternity, first established during our days together in the presence of the Blessed Perfection, has grown ever stronger with the passage of these 55 years.<sup>82</sup>

In the days after the ascension of the Blessed Perfection, hearts were melted, spirits were downcast, and eyes cried bitter tears of anguish. It was a particularly unbearable and sorrowful time for those who had been in His presence and had beheld that mighty Sovereign of the world of being. Many of the friends, men and women alike, gathered at night or during the day, in various homes, raising the cry of “Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá!” and supplicating for the honor of martyrdom and self-sacrifice in the path of His glorious Cause.

The month of Dhi'l-Qa`dih passed and, on 10 Dhi'l-Hajjih [6 July 1892], the `Id-i-Qurbán (the festival of Sacrifice) was observed. As was customary in those days, all the Iranian merchants would go to the Iranian Consulate, visiting the Consul-General and wishing him well. Typically, on such occasions, they would be served lunch and would stay until late in the afternoon. Because the Bahá'í merchants and Muslim merchants associated very little, each would occupy a different side of the reception hall in the course of their visits.

Because of his age and prominence in the community, my late father was the senior member and leader of the Bahá'í merchants. Consequently, we went

<sup>81</sup> A detailed and poignant description of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension is given in Mazandarani, *Tarikh Zuhuru'l-Haqq*, vol 5, pp. 433-72.

<sup>82</sup> See Samandari, Taráz Alláh. *Moments with Bahá'u'lláh, Memoirs of the Hand of the Cause of God Tarázu'lláh Samandari*, translated by Mehdi Samandari and Marzieh Gail. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1996.

to the Consulate led by him. [Because we were mourning Bahá'u'lláh's ascension], our intention was to leave after visiting for a few minutes, and not participate in the celebration.

When we arrived at the Consulate, as was customary, we sat on one side. At that moment, however, the Bananu'l-Mulk [Consul-General], without realizing that a number of Bahá'ís had arrived, said, "According to a report in a recent issue of the Hikmat Newspaper, the Prophet of the Bábís has passed away." He made this comment with such a mocking tone that it greatly offended the friends [the believers]. With a quick signal from my father, the Bahá'í group left the gathering without the least acknowledgement to the host or bidding anyone farewell.

Noting our departure, the Bananu'l-Mulk was greatly surprised by the turn of events. Later, we heard from other Iranian merchants present [in the gathering] that they had all reproached him, saying, "This place is not Iran and you cannot say things that are not civil or good mannered. Those people who left the gathering are not ordinary and commonplace people. They rank among the most respected merchants and should be seen as a source of pride by the Iranian government. If an amiable reconciliation is not brought about immediately, this incident will become a cause of great inconvenience, directly affecting you." This warning from the Muslim merchants, coupled with the powerful effect of our departure, left the Consul-General terrified of its possible consequences.

From the consulate building, we all went to my father's commercial office. We gathered in a room adjacent to his office where all the Bahá'í meetings took place. This room was decorated with a very large and unique calligraphy by Mishkin-Qalam, depicting two ornamented birds that made up the words of the Greatest Name. There was also a large circular table in the middle of the room. Most of us gathered around this table to discuss the event that had just taken place in the Consulate.

Some of the friends thought that our departure had insulted the Iranian Consul and that he had unwittingly acted in an impertinent way. I remember vividly that my late father was very upset and cried out in a raised voice, "He has erred greatly on something that he should have known better! I know him very well from our days in Shiraz and we have been friends ever since. However, we acted in the name of the Blessed Beauty and out of respect for the Greatest Name. I am prepared to have my blood spilled in this path! Mark my words: the Bananu'l-Mulk is now greatly repentant and ashamed [because of our departure]."

While this discussion was taking place, Hájí Sayyah<sup>83</sup>, who lived in Egypt at the time and was a confidant to both the Bahá'ís and the Muslims, entered the room. He related that the Bananu'l-Mulk had asked him to convey, with great reverence, his apologies for what he had said and further begged the Bahá'ís to return to the festivities so that the Consulate's traditional celebration could continue amiably. Hájí Sayyah added, "The Consul must send a report of the event to the Iranian Embassy in Istanbul. If you do not participate, it is possible that certain ill-wishers will connive and cause trouble for the Consul." My father replied, "Inform the Bananu'l-Mulk on our behalf that, as he has noted, we are currently mourning the departure of our Beloved and cannot participate in the festivities. Our visit this morning was only for the purpose of meeting him. However, we expect that, from now on, he will show proper respect to everyone with his remarks. This country is not Iran, where one can say and do as one pleases."

This warning and the gathering of the friends had greatly frightened the Bananu'l-Mulk. Hájí Sayyah had also added his own flavor to the message by reporting [to the Consul], "They have all gathered in Áqá Mírzá Áqá's office and are deliberating on plans to unseat and impeach the Consul." Consequently, before we had ended our discussions, Hájí Sayyah returned and, once again, on behalf of the Bananu'l-Mulk, fervently implored everyone to return to the Consulate and participate in the festivities. My father reiterated, "The Bahá'ís will not take part in your celebration," and repeated what he had said earlier.

Ultimately, the result of this incident was that the Bananu'l-Mulk became a loyal friend of the Bahá'ís and would not make the slightest decision without consulting my late father or Hájí Mírzá Hasan-i-Khúrásání. The friends enjoyed full freedom to do as they saw fit and became the envy of all the Muslim merchants.

### Núri'd-Dín Departs for Iran in 1894

Two years passed. As before, we were carrying out our commercial activities from Cairo, Port Said and Alexandria, when my late father was called by `Abdu'l-Bahá to return to Iran. As a prelude to this, a Tablet was revealed in his honor and he was instructed to go to the Holy Land. Before leaving for Iran, he set up a company with Áqá Ahmad [Yazdí], Hájí Muhammad-i-Yazdí and Hájí Siyyid `Alí-i-Yazdí.<sup>84</sup> Consequently, I was working in his office in Cairo under the supervision of Áqá Siyyid `Alí and

<sup>83</sup> In a second copy of this manuscript, the following parenthetical comments are recorded: "This was the same Hájí Sayyah who had attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and had been the bearer of letters from the Zillu's-Sultan and the Mushiru'l-Mulk-i-Shirazi." And, in the margin, it is written "Hájí Muhammad-`Alí-i-Sayyah-i-Mahallati." Although I have been unable to confirm the identity of this carrier, it is clear from *Khátirát Hájí Sayyáh* that Hájí Sayyah Mahallati was imprisoned in Iran throughout the period under discussion and the intended person is someone else. Sayyáh, Muhammad-`Alí. *Khátirát Hájí Sayyáh*. Edited by Hamíd Sayyáh. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Tehran: Amír Kabír, 1359 [1980].

<sup>84</sup> The Yazdí brothers had previously formed a company known as Société Ruháníyyih. However, because of some misfortunes, they now needed fresh capital and new partners; for details, see Yazdí, *Blessing Beyond Measure*, pp. 12-14. At this time, Núri'd-Dín was very affluent and was able to bankroll his fortune into this new joint venture.

my late brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, and in Alexandria under the supervision of Hájí Muhammad. Even though some of the friends were not optimistic about the prospects of this business merger, my late father did not heed their warnings and left for his pilgrimage. On this journey, my late brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, and I did not have the honor of attaining the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá. My father went with my mother, older brother Áqá Siyyid Áqá, younger brother Áqá Siyyid Diyá', and sister Tuba Khánum.<sup>85</sup>

After attaining the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá, and gaining further spiritual sustenance and insight from Him, they left for Búshihr by sea. En route, my father visited the renowned cleric [in Baghdad], Áqá Mírzá Muhammad-Hasan-i-Shírází, the Hujjatu'l-Islam (known as the Mírzáy-i-Shírází), at the cleric's request. He was a close relative of the Báb. I have recorded the details of this visit elsewhere.<sup>86</sup>

Regarding his visit with the above-mentioned person, my father received a Tablet from `Abdu'l-Bahá during his stay in Baghdad. In that blessed Tablet, He wrote:

To the attention of the illustrious Afnán, Áqá Mírzá Áqá, upon him rest the Glory of God, the Most Glorious.

He is the All-Glorious.

O thou twig, who hath excelled in propagating the Word of God! From what hath been heard, thou didst travel from Baghdad to Sámarrá for the purpose of conversing in utmost wisdom with the desired person<sup>87</sup>. Even though that person is physically weak and no doubt hath little strength and joy for discourse and communion, however, the divine fragrance bringeth immeasurable vigor, and the spiritual ecstasy hath eternal influence. It will convert a barren land into a flourishing city, and a dead and sterile realm into luscious earth. Bounties of the Holy Spirit will quicken moldering bones and the outpouring of the rain will bring forth pure pearls. Thus thou shalt see the earth giving praise and thanks, as we observe upon it everything delightful and verdant.

I hope that, in that region, thou wilt succeed in disseminating the words of truth and spreading the divine fragrance, in such wise that its sweet scent will perfume all nostrils and confer life upon the dead.

<sup>85</sup> In a Tablet (INBMC 52:329-30, no. 368) addressed to Núrí'd-Dín's son, Mírzá Jalál, who had stayed in Shiraz to serve at, and protect, the House of the Báb, `Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of the imminent arrival of Núrí'd-Dín. The Master recounts the bounties showered upon Núrí'd-Dín during the days of Bahá'u'lláh, and how he had stayed in Egypt at His behest. He further states that Núrí'd-Dín was now travelling to Iran in order to propagate the divine teachings and raise the banner of God's Cause.

<sup>86</sup> See *In the Land of Refuge*, Chapter 11.

<sup>87</sup> A reference to Mírzáy-i-Shirazi.

His Glory rest upon thee and all who stand firm in the Covenant.

`Abdu'l-Bahá `Abbás.<sup>88</sup>

My late father related, "The Hujjatu'l-Islam had declared his belief in the validity of the Báb's claim, the truth of the Blessed Beauty's Manifestation and the greatness of `Abdu'l-Bahá's station. I asked him, 'When did you learn about the Faith?' He responded, 'During the days when I was busy with my studies as a student in Isfahán. Your maternal uncle, Mírzá Siyyid Hasan (the Afnán-i-Kabír), was a student there as well. His Holiness [the Báb] had come to Isfahán and, one day, at the home of [the Sultanu'l-`Ulama,] the Imam-Jum`ih, one of the divines asked Him a scientific question. He gave a sufficient answer, but the akhund [cleric] spoke most unfairly and inappropriately. The injustice of the divine and the impeccability of the Exalted One awakened me to the truth of His blessed Cause.'" The details of this meeting have been written in a separate volume<sup>89</sup>.

### Arrival of Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl

In 1311 A.H. [1894], in accordance with `Abdu'l-Bahá's instructions, Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl<sup>90</sup> came to Cairo. The Master instructed the prominent Bahá'ís not to associate openly with him so that he would not attract undue attention and notice.<sup>91</sup> After he arrived, he moved to an apartment with two furnished rooms, situated above my father's business in Saray-i-Jawahiri. He began teaching philosophy and logic at Al-Azhar University and meeting and associating with the learned and accomplished men of his time. He organized and taught classes in various branches of knowledge and philosophy. Among his students were Shaykh Faraju'llah Ziky-i-Kurdi<sup>92</sup>, [and his brothers,] Shaykh Muhay'd-Din and Shaykh Badru'd-Din.

When he had been in Cairo for a while and had become acquainted with certain of its inhabitants, Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl would occasionally allow a few of the friends to attend his classes. I remember vividly one day, when I was present in his class, the important philosophical question of life and the nature of the soul was being discussed and explained. He quoted extensively, and cited many references, from well-known scholars and learned men and, employing solid reasoning and indisputable evidence, totally rejected the position of the naturalists and the theologians. On that

<sup>88</sup> INBMC 52:315 no. 353, *Khándan-i-Afnán* 16-7 and *Ma'idih-i-Asimani* 5:261-2. Although Mírzá Habíb quotes only a portion of this Tablet, the full text is given here for ease of reference.

<sup>89</sup> A reference to *Tarikh Amri Fars va Shiraz* (forthcoming *In the Land of Refuge*).

<sup>90</sup> The text, and most other Persian sources, refer to him as Abu'l-Fadál, but this translation uses the more commonly recognized transliteration.

<sup>91</sup> Mírzá Habíb means that Abdu'l-Bahá did not want the public to know that Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl was a Bahá'í, so that he could freely pursue his contacts among the intellectual circles of Cairo.

<sup>92</sup> He published the first series of Bahá'í books in Egypt, including the first compilation of `Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets. 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Makátib-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá*. 3 vols. Cairo: Matba'a Kurdistan al-'Ilmiyya, A.H.1330 [1910-1921].

day, all his students testified that Jináb-i-Mírzá's [Abú'l-Fadl's] deductions were perfectly correct.

Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl then continued, "During my stay at Bukhara and Samarqand, I saw a commentary by Bahá'u'lláh that adequately clarified this problem and resolved all questions." His students asked, "Who is Bahá'u'lláh?" "The Leader of our honored guests," he replied [pointing to us]. With real excitement, all students said, "Well, we will secure a copy from them." But Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl responded, "Our guests are among the ordinary people and laity. Such texts and commentaries are in the possession of their learned and scholars. I must contact them for copies to be sent here." And so, he concluded this subject and began discussing another topic. With every subject, Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl would do the same as described above, helping his students to grow receptive to hear [the Divine Call] and sowing the seeds of the Word of God in their hearts.

A month later, he told them that the commentary he had mentioned had arrived. His students eagerly competed with one another to see and read the Text, which they took home and spent countless hours discussing with one another. After all the discussion, he would often remind them, "Without a trace of religious prejudice, study the scientific and rational arguments of these Texts, and correlate them with your own deductive and intellectual understanding. Consider the ease and facility with which they resolve all complex issues. As for me, the more I study and ponder them in the light of logic and reason, the more convinced I am that the contents of these Commentaries are alone sufficient for all seekers of truth and only these Writings contain undeniable proof."

In this manner, he taught the Word of God. As a result, a number [of his students] enrolled under the banner of the Cause. Those who did not convert, such as Shaykh Muhammad-i-'Abduh, who was among the professors of Al-Azhar University, became sympathizers. Such was the way that Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl taught and served the Faith in Egypt.

### **The Greatest Holy Leaf in Egypt**

I have mentioned earlier that, during the time of the most great calamity of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension, the late Hájí Mírzá Hasan-i-Khúrásání and Hájí Niyyaz-i-Kirmaní were in the Holy Land and later returned [to Egypt]. Afterwards, the believers were not given permission to go on pilgrimage or were very rarely given the privilege. This was because of the faithless behavior of the Covenant-breakers and the manifold tests besetting the friends in the Holy Land, or for reasons that remain concealed in the divine knowledge. Consequently, we remained deprived of meeting the denizens of

the Crimson Ark and those circumambulating “Him round Whom the names of God revolve”.<sup>93</sup>

During this year [circa 1894], our late father returned to Shiraz and this servant and my late brother were busy with our commercial activities in Port Said and Alexandria. We would mostly spend the rest of our time in the honored presence of Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl. To a certain extent, and according to our abilities, we were able to benefit from his fellowship.

It was this very year, as well, that the Remnant of God, the Greatest Holy Leaf, honored Egypt with her footsteps. She stayed at the residence of the late Khúrásání. As a result of her visit, a rejuvenating breath of life was breathed into the spirit of the friends, and a marvelous bliss and enthusiasm developed among the community.<sup>94</sup> Each one of us sent to her glorious presence letters expressing our humility and absolute nothingness, and asking for her intercession and confirmations. For the most part, they were answered verbally.

### The Effect in Egypt of the Sháh's Assassination

Not long after the Greatest Holy Leaf returned to the Holy Land, Nasiri'd-Din Sháh was assassinated.<sup>95</sup>

One morning, Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl came to our office greatly perturbed and agitated. Until that day, he had concealed his belief [in Bahá'u'lláh]. He said, “Last night, I had a frightening nightmare. Since then, I have not had a moment's rest and fear that great trouble lies in store for the friends in Iran or the Holy Land.” He proceeded to describe his dream: “I dreamt that I stood in a vast field and a ferocious lion was chasing me to the point where I was thoroughly exhausted and could no longer escape his vicious grasp. I sensed that, at any moment, I was about to be devoured by this wild beast. I despaired and could find no way to save myself. Amidst this, a small door appeared before me, and I entered it trembling with fear. Then I woke up filled with terror and did not sleep a wink for the rest of the night.”

He had not quite finished his description when we heard the cry of the newspaper boy from the streets, “The Iranian King is slain; the Iranian King

<sup>93</sup> That is, the believers in `Akká and companions of `Abdu'l-Bahá.

<sup>94</sup> The following was revealed by `Abdu'l-Bahá on the occasion of Bahíyyih Khánum's departure for Egypt (*Bahíyyih Khánum: The Greatest Holy Leaf: A Compilation*. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982., pp. 14-15). For a considerable period - that is, from the day of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension - my sister had grown so thin and feeble, and was in such a weakened condition from the anguish of her mourning, that she was close to breakdown. Even though it was her dearest wish to drain her cup and wing her way to the realms where the Divine Essence shineth in glory, still this servant could not bear to see her in that state. Then it occurred to me that, God be thanked, I have such an unfailing comforter as Jinab-i-Hájí [Hasan-i-Khúrásání], and it would be well to make him my partner in distress. I therefore determined to send her to Egypt, to provide her with a change of air. Although this will certainly cause thee trouble and inconvenience, still, I trust that, out of God's bounty, it will also bring thee joy and good cheer.

<sup>95</sup> See Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*, pp. 430-55.

is slain!” Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl immediately said, “Now I understand the meaning of my dream!” We bought a copy of the Hikmat Newspaper, which had devoted its lead column to this subject. It said in part, “Yesterday, while the Royal Court was preparing for the festivities of the anniversary of the 50th year of the Sháh's ascent to the throne and the monarch was on a visit to the Shrine of Hadrat-i-'Abdu'l-'Azim, an Iranian Bábí by the name of Mírzá Ridá Kirmaní shot and killed him.” Since this news was being disseminated by Siyyid Jamalu'd-Din [Afghani]'s sympathizers, with gross exaggeration and embellishments, it was obvious that they were trying to attribute the Sháh's murder to the friends in Iran and the Bahá'í community there. These accounts were aimed solely at provoking public reaction against the Faith and its adherents.

Soon the news spread throughout the city and all the friends gathered in our office, fervently supplicating divine protection for the Bahá'í community of Iran, so it would stay safe from the claws of the barbarous wolves. They further prayed for celestial intervention, so that this event would not become a situation where the innocent friends' blood would be spilled and a number of them martyred. In truth, all the believers were profoundly disturbed and anticipated imminent tragedies.

At any rate, resigned to the will of God and submitting to His good-pleasure, we waited for news from Iran. The other newspapers and magazines were reporting the assassination of the Sháh in the same way, and discussed its implications in a provocative fashion. They inflamed the fire of enmity and hatred among the Iranians living in Egypt, preparing the ground for massive disturbances and convulsions [for the Bahá'ís] in Cairo.

During that period, the Consul-General of Iran was Mírzá Ishaq Khán<sup>96</sup>, [the Mafkhamu'd-Dawlih,] who was from Kurdistan and a Sunni. Incited by Mírzá Mihdí, the Za'im'd-Dawlih<sup>97</sup>, who was the secretary of the Consulate and one of the followers of Siyyid Jamalu'd-Din [Afghani], the Iranian merchants appealed to the Consulate. They reportedly said, “Now that the Bábís have killed the Sháh, all the Bábís in Iran are [or will be] massacred in reprisal. Therefore, we must also kill all those that live in this region and completely uproot their community.” They further noted, “We have arranged for each of us to kill the Bábís from his native town. For instance, the Shírázī Muslims are to kill the Bahá'ís from Shiraz, and Khúrásánís will do likewise with Bahá'ís from that region, and so forth.”

<sup>96</sup> From 1894, he was the Consul-General in Egypt for five years. Afterwards, he was the Iranian Ambassador to Washington for six years; see Bamdad, *Sharh-i Hal-i Rijal-i Iran*, vol 1, pp. 108-11.

<sup>97</sup> A native of Tabriz, he was the publisher of the Hikmat (wisdom) Newspaper in Cairo and the author of an Arabic polemic against the Faith, titled *Mifáhu Bábí'l-'Abwab* (the Key of the Gate of Gates). Initially, he had written this attack to extract money from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but failed in his purpose. See Browne, Edward G. *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia: Partly Based on the Manuscript Work of Mírzá Muhammad-'Ali Khán 'Tarbiyat' of Tabriz*. Reprint. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1983., p. 18.



From the outset, the late Mírzá Isháq Khán admonished them by saying, “This is not Iran where one can commit such heinous acts with impunity and spill the blood of people for no reason. Whoever has murdered the Sháh is now in prison and will be killed. In accordance with Islamic jurisprudence, one cannot kill another in place of a murderer.”

The more he reasoned in this way, the less effect it had on them, and they rejected his arguments by advancing further threats. Eventually, Mírzá Isháq Khán replied, “The people that live in Cairo and are known by this name [Bahá’í] are not ordinary and commonplace folk. They are all among the best known and most respected merchants and are engaged in business activities in all corners of the world. How are you going to deal with companies and merchants that they trade with and how will you compensate their customers?” They said, “We stand ready to provide a guarantee that we will settle all their accounts and are willing to sign a surety to this effect.” Mírzá Isháq Khán finally managed to still their fury by saying, “I will telegraph [the Amínu’s-Sultan,] the Atabak<sup>98</sup> [and find out the identity of the Sháh’s assassin]. Should he be a Bábí, you are free to do as you please and neither you nor I will be held responsible before the government. However, if he is not a Bábí, there is no reason to inflict injuries upon innocent people. Give me three days. If I haven’t received a reply by then, do as you please.”

On the third day, a memorial service was organized in the Consulate for the fallen monarch, and no response [to the telegram] had been received from Tihiran. I remember well when the Bahá’í group, led by the honored Khurasani, arrived at the gathering. The Za’imu’d-Dawlih snapped, “The rascals have killed the Sháh and now occupy the seat of honor too!” This comment greatly offended the illustrious Mírzá Abú’l-Fadl and he rose to defend the friends. The Za’imu’d-Dawlih asked, “Jináb-i-Mírzá, it seems that you are a Bábí as well?” To which Mírzá Abu’l-Fadl responded, “I am a Bahá’í and what harm is there in that?” That gathering was the occasion when, without the least hesitation, Mírzá Abu’l-Fadl openly and publicly declared himself to be a Bahá’í and, with his characteristic courage, heroically defended the Bahá’ís.

However, the Consul-General, fearing that the [Iranian] Muslims would commit an unseemly act, was extremely perturbed and worried. He was thoroughly unmindful of the representatives of various governments and officials of different embassies [who were there to pay homage]. With an agitated face that betrayed his inner turmoil, he sat in his designated position. Most people, however, thought that the loss and death of the monarch had brought about deep grief. The worry did not last very long however. At the final hour of the gathering, a telegraph arrived from the Royal Court in Tihiran to the effect that the murder of the Sháh was committed by a certain Mírzá Rida of Kirman, who was a follower of Siyyid

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<sup>98</sup> During the reign of Nasiri’-d-Din Sháh, the Prime Minister carried the title of the Atabak.

Jamalu'd-Din-i-Afghani and who was wholly unconnected with the Bábís or Bahá'ís. [The telegram further emphasized that] Iranian subjects, wherever they lived, must remain unmolested and protected.

After reading this telegram, the Consul-General was elated. He instructed the Za'imud-Dawlih to read its entire text out loud to the gathering. He read it once. The Consul ordered him to read it so emphatically that even pedestrians outside would hear him. So, he read it a second time. And likewise, a third time!

The Consul-General then got up from his seat and greeted the distinguished guests. He said to the Iranians, "Now you understand that Bahá'ís are not killers. Rather, they are supportive of the government and the Sháh. It is important that you now recognize the identity of the true enemy of the monarchy and our nation." In such a way, this potential disturbance was diffused.

## Second Pilgrimage: In the Presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá

### Departure from Egypt

In the year 1314 A.H.<sup>99</sup>, I sought permission to attain the sacred presence of the Center of the Covenant and visit the Holy Threshold of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. This request was graced with acceptance and I was invited to the Holy Land. Together with my brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, we left Port Said.

In Cairo, there had been occasional talk of the faithlessness of Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí and his collusion with the Holy Family and the widow<sup>100</sup> of Bahá'u'lláh against [the provisions of] the *Kitab-i-Ahdi* and `Abdu'l-Bahá. However, since `Abdu'l-Bahá had not yet disclosed this secret, none of the believers was sure it was true or knew any of the details. Those that had gone on pilgrimage were told by the Master, "When you return, leave whatever you have heard or seen by the sea." As such, the friends heard some things about what was going on, but did not dare repeat them. In particular, this subject was discussed by the elders of the [Bahá'í] community in Cairo. They would say things like, "If `Abdu'l-Bahá is in debt and has not been able to pay the expenses incurred during the days of the Blessed Perfection or associated with the funeral of the Ancient Beauty, why are the Aghsan living so luxuriously and lavishly?" Others would say, "Why do the Aghsan have excessive expenses, such as maintaining carriages, horses, and multiple servants, and incur the exorbitant cost of entertaining government officials, nobles, and influential citizens, especially at this time of widespread terrible financial recession when the Bahá'ís have very little

<sup>99</sup> June 1896 to June 1897

<sup>100</sup> Presumably, a reference to Mahd-i-'Uliya, Bahá'u'lláh's second wife.

means? Beyond the expenses [in the Holy Land], the critical obligations of the Cause in Iran must also be met! The actions of the Aghsan directly conflict with the interests of the Faith!" In short, there was talk like this about the news and events in the Holy Land.

Shortly before we left Cairo, I attained the presence of the honored Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl. After graciously welcoming me, he said, "Surely, you are familiar with some of the concerns expressed by the pilgrims returning from the Holy Land. When you have attained the presence of the beloved Master, reverently relate [this] on my behalf: 'The fragrances of love and fellowship do not show in the comments of some pilgrims returning through Cairo. Some say that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sanctified heart is not happy with the actions and activities of certain individuals. The illustrious Aghsan do not attain the august presence of the Master and, in turn, His blessed Person does not visit the Mansion. Others say that the sacred Figure of 'Abdu'l-Bahá has not been able to repay loans incurred during the period of Bahá'u'lláh's illness, nor have the expenses associated with His ascension been paid. However, we are told that the honored Aghsan spend excessively and live in great luxury. And yet, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is obliged to pay for all of this. Inevitably, when the pilgrims say such things here, they will repeat them elsewhere as well. Consequently, the Master's sufferings will surely multiply. If the blessed Person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá considers it wise to announce these issues openly, perhaps the apprehension the friends experience when they hear such hearsay would be alleviated.'" Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl particularly emphasized, "Open your ears well and find out all that you can [about what is going on in the Holy Land]. Pass on these things when no one besides yourself is in the presence of the beloved Master."

### In 'Akká

Once again, after the passage of five years, I was returning to the Holy Land.<sup>101</sup> Memories of our last pilgrimage during the Days of God, and beholding the Countenance of the Blessed Beauty, and our nine-month stay under His blessed shadow were coming back and setting my heart and soul on fire. The beloved Master had recently returned to 'Akká from the cave of Elijah.<sup>102</sup>

When we arrived, we attained His blessed presence. He showered us with His measureless favors and infinite bounties and asked after the friends in Cairo. He then warned, "This region is beset with turmoil. The gale of tests from the Blessed Beauty blows in every direction. Calamity's tempest has agitated the sea of the world of being. You must exert yourself and be

<sup>101</sup> Though the exact date of Mírzá Habib's second pilgrimage is not known, from the text's internal evidence, it is estimated to be in the spring of 1897.

<sup>102</sup> Finding the situation in 'Akka intolerable, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had moved to Haifa's Retreat of Elijah on Mount Carmel for two months.

vigilant lest, God forbid, the dust of rancor, enmity and infidelity to the divine Covenant should sully your pure hearts.”

The beloved Master’s comment left me very sad and pensive, as I thought about the subject that had been discussed in Cairo. I was certain that something ominous was stirring. Some of the resident believers, whom I had known during the time of the Blessed Beauty and who had served with great humility and sincerity, were no longer radiating the same spirituality and reverence. It occurred to me to discuss my perplexities and questions with two of my close friends in that land. Perhaps they could help alleviate the storm that had unexpectedly engulfed my heart and had caused the sacred city of `Akká to become like a cage to me.

What the Master said to us had profoundly saddened my heart, withered my spirit and paralyzed my whole being. I asked myself: what has happened that the One designated by both the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* and the *Kitab-i-`Ahdi*, and Who is the focus of adoration for the people of Bahá, must now warn the pilgrims in this way? I remembered vividly that every day during our pilgrimage at the time of the Ancient Beauty, we attained the presence of `Abdu’l-Bahá [and, as such, I knew His personality well]. Now I wondered: what had robbed Him of His strength and vitality? What had diminished His radiance and those heavenly smiles? His hair and beard had turned white; His luminous cheeks were now full of lines; and His blessed eyes, which at the time of the Ancient Beauty were full of life and brilliance, now looked bitterly tired. He seemed very sad and grief-stricken. At times, I thought perhaps it was the Blessed Perfection’s ascension that had so profoundly affected the Master and aged Him so much. But then I would reason: the supreme Spirit of the Ancient Beauty prevails over all things and envelops the world of being. Therefore, it could not cause such sorrow in `Abdu’l-Bahá. He knows best that Bahá’u’lláh’s ascension was His own will – a fact not only alluded to, but clearly enunciated in His sacred Writings – and this truth is one of the divine attributes.

Overwhelmed by anxiety and unable to resolve any of these perplexities, I would pace the streets like a crazed man and talk to myself. Eventually, I went to see one of my old friends, the late Áqá Rida Shirazí<sup>103</sup>, whom I truly loved like a father. I began to discuss these things with him, but being a wise and experienced man, he responded in such a way that I did not understand his meaning and was not enlightened any further.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>103</sup> He embraced the Faith in Baghdad, where he owned a confectionery shop with Mírzá Mahmud-i-Kashani. He accompanied Bahá’u’lláh in all stages of His exile and served the Master until his death in 1912. In the early 1880s, he penned a stirring account of Bahá’u’lláh, which remains unpublished. See `Abdu’l-Bahá. *Memorials of the Faithful*, translated by Marzieh Gail. Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1971, pp. 39-41.

<sup>104</sup> In accordance with the Master’s instructions to all resident believers and in order to protect the young Afán, the wise and veteran believer had refused to share any details about the events of `Akka and the rebellion of the Aghsan against `Abdu’l-Bahá.

Several times in the streets, I saw Mírzá Áqá Jan<sup>105</sup>, whom I knew Bahá'u'lláh had expelled<sup>106</sup>. He expected me to show him respect, bow down in deference to his station and greet him warmly, the same way that I esteemed him during the time of Bahá'u'lláh. But I did not take any notice of him, even though I knew he resented my discourtesy. One day, he asked me about my father. I pretended I had not heard him. He said, "Jináb-i-Afnán, what sin have I committed that you hold me in such contempt? Such acrimonious behavior is not in keeping with the quality of the Afnáns' holy lineage." I responded, "I dislike you and do not want to talk with you. From now on, please do not converse with me and agitate my fatigued soul."

All strength and confidence seemed to have been drained from me. I was very frightened and consumed with the thought that the talk circulating in Cairo would become a divine test for this unworthy soul as well.

Eventually, I went to see another of my old friends, Mírzá Jalál<sup>107</sup>, the son of the Sultánu'sh-Shuhadá [the King of Martyrs]. We were very close during the period that had he lived in Cairo. One time, he came down with dysentery and was near death. The Master had instructed that he be sent to the Holy Land. However, none of the believers dared to take him to Port Said so that, through Siyyid Yahya [Nahri], the brother of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's wife, he could be sent to the Holy Land. Even though I was discouraged from doing so by the honored Khurasani, I volunteered to take him, arguing that he might pass away in Cairo and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's wish would remain unfulfilled.<sup>108</sup> Because of this incident, he developed a particular fondness and affinity for me. As such, I went to visit him and asked him the truth of the matter.

At first, he was reluctant to answer and said to me directly, "Such speculations will harm you and it is best to disregard them. Focus your

<sup>105</sup> For a short biography, see Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 181-92.

<sup>106</sup> The original word is 'tard,' which, in this context, means excommunication. During Bahá'u'lláh's last years, He banished Mírzá Áqá Jan from His presence because of certain acts and attitudes. However, through the intercession of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, he was forgiven and resumed his services. He was finally expelled two months before Bahá'u'lláh's ascension.

<sup>107</sup> He had married Rúhā Khánum, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's third daughter. This marriage produced two sons, Munib and Hasan, and three daughters, Maryam, Duha and Zahrá. The family name was Shahíd [martyr]. Mírzá Jalál and his family eventually lost their faith.

<sup>108</sup> Mírzá Jalál arrived in 'Akka severely ill and at death's door. Abú'l-Qásim Afnán relates that he heard the following story from his father, Mírzá Habíb, on numerous occasions. His father deeply believed in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ability to work miracles. "Sometime after Mírzá Jalál had been sent to 'Akka desperately ill, I saw him well and in perfect health. He told me, 'I have no memory of how I came from Cairo to Port Said and from there to 'Akka. I remember, however, that when I arrived in 'Akka, I was laid up unconscious in bed and 'Abdu'l-Bahá would come to visit me each day. One day, all of a sudden, I noticed that I had become very light, soaring in the air and completely conscious. In that condition, I saw my body lying in bed while my mother and sister were pulling a white sheet over me and sobbing profusely. After they left the room still weeping, they met the Master, who asked them, 'What happened?' They answered, 'Mírzá Jalál has died.' 'Abdu'l-Bahá came into the room, removed the sheet from my face, and began to chant certain verses. Instantly, I returned to my body, opened my eyes and saw His luminous Countenance. The Master asked, 'Mírzá Jalál, what do you desire?' With a hushed voice, I replied, 'Yogurt.' 'Abdu'l-Bahá went outside and told my family, 'Mírzá Jalál is well. He wants some yogurt. Give him some.' After I was fed a few spoonfuls, I began a full recovery and, in no time, was thoroughly well and strong."

thoughts instead on the Threshold of the Ancient Beauty. Such affairs are not worthy of mention or your consideration.” I insisted on my request. There was no one in the room except the ever-present God and the two of us. He made me take an oath on the hair of the Master that I would not divulge to another soul what he was about to share, not even to my brother. Then he proceeded to recount all that had happened since the night of the ascension, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had noticed that the Aghsan were busy searching the papers and Tablets [of Bahá’u’lláh]. From beginning to end, he described to me everything he had seen or heard. At the end, he emphasized, “It is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s wish that the believers not know these things and you should pretend to be ignorant of them as well.”

The world turned dark before my eyes. Uncontrollably, I went by the seashore and, facing the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh, began to weep and supplicate: “Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá! Is it possible that Your religion, planted so firmly through the Covenant that You have established with each of Your servants, is now divided and fragmented? Is it possible that different sects will now appear in it? And if so, what was the good in the Sacred Blood of the Báb [being spilt] or the sufferings endured by the resplendent Person of ‘Him Whom God shall make manifest’<sup>109</sup>? How is it that the blood of the martyrs of the Cause has come to naught so quickly?” I would say such things and shed bitter tears. After several days of anguish, my sobbing and tears calmed my heart and stilled the storm that raged in my soul. I was afraid to speak with anyone or associate with any of the old friends.

As the grace of God always surrounds us, several pilgrims arrived from Iran at that time who were without equal in their humor and always made everyone happy. These were: Mírzá ‘Abdu’llah Khán<sup>110</sup>, the father-in-law of the martyred Varqa; the late Mírzá ‘Azizu’llah Khán, a son of the martyred Varqa; the honored Dr. [Yunis Khán] Afrukhtih<sup>111</sup>; and Áqá Mírzá Fadlu’llah Kandí<sup>112</sup>, known as the Mufsidu’l-Mamalík. Mufsid [corrupt] was a title that Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí used for the thabityn<sup>113</sup>. When Áqá Mírzá Fadlu’llah arrived in the Holy Land, it was said, “Another mufsid is added to the mufsidyn!” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá humorously would refer to him as the Mufsidu’l-Mamalík<sup>114</sup> and, thereafter, he was known by this name among the friends. Often in the Pilgrim House, Mishkin-Qalim, Zaynu’l-Muqarrabin and Áqá Rida [Qannad] Shirazi would entertain the friends with witty stories and, as such, lessened the pain of our hearts.

<sup>109</sup> That is, Bahá’u’lláh.

<sup>110</sup> A senior official in the Treasury Ministry of Tabriz.

<sup>111</sup> For a biography, see the *Bahá’í World*, vol. 12, pp. 679-681; and Afrukhtah, Yúnus. *Khátirát-i nuh sálah*. Rev. ed. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1983. Translated by Riaz Masrour, *Memories of Nine Years in ‘Akká*. Oxford: George Ronald, 2003.

<sup>112</sup> The father of Mírzá Ashraf Khán and Fu’ad Ashraf.

<sup>113</sup> The thabityn [the steadfast] were those who had remained faithful to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. They, in turn, referred to the followers to Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí as naqidyn (the Covenant-breakers).

<sup>114</sup> Literally, Corrupt in all realms.

The day after Mírzá Jalál told me the details and, to some degree, clarified the situation for me, I was thinking that the friends were not aware of these events. They did not know that the Aghsan had broken the Covenant of the Cause of God and were raising a rebellion against the Wronged One of the world [‘Abdu’l-Bahá]. Further, despite the emphatic injunction [of the Master], the pilgrims leaving the Holy Land would, sooner or later, tell others what they had found out, and this would sprout seeds of doubt in all hearts. And I further reflected that perhaps an inner agitation, similar to what had engulfed me during these few days, might overwhelm others as well. I thought that perhaps it would be better if His blessed Person allowed the friends to be generally acquainted with the details. At the least, the kind of rumor that was current among the believers in Cairo would subside. They would know how the Master was suffering daily at the hands of His jealous brothers and other enemies inside and outside the Cause, and how He bore the enormous expenses of the Mansion, which had become the center of sedition and the headquarters of His ancestral enemies. Each day, a long list of food and other necessities – from hay and barley, to meat and poultry – was sent from the Mansion to be bought. Áqá Rida [Qannad-i-Shirazi] was in charge of the expenditures and knew better than anyone else about the unwarranted expenses demanded by the Aghsan. Each day he had to borrow a sum to administer the affairs and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá concealed all these activities.

I did not sleep the whole of that night. Early in the morning, without telling any of my companions where I was going, I set out directly for His blessed House<sup>115</sup>. En route, on a street corner, I saw His sacred Figure coming towards me. I bowed down and kissed His feet. He raised me from the ground and showered me with His infinite kindness, saying, “Were you coming to visit Me? I too was coming to see you. Today, I want to visit the poor and needy. Come, so we may be together.”

I began to follow behind His blessed Temple. I knew that He was fully aware of one’s inner thoughts and, therefore, knew my condition as well. The resident believers were called on not to disclose what had happened [regarding the Covenant-breaking], and the pilgrims were instructed to leave behind by the seashore whatever they had heard or seen, and return home. Surely, [I thought,] He was well aware that Mírzá Jalál had described all the details for me. Also, I had heard some other things from Áqá Rida and Mishkin-Qalam. He must certainly know the kind of whispers that circulated among the believers in Cairo and the thoughts they commonly had.

He asked after the honored [Mírzá] Abu’l-Fadl, “How is Jináb-i-Mírzá and how is his health?” He continued with the same theme and asked about the friends in Cairo and their ways and thoughts. Characteristically, He

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<sup>115</sup> At the time, the Master and His family lived in the House of ‘Abdu’llah Pasha in ‘Akka.

showered me with so much kindness that I found the courage to say, “My Master, it has been rather difficult for some of the friends in Cairo to accept that Your blessed Person should be under the burden of so much debt, and yet the Aghsan live luxuriously, spending their time merrymaking.” Before I could continue, His countenance was filled with rage and He exclaimed, “How is that?!” and proceeded to walk on. I no longer had the strength to follow Him and started to tremble uncontrollably. It was as if soul had left my body. All I could do was lean against a wall. He had taken about 20 steps before He realized that I was not following behind. Seeing my condition, He returned, touching this servant on the shoulders. He said, “Tell Me, what has happened?” He poured out so much kindness and offered such favors and cheers that I gradually came to myself and began to follow Him.

At His bidding, I explained all that I knew and had heard. I also gave my own assessment about the sort of talk that was circulating among the friends and what the Jináb-i-Mírzá [Abu'l-Fadl] had said, namely, “If the believers were to know the details, such concerns would surely be alleviated.” The beloved Master exclaimed several times, “Well said!” He then added, “Until now, I had not wanted this talk to go beyond `Akká. But now it is clear that it is already too late and that the foul odor of the Covenant-breaking has reached the nostrils of the entire world.<sup>116</sup> What you see or hear, you are to share with the friends, but descriptively, not complainingly.” He then explained many things about the Covenant-breaking of Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí and the sufferings that He had been forced to endure, adding, “Recently, a Commission of Inquiry has arrived from Istanbul. Each day, I go to the government office and they interrogate Me. My brother has filed an official complaint. If I were to tell you the details, you would be grieved. Surely, you have heard and seen certain things here, or will hear of them. You must never complain. Tell the friends about them, but descriptively, not complainingly.” (I will tell the rest of this story when I recount the subsequent events in Egypt.)

That day, His blessed Being visited the homes of several of the town's poor and destitute. At each place, with His own hand, He provided them with a sum of money. He caressed all the small children, hugged them tenderly in His bosom and kissed them affectionately. Several of those visited were ill and He ordered their medicine. It was about midday when we returned. Near the Khán [Avamid] I was given leave from His presence.

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<sup>116</sup> The following, by Dr. Yunis Afrukhtih (*Khatirat-i-Nuh Salih*, pp. 51-2), further explains the effort that `Abdu'l-Bahá's brothers went to spread the news of their split with Him: “`Abdu'l-Bahá often used to say, ‘One day, Mírzá Diyá'u'llah came to see me. I noticed he was looking at his fingers, which were stained with ink, expecting Me to comment on them. I did not say anything, so he volunteered the information, saying, ‘Last night until the early hours of the morning, we were engaged in writing letters and gelatin printing. Consequently, my fingers are stained. My brother [Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí] had written a letter, and we printed several copies and sent them away this morning.’ I asked him, ‘Did you really write and dispatch them?’ And when he answered that he had, I said, ‘I swear by the Righteousness of God! A day will come when Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí will wish that his fingers had been cut off so that he could not have taken the pen to proclaim his break with the Covenant. For four years, I have concealed this matter so that the beloved of God may not learn of your unfaithfulness to the Covenant. It is now beyond My power to hide it any longer. You have announced it yourselves to the believers.’”



The agitation of the past few days had now completely evaporated. My heart was assured. I had no worries. I would converse, laugh and not avoid my companions, knowing that if I divulged anything [about Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí and his followers], I had the permission of the beloved Master and that I need not feel repentant about it. Also, [I felt elated] since, on that day, I had spent several magnificent hours in His presence, benefiting enormously from His utterances. It was a meeting that transforms even bitter venom into sweet honey.

When I joined my companions again, they asked me where I had been that morning. I told them that I had been in the Master's presence. Each of them expressed his joy for my good fortune in his own way and jested with me, especially Jinab-i-Mufsidu'l-Mamalík and Dr. Yunis Khán [Afrukhtih], may my spirit be a sacrifice to their dust.

### **The Dream of Salih Áqá**

Salih Áqá had been a devoted, black slave and one of the eunuchs of Cairo's royal court. After the Khedive<sup>117</sup> of Egypt, Isma'il Pasha, fell from office, all the slaves and eunuchs of his household that had been taught correct manners and etiquette were freed. At the time when the Greatest Holy Leaf came to Cairo, this black slave was introduced to her. As he possessed a pure and luminous heart, and had mastered all manners and etiquette [related to serving a royal audience], he had the good fortune of being employed to serve the Greatest Holy Leaf and to return with her from Cairo to the Holy Land. In his new capacity, he served the andaruni<sup>118</sup> of the house of the Master as well as His guests and pilgrims.

One day, all the friends, both pilgrims and residents, were in `Abdu'l-Bahá's presence in the biruni when Salih Áqá came in and said, "My Master, last evening I had a dream that I would like to recount for You." With utmost compassion and infinite loving-kindness, `Abdu'l-Bahá responded, "Do so." Salih Áqá spoke an eloquent and engaging Arabic and always stood in a punctilious manner before the Master. As he related his dream, his words and expressions revealed the emotion that had prompted him to share his thoughts. Salih Áqá recounted:

Last night, I dreamt that a very large legion of soldiers had camped on the plain between `Akká and Haifa. [They were garrisoned so densely that] passing through them was almost impossible. I stood at the top of a small rise and, wherever I looked, I saw nothing but soldiers and munitions. Armaments of all kinds were ready at the camp. I stood in wonder at their order and discipline and how thoroughly they prepared. At the very heart of

<sup>117</sup> A title belonging to a series of governors who ruled Egypt as viceroy to the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1867 to 1914.

<sup>118</sup> The inner quarters of the house, typically accessible to the family and a few close friends. The reception hall is known as the biruni.

the camp, a magnificent and enormous tabernacle was raised as the headquarters for the army's Commander.

Your blessed Person [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] summoned me to Your presence and instructed me to saddle a horse. I brought a wonderfully large, white horse and the Effendi [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] rode towards the camp, while instructing me, “Come, let us go and meet the Chief of this compound. This army has come to help us.” On foot, [I followed You], passing by the tents, where all the soldiers would immediately salute You and stand to attention in accordance with military custom. We came before that glorious tabernacle, erected in the midmost heart of the camp, with majestic, golden lanterns displayed above it. You dismounted and gave the horse to me and, with extreme reverence, entered the tabernacle. I was lost in bewilderment. Who, I thought, could the Commander of this army be that He could invoke such profound veneration in You? I followed You inside and saw inside the tabernacle a Person whose countenance I could not look upon. His beard was black and His eyes brilliant.

Salih Áqá then proceeded to describe all the features of the Ancient Beauty. He then continued:

When Your blessed Person went in, You prostrated and kissed the dust, and then offered declarations of praise and glorification to that Commander. He [came forward,] embraced You affectionately, showered You with His tender kindness, and began to converse with You. Battle plans and maps hung on the walls of the tabernacle and all were placed at Your disposal. You were viewing them, conferring with One another on the battle strategy. It was then that I woke up.

As Salih Áqá was describing his dream, tears streamed from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s eyes. The friends too were deeply moved. The tongue of grandeur then spoke these sweet words: “Blessed is your pure heart and luminous is your spirit. You serve the sacred Threshold of the Ancient Beauty so faithfully and are, indeed, among the near ones and His noble servants! The army in your dream is the Army of God and represents the confirmations of the Blessed Beauty. The Commander of the army that you saw in the world of dreams is none other than the Greatest Name, the Person of Bahá’u’lláh, and the Author of this Cause. Those maps and charts that hung on the walls were plans for the edification and reconstruction of the world.”<sup>119</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá then gave a detailed explanation of the importance of the divine Covenant, the magnificent future of the Cause, and its distinguished and superior feature over the Dispensations of the past. Afterwards, we left His presence [for the day].

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<sup>119</sup> See Afnán, Abú’l-Qásim. *Black Pearls in the Household of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1999. pp. 49-52.

### **Actions of the Covenant-breakers**

At that time, a Commission of Inquiry had arrived from Istanbul and was causing enormous anxiety for the Master, the pilgrims and the resident believers. It was investigating the constant barrage of false and calumnious reports that Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí had sent to the Sublime Court<sup>120</sup> and the string of lies and deceptions that he had woven.

[Yahya] Tabur Aghasi was [‘Akka’s] Chief of Police and a constant companion and close friend of Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí. He frequently visited the Mansion [of Bahjí], and, together with Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí, Siyyid `Alíy-i-Afnán, [Mírzá] Majdu’d-Din, Mírzá Áqá Jan and some other Covenant-breakers, was a principal figure in designing schemes against `Abdu’l-Bahá. These people occupied the Mansion like a beehive – a place that once witnessed the revelation of Tablets and was the seat of God’s Supreme Manifestation.

In the early hours of every morning, `Abdu’l-Bahá would leave His house and return about one hour after noon or perhaps a bit later. As the Master was leaving, Salih-Áqá would stand with the greatest dignity and reverence by the entrance door and leave it open until `Abdu’l-Bahá returned home. His attention to his duties and sense of responsibility towards his Master were indescribable. I well remember on one occasion, the entrance had been left open as several of the friends were awaiting `Abdu’l-Bahá’s return. Strong winds began to blow dust inside the house and one of the servants decided to close the door. With an agitated face, Salih-Áqá roared in protest, admonishing him, “How dare you close the entrance to the house of a Person Who desires to have it open to the entire world!”

When `Abdu’l-Bahá returned home that day, His blessed visage betrayed His deep inner turmoil and it was clear that He was very tired. Consequently, the friends were excused from His presence. That afternoon when we were summoned, He informed us:

These honored persons<sup>121</sup> have sent a report to the Commission of Inquiry, which has resulted in the Commission’s head moving with a vengeance to eradicate the Cause of God. He is now raising a tumult by saying, “The claims of Your Father and Yourself are at variance with Your deeds and the objections of Your brother. We have a Hadith that states: ‘The Messengers and Prophets do not inherit and have no heir.’ Your Father claimed the station of Prophethood and gave You His successorship. Your brother states that You have confiscated the estate of the Shaykh-i-Kabir<sup>122</sup> and deprived them of their inheritance.”

<sup>120</sup> A reference to Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>121</sup> That is, the Covenant-breakers.

<sup>122</sup> That is, Bahá’u’lláh.

I realized that, with such slanders, they sought to shatter the foundation of the Cause. However, at that moment, the confirmations of the Supreme Concourse poured down and the sun of the favors of the Blessed Beauty shone upon me. I said to him, "The Shaykh-i-Kabir has left a Will and Testament in His own hand and seal, and defined in it the inheritance of His heir:

'Although the Realm of Glory hath none of the vanities of the world, yet within the treasury of trust and resignation We have bequeathed to Our heirs an excellent and priceless heritage. Earthly treasures We have not bequeathed, nor have We added such cares as they entail. By God! In earthly riches fear is hidden and peril is concealed. Consider ye and call to mind that which the All-Merciful hath revealed in the Qur'an: 'Woe betide every slanderer and defamer, him that layeth up riches and counteth them'<sup>123</sup>."

'Abdu'l-Bahá then added, "I said this to him and the words choked his breath!"

In those days, certain mischievous and disingenuous individuals<sup>125</sup> often frequented the gatherings of the friends, and were also present in that meeting. 'Abdu'l-Bahá therefore said, "Inform my brother that I am not 'Alí, nor is he 'Umar. I am much greater than 'Alí and he is much slighter than 'Umar."<sup>126</sup> Then He smiled and talked about many subjects, none of which I have remembered. Afterwards, we left His presence. After we returned to the Khán [Avamid], each of us was filled with grief and sadness over the actions of the Covenant-breakers and their lack of faith.

### Mírzá Áqá Jan

At that time, the Covenant-breakers could generally be divided into two groups. One group consisted of those who had completely severed their relationship with the thabityn and, having crawled into a corner, spent their days and nights in close companionship and fraternity of Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí. The other group consisted of those who associated with the friends and the thabityn. This latter group would [openly] attend the presence of the beloved Master. But they were really agents of Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí and Mírzá Madju'd-Din, and were told to try and undermine the confidence of the friends, agitate their hearts and cloud their thoughts. This group was extremely insidious and dangerous. For instance, when a new pilgrim arrived [in the Holy Land], they would befriend and engage him, presenting themselves as deeply devoted to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, so

<sup>123</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitab-i-Ahd*, in *Tablets of Baha'u'llah Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas*, Haifa: Bahai world Centre, 1982, p.219.

<sup>124</sup> Qur'an 104:1-2

<sup>125</sup> Allusion to the agents of Mírzá Muhammad-'Alí.

<sup>126</sup> Dr. Afrukhtih reports a slight variation of this story: "On numerous occasions, He ['Abdu'l-Bahá] sent word to the Naqid-i-Akbar [Arch-Covenant-breaker], 'Neither are you 'Umar to shoulder such a mighty Cause, nor am I 'Alí to cry over your doings in the palm-grove.'" (*Khátirát-i-Nuh Salih*, p. 235)

that the unsuspecting visitor would think that they were sincere and loyal to the Covenant and Testament. However, their motive was, through whatever means possible, to plant seeds of discord in the heart of their victims, poison their soul and undermine their faith. [These agents] would attend the gatherings of the friends in the Pilgrim House [of `Akka] and participate in their conversations, which they would gradually begin to dominate. They would talk of the days of the Ancient Beauty and express their disappointment over the events subsequent to His ascension. They would describe the state of affairs in the Mansion, the condition of Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí, the anguish of [Bahá'u'lláh's] widow and others, thereby causing sincere believers to be uncontrollably moved with sorrow.

For example, after 40 years of being in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, serving as amanuensis for the Divine Revelation, and in the end losing both this world and the next, the faithless and wicked Mírzá Áqá Ján would attain the presence of the Master, [falsely displaying] humility and reverence. He would stand at the threshold of the room, by the spot where shoes were removed. After receiving `Abdu'l-Bahá's permission, he would sit at the very back of the room pretending to be in rapture and consumed with adoration for the beloved Master. And, outside of the gathering, he would engage the friends with the utmost consideration and charm. However, this abominable man was in constant contact with the Mansion and the Covenant-breakers.

And so it was until the events of the commemoration of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension [in May 1897]. On this day, his malicious nature and sinister character surfaced and became evident. The following is an account of that day.

A few days before the anniversary of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension, evidence of grief and deep sorrow were apparent on the Master's countenance and the friends visiting the Holy Land were pensive and heartbroken as well. The Master's appearance was such that the resident believers like the late Áqá Rida [Qannad] and Mashkin-Qalam, who had been with `Abdu'l-Bahá [for many years], expressed bewilderment over His condition. They said that they had never seen so much despondency on His face. Everyone thought that `Abdu'l-Bahá's heart was heavy with anguish and sadness because of the approaching eve of [the anniversary of] the Blessed Beauty's ascension.

These few days passed with great difficulty and gloom, until the 70th day after Naw-Ruz<sup>127</sup>. The friends were gathered at the Pilgrim House and `Abdu'l-Bahá was present in that meeting as well. We remained there until about two hours before the time marking the ascension. At that time, His

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<sup>127</sup> Bahá'u'lláh's ascension occurred 70 days after Naw-Ruz, on the eve of 29 May 1892, at 3 a.m. It is customary to recite the Tablet of Visitation at that time. Bahá'u'lláh. "Tablet of Visitation." In *Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and `Abdu'l-Bahá*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991, pp. 230-233.

blessed Person summoned all the believers and gave each a candle and a bottle of rosewater. With unreserved grief and sorrow, we proceeded towards the Mansion of Bahjí and Bahá'u'lláh's Shrine, following His blessed Figure.

[Along the way,] `Abdu'l-Bahá called on several of the friends to chant prayers. Áqá Fadlu'llah began to chant Bahá'u'lláh's Mathnavi<sup>128</sup> and, in such a meditative atmosphere, we arrived at the Shrine. `Abdu'l-Bahá instructed us to pour the rosewater on the inner garden of the Shrine and to plant the candles in the same soil. With His heavenly and soul-stirring tone, `Abdu'l-Bahá chanted the Tablet of Visitation. Tears were streaming from His eyes and the mourning of the friends soared heavenwards. The sound of sobbing and yearning filled the court of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. Until morning, each person was occupied offering prayers and supplications to the Threshold of the Beloved, oblivious of his surroundings.

At `Abdu'l-Bahá's bidding, we returned to the Pilgrim House of the Mansion, had tea and rested. His blessed Being went to an adjacent room next to the Shrine. After tea, we visited the Shrine once again. Later, we all gathered in the building of the Pilgrim House under the shadow of the Mansion of Bahjí.

On that day, Mírzá Áqá Jan, who, over the span of 40 years, had partaken immeasurably of Bahá'u'lláh's ocean of favors and munificence, had asked the friends to be his guests for lunch, so that the feast on that occasion would be marked in his name. This invitation was accepted by `Abdu'l-Bahá. Mírzá Áqá Jan had prepared bread and broth for lunch. A few hours before sunset, while some of the friends were sleeping in the Pilgrim House and some were awake, he came to the Pilgrim House and started saying, "O ye believers in the Blessed Beauty! Today is not a day to rest. Because of this calamity [the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh], today the world and its inhabitants are in lamentation. Today, the denizens of the Supreme Concourse are fervently sobbing and are bitterly grief-stricken. Arise! Arise!" So, everyone got up and gathered about.

Mírzá Áqá Jan ascended a stool - that same Khadimu'llah, that same `Abd-i-Hadir<sup>129</sup>, that same person who, because of countless favors bestowed on him by Bahá'u'lláh, had attained a great station and possessed an unequalled prestige in the Faith, to the point where the most prominent believers were humbled before him. He spoke like this: "In a dream, the Ancient Beauty bequeathed the station of divine revelation upon me," and then proceeded to belittle and speak disparagingly of the sacred station of `Abdu'l-Bahá. After voicing only a few sentences, the thabityn and the

<sup>128</sup> Bahá'u'lláh. "Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví-i Mubárak*: Introduction and Provisional Verse Translation." Translated by Franklin Lewis. *Bahá'í Studies Review* (London) vol. 9 (1999/2000), pp. 101-57.

<sup>129</sup> Khadimu'llah (the servant of God) and Abd-i Hazir (the ever-present servant) were titles given to Mírzá Áqá Jan by Bahá'u'lláh.

believers were so greatly enraged that they decided to slay him. Two of them, Habíb Áqá<sup>130</sup> and Taraz<sup>131</sup>, the son of Áqá Mírzá Muhmud-i-Kashi, who were stronger than the rest, rose to their feet, grasped his throat and pulled Mírzá Áqá Jan from the stool. They started to punch and kick him, with the intention of taking his life. [Through Mírzá Áqá Ján's death,] the plan of Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí and the other Covenant-breakers was about to be fulfilled and their malicious desires realized. However, before it was too late, Mírzá `Alí-Akbar, son of the honored Mishkin-Qalam, rushed to the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá and told Him the situation. `Abdu'l-Bahá came quickly. He pulled Mírzá Áqá Jan from beneath the hands and feet of the friends and took him to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.

The author of this scheme, Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí, had invited [Yahya] Tabur Aghasi, the Chief of Police, and a number of other notable enemies of the Cause to the Mansion. He hoped that, when Mírzá Áqá Jan made his accusations, it would provoke the believers into a violent response and result in a brawl between the two sides. He expected that the Police would be forced to intervene and the situation would end in their favor. However, with `Abdu'l-Bahá arriving on the scene [and rescuing Mírzá Áqá Jan], their plans came to naught and the officers had no reason to intervene.

In `Abdu'l-Bahá's company, Mírzá Áqá Jan was taken to the Shrine. The Master locked the Shrine's entrance from inside. There, this abominable man, who had been freed from the grasp of the friends [by `Abdu'l-Bahá], made an attempt on the Master's life. Furious and deeply upset, the friends stood outside the Shrine and the Holy Family waited in the adjacent rooms, while `Abdu'l-Bahá remained inside. We were truly distressed and agitated, until the Master opened the Shrine's entrance. He instructed Mírzá Habíb and Taraz to take Mírzá Áqá Jan to a stable near the Mansion. He confiscated all the papers he had hidden inside his pockets and returned only his seal to him. Mírzá Áqá Jan had wrapped large handkerchiefs containing seditious papers around his waist and under his `aba, and had many similar materials stuffed in his side pockets as well. `Abdu'l-Bahá then dismissed us from His presence and we returned to `Akká.<sup>132</sup>

Through this scheme, the Covenant-breakers intended to create an unfavorable situation, so that police officers would interfere in the affairs of the Cause and seize control of the Shrine. Even though the divine plan has always been, and will always be, more powerful than their sinister schemes, they didn't stop. They used cash, gifts, [Chinese] ceramic vessels<sup>133</sup>, and

<sup>130</sup> Better known as Mírzá Habíbu'lláh. He was a son of Áqá Ridá Qannád-i-Shirazí and the father of `Abbas Huvayda, a long-time Prime Minister of Iran during the rule of Muhammad-Reza Sháh Pahlavi.

<sup>131</sup> In the latter years of `Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry, he broke the Covenant.

<sup>132</sup> With some minor variations, another eyewitness account of this event is recorded in *Khatirat-i-Nuh Salih*, pp. 80-84.

<sup>133</sup> The Afán family had extensive trade with China and the Far East, and several of them had offices in these countries as far as Shanghai. Throughout Bahá'u'lláh's ministry, they presented the Holy Family with many pieces

Persian carpets from the days of Bahá'u'lláh that were used by His sacred Person, to bribe government authorities, political officials and anyone else associated with the State, hoping to win their sympathy. They either presented them with these gifts or sold the items at a nominal price until, eventually, their activities resulted in the Commission of Inquiry coming [to the Holy Land] and the amazing events that then happened.

O dear readers, who may one day peruse these notes! I swear by the oneness of the Author of the Cause, that no pen, save the august pen of the Center of the Covenant Himself, is able to convey a thousandth part of the calamities and tribulations that beset the blessed Person of `Abdu'l-Bahá in those days. They were filled entirely with pain and sufferings. Innumerable Tablets revealed in honor of friends throughout every corner of the world bear witness to this humble statement.

The papers discovered in the pockets of Mírzá Áqá Jan, or hidden elsewhere on his person, were found to be all written in the style of Revelation Writing and addressed to different friends, particularly prominent believers throughout the Bahá'í world. Each was given a mission and a [new] title. According to their scheme, Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí and [Mírzá] Madju'd-Din hoped that the letters would confuse the friends and undermine their confidence [in `Abdu'l-Bahá]. Such was the lifelong harvest of a man who had been singularly favored by the Almighty, but now had lost both this world and the next. I beseech God, through His subduing Might, omnipotent Authority, encompassing Favors and ever-present Grace, to protect all believers from the whisperings of evil-doers and worldly passions, and to guard the friends throughout all ages within the stronghold of His Covenant and the shelter of His Cause.

The following day, when we attained the presence of the beloved Master in His house, we noticed that He had spread all of Mírzá Áqá Jan's papers on a table and was looking through them. On seeing us, He laughed and handed us a blue sheet of paper, saying, "Look, one of these tablets was addressed to your illustrious father!"

In short, the atrocities committed by the Covenant-breakers against the body of the Cause was so heart-wrenching and harrowing that they truly defy description. The heat and flames of this fire engulfed and encircled the pilgrims and visitors alike. At last, due to the uncertainty in the Holy Land, the constant agitation of the Covenant-breakers and the arrival of the Commission of Inquiry, the entire company of pilgrims was dismissed. `Abdu'l-Bahá specifically instructed me to keep all correspondence, received from the believers in Iran or other corners, in Port Said. It was not to be forwarded to the Holy Land, as danger was always present. After that,

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of fine china and other service utensils. Some of the remnant pieces are currently displayed at various Bahá'í Holy Places in Haifa and `Akka, such as the House of `Abbud.



the Iranian pilgrims returned to Iran and the pilgrims from Egypt traveled to Port Said.

### **Departure from the Holy Land**

One day, the custodian of the Pilgrim House, Áqá Muhammad-Hasan, came and informed us that the beloved Master had instructed us to leave the Holy Land within a week. The next morning, `Abdu'l-Bahá called this servant and my late brother into His presence and said, "Because of the uncertainties in this land, return [to Egypt] aboard next week's ship. The Covenant-breakers have reported to the Commission of Inquiry that, in addition to the luxury of our lives in this House, the Pilgrim House has become very crowded because, day and night, we are entertaining a large number of pilgrims and resident believers. They claim that, with a large salary, we have hired for our own service a eunuch from the court of the [Egyptian] Pashas. Although I do not want to part with Salih-Aqa, there are compelling reasons for him not to remain here. It is best for him to return to Cairo as your guardian." We both bowed down in respect [and obedience].

The following day, we were once again called into His presence, and Salih Áqá was there as well. After showering His infinite kindness upon this fortunate black slave, who was the envy of all whites, the beloved Master said, "Salih Áqá, I did not want to send you away and had desired for you to remain in the Holy Land and continue serving the friends here. However, I am in a quandary. These two youth are very dear to me and are the trust of one of my closest friends. I wish now to commit this trust to your care and pray that you will do your best to look after them." Though not a believer, Salih Áqá profoundly adored the Master and, in tears, implored Him, "Effendi, I desire to remain close to this Threshold and serve it until my last breath. Would it be possible for the request of this servant to find acceptance in Your sight? Had it been Effendi's wish, in a single moment, a hundred guardians would have been found for these two." The Master responded, "Would you allow these two youth, whose father has entrusted them to me, to travel to a strange land? No one is more trustworthy than you." At last, with tears pouring from his eyes, this noble black man said, "Whatever is Your blessed will, I shall obey and resign myself to Your good-pleasure." `Abdu'l-Bahá consoled him, "I will summon you back here as soon as these honored youth have established themselves in Cairo, started a business and familiarized themselves with the Arabic language."

Because the time to leave the presence of the Center of the Covenant was near, we were particularly depressed and downcast during the last few days of our pilgrimage. In this period, all His blessed utterances centered on the activities of the Covenant-breakers, the hardship of the Baghdad period and the sufferings that the Blessed Perfection had endured at the hands of the followers of Azal.

During this pilgrimage journey, immeasurable divine favors and bounties were showered upon this undeserving servant. I considered myself thoroughly unworthy of these, as I found nothing but shortcomings and neglect in my deeds. With His own hands, the Master graciously bestowed upon me His Arab `aba, which I thankfully received, kissed and placed to my brow. That `aba is now kept among the sacred relics of the Archives of the House of the Báb in Shiraz.

In those days, each morning, the blessed Person of `Abdu'l-Bahá had to go to the government house and would not return until late afternoon. Many of the days, the pilgrims and resident believers could not behold His heavenly countenance or attain His presence. The exception was when they saw Him on the streets and en route. Then He would briefly greet the friends and quickly go on His way.

With `Abdu'l-Bahá's permission, the day before our departure, we visited the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh and offered our last homage. The next morning, the Master called us into His presence and, with a world of sadness, we bid Him farewell. We traveled to Haifa and, from there, to Port Said.

### Back in Egypt

As mentioned earlier, the veil concealing the deeds of the violators of the divine Covenant was not yet lifted. They continued to associate with some of the friends. Through various means, they sought to spread their polemics and tried to undermine the believers' confidence and confuse their thinking. `Abdu'l-Bahá had instructed me to share [with the friends] all I had heard [while on pilgrimage] in a descriptive way.

In Cairo, the same rumour and speculation as before was still circulating. When this servant arrived, the friends gathered at our house and Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl came as well. [During our discussion,] the subject of the Holy Land and the afflictions surrounding the beloved Master came up. I explained all that I had seen or heard and the sufferings that beset `Abdu'l-Bahá. I called the Ghusnu'llah Akbar [the Great Branch of the divine Tree] by his given name Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí. Similarly, I referred to Mírzá Badi'u'llah and Mírzá Diya'u'llah by their names only and did not refer to them as the Aghsan of the Tree of Holiness. Suddenly, quite angrily and with fury, Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl addressed me, "How dare a youngster like you be so presumptuousness towards the Branches of the Tree of Sanctity and insult the text of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*! The spirit of the Prophets and Messengers circle in adoration around these sacred figures and no one in the world is permitted to belittle them. The explicit text of the *Kitáb-i-Ahdi*, the Will and Testament of the Blessed Beauty, states that the entire world must respect Bahá'u'lláh's widows, the [members of the] Holy Household and the

Aghsan.”<sup>134</sup> He voiced his views with such passion and indignation that I felt paralyzed. The more I repeated, “I saw and heard ‘Abdu’l-Bahá relate these things and do not share them on my own accord,” the more he roared back that, “I do not accept hadith.” Finally, I was forced to say, “Write to His sacred Threshold. What He favors with a reply is verily the essence of truth.” He replied, “Of course I shall write!”

Mírzá Abu’l-Fadl immediately sent a supplication to the Holy Land. In response to his letter, a Tablet similar to the Lawh-i-Hizar Bayti<sup>135</sup> was revealed in 16 pages in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s own hand. It started with these sweet words: “He is the Most Glorious. O thou who hath devoted thy life to the propagation of the Word of God!” This Tablet detailed the deeds of the Covenant-breakers and the jealousy and enmity of the people of rancor.

In short, this is how the efforts of the Covenant-breakers [to subvert the Cause] became known to the friends throughout Egypt. [The believers] immediately severed all connection with them.

After receiving this Tablet, Mírzá Abu’l-Fadl showered this servant with the greatest kindness. He apologized so frequently that, to this day - some 50 years later – I am embarrassed [by his extreme generosity]. Later, he gave that Tablet to Áqá ‘Abdu’l-Husayn Samandari<sup>136</sup>, who was in Egypt at the time, to make a copy for him, and gifted me the original Text as a memento. That Tablet is currently in a safe place.<sup>137</sup>

As instructed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, I related the events of the Holy Land and the activities of the Covenant-breakers to my father [in Shiraz]. He informed the friends throughout Shiraz, Abadih, Sarvistan and Nayriz. As a divine favor, during the Days of God, the seeds of firmness and faithfulness had been planted in the hearts of the friends in [the province of] Fárs. Throughout the ministry of the Center of Covenant, all the believers [in Fárs] were immune to the temptations and satanic whisperings of the Covenant-breakers. The sole exception was a certain Mullá Husayn-‘Alí Jahrumi<sup>138</sup>, who fell under the influence of the violators of the Covenant in

<sup>134</sup> The two injunctions of the *Kitáb-i-‘Ahd* are: “It is incumbent upon everyone to show courtesy to, and have regard for the Aghsan...”, and “Ye are bidden moreover to respect [My wife,] members of the Holy Household, the Afán and the kindred.” (Bahá’u’lláh. “Kitáb-i-‘Ahd (Book of the Covenant).” In *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. pp. 222-3).

<sup>135</sup> Revealed in the same year, 1897, for Mírzá Jalil-i-Khu’i. Because of its length, it is known as the Tablet of One Thousand Verses. The original is found in INBMC 52:551-605. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “Lawh-i-Hizar Bayti.” In *Majmu’ih Makatib-i-Hadrat-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá*. Vol. 52, *Iran National Bahá’i Manuscript Collection*. Tehran: Mu’assasih-‘i Milli-yi Matbu’at-i Amri, [c 1977], pp. 551-605.

<sup>136</sup> The older brother of Tarazu’llah Samandari.

<sup>137</sup> The original text of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet remains among the Sacred Writings and other Holy relics in the Archives of the House of the Báb. Mírzá Habíb left instructions with his sons to publish the text of this Tablet with his memoirs. The Bahá’i World Centre has advised the present translator that they will publish a translation of this important Tablet in due course.

<sup>138</sup> In his memoirs, Hájí ‘Alí-yi-Yazdi states that Jahrumi was influential in the Covenant-breakers’ scheme to use Mírzá Áqá Jan against the Master. For a summary translation, see, Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 184-5.

India and became wayward. When he returned to Jahrum, he was shunned by all, near and far, and died in the utmost poverty.

### **A Pilgrim from Mecca**<sup>139</sup>

During the time that my brother and I were engaged in commerce at Port Said, the Consul-General of Iran gave us the seal of the Consulate in Egypt so that we could stamp the passports of the Iranian pilgrims returning from Mecca. This was to prevent them from proceeding to Cairo and further burdening the Consulate Office in that city. One of the pilgrims who came to us to process his passport was a tall and corpulent Siyyid who appeared to be a dignified man. He said to us, "I do not wish to return to Iran with my fellow travelers so soon [after our pilgrimage]. I want to journey in this region." However, his traveling companions were adamant that he should return, saying, "We have paid all his travel expenses so that, throughout the h.ajj journey and our return home, he would be our prayer-guide and example, informing us of our religious duties. Now that we are returning from the House of God [in Mecca], it is unfair of this Siyyid to leave us stranded and unguided in mid-journey. Furthermore, we have taken an oath in the name of his illustrious Ancestor to pay for his return [to Iran] and we do not want to betray our promise."

In private, they had earlier asked me to convince the Siyyid to comply with his solemn agreement. Therefore, I said to him, "This is a foreign country and you have no friends or acquaintances here. In addition, you do not speak the vernacular Arabic or its Egyptian dialect and may find yourself inconvenienced. Reason dictates that you not hurt the feelings of your traveling companions and comply with their request. Further, this country is not like Iran, where it is customary to organize passion plays and Siyyids are paid for their sermons. If you stay in this region, I am certain that you will be disappointed." With a face flushed with anger, he responded sarcastically, "I am responsible for myself. Should I come to your house, you may refuse me hospitality!" I had nothing more to say. Since their ship was ready to pull anchor, the other pilgrims left and the Siyyid stayed.

The following day, the Siyyid came to my office in the same state and said, "The reason I didn't want to return to Iran with my fellow pilgrims is because I want to visit 'Abbás Effendi in 'Akká." The enmity of the Covenant-breakers in those days had reached its peak. The Holy Land was in turmoil and many perils surrounded the blessed Person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. I didn't consider it prudent for such a Siyyid to visit 'Akká at that time and offered many excuses. I said, "Attaining His presence is not an easy task. First, one must receive His permission and it may well take over a month for the post to deliver your letter and bring back a reply. It is best if you go back

<sup>139</sup> This section consists of the recollections of Mírzá Habíb kept by his son, Hasan Afná. Mírzá Habíb intended for them to be inserted here.

to Iran and leave this visit for another opportune time.” “How do you make a visit?” he inquired. I responded, “We first pray fervently and focus our thoughts on His sacred Being. Then, with the utmost sincerity and humility, we send a request. After that, we wait for His response. If we are given a favorable reply, with utter elation and yearning, we attain His presence and stay for however many days He allows. Upon leaving, we [once again] pay homage at the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh and return home.” He responded, “I will not go in this manner. I will join whoever is traveling to ‘Akká.” I finally surrendered, “The route to ‘Akká is known. Travel as you think best.”

Immediately, I sent a telegraph to Áqá Siyyid [Muhammad-] Taqi Manshadi in Haifa, warning him that such a person was arriving and giving him the vessel’s details. Áqá Siyyid Taqi went by the ship and took the Siyyid first to Haifa and, from there, sent him to ‘Akká on a hired coach. He also telegraphed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá about the matter. Mishkin-Qalam related the details of his visit for me:

When the Siyyid arrived at the Khán-i-‘Avamid, he called out in a loud voice, “Are any of the honored gentlemen [Bahá’ís] present?” I replied, “Please come upstairs.” After he arrived, tea was brought for him. After tea, he asked, “Are there any waterpipes ready?” I responded, “There are no waterpipes here, but there are some at the coffee shop.” Surprised, he said, “Tell them to bring me one.” I sent a message and they brought him one. I was greatly disturbed by his rudeness and impolite manners. Several times he repeated, “I want to go see ‘Abbás Effendi.” At that point, I became angry and said to him, “Siyyid, calm down. When you arrived, your name was presented to Him. You will attain His presence whenever you are summoned. If you are not given permission, you may not go. This place is the sacred Threshold of the Lord and not a caravansary where any intruder without prior notice may enter.” At that point, the Siyyid became silent and refrained from comment.

Late in the afternoon, we were all summoned to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s House and the Siyyid joined us as well. When we came to the room where the Master was, he entered and greeted Him with a guttural voice in the custom of the clergy. With great pride, he occupied a seat of honor facing the Master. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ignored him completely. He spoke at length about the life of the Messenger of God [Muhammad], the deceit and trickery of the Quriyish, the enmity of Abu-Jahl and other oppressors in Mecca. I noticed that, as soon as the Master began to speak, the Siyyid collected himself and, with hands out of his pockets, politely began to listen most attentively to Him. At the end of His comments, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said, “There is a tradition passed down from the Prophet Muhammad that states, ‘The wrath of God be upon those who claim to be My relation, but are a

stranger to Me.” The Master then dismissed us, but the condition of the Siyyid had changed dramatically. That night, they brought supper from the House of `Abdu'l-Bahá for all of us.

The next day, I noticed that the poor Siyyid had changed his black turban for a white one. Therefore, I asked, “Until last night you were a Siyyid and a descendent of the Prophet [and signified it by wearing a black turban]. How is it that this morning your situation has changed?” He replied, “You are unaware that everything the Master, `Abbás Effendi, said yesterday, from beginning to end, was meant for me and that He was not speaking to the rest of you. Even the hadith quoted at the end was for my benefit, as I am a commoner. A few years ago, I went to Tihiran and presented myself as a Siyyid and people have believed me ever since. However, `Abbás Effendi was aware of my deceit and the tradition He quoted was meant for me.”

The Siyyid was in the Holy Land for 15 days. `Abdu'l-Bahá paid his travel expenses to Beirut and wrote to Áqá Muhammad-Mustafa Baghdadi to ensure his comfort and arrange his travel to Iran.

[Some years later], I asked Áqá Muhammad-Mustafa about this Siyyid and what had become of him. He replied, “When he arrived by boat, I went to welcome him and brought him home. After we began to converse, I asked him, ‘Now that you have spent 15 days in the presence of `Abbas Effendi, what have you learned and what impression did this meeting leave with you?’ He replied, ‘In truth, and between us and God, `Abbas Effendi is the most accomplished of men. He is knowledgeable in all branches of learning and knows of divine truth hidden from us. However, when it comes to the science of Islamic jurisprudence, He appears wanting.’” Áqá Mustafa continued, “I said to him, ‘He has left the science of “unclean and clean”<sup>140</sup> and such unworthy things for people such as you to ponder and devote your time to.’ After a few days, the Siyyid was sent to Iran through Damascus.”

### Siyyid `Alí-i-Afnán

Siyyid `Alí-i-Afnán<sup>141</sup> was the second child of Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Hasan, known as the Afnán-i-Kabír. As a result of supplications [to Bahá'u'lláh]

<sup>140</sup> *‘Ilm-i nájasat* is a sub-branch of Shi‘i jurisprudence.

<sup>141</sup> The writings of the Guardian record that a son-in-law of Bahá'u'lláh, Siyyid `Alí-i-Afnán, was an entrenched enemy of `Abdu'l-Bahá and that he had previously caused the untimely death of Khadíjih Bagum by abandoning his promise to escort her to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. The following telegraph from Shoghi Effendi refers to this: “Inform National Assemblies that God’s avenging wrath having afflicted in rapid succession during recent years two sons, brother and sister-in-law of Arch-breaker of Bahá'u'lláh’s Covenant, has now struck down second son of Siyyid `Alí, Nayer Afnán, pivot of machinations, connecting link between old and new Covenant-breakers. Time alone will reveal extent of havoc wreaked by this virus of violation injected, fostered over two decades in `Abdu'l-Bahá’s family. History will brand him one whose grandmother, wife of Bahá'u'lláh, joined breakers of His Covenant on morrow of His passing, whose parents lent her undivided support, whose father openly accused `Abdu'l-Bahá as one deserving capital punishment, who broke his promise to the Báb’s wife to escort her to Holy Land, precipitating thereby her death, who was repeatedly denounced by Center of the

from the wife of the Báb, Khadíjih Bagum, and `Abdu'l-Bahá, he was honored with becoming a son-in-law to the Blessed Beauty.<sup>142</sup> At first, he promised the illustrious wife of the Báb that, should she intercede on his behalf by sending a letter to the sacred Threshold of Bahá'ulláh, he would come to Shiraz and travel with her to the Holy Land. His father also wrote to her in this vein. The wife of the Báb longed to attain the blessed presence [of Bahá'u'lláh] and behold the countenance of the Sovereign of the world.

Therefore, in order to enlighten the reader further, it is best that I now share a letter written by the wife of `Abdu'l-Bahá [Munirih Khánum] to the honored wife of the Báb. It illustrates the extent of the latter's intense desire to attain the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and her eagerness to share in the blessings of such a pilgrimage:

... In short, you had written, "On every occasion [that you are] in the presence of the Divine Effulgence [Bahá'u'lláh], may my spirit be a sacrifice unto Him, kindly mention this desolate one. Perhaps, through the blessings of the pure souls, this remoteness will pass and I will attain the banquet of His presence." This supplication was brought especially to His divine presence and, in response, the Ancient Tongue spoke these words: "Through His unceasing favors and mercies, God has ordained that that Holy Leaf live at the shore of the sea of Our presence forever and the Lord has given her to taste the wine of Our union. At all times, the Tongue of the Merciful makes mention of her. In light of this, there is no reason [for her] to feel separation or remoteness. From the heaven of benevolence, an exalted Tablet was revealed in her honor and sent through the letter Sin<sup>143</sup>. God willing, on future occasions, other Tablets will be dispatched as well."

Be assured those expressions of salutation, devotion and enthusiasm that your good self wrote for the Divine Effulgence were shared in their entirety in His sanctified presence.<sup>144</sup>

Even at this moment, all are present and avidly remember that blessed Leaf. The Blessed Perfection conveyed these sentiments: "By God, in truth, not a moment passes that We do not occupy Ourselves

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Covenant as His chief enemy..." (Shoghi Effendi. *Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971, pp. 24-25) In this chapter, Mírzá Habíb records some of the details associated with Siyyid `Alí's broken promise and its devastating effect on Khadíjih Bagum.

<sup>142</sup> Siyyid `Alí married Furughiyyih, a daughter of Bahá'u'lláh from His third wife, Gawhar Khánum.

<sup>143</sup> Presumably, Shaykh Salman, the courier of Bahá'u'lláh.

<sup>144</sup> Munirih Khánum visited Shiraz on her way to `Akka to marry `Abdu'l-Bahá and recorded the following (*Khándan-i-Afnán*, pp. 165-6): "...The wife of the Báb said: 'Please supplicate the Blessed Perfection to grant two wishes of mine. The first, one of the exalted leaves of the Blessed Family may be permitted to join in wedlock with a member of the Family of the Báb, so that even outwardly the two Holy Trees may be knit together. The other, to grant me permission to attend His presence.' I conveyed this message when I attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. He readily assented to both her requests." An additional request of Khadíjih Bagum was for the House of the Báb to be renovated and this was also accepted.

with the joy of your mention. We beseech Him Who does what He wills to gather all the Leaves of His divine Lote-Tree in one spot, so that all will raise their voice in His praise and glorification and quaff the sweet wine of union from the chalice of immortality passed from one to another.” ...<sup>145</sup>

The supplication of the wife of the Báb was accepted into the presence of the Lord of the world of being. In a letter written by Munirih Khánum to the blessed wife [of the Báb], the following was noted:

You wrote about the matter that we had agreed.<sup>146</sup> Know, then, that your request was presented in the Sacred Presence and considered with favor. Praised be God and glorified be His name! The grace of God has surrounded your esteemed self in such wise that even such a tremendous petition has found acceptance before His throne!<sup>147</sup>

After Bahá'u'lláh consented to this union, Siyyid `Alí went to Simnán for his commercial activities. His father remained in Yazd and his older brother, Siyyid Mírzá, went to Bombay. The illustrious wife of the Báb passed on the news of the blessed permission [of Bahá'u'lláh] to [her brother,] the Afnán-i-Kabír. She also expressed her extreme excitement and eagerness to take part in this journey. She further wrote, “Day and night, I expectantly look for your arrival [in Shiraz].”

After waiting a considerable time, she received a letter from the Afnán-i-Kabír<sup>148</sup> and Siyyid `Alí, saying:

Since the means for our journey to Shiraz are not available at this time, we have arranged to leave by way of Khurasan and through Istanbul. Therefore, you may wish to go to Port Said with Hájí Mírzá `Abdu'l-Hamid<sup>149</sup> and Áqá Siyyid Áqá<sup>150</sup> so that, after we have completed our hajj [obligatory pilgrimage], we may join you in Port Said and, from there, leave for the Holy Land in your company.

Numerous letters are extant from them on this subject. However, we must content ourselves with quoting just one as evidence, so that the reader can plainly see how unfaithful the Covenant-breakers were to the blessed wife

<sup>145</sup> This letter is also quoted in *Khándan-i-Afnán*, pp. 175-6.

<sup>146</sup> Reference to the confidential agreement about the marriage of Siyyid `Alí with Furughiyyih Khánum.

<sup>147</sup> Quoted also in *Khándan-i-Afnán*, pp. 175.

<sup>148</sup> The term ‘Afnán-i-Kabir’ was originally bestowed upon the uncle of the Báb, Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muhammad (see Bahá'u'lláh; *Collection of Tablets revealed in honor of Áqá Mírzá Áqáy-i-Núri'd-Dín*; MS, n.d., p. 60). However, in later years it became a designation for Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Hasan.

<sup>149</sup> He embraced the Faith during the Báb's sermon at Masjid-i-Vakil and, subsequently, was taught the Faith through the loving-kindness of Khadíjih Bagum. He became a resident in the House of the Báb after the Báb's martyrdom and Khadíjih Bagum's departure for the home of the martyred uncle. He passed away around 1897.

<sup>150</sup> Parenthetically, Mírzá Habib has added, “my older brother”.



of the Báb. She had suffered so long and so bitterly in the path of the Faith, and the one solace for her broken heart would have been attaining the presence of the Blessed Beauty. Siyyid `Alíy-i-Afnán, in a letter dated 19 Ramadan 1299 A.H. [14 August 1882], writes from Simnán:

Humbly submitted to the presence of that honored noblewoman, may she be blessed with a long life:

Your blessed letter spoke of your perseverance and health, and this caused us to raise our voice in praise and gratitude to the threshold of the Almighty. May God perpetually keep you shielded under the shadow of His protection and custody.

However, your blessed letter was bereft of kind sentiments towards this servant and therefore rendered this ephemeral one perplexed and thoroughly disappointed in [his] self as to what has occasioned such a response. I have exerted efforts in [your] service and carried out my duties to the best of my ability. Nevertheless, I remain hopeful that, God willing, the Almighty will fulfil our arrangements in a splendid way.

At the time of my departure from Simnán, I was not fully apprised of my father's travel arrangements, and did not know whether he intended to go only to Mashhad or wanted to travel further. When he left Yazd, he told me, "I am setting out for Mashhad and you must depart in that direction as well." However, when he arrived in Mashhad, it became clear that he intended to leave directly for the Holy Land. I was thinking about this when your letter arrived, which caused deep sadness and disappointment. God willing, the Lord will conclude these affairs in a most agreeable fashion.

At the moment, it is impossible for me to return from here, otherwise I would attain the presence of that eminent personage [Khadíjih Bagum]. Such has been decreed. My own health is not the best. Be assured and rest confident knowing that this insignificant one remains devoted to his oath and promise.

Even now, should you agree and consider it appropriate, I have asked my honorable maternal uncle, Áqá Mírzá Buzurg, to arrange your travel. My honored cousin, Áqá Siyyid Aqa<sup>151</sup>, and Hájí Mírzá `Abdu'l-Hamid have gone to Mecca, which will not benefit you. You should journey from Bushihr to Alexandria and remain there for a few days. This servant will also travel to Alexandria and join you there and help Áqá Siyyid Aqa to leave for Bombay.

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<sup>151</sup> Parenthetically, Mírzá Habib has added, "my older brother."

And should this [suggested] arrangement fail to please you, then, God willing, I will come from there [the Holy Land] and we will travel together. ...”

In a letter to the wife of the Báb, the Afán-i-Kabír, expresses the following sentiments:

Again I submit that, concerning the travel of that exalted lady [Khadíjih Bagum], Áqá Siyyid `Alí has written to the honored Hájí Mírzá Buzurg. God willing, arrangements for your departure will be made with ease and facility. In order to avoid any alarm, Áqá Siyyid Aqa, son of Áqá Mírzá Aqa, will accompany you to provide privacy and the honored Hájí Mírzá `Abdu'l-Hamid will serve as your attendant and entourage. From Shiraz, you should travel directly to Alexandria, where Áqá Siyyid `Alí will join you and accompany you to the desired destination [the Holy Land].

One after another, the blessed wife of the Báb received communications from Áqá Mírzá Muhsin and others that thoroughly dashed her hopes of ever attaining the presence of Bahá'u'lláh.<sup>152</sup>

During that time, my late father was doing business in Bombay, and my paternal grandmother, [Zahra Bagum], told him in writing what had happened. Each week, my late father would write to the wife of the Báb. He was filled with gratitude to her for affection governed their relationship. On this occasion, too, my father wrote a letter describing some of the misdeeds and the infidelity of these kinsmen. I quote a portion of this letter here:

To the presence of that honorable and exalted lady, may my life be a sacrifice unto you:

My sole supplication at the Threshold of the All-Glorious Lord is your well-being and health. Through the grace of the Exalted God, may happiness ever surround you!

Previously, the details were recorded for your kind consideration and submitted in a humble letter. God willing, it has been perused by your good self. On this occasion, I humbly note that your cherished and most gracious letters of 9 Sha'ban [26 June 1882] and 2 Ramadan [10 July 1882] were received. Through your most kind and benevolent letters, I learned of their [the Afán-i-Kabir and Siyyid `Alí's] departure for Mecca and their unfulfilled promises. Their misdeeds are not surprising; what bewilders me is that your esteemed self would have any confidence in their empty and worthless words. I

<sup>152</sup> See *In the Land of Refuge* for the text of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet on the occasion of the passing of Khadíjih Bagum.

have yet to see a truthful word spoken by them. God knows the secrets of all hearts. There should be no need for my explanation.

That honorable lady must not be sad, nor should you dwell on what has happened. There is a station for everything, and the exalted honor of this task [to accompany you] was not to be theirs. God did not decree for this blessing to be bestowed on them. Otherwise, events would not have turned out as they have.

Consider what He [Bahá'u'lláh] has revealed in honor of your journey and note well the way He has spoken of its importance. Furthermore, call to mind the bygone days of the illustrious Báb, may my life be a sacrifice unto Him. To be sure, the Exalted One would not have wanted them to be in your service. However, what this desolate one writes is of no consequence, given that your own honored self is well aware of their character. Nothing at all is concealed from God and everything is known to Him.

I will forward your letter to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, and will write separately to Áqá Siyyid Mihdi<sup>153</sup>.

In short, my father wrote extensively to console the wife of the Báb. Even at the end of this letter, he noted:

I have now sent the letter of that esteemed lady [to Baha'ullah] and I have also informed Áqá Siyyid Mihdi. Do not give way to despair. God will decree what is best for all. Of a certainty, His Holiness the Báb was not pleased with this arrangement [that you should journey with them]. You know best that they have always treated you in this way. If you reflect on the details, you will come to the same conclusion. Concerning the question of faith, if someone is truly faithful, he will consider it an obligation to obey your every command and never fail in your service. In any case, what has happened to the consideration [one should have for] one's sister<sup>154</sup>?!

In short, these thoughts have set me on fire. God will set all things right; whatever else I say is unworthy.

8<sup>th</sup> Ramadán 1299 A.H. [24 July 1882]

[Signed] Mírzá Áqá

The profound disappointment of not having the privilege of going on pilgrimage and attaining the presence of the Blessed Beauty shattered the

<sup>153</sup> Most likely, a reference to Siyyid Mihdi Afnán; private communications from Dr. Moojan Momen, April 2004.

<sup>154</sup> The Afnán-i-Kabir was an older brother of Khadíjih Bagum.

blessed wife of the Báb and burned in her soul.<sup>155</sup> Her illustrious self soon became seriously ill through acute depression and she contracted dysentery. Within two months of hearing the news from her brother and faithless nephew, she left this transient life for her eternal abode within the everlasting divine paradise and for perpetual consort with the sacred spirits of the Prophets and His chosen ones. Her unique and exalted station is evident from the Tablet of Visitation revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in her honor, which adorned these pages earlier.

I wish, also, to quote a letter of the late Hájí Mírzá Abú'l-Qásim-i-Afnán, the older brother of Khadíjih Bagum. He selflessly and devotedly served his noble sister until her last breath. This letter is addressed to my late father in Bombay. In it, he describes the events during and after the passing of Khadíjih Bagum.

Dated 28 Dhi'l-Hajjih 1299 A.H. [10 November 1882]

Beloved light of my eyes, may God preserve you.

Monday last week, I wrote you a letter that I mailed immediately. God willing, it has been seen by your illustrious self. I pray that, through the decree of God, you remain protected and preserved from harm and injury. As the mail for Bushihr is about to leave soon, it is necessary to write a few words about what has happened and give the details.

In my previous correspondence, I described the condition of my most cherished sister and her infirmity, and said I had no hope that she would be cured and recover. I also expressed my fear that the illness was at an advanced stage and had become very acute. The honored Áqá Mírzá Ahmad-i-Tabib was her physician, and the honored Hájí Mírzá Hasan (the Hakim-Bashi-i-Buzurg) frequently attended as well. On occasion, we troubled the honored Aqay-i-Hakim-Bashi to help Áqá Mírzá Ahmad and he would confirm that the right medication had been prescribed. However, "All bounties are in the hand of God"<sup>156</sup>, and the decree of God and his predestined will cannot be delayed.

Finally, on the eve of Monday the 2<sup>nd</sup> [Dhi'l-Hajjih 1299 A.H.<sup>157</sup>], about three hours after sunset, she left this world and winged her

<sup>155</sup> Bahá'u'lláh notes in a Tablet addressed to Núri'd-Dín that the wife of the Báb always longed for the privilege of pilgrimage: "O My Afnán! My Glory of God be upon thee, as well as My Bounty, My Peace, My Favor and My Mercy! Day and night, that esteemed and late lady wished to attain Our presence and desired to behold Our Countenance. This was the object that her heart longed for, her tongue spoke of, her eyes searched for expectantly and her whole being yearned for; and yet, the divine decree prevented." INBMC 51:332-3, no. 338

<sup>156</sup> Qur'an 3:73

<sup>157</sup> This letter does not give the exact date of Khadíjih Bagum's passing. However, Mírzá Habib has noted that it was in the month of Dhi'l-Hajjih; see *In the Land of Refuge*, Chapter 9. This is consistent with Mírzá

flight for the unseen realm. Yet, how great the anguish of those that are left behind. [I have] no strength or spirit left to describe the details. My only prayer is that the merciful God will grant us all patience and perseverance.

Kindly inform Hájí Mírzá Buzurg and Áqá Mírzá Aqa<sup>158</sup> [of this news]. The lights of my eyes [your sons] are in no condition to write and are otherwise occupied elsewhere.

This lowly one knows perfectly well how painful and disturbing this bitter news will be for you. But what is to be done? Whatever is destined will happen, and what God decrees shall come to pass.

During her illness, she said nothing that can serve as her will, nor did she leave any directions about what to do with the household goods. On the night of her passing, we stayed behind and, with great care, arranged for her blessed remains to be washed [and prepared for interment] in the Hammam-i-Khaiyri<sup>159</sup>. From there, it was moved to ... and buried in a grave next to ...<sup>160</sup> The undertakers came in the middle of night. When they finished their work, she was interred before the hour for the dawn obligatory prayer, and we returned.

Prayer vigils were held in her memory on Monday and Tuesday at the burial-place. On Tuesday afternoon, a group of the city's noblemen, which included the honored [Abu'l-Hasan, the] Mushiru'l-Mulk and his Excellency the honored Imam-Jum'ih<sup>161</sup>, attended and helped to conclude the prayer vigil. From the burial-place, we returned home and continued the prayer sessions there. The friends that did not have the opportunity to come by her graveside troubled themselves to come and visit. We are now occupied with the memorial services. In short, the customary duties have all been carried out.

However, since she did not leave a will, I am at a loss about what to do. I am thinking of making an inventory of the residence's furnishings and her other possessions. You must write [to Bahá'u'lláh] and ask for guidance. Whatever He commands will be done. I am unclear about the status of the title of the House [of the

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Abú'l-Qásim's statement that her death occurred on the second of the month, which is a Monday. Therefore, it seems clear that she passed away on 2 Dhi'l-Hajjih 1299 A.H. (16 October 1882). Based on this evidence, the dates given in *Khadijih Bagum*, p. 35 (15 September 1882) and *Khándan-i-Afnán*, p. 179, (29 Dhi'l-H.ajjih) must be incorrect. The latter date must also be incorrect because it falls after Mírzá Abú'l-Qásim wrote this letter.

<sup>158</sup> He also lived in Bombay at the time.

<sup>159</sup> Named after its owner, Khayr, this public bathhouse is otherwise known as the Hammam-i-Guldastih. It is situated near the House of the Báb and next to the Masjid-i-Naw.

<sup>160</sup> For security reasons, the exact location is not given in this translation.

<sup>161</sup> Shaykh Abu-Turab

Báb] or what I must do.<sup>162</sup> The property that she owned and was leased to the gentlemen in Yazd<sup>163</sup> earned three tumans a month. She also had some property with Mírzá Siyyid Hasan and Siyyid Mírzá, for which they paid 12 to 13 tumans a year. This year, even though Siyyid Mírzá sent a draft for the due amount to Siyyid [Muhammad-]Husayn, when it was presented to her, she refused it because of the bitterness they had caused – a matter that she had repeatedly complained about to me.

I also do not know the situation with the House [of the Báb] or what I must do about it. I have heard that Hájí Mírzá Buzurg has said that, after the return of Hájí Mírzá [Siyyid] `Alí and his mother, who is the sister of Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, they may take up residence there. Your mother said, "I cannot accept anyone in this house in place of my sister. I will stay here for the rest of my days. ..." <sup>164</sup>

I do not know the situation with the dedicated properties that my late cousin<sup>165</sup> gave to Khadíjih Sultan Bagum, or to what extent they have been renovated. Surely, you know.<sup>166</sup>

You must write as soon as possible and ask for guidance [from Bahá'u'lláh] about what to do with the Blessed House [of the Báb], the property leased to the Yazdi gentlemen, the property with Áqá Mírzá Siyyid Hasan and Áqá Siyyid Mírzá, and all the furnishings, carpets and clothing in this House, and other things. Once we have His directions, we will attend to whatever is decided.

Please carry out this vital task in the quickest way possible, so that we can have an early answer and know how to divide the estate and distribute the inheritances. You must also mention in your letter [to Bahá'u'lláh] that she has been survived by a [natural] sister (my maternal grandmother) and two brothers (Hájí Mírzá Abú'l-Qásim and Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Hasan, known as the Afnán-i-Kabir), and a stepbrother and a stepsister (Hájí Muhammad-Mihdiy-i-Hijab, the wife of the martyred uncle of the Báb), and no other. It is critical that whatever action is taken is done through His [Bahá'u'lláh's] guidance and direction.

<sup>162</sup> Hájí Mírzá Abú'l-Qásim was unaware that, some time earlier, the title of the House of the Báb was lost in a robbery at the home of Mírzá Zaynu'l-'Abidin (Núri'd-Dín's father).

<sup>163</sup> A reference to the sons of the Afnán-i-Kabir, who lived in Yazd.

<sup>164</sup> During the early days of the Afnán family, there was considerable competition within certain quarters of the family over the House of the Báb. On several occasions, the issue was brought to Bahá'u'lláh. He consistently reaffirmed the hereditary custodianship of Zahra Bagum and her descendants. By the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Ministry, only a few family members questioned the custodianship rights. However, to ensure complete unity, the Master reaffirmed the hereditary right of Núri'd-Dín and, thereafter, Mírzá Habíb. Before his passing, Mírzá Habíb passed the custodianship to his oldest son, Abú'l-Qásim Afnán.

<sup>165</sup> A reference to Fatímih Bagum, the mother of the Báb.

<sup>166</sup> 'Vafq' properties are donated to the Faith for the promotion of its best interest, either during the person's lifetime or as part of their bequest.

If there is anything that you have become aware of recently that I do not know, kindly inform me as soon as possible so that I know what to do and how I should dispose of various articles. The sooner my duties are made clear, the better her interest will be served.

In her latter days, she was deeply saddened and disheartened by the false promises of Siyyid Mírzá, Siyyid `Alí and Siyyid Muhsin to be available for the journey to Mecca<sup>167</sup> and their eventual betrayal. She used to repeat, "For 20 years or more, Áqá Mírzá Siyyid Hasan<sup>168</sup> never once wrote to me. Why did I write to him on this occasion and about this journey, so that he would make a promise and then betray it?" She used to add, "As soon as I read his letter [about not taking her to the Holy Land], I felt an acute emptiness and depression inside me." And it was then that she began to experience the symptoms of dysentery. From the same illness, she left this nether world and ascended to the immortal realm.

What am I to write?! It seems as if they [the Afnán-i-Kabir and his progeny] have become proud and think too much of their accomplishments. I am bewildered at their motives. This should not be the conduct of people. In this new Dispensation, such characteristics have been forbidden - nay, we are commanded to be righteous. Then what manner of behavior is this?! ..."

This was a portion of a letter of the late Hájí Mírzá Abú'l-Qásim, who wrote it shortly after the passing of the wife of the Báb in Shiraz. [I have] included it in these pages to acquaint us with the details.

In accordance with Bahá'u'lláh's instructions, in 1308 A.H. [1891], Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí<sup>169</sup> went to Bombay to publish some of the Holy Tablets. As the Blessed Beauty instructed, he purchased a gravestone for the resting place of the wife of the Báb. The following verse, revealed from the heaven of divine will, was engraved on it: "He is the Everlasting. Verily this exalted leaf hearkened to the Call of the Tree beyond which there is no passing and winged her flight towards it. 1299."<sup>170</sup> This stone was left as a trust in the home of the late Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí-i-Afnán (a son of the

<sup>167</sup> A coded reference to `Akka, where Bahá'u'lláh resided.

<sup>168</sup> The following Tablet of the Báb addressed to Khadíjih Bagum is quoted in *Eminent Bahá'is During the Time of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 216-17: "Do not expect any assistance from thy brothers. They will not help; it is enough that they refrain from insults. Overlook their faults. Even Our enemies have not caused the like of what resulted from the acts of Siyyid 118 in Isfahan. God grant that when the light of thine eyes Mírzá Áqá reacheth maturity, he will be thy help and support. O God! Preserve him from all the evil of the envious and the contumacious." It should be noted that "118" is the numerical equivalent of Hasan. All evidence indicates that Siyyid Hasan, the Afnán-i-Kabir, was never supportive of his sister, Khadíjih Bagum, or other family members.

<sup>169</sup> Bahá'u'lláh's son

<sup>170</sup> In a Tablet (*Núri'd-Dín's Collection*, p. 91), Bahá'u'lláh revealed for Núri'd-Dín: "The other matter is that, at thy previous request, three verses were revealed and sent specially for the gravestone of the illustrious exalted leaf, upon her rest the Most Glorious of the Glorious and the Most Exalted of the Exalted. Any of these that thou consider to be in accord with wisdom and deem prudent may be engraved."

illustrious maternal uncle of the Báb, Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muhammad). Áqá Mírzá Abdu'l-Vahhab (a son of the late Áqá Mírzá Aqa, son of the late Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí) brought it to Shiraz when he returned from the Holy Land through Bombay in 1327 A.H. [1909]. At present, it is in my safe-keeping in the House of the Báb. When God's will decrees the time is right, it will be placed on her grave.<sup>171</sup>

In summary, Siyyid `Alí-i-Afnán grieved the wife of the Báb and prevented her from attaining the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. With his parents and brother, he traveled to the Holy Land through Mashhad, Russia [Ishqabad] and Istanbul. When he arrived, he arranged the wedding ceremony, which took place in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh.

On our [first] journey to the Holy Land [in 1891-2], the Afnán-i-Kabir was still alive. Shortly after that, perhaps within only a few months of the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, he too passed away. Subsequently, Siyyid `Alí and his brothers, Siyyid Mírzá<sup>172</sup> and Siyyid Muhammad, who were in Bombay, began to collaborate with Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí, [Mírzá] Majdu'd-Din and other brothers of `Abdu'l-Bahá. They rose up fiercely to oppose Him. Using various schemes and deceitful methods, they tried to cause division among the friends. His brothers in India were particularly involved in undermining the confidence of the believers by disseminating polemic papers.

This same Siyyid Mírzá had a son named `Abdu'l-Husayn, who was my first cousin on my mother's side. He lived in Yazd and was firm and steadfast in the Divine Cause. He wrote to his father with great conviction, "If you return to Yazd in this state, I will not accept you in my house and will shun you!" During the days of the Ancient Beauty, Siyyid Mírzá had observed, and knew about, the singular spiritual bond that connected Bahá'u'lláh to His Center of the Covenant. He had witnessed the pilgrims pleading with Bahá'u'lláh, "We have been deprived of beholding Your blessed Countenance for several days," and Him telling them, "When you attain the presence of the Master, it is as though you have beheld My Countenance." On many occasions, Siyyid Mírzá had heard the Tongue of Grandeur say, "The only Master is the Greatest Branch and all others dwell beneath His shadow." Siyyid Mírzá had been the recipient of infinite favors. And yet, this same Siyyid Mírzá rose up to dispute with, and oppose, `Abdu'l-Bahá in the most vehement manner and caused tumultuous storms in the Faith. With satanic schemes he would make his way into the gatherings of the friends, acquaintances, Holy Family and other kinsmen and deceive them for his own ends.

After hearing the news of the Covenant-breaking, the very first letter that my father wrote to my brother and I contained certain glimpses of the evil

<sup>171</sup> Abú'l-Qásim Afnán informs the translator that this gravestone is safe in an undisclosed location in Iran. (Private communication, Aug 1997.)

<sup>172</sup> Siyyid Mírzá was an older brother of Siyyid `Alí.



deeds they perpetrated during the days of the wife of the Báb. It gave us a better idea of their activities. A section of this letter follows:

Concerning Siyyid Mírzá and his schemes and aims, I am very familiar with the situation. In Bombay, I spent over 10 years, day and night, with him and never perceived him to be firm in the Faith of God. All his thoughts were focused on worldly matters.

In one instance, he had received a sum of money from Hájí Siyyid `Alí-Akbar [Dahaji], and the two of us<sup>173</sup> were discussing this situation with Hájí Muhammad-Ibrahim, the Muballigh<sup>174</sup>. The latter was speaking to him and offering friendly advice, "You must never use this money without the owner's permission, as this sum has been placed with you in trust. The best course is to deposit it in a bank and earn interest on it. This way, whenever Hájí Siyyid `Alí-Akbar asks for the principal to be returned, it is readily available. Otherwise, you ought to forget about this capital." But Siyyid Mírzá roared back, "What are you saying?! We are the heirs to the Throne and Sovereignty of the Báb!" This ephemeral servant replied, "But the Báb detested you and disavowed any relation with you!"<sup>175</sup> In no time, we were arguing heatedly and Hájí Muhammad-Ibrahim had to intervene.

If you remember well, when His blessed Temple [Bahá'u'lláh] lived in the Abode of Peace [Baghdad], the wife of the Báb had a Tablet revealed in her honor by her illustrious Husband during His confinement in [the citadel of] Mah-ku. She gave me that Tablet with the instructions: "Write to the Blessed Beauty on my behalf. Also write another letter of your own and fold this Tablet of the Báb in your letter. Then place both letters in an envelope and give me the envelope."

I did as asked. She arranged for that envelope to be submitted through Shaykh Salman to the presence of the Ancient Beauty. Subsequently, I was informed that our letters and the Báb's Tablet were received. [This confirmation came] in a Tablet revealed in honor of this evanescent servant in the hand of the beloved Master, which is in my possession. The point is that, in the Tablet [forwarded to Bahá'u'lláh], in truth the Báb had recorded His Will and Testament.<sup>176</sup>

<sup>173</sup> Meaning, Núrí'd-Dín and Siyyid Mírzá.

<sup>174</sup> Lit. the Teacher. He was a son of the merchant Hájí `Abdu'r-Rasul and the recipient of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the Letters (Lawh-i-Hurufat). Years earlier, he wrote a proof treatise on the appearance of the Báb.

<sup>175</sup> See the Tablet of the Báb quoted above.

<sup>176</sup> The Will and Testament of the Báb is published in The Báb. "Lawh-i Vasaya." (Will and Testament) In *Majumu'ih-i Athar-i Hadrat-i A'la*. Vol. 64, *Iran National Bahá'í Manuscript Collection*. Tehran: Mu'assasih-i Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, [c 1977], pp. 95-102. INBMC 64.

Similarly, in a letter dated 1 Dhi'l-Hajjih 1314 A.H. [3 May 1897], my father wrote from Shiraz to my late brother Hájí Mírzá Buzurg and myself in Port Said:

About the matter that the light of my eyes, Mírzá Habíb, had written, "Siyyid Mírzá and his brethren have committed such deeds that have greatly dishonored the name of 'Afnán' and, because of this, we must disassociate ourselves from this family..." This is not so, my son. Do not allow this situation to dishearten you. The more mischief they<sup>177</sup> commit, the more manifest your nobility.

The Blessed Perfection, may my soul and the spirit of all creation be a sacrifice to the dust trodden by Him, had already disassociated Himself from them. But, unfortunately, at that time we did not see the wisdom in, and the reason for, His words. Now His foresight stands manifest, that He prepared for such a day beforehand.<sup>178</sup> Many times, He spoke of this to the friends present before Him. He also instructed Mullá Muhammad-'Alí Dahají, "Whatever town you arrive in, inform the believers that Our union<sup>179</sup> was only due to the request of the wife of the Báb and the supplication of [Aqa] Mírzá Aqa, the Afnán. We consented only for the sake of her wish and his request. Otherwise, We knew Mírzá Hasan<sup>180</sup> not, nor Siyyid 'Alí."

Bahá'u'lláh often spoke such words to many of the friends, including Hájí Niyyaz and Áqá Siyyid 'Alí. They were present on two occasions and heard Him speak in this way. Now [because of the misdeeds of these brothers] it is clear why the Blessed Perfection made such pronouncements. ...

In a letter dated 5 Dhi'l-Hajjih 1314 A.H. [7 May 1897] addressed to [my brother,] the late Hájí Mírzá Buzurg and this ephemeral servant, my father wrote:

You wrote about the undertakings of Áqá Mírzá Muhsin and his brethren. All their deeds and actions are plain to see. Hájí Siyyid Muhammad is also in collaboration with them. This humble servant wrote a detailed account to Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taqi and Hájí Mírzá Aqa in Yazd. In response, they wrote a most informed reply, expressing their own frustrations and complaining about the situation [of these brothers]. However, you must not let yourselves be discouraged by their activities. The Blessed Beauty, may my soul and

<sup>177</sup> Reference to Siyyid 'Alí and his brothers.

<sup>178</sup> This suggests that early steps for the expulsion of Siyyid 'Alí had been initiated by Bahá'u'lláh and later confirmed during the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

<sup>179</sup> Reference to the marriage of Furughiyyih and Siyyid 'Alí Afnán.

<sup>180</sup> The Afnán-i-Kabir.

every other spirit be a sacrifice to the dust of His Shrine, has closed the door on them from all directions. No matter how openly they manifest their evil nature, the noble character of the other [Afnán] family members will be more evident. Under all conditions, you must remain tranquil.

### Third Pilgrimage: 1898

My late brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzúrg, and I [lived] in Cairo while our late father remained in Shiraz. Months and days went by, each filled with priceless, yet momentous and pregnant, events. A year and a half passed in this way, from the time the goings of the believers to the Holy Land had increased somewhat and the intensity of the calamities and upheavals had subsided to some extent.

When petitions intended for the Holy Land were received, I immediately submitted them to the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá. They were not delayed in Port Said with Áqá Ahmad [Yazdi], as was done previously. The sun of the Covenant and its life-giving rays shone very brightly, and these ephemeral servants sent supplications to the blessed presence of the Master frequently and also corresponded with each other. We also corresponded with the honored [Siyyid Muhammad-Taqi] Manshadi and Áqá Rida [Qannad-i-Shirazi]. Whenever supplications were received from our late father, these were forwarded at once to the threshold of `Abdu'l-Bahá as well.

Toward the beginning of 1316 A.H.<sup>181</sup>, we sought permission to attain His Holy presence for a second time. Our request was readily accepted and we were invited to the Holy Land. On this journey, we were accompanied by the honored Shaykh Salman, who had been the courier of the Merciful, the late `Alí Aqay-i-Khayyat [the tailor] Shirazi and several believers from Sarvistan and Shiraz. There was also Áqá Mírzá `Inayatu'llah Isfahani<sup>182</sup>, who I remember fondly, but I haven't known his whereabouts for many years.

With incredible joy and felicity, we left Port Said. The extent of our bliss none can fathom except God. He alone knows the profound heavenly ecstasy that overwhelms the heart of pilgrims. In truth, you lose all consciousness and find yourself in a flower-filled paradise of happiness, intoxicated with the breezes of spirituality and fragrances of bliss – the very thought of which is well nigh impossible.

We arrived in `Akká and beheld the Holy Land. When I attained the presence of the Master, my unworthy eyes were illumined once more by the beauty and divine radiance of the Center of the Covenant. My whole being

<sup>181</sup> Circa summer 1898

<sup>182</sup> He was a merchant. He lived in Haifa into the ministry of Shoghi Effendi and returned to Iran, where he passed away.

was spellbound by His sweet and soul-stirring melodies. By now, the tumult of the Covenant-breakers had subsided somewhat and was not as evident as it was before. The majestic station of `Abdu'l-Bahá and His august sovereignty had humbled the necks of the skeptics and reduced the evil of the mischief-makers. Now, everyone, such as the Mufti<sup>183</sup>, the Qadi [the judge] and other influential members of society, clearly saw how Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí was enveloped in the wrath of God. No matter what he planned, only he was caught in his web of intrigues. It was an amazing scene and in no way comparable to our previous pilgrimage after the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh. Then the violators of the Covenant associated closely with the believers. Now there was a complete break and the foundation of discord and division uprooted. Those here and there who had tried to betray the Cause were now well known and it was clear to pilgrims who they could associate with. `Abdu'l-Bahá was devoting most of His time to revealing Divine Verses and meeting with the friends.

One day in an afternoon, a large number of resident believers, pilgrims, friends and non-Bahá'ís were gathered in the biruni [the outer apartment] of the Master's house. He was engaged in revealing the Lawh-i-Nuh-Sha'n [The Tablet of Nine Modes]. The Mufti of `Akká was sitting next to the Master. He was a man of remarkable qualities. He had a pleasant nature and was deeply devoted to `Abdu'l-Bahá; he was sitting next to the Master. Next to him was the Qadi of the city of `Akka, and seated after him was the Mutasarrif<sup>184</sup> of the city. The Master was busy revealing verses. His pen moved extremely rapidly across the page. Meanwhile, He was conversing with the Iranian believers in Persian, with the Mufti and the Qadi in Arabic and with the Mutasarrif and several of the Pashas in Turkish. All the while His pen never stopped moving. The divine spirit had enveloped the atmosphere and anyone who ventured a question was favored with an answer until that blessed Tablet was completed and `Abdu'l-Bahá sat the pen down.

Thereupon the Mufti implored the Master to read what He had written. However, [ `Abdu'l-Bahá] responded, "Mufti Effendi, this letter is an answer to a letter from one of My close friends. As such, it is not possible for Me to comply with your request." The Mufti asked for a second time and the response was, "You are asking for a difficult thing." Again, the Mufti insisted, "All the dwellers on earth are close friends of the Effendi and Your blessed Person considers them all in the same light." The Master [still not wishing to read the Tablet] answered, "But portions of what has been written are in Persian, while other segments are in Turkish; not everyone

<sup>183</sup> In Islamic law, the mufti is the trained jurist who writes opinions (*fatwa*) on legal subjects for private clients, or assists judges in deciding cases. Only *fatwas* given in the areas of marriage, divorce and inheritance make binding precedents. *Fatwas* on other subjects may be set aside. In the Ottoman Empire, the muftis were state officials, responsible also for civil administration at a given level. The mufti of Istanbul was the highest of these. The British retained the institution in some Muslim areas under their control. They gave the office of Hussayni, the grand mufti of Jerusalem, great political importance.

<sup>184</sup> The highest ranking provincial military commander.

will understand.” The Mufti replied, “The Qadi Effendi knows Turkish and others speak Persian.” Eventually, he beseeched the Master in the name of the Blessed Beauty and insisted so much that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá consented and read the first three Modes, which were revealed in Arabic. With extreme humility, the Mufti asked the Master to continue and He recited the whole of Tablet.

God knows that every time I think of that magnificent day, my entire being trembles with wonder and joy. After ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had finished reciting the Tablet, the Mufti patted the Qadi on the hand, saying in Arabic, “Did you understand? Did you understand? Do you now see that the Effendi’s knowledge is innate and ours is acquired? I have studied the science of religious jurisprudence and the doctrines of faith and its laws at the Al-Azhar University, which has allowed me to gain an *ijtihād* and I am now the Mufti of ‘Akka. Likewise, you have studied in the various schools of Istanbul and Egypt and acquired the advanced degrees bestowed upon you by others learned in the field of law. And, after much exertion, you have become the Qadi. The Mutasarrif Pasha also started as a soldier in the service of the government, participating in many battles and campaigns. Today, he has risen to the office of chief command and been confirmed as the Mutasarrif of ‘Akka. As such, our attainments are acquired, whereas the Effendi has never studied in a school, nor has He received tuition from anyone. The knowledge He possesses is God-given and most extraordinary. The source of His innate erudition is God and its origin the fount of the invisible world.”

That day, we realized that the Qadi had been antagonistic towards the Faith and that the Mufti was an honorable man and deeply devoted to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. His purpose in being so bold in the presence of the Master had been to impress upon the Qadi the innate character of the Master’s knowledge.

In short, those were wonderful days. Previously, this same Mufti had taken ill and was sent to Beirut for treatment. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote to Áqá Muhammad-Mustafa Baghdadi<sup>185</sup> urging him [to look after this man]. Baghdadi received the Mufti with the utmost compassion and consideration. He housed him in his own home, arranged for all his medical treatment and saw him through to a full recovery.

One morning, during the first days of our arrival in the Holy Land, the Master called one of the resident believers and me, informing us, “This morning I want to visit the Mufti, who has recently returned [to ‘Akka].” We followed in attendance. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reached the entrance to the Mufti’s home and called out, “Mufti, where are you?” [The Mufti] immediately ran out to throw himself in prostration at ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s feet. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

<sup>185</sup> A son of Hájí Muhammad-Shibl. He and his father accompanied Tahirih on her return to Iran from the ‘Atabat. He resided in Beirut and served the Faith as the focal point of communications with the Holy Land.

prevented the Muftí and, instead, raised him and kissed his face as He entered the room. We followed inside as well. That day [as a sign of respect,] the Muftí would not sit in the Master's presence and stood by the threshold of the room.

After `Abdu'l-Bahá insisted several times that he should sit, he finally sat on a chair at the lowest part of the room [by the entrance]. Addressing those present, the Muftí said, "Gentlemen of Haifa and `Akká! You have come to visit me and inquire about my health. I have been granted a new life through a favor bestowed on me by [`Abbás] Effendi. He wrote a few lines to one of His subjects in Beirut asking him to accept me and care for me. As a result, despite my being a total stranger and unknown to them, I was received by that family with such warm hospitality. I have never experienced [anything like it before], even at the hand of my own children and kinsmen!" In short, it is impossible to describe his expressions of appreciation and gratitude and the way that all those present showed humility and submissiveness before the Master.

On another occasion, we were in the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá when one of the Turkish Pashas arrived to visit Him as well. He spoke Persian in a sweet manner and was very knowledgeable about Persian literature. He was also profoundly devoted to the Master and loved Him dearly. As a token of his affection, the Pasha said, "No words can adequately express our thanks to the Iranian monarch, or the government, and the people of that land for exiling with their own hands this priceless Treasure, the blessed Person [of `Abdu'l-Bahá], and sending Him to our land. What extraordinary bliss and exhilaration has surrounded us and how truly we pride ourselves in this stupendous blessing! As the Shaykh-i-Shirazi<sup>186</sup> has written:

The candle must be removed from home and extinguished,  
so neighbors remain unaware that thou art among us."

`Abdu'l-Bahá smiled and replied in verse:

In fear of rivals, quenching the candle is of what use?  
when the radiance of thy beauty tells that thou art hither.

Surely, in whatever world the spirit of Sa`di is dwelling, he must have been filled with pride and ecstasy!

Among the events that I remember vividly from this journey is the following. One day, `Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of His Holiness the Primal Point, referring to the ways He conducted His business transactions as a merchant and associated with people. He related:

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<sup>186</sup> A reference to Sa`di, one of the foremost literary figures in Iranian history.

During the time that His Holiness the Exalted One lived in Bushihr and was in the trading business, a few merchants bought some Prussian blue dye from His blessed Person. When their negotiations were over, the goods were delivered to their office and the time came to settle the account. But they abandoned their agreement and began bargaining anew. This was the practice of the merchants in Bushihr in former days. When the transaction was concluded, the buyer would dismiss the contract and begin renegotiating, in order to get a better price or a discount. Consequently, the merchants reneged on the price. However, His Holiness did not agree to it. They persisted, but He responded, "Our negotiations were completed. If you do not want to buy [the goods], cancel the contract altogether." No matter how hard they tried, their plea was not accepted. The Báb told them, "I will arrange for the blue dye to be brought back from your office." They replied, "But then our credit will be ruined among the merchant community!" "We have concluded the transaction and made a contract," the Báb responded. "Whether the terms are favorable or disagreeable, you must now pay the full sum." "But it is the custom of the realm," they said. To which He replied, "Soon many of these ignoble customs will be changed."

The Báb did not give in and eventually the Prussian blue dyes were brought back to His office. After a while though, one of the uncles of the Báb arrived in Bushihr and the merchants complained to him, "Your Nephew has thoroughly ruined our credit and you must advise Him to be more considerate in dealing with us." The uncle of the Báb reported the matter to the Latter, Who replied, "Even now, if they wanted to conclude an agreement and then abandon it, I would not agree to it."

On that occasion, the blessed Person of `Abdu'l-Bahá noted, "The ways of His Holiness the Báb in Bushihr caused many of the old and sterile traditions to be changed."

`Abdu'l-Bahá also related:

One day in Baghdad, very early in the morning, Mullá Baqir, one of the Letters of the Living, attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. He asked him, "What were you doing last evening?" "I was reading the Ahsanu'l-Qisas<sup>187</sup>," he replied. Bahá'u'lláh queried further, "How much did you read?" and he replied, "I read several chapters of the Ahsanu'l-Qisas." Then He asked, "What did you understand [of it]?"

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<sup>187</sup> The Báb's *Qayyumu'l-Asma* is a commentary on the Surih of Joseph of the Quran, where the story of Joseph is referred to as the "Best of the Stories," (Qur'an 12:3). The commentary of the Báb is typically referred to by the same title. The Báb. "Excerpts from the *Qayyumu'l-Asma*." In *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*. Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice and translated by Habib Taherzadeh. Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1976.

In a state of extreme joy and ecstasy, Mulla Baqir whirled as mystics are wont to do, snapped his fingers in rapture and replied, "Every word announces, 'I long for My Beloved!'"<sup>188</sup>

That day the Master was extremely cheerful and happy and bestowed upon us His infinite generosity and benevolence.

{One day my brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, and I accompanied `Abdu'l-Bahá in His carriage from Haifa to `Akka. `Abdu'l-Bahá sat in the front next to the driver and we sat in the back of the carriage. It was raining gently and the sea was turbulent. Occasionally, the drops of rain sprayed the carriage and `Abdu'l-Bahá was whispering this verse:

Gentle sprinkles are joy for the drunkard,  
Divine absolution is bliss for the sinner.

A few strands of `Abdu'l-Bahá's hair had fallen on His blessed shoulders, so I gathered them very gently from behind. Now they are kept in the Archives of the House of the Báb in Shiraz.<sup>189</sup>

On this trip, we were honored to stay for only a short time - perhaps two weeks. When it was time for us to leave, `Abdu'l-Bahá said, "I have summoned your father and he will arrive soon. At that time, you will attain Our presence once again, in his company. For now, return to Port Said and keep working at your business."

As instructed by the Master, we returned and continued our commercial activities in Port Said and Cairo as before. Eventually, because of accounting improprieties in the Ruhaniyyih Company<sup>190</sup>, `Abdu'l-Bahá sent a message [instructing us to] write to our father and tell him, "Your accounts and business transactions have become entangled like a hairball. It is imperative that you return in order to fix the problem." In accordance with the Master's direction, we wrote to Shiraz and told our father the exact message of `Abdu'l-Bahá. Along with it, we forwarded a Tablet revealed in our father's name.<sup>191</sup>

<sup>188</sup> The Báb had told Mulla Baqir that he would attain the presence of the Promised One of the Bayan. For details of his historic mission on behalf of the Báb, see *The Dawn-breakers*, pp. 504-6. *Tarikh Zuhuru'l-Haqq* 5:5 notes the following extract from a treatise of Mulla Baqir addressed to Yahya Azal: "His Holiness the Báb placed all the Mirrors, Witnesses and believers under the command of the Letters of the Living. Therefore, you and those like you, who claim the station of Mirrorship, must obey my behest. Now I testify and confess that the promised 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' in the Bayan and the One lauded in the Tablet revealed in my honor has indeed been made manifest. Since I [received] that assurance from the Báb, I have attained unto His august presence. And you too, as you are under my shadow, must recognize Him and believe in Him."

<sup>189</sup> The bracketed section is based on notes kept by Hasan Afán. Mírzá Habib intended for them to be inserted at this point. (private communications, August 1991)

<sup>190</sup> Shirkat-i-Ruhaniyyih was formed in 1305 A.H./1887 in Cairo through the association of Núri'd-Dín, Hájí Mírzá Hasan-i-Khurasani, Hájí Muhammad-i-Yazdi, Áqá Siyyid Aqay-i-Afnán, and Hájí `Abdu'l-Karim-i-Tihriani. The company was dissolved in 1311 A.H./1893.

<sup>191</sup> In a Tablet (INBMC 52:302-4, no. 345) to Núri'd-Dín, `Abdu'l-Bahá says that He reviewed the accounts of the company and concluded that the partners had committed improprieties and owed money to Núri'd-



{Sh[iraz]. The illustrious Afnán of the sacred Lote-Tree, the honored Áqá Mírzá Aqa, upon him rest the Glory of God, the Most Glorious.

He is God.

O thou distinguished offshoot of the sacred Lote-Tree! A while ago, the illustrious Afnáns<sup>192</sup>, upon both be the Glory of God, the Most Glorious, were summoned and they arrived in the Holy Land. It so happened that, during those days, this servant was surrounded with a multitude of troubles, to the point that night and day were indistinguishable, and [I was] unable to see fully to their comfort and felicity.

The Holy Land is tumultuous beyond description. Only the constancy and tenacity of this servant and the resoluteness of the steadfast friends have preserved us. Given that the agents of troubles and difficulties are at the ready in all directions, I worried that further hardships and adversities would lead to other trials. Accordingly, it was considered wise not to entangle them in these matters and to send them to Egypt to wait until word was received from you.

In short, the affairs of that honored person and your sons cannot be resolved without your presence. I have written previously about this.

I wrote about the steadfastness and firmness of the friends of God, and their devotion and attachment to the Covenant and Testament. It is evident that, should the whole earth arise to disturb even slightly the faith of those who believe in God and have certitude in His divine Verses, they would utterly fail. This is because these souls have quaffed from the chalice of favors, seek naught but the celestial fragrances and are attracted to nothing but the divine effulgence. Upon thee rest the Glory of God.

Convey my warmest greetings to the sacred leaf, your honored wife, and assure all the friends of my deep love. The Glory of God rest upon all.

`Abdu'l-Bahá, `Abbas.}<sup>193</sup>

My father left Shiraz on Rabi`u'l-Avval 1316 A.H. [July 1898] and arrived in Port Said on Rabi`u'th-Thani [August 1898]. Since he had told us when

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Dín. Further, the Master encouraged Núri'd-Dín to separate himself from this partnership and move his sons, Mírzá Buzurg and Mírzá Habíb, to Beirut.

<sup>192</sup> Presumably, a reference to Mírzá Habíb and Mírzá Buzurg.

<sup>193</sup> INBMC 52:282-3 no. 334. This Tablet has been added to the memoirs at the request of Abú'l-Qásim Afnán, who believes his father wanted it included.

he was due to arrive, we traveled from Cairo to Port Said and made the arrangements for his landing and stay. He arrived with my mother, my youngest and late brother, Mírzá Diya', and our sister, Tuba Khánum. Without contacting his business partners, he instructed my brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, and I to establish a separate office in Port Said. Given that we were thoroughly fluent in Arabic and Italian, we did not need any assistance in seeing to the needs of the business.

#### Fourth Pilgrimage: 1898

After receiving permission from the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá, we left with our father for the abode of the Beloved in the month of Jamádiyu'l-Avval [September 1898]. When we arrived, we attained `Abdu'l-Bahá's sacred presence, and received His many favors and were showered with His love and generosity. A house next to the Master's residence was prepared for our stay and, each day, we were able to benefit from His blessed utterances.

#### The Remains of the Báb

One day, several elders among the resident believers were in the presence of `Abdu'l-Bahá when He informed us, "Certain [good] news has been received from Iran. If divulged, the old would dance with joy. But the time for its announcement has not yet arrived." The illustrious Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin and the honored [Hájí] Mírzá Haydar-`Alí, who were present, asked, "Is the time for proclaiming this good news near?" `Abdu'l-Bahá answered, "God willing."

During the following week, `Abdu'l-Bahá informed us, "The good news that I had promised is this: the sacred remains of the Exalted Báb have safely left the soil of Iran and just arrived in the Ottoman land. They are now completely out of danger.<sup>194</sup> After 50 years, what the Blessed Beauty promised has come to pass. In gratitude for this most great divine blessing, lives must be sacrificed! Soon will the effulgence of the Shrine of the Báb attract the attention of the denizens of the world and the blessed prophecies of Bahá'u'lláh will be clearly fulfilled.<sup>195</sup>"

On that occasion, `Abdul-Baha's blessed countenance beamed with joy and excitement. Truly, all the friends were deeply affected by this radiance and were in a state of utmost ecstasy and rapture. `Abdu'l-Bahá spontaneously and repeatedly kept reciting this verse:

<sup>194</sup> Shoghi Effendi notes that the remains of the Báb arrived in the Holy Land a short while later, on 31 January 1899; see Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*. New ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974; [1999], p. 274.

<sup>195</sup> For Bahá'u'lláh's instructions regarding the building of the Shrine of the Báb and the development of the Bahá'í administrative nucleus on Mount Carmel, see Bahá'u'lláh, "Lawh-i-Kármil (Tablet of Carmel)." In *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Pp. 1-5. For a history of the remains of the Báb, see Rabbani, Ahang, "Efforts to Preserve the Remains of the Báb: Four Historical Accounts." *Bahá'í Studies Review*, vol. 11, (2003), pp. 83-95.

Nayriz burneth with fever,  
and my sorrow-filled heart sheddeth blood,

How consumed my soul is,  
of what Adharbayjan hath wrought.<sup>196</sup>

### Meeting with Siyyid `Alí

During this period, the violators of the Covenant were not quiet. From one corner or another, each tried to spread intrigue through various means. However, unlike the past, far fewer of the friends were gullible and taken in by their vague promises and innuendoes.

Siyyid `Alí-i-Afnán was informed of my father's arrival and sent a message saying he wanted to visit him. After my father consulted with the Master and received His permission, Siyyid `Alí came to visit. At the start of the conversation, even before the customary exchange of pleasantries, he launched into a complaint and began listing grievances against me. He said, "Mírzá Habíb has acted presumptuously towards my brother, Siyyid Mírzá. He has said to him, 'Because of your actions, I have to cut off my relations with you!' During his previous visits to the Holy Land, he has acted most disrespectfully [towards me], as if I was his most determined enemy or had committed a shameful act! Such base behaviors are the antithesis of the Bahá'í qualities we must possess. You must admonish him to stop this contemptible conduct and these repulsive deeds. Bahá'u'lláh has stated, 'Henceforth everyone ... should refrain from ... whatever causeth sadness in men.'<sup>197</sup> I also have a complaint against your own self. I have written several letters and messages to you, and have forwarded a number of tablets penned by the Ghusn-i-Akbar<sup>198</sup>, which have all gone unanswered."

My father knew him and his family well. This was not only because they were first cousins and had corresponded during the lifetime of Khadíjih Bagum, but because for some ten years my father had been a business partner of Siyyid Mírzá in Bombay. In addition, he was thoroughly familiar with their recent deeds and Covenant-breaking activities. At the same time, my father was extremely intense, law-abiding, and hot-tempered when it came to the affairs of the Faith and its protection.

I noticed that my father's face was flushed with anger over this man's hypocritical ways and I feared that, at any moment, they would end up in a heated quarrel. Therefore, I intervened by gesturing for my father to remain

<sup>196</sup> A decade later, in Naw-Ruz 1909, simultaneous with the interment of the remains of the Báb on Mount Carmel, 19 believers were martyred in Nayriz and, as such, `Abdu'l-Bahá's prophecy that such a sacred act required sacrifice came to pass. See *In the Land of Refuge*, Chapter 16.

<sup>197</sup> *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 219-220

<sup>198</sup> The Great Branch, a title of Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí.

calm. After [taking] a few minutes to compose himself, my father began to answer him. First, he recited from memory the whole of the Will and Testament of Bahá'u'lláh. Then he opened the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* and recited a number of verses from it. He followed this with recollections of what he had seen or heard during the days of Bahá'u'lláh. Siyyid `Alí confirmed all that he heard, but would surreptitiously add, "There is no need for a mujtahid in the Faith. God has rendered everyone capable of discernment."<sup>199</sup>

When my father finished, Siyyid `Alí endeavored to expand on his own false views. However, my father cut him short and interjected, "What you have related concerning Habíb'u'llah's impoliteness towards Siyyid Mírzá is unknown to me. As such, I have no opinion on the matter." At this point, I ventured to explain to my father: "One day in Egypt, Siyyid Mírzá came to our office and asked after you. I did not reply and occupied myself with some work. Several times he asked, 'Where is my cousin?' 'Whose cousin?' I finally replied contemptuously. 'My cousin,' he said. I answered, 'My father is not your cousin, since your connection was spiritual and that bond is now broken.' He started shouting, 'My son `Abdu'l-Husayn writes that should I, as a violator of the Covenant, go to Yazd, he would not admit me to his house.' I laughed and answered, 'If truth be known, `Abdu'l-Husayn is not your son; his father is the Holy Spirit.' After that, I did not pay him any further attention. This was the sum total of my rudeness towards him."<sup>200</sup> And, as for not visiting Siyyid `Alí during my pilgrimages to the Holy Land, in all my previous journeys, he lived in the Mansion [of Bahji] and was always a close confidant and an intimate companion of Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí. I, therefore, broke off all connection with him. Moreover, I cannot fathom how it is that Áqá Siyyid `Alí is so intimately familiar with the verse [of the *Kitab-i-Ahdi*], 'Henceforth everyone ... should refrain from slander, abuse and whatever causeth sadness in men,' but has conveniently forgotten the verse, '...turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who

<sup>199</sup> A strategy of the Covenant-breakers was to undermine `Abdu'l-Bahá's station by suggesting that Bahá'u'lláh's Texts were clear and everyone could adequately understand them without the need for an authoritative interpreter. For a similar situation in Islam that led to divisions, see Chapter 2 above. It is also referred to by `Abdu'l-Bahá in the following Tablet (INBMC 52:304-5 no. 345): "In this day, should a person pay attention to the insinuations of the doubters by a needle's eye, of a certainty he would fall, in such wise that there would be no remedy. Among the sayings of such insidious people is their claim that, 'One must return to the Divine Verses and deduce for oneself.' By this they mean to suggest, 'All are able to discern what they need and no Interpreter is required.' Consider how their claim can truly weaken the Cause of God and how it will bring about divisions and differences. Even though the Book of the divine Covenant is evident and the appointed Interpreter stands manifest, yet such things are spoken. This manner of reasoning was first proposed by `Umar at the time when the Messenger of God, may the spirit of all be a sacrifice unto Him, was on His death bed. He said, 'Bring me a pen and paper.' `Umar responded, 'Do not give Him writing papers as He is delirious,' and then he added, 'Sufficient unto us is the Book of God.' Now that same saying of `Umar has been changed into, 'God has created all competent of discernment. Read the Writings.' By this they mean to imply, 'Do not ask the Interpreter and do not pay attention to His words. Seeking His good-pleasure and following His instructions and example are not necessary. Be your own judge.' Their purpose is naught but to turn all against the Covenant and the Testament."

<sup>200</sup> In a Tablet to Núri'd-Dín (INBMC 52:307 no. 347), `Abdu'l-Bahá speaks very critically about Siyyid Mírzá and states that everything he has written should be considered lies and calumnies. He also says that Siyyid Mírzá is beyond all guidance, admonishment or reasoning and such efforts are fruitless. He traces Siyyid Mírzá's rebellion to the time of Bahá'u'lláh, when the Latter emphatically forbade him from using opium and yet he refused to obey.

hath branched from this Ancient Root. The object of this sacred Verse is none other except the Most Mighty Branch.<sup>201</sup>”

Addressing Siyyid `Alí, I further added, “Not only have we, who are outwardly blood-relations, severed all ties with you, but rest assured that all faithful believers and those remaining firm in the Covenant of God will do likewise and disassociate from you. If you want to receive the same consideration as before, then you must go before `Abdul-Baha’s blessed threshold and, with great sincerity and absolute truthfulness, repent [your misdeeds]. You must seize the hem of His garment and implore His forgiveness. If the Head of the Faith accepts you, then count us among your lowliest servants. Otherwise, it is best for you to take your leave.”

My father never thought that I could speak with such force, vigor and resolution. I said all that he had wanted to say, and he was elated and praised [me] aloud, “Well said!” “He got his answer from me,” I replied. My father went on to tell him, “Two years ago, the news of the Covenant-breaking of Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí and others reached us in Shiraz through Mírzá Habíbu’llah and Mírzá Buzurg. Ever since, I have sent all your communications, and those received from your comrades, unopened to the presence of the Center of the Covenant. As soon as I saw that a particular communication was from you or your associates, without even opening the envelope, I would send it to the presence of the Master.” Siyyid `Alí grew very agitated and apprehensive by this discussion. Now he could plainly see that all his plans had come to nothing and had had no effect on us. My father added further, “Mullá Husayn-`Alí-i-Jahrumi<sup>202</sup> had also written and I have also destroyed his letter.”

This was our first and last meeting.

My late father related what happened to the presence of `Abdul-Baha. After showering us with His infinite favors and kindness, He stated, “From this one incident, you can well imagine the hardship and injuries heaped upon me and calculate the extent to which I must be occupied watching over the friends and how, day and night, I must see to their spiritual health and other needs.”

### The Company’s Finances

After a few days, `Abdu’l-Bahá appointed several of the friends to assess the accounts of our commercial enterprise [the Ruhaniyyih Company]. This investigation committee included the honored Áqá Mírzá Hadi, Áqá Mírzá Muhsin, Áqá Mírzá Mahmud-i-Kashi, Áqá Mírzá Husayn-i-Hájí and Hájí Sayyid Javad. After this committee had studied and examined the

<sup>201</sup> *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, The Kitáb-i-`Ahdi, p. 221

<sup>202</sup> He lived in Bombay and was a contact for Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí and other Covenant-breakers.

company's accounts and books for a few days, it concluded that our partners had embezzled our father's fortune and bankrupted his principal capital.

Through the late Muvaqqaru'd-Dawlih, my father had already obtained an official writ from the office of the Iranian Prime Minister, instructing the Iranian ambassador in Istanbul to order its consulate in Egypt to arrest the Yazdi brothers<sup>203</sup> in Cairo. This arrest warrant, which was written in an extremely strong and unusual tone, went on to say that, if the Consulate could not evaluate all the business books in Egypt, it should immediately send these partners to Iran by way of Bombay for [criminal] prosecution.

The esteemed believers in charge of the investigation sent the report with their findings to the sacred presence of the Master. One day, very early in the morning, 'Abdu'l-Bahá came to our house. After bestowing His immense favors and infinite consideration upon us, He addressed my father, "The gentlemen charged with investigating your accounts have completed their task and forwarded their audit report. They have rendered their decision thoroughly in your favor."<sup>204</sup> What do you intend to do now?" My father immediately replied, "I have no will of my own and am wholly resigned to Your instructions. Whatever You order, I shall obey instantly." He then submitted the decree of the Iranian Prime Minister to the presence of the Master.

'Abdu'l-Bahá studied the royal writ. Putting His blessed hand on His forehead, He stood there in deep thought for a full ten minutes. We were all transfixed during His contemplation. He then lifted His blessed head and addressed us aloud, "According to this writ, you can strip them of all their possessions, but hearken to your qualities as an Afán."<sup>205</sup> [In immediate obedience,] my late father moved to burn all the papers right there in the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, when the Master sternly forbade him, saying, "If you destroy these papers, then they can launch a counter suit. You must preserve these papers." In the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, my father immediately placed all the papers in a box and nailed it secure and instructed that none of us were to ever open that box. At the present time all the books and papers are preserved in the same way that were assembled in the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and my father never complained about the misconduct of our business partners – not even to us, his own sons. He further wrote separately to each of the former partners and assured them that from that point he had relinquished all claims against them.

<sup>203</sup> For a Yazdi family tree, see Yazdi, Ali M. *Blessings Beyond Measure: Recollections of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi*. Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988., p. xv.

<sup>204</sup> In a Tablet (INBMC 52:303 no. 346), 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms in writing that Núri'd-Dín had been wronged by his partners and that he was owed the principal plus interest.

<sup>205</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá was urging Núri'd-Dín to forego his claims and the criminal investigation against the partners.

## **Return to Egypt**

The abundance of the generosity of the Blessed Beauty and the infinite benevolence of `Abdu'l-Bahá has forever sustained these meek and helpless souls. In the course of this journey, we were honored to remain in the Holy Land for nearly a month and each day were graced with beholding the countenance of the Beloved of all hearts, may my spirit be a sacrifice for His favors, and were rendered joyous as we partook of His generosity and loving-kindness.

After one month we were dismissed and commanded to proceed to Port Said where we would start our business activities afresh.

## **Final Years in Egypt**

In those days, we were thrilled every month to meet a group of pilgrims who had returned from circumambulating the Most Sacred Court<sup>206</sup>. During that period, `Abdu'l-Bahá issued instructions that, under no circumstances, was the Cause of God to be proclaimed or propagated in Egypt. The pilgrims who came through Port Said were told when they arrived not to teach the Cause and, if they were asked about the Faith, not to offer a response.

## **Ibrahim Effendi**

We had become intimate friends with one of the natives of Port Said – an extremely kind and spiritual man by the name of Ibrahim Effendi<sup>207</sup>. We associated with each other freely and without any of the customary ceremonies. On one occasion, a group of Yazdi and Hamadani pilgrims arrived in Port Said on their way to the Holy Land and this group included the honored Nush<sup>208</sup>. We had neglected to tell him [about the Master's instructions] and that he was to conceal his destination.

One day, it so happened that Ibrahim Effendi was visiting us. With a few Persian words he had recently learned, he ventured to ask about the purpose of Jinab-i-Nush's visit. "Each month," Ibrahim Effendi asked, "a large group of Iranians arrive at Port Said and leave here for an unknown destination. A month later, that same group returns and another one leaves in its stead. Where do they come from and what is their destination, and why do they wait in Port Said?" Without the least hesitation or effort to disguise his purpose, the honored Nush began to teach him about the Faith. At this point, I happened to enter the room and, realizing what was happening, motioned the honored Nush to end the discussion. He immediately complied.

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<sup>206</sup> The Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh

<sup>207</sup> He served in the Egyptian Custom Office as an inspector.

<sup>208</sup> A renowned Bahá'í teacher from a Zoroastrian background.

At this moment, Ibrahim Effendi turned around and saw me standing [there]. As such, he was deeply agitated. With tears streaming down his face, he protested, "Indeed, you do not have any consideration for our deep bonds of friendship. You possess such wonderful news and do not divulge any of it. And when another one begins to share this truth, you prevent him from continuing." I realized at that point that it was already too late and hesitantly engaged him in a teaching discussion. After a few meetings, he declared his belief in the blessed Faith and, consequently, became the first native believer of Port Said. In a Tablet addressed to my late father, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, may my life be a sacrifice for His gracious generosity, urged us to show him every consideration.<sup>209</sup>

In short, this believer was greatly favored by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and, truth be told, it was the honored Nush who taught him the Faith in the first instance.

After his recognition [of Bahá'u'lláh], Ibrahim Effendi became a celestial source of light and inflamed with the fire of the love of God. When it came to propagating the Word of God or proclaiming the Cause, he could never stay still and, putting aside all caution, would teach at every opportunity that presented itself. Although many a time he was advised to be more prudent in his ways, he could never conceal what burned within his soul.

Praise be God, he eventually had a family and his children are firm in their faith and have become staunch believers. His oldest son is the honored Dr. Bashir, who I have heard is the chairman of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Alexandria. I met his second son, Fadlu'llah, sometime ago in Iran, where he lived for a while.

### The First Western Pilgrims

One of the important events that took place in those days was the arrival of the first contingent of American and European friends. They arrived in Port Said to go on pilgrimage to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh and attain the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This happened in 1317 A.H. [1899]<sup>210</sup>. Nearly a month before they arrived, my father received a Tablet revealed in his honor by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in which we were told the good news of the arrival of the pilgrims from America. The Master instructed us to look after the needs of

<sup>209</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá (INBMC 52:272-3, no. 322) mentions this in the following Tablet: The illustrious Afnán of the sacred Lote-Tree, the distinguished offshoot Áqá Mírzá Aqa, upon him be the Glory of God, the Most Glorious. He is God. The illustrious Afnán of the divine Lote-Tree! In accordance with the unconditioned will: since the honored Ibrahim Effendi is among those who have newly entered the religion of God and have arrived at the shore of the sea of oneness, his heart is illumined by the effulgence of Divine Guidance and his soul verdant with the sweet fragrance of the paradise of the Lord's benevolence. Therefore, you are to use every means possible to increase his faith and spirituality and to multiply the fire of the love of God in his bosom. To be sure, you are to ensure that he is contented and grateful. May glory and luster, praise and salutations be upon him and his kinsmen. Verily, he is remembered in the hearts of the Holy Household and other friends. 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In peace.

<sup>210</sup> According to Stockman, Robert H. *The Bahá'í Faith in America*. Vol. 1, *Origins, 1892-1900*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985, 36-57, the first group of pilgrims arrived in the opening months of 1899. The year 1317 A.H. corresponds with May 1899 to April 1900.



these friends while [they were] in Port Said. In His blessed Tablet, `Abdul-Baha enjoined upon my father, "The Western friends will arrive; provide Eastern hospitality."<sup>211</sup> In a later Tablet, the Master wrote, "When the American believers arrive in that realm, show them every consideration and greet them lovingly on my behalf. `A `A."<sup>212</sup>

In those days, Port Said was not developed much and there were no hotels. Although there were a number of streets designed in square and perpendicular fashion, very few houses had been built. Our residence was an apartment on the second floor of a three-story building belonging to a Greek man named Dimitri, who showed great respect towards my father. Our business offices were on the first floor and we lived on the floor above them. Dimitri and his wife lived on the third floor and, on the rooftop, there were a few more rooms used mostly for storage and drying clothes. My father asked me to meet with Dimitri and ask him to rent the rooftop rooms for our use, so that we could let the western pilgrims occupy our own apartment. I conveyed my father's inquiry to him. As soon as he understood his request, he responded, "God forbid! My wife and I will move to those rooms and your friends can stay in our apartment. And I will accept no additional payment." No matter how much I insisted, it did no good. I went to my father with the story and he said, "This is all due to the sovereign will of `Abdu'l-Bahá, Who removes all obstacles." He then went to Dimitri's apartment and thanked him for his immense kindness.

We waited until the ship carrying the pilgrims arrived at the port. My father instructed my two brothers and I, along with Áqá Nuru'llah Isfahani, who worked in our office at the time, to go and welcome the visitors.

When [they arrived and] we saw each other, the sound of "Allah-u-Abha" was raised all throughout the Custom Office. And as we tenderly embraced and kissed one another, tears of joy streamed from our eyes because this was the first time that we had met Bahá'ís from the western countries. They numbered fifteen and came to our home.

<sup>211</sup> The following is recorded in *Ru'yáháy-i-Sádiqih*, p. 32 (compiled by Míhrangiz Khursrawi): In 1898 when the late Mírzá Aqay-i-Afnán, surnamed Núri'd-Dín, was engaged in business in Port Said, he received a cable from `Abdu'l-Bahá, stating essentially, "Port Said. Nur. Western friends will arrive. Provide Eastern hospitality." This telegram confirmed for the honored Núri'd-Dín a prediction of the Master made two years earlier during His conversation with Hájí Muhammad-Isma'il-i-Yazdi. That is, two years earlier, `Abdu'l-Bahá one day humorously said to the Hájí, "I had a dream and you must interpret it for me." The Hájí responded, "But how am I to interpret my Master's dream?" For the second time, in humor, `Abdu'l-Bahá insisted that the Hájí was to give the meaning of His dream, but the Hájí yet again kept his tongue. Thereupon, the Master related His dream: "Last night the Ancient Beauty appeared in my dream and said, 'I have guests that have never been here before. I want you to receive them most befittingly.' I related Bahá'u'lláh's command to the Greatest Holy Leaf. Together, we went to the storage [area] and retrieved the set of fine china that the Khal's son (that is, the honored Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí-i-Afnán) had sent from China and got it ready." After jesting with the Hájí some more, `Abdu'l-Bahá explained the meaning of the vision: "The standard of the Faith has been raised in America. A number in that country have embraced the Faith and will come here soon for pilgrimage to the Sacred Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. These friends have never outwardly been here and will now come and share in this blessing." It was only two years later that the Master's prophecy was fulfilled and the first group of American pilgrims, joined by British and French Bahá'ís, came by way of Europe to Palestine for Bahá'í pilgrimage.

<sup>212</sup> Postscript to the Tablet in INBMC 52:319 no. 356.

Without delay, my father telegraphed the Master informing Him of the arrival of the [western] friends. `Abdu'l-Bahá instructed that they be divided in three groups of five. Each group was to leave for the Holy Land only after the previous one had arrived back in Port Said.

I distinctly recall that, one day at lunchtime, Mrs. Lua Getsinger<sup>213</sup> (who was accompanied on this journey by her husband, Dr. [Edward] Getsinger) suddenly began to weep very loudly. We were amazed, and perplexed as to what had caused her sadness and brought about this condition. After a few minutes, with intense emotion, she said, "If, at every moment, we were to offer a thousand thanks at the threshold of the Blessed Beauty, it would not suffice. See how the promises of the Bible and the prophecies of the New Testament and all other Holy Books of the Divine Messengers have come to pass. Consider how it has enabled the cobra to play with the babe, sparrow to dwell in the same nest as the hawk, and the bloodthirsty wolf to graze the same pasture as the lamb.<sup>214</sup> Where is the discerning eye and the hearing ear? Consider how each of us is from a different race, religious background or nationality. And yet, with utmost peace and affection, we have come together under the shadow of God's Sacred Tree, dwell within the tabernacle of unity raised by the Blessed Beauty and sit at the same table spread in the name of oneness. I am from America and of Christian background, while you are Iranian and of Jewish, Zoroastrian or Shi'ah backgrounds<sup>215</sup>, and still this Ibrahim Effendi is Egyptian and of Sunni descent. And consider how, because of our divers backgrounds, we are supposed to be ready to shed each other's blood and to try to destroy one another; and yet, the Word of God has healed our hearts. This is none other than the miracle of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and the result of His regenerative and life-giving revelation."

We spent many wonderful hours and days in the presence of these western pilgrims until, eventually, the preparation for their journey was complete. After their visit to the Holy Land, with spirits brimming with affection and enamoured with love for the Master, they returned to Egypt. Truly, they were made a new creation, each the essence of joy and felicity, yearning to teach the Faith of God day and night. In such condition, they returned to their homeland. Dr. Getsinger gave my father his own photograph, which is now kept safe with my father's papers. Later they sent photographs taken in the presence of the illustrious [Mírzá] Abu'l-Fadl and Hájí `Abdu'l-Karim-i-Tihirani<sup>216</sup>.

<sup>213</sup> See Sears, William and Robert Quigley. *The Flame*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1972.; and Metelmann, Velda Piff. *Lua Getsinger: Herald of the Covenant*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1997.

<sup>214</sup> For the Biblical prophecies, see the Book of Isaiah, chapter 11.

<sup>215</sup> Parenthetically, Mírzá Habíb adds: "At that time, other Iranian and Indian pilgrims from Jewish and Zoroastrian backgrounds were also present and were waiting for a sea vessel to take them to the Holy Land."

<sup>216</sup> At `Abdu'l-Bahá's instruction, he had gone to Chicago to encourage and deepen the believers.

One of the other ladies who came on pilgrimage was Miss Sarah Farmer, with whom my brother, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg, remained in communication over the years.<sup>217</sup> I should note that, in addition to Miss Farmer, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg was in constant contact with a number of other western friends until the end of his life.

Several Tablets were revealed by `Abdu'l-Bahá in honor of my father, Áqá Mírzá Aqa, about meeting with the western believers. It was revealed, "Concerning the other matter, the consideration you have shown to the American visitors has brought immense joy and felicity to my heart. Naught short of this is to be expected of your exalted station."<sup>218</sup> At the conclusion of the same Tablet, the Master writes, "However, about your return to your beloved land, I had wanted you to remain in these parts [that is, near to the Holy Land] and for the affairs [of the Cause] to pivot round the desired goals. In this way, you could shoulder some of `Abdu'l-Bahá's hardships, even if you are in that region - much like your efforts during the visit of the American ladies."

### Departure from Egypt

For two years, affairs passed in this way. During this time, certain communications arrived from Shiraz that worried the Master and brought concern to His pure heart. In a Tablet addressed to my father in Port Said, `Abdu'l-Bahá wrote:

... You had written regarding the blessed Threshold of the Sacred House [of the Báb] – may my soul be a sacrifice unto its dust. From the letters arriving here, we continually hear the supplication of that sacred city. Were I to expand on the details, it would surely bring sadness and sorrow to that honored person and be a source of

<sup>217</sup> The following is the text of the first letter that Mírzá Buzurg received from Miss Farmer (private communications from Abú'l-Qásim Afnán, May 1992): Hotel Chateau-Durieux et des Anglais Aix-les-Bains, France July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1900 To: Mírzá Bozorg Afnán Dear Brother in the Truth: Your kind letter was most gladly received. Miss Wilson and I both had desired to write and thank you for all the very generous way in which you had received and cared for us, but we waited to learn first from you the address to which to send it – you remember you promised it to us. When it did come, it found me recovering from a serious attack of Roman fever. I am much better but am not permitted to write much yet. Consequently I have much time to think of you all and pray for you, which I do constantly. God was so good to open the doors of His Holy Temple to us, to permit us to come into the presence of our blessed Lord (Rouhi fedah) and to visit the Sacred Tomb that life itself will not be long enough to pour forth our praise and thanksgiving. Miss Wilson and I spend our time reviewing the scenes through which we have passed and the teaching which we have received, meanwhile studying the Old and New Testaments and the Koran. It is a continual feast and we permit nothing to draw us away. We have the opportunity also to unfold the Truth to hungry souls whom we meet, one, a Swedenborgian, confirmed it from the mouth of the Swedish seer, who proclaimed that the next and the fullest revelation of God would be found in Persia and would harmonize all that is true in all other scriptures. I could write for hours but must not. Keep on with your English. If you desire it, I will help you by correspondence and point out any little mistakes which happen to come in. Miss Wilson and I desire to be remembered to all the believers in Port Said, but especially to the dear mother and the other members of your family. We shall never forget your loving-kindness to those who were strangers after the flesh but who in the blessed Spirit are and always will be one with you! We rejoice in the inestimable privilege you are all enjoying in the presence of our blessed Lord to whom be glory forever! With all good wishes, Your sister in the Faith, Sarah J. Farmer

<sup>218</sup> The full text is in INBMC 52:308 no. 347.

anguish. However, the intent is this: that Threshold is more important than `Abdu'l-Bahá's soul. From this, you can see how cherished and venerated that House should be regarded. Therefore, your honored person must take on this important task in such a way that it will enthrall the spirit of `Abdu'l-Bahá and bring it gladness. I swear by the blessed Spirit of that Sanctified Being, that Sun of Reality and Lord of the House – may my spirit, my essence and my whole being be a sacrifice unto His dust! It is the ultimate desire of my heart and soul that I may attain that hallowed dust and sweep that Threshold with my eyelashes. Therefore, the honored Diya' Effendi should be sent to sanctify that Threshold of Sanctity and serve that Spot on my behalf.<sup>219</sup>

Several more Tablets on the same theme were revealed in honor of my late father.<sup>220</sup> Reading these over, my father realized that, to achieve `Abdu'l-Bahá's purpose, he would have to go to his native town in a hurry. Therefore, he wrote about this proposal in a supplication to the Master. In it, he asked whether [his plan] met with `Abdu'l-Bahá's good pleasure. If so, he was ready to wind up all his business interests in Port Said and return to Shiraz with his family.

This petition was looked on with favor. After the passing of two years, we were once again permitted to visit the Holy Land and pay our respects. Immediately, we closed our commercial office and ended all financial transactions in Port Said. Our entire family traveled to the Holy Land.

### **Fifth Pilgrimage: 1901**

After arriving in the Holy Land, we went [first] to pay our humble respects at the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. The next day, the blessed Person of the Center of the Covenant called our entire family into His presence. Having showered us with His infinite blessings, He said, "It had been my earnest wish for you to stay in this region and to see to affairs related to the Holy Land. In particular, now that I am busy with the construction of the Shrine of the Báb, I had intended for you to help me in every aspect of the raising of this Sacred Edifice. However, as I think about it some more, I note [that there are] certain difficult undertakings; that is, an important task and a befitting service in Shiraz. Therefore, I have decided to send you there. When you arrive in Shiraz, I will give you the complete instructions<sup>221</sup>. This task entrusted to you is the most important of all services and worthy of the greatest reward before the Divine Court. Truly, future kings and monarchs will long to have been present on this day and been numbered among the servants and attendants of that Sanctified Threshold." He then proceeded to

<sup>219</sup> The full text is in INBMC 52:320 no. 357 and *Khándan-i-Afnán*, p. 209.

<sup>220</sup> See *In the Land of Refuge*, Chapter 8, for the text of one of these Tablets.

<sup>221</sup> `Abdu'l-Bahá is alluding to the rebuilding of the House of the Báb in Shiraz and the significance of this undertaking.

give instructions on the way to receive visitors and pilgrims at the House of the Báb and how to conduct the management of its affairs. "Now is only the emergence of the dawn of the Sun of Truth," His blessed Person told us. "Soon it will envelop the whole earth."

Our pilgrimage lasted a total of 40 days. For us, the passage of those days was agonizing and filled with anguish, because we knew that we were about to leave for a far off land, which gave us no further opportunity to attain the presence of the Master.

Among the gifts that we had the privilege of carrying to the presence of the Master on this journey was a piece of marble that the honored Áqá Siyyid Mustafa [Rumi] had sent from Rangoon in the care of my father, intended for the Holy Land. This was a sample of the marble that the sarcophagus for the blessed remains of the Primal Point was to be made from. One day, while contemplating this marble specimen against the sunlight, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "Observe how you can see the sun's rays through this stone. It is the finest piece of stone excavated from the mine and purposed for this sacred sarcophagus. In quality, it truly is peerless in the entire world." The late Mishkin-Qalam was present and entreated, "If it meets with the Master's good pleasure and should He grant permission, I will draw the designs of the Greatest Name that would adorn this sarcophagus and present them to Your august Self. And should You wish, I am prepared to journey to India to arrange for them to be carved on the side of the sarcophagus." In accepting this request, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said humorously, "You want your name to be preserved for as long as the earth and the heavens endure!" "It is entirely possible," Mishkin-Qalam responded, "if I am favored by the Master's boundless grace."

As proposed, this illustrious person prepared the calligraphic pieces and signed each, "The servant of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Mishkin-Qalam." I was present when he offered them to the Master. When He saw them, His blessed countenance showed signs of deep indignation and, with great disapproval, He addressed Mishkin-Qalam, "Who told you to sign them in such a way?! I do not wish for anything to be written at all!" With tears pouring forth, Mishkin-Qalam began to implore the Master. He took hold of the hem of His garment and, with great fervor and intense wailing, begged forgiveness for his misdeed. He sobbed and pleaded with much intensity until the ocean of absolution of his compassionate Master was aroused and 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, "If you sign your name in the same manner that you did during the time of the Blessed Beauty, then I will accept." Mishkin-Qalam complied and changed his signature to "The servant of the Threshold of Bahá, Mishkin-Qalam."<sup>222</sup>

<sup>222</sup> Throughout His ministry, 'Abdu'l-Bahá greatly disapproved of believers composing verses about, or glorifying, His Person in any way. He would admonish them to focus their praise on Bahá'u'lláh.

In short, in those days, wonderful news about the immense victories of the Faith throughout the world, the vast proclamations of the Cause in the East and the West, as well as very pleasing reports from other corners of the globe, were arriving constantly. Because of this, the heart of the beloved Master was brimming with joy and signs of immense elation were evident on His blessed face. At times, He would go to Mount Carmel and allow some of the friends to accompany Him on such visits. The land for the construction of the Shrine of the Báb, which was designated in the days of the Blessed Beauty, was now purchased and the neighboring grounds had also been acquired. The sacred remains [of the Báb] were also now in the Holy Land. Even though the Covenant-breakers persisted in their evil-plotting and mischief-making, and corresponded day and night with the Ottoman Court in an attempt to pollute people's minds, by the divine favors, the Cause of God was prevailing over all its adversaries.

### **Jamalu'd-Din-i-Afghani**

In those days, Siyyid Jamalu'd-Din-i-Afghani lived in Istanbul. From there, he tried his best to extinguish the Cause of God because he believed that the only obstacle in the way of achieving his evil-minded purpose was the impenetrable fortress of the Faith of God. Therefore, in order to increase his popularity and influence among the Shi'ahs and the Sunnis, and also to attain his ultimate objectives, he rose up to create a situation designed to uproot the Faith of God in Iran and the Ottoman realms.

One night, the beloved Master called Husayn-i-Aqay-i-Khadim [the attendant] and instructed him, "Light the lantern a little later tonight as I want to talk with the friends." In those days, it was customary for a lantern to be lit at night in the biruni [the outer apartment] of the house and His blessed Person would meet with those of the town's inhabitants who wanted to attain His presence and listen to His utterances. That night, He instructed that the lantern be lit later so that non-Bahá'ís would not be present [as He wished to talk confidentially with the believers].

He told us, "Recently Siyyid Jamalu'd-Din has announced that the Bahá'í Faith intends to destroy the foundation of the world and aims at obliterating all religions. For instance, he has alleged that, 'The religious beliefs of Bahá'ís and the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are: the destruction of all Islamic mosques, Jewish synagogues and Christian churches; the annihilation of the Baytu'l-Haram<sup>223</sup> and the Baytu'l-Muqaddas<sup>224</sup>; the burning of the Qur'an and the Bible; the eradication of all evidence of religious attainments; and to dislodge the Qajar and the Ottoman dynasties. These are the ordinances of their Books and the religious beliefs of Bahá'ís.' He has further suggested, 'If you want to stop these things from happening and to ensure that none of

<sup>223</sup> A reference to Mecca, the holiest site of Islam.

<sup>224</sup> A reference to Jerusalem, where the Mosque of the Dome of Rock is situated. It is considered particularly sacred by Muslims.

these teachings is ever realised, then you must demolish `Akká, slay `Abdu'l-Bahá, Who is the Center of their Faith and the fount of their inner confidence, and massacre all the Bahá'ís, whether they live in Iran or the Ottoman Empire.' Such are the intentions of this evil man."<sup>225</sup>

`Abdu'l-Bahá then added, "However, this man does not know that even if `Akká is destroyed or `Abdu'l-Bahá slain or Bahá'ís martyred, he can never extinguish the Faith of God. *'Leave them to their inventions.'*"<sup>226</sup> Soon you will witness how God deals with the tongue that has spoken in this way and so dishonestly uttered such lies and slander." Then `Abdu'l-Bahá asked for the lantern to be lit and for various people to attain His presence. Subsequently, they were dismissed after having received their fill of His bounties.

Not long after that, the veracity of `Abdu'l-Bahá's prediction about Siyyid Jamalu'd-Din was demonstrated. Of course, it is now common knowledge that, in order to carry out his plans, Siyyid Jamalu'd-Din went from Iran to Istanbul and gathered around him a number of disciples. Sultan `Abdu'l-Hamid was disturbed and horrified by him and his partisans. He instructed that a palace be assigned to him and arranged a haram, where [Afghani] engaged in a life of luxury and indulgence. At the same time, the Siyyid busied himself with making plans for sedition and revolt. However, a short time after `Abdu'l-Bahá spoke about him, a small growth appeared on the Siyyid's tongue. The Sultan's special physician was sent to attend him. [In a number of operations,] his tongue was cut several times until none was left and, soon after, he died. This was the end of a person whose tongue had spoken presumptuously towards the Cause of God and had committed such slander and calumny against the Faith!<sup>227</sup>

### Letters from Iran

On another occasion, while we were in the presence of the beloved Master, the package of correspondence from Iran arrived. In it was a letter from Yazd sent by the late Hájí Mírzá Mahmud-i-Afnán, the honored son of Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taqi, the Vakilu'l-Haqq. He had written two pages in small script, all devoted to the excellence of the Jalalu'd-Dawlih and his very many services to the friends. [It mentioned] such things as his intention to participate in the Feast in Mihdi-Abad<sup>228</sup> and his profound humility and submissiveness towards the Cause of God. `Abdu'l-Bahá read the letter closely, pondered for a moment, and then said, "Because of his pure heart, the honored Afnán harbors no malice, is void of bitterness and radiates

<sup>225</sup> See *In the Land of Refuge*, Chapter 11, where the celebrated Mírzáy-i-Shirazi recounts some of Afghani's efforts to assault the Faith.

<sup>226</sup> Qur'an 6:137

<sup>227</sup> On Afghani's life, see Keddie Keddie, Nikki R. *Sayyid Jamal ad-Din 'al-Afghani': A Political Biography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.; Balyuzi, *Edward G. Browne and the Bahá'í Faith*, pp. 23-8 and Bamdad, *Sharh-i Hal-i Rijal-i Iran*, vol. 1, pp. 257-80.

<sup>228</sup> A village in the vicinity of Yazd, where the believers of that region would gather for meetings.

nothing but truth and spirituality. He imagines that the Jalalu'd-Dawlih also tells the truth. The Afnán conflates this man with his own self and is unaware that the Qajars have no faith. The Jalalu'd-Dawlih is a liar and merely wants to use the Afnán and the believers for his own purposes."

`Abdu'l-Bahá then opened another envelope that contained only a blank piece of paper. The beloved Master smiled and said, "The servants want to test us. Woe betide them of the day when God decides to test His servants!" Immediately, He picked up the pen and revealed a Tablet on that very same paper and sent it back by the post. This piece of paper was sent by Áqá Siyyid Muhammad-Sadiq, the husband of Fa'izih Khánúm. As a result of many teaching discussions, he had decided to formulate a number of questions in his own heart and to send a blank piece of paper before `Abdu'l-Bahá. He had resolved that, if the Master answered his heart's questions on that very same paper, then he would recognize the truth of the Faith and accept it. Finally, when this Tablet arrived, his questions were answered and he attained the shore of certitude.

### **Return to Port Said**

I am at a loss to know what else to write about our time [in the Holy Land] until the beloved Master sent us to Iran. To this day, whenever I think of that time, I am stirred with profound emotions and reduced to bittersweet tears.

Eventually, for yet a second time, `Abdu'l-Bahá bestowed His immeasurable favors upon us and admonished us in this way, "Prepare yourselves for the services and mighty tasks that lie ahead of you. God willing, they will be accomplished through your perseverance." This promise of the Master was the consolation of our heart. That is, if we were to be outwardly deprived of the unfathomable grace of beholding His blessed countenance and could no longer visit the sacred places of the Holy Land, praise be unto God, we were propelled forward, instead, with His life-regenerating promise!

After bidding farewell to our friends in Haifa, we went directly to Port Said. We completed the remainder of our commercial activities and left for Shiraz soon after.

### **Restoration of the House of the Báb**

It was now over ten years since we had last seen Iran. Clad in Arab clothes, we may even have been more fluent in the Arabic language than in Persian. We arrived in Bushihr first, then traveled to Shiraz with a caravan led by one of my late father's assistants. When we arrived, we went directly to the House of the Báb. After visiting that Holy Threshold, my late father designated his ancestral home - situated next to the Masjid-i-Jami` and blessed by the footsteps of the Exalted One - as the place for meeting the



friends. A steady stream of believers gathered to hear the good news of the Holy Land. My late father spoke of the progress and victories of the Cause of God in America, which brought great joy and delight to the friends.

During the first two years we were in Shiraz, two important incidents happened that affected my late father. The first was that a rock was deliberately hurled at his head from a rooftop, which injured him badly and forced him to stay in bed for a long period of time. The second incident was that he was badly stabbed in the foot one night as he was passing through Shamshirgarha Street<sup>229</sup>. The injury never healed during the remainder of his life. However, the confirmations of Abdu'l-Baha poured out like spring showers and he remained thoroughly fearless - nay, thankful - before all adversaries and under all conditions and was completely resigned to His good pleasure.

My brother and I resumed our trading business in Iranian carpets. In the month of Rabí'u'th-Thání, 1321 A.H. [July 1903], my late father was honored with a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In it, he was asked to begin rebuilding the House of the Báb in its original style. Therefore, it may be helpful to document here a short history of the Blessed House of the Báb. This will explain the reasons for the changes made to it previously, and the efforts made during the Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to convert it back to its original state, so that there will be no room for unwarranted speculation in the future.

### History of the Blessed House

The House of the Báb was an ancestral inheritance of Áqá Mírzá Muhammad-Rida,<sup>230</sup> the father of the illustrious Exalted One. The title for this property was stolen, along with other goods and articles, from the house of the late Áqá Mírzá Zaynu'l-'Abidin, a brother-in-law of the Báb and my paternal grandfather. The Báb grew up in this House until the passing of His father, then He moved to the house of the martyred-uncle [Hájí Mírzá Siyyid 'Alí]. After His sojourn in Bushihr and pilgrimage to the 'Atabat, the Báb returned to Shiraz. He took up residence in this House and married His mother's paternal cousin, Khadíjih Bagum. From this union, a child was born by the name of Ahmad, who died in infancy.

The declaration of the Báb took place on 5 Jamadiu'l-Avval 1260 A.H. [22 May 1844] in the upper chamber of this Blessed House. There the Báb announced His mission for the first time, to Mulla Husayn-i-Bushrú'í.<sup>231</sup>

<sup>229</sup> The House of the Báb was located on this street.

<sup>230</sup> Taherzadeh, Adib. *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 4, *Mazra'ih & Bahjí 1877-92*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1987, 429 and *Khándan-i-Afnán*, p. 204, state that the Báb's father bought the House. However, the family records show that it was an inheritance (Abú'l-Qásim Afnán, private communications, September 1995).

<sup>231</sup> At this point in the narrative, Mírzá Habib notes: "Even though this might not be relevant, I would like to relate a dream that the wife of the Báb had after she was married for only a short time." He then relates a

After His declaration, the Báb left for Mecca. He performed the hajj ceremony and proclaimed the divine Cause to the entire Islamic world, the Sheriff of Mecca and others, and returned to Shiraz. The account of the journey to His native town and His stay there is extensive. As instructed by the beloved Guardian, this has been recorded in detail and is available elsewhere.<sup>232</sup>

After arriving in Shiraz, the Báb at first took up residence in the house of the illustrious uncle [Hájí Mírzá Siyyid `Alí]. Previously, the Letters of the Living would gather there. Later, however, He moved to the Blessed House, where He lived until the time of His departure for Isfahan.

The Governor-General of Shiraz had been told that a group of believers regularly gathered in the House of the Báb. Therefore, one night, he sent to the House `Abdu'l-Hamid Khán, the Darughih, and Mir Mu`min-i-Iyzad-khasti, with a few guardsmen and night prowlers. Mir Mu`min-i-Iyzad-khasti was influential in government affairs and particularly antagonistic and spiteful [towards the Cause].

Unannounced, this group entered the House from the rooftop at a time when the Báb and His wife were resting inside and the mother of the Báb was sleep in the courtyard.<sup>233</sup> When these men entered, the Báb sent His wife to His mother and both women went into the adjacent room where His declaration had taken place. He asked `Abdu'l-Hamid Khán, "Why have you intruded into My House without prior notice?" The Darughih responded, "The Governor has received reports that a group of men have assembled in Your residence. Therefore, we were sent to investigate the matter." The Báb said, "Now that you are satisfied that no men are here, you may leave and inform your superior." The Darughih insisted on receiving a bribe, but the Báb refused to give him one. The officer took the Báb's cashmere shawl, cut it in half and took a half. Without allowing the Báb to dress properly, he arrested Him and took Him to the residence of the Governor-General. At dawn, however, the Báb was released from custody. That night, His blessed Person spoke vehemently against the Governor, the Darughih and the `ulamas, and with great power addressed the Governor and his men as ignorant and apostates.

Here I will include a small section of a letter from Hájí Mírzá Abú'l-Qásim-i-Afnán, a brother-in-law of the Báb, to the Khal-i-Akbar<sup>234</sup>, which gives an

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dream that indicated Khadíjih Bagum would be with the Báb for only two-and-a-half years. Since this dream appears in *In the Land of Refuge*, Chapter 2, and Rabbani, "The Báb in Shiraz", it is not included here.

<sup>232</sup> See *In the Land of Refuge*, chapters 1-4, and Rabbani, "The Báb in Shiraz".

<sup>233</sup> To enjoy the night breeze of the summer months, many Iranian families sleep outdoors under mosquito nets.

<sup>234</sup> Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muhammad, the oldest maternal uncle of the Báb, who was in Bushihr at the time. For a biography, see Rabbani, Ahang. "Conversion of the Great-Uncle of the Báb." *World Order* (Wilmette, Ill.) vol. 30, no. 3, (Spring 1999), pp 19-38.

outline of that eventful night [11 September 1846]. The letter is dated 20 Ramadan 1262 A.H. [11 September 1846]:

... These days, they have incited enmity against Hájí Mírzá `Alí-Muhammad [the Báb] and Hájí Mírzá Siyyid `Alí. In every gathering, they say what they will and accuse them of the worst offences. Out of consideration for that Sahib [the Báb], one is unable to confront the accusers and must bear all the allegations, show patience and tolerance, and disregard their calumnies. We used to hear these [accusations] from the city folk. More recently, [we hear them] from our closer associates [too]. In the past, while they never supported us, at least they refrained from insulting us. But now, they readily scorn us as well.

Mir Mu`min-i-Iyzad-khasti is now securely established over all affairs and is the lord and master of all the inhabitants. He too has generated animosity towards Hájí Mírzá `Alí-Muhammad [the Báb]. Moreover, in this effort he is an accomplice of the Sahib-Ikhtiyar [the Governor]. ... It is evident that the people of the world have dealt [most unjustly] with the Holy Figures, upon Them be peace ...

It was the night of 20 Ramadan [11 September 1846] when Áqá Mir visited the Sahib-Ikhtiyar ... to confer and seek his good pleasure... It was six hours into that night<sup>235</sup> when Áqá Mir went to their [the Báb's] House while they [the Household] were sleep.<sup>236</sup> They woke up and noticed the men intruding from the rooftop. As you recall, there is not much distance between the courtyard and the roof. I find myself thoroughly incapable of describing their shocked state, particularly the condition of the ladies of the household. Certainly, it evoked the opening scenes of Karbila. Indeed `Abdu'l-Hamid Khán himself had said, "How have my deeds differed from Shímr's<sup>237</sup>!" The scene was such that, even had an infidel witnessed the last evening's events, he would have grieved over them. The entire neighborhood was awakened and the town was filled with the sigh of anguish and sadness. They hardly gave the Hájí [the Báb] time to dress and conducted Him away forthwith. They treated the Hájí most discourteously. He therefore set aside all caution and spoke to them as sternly and angrily as He willed. They confiscated from His House whatever written materials were in the Hájí's possession.

At last, two hours before sunrise, `Abdu'l-Hamid Khán brought Him back and procured a bond from me that He would no longer invite

<sup>235</sup> This letter makes it clear that the Báb was arrested on the night before this letter was written; namely, on the evening of 10 September 1846. On the authority of Tarikh-i-Jadid, *The Dawn-breakers*, p. 195 n.1, incorrectly placed this event on 23 September 1845.

<sup>236</sup> *The Dawn-breakers*, p. 195, states the house of the Báb's uncle was targeted for this attack. However, this document shows that the Báb was at His own residence when He was arrested.

<sup>237</sup> It is believed that the Imam Husayn was slain by Shímr ibn Dhu'l-Jawshan on the plain of Karbala.

others to His House or converse with the mullas who are His followers. God only knows what will happen now.

The mother of your illustrious self was at our house and I have concealed the events from her. Your sister [the Báb's mother] and my sister [Khadíjih Bagum] are profoundly distraught and in a wretched state. God will protect all.

The whole town is well aware of what happened and almost everyone has learned that the ladies of the Household have been overwhelmed with grief, which has rendered them paralyzed. However, not one soul, neither family nor friend, has come to inquire about our condition and what we have had to endure. In short, life in this town has proved exceedingly difficult. To be sure, you will arrive shortly and perhaps, out of respect for you, some may prove embarrassed about their deeds. Events may take a different turn though, and we may need to take our family and quit this town for another region. Not even the land of the infidels manifests such tyranny.

I have no inclination to write anything further.

[Dated] 20 Ramadán 1262 A.H.

Because of the great transgressions committed by `Abdu'l-Hamid Khán, the Báb cursed him and eventually he was killed, [dying] from a cut in the stomach. It was the same `Abdu'l-Hamid Khán who, on instruction from the Governor, Husayn Khán-i-Ajudan-Bashi, imprisoned the Báb in his house. When the cholera epidemic was spreading in the city and his two sons fell ill, `Abdu'l-Hamid Khán's wife was convinced that her sons' illness was caused by her husband's cruel and unjust treatment of the Báb. She forced him to release his illustrious Prisoner. Upon freeing Him, the Darughih pleaded for the life of his sons. The Báb prayed for them and gave [him] a sweet pomegranate that he had with Him, with this instruction, "Give this to them and I will pray for their recovery." At last, the Báb returned home from the house of `Abdu'l-Hamid Khán and subsequently left for Isfahan.

After the Báb left Shiraz, His wife, mother, and maternal grandmother, a black servant named Mubarak, and a black maidservant named Fiddih were living in the Sacred House.<sup>238</sup> When the news of the martyrdom of the Báb reached Shiraz, Fatimah Bagum, the mother of the Báb, having previously consulted with her Son about the journey to the `Atabat, decided to leave Shiraz. She wanted to put behind her the constant barrage of insults aimed at her family by the city's divines. Before she left, it was decided that Khadíjih

<sup>238</sup> On the life of the black servants in the Household of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, see Abú'l-Qásim Afnán, *The Black Pearls*.

Bagum would live with her half-sister in the house of the martyred-uncle of the Báb and the Blessed House be entrusted to Mírzá Muhammad-Husayn-i-Bazzaz, son of Mírzá Asadu'llah. He was not a believer in the Báb but a native of Shiraz and a close acquaintance of the family. This [decision] ushered in a period where the House was in the hands of non-believers.<sup>239</sup> Gradually, two brothers, Samad and Ibrahim, took over all the affairs of the House and claimed sole ownership.

At the time when my late father reached the age of maturity, he was deeply saddened over this matter and appealed to Khal-i-Akbar, "You are the closest relative of His Holiness the Báb and, therefore, have responsibilities towards this House. You must try to extricate the House from the grasp of non-believers, who currently occupy it."<sup>240</sup> "I can't do it now," the illustrious Khal-i-Akbar replied, "since all my sons are engaged in commerce elsewhere. However, you have my permission to take all the necessary steps to resolve this situation as you see fit."

My father took advantage of his influence and prestige<sup>241</sup> and, during his conversations with the tenants, said, "As you know, this House has belonged to the infidels and non-believers and, as such, your prayer offerings will not be accepted from such a place. In addition, because of the recent earthquakes, some parts of the House have been structurally damaged, making it unsuitable to live in. Indeed, it is life threatening. Should you agree, we are willing to purchase or lease another house in your name and you can stay there while we renovate this one. When we have completed the repairs, if you still prefer to live here, we will abide by your decision." The tenants saw the opportunity to become homeowners and agreed immediately

<sup>239</sup> Abú'l-Qásim Afnán notes the following in "Baytu'llahu'l-Akram", p. 19: A year after Fatimih Bagum left, a severe earthquake destroyed many homes and buildings in Shiraz, killing a third of the population and forcing a vast multitude to live in the fields and wilderness and dwell in tents or makeshift camps. [*Farsnamih-i-Nasiri*, vol. 1, reports that this massive destruction took place on the night of 25 Rajab 1269 A.H./4 May 1853. It destroyed many homes and killed several thousand citizens. It also demolished the majority of the schools and mosques, including the one next to the House of the Báb. Translator. Fasa'i, Hasan ibn Hasan. *Tarikh-i-Farsnamih-i-Nasiri*. Tehran: Intisharat-i Kitabkhanah-i Nisa'i, 1312-1314 [1895-1897]). Two volumes.] During this incident, the House of the Báb was severely damaged and the mosque next to it was completely demolished. Khal-i-Akbar came to Shiraz from Bushihr to look after the family's interests and business. One action he took was to secure a written lease from Mírzá Muhammad-Husayn, who was occupying the House with no written documentation. This lease is dated Rabí'u'l-Thání 1270 A.H./January 1854 and reads: In the presence of the esteemed Mírzá Muhammad-Husayn, son of the late Mírzá Asadu'llah-i-Shirazi, it is known and rightly recorded that the house located in the Kuchih-i-Shamshirgarha belongs in its totality to Siyyidih Fatimih Bagum, daughter of the late Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Husayn. This residence was entrusted to the aforementioned Mírzá to dwell there upon her [Fatimih Bagum's] departure from Shiraz. Since an earthquake has caused considerable damage and the tenant wishes to make certain repairs, he is permitted to do so at his own expense. This will not be reimbursed by the owner, who may claim possession of the residence at any time with due notice. This legal document was signed and witnessed by the appropriate jurists and Shaykh Abu-Turab, the Imam-Jum'ih of Shiraz. After this document was signed, Mírzá Muhammad-Husayn realized the cost of the repairs was prohibitive. Consequently, he leased the House to two brothers, Samad and Ibrahim, who were bakers. They took up residence with no formal documentation. Afnán, Abú'l-Qásim; "Baytu'llah-i-Akram", *Andalib*, pp 16-27.

<sup>240</sup> Abú'l-Qásim Afnán suggests that Núri'd-Dín's interest in the security and renovation of the Blessed House stemmed from his reading in the Persian Bayan about the supreme station of this Dwelling; see "Baytu'llahu'l-Akram", p. 20.

<sup>241</sup> At that time, Núri'd-Dín's father, Mírzá Zaynu'l-'Abidin, was alive. He was closely related to two prominent clerics, Mírzáy-i-Shirazi and Áqá Siyyid Javad-i-Shirazi, the Imam-Jum'ih of Kirman, and enjoyed great influence with the divines of the city.

to the arrangement. Quickly, a house was leased for 100 tumans and the two brothers moved there.<sup>242</sup>

In this way, the House of the Báb was recovered from the hands of non-believers. After some minor repairs, a believer named `Abdu'r-Razzaq lived there for three years. After him, it was occupied by the late Hájí Abu'l-Hasan [Bazzaz], who had accompanied the Báb on His hajj journey to Mecca and was one of the first believers of Shiraz.<sup>243</sup> Afterwards, the House was leased to Mulla Áqá Buzurg-i-Zarqani, who was a Bábí but not known as one.<sup>244</sup>

During this period, Shiraz sustained a number of severe earthquakes, which destroyed many homes and public buildings that had not been damaged previously. Many people were forced to take refuge in the city's outskirts and live in tents.

### **The First Renovation of the House of the Báb – 1289 A.H. [1871]**

During Dhi'l-Qa`dih 1288 A.H. [January 1872], Munirih Khánum, who was travelling to the Holy Land to marry `Abdu'l-Bahá, arrived in Shiraz from Isfahan. During her 15-day sojourn, she stayed in the house of the martyred-uncle, where the wife of the Báb was living [with her maternal sister, Hájíyyih Bibi Jan-jan]. During her stay, Munirih Khánum was a constant companion of Khadíjih Bagum and the two were always in each other's company.

One day, during their conversation, the wife of the Báb asked her guest to supplicate on her behalf at the Threshold of Bahá'u'lláh for permission to renovate the Blessed House so that she could transfer her residence to that sacred location. This request found ready approval in the presence of the Blessed Perfection. He asked my father to restore the House in whatever manner that Khadíjih Bagum saw fit.

After Bahá'u'lláh gave permission to renovate the House of the Báb in accordance with Khadíjih Bagum's wishes, she instructed her nephew (my father), "If the House is renovated in its original style, the memories of the days of His Holiness and my profound sadness over His loss will prevent

<sup>242</sup> According to A.Q. Afán, this house was located on Zanburak-Kháníh Street; see "Baytu'llahu'l-Akram", p. 20.

<sup>243</sup> Although Hájí Abu'l-Hasan had accompanied the Báb on His pilgrimage journey and observed all the events of that voyage, it was the proclamation of the Báb at Masjid-i-Vakil that finally convinced him of the truth of the new Dispensation. Hájí Abu'l-Hasan lived in the House of the Báb with his wife and two sons, Mírzá Muhammad-`Alí and Mírzá Muhammad-Baqir, who later adopted the surname Dihqan. His wife was a relative of the Imam-Jum`ih Abu-Turab and, consequently, the family enjoyed some measure of protection. After five years of living in the Blessed House, his wife passed away and the protection of the `ulama was withdrawn. Because he was known as a Bábí, Hájí Abu'l-Hasan was forced to leave the city in the middle of the night, taking his two young sons with him. See "Baytu'llahu'l-Akram", p. 20.

<sup>244</sup> With Zarqani's departure, in January 1872 a mother and daughter of Nayriz, who were brought as captives to Shiraz after the battles of 1853, occupied the House in order to preserve it. They remained there until 1289 A.H./1872. See "Baytu'llahu'l-Akram", p. 20.

me from ever living there. Certain changes must be made to the House.” Therefore, substantial changes were made to the structure of the House. These included making two of the rooms part of the expanded courtyard and moving the small pool. {The initial cost of this reconstruction was met by Bahá’u’lláh.

To protect the House further, a small house next to it on the eastern wall was bought. It belonged to a certain Hájí Muhammad-Ja`far-i-H.adíd. The elders of the Afnán family asked Hájí Mírzá `Abdu’l-Hamid to live there. He was one of the early believers in the Báb and married to the daughter of Hujjat-i-Zanjani. From the first day Hujjat’s daughter arrived in Shiraz, she was a close companion of Khadíjih Bagum, who had a particular affinity for the families of the Bábí martyrs. An underground passageway was constructed connecting the two homes. It was used as the main entrance for the House of the Báb so that the neighborhood would not take notice of the occupants. }<sup>245</sup>

After these changes [were made], the esteemed Khadíjih Bagum took up residence in the Blessed House. She lived there for the next nine years, until her noble soul took her flight to the immortal abode in the month of Dhi’l-Hajjih, 1299 A.H. [October 1882].

After her ascension, as instructed by Bahá’u’lláh, her sister, Zahra Bagum, moved her residence to the Sanctified House. She lived there until her passing in 1308 A.H [1891].

### **The Custodianship of the House of the Báb**

In the year 1302 A.H. [1884], the following instructions were issued for the custodianship of the House of the Báb from the heaven of Divine Will, exalted be His utterance, in honor of the wife of the Báb, her sister and her descendants. In this way, solely by divine grace, this honor was placed upon them:

This honor and benevolence hath been bestowed upon the ukht<sup>246</sup> and her descendants, from her Lord, the Merciful. He is the Munificent and the Compassionate, and He is the Generous and the Bounteous.<sup>247</sup>

<sup>245</sup> The bracketed section was a supplement from Abú’l-Qásim Afnán, based on his “Baytu’llahu’l-Akram” article.

<sup>246</sup> Lit. sister. It refers to Zahra Bagum, the sister of Khadíjih Bagum.

<sup>247</sup> A Tablet of Bahá’u’lláh revealed in 1292 A.H./1875, which bears His seal reads: “The custodianship of the Blessed House has been granted to the exalted leaf, the wife of the Primal Point, and her sister, upon both be My Glory of God, My Bounty and My Favor. Before God, we have conferred this custodianship on the House and thus have We adorned it with Our Benevolence, and arrayed Our command with the evidence of His Might and Compassion. Solely on the ukht [Zahrá Bagum] and her issue has this honor and favor been bestowed from the heaven of the Lord, the Giver, the Compassionate, the Bestower, the Forgiver, the Merciful.”

Years passed and the House of the Báb was left as described above. When Zahra Bagum passed away, my mother [Maryam Sultan Bagum], two brothers, sister and I left for pilgrimage to the Holy Land and reunion with my father in Port Said. We had not seen him since 1296 A.H. [1879]. The details of this visit have been recorded earlier.

During my father's stay in Port Said, he was honored to receive several Tablets from the beloved Master that spoke about the importance of the friends visiting the Blessed House of the Báb under all conditions and the harm [that would result] if this was neglected. One such Tablet addressed to him said in part:

Port Said. The illustrious Afnán of the Sacred Lote-Tree, Áqá Mírzá Áqá, upon him rest the Glory of God, the Most Glorious.

... You wrote about the Eminent House and the Point of Adoration of the world, may my life be a sacrifice unto its dust. This issue is most important; nay, it stands as the most momentous of all matters. According to your letter, it is currently impossible for people to visit the House. This is surely a source of great sorrow for the faithful friends and those who long to circumambulate the Blessed House.

Certainly, in whatever way possible, a way must be found for some of the friends to occasionally gain access [to the House] and at least be able to visit that Spot. Otherwise, neglecting to visit will become a norm and the sacredness of this act will be diminished. The friends who live in Shiraz must consider it absolutely obligatory and binding to visit the House at least once a month. If this servant lived in the province of Fars, assuredly he would circumambulate that Sanctified House once a week, even if the enemies rained blows of stones upon him.<sup>248</sup>

You are the protector and custodian of this House and must make every effort in this important matter.

Upon thee be the Glory of God.  
`Abdu'l-Bahá, `Abbas.<sup>249</sup>

Eventually, in 1319 A.H. [1901], as asked by `Abdu'l-Bahá, my parents, brothers and sister and I left for Shiraz. At the time we left the Holy Land, His blessed Person said to us, "You have been sent to Shiraz for the most important of all duties. I pray that you will be effective in carrying out this responsibility." However, the Master did not divulge the nature of the entrusted task and our sole wish was that, whatever the duty, we would be

<sup>248</sup> In a Tablet (INBMC 52:300 no. 344), the Master instructs Núrí'd-Dín to make a complete and befitting visit to the House of the Báb once a year on `Abdu'l-Bahá's behalf.

<sup>249</sup> The full text is in INBMC 52:318-9 no. 356 and *Khándan-i-Afnán*, p. 208.



able to carry out His wish and win His good pleasure. Things passed in this way until 1321 A.H. [1903].

### **The Second Renovation of the House of the Báb – 1321 A.H. [1903]**

Iran was in disarray and immersed in turmoil. In the face of sustained persecution and unrelenting oppression, the Bahá'ís of Isfahan had taken refuge in the Russian Consulate. In Yazd and its environs, the believers were martyred and those who survived were forced to flee to far away lands.<sup>250</sup> Shiraz was also in disorder and the friends were despondent and distressed over the fate of their brethren and the gloomy news reaching them from other sectors.

At this time, a Tablet was revealed by `Abdul-Baha in honor of my late father. In it, he gave instructions to rebuild the House of the Báb according to its original structure and design, without a moment's delay. The following week, a second Tablet on this matter was received from the pen of the Center of the Covenant and, the following week, yet another Tablet was received that further admonished: "Not a moment of lassitude must be allowed, since a delay will cause a colossal catastrophe." In this Tablet, `Abdu'l-Bahá sternly ordered:

The Blessed House of the Exalted One must be restored without a hair's breadth change from its original form, and this must be carried out with absolute cleanliness, elegance, delicacy and firmness.<sup>251</sup>

In one of these Tablets, the Master gave explicit instructions concerning the speedy renovation of the Blessed House of the Báb:

Although at present the horizon of the world of humanity is darkened with turmoil, its foundation shaken to its core, the portals of hardship and trials are flung wide open, and the tempests of trials and difficulties are everywhere, it is in such a state of tumult that the reconstruction of the renowned House must be carried out, as it will bring joy and comfort to every desolate heart.<sup>252</sup>

Having received these sacred Tablets, my father asked me to gather some prominent friends on his behalf. I invited a number to the House of the Báb, including such people as Prince Mu'ayyadu's-Saltanih, the late Muvaqqaru'd-Dawlih, Mírzá Muhammad-Baqir Khán-i-Dihqan, the Bashiru's-Sultan, Áqá Siyyid Husayn-i-Afnán, `Andalib, Mírzá Aqay-i-Mi'mar-Bashi and Mírzá Aqay-i-Afnán. However, when they heard the

<sup>250</sup> For a glimpse of this massive persecution, see Hájí Haydar-`Alí, Hájí Mírzá. *Bahai Martyrdoms in Persia in the Year 1903 A. D.* Chicago: Bahai Publishing Society, 1904.; and Rabbani, Ahang and Naghmeh Astani. "The Martyrs of Manshad." *World Order* (Wilmette, Ill.) vol. 28, no. 1 (Fall 1996), pp 21-36.

<sup>251</sup> The full text is in *Kháندان-i-Afnán*, p. 211.

<sup>252</sup> The full text is in INBMC 52:323 no. 361 and *Kháندان-i-Afnán*, p. 213.

Tablets of `Abdu'l-Bahá, each of the assembled notables voiced his concern that the reconstruction of the House was an untimely endeavor, particularly during such a turbulent period. After considering their views, my father responded, "The Head of the Faith has issued a command to rebuild the House of the Báb without a moment's delay. Surely, there is wisdom hidden in this instruction that is not currently clear to us and we don't understand its insight. I have not invited you to consult on the matter, as the Master's wish is clear and no one can speak contrary to His will or even question its advisability. We are subjects and He is our lord. I have invited you to hear the sacred Tablets that have recently been received and to tell you that I plan to start construction immediately. I only wanted you to know about the situation." When everyone heard him speak in this way, they readily agreed with his views.

With `Abdu'l-Bahá's confirmations, on Saturday<sup>253</sup>, 5 Jamadu'l-Avval 1321 A.H. [20 July 1903]<sup>254</sup>, the late Mi`mar-Bashi began the renovation project. He was one of the most devoted believers and the love of the Faith burned brightly in his bosom. My late father supervised every step.

At first, they demolished the whole structure. My father was present during the first reconstruction and had supervised the work. Therefore, he knew the original architecture of the House. He instructed that the ground under the building be excavated until the original foundation of the House was uncovered. The workers began to raise the walls and rebuild the House on the same foundation and following the original design. Each day, in this small area, over 30 construction crew labored devotedly. Within two months, as `Abdu'l-Bahá had commanded, the structural walls were completed in exactly the same design as that of the time of the Báb. Soon the rooms were finished and the doors and windows added, much as it was in the old days.

At the beginning of Sha`ban [23 October 1903], my father fell ill and, day by day, his condition grew worse. However, until a week before his passing, he would come each day to the site of the construction and, although suffering from illness, spend the day supervising all the work. He passed away on 24 Sha`ban 1321 A.H. [15 November 1903] after completing the task entrusted to him by `Abdu'l-Bahá. It was then that the wisdom of the Master's statement "*delay will cause a colossal catastrophe*" became clear, as my father was the only one of all the kindred who knew the original design of the House. After his passing, the rest of the work, consisting of painting and decoration, was completed.

<sup>253</sup> According to the calendars available to the translator, 5 Jamadi 1321 A.H. fell on a Thursday.

<sup>254</sup> This day corresponded with the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb.

## Renovation of the Adjacent Mosque

A mosque is located next to the House of the Báb. Originally, it was a Jewish synagogue. Later, it was converted to a mosque named Khizr, and now it is known as Masjid-i-Shamshirgarha. After the Muslims took possession of the property and converted it into a mosque, the Báb would, before His Declaration, frequently visit this Masjid and perform His obligatory prayers. However, because of severe earthquakes, the building sustained serious damage. By this time, it had become a site where the neighborhood deposited its waste and where thieves, after having robbed people's homes, would hide and rest most evenings. During my late father's time, he blocked the entrance to the mosque and the neighborhood protested, "It is not appropriate to block the entrance to a mosque." To that my father replied, "My home and possessions are otherwise at the mercy of thieves roaming this ruined building."

During that time, a Tablet<sup>255</sup> was revealed in honor of my late father. It contained important directions about this mosque. A section of this exalted Tablet reads:

...You wrote that the renovation of the House [of the Báb] might produce a great tumult. Indeed, the illustrious Áqá Mírzá Aqay-i-Afnán, upon him be the Glory of God, the Most Glorious, pointed out that the provinces of Fars and Yazd have sustained multiple calamities. Concerning this, he has beseeched prayers at the Holy Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.

The purpose of this servant was to alleviate these trials in order to further promote the Cause of God and proclaim the Word of the Almighty. Therefore, I accepted the [financial] obligations of this important task so that, once the House [of the Báb] is renovated and the Point of Adoration of the jewels of creation is rebuilt, these calamities would completely disappear. Until now, no other in any past Age has so readily and manifestly pledged such a commitment. The intention was to fulfill the divine proof and reveal the honor and excellence of that sacred and mighty House. Now that the people of rancor have incited rebellion, wisdom must be observed.

As such, a plan must be found to reduce and decrease the persecution so that, God forbid, these difficulties do not continue. Indeed, that design is this: it must be said that a holy person who is knowledgeable in the science of Jifr-i-Jámi<sup>256</sup> has calculated that, when the ruined mosque is renovated, these persistent calamities will

<sup>255</sup> While Mírzá Habíb was in Egypt, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to his father in Shiraz about the importance of rebuilding the adjacent mosque and how this would alleviate the trials and tribulations besetting the inhabitants of Fars; see INBMC 52:288 no. 339.

<sup>256</sup> The science of numerology and letters.

be reduced and these dark clouds lifted. Oil must be poured over troubled waters. This mosque is honored to be next to the House and, because of this nearness, is endowed with an influence. It is not part of the sacred House, but stands as the landing and portal to this Threshold.

It does not seem likely that further unrest would result from this proposal. However, should you note that it is indeed leading to criticism and hostility and would raise a commotion among the people and the cry of the inhabitants, then one must be resigned. Certainly, wisdom is one of the divine teachings. Great care is vital and protection essential.

Today, the most important of all things is firmness and constancy of all in the Covenant of God. However, not such steadfastness that consists of words and nothing else, much like some Muslim's testimony of faith. ...<sup>257</sup>

My late father never had the opportunity to renovate this mosque. It was not until after the hallowed House of the Báb was completely restored and its true majesty and exquisite beauty laid bare that the Muslim neighbors thought to themselves, "Though there is only a few of them, the Bahá'ís have built their Temple<sup>258</sup>; and yet, we are so wanting in commitment to our Faith that we have allowed our mosque to become ruins!" Consequently, they assembled and sought the advice and involvement of Mírzá Ibrahim-i-Mahallati, a very influential cleric and a prominent mujtahid. They said to him, "This mosque is surrounded on three sides by the homes of these people [the Afnáns] and, on another side, it shares a wall with the Jewish homes. After sometime, the Bahá'ís have built their Temple and a steady stream [of believers] comes for pilgrimage to this Site. However, in its present condition, this mosque is a disgrace to the Muslim community." "You must go and discuss this matter with these people," the Ayatu'llah responded. "If they agree, I expect that rebuilding this mosque will be an easy job; otherwise, it would be very difficult."

One night, a neighbor of ours, Hájí Ahmad-i-Mahut-chi [the crinoline merchant], sent word that he wanted to meet with us and I named a time for this meeting. We met at the house next to the House of the Báb. After the customary exchange of pleasantries and sharing of refreshments, he ventured to say, "You have raised a beautiful and most delightful House. Nevertheless, it seems wanting in one respect. Once that is also taken care of, it will be the essence of perfection." Imagining that he was about to be presumptuous towards the House of the Báb, I sternly said, "What is the defect that has come to your notice?" "There is a ruin next to your House,"

<sup>257</sup> The full text is in INBMC 52:294-5 no. 341.

<sup>258</sup> In a Zoroastrian or Jewish context, 'Ma'bad' is a place of worship.

he replied, and I said, "It is a mosque and must be rebuilt." Taken by surprise, he reiterated, "So, you agree with rebuilding the mosque?" I answered, "I agree only to rebuilding the mosque and not to any other use for the building." With great satisfaction, he exclaimed, "The mosque will be built!"

Later, he went to Mahallati and reported that the Bahá'ís had agreed, and would help with the reconstruction. The Shaykh rejoiced, "In that case, there is no problem." To this day, I am puzzled as to why Mírzá Ibrahim-i-Mujtahid was apprehensive of us at that time and wanted our consent. In short, he prepared a written petition for all who stood identified with the sacred religion of Islam, requesting financial contributions toward the cost of renovating the mosque. He instructed his agents to take this petition to all the Muslim homes in the neighborhood, and each was to mark his pledge on it. Then, he added, "You are to take the petition to these gentlemen [the Afnáns], but should they decline to make a contribution, do not constrain them."

The Muslim neighbors were each content to make a small contribution. After all the donations were collected, they came to us. After reviewing the sheet, this servant said to Hájí Ahamd, "Perhaps the esteemed supporters don't know the true cost of such a construction, as this small amount is certainly not enough." "Everyone has pledged according to his own ability," Hájí Ahmad replied. "Whatever you give is in the path of service to your illustrious Ancestor and will show your lofty purpose." Since it was my desire to help realize `Abdu'l-Bahá's wish to have the mosque rebuilt, I pledged a sum of 300 tumans on behalf of my brothers and myself, to be paid in three installments. When they brought this promise to the attention of Shaykh Mírzá Ibrahim, he raised his voice and cried, "O ye the faithful! You claim that these people have no religion, don't believe in the Prophets and Imams, and don't obey divine laws and ordinances, [but] they have, for no reason other than the love of God, given 300 tumans! But consider, the Sadru'l-Islam, with all his wealth and affluence, has contributed a trifling three tumans! Theirs is the true demonstration of faith! If these people are indeed Bábís, I only wish that you were all Bábís!" One of the confidants of Mírzá Ibrahim, who was a Bahá'í, reported all their discussions to us.

Soon the construction work began and a certain Nur-Muhammad was appointed to supervise the task. He was one of the residents of Shimshirgarha Street and had recently converted to Islam. From the beginning, he defrauded and embezzled the funds and was soon discovered by one of his co-workers – a righteous and religious man and a faithful friend of ours. He reported the matter to Mírzá Ibrahim. After it was determined that Nur-Muhammad had indeed committed theft, Mírzá Ibrahim reproached him, "O infidel garbed in Muslim's clothing! How ironic that the Bábís should pay for the construction of the mosque and you, who claim allegiance to Islam, would steal from the endowment fund!"

Should the Bábís find this out, I will never be able to look them in the eyes because of this shame!”

In short, Hájí Muhammad-Rahim, another new convert to Islam, was appointed to the task this time and he invited me to the mosque and consulted about the repairs. Frequently, I would go and help with the planning and discussions. When the work had progressed to the point where a well and an underground cistern were to be built, Hájí Muhammad-Rahim said to me, “You have earned every right to this mosque. The existing well and tank are situated behind the wall of your House and the repairs would cause damage to your Dwelling. Therefore, we think it is best for the well, cistern and sewage lines to be moved to the south-eastern quarters. In its place, we will raise the pulpit and prayer-court.” I thanked him very cordially. The promise of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that “This mosque will be the landing and portal of the blessed House” was now fulfilled. As the construction continued, they needed straw and wood to complete the work and I contributed the required sum. Later, when they tried to reimburse me, I refused, saying, “What I gave was in the path of God and my reckoning is with Him.”

When the mosque was completed, we also donated a pulpit that was ornamented with silver domes and calico figures, which we had inherited from the time of Hájí Mírzá Abú’l-Qásim. This donation was reported to Mírzá Ibrahim and he expressed great eagerness to meet us.

On the day the mosque was inaugurated, I attended with my two brothers, Hájí Mírzá Buzurg and Hájí Mírzá Diya’. Mírzá Ibrahim had extended a special invitation to us. He presided over the ceremony. Beforehand, he had particularly admonished the people and the clergy present to ensure that no one acted in a presumptuous or insulting manner towards us. When we entered, the crowd welcomed us with cheers and praise. They had arranged for our seat to be next to Mírzá Ibrahim himself – the seat of honor – and we were led to the designated spot by Hájí ‘Abdu’l-Rahim. When Mírzá Ibrahim saw us, he stood full figure as a sign of utmost respect and greeted us very affectionately. Refreshments and water-pipes were served and then the Mírzá ascended the pulpit. For well over an hour, he sang our praises and complimented us. He even pointed to us and noted, “Had it not been for the efforts of these gentlemen, this mosque would have never been raised. They contributed in every way, from offering money to wood to consultation, until this house of God was erected in such a wonderful manner. Indeed, this very pulpit on which I stand today, and from which the remembrance of God and the sufferings of the Five Immaculate Ones<sup>259</sup> will be recounted from now on, is just one of their generous donations. They, surely, are the true Muslims. One can only wish that a few more Muslims like them were found in this town!”

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<sup>259</sup> A reference to the principal Shi‘ah figures, Muhammad, ‘Alí, Fatimih, Hasan and Husayn.

In short, his expressions of acclamation knew no bounds. At the end, he offered a prayer for us, supplicating that, in the future, we would attain even greater success in the service of God. When he descended the pulpit, another eulogist ascended the altar and spoke at length and in the same vein about us.

A period passed and, because of the above-mentioned events, we were not disturbed. Eventually, conflict among different political factions started and the democrats, constitutionalists and royalists began to dispute.<sup>260</sup> In no time, this mosque became a beehive for all the worthless elements. It ushered in an era of injury and torment for us and witnessed a great surge in our persecution, which continues unabated to this day. This is particularly bad during the commemorations of `Ashura, the month of Ramadan, or any other significant occasion, such as the marking of a martyrdom or a festivity. [We are even persecuted] simply to raise a political clamor, as the sole target remains the House of the Báb. However, God is the All-Powerful, the Almighty and the Self-Sufficient. In Him we trust.

[As an example of God's all-preserving protection,] about a year-and-a-half ago, one of the caretakers of the mosque negligently allowed the heater to explode. It sat behind the wall of the House of the Báb. Soon the roof of the mosque's sleeping quarters was in flames and it seemed imminent that the fire would spread to the Blessed House as well. However, the friends who lived in Shamshirgarha Street and pilgrims visiting at the time helped and extinguished the fire.

Later that day, however, the Muslims claimed that the Bahá'ís had intentionally set fire to the mosque. {Since we were friends, I immediately called the chief of police, the Brigadier General Qavami, the Furughu'l-Mulk. He instructed Captain Iyzadi to come at once and to bring several officers, as well as the district attorney and Muhammad Nimruzi, the inspector general of the city.}<sup>261</sup> After a thorough investigation and examination of all the evidence, they prepared a written report concluding that the fire had started due to the negligence of someone in the mosque. Fortunately, their report prevented the incident from erupting into an attack on the Faith.

On that day, Siyyid Muhammad-i-Razavi, one of the influential clerics of the city, came to the mosque to inspect the situation for himself. The city's officials were, however, able to convince him that the fire was accidental and that the Bahá'ís had no hand in it. It so happened that Mírzá Muhammad-Baqir-i-Khalili arrived as well. He was a friend to the Siyyid and me, and he spoke with the Muslims to ensure that no disturbance

<sup>260</sup> For the political turmoil during the constitutional revolution of Iran and its effect on the Bahá'ís of Shiraz, see *In the Land of Refuge*, Chapter 15.

<sup>261</sup> The bracketed section was inserted by Abú'l-Qásim Afnán (private communication May 1992).

resulted from the accident. Khalili was a deeply devoted Bahá'í, though he never registered as one. On that day, without being asked, he volunteered to pay for all the repairs, which drew the admiration of the Siyyid and other Muslims. God works in wonderfully mysterious ways.



## An Introduction to the Lawh-i Haqqu'n-Nas<sup>1</sup>

Jean Marc Lepain  
Kabul, Afghanistan, Independent Scholar

Baha'u'llah devoted an entire tablet, which is sometimes called "*Lawh-i-Haqqu'n-Nas*"<sup>2</sup>, to explain the metaphorical character of this world. Unfortunately we do not know the circumstances of the revelation of this Tablet. It was written in response to a correspondent whom Baha'u'llah calls "friend of my heart", and who apparently sent him a letter with a number of questions to be answered. The question with which the tablet starts is apparently a trivial one and a particularly obscure point of Muslim theology: How is it possible, as tradition [*hadith*] teaches, that we can acquit ourselves of our debts in the next world after we die? This is a principle known in Muslim theology as "*haqqu'n-nas*", literally the "right of people". It affirms that in the other world there is compensation for whatever is owed to us, including everything stolen or usurped. In the context of the Baha'i teachings, this question has no meaning, and this is what Baha'u'llah in a gentle way endeavoured to have his interrogator understand.

The question nevertheless reflects the Persian mentality of the time. The Shi'i theologians and jurists were partial to this kind of problem, engaging in long contradictory debates which in turn gave rise to multiple interpretations in which are systematically envisioned all of the germane cases, even the most absurd. Baha'u'llah himself cites a particularly absurd example of such casuistics which reminds us of the question asked to Jesus by the Sadducees, regarding the status, on the day of resurrection, of a widow who would have successively married the six brothers of her first husband after the passing away of each one.<sup>3</sup>

The problem is posed in the following terms: Let us imagine a Christian who lends another Christian a jar of wine and a piece of pork meat; two things which are permitted to Christians but forbidden to Muslims. After a certain time the debtor and the lender both become Muslims. How can the debtor acquit himself of his debt, for not only can Muslims not consume either wine or pork meat, but they are forbidden to engage in the commerce of either, and it is thus impossible to pay back the lender with money. If the debt cannot be repaid in this world, how will it be in the other world for the debtor? Persian society of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was passionately fond of this kind of problem.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from the French by Mr. Peter Terry, gratefully acknowledged by the Editors'.

<sup>2</sup> Mehran Ghasempour, "Bahá'u'lláh's Lawh-i Haqqu'n-Nas: Tablet of the Right of the People, Provisional Translation, *International Journal of Baha'i Studies*, 2007, 1, 405-409.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 20:27-33

Jesus gave the following response to the Sadducees:

"Those who belong to this world take wife and husband. But those who have been judged worthy of having part in the world to come and in the resurrection of the dead take neither wife nor husband. It is that they cannot die, for they are the same as angels..."<sup>4</sup>

Baha'u'llah responds in a similar vein. He begins by indicating that in order to understand this problem, one must have a detached heart and an understanding purified from common superstitions, and only in this case can one reach a true comprehension of what life is after death and resurrection. He proceeds by explaining that all that exists in the world of *Nasut*, which He also calls the "world of limitations" (*'alam-i-hudud*), whatever may be its name (*ism*), form (*rasm*), appearance (*surat*) or characteristics (*vasf*), exists in the divine worlds in an appearance (*shuhudi*) and a manifestation (*zuhuri*) which is appropriate to each of these worlds. The things which exist in the spiritual worlds thus exist in these worlds with totally different characteristics from those of the world below, in such manner that no category of our understanding such as place, extent, form or time can apply to them.

What Baha'u'llah says here is very different from what Muslim philosophy used to teach, and in particular the Ishraqi or Shaykhi philosophy of his time. Ishraqi philosophy says that to every thing existing in this world is attached an intelligible reality (*haqa'iq*) which exists in *Malakut* or in the World of Images or Imaginal World [*'alam-i-mithal*]. Thus, this world (*Nasut*) becomes the mirror of the other world, as in Plato's myth of the Cave. However, for Baha'u'llah it is not only the world of *Malakut* and the world of *Nasut* which are the image of each other, but a plurality of worlds which he calls divine (*ilahi*). In several places in this tablet he insists upon this plurality in speaking of innumerable worlds (Arabic *la-tuhsa*).

Death in this world is thus but the disappearance of forms and appearances. It never touches the "reality" (*haqiqat*) and the "essence" (*dhat*) of beings, for the spiritual reality (*haqa'iq*) of things exists in each world with a manifestation adapted to each of these worlds corresponding to degrees of different realities, which might be understood as different ontological levels.

This explains why everything that man does in this lower world affects his "essential reality" in the other worlds. Thus our acts and words live on from one world to the other, and every soul find his retribution (reward) in *Malakut*. It means that there is no avenging God who judges and condemns us, but it is rather the consequences of our actions that follow us into the next world represent our reward or punishment. God does not intervene

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 20:34-36

except to pardon the sinner and to assist him through his grace in surmounting the handicap which he has created for himself.

Baha'u'llah continues with this theme by explaining that if we wish to understand the way in which the reality of things is manifested in these infinite worlds, the only fashion in which we can approach this comprehension is to use metaphorical images. He explains that one of best illustrations that we can find is that of sleep, because sleep is just like death. It is so similar, that one can say that sleep and death are brothers. It happens sometimes that we see things in our dreams that are unintelligible and without relation to our lives. Yet, if we ask for the interpretation of these dreams from a specialist, he will explain that the things we have seen in our dream are symbolic representations of other things, and once we have understood the key to this interpretation and the correspondence between the symbol and the reality, we see that the things which we have seen in dream corresponded to real situations in our lives. The only difference, in this case, between the world of sleep and the world of waking is that these things appear in one form in the world of sleep and in another in the world of waking. The world after death, that is to say *Malakut* or the *Kingdom of Abha*, is like the world of sleep. The things which we see in the temporal world may also appear in the other world, but in another form which can be as far removed from the reality of this lower world as the metaphorical language of our dreams.

In another Tablet, Baha'u'llah explains that we cannot understand the metaphorical character of this lower world in relation to the spiritual worlds without understanding the nature of the soul. He says in speaking of the soul that "It 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."<sup>5</sup> It is the absence of any spatial and temporal reference in the spiritual worlds which makes these so different from our world, and which ultimately eludes our comprehension. It is for this reason that a comparison can be made between the world of dreams and the spiritual world after death, because the dream is the only experience which man can have in this world which is exempt from space and time. Baha'u'llah says:

"Behold how the dream thou hast dreamed is, after the lapse of many years, re-enacted before thine eyes. Consider how strange is the mystery of the world that appeared to thee in thy dream."<sup>6</sup>

In the "*Tablet of Haquq'n-Nas*", in order to illustrate his point, Baha'u'llah takes the example the dream of Joseph. Joseph dreamed that the sun, the moon and twelve stars prostrated themselves before him. This dream announced the imminent ascension of Joseph to the rank of the Pharaoh's

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<sup>5</sup> *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, section LXXXII

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

prime minister and to the arrival of his family in Egypt, who would prostrate themselves before him without recognizing his real identity. Baha'u'llah points out that the world of dreams is strange inasmuch as in that world the father and mother appear in the form of the sun and the moon, and the brothers in the form of stars. This shows to what extent the forms and representations of this world are different from the forms and representations of the world of waking. The difference between the world below and the world of death, he says, is of the same order.

To explain the metaphorical link which ties the changing of forms from one world to another, Baha'u'llah brings another example. Let us imagine that in the springtime a powerful man robs a weak man of his provision of seeds and that he plants these seeds in his own garden. The seeds germinate and in summer produce plants, trees and ultimately fruits. Then, it befalls that a just king decides to redress the wrong that was done to the weak one. In what manner should this just king proceed? Should he require from the oppressor that he return the same quantity of seeds? At harvest-time the seeds are of no immediate utility. Or should he return to him the product of the seeds that were stolen from him? We understand immediately that justice requires that we return to the victim not the original seeds but that which they produced. The seeds changed in form, they were transformed into something else, the appearance and the qualities of which are only distantly related to their first appearance and qualities. The relationship between this world and the other world is of the same nature, and of the same nature also is the nature of justice that links the two. Here below things exist only in the state of seed. When they evolve in the divine worlds, they are completely transformed in form, appearance and qualities. Nevertheless, the qualities of the tree and of the fruit depend upon the qualities of the seed that produced them.

In this Tablet, Baha'u'llah proceeds with a digression of a moral rather than a metaphysical character. In this life, the material things that we might lose do not matter. In due course, these material things show their true colors, becoming tests and of calamities in our spiritual evolution, while tests and calamities prove to be the source of true riches. At the final count, the fact that we have lost material goods for spiritual reasons, whether we have offered them to God in a spirit of detachment, or lost them because of the oppression of men, makes no difference. The man who robs another man of his wealth removes from him a portion of the tests that weigh upon his victim's shoulders. In this subtle manner, Baha'u'llah explains that the principle of "*Haqqu'n-Nas*" cannot apply to material goods. One cannot pay these material debts in the next world. However he who has unjustly seized the goods of another in order to accumulate his own riches in fact has but accumulated obstacles to his own spiritual development. Without fail, the consequences of our actions follow us from one world to the next.

## **Bahá'u'lláh's Lawh-i Haqqu'n-Nas** **Tablet of the Right of the People, Provisional Translation<sup>1</sup>**

Dr. Mehran Ghasempour  
Houston, Independent Scholar

In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful

Praise be to God Who fulfilled what He revealed to all His Prophets and Messengers and gave to all the tidings of His days. And of them is the Day which He promised us in His Mighty Book through His saying, exalted be His dominion: on that day "God will enrich everyone out of His abundance."<sup>2</sup> And this, truly, is our Day, when I behold Him enriching all who enter in His shadow from the abundance of His knowledge and command, inasmuch as on this Day He hath placed the reins of knowledge in the grasp of His lowliest servant and in the possession of His most insignificant subject who hath held fast to the cord of His Love in the days of His manifestation.

And praise be to God who inspireth whom He wisheth with the hosts of His revelation and "casteth the light of His knowledge into the heart of whom He willeth." (H.adíth) There is no God but Him Who is manifest through the manifestation of His own Self, inasmuch as there remains no veil for Him but the light of His Beauty, and no cloud but the abundance of His manifestation. Blessing and peace be upon the noblest of His Chosen Ones, and the most distinguished of His creation, and upon His kindred, and upon His family, and upon His saints who stood firm in His Cause and continued steadfast in His love.

And then We convey that the letter of that loved one was perused and was the source of joy and cheer. God willing this divine confirmation may always be Our friend and this divine assistance continue, such that from time to time thou shouldst seek to become informed of, and have sympathy for, the wanderers of the wilderness of disappointment and obscurity. Thus may God reward thee with the best of rewards and graciously aid thee as He wisheth and pleaseth.

Thou hadst inquired as to how the settlement of one's rights in the world after death and paying the rights of people due to them can be conceived and be made possible in the great Resurrection, which hath been referred to as the Day of Judgement? Since these vanities, possessions, and rights that are desired and witnessed in this vain life have no existence in the worlds

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<sup>1</sup> The Persian original is printed in `Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari (ed.), *Ma'iyidih-i Asmani*, vol. 7, Iran, 129 BE, pp. 119-125.

<sup>2</sup> Qur'án, 4:130. All translations of the Qur'an are from Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall's translation with some modifications.

after death, and assuming their existence, they will be of no profit or benefit to those to whom those rights are due; how then, will the settlement of one's rights be accomplished in those worlds? Inasmuch as it is current amongst people that God, the All-Merciful, at times forgoeth His own right and forgiveth, but He forgoeth not the rights of the people until their rights are settled.

O beloved of my heart, thou hast inquired of a subject which is extremely perplexing and abstruse. For understanding this subject is dependent upon understanding and comprehension of the days after death and the knowledge of the the Day of Resurrection. And the comprehension of these two subjects requireth a detached heart and necessitates a pure ear. Every ear is not worthy to hearken unto this call. The ear which doeth not hearken unto the roar of the trumpet and the bugle from the heaven of the Manifestation, how can it hear the whisperings of the birds?

But since I cannot but reply to the bidding of that honored friend, therefore, I will briefly state a compendium and express a few comparisons and examples that they may suffice. And there is no power or strength save in God, the One, the Subduer.

Thus I express to thee that what thou hast seen and heard in this mortal world of limitations, by any name and character and by any form or descriptive attribute, in every one of divine worlds is manifested and witnessed in a manner suitable and proper to each world, which shineth forth and revealeth itself by another name, character, form and descriptive attribute.

This death that thou hast heard of in the world, referreth to the outward appearance and the garment, and not to the truth and the inner essence. Certainly the realities of things, through different appearances and various manifestations, truth after truth, shine forth and reveal themselves in every world. The sages of mature wisdom who have drunk from the mystic choice wine - God requite them - have believed in the embodiment of deeds.

The All-Glorious saith: "God will reward them for their attributions !".<sup>3</sup> The Dawning-Place of revelation, the All-Merciful, hath said that people are recompensed according to their deeds; reward for good and punishment for evil.

Thus it becometh evident that a deed will remain and every attribute will exist until recompense is given according to the deed and attribute itself. Therefore, any deed and any attribute that appeareth from any person

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<sup>3</sup> Quran 6:139

hath a form in every world and unveileth itself "that God may reward every soul what he hath earned; verily, God is swift in reckoning."<sup>4</sup>

And every time We wish, in making this subject understandable, to explain the nature of the manifestations of things in the innumerable worlds by mentioning and setting forth an example which is nearer to understanding and comprehension, I consider none better to mention than the world of sleep. It is said that sleep is the brother of death, that thou may know the brother by the likeness of the brother. Thus observe that in the world of dreams thou dost witness some things, and after awaking thou dost interpret and explain them in this world by another name, form and description. And then as days go by they are witnessed in a like manner as they were interpreted and explained.

Thus O brother, every moment hath itself been from the dream, and in the world of dreams thou hast seen such a thing which, had another name and descriptive attribute in the dream, and hath another name and descriptive attribute in this world. Therefore, acknowledge thou likewise, the different forms in the world after death and know thou of a certainty that the truth, essence, oneness, form, and descriptive attributes are different. And in the event that thou hast not seen this same station with thine own eyes, thou shouldst refer to the interpretation of dream interpreters who possess knowledge and have interpreted every action and word, and have explained every thing.

The Most Truthful of Speakers hath given utterance in mentioning Joseph's dream (peace be upon the Lord of our age and upon Him) and hath mentioned Joseph's explanations and interpretations of the two persons mentioned in the Book.

Ponder now, what a world is this wherein father and mother are seen as the sun and the moon, and brother viewed as a star? And what a world is this which is seen conversely, inasmuch as the sun and the moon are witnessed as the father and mother, and the star is observed as the brother?

He saith, glorified be His dominion: "Lo! I saw eleven stars and the sun and the moon - I saw them prostrating themselves unto me."<sup>5</sup> And the interpretation of this dream became evident when Joseph sat upon the throne and Jacob, peace be upon Him, with the eleven brothers fell at Joseph's feet.

Thus, after this question is definitely proven, the settlement of every right in every world is in a manner that accords with that world. And, of course, if it were otherwise then the right is not settled. I give thee another example that

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<sup>4</sup> Qurán, 14:51

<sup>5</sup> Qur'an, 12:4

perchance through manifold examples that which hath been expressed should be closer to understanding and the subject be acknowledged.

Consider thou that should a person usurp a grain or a seed from another person and he should plant it in his own garden in the spring season, till it becometh green and flourishing until it finally bears fruit and becomes a tree in the summer season. Then, in this summer season, a just king desireth to restore the rights of the one who was wronged. How would the king accomplish this? Would he, in exchange, seize a grain or seed? Or would he seize the tree itself with all its fruit, to surrender it to the one who was wronged? Surely thou wilt say the tree. However, the tree in this form is different from the previous form, and its name and description is different from the name and description in the spring season, because that grain or seed, as thou wouldst claim, doth not exist. And assuming that it doth exist and the same kind be given back, it would give no fruit and be of no consequence to the owner inasmuch as the spring season, which was the season of planting, hath ended and the grain or the seed will be an idle object. To outward view it is possible to say that the grain or the seed doth not exist and giveth no fruit. Nevertheless, in truth and reality this grain and seed doth exist and is witnessed as a tree and fruit, which is better and more valuable.

Many a time the settlement of rights hath taken place in this same world, without thy being aware of it. Even as it doth happen at times that the riches and possessions are the garment of fate and afflictions, and affliction and fate are revealed as riches. Thus at times it doth occur that the loss of possessions redounds to the removal of affliction, and in this instance it maketh no difference whether this loss of possessions be due to heavenly means or to the tyranny committed by the person who stealeth thy possessions. In this case, whoever usurps and takes such possessions, that person hath removed the affliction and fate from thee and hath taken them unto himself. Could a better settlement of rights than this one be conceived? Nay, by the Lord of the worlds!

And were I to unveil and elaborate upon the manifestation of deeds, actions, and words, as they reveal themselves in various unlimited forms in the worlds of God, it is feared that on the one hand the sanctified souls would abandon their bodies and ascend toward the seats of grandeur of the All-Merciful, and the ungodly and tyrannical souls would die for fear of what they have done in this vain life.

O what longing for the spiritual characteristics, goodly deeds, truthful and beneficial words and what manifests from them from the lofty heavens, to the vast earth: shining suns, resplendent moons, radiant stars, clear springs, flowing streams, pure air, sublime palaces, lofty trees, wondrous fruits,



clusters of fruit that are near,<sup>6</sup> warbling birds, reddened leaves,<sup>7</sup> fragrant roses!

Whereas I say, "Shelter! Shelter! O my Lord, the All-Merciful, from sinful characteristics, ungodly actions, unseemly deeds, lying and harmful words and that which appears from them:<sup>8</sup> which manifests on earth as hellish fire, hell, the tree of Zaqqu'm,<sup>9</sup> the bitter thorn fruit<sup>10</sup> and in the form of all the wickedness, deceptions, sicknesses, sorrows, Simúm,<sup>11</sup> swords, arrows, spears.

Great God! revealing of the mysteries, any further, is not permitted! And I say: greatness, and again greatness and grandeur belongeth to God, the One, the Subduer.

I give thee another example from the world of divine law, which corresponds to the world of being, and I will conclude the examples with the divine laws, that perchance thou mayest, to the extent that thou art familiar with the worlds of God, know and comprehend the similitude of the world, and extrapolate it, as much as thou art able, to the endless worlds. I give thee an example of the divine law of Islam and the divine law before it which thou art familiar with and cannot but accept:

If a jug of wine or a measure of swine meat was lawfully owed to a Christian by another Christian, should both of them accept Islam, and the magistrates of the religious court were to rule on the payment of this debt to the creditor, how would the magistrates accomplish this and take give is due to the creditor? Notwithstanding that in Islamic law wine and swine meat are useless, have no value, and are of no benefit to the claimant, thou hast no recourse except to say either that the debtor must give restitution from whatever is lawful in Islam, or say that the defendant must pay its price according to what is fixed and specified among those to whom it is lawful. Similar cases are mentioned and written in the books of the doctors of religion. And if I wish to give thee one hundred thousand examples, mystical or vernacular, by God's power and strength I am not unable to do so. However, I fear that this might become lengthy and tedious for thee, and thou mayest become perplexed by what was said.

Thus We end Our argument and say: Praise be to God Who guided us unto the knowledge of His Most Great Name and made Us know what the whole world hath not known.

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<sup>6</sup> Quran 69:23

<sup>7</sup> *awráqun muh.ammara/awráqun muh.marra*

<sup>8</sup> What follows is a list of tropes for the traditional Islamic topography of hell

<sup>9</sup> Qur'an, 37:62, etc.

<sup>10</sup> Qur'an, 88:6

<sup>11</sup> *Samúm/Sumúm*: since the text has no vowel markings, the word could be hot wind, hot sandstorm, or *simúm*, poisons. Quran, 56:42, 52:27, 15:27

## **‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Mírzá Ghaffár Zanúzí** **ALM Nicolas’s ‘Abdoul-Béha et la situation’, 1912<sup>1</sup>**

### **Translator**

Tenerife, Spain, Ismael Velasco

The Fikr, only journal currently published in Tauris, carried the following article:

During these last years, some plotters had endeavoured to sow suspicion between the government and the nation; to stir dissension between the constitutionalists and the reactionaries! It was everywhere proclaimed: If the government and nation do not become constitutionalists, religion will disappear! We had been told this so much, that we were persuaded and convinced of it. At last the government and the people came to agreement and the organic laws were drawn and printed. We all know them; their limits are precise, and the acts of government, as those of the nation also, must be in accord with both the civil and the religious Law.

However, at that moment, someone, dressed in the garb of Islam, set about gathering all that was needed to raise, between the government and nation at last in agreement, the germs of dissension and hatred. Soon one could see that certain individuals, enemies of Islam, whose garb they wore, were carefully chosen by certain others. They were specifically charged to prevent, by whatever means, the entente from becoming established.

Among these last, shines the name of Mirza Ghaffar Zenouzi, popular tribune. This hypocrite, beating on his chest with the stone of Islamism, shouted from the rostrum: “Islam has disappeared! Islam is dead!” Certainly all of you, inhabitants of Tauris, know him. Then the people of the governor general arrested him<sup>2</sup> and found him to be the carrier of the two letters which we publish below. One of these letters is signed by Mirza Ghaffar himself and is addressed to Saint-Jean d’Acre; the other comes from the hand of Abdoul-Béha, signed with his seal and addressed to Mirza Ghaffar.

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<sup>1</sup> Abdoul-Béha et la situation [article traduit par A.-L.-M. Nicolas, sous le pseudonyme de Ghilan], *Revue du Monde Musulman* (Paris), 1912, vol. 21, p. 261-267. Editor’s note: regarding this article, we read in Mírzá Mahmúd-i-Zarqání’s diary for Sunday, August 24, 1912, “The newspaper ‘Fikr’ [Thought] was mentioned, and He continued: “In this newspaper our letter speaks for itself. We are far from taking part in any seditious movement and we hold fast to the will of the Lord.” (Mírzá Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, *Mahmud’s Diary: The Diary of Mírzá Mahmúd-i-Zarqání*, translated by Mohi Sobhani, George Ronald, Oxford, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Mirza Ghaffar frequented the Lazarite school in Tauris. As such he was more or less, and rather less, protected by the French consulate. As the Consul was absent, a Lazarite went directly to the governor Choudja ed-Dowlé. This behaviour was not pleasing and the Lazarite was not admitted. Mirza Ghaffar was condemned to death, to be executed that very night. At nine o’ clock in the evening, the Consul’s wife, made aware of the situation, telephoned Choudja ed-Dowlé to ask for mercy for the guilty. Choudja ed-Dowlé granted it with the best grace in the world and Mirza Ghaffar was released.

I wish for you to publish these two documents so that Persians may become aware of the hidden springs of certain events and understand, at the same time as the goals pursued, the twisted means adopted. They will then know whence come the widespread tides of blood, and from what source emanate the troubles and discord. They will understand where is the centre of activity seeking to throw to the winds the might of government. Then, perchance, the blinded Persian nation will be able to recognise where her friends are to be found and who her enemies are.

### **Letter of Abdoul-Béha**

O friends of Abdoul-Béha! The Creator of the world is bestirred! The cloud of divine mercy is moved! The light of God hath appeared and rises over all horizons! It is the cause of tranquillity for all created beings. This is the time for goodwill and union stretching to the high heavens! This is the peal of the bell of unity and concord, sounding from the mysteries of glory! Man has found felicity once more, while the shadows have cleared. The freed have recovered their joy; the sea of unity is astir with crashing waves, and union's zephyr blows from the flowerbed of mercy<sup>3</sup>. Each one of God's friends must become even as a regiment, and make their hearts steadfast through unveiling and making visible the truths, evidences, insights and meanings. The divine bugles must proclaim the glad tidings of God, and attract the souls to happiness in these good news.

Call all men to the light of guidance, and give the glad tidings of the great gift! Soon will this land, through the bounty of the God of all the world, become purified and be the object of heaven's envy! The banner of guidance will be raised! The curtains that conceal the unity of the human world will be lifted! East and West will become one! Between North and South there will be no more differences! The basis of all things will be founded upon unity, and all mention of the opposer will die out! The Most Great Name, may the souls of his servants be a sacrifice for Him, has destroyed all obstacles, torn away all bonds. He shows forth love for everyone, casting the blessing of unity into the thronged multitudes; spreading its benevolence to each being in this world and counselling and bidding everyone to profit from the lights of Truth and benefit from the ultimate Beauty!

Therefore do not look upon the faults nor defects of anyone! Pay no heed to envy or hostility! Become, one and all, the tokens of God's mercy, and endeavour to obtain forgiveness from everyone! Thus will ye change the stranger into an intimate, and every oppressor into a friend of justice! The ignorant, summon ye to knowledge! Guide the steps of the wayward to the Sirat! Act with the greatest joy, the most perfect goodwill, with all your soul! May the glory of the All-Glorious rest upon you.

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<sup>3</sup> Whether this tableau refers to Persia or the world in general, it must be confessed that it does not remotely resemble reality.

### Letter of Mirza Ghaffar

O my Master! O Abdoul-Béha!

I write with extraordinary ardour and love! I yearn to kiss thy blessed feet! May it please heaven that as those who have at this moment the honour of attaining thy presence, I may take my portion of this immense boon! For I, who am nameless before the existence of that Sultan of Being, have rejoiced in the recognition of this great Cause! It is through the blessing of the marvellous preaching and exhortations of my dear friend Mounir Divan that from darkness' shadows I have stepped into the world of lights! It is thanks to him that I have become a unit in the army of the friends! Praised and glorified be God!

At the command of my guide, Mirza Ebrahim Mounir Divan, I will recount the dream that was my guide and the cause of my conversion. I will share also a strange dream I had, two years ago, in Téhéran. The night of the 12 djemmedi el-evvel 1330, I saw a corridor 4 metres wide, but with a length of many farsakhs. It stretched out in a straight line. The ceilings and walls of this strange corridor were carpeted with polished fabrics of many colours and great price. Suddenly, I arrived at a door that was on the right hand side and opened into a room. Numerous people entered and left this room.

A young man, handsome, of tall stature, who wore on his koulah the insignias of the Souldan<sup>4</sup> of the Persian army, was sitting, in the room, on a chair. Another young man, like a servant, stood nearby. Suddenly I saw my eldest brother approach. Thereupon I understood I had stumbled into a gathering of Béhaïs. I then began to insult my brother, telling him: "O my brother, do you know what you have done? You have become a Béhai! You have dishonoured our family!" I spoke to him thus for a long time! The moment when, carried away, I overflowed with the most awful insults, I felt of a sudden a revolver in my hand! I shot at him and struck his back on his right. He bled profusely, but did not move. Only a faint smile hovered on his lips, whilst he gazed at me.

The one who seemed the servant of the Sultan addressed me violently: "Brother!" he told me, "Why do you torment the people? Why do you pull the curtains thus? Perhaps the majority of men share in the beliefs of this religion! What have you to meddle in the religion of another?" But the Sultan silenced him: "What is this to do with you? How many times have I told you not to get involved in what does not concern you? Such a person acts, acts, acts, and ends up by exhausting himself!" I shot a few bullets at the domestic and he was gravely wounded. But neither he nor my brother died.

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<sup>4</sup> A subordinate officer in the Persian army

Fearing that I might be questioned, I moved on. I was leaving in a troubled state, when suddenly I stepped on a precipice more than 1000 metres deep. It rose above an ocean dark and full of waves. Were I to move in the slightest, I was indubitably lost. My head turned and suddenly I began to insult myself: "Wretched one! Why did you not perceive this earlier! You could have avoided this misfortune!" I had such fear, that I could not turn back my steps. The cliff plunged abruptly into the sea. I fell all the while screaming like a madman. But, suddenly, I saw my brother who, with the smile still on his lips, stretched out his arms and caught me. I was so ashamed I turned away... and awoke. I declared my faith the same day!

As to my dream in Téhéran, which I have written on my notebooks as a political dream, it is as follows:

"I saw, in a dark night, two dragons, similar to those which are struck on Chinese coins, that is head raised, tail hanging, suspended between heaven and earth. They were yellow and spotted and one would have described them as golden by the light of the setting sun. Suddenly a two headed eagle, full of eagerness, claws outstretched, plunged toward them. These two did not pay, at the beginning, the least heed; but the eagle having reached their vicinity, the dragons turned their heads toward it. The eagle then withdrew, then returned to the charge. At this moment a tiger assailed the dragons; then a panther made its appearance and joined the battle. A wolf arrived, then a stag, and an elephant. All fell on the dragons and the attacks increased.

All these wilds beasts found themselves, now in the air, now on the floor. I then saw an enormous lion, but very old and very thin. With perfect slowness, caused by its weakness, it marched slowly towards the dragons. It sought to keep itself on the air, but he was so feeble that he advanced only with great difficulty. He went thus till he reached the dragons. Suddenly these, with an infernal noise, exploded. One of them was surely an instrument of hellfire, since all around him took flame. All the wild beasts disappeared. There was naught but those multicoloured sparks one witnesses in fireworks. I awoke trembling with fear.

May I be offered up as a sacrificed to the friends!

I beseech my Master to please to honour me with the explanation of these dreams and instruct me as to the services I may render the Cause<sup>5</sup>

Translation: Ghilan<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> One can get a sense of the mentality of Abdoul-Béha's adepts. The misfortune is that this incident alerted the Musulmans and that little by little the Béhaïs were thrown out, in Tauris, from administrative posts

<sup>6</sup> Editor's note: Pseudonym of ALM Nicolas

## **Bahá'í Consultation and Freireian Dialogue in Development A Comparative Perspective**

Adel Salmanzadeh  
Auckland, Independent Scholar

“The ‘development debate’ is re-forming around a conflict between privileging the global market and privileging human communities: Do we continue expanding industry and wealth indefinitely, or do we find a way that human communities (however defined) can recover social intimacy, spiritual coherence, healthy environments, and sustainable material practices?”<sup>1</sup>

### **History and meaning of development**

Development as a practice and as an intellectual concept has become a significant feature in many parts of the world for many decades, and over time it has carried very different meanings. The meaning of ‘development’ that is most related to this dissertation dates from the post war era of modern development thinking. According to Pieterse<sup>2</sup> in modern development, the core meaning of development was economic growth through Western aspirations such as mechanization and industrialisation, which was later broadened to encompass the advancement of social, economic and political modernisation. Around this period, so-called developed nations believed that it is only through material advancement (industrialisation and urbanisation) that social, cultural and political progress can be achieved, and that capital investment was the key to economic growth and development<sup>3</sup> It was also then that many developed nations believed in the importance of advancing the role of modernisation as an effective way of dealing with the so-called social, cultural, and political backwardness of the nations that they come to regard as ‘Third World’.

In January 20, 1949 US president Truman seized the moment as one of the powerful leaders of the First World by asserting the importance of the US in aiding the economic progress of the world:

“We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdevelopment areas. The old imperialism- exploitation for foreign profit – has no place in our

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<sup>1</sup> P McMichael, *Development and Social Change: A Global Perspective*, Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press, 2000, xlii.

<sup>2</sup> Jan, N Pieterse, *Development Theory: Deconstructions/Reconstructions*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc, 2001. 6.

<sup>3</sup> A Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995, 39-40.

plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing”<sup>4</sup>

However, the motivations for the introduction of ‘development’ as a global project and the introduction of the notion of “underdeveloped” has been widely criticised by intellectuals such as Gustavo Esteva, who makes the following powerful statement:

“Underdevelopment began, then, on January 20, 1949. On that day, two billion people became underdeveloped. In a real sense, from that time on, they ceased being what they were, in all their diversity, and were transmogrified into an inverted mirror of others’ reality: a mirror that defines their identity ... simply in the terms of a homogenizing and narrow minority”<sup>5</sup>

According to McMichael<sup>6</sup> this historical proclamation divided the humanity into the “developed” and the “underdeveloped” regions. This became a new way of looking at the world where so-called modern became the standard that all the societies of the world were measured and judged. Furthermore this became a new paradigm for producing a strategy to improve the conditions of the Third World, mentioned before came to be known as the development project. This strategy by the First World assumed that firstly, no matter how diverse those “underdeveloped” nations were, they were viewed in a similar way and that the western experience became the universal model for their development. Secondly, the Third World nations were seen as being only at the early stages of a universal path to modern society.

At this period, underdeveloped nations were seen trapped in a cycle of poverty and lacking the capital to achieve economic growth. To achieve this material success, international supports such as foreign aid, technology transfer, stable currency exchange and robust international trade became an essential part of the development project. To accommodate these necessary supports and funds United States spearheaded two initiatives to reconstruct the world economy: the Marshall Plan and the Bretton Woods program<sup>7</sup>. As the result of these initiatives the “twin sisters” of World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were established, to stabilize national finances and economic growth by funding the Third World, among others.

The following statement expressed at the 1944 Bretton Woods conference offered invaluable evidence, for the types of attitudes that supported the aims of development project for peace and free trade as a whole:

<sup>4</sup> H. S. Truman., *Harry S. Truman: Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President, 1945-53*. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office. 1961, 114

<sup>5</sup> G Esteva, “Development”. In Wolfgang Sachs (ed.), *The Development Dictionary*. London: Zed Books. 1992, 7.

<sup>6</sup> McMichael, *Social Change*, 24.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 44.

“Creation of a dynamic world economy in which the peoples of every nation will be able to realize their potentialities in peace ... and enjoy, increasingly, the fruits of material progress on an earth infinitely blessed with natural riches. This is the indispensable cornerstone of freedom and security. All else must be built upon this. For freedom of opportunity is the foundation for all other freedom”<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, on delivering the “Resolution of Thanks” at the conference, the Brazilian delegate, Souza Costa, proclaimed that the Bretton Woods institutions were “inspired by a single ideal - that happiness be distributed throughout the face of the earth”<sup>9</sup> Overall, these became the key sentiments of the development project: multinational universalism, viewing natural bounty as unlimited, and a liberal belief in freedom of opportunity as the basis of political development and human satisfaction was linked to rising living standards<sup>10</sup>

Later as a direct outcome of those development initiatives and institutions, many newly independent states were turned into financially dependent states. It was at this point around the 1960's that the dependency school of thought began to expose the unequal economic relationships of aid, trade, and investment between First and Third World nations. According to Pieterse<sup>11</sup> dependency theory acknowledged that the core meaning of development was economic growth, under the heading of accumulation, which was a distorted form of dependent accumulation that led to the development of underdevelopment. Well-known dependency theorists like A.G. Frank criticised development thinking for denying the historical relationship between development and underdevelopment. Frank<sup>12</sup> argued that ‘if the now underdeveloped were really to follow the stages of growth of the now developed ones, they would have to find still other peoples to exploit into underdevelopment, as the now developed countries did before them’.

Dependency theory with its unique critique of development further established a platform for new reflections and strategies that contributed to the emergence of ‘alternative development’ and ‘human development’. From the 1970's to the end of the 1980's alternative and human development thinking offered new understanding and approaches on development that mainly focused on issues regarding social and community development. According to Pieterse<sup>13</sup> these new development paradigms

<sup>8</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference*. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office. 1947, 4 (Statement by President Roosevelt, read by Henry Morgenthau)

<sup>9</sup> Souza Costa, 1947, in *Ibid*, 4

<sup>10</sup> McMichael, *Social Change*, 48

<sup>11</sup> Pieterse, *Development Theory*, 6

<sup>12</sup> AG Frank, *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution*. New York: Monthly Review Press. 1969, 46

<sup>13</sup> Pieterse, *Development Theory*, 81



tended to be practice-oriented rather than theoretically inclined, and aimed to create a people-centred development model that valued equity, participation and sustainability.

The emergence of these new people-centred and action-oriented development paradigms offers the most relevant context for the central topic of this paper, discussed below. However it would be appropriate in this historical overview to briefly discuss the emergence of radically different development schools of 'neo-liberalism' and 'post-development' in the late 1980's and 1990's. According to Pieterse<sup>14</sup> neo-liberalism introduced the return to the neoclassical economics model of economic growth, to be achieved through structural reform, privatisation and deregulation. In this approach development as a source of economic growth remains the central goal and the market replaces the state as the agent of achieving this goal. Pieterse further adds that the neo-liberalist approach can be regraded as anti-development in terms of its emphasis on the power of the market for achieving economic growth.

In the 1990's post-development thinkers also put forth an anti-development position. Post-development scholars such as Tucker<sup>15</sup>, Rist<sup>16</sup> and Escobar<sup>17</sup>, began to question the whole nature and the validity of development. Vincent Tucker<sup>18</sup> refers to the "Myth of Development" and criticises its application as a natural law and a necessity that has been forced on millions upon millions of human beings by "developed" nations. Furthermore, he strongly views development as 'the process whereby other peoples are dominated and their destinies are shaped according to an essentially Western way of conceiving and perceiving the world'. Similarly, Rist<sup>19</sup> affirms that development is not a natural process or a transcultural concept that can be simply transplanted to "developing" nations without a careful consideration of peoples' needs, histories and aspirations. Rist further argues that it is for this very reason that despite all kinds of Western technological or economical advancements, these accomplishments of the West cannot be replicated in Third World countries. Some have argued that this attempted replication of First World socio-economic accomplishments has come to control the destinies of Third World nations and directly or indirectly began to influence their social and cultural values and meaning systems<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Pieterse, *Development Theory*, 6

<sup>15</sup> Vincent Tucker, *The Myth of Development: A Critique of a Eurocentric Discourse*. In Munck, R. & O'Hearn, D., (eds) *Critical Development Theory: Contributions to a New Paradigm*, Zed Books: London, 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Rist, G., "Development" as Part of the Modern Myth: The Western Socio-Economic Dimension of Development "Development", *European Journal of Development Alternatives*, 1990, 2(1), 10-21.

<sup>17</sup> Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995

<sup>18</sup> Tucker, *Myth*, 1

<sup>19</sup> Rist, *Modern Myth*, 12

<sup>20</sup> Escobar, 1999.

Furthermore, Tucker<sup>21</sup> recognises this type of control as being a central issue in development discourse, and questions whether these accomplishments as well as Western values should be replicated or imposed on those nations in the name of 'development'. Likewise which traditional values and practices must be abandoned and which retained to make way for development and modernisation. These questions are only some of those asked by critical development theorists to challenge the myth of development.

Does this imply that there is no need for nations, developed or underdeveloped, to assist one another as inhabitants of one planet? Post-development thinkers like Escobar<sup>22</sup>, Tucker<sup>23</sup> and McMichael<sup>24</sup> have suggested that the West should abandon the concept of development as a means for legitimising the oppression and domination of many nations. Hegemonical development discourse has failed to acknowledge other forms of rationality and ways of life that have existed before the introduction of modernisation. There is an urgent need to rethink the notion of development by addressing these destructive and dehumanising practices that have resulted in unhealthy inequalities of power. Tucker<sup>25</sup> sees this inequality of power at the heart of the problem of development, where modernisation and dependency discourses have 'reduced the subjects of development to passive objects'.

Today development is no longer divided between mainstream (based on economic growth) and alternative (based on increasing of people's choices and human capacitation). According to Pieterse<sup>26</sup>, there is now a considerable overlap between mainstream and alternative development, especially in relation to their approach in defining and conceptualising development in terms of participation, working with the poor and vulnerable groups, and emphasis on local action. She further acknowledges that these overlapping ideologies and practices with their particular emphasis on peoples basic needs (health, literacy, education and housing), are giving people-centred development a more mainstream position in recent years. Overall, development is not what it used to be and it is in a constant state of flux, with development practice, policy and studies rapidly flourishing and universities establishing development schools more than ever before.

### **The alternative development paradigm**

As mentioned by Pieterse<sup>27</sup> alternative development since its inception in the 1970's has introduced alternative practices and redefining goals of development. Its significant contribution has mainly been in the areas of

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<sup>21</sup> Tucker, *Myth*, 3

<sup>22</sup> Escobar, *Encountering Development*

<sup>23</sup> Tucker, *Myth*

<sup>24</sup> McMichael, *Social Change*

<sup>25</sup> Tucker, *Myth*, 14

<sup>26</sup> Pieterse, *Development Theory* 94

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 74

local and grassroots development. Alternative development is often identified with development-by-NGOs<sup>28</sup>, however it can be further distinguished with respect to its development notions of participation and self-reliance aimed at achieving basic needs. Also according to Pieterse<sup>29</sup> and Korten<sup>30</sup>, in alternative development the state has an important role in being a facilitator of people's self-development, complemented by business and other voluntary agencies. For example as mentioned in Pieterse<sup>31</sup> the Thailand Five Star Partnership programme integrates the efforts of government, NGO's, private sector, religious communities and academic institutions to facilitate local and grassroots development.

In recent years, alternative development has been regarded as a paradigm that values equity, participation and sustainability<sup>32</sup>. Alternative development thinkers such as Rahman<sup>33</sup> unlike post-development thinkers disapprove of abandoning development, as he regards the word "development" to be a very powerful means of expressing peoples creativity. He further argues that we must not abandon valuable words because they are abused: what do we do then with words like democracy and socialism, which have also been abused? However as Korten<sup>34</sup> has argued it is important to redefine development in relation to its benefits to developing societies:

“ Development is a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations”<sup>35</sup>

One of the ways such definition of development becomes realised has been through the practical concept of 'mobilisation' in the Participatory Action Research (PAR) movement. Rahman<sup>36</sup> regards mobilisation as a process where by people are emotionally stimulated, in the sense of generating *inner urges* for collective activity, an inner urge being defined as an urge that arises from one's own consciousness to achieve emotional fulfilment. He further emphasis that mobilisation requires the following:

<sup>28</sup> AG Drabek, (ed.), 1, Development Alternatives: The Challenge for NGOs, *World Development*, 1987, 15, Supplement: 1-261.

<sup>29</sup> Pieterse, *Development Theory*, 83

<sup>30</sup> DC Korten, *Getting to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Voluntary Action and Global Agenda*. West Hartford: CT: Kumarian Press. 1990, 95

<sup>31</sup> Pieterse, *Development Theory*

<sup>32</sup> Arruda, M., 1994, 'A Creative Approach to Structural Adjustment: Towards A People-Centred Development', in John Cavanagh, Daphne Wysham & Marcos Arruda (eds), *Beyond Bretton Woods: Alternatives to the Global Economic Order*, London:Pluto Press. 1994, 139

<sup>33</sup> Anisur Rahman, *Peoples Self-Development: Perspectives on Participatory Action Research. A Journey Through Experience*, London: Zed Books. 1993, 213-214

<sup>34</sup> Korten, *Voluntary Action*

<sup>35</sup> Korten, *Voluntary Action*, 67

<sup>36</sup> Rahman, *Self-Development*, 19-20

Firstly, that people have a sense of owning the means of production and a sense of being the agents of decision-making. Secondly, they must have a sense of positive purpose in the exercise of ownership and decision-making. Thirdly, above all they must achieve *self-reliance*, that can be defined as a state of mind that regards one's own mental and material resources as the primary source of achieving one's collective objectives and emotional fulfilment.

In relation to the aims of this study it would be relevant to place a particular emphasis on what Anisur Rahman<sup>37</sup> calls 'people's self-development'. In his informative book with the same title Rahman comprehensively discusses PAR as a significant movement within the field of alternative development. This book presents Rahman's reflection on development through collective grass-roots initiatives by people themselves. His intellectual and practical involvement in grassroots, people led development, experimentation with participatory research, and his experience in the field of 'animation' is invaluable to the field of alternative development.

Furthermore, the PAR group decision-making practice of 'animation' has been a significant feature of this movement, which according to Rahman<sup>38</sup> aims to stimulate unprivileged people to regard themselves as the principal actors in the development of their communities and to develop a critical understanding of their conditions and to express and assert themselves through collective action. In this decision-making process a significant emphasis is placed on enabling people to get collectively engaged in seeking creative solutions to their problems. This collective inquiry of people in to their circumstances must be further complemented by collective action. As Tilakaratna<sup>39</sup> has observed:

"People operate as animated subjects when they are able to investigate, critically reflect on and analyse the social reality on their own, perceive self-possibilities for change, take initiatives and engage in critical review of their ongoing actions as a regular practice. The role of animation is therefore to assist the people to build up the above capacities, and a knowledge base to think and act creatively to transform their realities".

Animation further requires 'facilitation' for it to be systemically possible. Rahman<sup>40</sup> explains that facilitation is needed for the acquisition of basic skills such as literacy and management skills, for effective operation of organizations and collective undertakings. Through facilitation people are also encouraged to develop contact with development agencies and

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<sup>37</sup> Rahman, *Self-Development*

<sup>38</sup> Rahman, *Self-Development*, 156

<sup>39</sup> S Tilakaratna, *The Animator in Participatory Rural Development (Concept and Practice)*, Geneva: ILO, 1987, 23.

<sup>40</sup> Rahman, *Self-Development*, 157

institutions for funding and support. It is important to mention that this process is initially introduced to a group by an *animator*, which has the responsibility of stimulating people and advancing their knowledge for collective inquiry and decision-making.

Furthermore, alternative development involves a social and political process of 'empowerment' that aims to rebalance the structure of power through greater participation. According to Oakley<sup>41</sup>, 'power-formal, traditional, or informal lies in the heart of any process of change and is the fundamental dynamics that determines social and economic relations'. Empowerment is concerned with the recognition of people's capacities to take action and to play an active role in development initiatives. Empowerment is an intentional and ongoing dynamic process centred on the local community, involving mutual dignity, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through the exercise of an increased leverage on power<sup>42</sup>. Overall, according to Oakley<sup>43</sup>, empowerment requires the full participation of people in every step of the decision-making processes of: formulation, implementation and evaluation for the well being of the society to be achieved.

In relation to the main topic of this paper, people's participations in decision-making has been recognised as one of the main features of empowerment. Alternative development authors such as Friedman<sup>44</sup>, Galjart<sup>45</sup>, Stiefel and Wolfe<sup>46</sup> think of development as '*participation in decision-making*' in matters to the target group. According to Oakley<sup>47</sup>, this expression of empowerment is significant when it comes to capturing the basic element of 'power': the power of decision-making. Empowerment assists the subjects of development, who normally are, or have been excluded from decision-making to become 'self empowered'<sup>48</sup>. In this sense decision-making becomes central in exercising one's power to influence change in a developing community in a social-political context.

The significance of decision-making has been discussed above in relation to a number of concepts in alternative development thinking. However, when it comes to the practical application of decision-making, alternative development does not offer enough methodologies and principles to guide the participants in the decision-making process. This paper aims to offer and discuss two possible alternative group decision-making methods in the

<sup>41</sup> P Oakley, Empowerment and Its Evaluation. In Oakley, P. (ed.), *Evaluating Empowerment: Reviewing the Concept and Practice*. Oxford, UK: INTRAC. 2001,13

<sup>42</sup> W Van Eyken, 1991, *The Concept and Process of Empowerment*. The Hague: Bernard Van Leer Foundation

<sup>43</sup> Oakley *Empowerment*, 39

<sup>44</sup> J Friedman, *Empowerment: The Politics of Alternative Development*. Oxford: Blackwell. 1992

<sup>45</sup> B Galjart, 'Participatory Development Projects: The History of a research Project and Summary of Results', *Netherlands Review of Development Studies*, No. 1., 1987

<sup>46</sup> M Stiefel & M Wolf, *Voice for the Excluded: Popular Participation in Development, Utopia or Necessity?* London: Zed Books. 1994

<sup>47</sup> Oakley, *Empowerment*, 59

<sup>48</sup> R Tandon, *Participatory Training for Rural Development*. New Delhi: PRIA. 1987

context of development theory and practice: Bahá'í consultation, and Paulo Freire's notion of dialogue.

### The Bahá'í consultation model

According to Wendi Momen<sup>49</sup> the Bahá'í Faith acknowledges that the social, political, economic and spiritual capacity of people around the world is advancing, as the scope of human's sense of loyalty to a group is broadening from family to clan, tribe, city-state, nation and ultimately to the recognition of the oneness of humanity. Bahá'u'llah's foundational principle of the oneness of humankind is articulated in terms of unity in diversity, peace, justice, and brotherhood among all the peoples of the earth regardless of religion, nationhood, race or class. This implies, according to the Bahá'í writings, "an organic change in the structure of present day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced."<sup>50</sup> To achieve these aspirations, Bahá'u'llah advances a series of spiritual, moral, and social guidelines for human development, one of which involves the decision-making system of consultation.

Bahá'í consultation advocates dialogue between individuals and within groups as the ideal method of clear decision-making. Consultation is encouraged in personal, family and community decisions<sup>51</sup>. Bahá'í consultation is put forward in the Bahá'í writings as a method for problem-solving and decision-making, and a contributor to the well being of the group which through its processes enables its maturity and understanding to manifest<sup>52</sup>. In this communicative process; true understanding materialises when all the different views regarding a matter are courteously but candidly expressed by everyone who would like to contribute to the discussion. This level of openness to considering multiple views allows for a greater and more holistic understanding of a subject matter. According to Bahá'u'llah, 'consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding'<sup>53</sup>. Bahá'í consultation is seen as a powerful process that can only be discovered gradually through practice and reflection. It is regarded as significant in its potential to transcend the more hierarchical decision-making processes of the institutions of church and state. The Bahá'í Faith has no clergy and the entire administrative body of the Bahá'í Faith locally, nationally and internationally is elected by all adult members of its community. Authority is vested solely in collective consultative bodies where individuals have no decision-making power<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> Wendi Momen, *A Basic Bahá'í Dictionary*. Oxford, UK: George Ronald. 1989, 186-187

<sup>50</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1992-1932*, Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. (7<sup>th</sup> ed), 1974, 43

<sup>51</sup> Momen, *Dictionary*, 57

<sup>52</sup> Baha'u'llah, in *Bahá'í Consultation: A Compilation by the Universal House of Justice*, Auckland, New Zealand: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand. 1978, 93

<sup>53</sup> Bahá'u'llah, *Consultation*, 1

<sup>54</sup> Guy Sinclair, *Mediation, Transformation and Consultation: A Comparative Analysis of Conflict Resolution Models*, Unpublished, Auckland: University of Auckland. 1997.

Bahá'í consultation is aimed to advance beyond the arena of limited interest, replacing brute force and contending vested interests with a spiritually engaged participatory process, while ideally enabling human beings to graduate from divisive partisan politics<sup>55</sup>

The most significant purpose of Bahá'í consultation is the “investigation of truth”<sup>56</sup>. This search for truth according to the Bahá'í writings has universal application. Whether it is used for administrative purposes or purely personal matters, consultation is a process of achieving “insight into things”<sup>57</sup> and a method of establishing greater awareness in the spirit of “unity in diversity”. Consultation entails both joint consideration and allowing an idea to grow. Once an idea is put forward by an individual as a contribution to the search for truth, it is considered as belonging to the group. At the same time, regardless of its propounder or the apparent quality of the idea, the group is urged to consider its possible relevance and value and consult on whether it needs implementation, further growth, considered dismissal or postponement for future consultation. This process is designed to ensure that every idea or recommendation is treated with justice and fairness regardless of the position and background of the individual. Bahá'í consultation is thus a multi-dimensional concept that respects and combines the experiences, knowledge, minds, hearts, feelings, hopes and fears of the participants. For this reason consultation can initially be somewhat complex and challenging for individuals inexperienced in its dynamics, and it is through committed self-inquiry and personal observation that one's quality of participation can increase.

In Bahá'í consultative bodies of the Bahá'í Faith, a chairperson is elected to facilitate the consultative process and ensure that each member is provided with the opportunity to contribute to the discussions. Overall, the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith emphasises collective leadership and through the process of consultation the decision-making power of the elected group should be realised and utilised. The group should welcome the views of all, including “the most lowly, untutored and inexperienced”<sup>58</sup>. In this forum, decision-making is dialectically structured by differences of opinions and “through the clash of personal opinions the spark of truth is often ignited”<sup>59</sup>.

Bahá'ís are encouraged to come to terms with this challenging decision-making process in the recognition that consultation is not an easy matter, because of the imperfect individual behaviours, attitudes and orientations we bring to this consultative process. Bahá'í consultation is therefore not merely a mechanical process or a specific methodology, but a journey of personal maturation in which success will also depend on the qualities of

<sup>55</sup> J Kolstoe, *Consultation: A Universal Lamp of Guidance*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1985, 8

<sup>56</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, (4th ed) 1982, 68-70

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 97

<sup>58</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Administration*, 102

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

one's character and personal conduct. Consultation requires therefore constant examination of one's motives and conscious adjustment of one's behaviour<sup>60</sup> Sinclair suggests that these real dilemmas and conflicts challenge individuals to mature over time, engendering a process of spiritual transformation.

The Bahá'í writings regard the domain of consultation as a "spiritual conference" and "not the mere voicing of personal views"<sup>61</sup>. In such a conference, the participants are urged to detach themselves from their opinion and "set it forth as a contribution to the consensus of opinion". 'Abdu'l-Bahá<sup>62</sup> encourages the participants through a "spiritual conference" to evaluate their personal opinions with utmost "serenity, calmness and composure". By controlling one's emotional attachment to an opinion the individual is able to consider the worth and the truth of the opinions that have already been expressed; therefore they are able to willingly modify their stance. In such situations, one's detachment and clarity enables one to allow the consultation process to arrive at unity and truth. "Therefore true consultation is a spiritual conference in the attitude and atmosphere that good results may be forthcoming. Love and fellowship are the foundation"<sup>63</sup>

Bahá'ís are urged to approach all collective matters in "the spirit of frank and loving consultation"<sup>64</sup>. Opinions and ideas must be expressed with "the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation"<sup>65</sup> Those who engage in Bahá'í consultation must "search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden"<sup>66</sup> This involves learning increasingly to reconcile in consultation "the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand and fellowship, candour and courage on the other"<sup>67</sup>

Above all else, then, Bahá'í consultation stems from an engaged spirituality: a state, an inner condition, that should manifest itself in action, in everyday choices, in a profound understanding of human nature and in meaningful contributions to community life and society."<sup>68</sup> Such individual cultivation of spirituality is considered fundamental to collective and united consultation for the investigation of truth. According to Sinclair<sup>69</sup> the act of consultation is itself sacred and sanctified; first, through the spiritual

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<sup>60</sup> Sinclair, *Mediation*, 12

<sup>61</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, 68-70

<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

<sup>64</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Administration*, 101

<sup>65</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, 95

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 88

<sup>67</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Administration*, 101

<sup>68</sup> Farzam Arbab, "The Process of Social Transformation" in Eyford, G., (ed.), *The Bahá'í Faith and Marxism: Proceedings of a Conference held in January 1986*, Ottawa: Association for Bahá'í Studies. 1987, 49-50

<sup>69</sup> Sinclair, *Mediation*, 11



outlook each participant brings to the consultation process, secondly through their prayers and concentrated efforts to manifest spiritual qualities; finally, dialogue is understood to be facilitated by the power of God and one's reliance on God in all matters. "The prime requisite for them that they take counsel together," Bahá'í writings assert, "are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine fragrances, humility amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering and servitude."

Sustained by the spiritual dimension of consultation, then, Bahá'ís are encouraged to develop strong cooperation and association to achieve true happiness and development, individual and collective<sup>70</sup>. Within this context, Bahá'ís become increasingly able to examine any issue from various points of view, together finding the most suitable direction to embark upon, consulting until a solution for collective action emerges. Through consultation, unity of thought is persistently pursued and achieved, and when the thoughts and views of all participants are united, imaginative plans for development and growth of any community can be achieved<sup>71</sup> (Ruhi, Book 2, 1985).

Consultation is "no easy skill to learn, requiring as it does the subjugation of all egoism and unruly passions, the cultivation of frankness and freedom of thought as well as courtesy, openness of mind, and wholehearted acquiescence in a majority decision"<sup>72</sup> (UHJ, Wellspring, p.96). Certainly, in this early stage of growth of the Bahá'í community with its wide diversity of individuals the process of consultation may present itself as a challenge, and at times the perfect decision may not be a practical possibility<sup>73</sup> (Abdu'l-Bahá, 1982: 96). However, it is important for the group to remain united in all stages of the decision making process, especially after the group has reached its final decision. If the final decision is implemented and it does not produce the desired out come, the group must reflect and consult on the matter again in unity and solidarity.

Overall, Vick<sup>74</sup> (1989:49) believes Bahá'í consultation is a method of human interaction and communication that suits all situations. It is a new social institution that shapes and develops people and communities. Bahá'í consultation is put forward by its proponents as unique and evolutionary, its full potential and powers only gradually being discovered and developed<sup>75</sup> (Kolstoe:1985&1995, Vick:1989). The process of consultation is advanced

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<sup>70</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, 35

<sup>71</sup> The Ruhi Institute, Book 2: *Arising to Serve*, Ruhi Foundation, Colombia, Florida: Palabra Publications, 1987.

<sup>72</sup> The Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance: Messages 1963-1968*. Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. 1969,96).

<sup>73</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, 96

<sup>74</sup> HH Vick, *Social and Economic development: A Bahá'í Approach*, Oxford: George Ronald. 1989,49

<sup>75</sup> Kolstoe, *Consultation*; John Kolstoe, *Developing Genius: Getting the Most Out of Group Decision-Making*, Oxford: George Ronald. 1995; Vick, *Social*

by Bahá'u'llah as a universal 'lamp of guidance', and as a reflection of the maturation of humanity and its ability to make informed decisions.

### **A case study of Bahá'í consultation in development practice: Radio for Development (Ecuador)**

Consultation is one of the fundamental features of any Bahá'í initiated development project around the world. Below a case study of a bahá'í development project is discussed in which Bahá'í consultation has been used in practice. It is important at this point to offer a brief explanation of the Bahá'í understanding of development. Generally, it has been regarded by the Bahá'í Faith as the process of maturation of social institutions together with an increase in participation of individuals and groups in those institutions, and improvements in the economic welfare, wealth, standard of living and material comfort of individuals, groups and whole populations<sup>76</sup>.

Furthermore, the success of any form of material development is held to be related to the level of spiritual development. All of the social teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, such as universal education, equality of men and women, the importance of agriculture, etc., are approached from a spiritually informed perspective in both theory and practice. This fundamentally spiritual approach to development has been the most significant vehicle for humanitarian aid and assistance by the members of the Bahá'í Faith.

In 1977, the Bahá'ís of Ecuador began the first Bahá'í radio station. Radio Bahá'í of Ecuador was established through consultation between the Bahá'ís in the Otavalo region and the National Spiritual Assembly of Ecuador. According to the Bahá'í scholar Kurt Hein<sup>77</sup> the station was established in part to promote self-determination and self-reliance among rural populations by encouraging their participation in the operations of the station. In particular the Bahá'ís aimed to offer their services to the spiritual, administrative, social, and economic of the indigenous population.

The station was licensed as an educational, cultural, and religious institution. Its aims included:

- Providing universal education for the general population.
- Promoting the development of human potential.
- Promoting the unification of humankind into "one universal family".
- Assisting in the development and instruction of the Bahá'í community in the region.

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<sup>76</sup> Momen, *Dictionary*, 69

<sup>77</sup> Kurt Hein, Radio for Development. *World Order*, 1987, 198(3-4), 39-50.

- Helping raise the listener's standard of living without destroying their values.<sup>78</sup>

In addition Radio Bahá'í began serving community organizations through programming that encouraged participation by all community members, especially women, and by teaching the principles of Bahá'í consultation as a method of community decision making. This was initially to develop and strengthen consultative skills among the Bahá'í communities in the region, later extending its benefits and possible usage to the rest of the community.

Bahá'í consultation became an important feature of the management and administration of Radio Bahá'í, implemented by the Radio Bahá'í Commission. According to Hein<sup>79</sup>, the Commission met weekly to review programming and personal issues. After consultation between the members of the station staff and the Executive Director, the decisions and the policies of the Commission were implemented. By following the principles of Bahá'í consultation each staff member had the opportunity to offer ideas for improving the services of Radio Bahá'í.

Since its inception Radio Bahá'í has served the community by producing many regular programs on agricultural and health issues; public announcements; regular visits to the villagers to interview the people concerning rural farming issues, women's activities, oral traditions; indigenous music festivals and local news and information. These programs have been effective for two reasons. First, the audience needs are addressed and then the programming is developed to address those needs. Second, Radio Bahá'í uses the voices of the villagers and the indigenous people not only so they can hear themselves but also using radio as a medium to reach civil servants<sup>80</sup>

With regards to staff training many visiting consultants offered short-term courses for those interested in learning to produce their own programs. As mentioned by Hein for example a number of indigenous women produced their own programs, although none had any radio experience before coming to the station. In fact, only one of the women had received any formal schooling. Nonetheless, after completing some initial courses, they were teamed up with more experienced staff until they felt comfortable operating the equipment on their own. As their confidence grew they started to participate in daily consultation regarding Bahá'í Radio's activities, especially in relation to indigenous women's issues.

In addition, through effective consultation between consultants, the administrative bodies of the Bahá'í Faith and volunteers, the station has continued to fulfil its mandate as a participatory service to the indigenous

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<sup>78</sup> Hein, Radio, 41

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 44

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 46

community for more than two decades. Radio Bahá'í of Ecuador has inspired many other communities around the world to initiate similar projects, Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í.

### Freirean notion of dialogue

Paulo Freire has become one of the most influential educationists for nearly four decades. His work and philosophy have inspired not only educational workers but also others in the fields of human and social development, in many developing nations and also in many developed countries. In his most widely read book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he lays the foundations of some of his most thought provoking concepts such as the notions of, 'liberation', 'humanisation', 'dehumanisation', 'conscientisation', and 'dialogue'. Many of these concepts were developed while developing and conducting his revolutionary literacy programs in his home nation of Brazil. However, after the military coup in 1964, the officials found his educational activities and teaching philosophies too radical and placed him under house arrest. He was later asked to leave his country and spent more than two decades in exile.

With regards to the main theme of this study, the notion of dialogue can be regarded as a significant contribution of Freirian philosophy. However, we cannot treat dialogue as an isolated notion, and as a stand-alone contribution of his philosophy. We must as Roberts<sup>81</sup> (1998:33) argues, go beyond his classic work the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and read Freire holistically. 'A holistic reading allows a more complex picture of both Freirean theory in general, and the place of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in that theory in particular, to emerge'

In another early work, *Cultural Action for Freedom*<sup>82</sup> (1972) Freire addresses some of the political and developmental issues in the Third World with specific reference to Latin America. He examines the significant process of conscientisation, and dialogue as one of its key components. Here we must also mention that, although the concept of conscientisation has been directly associated to Freire, he was not the first to use the notion. The original Portuguese term, '*conscientizacao*', came in to being during a series of meetings between professors at the Brazilian Institute of Higher Studies, and later popularised by Helder Camara<sup>83</sup>

It is appropriate at this point of the study to make an explicit and systematic analysis of the concept of conscientisation and its relationship to the notion of dialogue. In his work before the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire refers to dialogue as "communion" in relation to the project of conscientisation by

<sup>81</sup> P Roberts, Knowledge, Dialogue and Humanization: The Moral Philosophy of Paulo Freire. *Journal of Educational Thought*, 1998, 32(2), 95-117 [33](#)

<sup>82</sup> Paulo Freire, , *Cultural Action for Freedom*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.1972

<sup>83</sup> P Roberts, Rethinking Conscientization . *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 1996, 309(2), 179-196

stating that “only praxis in the context of communion makes conscientisation a viable project”<sup>84</sup> (1972: 46). In this sense conscientisation is a joint project that takes its form with unity and solidarity between the people through action and constant reflection upon that action and upon the world. Freire emphasises that, in order for conscientisation to take place a radical denunciation of dehumanising structures must occur alongside people constructing a new reality for themselves. By doing this people come to openly challenge the oppressive conditions they have been subjected to, and through dialogue and action take charge of their own progress and development.

According to Freire, the starting point for the analysis of conscientisation is to critically comprehend humans as beings who exist in and with the world. “It is as conscious beings that men are not only in the world, but with the world, together with other men. Only men, as “open” beings are able to achieve the complex operation of simultaneously transforming the world by their action and grasping and expressing the world’s reality in their creative language.”<sup>85</sup> According to Roberts, “‘conscientisation’ is the reflective moment which occurs in a liberating educational programme designed to dialogically address and transform conditions of oppression.”<sup>86</sup>.

Freire has often referred to the importance of dialogue and its significant role in the *conscientizacao*, or “conscientization”, process<sup>87</sup>. For example, with regards to students and their process of becoming conscious and transformed, dialogue represents a powerful and transformative political process. It is through dialogical interaction and relationships that students learn to build strong learning communities in which they can freely communicate their thoughts and ideas about what they know and also in relation to the larger political project of emancipation<sup>88</sup>. Even though in this example the relationship of dialogue and conscientisation is expressed with regards to students, the same would apply to other members of a society who continue to engage in the process of critical consciousness and liberation. According to Darder<sup>89</sup> it is important to understand that a true act of dialogue needs purposeful focus, particularly, on the process of developing critical consciousness or transformative social action.

<sup>84</sup> Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Herder and Herder. 1972, 46

<sup>85</sup> Paolo Freire, Cultural Action and Conscientization, *Harvard Educational Review*, 1970, 40(3), 452-

<sup>86</sup> Roberts, *Conscientization*, 89

<sup>87</sup> Antonia Darder, ‘Teaching as an Act of Love: Reflections on Paulo Freire and His Contributions in Torres, R.D. (ed), *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, New York & London: Routledge Falmer. ;Roberts; *Conscientization*

<sup>88</sup> Darder, *Teaching*, 103

<sup>89</sup> Darder, *Teaching*

According to Krank and Steiner<sup>90</sup>, Freirean transformation in relation to education is based on the active engagement of students as liberatory learners during their educational experiences and the critical facilitation of learning. Furthermore this kind of transformation creates liberated learners whom are actively involved in the humanisation of their individual realities through subjective reflection, and rational objective action. Individual transformation further contributes to the collective transformation outside of the learning environment through active and united participation in dialogical action and reflection. Taylor<sup>91</sup> argues that Freire's work constantly asserts that conscientisation, engendered by dialogue, is the means of transforming objects into subjects, the oppressed into the liberated. Taylor goes on to identify five premises that accumulatively provide the infrastructure of the pedagogy of the oppressed and highlights the liberating and transformative power of dialogue:

- The individual deprived of dialogue is oppressed.
- Dialogue is the process and practice of liberation.
- The individual engaged in dialogue is liberated.
- Dialogue, by definition, requires more than one person.
- More than one person could be called a society.

Roberts<sup>92</sup> stresses the fact that 'dialogue for conscientisation implies a certain unity of purpose' and that this collective effort as human beings originates from the ontological vocation of humanisation<sup>93</sup>. This unifying nature of dialogue and its role as agent of unity is one of the key features of this study and it will be further discussed in relation to the Bahá'í model of consultation.

Freire emphasises the importance of a constant dialectical relationship and interaction for objective transformation. Further, Freire urges us to approach this dialectical intervention as a way of verbally explaining to the people their own action. This form of communication 'with' the oppressed, rather than 'to' the oppressed Freire explicitly relates to the notion of 'dialogue' in chapter three of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. However before focusing further on his notion of dialogue we must reflect on his notions of 'action' and 'reflection'. As mentioned in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, for action to be humanising it must be more than an occupation, a preoccupation, which must not be separated from reflection. This interdependence of action and reflection is highly important to the advancement of any liberation process. For the oppressed to pursue liberation, they must engage with each other dialogically through a constant process of critical action and reflection. In this sense liberation is a process of struggle that encourages

<sup>90</sup> HM Krank, & Stanley Steiner, A pedagogy of transformation : An introduction. In S.F. Steiner, H.M. Krank, P. McLaren & R.E. Bahruth (Eds.), *Freirian pedagogy, praxis, and possibilities: Projects for the new millennium* (pp. ix-xiii). New York: Falmer. 2000, xi

<sup>91</sup> P. V Taylor, *The Texts of Paulo Freire*, Buckingham: Open University Press. .1993, 58-59

<sup>92</sup> Roberts, *Knowledge*,191

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

people to actively strive to improve their conditions as humans with unity, and at the same time evaluate and reflect on their achievements through ongoing communication with each other. Even though Freire did not regard himself as a member of the oppressed class, as a teacher and a human being he saw the importance of joining the oppressed with their struggle for liberation and humanisation, and he encouraged others to do the same. However, Freire warned people, whether academics or community workers to avoid the trap of thinking that they are the executors of transformation, just because they truly want to change injustices in the world.

Turning now to dialogue proper, Freire suggests that our initial attempts to understand the nature and the meaning of dialogue, involves discovering something that is the very essence of dialogue itself: it is not simply to view the word as the instrument to carry out dialogue and its literal role in constructing speech, but to go deeper and comprehend its constitutive elements. We must understand that this word contains two important dimensions of reflection and action, and that both need to interact for authentic dialogue to emerge<sup>94</sup>. In the absence of one of these dimensions the word becomes unauthentic. When the word is deprived of one of these dimensions, Freire adds<sup>95</sup>, the other one suffers; in this sense action without reflection leads to an activism based on action for action's sake that negates true praxis and makes dialogue impossible. On the other hand reflection without action leads to verbalism, resulting in verbal reflection as an empty word or idle chatter with no transformative power. These are both undesirable outcomes in Freire's pedagogy for liberation, humanisation, and transformation of the oppressed. Overall, dialogue must become the encounter between human beings, which is essentially mediated by the world, in order to name the world<sup>96</sup>.

Clearly, then, Freirean dialogue requires certain personal qualities to succeed. Freire has discussed these in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*<sup>97</sup>, as essential requirements for dialogue, including love, humility, faith, and mutual trust, among others.

Freire, regards love as the foundation of dialogue, an act of courage, not of fear, and an act of commitment to others. Dialogue, cannot exist without a profound love for the world and humanity as a whole. Dialogue requires humility, for the dialoguers to be able to name the world in unity and partnership. In this way everyone's dialogical contribution is valuable and no one can be regarded as ignorant. According to Freire, by having faith in others the "dialogical man" believes in others before even engaging in dialogue with them. It is also, by having faith in their power to make and remake; and in their vocation to become more fully human. This faith,

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<sup>94</sup> Freire, *Oppressed*, 68.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 69

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 70-74

however, is not naïve, and the dialogical man must be critical, although it is possible for an individual to have the power to transform, it does not mean individual dialogical action is in isolation. By achieving these virtues, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of mutual trust between the dialoguers in a logical sequence.

Dialogue emerges from this discussion as a collective and united interaction (action and reflection) between the dialoguers, a necessary tool for transforming and humanising the world. In this pedagogy human existence is not silent, and no one in this collective struggle is denied his or her right to speak his or her word. Therefore, dialogue becomes a necessary tool for achieving significance as human beings and through speaking their word, through naming their world, they have the power to transform their reality:

“If it is in their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity”<sup>98</sup>

### **Freirean Dialogue and Bahá'í Consultation: A Comparative Analysis**

A comparative analysis of Freirean dialogue and Bahá'í consultation can begin by understanding their similarities and differences.

The Bahá'í writings on consultation place significant emphasis on the importance of developing a number of personal (spiritual) qualities when taking part in the consultation process. Similarly, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *A Response* among others Freire stresses the importance of dialogical qualities and virtues that are necessary for individual and the group as a whole.

In Bahá'í consultation, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has emphasised that “the first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members...”<sup>99</sup>. By acquiring this condition the consultative body are able to free themselves from estrangement and antipathy and to care for each other personally<sup>100</sup>. Furthermore Bahá'is are reminded by Shoghi Effendi, that the keynote of this Faith is “not arbitrary power, but... loving consultation”. This is a kind of love that is not simply based on just tolerating one another, but truly committing ourselves to understanding one another.

In a similar way Freire<sup>101</sup>, regards love as the foundation for dialogue: dialogue “cannot exist in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people”. Indeed, he clearly emphasises that love is dialogue itself and

<sup>98</sup> Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the City*. New York: Continuum 1993, 69

<sup>99</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre. 1978,3.

<sup>100</sup> Kolstoe, *Consultation*, 20

<sup>101</sup> Freire: *Oppressed*, 70



that only people who love one another are able to enter into this dialogue with each other. According to Darder<sup>102</sup> Freire spoke of a love that is rooted in commitment to humanity and the willingness to struggle to attain what he calls our “true vocation” – that of being human. Furthermore, he spoke of a kind of love that was lively, inspiring but at the same time, challenging and critical: an “armed love - the fighting love of those convinced of the right and the duty to fight, to denounce, and to announce”<sup>103</sup>

Hence, although love as a starting point is shared between the two perspectives, the notion of love used by Freire is fundamentally different to the Bahá'í notion of love. Bahá'í love is based on the spiritual nature of human relationships springing from the love of God, whereas Freirean love is based on a humanistic understanding of people's love and commitment to their fellow humans and to the cause of liberation.

Humility is another crucial requisite of Bahá'í consultation. Shoghi Effendi<sup>104</sup> urges Bahá'ís to take counsel together with “humility and lowliness”. Bahá'ís are discouraged from self-aggrandisement or self-praise over their contributions to the consultative process. According to Kolstoe<sup>105</sup>, humility is achieved through action and service to humanity and the Bahá'í community. Furthermore, he explains that true humility lies in the development and use of talents, capacities and resources by individuals who have participated in the consultative process<sup>106</sup>. In Bahá'í consultation the ability to listen to others and take in to consideration the opinion of others is another significant characteristic of a humble participant and an open-minded individual.

Freire likewise considers humility a crucial component of humanitarian dialogue. He sees it as enabling dialoguers to name the world in partnership to achieve common goals. In this way no one is regarded as ignorant, rather people as partners attempt together to increase their knowledge and understanding about their world. Freire explicitly states, “Dialogue cannot exist without humility. The naming of the world, through which people constantly recreate that world, cannot be an act of arrogance”<sup>107</sup>. Freire too emphasises the importance of the virtue of listening as a sign of humility and that ultimately “only those who listen, speak”<sup>108</sup>.

However it is important to mention that Freire is not a relativist and does not believe that everyone's dialogical contribution is of equal value; but on the

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<sup>102</sup> Darder Teaching, 498

<sup>103</sup> Paolo Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare to Teach*. Boulder, Co: Westview.1998, 42

<sup>104</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Administration*,21

<sup>105</sup> Kolstoe' Consultation,17

<sup>106</sup> Ibid

<sup>107</sup> Freire, *Oppressed*,71

<sup>108</sup> Freire, P, Fraser, J.W., Macedo, D., McKinnon, T. & Stokes, W. T. (eds), 1997, *Mentoring the Mentor: A Critical Dialogue with Paulo Freire*, New York: Peter Lang.1997, 306.

contrary, some peoples' ideas and thoughts are better than others<sup>109</sup>. In comparison, while acknowledging the differential value of concrete ideas, the members of the Bahá'í faith elect their Bahá'í consultative groups with an emphasis on their collective contribution to the community, and not the quality or record of their individual ideas.

Bahá'í consultation and Freirean dialogue also share a concern for unity within a field of human diversity. The virtue of unity and unity in diversity are fundamental teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. Bahá'u'llah has explicitly stated that, "no power can exist except through unity, no welfare and no wellbeing can be attained except through consultation"<sup>110</sup>. Furthermore both unity and consultation are bedrocks of Bahá'í administration. The Bahá'í consultative process requires unity to create a sense of wholeness, togetherness and solidarity among the group. In this form of group decision-making, it is the first duty of the members to effect their own unity and harmony in order to obtain good results. Overall according to Kolstoe<sup>111</sup>, unity in consultation is a matter of identifying a clear common purpose. When this clear common purpose is combined with other consultative qualities of love, humility and respect, the group is then able to move towards decisiveness. Even if a decision is made that is later proven to be wrong, a united consultative body will simply review the matter, without any disappointment or blame.

The principle of unity in diversity is closely related to the quality of unity in consultation. The notion of unity in diversity offered by Bahá'u'llah encourages Bahá'ís to first observe their oneness as human beings, so they can make their differences harmonious. According to this principle, the diversity of the individuals in a consultative body is acknowledged and respected; and their personal views and background are welcomed. At the same time through the ongoing process of consultation on all matters, Bahá'ís further recognise and celebrate their common spiritual path, guided by Bahá'í principles. The practical application of unity in diversity in many Bahá'í communities is in its formative stage and an ongoing learning process.

In Freirean pedagogy, the notion of unity is closely related to the revolutionary praxis of liberation. In this model, it is the responsibility of revolutionary leaders to dedicate themselves to a ceaseless effort towards unity among the oppressed - and unity of the leaders with the oppressed - in order to achieve liberation and that the unity between the leaders grows out of communion with the people. Freire further emphasises that achieving this level of unity requires a form of cultural action through dialogue, for people to come to understand their adhesion to reality<sup>112</sup>. In this sense, unity is a

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<sup>109</sup> Roberts, *Knowledge*, 101

<sup>110</sup> Baha'u'llah, *Consultation*, 1

<sup>111</sup> Kolstoe, *Developing Genius*, 1995

<sup>112</sup> Freire, *Oppressed*, 153-154.

relationship between individual leaders and the people, whereas from a Bahá'í point of view, unity is achieved through consultative processes between the collective leadership elected by the believers locally, nationally and internationally and the wider community.

In Bahá'í administration unity has been regarded as the most vital element of the organization and management of communities around the world. In particular, at the local and national level the collective leadership (local and national spiritual assemblies) and the members of the community as a whole are encouraged to work and consult in full harmony in a cooperative manner. According to Shoghi Effendi<sup>113</sup> the unity and cooperation of Bahá'í administrative bodies at the local and national level are of utmost importance, upon them depend the unity of the Bahá'í faith and the solidarity of the members of the faith. Freire<sup>114</sup> also regards unity as vital to group organization and management development. For him, organization is a highly educational process of learning and perfecting necessary skills and knowledge required to achieve liberation. Which further requires the unity of leaders and the people to create true authority and freedom through dialogue.

'Thus unity is a recognised notion in both the Bahá'í Faith and Freirian pedagogy, however they represent two different models of unity. The Bahá'í approach to unity presents a collective spiritual vision of a global faith community for the systematic and united implementation of Bahá'í teachings and its administrative order. For Freire unity represents a collective action and reflection (dialogue) between people and revolutionary leaders for social and political change and humanisation of the world.

According to Freire the notion of unity in diversity was born from his growing awareness of the patterning of the specifics of oppression along the lines of language, race, gender and ethnicity, etc. He further states that he has "been defending the fundamental thesis of unity in diversity, so that various oppressed groups can become more effective in their collective struggle against all forms of oppression"<sup>115</sup>. Freire believes that through unity in diversity and democratic solidarity, people are potentially able to generate profound shifts in the political and economic systems that intensify racism and separatism. Freire argues that we must begin by understanding the history of these cultural differences, due to the presence of factors such as class, race and gender, and secondly to understand how these differences have contributed to discriminatory practices that exist in our societies today<sup>116</sup>.

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<sup>113</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Administration*, 24

<sup>114</sup> Freire, *Oppressed*, 160

<sup>115</sup> Freire, *Dialogue*, 310

<sup>116</sup> Freire (1995:395).

Freire's approach to the notion of unity in diversity is in some ways compatible to the Bahá'í approach especially when it comes to the importance of open dialogue and solidarity among diverse sections of society and humanity as a whole for the betterment of the world. Another similarity is Freire's acknowledgement of the importance of understanding and embracing cultural differences for achieving unity in diversity. In the Bahá'í faith the vision of unity in diversity is foundational, considered a fundamental step towards a greater understanding and the celebration of our differences, and consultation provides the opportunity to communicate those differences. In comparison, Freire only began to discuss unity in diversity or unity within diversity later in his writing, without any in depth exposition of the topic. His brief expressions on this topic have been mainly in relation to unity in diversity among educators from educationally and politically oppressive backgrounds.

Another noticeable similarity between the two philosophies is their systematic approach to achieving group goals and aspirations. In the case of Bahá'í consultation, the Universal House of Justice<sup>117</sup> directs all Bahá'í institutions and communities to foster the advancement of Bahá'í community growth and development by engaging in a constant process of action, consultation and reflection/learning. Bahá'ís around the world engage in regular consultation meetings; to reflect on issues, consider adjustments, and maintain enthusiasm and unity of thought.

Similarly in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire rouses the oppressed to achieve transformation through dialogue by committing themselves to a constant process of action and reflection. If dialogue or the "word" is deprived of the dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well, and it becomes mere verbalism (Sacrifice of Action). On the other hand if action is emphasised exclusively, to the detriment of reflection, the "word" is converted into activism for activism's sake (Sacrifice of Reflection)<sup>118</sup> (1972:68-69). For Freire reflection provides people with a greater understanding of the historical backgrounds of oppression, so that their fight against oppressive conditions is not purely based on informative exposition, without radical action. Freire has regarded the above as his revolutionary theory, holding that any human activity or revolution must consist of action and reflection for it to be transformative. "Human activity is theory and practice, it is reflection and action. It cannot be reduced to either verbalism or activism"<sup>119</sup>.

Finally, it is important to recognise that there are a number of fundamental differences between the two approaches. Bahá'ís believe that it is through spiritualisation that humanity can advance and develop materially. Also the

<sup>117</sup> The Universal House of Justice, *The Five Year Plan 2001-2006: Messages of the Universal House of Justice*, Florida, USA: Palabra Publications. 2001

<sup>118</sup> Freire, *Oppressed*, 68-69

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 106

institution of Bahá'í consultation is regarded as a means whereby people can now utilise their God-given wisdom to determine their own destiny, and no longer need self-appointed leaders, clergy and priests to instruct them. Bahá'í teachings most of all stress the spiritual nature of justice and freedom and see them as innate, bestowed when we enter the world. Bahá'í teachings also call us to engage, as individuals, with the social injustices of the world through the development and application of virtues, noble deeds and the development of spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual capacities. Bahá'ís strongly believe that serious attention must be given to the role of spiritual values in building human capacity, and that overall human progress and development cannot come from political and revolutionary participations alone.

By contrast, Freire focuses on the importance of revolutionary leadership and theory, to transform the world. He also emphasises the political and social nature of justice and fighting for freedom from oppression. He most certainly sees humans as ethical beings always in the state of becoming more “fully human” by engaging in authentic praxis, through dialogue with others, in a critically conscious way<sup>120</sup>. Unlike Bahá'ís, Freire does not recognise religious spirituality as the key element for human betterment and progress. For Freire, liberation and betterment is achieved through conscientisation and humanisation of people and their willingness to fight oppression through dialogue and political activism.

Both Bahá'í consultation and Freireian dialogue are, it is suggested, effective means of freeing people from oppression and a way of giving them the power to make their own decisions and realise their own potential. For Bahá'ís, however, consultation is also a way of “redefining power in society” making radiance of spirit, love of God, humility and patience the dominant forces in all decision-making<sup>121</sup>. From the Bahá'í point of view human power is directly connected with spiritual power initiated through the love of God and communion with him. Hence, all consultative meetings always start with prayers and remembrance of the Creator, which is also an effective way for the group to achieve a meditative state and a level of clarity in preparation for the decision-making process itself. Bahá'í teachings acknowledge the power of human intellect and expression in consultation, especially when combined with the power of spiritual insight and faith.

Freire, on the other hand emphasises the power of human intellect and human ethics for humans to achieve their significance. For instance in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* he states that dialogue “requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create faith in their vocation to become more fully human”<sup>122</sup>. In this

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<sup>120</sup> Freire, *Teachers*, 102-103

<sup>121</sup> Vick; *Development*, 59-60

<sup>122</sup> Freire, *Oppressed*, 71

pedagogy the relationship between the dialoguers is the centre of achieving true dialogue, whereas the Bahá'ís believe that this relationship is secondary to the relationship that people must develop with the Creator. However as mentioned previously when it comes to peoples' treatment and their relationship with each other both Freirean and the Bahá'í faith demand the same degree of commitment.

According to Elias<sup>123</sup> Freire was committed to the Christian gospel and many concepts such as freedom and equality have deep religious roots, and in his work as consultant to the World Council of Churches he more fully developed the connection between his theological and his educational theories. As an educationist, he preferred a prophetic type of religion that used education as "an instrument of transforming action, a political praxis at the service of permanent human liberation"<sup>124</sup>.

Overall, both the Bahá'í Faith as a religious movement and Freirean pedagogy as a revolutionary movement aim to empower the oppressed and the downtrodden to be more conscious about their own abilities and potentials as human beings. This sense of awakening and consciousness can be pursued in significant measure through the decision-making powers of Bahá'í consultation and Freirean dialogue. Furthermore, they can both be recognised as effective tools for people to unite and depend on one another with intense love and faith. They also provide an ideal environment for people to develop their humanity and human virtues while learning to listen to others with patience, humility and trust.

### **Possible Contributions of Bahá'í consultation and Freirean Dialogue to the Field of Development**

Consultation as a method of communication, decision-making and problem solving has been one of the major features of Bahá'í community development for many decades. In relation to the field of development its usage became official after the 20 October 1983 message from the Universal House of Justice. Bahá'ís around the world were encouraged to become more effective in the field of socio-economic development "through their application of spiritual principles, their rectitude of conduct and the practice of the art of consultation, to uplift themselves and thus become self-sufficient and self-reliant". As a consequence of this process they would be able to extend the benefits of their experience and their efforts to society as a whole<sup>125</sup>

The call was made globally to Bahá'ís of all social, economic, educational backgrounds to contribute to the field of development by evoking their

<sup>123</sup> J.L. Elias, Paulo Freire: *Pedagogue of Liberation*, Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company. 1994, 110-112

<sup>124</sup> Paolo, Freire, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation*. London: Macmillan. Translated by Donald Macdonald with an introduction by Henry Giroux. 1985, 140.

<sup>125</sup> Vick, *Development*, 1-6

resourcefulness, flexibility and cohesiveness. This is to say that all Bahá'ís, irrespective of their circumstances and resources, are endowed with the capacity to participate in activities and can use the Bahá'í principle of consultation, among others, to raise the quality of human life, followed by unity in spirit and in action.

According to Vick<sup>126</sup>, “social and economic development requires consultation to restore hope and self-confidence to people who do not recognise their own potential”. Although many people are regarded as “underdeveloped”, as belonging to the “third world”, they are presented, within a Bahá'í paradigm, with an equal opportunity to participate in any consultative process. First, they begin by creating a greater awareness about their circumstances by listening to others, secondly, by gaining self-confidence in expressing their own ideas, and thirdly by becoming aware of their own abilities to transform their ideas into united action.

Furthermore, Bahá'í consultation is central to the task of reconceptualizing systems of human relationships. The standard of truth seeking that is required by Bahá'í consultation is far beyond the patterns of negotiation and compromise that tend to characterize present-day discussion of human affairs<sup>127</sup>. This ultimate search for truth as a moral and ethical foundation allows a group to arrive at a consensus about the truth and the most appropriate line of action to be taken in any given situation in unity and solidarity.

In any social and economic development project, individual Bahá'ís are called to strive to transcend their individualist perspectives, in order to function as members of a body<sup>128</sup>. Even when a collective body arrives at a decision about an aspect of a project, and some individuals may not fully agree with the decision they are encouraged to support the decision to preserve and facilitate the learning processes of the group. With regards to development, I believe that this kind of approach to decision-making and problem solving allows people the opportunity to learn from their own mistakes. They come to understand that Bahá'í consultation is a process of discovery rather than a magical solution for their issues and problems. Viewed in this light, consultation is the operating expression of justice in any given development practice. In this context true justice is the ability to consider and consult all possible options with unity of thought and an open mind.

According to Bahá'u'llah<sup>129</sup> no Bahá'í can achieve their true station as spiritual beings “except through justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no wellbeing can be attained except through

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 51

<sup>127</sup> Kolestoe, *Developing Genius*, 10

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>129</sup> Bahá'u'llah, *Consultation*, 1

consultation". The Prosperity of Humankind, a statement by the Bahá'í International Community, points to the significance of justice: "so vital is it to the success of collective endeavour that it must constitute a basic feature of a viable strategy of social and economic development. Indeed, the participation of the people on whose commitment and efforts the success of such a strategy depends becomes effective only as consultation is made the organising principle of every project"<sup>130</sup>.

According to Dahl<sup>131</sup> the use of Bahá'í consultation in development practice is more than just a procedure for arriving at good decisions; more importantly it is a method to teach groups to work together and establish stronger human ties. By participating in the process of consultation people are forced to acknowledge and hopefully appreciate their differences, while respecting and being open to each individual's unique contribution. Dahl also emphasises that in a Bahá'í consultative group everyone has an equal voice regardless of their level of education or wealth, each individual equally possesses a human wisdom. In some cases, in his experience, the best ideas have come from the most humble participants. Overall Dahl regards such consultative development groups as powerful forums for practically and concretely exposing Bahá'ís to the spirit of equality and brotherhood, which is central to the Bahá'í teachings.

Bahá'í consultation according to Vick<sup>132</sup>, challenges injustice by eliminating power relationships in decision-making. Shoghi Effendi<sup>133</sup> stresses "...the keynote of the cause of God (Bahá'í Faith) is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation". Bahá'í consultation is an exercise of collaborative power, based on personal and collective qualities such as love, humility and patience, and the importance of considering all ideas regardless of people's status in the society. Again this shows that consultation is no easy skill to learn, especially when it comes to people in positions of power coming to view others as their equals.

Experience has shown, according to Vick<sup>134</sup> and Dahl<sup>135</sup> that in numerous Bahá'í development projects, consultation has enabled highly educated development experts and communities of illiterate people to make unified and effective decisions. Such consultation offers all parties a ladder to climb beyond the limited experiences and attitudes they held about each other before entering into the domain of consultation.

<sup>130</sup> The Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind. A Statement Prepared by the Bahá'í Office of Public Information*: Haifa, Israel.1995, 1985:10.

<sup>131</sup> GC Dahl, A Bahá'í Perspective on Economic and Social Development. In Lee, A (ed.), *Circle of Unity: Bahá'í Approach to Current Social Issues*. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press. 1984, 158

<sup>132</sup> Vick, *Development*

<sup>133</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Administration*, 10

<sup>134</sup> Vick, *Development*

<sup>135</sup> Dahl, Perspective; GC Dahl, Values, Culture and Development: A Bahá'í Approach. *World Order*, Volume 1987,19(3-4), 11-20.



Consultation is no easy skill to learn, its application in development can at times be slow and seemingly inefficient<sup>136</sup>. It takes patience, sensitivity and profound love to draw out the noble qualities and sentiments in people who have been denied a voice all their lives<sup>137</sup>. Bahá'í consultation, as difficult and challenging as it might seem, will remain at the heart of the Bahá'í faith's contribution to the field development. I believe as the number of successful Bahá'í development projects grow, more and more communities will be interested to collaborate with Bahá'ís in a mutual process of learning and consolidation. While in the short-term Bahá'í consultation is used by Bahá'ís in development practice, the many positive decisions and solutions achieved through it aim to benefit humanity as a whole.

With regards to Freire, his work and philosophy has already been recognised in alternative development tools like Participatory Action Research (PAR), and he is regarded as a legend in this field. In particular the Freirean concept of conscientisation or the stimulation of self-reflected critical awareness has been widely used in the PAR movement. For example, its usage is proven to be effective in a number of Asian initiatives, where the rejection of 'aid' has been recognised as a solution to the problem of people's development ('liberation')<sup>138</sup>.

Furthermore Freirean thinking is well articulated in relation to the role of education in social development and has come to be viewed as an organic component of the process of 'animation'<sup>139</sup>. Similar to dialogue and Bahá'í consultation animation is about learning, knowing and understanding, as well as coming to terms with their own intellectual powers and self-discovery as creators of knowledge. Inspired by Freire, the dialogical process of Participatory Action Research has offered many developing communities the chance to create a method of collective reflection and communication. This dialogical process has also been referred to as 'animation', which can be defined as a communication process of people's development of 'intellectual capabilities and collective self-knowledge', and through this process they come to recognise themselves as 'the principal actors in their lives and not as subordinates to other social classes, to stand up with self-esteem, to develop a critical understanding of the conditions of their lives and to express and assert themselves through collective action'<sup>140</sup>.

Freire's work in alternative development has increased people's awareness by helping them develop their 'critical faculty' and has encouraged them to break down decades of passive acceptance to become legitimate development actors<sup>141</sup>. Rahman<sup>142</sup> uses the example of an NGO in

<sup>136</sup> Vick, *Development*; Universal House of Justice, Wellsprings

<sup>137</sup> Vick, *Development*, 58

<sup>138</sup> Rahman, *Self Development*, 81

<sup>139</sup> Tilakaratna, *Animator*

<sup>140</sup> Rahman, *Self Development*, 156.

<sup>141</sup> Oakely, *Empowerment*, 14

Bangladesh implementing Freirean pedagogy to develop self-reflected awareness ('conscientisation') of the landless. The efforts began with a three months process of learning and dialogue on matters relating to land ownership, and even discussing some vocabulary used for expressing land ownership and landlessness in that community. Through this process landless people developed organization consciousness at a local level, starting a savings programme that eventually led to a collective ownership of a number of agriculturally suitable lands.

As discussed above, according to Oakley<sup>143</sup>, Rahman<sup>144</sup>, Roberts<sup>145</sup> and other development thinkers, unequal power relations are a key issue in people's participation in their own development. As early as 1974 Roberts declared that development should emphasize more equal distribution of power among people. Paulo Freire<sup>146</sup> convincingly argued that only access to real power could break what he termed 'cultural of silence', which can be characterised by the dependence and the marginality of the powerless. According to Oakley<sup>147</sup>, power in a Freirean sense refers to power 'to do', 'to be able' and the feeling of being more capable and in control of situations. This implies that development must recognise people's capacities to take action and to play an active role in development initiatives, and that dialogue is a significant aspect of it.

Freire believes that the development and the transformation of a society must occur in its own existential time, never outside it. He then goes on to state that:

"It is obvious that only a society which is a 'being for itself' can develop. It is essential not to confuse modernisation with development. In order to determine whether or not a society is developing, one must go beyond criteria based on indices of per capita income, the basic elementary criteria is whether or not the society is a 'being for itself'"<sup>148</sup>.

This notion of 'being for itself' can only be fully realised by a developing nation or a community through the political, economic and cultural decision-making power of dialogue. Promoting a culture of self-reliance, people are able to realise their own potential and feel a sense of (positive) purpose in the exercise of ownership and decision-making<sup>149</sup>.

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<sup>142</sup> Rahman, *Self Development*, 62

<sup>143</sup> Oakely, *Empowerment*

<sup>144</sup> Rahman, *Self Development*

<sup>145</sup> Roberts 1974

<sup>146</sup> Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*. London: Sheed and Ward.1974

<sup>147</sup> Oakely, *Empowerment*, 14

<sup>148</sup> Freire, *Oppressed*, 130

<sup>149</sup> Rahman, *Self-Development*, 19

By using the principles of Freirean dialogue and Bahá'í consultation, development practice can further empower and enable people to articulate and assert themselves verbally and intellectually. The power to voice one's ideas and hopes can ultimately lead to people's control over their own development and self-reliance. This self-reliance and control over their material resources is strengthened by people's united vision, collective identity and solidarity, driving their material strength and also their spiritual, mental and emotional powers.

The power of Bahá'í consultation and Freirean dialogue has already been discovered and used by many grassroots projects to awaken a sense of hope and increased capacity among many peoples. In both approaches people's humanity and self-worth lie at the centre of their methodological goals, they both acknowledge and promote the need for development of certain qualities. These qualities include love, respect, trust and patience, among others, when engaging in developmental decision-making. In addition, they both place a significant emphasis on the power of unity (in diversity, through diversity), and collective nature of group decision-making. In addition they both see the importance of complementing communication with action and vice versa. Overall both approaches share the fundamental principle that through collective and united dialogue and consultation people gain a greater awareness and understanding about their own need for self-development.

It is important to note that the Bahá'í Faith recognises that a large number of people in developing nations hold particular spiritual and religious belief, that make Bahá'í consultation highly relevant. This is where Bahá'í consultation is distinguished from Freirean dialogue and other methods such as "animation" and "consciousness raising". Bahá'í consultation calls for spiritual qualities and positive responses to problems based on truth and justice under a collective elected leadership<sup>150</sup>. On the other hand Rahman<sup>151</sup> believes that Freirean pedagogy will continue to be influential in people's self-development in the field of PAR, especially in the area of education development.

In this paper, I have tried to address issues to do with the decision-making powers of consultation and dialogue. Further exploration and discussion of the main themes of this study through comprehensive empirical research would be beneficial. Overall, as growing disenchantment with the top down approach in development increases and as some expert consultants fail to provide suitable solutions to development problems, the decision-making processes of Bahá'í consultation and Freirean dialogue will continue to provide alternative modes of achievement and models of what constitutes a desirable world of development.

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<sup>150</sup> Vick, *Development*, 53.

<sup>151</sup> Rahman, *Self-Development*



## **Mediation, Transformation and Consultation** **A Comparative Analysis of Conflict Resolution Models**

Guy Sinclair  
Auckland, Independent Scholar

Transformative models of mediation begin from a belief that mediation offers not merely an opportunity for conflicting parties to satisfactorily resolve their problems, but a medium through which transformation of individuals, and by extension society, can take place. While the precise nature of that transformation may not be agreed upon by all writers on the subject, nevertheless something more than mere “conflict resolution” is envisaged. Moral development, the awakening of latent capacities of self-awareness and compassion and the emergence of a society of peacemakers - all are goals which are either explicit or implicit in the various models of transformative mediation.

This paper begins by examining the best-known theory and model of transformative mediation - that proposed by Folger and Bush in their book, *The Promise of Mediation*<sup>1</sup> and related articles<sup>2</sup>. Specifically, we will analyse their philosophy of transformation, its implications for individuals as well as society, and the particular mediator practices they propose.

Critics of Bush and Folger's work have, among other things, expressed dissatisfaction with their sharply-drawn but simplistic taxonomy of mediation models, pointed out shortcomings in the political theory which underlies their mediation model, and suggested that they marginalize a number of relevant cultural practices. In addressing these criticisms, we will draw attention in particular to alternative models of transformative mediation such as those proposed and practiced by Mark Umbreit and various religious groups. We will suggest that any theory of transformative mediation must of necessity take into consideration the moral beliefs, faith and religious practices of diverse peoples, so that the reality of conflict in a pluralist society can be adequately addressed.

In the remainder of this paper, we turn to a model of communication drawn from the Baha'í Writings, and practiced in communities of that Faith all over the world. These teachings identify specific goals for transformation, including the spiritualization of individual lives and the appearance of unity

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<sup>1</sup> Bush RAB & Folger JP, *The Promise of Mediation* (1994) San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers

<sup>2</sup> Folger JP & Bush RAB, “Ideology, Orientations to Conflict and Mediation Discourse” in Folger JP & Jones TS (eds) *New Directions in Mediation* (1994) London, Sage Publications Folger JP & Bush RAB, “Transformative Mediation and Third-Party Intervention: Ten Hallmarks of a Transformative Approach to Practice.” *Mediation Quarterly* 13:4 (Summer 1996) pp. 263-78

in human society. One of the practical methods which, if implemented, will promote both individual and societal transformation is consultation. We suggest that this practise, while having much in common with the models of mediation proposed by Bush and Folger, Umbreit and others, offers additional insights into human reality and relationships.

### **Bush and Folger's Model of Transformative Mediation**

The name of transformative mediation is most commonly associated with the publications of Joseph Folger and Robert Bush. This section examines two broad aspects of their theory: the goals and the practices of transformative mediation.

#### **The Goal of Transformation**

Underlying all models and practices of mediation, Bush and Folger argue, are certain basic assumptions about human nature<sup>3</sup> particular conceptions of conflict<sup>4</sup> and ideas of what constitutes a 'good' society<sup>5</sup>): ultimately, every mediation rests on an ideological foundation. They note a move away from the mediation movement's origins as an idealistic, non-institutional and informal dispute resolution process and towards a more institutional, formal practice which clearly exhibits a 'problem-solving' orientation to conflict. This orientation, argue Bush and Folger, reflects and is driven by an ideology of Individualism, which they define as a view of "the human world as made of radically individual beings, of equal worth but with different desires. . . whose nature is to seek satisfaction of those. . . desires"<sup>6</sup> Individualism dominates Western thought and culture, underlies its notions of democracy and motivates its political institutions. Unavoidably and almost unnoticed, Individualism shapes the goals and practices of mediation. As a result, mediators habitually employ "oppressive"<sup>7</sup> strategies - by making global assessments of parties' circumstances in terms of identifiable 'problems', disregarding aspects of the conflict (such as emotions and feelings) which cannot be treated as problems, and orienting their efforts towards facilitating acceptable settlements<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, Bush and Folger advocate a Relational framework which distinguishes itself from Individualism in that it "sees the world as containing \*both\* the plurality of individual selves and the (potential) unity made up of the network of their relationships"<sup>9</sup> Bush and Folger distinguish two human capabilities in particular which contribute to this latter aspect of the Relational ideology, and they call these "empowerment" and

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<sup>3</sup> Bush & Folger, *Promise*, 242

<sup>4</sup> Bush & Folger, *Ideology*, 8

<sup>5</sup> Bush & Folger, *Promise*, 236

<sup>6</sup> Bush & Folger, *Ideology*, 12-13

<sup>7</sup> Bush & Folger, *Ideology*, 14

<sup>8</sup> Bush & Folger, *Ideology*, 10-11

<sup>9</sup> Bush & Folger, *Promise*, 89-91.; Bush & Folger, *Ideology*, 20

“recognition”. In brief, the empowerment entails greater awareness of one’s own goals, options, abilities, resources and ability to make conscious decisions for one’s self<sup>10</sup> Recognition, conversely, involves the exercise of a complementary appreciation of the other’s situation: it is the realization of the capacity and will to consider, reflect on and acknowledge, in words and actions, that other’s point of view

Bush and Folger argue that the development of these two capabilities of empowerment and recognition is what constitutes true moral growth - it is in fact the essence of individual transformation. Ideally, neither one of these aspects should be developed in isolation from the other. Together and integrated with each other, they constitute “compassionate strength”, which the authors identify with the highest mode of human behaviour<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, Bush and Folger relate individual transformation to a larger goal: the transformation of society itself. Whereas other types of mediation seek to change the situations people find themselves in, transformative mediation<sup>12</sup>

involves changing. . . people themselves, and thus the society as a whole. It aims at creating ‘a better world,’ not just in the sense of a more smoothly or fairly working version of what now exists but in the sense of a different kind of world altogether.

### The Practice of Mediation

To summarize Bush and Folger’s thought, we may say that mediation practice reflects and proceeds from an orientation to conflict, which ultimately rests on an ideological foundation. The ideology which most completely and truly reflects the human world is called the Relational framework; the orientation which rests upon it believes that the purpose of conflict is individual transformation. What remains to be seen is the particular discursive practices which follow from such an orientation.

From a practice perspective, Bush and Folger assert that “third-party influence [is] inevitable”<sup>13</sup> the form which that influence takes is what distinguishes a transformative mediation from any other. Starting from the belief that people’s concerns and conflicts represent “opportunities for human growth and transformation”<sup>14</sup>, that is, for the exercise and development of empowerment and recognition, Bush and Folger propose a set of specific mediator moves which they argue will facilitate this process.

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<sup>10</sup> Bush & Folger, *Promise*, 85-87

<sup>11</sup> Bush & Folger, *Promise*, 230-233.

<sup>12</sup> Bush & Folger, *Promise*, 29

<sup>13</sup> Bush & Folger, *Ideology*, 6;

<sup>14</sup> Bush & Folger, *Ideology*, 15

Bush and Folger advocate a number of third-party interventions - the “hallmarks of transformative practice”<sup>15</sup> - which can be grouped under three headings. The first of these is the “micro assessment of parties moves”<sup>16</sup>. They suggest, for example, that parties should be encouraged to explore their feelings, as well as any confusion or uncertainty about what the conflict is about or what they want<sup>17</sup>, since these are all opportunities for empowerment and recognition. Mediators are encouraged to see that “the action is in the room”, that the here and now is what matters most and that a conflict unfolds in mediation; and this furthermore encourages discussions of the past as they affect the present<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, mediators must consciously suspend judgment on the motives and intentions of the parties, being aware of their own relative ignorance of the ‘full picture’<sup>19</sup>. Bush and Folger suggest that a close and clear focus on the specific statements of parties will yield opportunities for transformation which a more future-oriented, global vision of the conflict will not: this means that the mediator will adopt a “responsive posture”<sup>20</sup>.

The second “key element” of transformative mediation practice is “encouraging parties’ deliberation and choice-making”<sup>21</sup>. This is manifested in a variety of ways - in the mediator’s opening statement, which will emphasize this as a goal of the mediation<sup>22</sup>, as well as in particular instances when the mediator will call the parties’ attention to an opportunity for empowerment or recognition and leave it to the parties to decide whether or not they will take it up<sup>23</sup>. Finally, the third element of transformative mediation sees mediators encouraging parties to consider each others’ perspectives<sup>24</sup>; again this will appear as a goal in the opening statement, as well as being a constant feature of third party interventions throughout the mediation whenever emotions, confusion, disagreement occur.

Aside from these practical guidelines, Folger and Bush emphasize that transformative mediation must be the genuine outcome of a Relational ideology and approach to conflict. The mediator will therefore be consistently optimistic about the parties’ motives, competence and ability to “deal with their own situation on their own terms”<sup>25</sup>. Equally importantly, success, however small, must be registered in both the mediator’s and the parties’ minds, since this will encourage commitment to the process of transformation<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Folger & Bush, *Transformative Mediation*, 16

<sup>16</sup> Bush & Folger, *Ideology*, 17

<sup>17</sup> Folger & Bush, *Transformative Mediation*, 271-272

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 273-274.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid* 268-269

<sup>20</sup> Bush & Folger, *Promise*, 193

<sup>21</sup> Bush & Folger, *Ideology*, 17

<sup>22</sup> Folger & Bush, *Transformative Mediation*, 266

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid* 267-268

<sup>24</sup> Bush & Folger, *Ideology*, 18

<sup>25</sup> Folger & Bush, *Transformative Mediation*, 269.

<sup>26</sup> Folger & Bush, *Transformative Mediation*, 275-276.



## Transformative Mediation: A Critical View

Transformative mediation, as presented by Bush and Folger, has been greeted with both excitement and dismay. This section summarizes and evaluates the main objections to their work, and considers some alternative visions of transformation in mediation by way of response.

### Criticism of Bush and Folger

Criticisms of Bush and Folger's model of transformative mediation address both the theory and practice of mediation. Dealing with the practical first, several critics have disputed Bush and Folger's view that the goal of transformation requires entirely eschewing the problem-solving aspect of mediation. Carrie Menkel-Meadow objects to "the kinds of simplistic taxonomies that academic critics ... love to create that simply do not ring true for many practitioners"<sup>27</sup>. Michael Williams concludes from his own experience that it is possible "for a skilled mediator to discuss the issues, try to find solutions to specific problems, and at the same time try to help his clients toward Transformation"<sup>28</sup> Alison Taylor, writing on neutrality, also suggests that while there are "two distinct ends of the ethical practice of mediation ... \*strict neutrality\* [and] \*expanded neutrality\*"<sup>29</sup>, "[p]ractitioners are seldom unidimensional, and we need not make forced choices as if there were only two ways of mediating"<sup>30</sup> The extreme position adopted by Bush and Folger against a solution-oriented approach thus appears impractical and even dangerous from the perspective of practicing mediators.

These critics have also expressed alarm at the kinds of third-party interventions transformative mediation appears to require. Whereas Bush and Folger assume the inevitability of mediator participation in the unfolding conflict<sup>31</sup>, and attempt to limit the directiveness of the mediator accordingly, some commentators find their suggested interventions just as oppressive as those in 'problem-solving' mediation - or more so. Menkel-Meadow finds Bush and Folger "remarkably judgmental and conclusionary about . . . other models of mediation"<sup>32</sup>, although they "have created a model which simply relocates the directiveness of mediators"<sup>33</sup>. And Williams suggest that contractual and ethical principles require that

<sup>27</sup> Menkel-Meadow C, "The Many Ways of Mediation: The Transformation of Traditions, Ideologies, Paradigms, and Practices." 1995 *Negotiation Journal* 217-242 11(3), pp. 232-233

<sup>28</sup> Williams M, "Can't I Get No Satisfaction? Thoughts on The Promise of Mediation." 1997 15 *Mediation Quarterly*, 150.

<sup>29</sup> Taylor A, "Concepts of Neutrality in Family Mediation: Contexts, Ethics, Influence, and Transformative Process." 1997 14 *Mediation Quarterly*, 226

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 227.

<sup>31</sup> Sara Cobb, among others, agrees, cf. Cobb S, "A Narrative Perspective on Mediation" in Folger JP & Jones TS (eds) *New Directions in Mediation* (1994) London, Sage Publications, p.52

<sup>32</sup> Op. Cit. p.237

<sup>33</sup> Ibid: 238

mediators respect the parties' choice: "if clients seek a practical, down-to-earth agreement on specific issues, we should help them to attain it"<sup>34</sup>.

Last among practical considerations is a question of proof: have Bush and Folger adequately demonstrated that transformative mediation works, even within its own terms of reference? Neal Milner answers in the negative, and finds the examples of transformative mediation in *The Promise of Mediation* unsatisfactory and disappointing<sup>35</sup>. Williams argues that a drive towards transformative mediation by the mediator is self-defeating in that it disempowers the parties<sup>36</sup>. Menkel-Meadow similarly asks how parties can be empowered when no solution to their problems is found<sup>37</sup>, and finds it "astonishing" that Bush and Folger suggest that, in her own words, "people are easier to change than situations"<sup>38</sup>.

Fewer critics address the theory behind transformative mediation; this is probably partly because the natural focus of practitioners is practice and partly because the goals of empowerment and recognition feature in many kinds of mediation, and the difference is to some extent one of degree. Nevertheless, there are some telling points made even here. Finding fault with the political analysis which underlies Bush and Folger's work, for example, Milner refutes their assertion that a Relational ideology is emergent; rather, he adduces evidence to demonstrate the continued vitality of Individualism<sup>39</sup>.

More importantly, both Milner and Menkel-Meadow find Bush and Folger's vision culturally limited. Menkel-Meadow expresses this aptly:

... mediation is deeply contextual and, when situated in different environments and institutions, it will perform different social tasks. Bush and Folger attempt a meta-level explanation for mediation that simply will not work. Transformative mediation is a concept that is both vague and, at the same time, presumptuous; it is insensitive to social conditions and - dare I say? - too ethnocentric to reach all mediations.<sup>40</sup>

Milner is more particular about his criticism on this point. He begins by arguing that transformative mediation is as inextricably bound up in the North American mediation culture as the problem-solving approach it opposes<sup>41</sup>. He notes, for example, that the mediator is assumed to be a

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<sup>34</sup> Op. Cit. p. 153

<sup>35</sup> Milner N, "Mediation and Political Theory: A Critique of Bush and Folger" *Law & Social Inquiry*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Summer, 1996), p. 750

<sup>36</sup> Williams, op. cit., p.153; cf. Milner, op. cit., pp. 743-744

<sup>37</sup> Op. cit., p.238

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p.235.

<sup>39</sup> Op. cit., pp.752-759.

<sup>40</sup> Op. cit., p.236

<sup>41</sup> Op. cit., p.744.

stranger to the parties. This is much less likely in other cultures, he states, where conflict resolution is also “often more fluid, less linear, less directly concerned with staying on point, and more likely to be handled by someone who is familiar to the conflicting parties”<sup>42</sup>.

Moreover, Milner suggests that Bush and Folger have overlooked important evidence which would support the transformative vision’s claims to universal application, but which would also make explicit its spiritual debt<sup>43</sup>. Intentional or not, it is true that the authors have neglected consideration of “some religiously based arguments for peacemaking that support the idea that joint work on a conflict heightens moral capacities and fosters both a sense of self and a regard for others”<sup>44</sup>. It is to these alternative models of transformative mediation that we now turn.

### **Response: Alternative Visions of Transformative Mediation**

Notwithstanding criticism of Bush and Folger’s particular formulation of transformative mediation, the idea that conflict represents an opportunity for moral growth is popular and pervasive. It is not uncommon to find reference in mediation literature to concepts of empowerment, respect and faith in parties’ ability to resolve their disputes<sup>45</sup>. Mediators such as Albie Davis refer to the “‘transformative’ power of mediation”<sup>46</sup>. Kolb and Kressel name a significant number of prominent mediators among those who “define their work in transformative terms”<sup>47</sup>, where this means “empower[ing] community members, further[ing] the goal of citizen participation, and set[ting] standards for responding to the current world challenge of ethnic, tribal, and cultural disputes”.<sup>48</sup>

Clearly, Bush and Folger do not have a monopoly on the definition of transformative mediation. We now consider some alternative visions which address some of the criticisms outlined above.

### **Mark Umbreit’s ‘Humanistic’ Mediation**

Mark Umbreit begins his presentation of ‘humanistic’ mediation from a premise similar to Bush and Folger’s - that mediation can offer something more than mere settlement:

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid: 745

<sup>43</sup> Ibid: 745, 748-749

<sup>44</sup> Ibid: 748

<sup>45</sup> Merry SE, “Albie M. Davis: Community Mediation as Community Organizing” in Kolb DM and Associates (eds) *When Talk Works: Profiles of Mediators* (1994) San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, pp. 246-247; cf. Forester J, “Lawrence Susskind: Activist Mediation and Public Disputes”, in *ibid.*, pp.329-331

<sup>46</sup> Cited in Merry, *op cit.*, p.248

<sup>47</sup> Kolb DM and Kressel K, “The Realities of Making Talk Work” in Kolb DM and Associates (eds) *When Talk Works: Profiles of Mediators* (1994) San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Publishers, p.466

<sup>48</sup> *Idem.* It is worth noting here that Kolb and Kressel express skepticism about claims about the transformative power of mediation

Mediation can move toward a higher level of practice which can intentionally and more consistently tap into its transformative and healing powers. These healing powers are intrinsic to the process of mediating conflict between individuals but need to be consciously drawn out and utilized.<sup>49</sup>

Umbreit sees potential in mediation for “a genuine transformative journey of peacemaking that is grounded in compassion, strength, and our common humanity”<sup>50</sup>. Here then is a model whose aspirations to universal application are explicit. Although Umbreit clearly excludes certain kinds of disputes from its ambit, he nevertheless considers the majority of conflicts to be susceptible to a process based on “an opening of the heart through genuine dialogue, empowerment, and a recognition of each party’s humanity despite the conflict”<sup>51</sup>. Umbreit’s approach is distinct in grounding itself in both the insights of Western cultural models of mediation, as well as the “skills and . . . life perspective”<sup>52</sup> of non-Western, indigenous cultures (It is of interest here that Umbreit has been influenced by the New Zealand Family Group Conference model of restorative justice, among other things). He thus avoids the temptation to privilege any one form of mediation practice over another.

Indeed, Umbreit acknowledges a debt to Bush and Folger<sup>53</sup>. While he avoids specifically criticizing their contributions, however, he clearly moves beyond their model to present a less rigid yet practical model of mediation. Like them, he identifies power in the parties and sees value in feelings and emotions<sup>54</sup>. Rather than providing a detailed political framework for his model, he begins from a set of values which are fundamental to humanistic mediation: in fact, these values suggest a rich metaphysical tradition and belief system such as is found in many indigenous societies. They include, for example, a “belief in the connectedness of all things”; in “the desire of most people to live peacefully . . . to draw upon inner reservoirs of strength to overcome adversity . . . [and] to grow through life experiences”; and in “the inherent dignity and self-determination that arise from embracing conflict directly”<sup>55</sup>. Addressing the issue of third-party intervention, Umbreit acknowledges “the importance of the mediator’s presence and connectedness with the involved parties”. Umbreit thus embraces a “paradigm of healing” that rests on “a profound recognition of the precious gift of human existence, relationships, community, and the deeper spiritual

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<sup>49</sup> “[A Humanistic Mediation Model: Moving to a Higher Plane](#).” Internet web page: VOMA Quarterly Conference Review (Fall / Winter 1996)

<sup>50</sup> Umbreit MS, “Humanistic Mediation: A Transformative Journey of Peacemaking.” *Mediation Quarterly*, [1997] 14 p. 202

<sup>51</sup> Ibid: 202

<sup>52</sup> Ibid: 202

<sup>53</sup> Ibid: 203

<sup>54</sup> Ibid: 208

<sup>55</sup> Ibid: 204-205

connectedness among all of us in our collective journey through this life, regardless of our many religious, cultural, political, and lifestyle differences”<sup>56</sup>

Flowing from this framework of ‘healing’, Umbreit suggests a number of practice implications; for the purposes of this essay, it will be necessary to mention only a few of these. Foremost among his suggestions are those which focus on the role of the mediator, and here Umbreit’s model reveals its underlying spiritual concerns. He writes, for example, that

..[p]rior to initiating contact between people in conflict, the mediator(s) is encouraged to take a few moments of silence, through reflection, meditation, or prayer, to reflect on the deeper meaning of his or her peacemaking work and the needs of the people in conflict.<sup>57</sup>

This process of “centering” should continue throughout the mediation, reminding the mediator of the spiritual connectedness of all people<sup>58</sup>. The mediator concentrates her efforts on helping the parties to “understand and respect their differences and to arrive at a mutually acceptable way to deal with those differences”<sup>59</sup> (Idem), and will deliberately remove herself at times from the dialogue between the parties<sup>60</sup> (Idem). She will moreover take steps to “connect” with the parties. This in turn requires “congruence” on the part of the mediator, which is defined as “a condition of being emotionally honest with yourself in which there is consistency in your words, feelings, body and facial expressions, and your actions”<sup>61</sup>. Such an approach engenders a feeling of trust in the parties, which careful coaching on communication skills as well as a nondirective style of mediation reinforce<sup>62</sup>. Once again, Umbreit suggests that mediation can become a spiritual tool connecting people with themselves, with each other and with their beliefs<sup>63</sup>

### Summing Up: Religion and Transformation

In his critique of Bush and Folger, Neal Milner suggests that certain affinities exist between their work and the mediation practice of a number of religious groups. In particular, he mentions the Quakers and Mennonites as examples of traditions “so strong, so much on point, so thoroughly based on practice, and already so much a part of the secular mediation community . . .

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<sup>56</sup> Umbreit MS and Burns H, “Humanistic Mediation: Peacemaking Grounded in Core Social Work Values”, Centre for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking, University of Minnesota, 15 May 2002, p. 3

<sup>57</sup> Umbreit, op. cit, 205-206

<sup>58</sup> Ibid: 206

<sup>59</sup> Idem

<sup>60</sup> Idem

<sup>61</sup> Ibid: 207

<sup>62</sup> Ibid: 208-209

<sup>63</sup> Idem.

that they [deserve] some attention”<sup>64</sup>. The Mennonite Conciliation Service, for example, describes its own activities as nurturing “the transformation of conflicts and the people involved in them by developing and promoting resources, providing referral and direct mediation and consultation services, holding training and educational events, and developing networks”<sup>65</sup>.

While noting that Bush and Folger have unhappily failed to note non-secular transformative mediation practices, Neal Milner suggests that this approach has certain advantages<sup>66</sup>. He refers for example to the contentiousness of the religion and morality debate, and infers that they avoid such controversy in order to widen their audience base<sup>67</sup>. Nevertheless, he judges their omission of religiously-based arguments for transformative mediation a serious flaw, and we would have to agree.

On a global scale, moreover, there are even more compelling reasons to take into account religious models of mediation. If we are to take the ‘peacemaking’ claims of mediation seriously, it should be broadly applicable. Menkel-Meadow is correct in saying that “mediation is deeply contextual and, when situated in different environments and institutions, it will perform different social tasks”, and she is right to fault Bush and Folger’s model with being too restrictive and ethnocentric<sup>68</sup>. Moreover, the religious controversy Milner cites is largely restricted to the American context: other societies, where the state-religion separation is less central to political concerns, would see this as a non-issue. On the contrary, the large majority of the world’s peoples continue to regard some form of religion or spirituality as central to their existence. Surely a project such as Umbreit’s, which seeks to wed secular concerns with religious beliefs in a common project of ‘peacemaking’, is worthy of effort. We would only add here that an even broader basis for mediation practices must be sought among all the major religious communities if we are to expect significant transformative effects to follow.

### The Baha’i Concept of Consultation

The Baha’i Faith is one such religious community in which conflict-resolution takes place within a context of individual and social transformation<sup>69</sup>. This practice, known as consultation, aims to address

<sup>64</sup> Milner, op. cit., p. 749

<sup>65</sup> Mennonite Central Committee, “Mennonite Conciliation Service”, *MCC Workbook* 1996, Peace and Justice.

<sup>66</sup> Milner, op.cit., p.748.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid: 749

<sup>68</sup> Menkel-Meadow, op. cit., p. 236

<sup>69</sup> “The Bahá’í community, comprising members of the Bahá’í Faith from all over the globe, now numbers some five million souls. They represent 2,112 ethnic and tribal groups and live in over 116,000 localities in 188 independent countries and 45 dependent territories or overseas departments. What was once regarded by some as an obscure, tiny sect is now recognized by the Encyclopedia Britannica as the second-most widely spread independent religion in the world, after Christianity.” <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-6-0-1.html> [Last accessed March 25 2007]

conflicting perspectives within a framework of spiritual transformation. The fundamental principles of consultation were established by Baha'u'llah, the Prophet-Founder of the Baha'i Faith (1917-1892), and have since been elaborated, interpreted and elucidated by his eldest son 'Abdu'l-Baha (1844-1921), his great-grandson Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), and the Universal House of Justice, the Supreme Baha'i Institution (first elected 1963). The following description of consultation has been primarily drawn from these authoritative sources, although numerous references to the subject can be found in Baha'i literature of a secondary nature.<sup>70</sup>

### A Programme for Transformation

According to Baha'u'llah, the fundamental purpose of every Revelation from God has been "to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions"<sup>71</sup> Fundamental to Baha'u'llah's programme for the transformation of both individuals and societies is the recognition of the oneness of humanity - an acceptance of the principle of unity in diversity. While this principle implies, among other things, the unity of all races and peoples, the equality and complementarity of the sexes, and the abolition of all prejudices, Shoghi Effendi explains its deeper implications: "It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. . . It represents the consummation of human evolution. . ."<sup>72</sup>

The evolutionary transformation of individuals is inseparably related to that of society. The Baha'i teachings state that the human beings are fundamentally spiritual, but that this spirituality emerges as a result of effort and education. Baha'u'llah thus states: "Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures"<sup>73</sup> If these 'treasures' are virtuous conduct and deeds, it is clear that such

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, in the context of Baha'i family life (Jordan DC *et al*, *Marriage: A Fortress for Well-Being* (1988) Wilmette, Baha'i Publishing Trust, pp. 67-70), peace (Huddleston JS, *Achieving Peace by the Year 2000: A Twelve Point Proposal* (1988) London, Oneworld Publications, pp.75-76), world order (Bramson-Lerche L, "An Analysis of the Baha'i World Order Model" in Lerche C (ed) *Emergence: Dimensions of a New World Order* (1991) London, Baha'i Publishing Trust, pp. 41-43), social and economic development (Vick HH, *Social and Economic Development: A Baha'i Approach* (1989) Oxford, George Ronald, pp. 49-60) or psychology (Danesh H, *Unity: The Creative Foundation of Peace* (1986) Ottawa, Baha'i Studies Publications pp.116-118); or in general introductions to the Baha'i teachings (Momen M, *A Short Introduction to the Baha'i Faith* (1997) Oxford, Oneworld Publications, p.78; Esslemont JE, *Baha'u'llah and the New Era* (rev. 4th ed., 1974) London, Baha'i Publishing Trust, p.171; Huddleston J, *The Earth is But One Country* (2nd ed., 1980) London, Baha'i Publishing Trust, pp. 99-102); or more generally, a compilation of extracts from the Baha'i writings on consultation has been published (The Universal House of Justice, "Consultation: A Compilation" in *The Compilation of Compilations Vol.1* (1991) Baha'i Publications Australia); as well as at least one major study of the subject (Kolstoe JE, *Consultation A Universal Lamp of Guidance* (1985) Oxford, George Ronald).

<sup>71</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Book of Certitude*, 3d. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 240-241

<sup>72</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Baha'i Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932* (7th ed, 1974) Wilmette, Baha'i Publishing Trust, p.43.

<sup>73</sup> Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah Revealed After the Kitab-i-Aqdas* (1978) Wilmette, Baha'i Publishing Trust, p. 162)

education must take place in the real world of interaction in society. Therefore<sup>74</sup>,

Spirituality [is] a state, an inner condition, that should manifest itself in action, in everyday choices, in profound understanding human nature and in meaningful contributions to community life and society. . . every act [is] a means for the clarification and application of spiritual principles.

The Baha'i writings therefore supply principles which address both the individual and social reality of humanity, each of which is inextricably tied up in the development of the other. Moreover, a process of growth is conceived in which the Baha'i writings illuminate and in turn are illuminated by the experiences of the Baha'i community: "many of the theoretical and practical tasks are left to be accomplished by the growing Baha'i community through a global and constant process of consultation and scholarly inquiry into social reality"<sup>75</sup>

These two processes of transformation - at micro and macro levels - meet in the practice of consultation.

### **Consultation in Theory: Application and Purpose**

The Baha'i writings on consultation emphasize its universal application. Whether in the work of Baha'i administration<sup>76</sup>, commerce<sup>77</sup>, family affairs<sup>78</sup>, or purely personal matters<sup>79</sup>, consultation is regarded as a "lamp of guidance which leadeth the way"<sup>80</sup>. Indeed, Shoghi Effendi called "the spirit of frank and loving consultation" the "keynote" of the Baha'i Faith<sup>81</sup> and the "bedrock of this unique Order"<sup>82</sup>. It is significant to note here that the Baha'i Faith has no clergy, and that the administration of its affairs is entirely conducted by elected councils at the local, national and international level. In this system, authority is thus vested solely in consultative bodies and individuals have no decision-making power.

The purpose of consultation is variously expressed as being the investigation of truth<sup>83</sup>, to achieve "insight into things"<sup>84</sup> and to produce "the tranquillity and felicity of the people"<sup>85</sup>. Thus, although "right

<sup>74</sup> Arbab F, *Lectures on Baha'i-Inspired Curricula* (1994) Florida, Palabra Publications, pp. 49-50

<sup>75</sup> Arbab F, "The Process of Social Transformation" in Eyford G (ed) *The Baha'i Faith and Marxism: Proceedings of a Conference held in January 1986* (1987) Ottawa, Association for Baha'i Studies, p. 11

<sup>76</sup> Shoghi Effendi in Universal House of Justice, op. cit., pp. 101-102

<sup>77</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *ibid*, pp.96-97

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, p.98

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, p.96

<sup>80</sup> Baha'u'llah in *ibid*, p.93

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, p. 101

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, p.103

<sup>83</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *ibid*, p.99

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.97

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96



solution[s]” are a clearly envisaged outcome of consultation<sup>86</sup>, agreement is more important to the process than correctness<sup>87</sup>. Equal to, or perhaps more important than, its problem-solving function, consultation is praised for bestowing “greater awareness”<sup>88</sup>, and producing “good and well-being”<sup>89</sup>; through consultation the “maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest”<sup>90</sup>.

### Procedure of Consultation

As in both Umbreit’s and Bush and Folger’s models of mediation, the successful practice of Baha’i consultation presupposes certain attitudes and beliefs. In particular, the Baha’i writings emphasize that the parties to consultation must make efforts to detach themselves from predetermined outcomes. The act of consultation is itself sacred and sanctified; by preparing for it through prayer and through concentrating their efforts to manifest spiritual qualities, dialogue is facilitated and confirmations from the spiritual realm are promised:

The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrances, humility. . . amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering. . . and servitude. . . Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Baha [glory] shall be vouchsafed to them.<sup>91</sup>

An important aspect of consultation is the emphasis placed on the decision-making power of the collective or group. The group should welcome the views of all, including “the most lowly, untutored and inexperienced”<sup>92</sup>. Individuals are encouraged to express their opinions openly “without being afraid of displeasing or alienating”<sup>93</sup> anyone; differing viewpoints are encouraged, since “[t]hrough the clash of personal opinions. . . the spark of truth is often ignited”<sup>94</sup>. But this frankness must be tempered with “the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation”<sup>95</sup>. Moreover, each should offer her opinion to the group as a gift, and “not insist. . . for stubbornness and persistence in one’s views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden”<sup>96</sup>. Thus the parties in consultation are called upon to focus on the issues, and not on personalities.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 98

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 96

<sup>88</sup> Bahá’u’lláh, in *ibid*, p.93

<sup>89</sup> Idem

<sup>90</sup> Idem

<sup>91</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (1978) Haifa, Baha’i World Centre, p.87

<sup>92</sup> Shoghi Effendi in Universal House of Justice, *op. cit.*, p.102

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p.104

<sup>94</sup> Idem

<sup>95</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in *ibid*. p.95

<sup>96</sup> Idem

In certain kinds of consultation, a decision may be reached by vote, and unanimity is preferred, though not essential. The practice of Baha'i consultation therefore nurtures a new social outlook which emphasizes unity - albeit while preserving a diversity of viewpoints, opinions and approaches.

Consultation likewise affects individuals in a transformative manner. The Baha'i writings acknowledge the numerous complications and difficulties in frank consultation that arise out of the need to:

...''reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand and fellowship, candour and courage on the other.''<sup>97</sup>

In a way, these are the real dilemmas facing every individual involved in conflict. The process of consultation thus requires a constant examination of one's motives and conscious adjustment of one's behaviour in conformity with principle. Whereas most models of mediation envisage the intervention of a third party, consultation assumes that each party is engaged in a personal process of reflection and self-examination in light of the Baha'i writings. Over time, this endeavour will gradually induce a spiritual transformation of character.

Finally, the Baha'i concept of consultation recognizes that a perfect decision may not be a practical possibility in every case<sup>98</sup>, and that the act of consultation is not separable from the context of relationships and society as a whole. Therefore, the form of each consultation, the parties concerned, and the advice of experts are all matters in respect of which "rigidity should be avoided"<sup>99</sup>.

### Consultation in Practice

To understand how consultation might apply to real situations, we take as an example from Columbia an initially small Baha'i community which experienced rapid and sudden growth in numbers in the 1970s. The authors of a study of this development write that reactions to the growth were mixed. Whereas some Baha'is were exhilarated by the sudden growth and wanted to 'push on', others felt that the expansion should be put on hold indefinitely until the new believers had been consolidated. There thus existed conflicting views of which the Baha'i principle of unity required a resolution. Nevertheless, the authors of the study do not indicate a pre-determined 'right' or 'wrong' answer: rather, they indicate that the solution was left to be 'discovered' through consultation:

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<sup>97</sup> Shoghi Effendi in *ibid.*, p.101

<sup>98</sup> 'Abdu'l-Baha, in *ibid.*, p.96

<sup>99</sup> Universal House of Justice, in *ibid.*, p. 109

Regular meetings of consultation were called to explore the diverse elements of a more unified vision of teaching. Every effort was made to prevent these consultations from being reduced to mere expression of differing opinions and tiring analysis of abstractions. The community was constantly reminded that it was viewing the very complex process of the growth of the Faith in an entire country, and that any one of them would only be able to see a few aspects of this process the lens of their own understanding and experience. But limited understanding could not persist in the form of personal opinions once the process had been viewed through different lenses; sooner or later, a new and more complete vision, to be shared by all, had to be formulated and adopted.<sup>100</sup>

Interpreted, this passage suggests that the process of consultation enabled all parties to transcend their individual perspectives; not one of the viewpoints was complete and correct. There is evidence here of effort to move beyond empty debate; of acknowledgment of the importance of bringing different understandings and experiences to shed light on the matter; and of the ultimate goal of achieving a new, more holistic vision. The authors suggest that: “As the believers in Columbia matured in their ability to consult, they began to advance rapidly towards the unity of thought and vision they so ardently desired”<sup>101</sup>.

This narrative of events in Columbia further describes how this process of consultation was continued “in unshakable unity and with a spirit of utmost humility”<sup>102</sup>, always aiming at “the objective analysis of possible courses of action and the evaluation of methods and results, all carried out in light of the Writings of the Faith” (Idem). In this manner the community, although consisting of diverse individuals with differing points of view, was able to reach a workable degree of unity on such matters as the role of the Baha’i ‘teacher’ in the expansion of the Faith<sup>103</sup>, the content of the first message that was to be presented<sup>104</sup>, and the structure and substance of educational programmes designed to deepen the knowledge of the new Baha’is<sup>105</sup>.

Clearly this case-study has not provided analysis the particular ‘moves’ of third-party interveners, nor suggested practical steps to take in every situation. Indeed, the nature of consultation is such that it is adaptable to diverse situations. The detailing of such specifics would tend to establish a set of standard ‘techniques’, which would undermine the inherent flexibility of consultation - as well as, according to Umbreit, to ‘humanistic’

<sup>100</sup> Ruhi Institute, *Learning about Growth* (1991) Colombia, Palabra Publications, p.4

<sup>101</sup> Idem

<sup>102</sup> Ibid: 10

<sup>103</sup> Ibid: 11-12

<sup>104</sup> Ibid: 15-16

<sup>105</sup> Ibid: 20-29

mediation<sup>106</sup>. Nor does the above narrative suggest that the same process would or does take place in the same way in every community. Clearly, cultural differences in and across individuals, institutions and communities necessitate a 'unity in diversity' of approaches to the application of the principles of consultation.

### **Conclusions: Mediating Approaches to Transformation**

This essay has surveyed two representative types of transformative mediation which have received some notice in the mediation community. The first - and by far the best-known - of these is the model discussed and advocated by Bush and Folger in their various publications. Central to their work is the idea that transformation of individuals can take place by developing their capacities for recognition and empowerment, and that mediation provides an excellent opportunity for this. Their work has received criticism, however, for its narrowness on two counts: on the one hand, practitioners argue that their model has limited application and disregards too many legitimate goals and practices in mediation; on the other hand, their political theory has been criticized as unsupported at best and culturally biased at worst. Despite this, we support their central intuition that mediation offers more than mere problem-solving.

Mark Umbreit's model of 'humanistic mediation' is less well-known - or less notorious. His important contribution is recognize that there are non-secular forces at play in communication, and especially in the conflict resolution practices of traditional and indigenous societies. His model therefore acknowledges the fundamental connectedness of all people, and assigns a more spiritual role to mediation practice.

Finally, the Baha'i practice of consultation goes one step further in affirming the spiritual realities affecting conflict resolution. Certainly, consultation may be criticized by some as too vague and insubstantial, unsupported by political or social theory and unsuited to, for example, American society, where faith is viewed with suspicion and ethnic and religious differences are highly politicized.

Nevertheless, the Baha'i framework certainly defines a goal for transformation that affirms the connectedness of all people without disregarding the importance of the individual, and which is less vague than others we have considered. Consultation provides a context and framework for the practical application of spiritual principles, and thus encourages the manifestation of virtuous behaviour by individuals and groups. Moreover, it establishes a process based on principle, is therefore not rigid and is widely applied in the Baha'i world. The fact that the same model *\*is\** used in Baha'i communities in over 200 countries indicates this flexibility and may

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<sup>106</sup> Umbreit op.cit., p.202

give pause to consider what insights may be gained from a deeper investigation into its premises and application.

For mediation to remain a vital and expanding field , it will be necessary to conduct much more inquiry into the various extant models of communication that share with it either conceptual or practical affinities. In particular, mediation has often been thought of as a secular practice, and perhaps this is due to the origins of the modern mediation movement in North America in the 1960s and 1970s. Studies into the conflict resolution behaviour of Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic and other religious groups would surely shed light on mediation practices. Certainly, a dialogue between all these groups and ‘secular’ mediation would be mutually illuminating. We hope that by comparing transformative mediation models with Baha’i consultation we have suggested how such a dialogue might begin.

## In Memoriam: Hugh McKinley<sup>1</sup>

Ismael Velasco  
Tenerife, Spain, Independent Scholar

Upon his thirteenth birthday, Hugh McKinley's mother devised a means to test empirically her knowledge of astrology: she cast a detailed and elaborate chart made up of arcane symbols, crescent moons and star-sign emblems, derived from the single fact of her son's birth in Oxford, England, at precisely 1:55 am Greenwich Meridian time, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February, 1924. He weighed a full eight and a half pounds. A series of epigrammatic prognostications followed, predicting year by year Hugh McKinley's future till his 58<sup>th</sup> birthday, set down concisely in a small red notebook titled in neat script:

*Natal and Progressed Horoscopes.*  
*Hugh McKinley*  
*cast by his mother*  
*DATE: 1935*

Thereafter at year's end, till her own very last, she faithfully inscribed below her divinations an equally brief survey of the most notable among his life's actual happenings. This allowed her - and us - to compare life's vicissitudes to the omens and augurations of the stars.

The portents intimated to Violet McKinley, mother, lifelong companion and co-sharer in the spiritual knighthood of her only son, that there awaited him an eventful and on the whole a trying life, with many episodes of illness, with accidents and financial misfortunes or stress, and two or three catastrophic years, punctuated by fewer years of spiritual abundance, deepening friendships and domestic happiness. While year by year the predictions varied in their accuracy from the startlingly correct to the humorously off course, the anticipated pattern proved itself on the whole accurate, and Hugh McKinley's life was indeed marked by an undertone of hardship, by serious accidents and periodic bouts of ill-health, by troubled relationships and consoling friendships, by financial stringencies and ever burgeoning spirituality. His years of ease, over his seven decades and four, were less than those of challenge, yet he was happy in the evening of his life, with a strong and loving marriage, a home in nature, and a spirit reconciled and peaceful, if ever active, ever struggling, ever visioning new possibilities and new friendships.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Olive McKinley, [The Life of Hugh McKinley](#), Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, *Solas*, 2004, 4:59-71

Be that as it may, it was sometime after September 1923, when Violet was some half way through her pregnancy and David McKinley still engaged in his osteopath's practice, that an occasional visitor to the Oxford Theosophical Society placed in their hands a newly published copy of a book that revolutionised the labours of the Bahá'í community for decades to come: John Esslemont's *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*.<sup>2</sup>

"One night at the Theosophical Society in Oxford, one of the 'friends', as they were then referred to (and I've only ever met one believer in England who knew him) was called Robert somebody. I don't know his name. But Alice Phillips, who was an isolated believer in the late 1940s down in Arundel, knew his name and had met him. He left mother and father a copy of Dr. Esslemont's book *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*." <sup>3</sup>

For the McKinleys, the book was a source of spiritual insomnia: "they sat up in bed all night and read that book from cover to cover." When they turned the last page, the night had gone Dawn breaking, they turned to each other, and exclaimed: "This is it!"<sup>4</sup>

We have rather precise notions regarding the physiological development of the embryo in its different phases, but know next to nothing about the nature of its inner life while in the uterus. In this respect, if life after death is a mysterious subject, life before birth is only marginally less so. What is no longer in doubt after much investigation is that the embryo is highly susceptible to the mother's environmental influences, her state of mind, her moods, in short, the mother's consciousness and experiences. If this be so, then it may not be unreasonable to suggest that the experience of that night, profound, thrilling and fundamentally life-changing, full mid-way or more through her pregnancy, may well have had some impact on the child within her womb whose first, if vicarious encounter with the "spirit of faith" may perhaps be said to have taken place before his consciousness was able to register it.

Nothing is known of the man that so fortuitously changed their lives forever and sealed the future of their child, except his first name, but his modest and potentially inconsequential act would in the fulness of time prove to have been the means of raising two knights of Bahá'u'lláh, Violet and her son Hugh. As so often happens, apparently small acts may have large impacts in seeming disproportion to their genesis. It is not clear what, if any, other contribution "Robert somebody" made to the growth of the Bahá'í community, but by one passing talk and the sharing of one book he changed a nation's destiny.

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<sup>2</sup> The book was published in September of 1923, which allows us to trace this event to the autumn or winter of that year.

<sup>3</sup> Hugh McKinley, op.cit.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Hugh McKinley's path was neither smooth nor inevitable, and perhaps herein lies its luminosity. Most likely the spiritual honorific, Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, an accolade conferred by Shoghi Effendi upon those Bahá'ís who like Hugh McKinley settled across the world as part of the first global plan for the expansion of the Bahá'í Cause,<sup>5</sup> will grow legendary with the rolling of the years. But, in Hugh McKinley's living witness, the glory behind the title lies not in a frozen tableau of beatific vision, nor a tale of morally unambiguous heroism (heroism seldom is), nor yet in an instructive story of triumph over adversity and success over vicissitudes. To outward seeming and to worldly eyes, indeed, the tale of Hugh McKinley was a tale of thwarted dreams, of unrealized potential, and recurrent penury. His old age was not that of a man reminiscing at his ease, but rather a constant, final struggle against illness and poverty; not contemplative rest but one final lap in a long distance race that demanded the impossible.

And yet, the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup> of May, 1992, found Hugh McKinley, a mere seven years before his death, within the precincts of a garden of unusual beauty, face to face with the harvest of his life. Seldom does a person see, in his lifetime, even a glimmer of the true significance of the actions and deeds performed in years and decades past, but to Hugh McKinley, on this occasion, was granted the sight. For anyone receptive to what Rudolf Otto called the "Idea of the Holy"<sup>6</sup> the occasion would be fraught with significance. For a Bahá'í for whom a sense of spirituality was the motivating force of life, the event, in a region four religions coincide in designating as the Holy Land, was positively numinous.<sup>7</sup>

Hugh McKinley stood that day with one hundred and twelve companions watching an illuminated scroll bearing his name and theirs being placed, for centuries to come, in a chamber at the entrance door of the inner sanctuary of the holiest Shrine of the Bahá'í world, guarding the mortal remains of Bahá'u'lláh, Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith - and the One for Whose sake Hugh McKinley had given up his career, his reputation, his worldly prosperity and, little by little, it may be considered, his life. The scroll was a Roll of Honour, registering for posterity the names of all the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh. This spiritual knighthood was intended "to signify their acts of daring and devotion as teachers of the Faith",<sup>8</sup> and bear witness that by their exploits they had "realized the actual establishment of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh as a world religion."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> A campaign known in Bahá'í literature as the Ten Year Plan (1953-1963)

<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*. Trans. John W. Harvey. London: Oxford University Press, 1948.

<sup>7</sup> An idea of the intensity of this innate spirituality may be gathered from a telling event in his youth, long, long before the day of his harvesting arrived. Having had a terrible motorcycle accident provoking a grave head injury that threw him into a coma with little hope of recovery, he abruptly came back to consciousness under his mother's prayers after many days in a vegetative state, pronouncing a single sentence as if from another realm drawn: "alláh'u'abhá".

<sup>8</sup> The Universal House of Justice, May 29, 1992, *Centenary Tribute to Baha'u'llah*, p. 3

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



The meaning of the scroll, the significance of the Bahá'í knighthood bestowed upon him, Hugh McKinley heard expounded in an ardent supplication addressed on that day by the Universal House of Justice, the body entrusted with the guidance and direction of the world Bahá'í community, to Bahá'u'lláh:

"This is both a symbol and a promise -- a symbol registering the reality of a clear response, at a critical time, to the duty laid upon us by the Lord of Hosts to diffuse His teachings among all peoples; a promise that the commitment so dazzlingly displayed by these intrepid pioneers will be reaffirmed by generations of their successors, ensuring that the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, "shining in all its power and glory, will have suffused and enveloped the entire planet."

"This is also a mark of recognition of the power of the Hand of Omnipotence to turn gnats into eagles. His bounties embolden us. Broken-winged birds are we; yet, with His assurances resounding in our souls, we soar to ever greater heights in His service. "I am the royal Falcon on the arm of the Almighty!" He declares, benevolently adding: "I unfold the drooping wings of every broken bird and start it on its flight."<sup>10</sup>

In these words - which Hugh McKinley heard read out before the assembled knights of Bahá'u'lláh on that solemn anniversary - is an intimation that, the reality of their heroic response notwithstanding, the birds that journeyed into victory had injured wings, and the eagle flights were flown by individuals who nevertheless partook of the quality of the gnat.

It should come as no surprise then, that to discern the implausible flight path implied in these assertions of irreconcilable qualities (gnathood/eaglehood) calls for an unusual point of view. Thus the mighty title, Knight of Bahá'u'lláh - which, were all else forgotten, would remain - was won in Cyprus by Hugh McKinley in the course of what was probably the hardest and apparently least fruitful period of his life. In attracting souls to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh Hugh McKinley had been more successful in Britain than he would ever be in Cyprus. In building a vibrant Bahá'í community life the interpersonal barriers proved more intractable in Cyprus than was the case before or subsequently. In artistic self-expression, no period was less productive than this one. In his personal life, no time was more challenging than the time of his investiture as Knight of Bahá'u'lláh. At the end of his pioneering services in Cyprus, Hugh McKinley and the handful of fellow-Knights in that isle, had indeed sown the seed of a future national community, but at the moment of departure, after years of effort, the seeds left behind altogether uncertain, and not one soul had been moved to join the Bahá'í community.<sup>11</sup> By the same token, it is safe to say that no other

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 240

<sup>11</sup> The first Cypriot believers declared not long after in a letter to Hugh in Greece, through whose efforts, together with his mother, they had been attracted to the Faith.

time demanded such heroism, evoked such self-sacrifice, required such inner fortitude, or called for such self-abnegation in Hugh McKinley as his time in Cyprus.

The words of the House of Justice, then, present us not with a sweet simile but a challenging and even painful paradox, of broken-winged birds setting out to imitate the falcon's aerial prowess, or mosquitoes embarking on seemingly fatuous, even self-destructive odysseys to emulate the eagle. To grasp the liberating, the fulfilling, the ever-cherished aspects of this journey, one must be prepared to see that above and beyond material circumstances or outward markers of success, at the heart of this paradox, was a spiritual process; an expression of communion, a search for faithfulness to an experience of truth that made the journey more than bearable - worth it. One must know, else guess the experience captured in poetic language by Bahá'u'lláh as the unpredicted madness of a taste, which Hugh McKinley – those that knew him will agree – tasted early on:

“By My life, O friend, wert thou to taste of these fruits... yearning would seize the reins of patience and reserve from out thy hand, and make thy soul to shake with the flashing light”<sup>12</sup>

Thus did yearning take over his life, that without reserve, he threw himself into seemingly quixotic ventures, abandoning a promising career in opera, to live an intranquil, trying life in frequently alien environments, struggling with poverty, illness, separation, loss, and cultural isolation, for the sake of a social vision, and spiritual calling, that energised and galvanised him and brought him more than contentment: joy.

Indeed, if a keynote could be discerned in Hugh McKinley's life, it is the demonstration that there is more to happiness than happy circumstances (for Hugh McKinley was an essentially happy person, albeit schooled in grief and loss), that one's inner world can well exceed one's outward one, and that to understand Hugh McKinley one must shake the inertia of superficial judgements and criteria and touch the depths that motivated him and made him be and become who he was and who he is.

And if, as Ernest Becker held, the greatest form of heroism is the ability to contain the maximum paradox, then Hugh McKinley was heroic in the most palpable manner. This was the man whose voice was deemed to call for cultivation and consecration to the muse by the great Dino Borgioli and who studied under him in 1952 while singers waited a decade before being allowed to leave their countries and be trained by him – working as a farm labourer until he began his musical apprenticeship.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p.4

<sup>13</sup> Borgioli, (1891 – 1960) was launched in La Scala by Toscanini himself, becoming one of opera's best-loved tenors in the 1930's, and in the 1950's one of the world's foremost opera teachers. The Australian soprano June Bronhill, OBE, changed her surname from Gough to Bronhill after the residents of the eponymous

The beginnings of a professional and promising career in opera were not won without sacrifice, and the same year, in a positive and confident tone, Violet McKinley, Hugh's mother, wrote in her record of the year: "our money nearly gone, we must earn some somehow".<sup>14</sup> This was the man who, a complete autodidact with an interrupted and abandoned schooling, became nonetheless the cultured critic who corresponded with Erich Fromm and led him to review his treatment of religion; interviewed Arnold Toynbee, last great exponent of cyclical history; became a lasting friend of his contemporary and fellow poet (a world authority on Blake) Kathleen Raine, and likewise built most lasting ties with the famed poets Helen Shaw of New Zealand and the American May Sarton, best known perhaps for her novels. He would converse with varying ease in English, Greek, Persian, and French, yet never reached secondary school.

This was the man in whom the lore of ancient Celts and ancient Greeks and Romans combined with the exquisite appreciation of nature and its colours and a repertoire of memorised French, Italian and German arias that played in his mind and occasionally found outlet in his sonorous bass. This was also the man who, in the end, physically frail and past his seventies, was left to earn the necessities of life each day anew not by his pen or by his art or by his calling, but selling cleaning materials door to door to make ends meet, following a professional path that took him from farm labouring to book-keeping, to gardening, to selling double-glazing and insurance and eventually domestic products to neighbours and acquaintances on a commission-only basis.

Such contrasting journeys were the product of circumstance, but primarily of choice, of decisions made for love, sometimes swiftly, never lightly, and always hard to understand from the perspective of the perennial human search, and even need, for material stability and comfort.

"How well is it said: Live free of love, for its very peace is anguish; its beginning is pain, its end is death."<sup>15</sup>

We stand, then, not before a creature of air but before a man, of flesh and bone and blood and longing who, when I knew him in the evening of his life, just into his seventies, glinted and smiled at once mischievously and miraculously amidst the difficulties that beset him and that he wore so lightly, as he proclaimed to a touched twenty year old passer-by who had approached the Bahá'í stall that we were manning together in the paved indifference of Felixtowe:

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town raised a considerable sum of money to enable her to leave Australia to study under Borgioli. She was his pupil in the same year as Hugh McKinley, and may give an indication of what could have been - Hugh's potential professional trajectory.

<sup>14</sup> Violette McKinley, "Astrological Diary of Hugh McKinley, with additional notes by Hugh and by Deborah McKinley" (henceforth referred to as *Astrological Diary*), entry for 28 years old.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Bahá'ulláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p.41

“I am a revolutionary!”

And proffered to him, urgently yet gracefully, not the *Socialist Worker*, but an invitation to spiritual transformation and an end to discordant conflict.

The little note which, in her 90<sup>th</sup> year, the great Kathleen Raine wrote upon hearing of Hugh McKinley’s passing captures, perhaps best of all, the meaning of Hugh McKinley’s life, and his relevance:

“I don’t know how many years ago I first knew (by letter) Hugh who at that time was living on his Greek Island with his cats and writing for a little paper... all these years he has been a friend I have valued as one of the loveliest human beings I have known – ‘one of the pure in heart’ who ‘sees God’”.<sup>16</sup>

One is reminded of the words by Blake which that same poet wished could be said of her after her death:

“That in time of trouble, I kept the divine vision”.

These ten words are, to me, the most transparent evocation of Hugh McKinley’s life.

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<sup>16</sup> Kathleen Raine to Deborah McKinley, February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1999, in Hugh McKinley archives.

## **Bushido (Chivalry) and the Traditional Japanese Moral Education**

Nozomu Sonda  
Yamaguchi, Independent Scholar

### **Abstract**

"Bushido" was written in 1900, in response to questions often asked by his Western wife and colleagues. In this work he eloquently explains the very heart of traditional Japanese moral education inculcated to samurais and their families, referring to some major "virtues" of Japanese. Incidentally, the late Hand of the Cause of God Rúhiyih Khanum lavished her praise on Japanese listing many wonderful qualities and virtues she observed on her visit to the country back in the 1970's. This study will explore the Japanese virtues explained by Nitobe in contrast and comparison with the Baha'i perspective on moral education.

### **Introduction**

“Chivalry is a flower no less indigenous to the soil of Japan than its emblem, the cherry blossom.”

In 2003 a Hollywood movie *The Last Samurai* was released and became a big hit. It featured a superstar like Tom Cruise and also introduced a Japanese star Ken Watanabe to the international film scene, attracting a great deal of attention from media. However, the most salient feature of the movie was actually the spirit and thought that underlay it, namely, Bushido.

The timing of the appearance of such a movie seemed to be no coincidence to the present author. It was a time when Japanese people were enjoying the sentiment of traditional thought and spirit, recollecting the heroic times of the end of Edo Era when young samurais fought fearlessly for the sake of the country, preservation of old values and acceptance of new values. The time was apparently contrasted with the contemporary age when there are so many political scandals, deception, corruption and cowardice. The author recalls one commercial where a famous samurai (Sakamoto Ryoma) from the same period “appears” and makes a bitter comment on the current situation in Japanese society, implying that he would do things in a different way (and thus appealing to the company's service being advertised).. Around at the same time the author met a Japanese gentleman, who had just retired and said that he just started reading “Bushido,” thinking about what it meant and how he could make use of it. There was a need and craving for the revival of such traditional values and thoughts; Bushido seemed to be an epitome of this phenomenon.

In brief, as Captain Algren (Tom Cruise) learns in *The Last Samurai*, Bushido is not just a code of ethics for samurai warriors but rather a moral system and even a way of life for people in general, which influenced Japanese for centuries. It inculcates the importance of cultivating and practicing “virtues.”

Speaking of “virtues,” the author makes another recollection when the late Hand of Cause of God Ruhiyyih Khanum made a visit to Japan in 1978 and made a comment that of all the peoples she had encountered the Japanese manifest the most of the virtues which Baha’u’llah exhorts us to acquire. As a member of the same ethnic group, the author feels a great honor to receive such a comment but at the same time regards it as a compliment for the purpose of encouraging the Japanese people to arise and serve the Cause of Baha’u’llah. Other peoples in the rest of the world must surely manifest as many virtues as the Japanese do, if not less. Having said this, there must be still something more or less special in the Japanese people that compelled her to make such a comment.

It is this point that motivated the present author to explore Bushido as a moral system and a source of Japanese virtues and to compare and contrast it with teachings of our beloved Faith. In this study, the background of Bushido will be first explained and then virtues which Bushido inculcates will be examined. Then we education and training based on Bushido will be described, including those of women. Finally, Bushido will be compared and contrasted with ideals, goals and objectives of the Baha’i Faith and implications to moral education in contemporary Japan will be discussed. .

### **What is Bushido?**

Bushido was spontaneously developed over hundreds of years as a way of life for samurais. Thus we cannot categorically determine its origin. But we can roughly say that its origin somewhat coincides with the Kamakura Era (12th century), which was the beginning of the feudal system which was obviously the bedrock of Japanese swordsmanship. In order to further explore the origin, sources and background of Bushido, we will mainly rely on the masterpiece written by Inazo Nitobe, a Christian educationalist from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

### **Inazo Nitobe**

Nitobe was born in Morioka, Iwate in 1862. In his youth, he studied at Tokyo Foreign Language College and Sapporo Agricultural College and later at Johns Hopkins University in the U.S. and the University of Bonn in Germany. In 1891, he married Mary Elkinton, a fellow Quaker Church member, when he was 29 years old. After returning to Japan, he took up professorship at Sapporo Agricultural College. Then he published *Bushido* in 1900, later teaching at various major universities in Japan and also

serving as Vice-Secretary General of the League of Nations and member of the House of Lords. In 1933 when he was attending the 5th Pacific Conference in Vancouver, Canada, he fell ill and passed away.

In his late teens, Nitobe was baptized as a Christian; then he determined to become “a bridge over the Pacific Ocean” which connects Japan and the West. In his mid-20’s he attended Quaker church while studying at Johns Hopkins University. There he met his future wife Mary.

Nitobe made great contributions in the educational field during the Meiji and Taisho Eras. He was also a champion in the international field while working for the League of Nations and an agency which was to later become UNESCO. In contrast, Japan was heading towards a military empire; the militia did not like such “a global-minded” person s Nitobe those days. His achievements were only recently acknowledged, symbolized by the fact that his iconography appeared in the new 5,000-yen bills.

### **The Book *Bushido***

His book *Bushido* was first published in English, whose first Japanese edition was prepared by Sakurai. Later Tadao Yanaibara revised the translation. Yanaibara was actually one of Nitobe’s students when the latter was principal of Daiichi High School in Tokyo. He was also a disciple of Kanzo Uchimura’s. Uchimura was in turn a classmate of Nitobe when both were students at Sapporo Agricultural College. Both signed “the covenant of those who believe in Jesus” introduced by W. Clark of the same college. These three, Nitobe, Uchimura and Yanaibara, are leaders of thought in the early 1900’s in Japan who had the Christian background.

The book was written essentially in response to countless questions about Japanese culture and society posed by his Western wife and colleagues. One time a Westerner commented, “Do you mean to say that you have no religious instruction in your schools? No religion! How do you impart moral education?”<sup>1</sup> At that time, Nitobe could give no answer, but later he gave much thought and concluded that all basic moral notions he had received came from *Bushido*. Thus he came to write this book.

### **Sources of *Bushido***

#### **Buddhism**

One of the main sources of bushido is Buddhism. Buddhism was introduced to Japan from India and via China and Korea. It taught a sense of calm trust in fate, a quiet submission to the inevitable, stoic composure in sight of danger or calamity and disdain of life and friendliness with death. One of its

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<sup>1</sup> Nitobe, Inazo: *Bushido*, Tuttle Publishing, Tokyo, 2001. Preface, xi.

schools, Zen, had an especial impact on Bushido. According to Lafcadio Hearn<sup>2</sup>, Zen can be defined as that “which represents human effort to reach through meditation zones of thought beyond the range of verbal expression”<sup>3</sup>

### **Shinto**

Another source was Shinto, which is a Japanese indigenous religion. It stressed patriotism, loyalty, and obedience, teaching loyalty to the sovereign, reverence for ancestors and filial piety. Unlike the Christian thought, there is a lack of the dogma of “original sin.” In other words, Shinto teaches that a human heart is originally pure and good like a god and that it is a sanctified place where a god’s words are uttered. Thus the human heart must be revered. A mirror which is placed in the shrine’s penetralia symbolizes a human heart, which is believed to reflect the very image of Deity when calm and serene.

### **Confucianism**

Yet another source is Confucianism which is a prolific source of ethics. It taught five moral relations between “master and servant,” “father and son,” “husband and wife,” “older and younger brother,” and “friend and friend.” It comprised politico-ethical precepts in an aristocratic and conservative tone. The writings of Confucius and Mencius were the principal textbooks for youths and the highest authority for the old. It also taught one to avoid being a book-smelling sot, as shown in a saying “To know and to act are one and the same” and words from the Bible “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”

### **Virtues of Bushido**

Confucius says, “Let but a prince cultivate virtue, people will flock to him; with people will come to him lands; lands will bring forth for him wealth; wealth will give him the benefit of right uses. Virtue is the root, and wealth an outcome”<sup>4</sup> Thus, virtue is the foundation of all things. In this section, we will analyze some virtues extolled and emphasized in bushido; namely, rectitude/justice, courage, benevolence, politeness, veracity/sincerity, honor, loyalty, and self-control.

### **Rectitude/justice**

Rectitude is the most severe lesson and it “is the power of deciding upon a certain course of conduct in accordance with reason, without wavering;--to

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<sup>2</sup> Lafcadio Hearn is a Greek writer of English, who moved to Japan in 1889, married to a Japanese woman and died in Japan in 1904.

<sup>3</sup> Lafcadio Hearn. *Exotics and Retrospectives*. Tokyo: ICG Muse Publications, 2001 p. 84.

<sup>4</sup> Nitobe, *Bushido*, 36-37.



die when it is right to die, to strike when to strike is right”<sup>5</sup> Nitobe explains the significance of rectitude or sense of justice while contrasting it with the Christian concept of love: “...though love should be the only motive, lacking that, there must be some other authority to enforce filial piety; and they formulated this authority in Giri”<sup>6</sup> He also warns, “Starting as Right Reason, Giri has...often stooped to casuistry. It has even degenerated into cowardly fear of censure”<sup>7</sup>. Thus for Nitobe, love is the highest form of virtue, without which one’s action can only be motivated by sense of justice, which is understandable judging from his Christian background. He then explains the role of courage which helps one to manifest rectitude in its highest potential: “It would have been easily turned into a nest of cowardice, if Bushido had not a keen and correct sense of courage, the spirit of daring and bearing”<sup>8</sup>

### **Courage: Spirit of Daring**

Nitobe explains that “Courage was scarcely deemed worthy to be counted among virtues, unless it was exercised in the cause of Righteousness”<sup>9</sup> pointing out the complementary functions of justice and courage. . He also states that “...valour and honour alike required that we should own as enemies in war only such as prove worthy of being friends in peace” and “When valour attains this height, it becomes akin to Benevolence”<sup>10</sup>, illustrating which point with the examples of Uesugi Kenshin and Takeda Shingen or Brutus and Antonius/Octavius. As it is said, “We Romans do not fight with gold, but with iron,” fight is not for greed for money but for a great cause, justice. Thus enemies are not what are to be hated but to be fought with respect. In this sense, they can become one’s true friends, as Nietzsche says, “You are to be proud of your enemy; then the success of your enemy is your success also.” During the samurai days, “Valour, Fortitude, Bravery, Fearlessness, Courage” were among the most popular qualities for the youths, giving great impact on character formation of the young.

### **Benevolence: The Feeling of Distress**

Benevolence was considered “a princely virtue” as shown in the following words: “Love, magnanimity, affection for others, sympathy and pity, were ever recognized to be supreme virtues, the highest of all the attributes of the human soul”<sup>11</sup> This virtue posed a great contrast with justice and courage because “...benevolence was a tender virtue and mother-like. If upright Rectitude and stern Justice were peculiarly masculine, Mercy had the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid 23.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid 26

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 27

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 28

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 29

<sup>10</sup> Ibid 35

<sup>11</sup> Ibid 36

gentleness and the persuasiveness of a feminine nature”<sup>12</sup>. The balance of these two virtues was very important to make the character whole. Thus, verse writing was encouraged to cultivate more subtle sentiments of soul.

### Politeness

“Modesty and complaisance, actuated by respect for others’ feelings, are at the root of politeness”<sup>13</sup>. Politeness is yet another typical Japanese virtue; however, Nitobe makes sure that it is not a superficial display of adulation but a sincere expression of care and concern for others: “Politeness is a poor virtue, if it is actuated only by a fear of offending good taste, whereas it should be the outward manifestation of a sympathetic regard for the feelings of others. It also implies a due regard for the fitness of things, therefore due respect to social positions”<sup>14</sup>. He also gives an excellent explanation for the seemingly different practice of gift-giving between the Japanese and Western customs. That is, whereas Westerners present their gifts as wonderful and excellent items, Japanese give theirs saying they are poor and useless ones. Nitobe expounds that these two contrasting practices actually convey the same feeling and thought; they are just two ways of saying the same thing. In other words, Westerners focus on the great merit which their guest deserves; thus, they would say, “This is a nice gift: if it were not nice I would not dare give it to you; for it will be an insult to give you anything but what is nice.” On the other hand, Japanese would focus on the inadequacy of the gift they are presenting because the guest is just too great and wonderful for any gift we might come up with: “You are a nice person, and no gift is nice enough for you. You will not accept anything I can lay at your feet except as a token of my good will; so accept this, not for its intrinsic value, but as a token...”<sup>15</sup>. Both expressions stem from the feelings of respect for the guest; they manifest the same spirit of politeness. Only the cultural expressions differ.

### Veracity and Sincerity

What makes the above virtue of politeness true and real, is sincerity. Nitobe warns, “Without veracity and sincerity, politeness is a farce and a show”<sup>16</sup>. This is reinforced by Date Masamune saying, “Propriety carried beyond right bounds becomes a lie” and Confucius saying, “Sincerity is the end and the beginning of all things; without Sincerity there would be nothing.” Words and deeds clothed with sincerity capture and move human hearts. This spirit is alive in modern Japanese society especially in the service industry. Stores that provide sincere service attract customers and thus prosper.

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<sup>12</sup> Nitobe, *Bushido*, p.41

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.50

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.59

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.61

## Honor

The sense of honor implies “a vivid consciousness of personal dignity and worth...” and it is “the immortal part of one’s self, what remains being bestial”<sup>17</sup> (p.72, *Bushido*). The sense of shame was one of the earliest to be cherished in juvenile education. The following expressions were often used (and in fact are still used today) to appeal to the minds and hearts of the youths for their behavioral rectification: “You will be laughed at,” “It will disgrace you,” and “Are you not ashamed?” Samurais, in defense of this honor (or avoiding shame), would even go so far as to take their own lives (i.e., seppuku, disembowelment). Even in today’s society, leaders often resign from their posts if there are any disgraceful happenings in their jurisdiction. Some even commit suicide. In today’s world, such acts are not necessarily constructive. They may save their honor for the time being but not their companies and their employees. It may be even more honorable to remain in their posts and carry out necessary duties.

## Loyalty

Homage and fealty to a superior is the distinctive feature of feudal morality. Personal fidelity is a moral cohesion existing among all sorts and conditions of men. “...it is only in the code of chivalrous honour that loyalty assumes paramount importance”<sup>18</sup> (p.82, *Bushido*) and “Life being regarded as the means whereby to serve his master, and its ideal being set upon honour, the whole education and training of a samurai were conducted accordingly”<sup>19</sup> (p.93, *Bushido*).

## Self-Control

Showing “no sign of joy or anger” was considered a sign of a great character. Thus a samurai would show no emotion. This is also apparent in average family life today. A father would not hug his son because he considers it harmful to dignity and a husband would not kiss his wife in public. On the other hand, there is this “strange” phenomenon of “a Japanese smile.” That is, when in most severe trials, there is a tendency for Japanese to form a smile. The point in all these behaviors is not to show true emotion. Thus, self-control tends to exceed moderation. Self-control is in itself a wonderful quality. However, excess of this practice might result in confusion and frustration; it is not conducive to more humane interaction with others. Children also need to express themselves more freely in order to grow and develop in healthy manners.

## Education and Training of a Samurai

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<sup>17</sup> Nitobe, *Bushido*, p.72

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.82

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.93

The foremost point in samurai educations was to build up character, leaving other subtler faculties of prudence, intelligence and dialectics in minor position. This point is fully expounded in the earlier sections of this paper. Having said this, philosophy and literature constitute the mainstay of intellectual training. Literature was pursued as a pastime and philosophy as a practical aid in the formation of character, if not for the exposition of some military or political problem. Other courses of training included fencing, archery, jijutsu/yawara<sup>20</sup>, horsemanship, the use of spear, tactics, calligraphy, ethics, literature, and history.

Moreover, "The mental discipline which would nowadays be chiefly aided by the study of mathematics, was supplied by literary exegesis and deontological discussions"<sup>21</sup> Francis Bacon listed three services of studies: delight, ornament, and ability. Bushido emphasized the ability purpose where the use of studies was in judgment and the disposition of business because "Learning without thought is labour lost; thought without learning is perilous."

Since the most important goal of samurai education was character building, his teacher's duty was basically spiritual: "When character and not intelligence, when the soul and not the head, is chosen by a teacher for the material to work upon and to develop, his [teacher's] vocation partakes of a sacred character"<sup>22</sup>. In this respect, Nitobe makes a quite bitter and yet exact point, criticizing as follows:

The present system of paying for every sort of service was not in vogue among the adherents of Bushido. It believed in a service which can be rendered only without money and without price. Spiritual service, be it of priest or teacher, was not to be repaid in gold or silver, not because it was valueless but because it was invaluable."<sup>23</sup>

He believes that "the best service done in education,--namely, in soul development (and this includes the services of a pastor), is not definite, tangible, or measurable" and that "Being immeasurable, money, the ostensible measure of value, is of inadequate use"<sup>24</sup> This is a profound statement, giving much insight to today's educational world. In today's society, the teaching profession is often taken up by those who "had no where else to go" and teachers are often poorly paid. Thus, teachers are often poorly trained and less motivated. School teachers have the most difficult times these days as classrooms break down and children

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<sup>20</sup> Jijutsu meaning "gentle/yielding/compliant art") is a Japanese martial art whose central ethos is to yield to the force provided by an opponent's attack in order to apply counter techniques from the resultant ensuing situation see Wikipedia, "[Jujitsu](#)",

<sup>21</sup> Nitobe, *Bushido*, p.99

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p.100

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p.101

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*

misbehave. Teachers are at loss and often do not know what to do with the situation.

On the other hand, there is still that feeling of sacredness in the teaching profession. There is sense of respect. Students do look up to teachers to a certain degree. They do trust teachers. In turn there are teachers who are devoted to their profession and sacrifice themselves for the sake of students' growth and development. The difference between now and then is that there is much lack of sacredness in the profession. Teaching is taken up for more utilitarian purposes. Schools focus mostly on intellectual achievement. Teachers are thus regarded and treated as mere workers in the factory producing high-mark scores of students.

For Nitobe, teachers "were grave personifications of high spirits undaunted by adversity" and "an embodiment of what was considered as an end of all learning, and were thus a living example of that discipline of disciplines, self-control, which was universally required of samurai"<sup>25</sup>. In other words, teachers were supposed to be moral leaders for their students. Because they were relatively free from monetary care, "Bushido itself could long remain free from a thousand and one evils of which money is the root"<sup>26</sup>.

### **The Training and Position of Women**

Since Bushido was basically intended for males, its training was masculine and the virtues extolled therein were also more or less masculine. It is quite interesting and helpful that Nitobe talks about education of women in relation to Bushido. The Bushido ideal of womanhood was pre-eminently domestic, though not confined to the so-called traditional Western view of female domain of activity: kitchen, church and children. Women in the samurai family were also taught to be Amazonian, that is, to make domestic usage of Bushido for child education and to protect their family from enemies. Women thus took up naginata (wooden swords) and learned to fight. At the same time, in order to purify their minds and hearts, women appreciated music and dance.

Women were also taught self-denial from childhood and learned to sacrifice themselves for their fathers, husbands, and children. This became the keynote of their domesticity. To them, service meant "to serve something higher than self." Just as their husbands served their lords, women served the needs of their fathers, husbands and children.

To samurais and their wives, marriage meant unity of man and woman; thus they would not insult or degrade each other. In this regard, Nitobe explain why Japanese husbands introduce their wives as lowly beings and never

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<sup>25</sup> Nitobe, *Bushido*, p.102

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p.99

praise them. He says that in Japan self-praise is considered poor taste and thus they do not praise their wives in public because they consider them as the same as themselves. Today, the concept of sexual equality is viewed differently in Japan in contrast with that of the West. What Western women might see as sexual inequality or even abuse is not necessarily felt as such by Japanese women themselves. They might even feel perfectly equal. It may be explained by the same one as posed by Nitobe.

### **Bushido and the Baha'i Faith**

In comparing and contrasting Bushido and the Baha'i Faith, there are great similarities and distinct differences. In terms of the former, the strong emphasis on spiritual virtues, even over intellectual capacities and skills, is a common foundation. In terms of the latter, these virtues of Bushido are clearly confined to the Japanese culture and especially in the context of samurai swordsmanship whereas the Baha'i virtues are more universal and global, encompassing both women and men, young and old and peoples of all national and cultural backgrounds.

### **Acquiring virtues**

One definite common factor to both Bushido and the Baha'i Faith is acquisition of virtues. In fact, acquiring virtues has always been the most important aspect of all religions. In the Koran, there are 99 names (or divine virtues) of God mentioned. Likewise, in the Baha'i Writings, there are numerous divine virtues and qualities mentioned throughout its Writings. A Baha'i virtue educator Linda Popov easily mentions more than 50 virtues for children and families to develop in her books whereas in fact she has identified a few hundred virtues in the process. The following are among such virtues mentioned in the Baha'i Faith:

Assertiveness, care, cleanliness, compassion, confidence, consideration, consultation, courage, courtesy, creativity, detachment, eloquence, enthusiasm, excellence, faithfulness, flexibility, forgiveness, friendliness, generosity, gentleness, helpfulness, honesty, honor, humility, idealism, joyfulness, justice, kindness, knowledge, loftiness, love, loyalty, mercy, might, moderation, modesty, obedience, orderliness, patience, peacefulness, prayerfulness, purposefulness, question, reliability, respect, responsibility, reverence, search, self-discipline, service, steadfastness, tact, thankfulness, tolerance, trust, trustworthiness, truthfulness, unity, utterance, will, wisdom,

### **Justice**

Baha'u'llah says:

O SON OF SPIRIT! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice..... By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not

through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. .... Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness.<sup>27</sup>

Justice is definitely one of the most important virtues in the Baha'i teachings. With its aid one will see things as they are, not influenced by others' opinions. But the balance of weighing things comes from God Himself, as Baha'u'llah explains, "The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice, is for man to free himself from idle fancy and imitation, discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye."<sup>28</sup> In Bushido, the cause of justice is done in relation to loyalty to the lord whereas in the Baha'i Faith it is in relation to God Himself.

### Courage

Just as explained under "Justice," the virtue of "courage" is also manifested in relation to God's teachings. Baha'u'llah says, "The source of courage and power is the promotion of the Word of God, and steadfastness in His Love"<sup>29</sup> In Bushido, justice and courage are in complementary relations, which is also confirmed in the Baha'i Faith; however, the most distinctive difference is that both virtues are directly founded upon Word of God and His teachings.

### Benevolence

Just as love and affection are highly valued in Bushido, so are they in the Baha'i teachings. The Baha'i Faith emphasizes, once again the foundation of love coming from God:

The essence of love is for man to turn his heart to the Beloved One, and sever himself from all else but Him, and desire naught save that which is the desire of his Lord.<sup>30</sup>

The essence of charity is for the servant to recount the blessings of his Lord, and to render thanks unto Him at all times and under all conditions.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, the following virtues of Bushido are equally emphasized and extolled in the Baha'i Writings:

<sup>27</sup> Baha'u'llah: *Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah*. Trans. and arranged by Shoghi Effendi. Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1982. Arabic Hidden Word, No. 3

<sup>28</sup> Baha'u'llah, *Tablets of Baha'u'llah Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas*. Comp. The Research Department of the Universal House of Justice and trans. by Habib Taherzadeh with the assistance of a Committee Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1978, Words of Wisdom, 157.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Ibid p. 156

<sup>31</sup> Ibid p.157

### Politeness

O people of God! I admonish you to observe courtesy, for above all else it is the prince of virtues. Well is it with him who is illumined with the light of courtesy and is attired with the vesture of uprightness. Whoso is endued with courtesy hath indeed attained a sublime station. It is hoped that this Wronged One and everyone else may be enabled to acquire it, hold fast unto it, observe it, and fix our gaze upon it.<sup>32</sup>

### Sincerity

In these days truthfulness and sincerity are sorely afflicted in the clutches of falsehood, and justice is tormented by the scourge of injustice. The smoke of corruption hath enveloped the whole world in such wise that naught can be seen in any direction save regiments of soldiers and nothing is heard from any land but the clashing of swords. We beseech God, the True One, to strengthen the wielders of His power in that which will rehabilitate the world and bring tranquility to the nations.<sup>33</sup>

### Honor

The source of all glory is acceptance of whatsoever the Lord hath bestowed, and contentment with that which God hath ordained<sup>34</sup>.

..... man's glory lieth in his knowledge, his upright conduct, his praiseworthy character, his wisdom, and not in his nationality or rank. O people of the earth! Appreciate the value of this heavenly word. Indeed it may be likened unto a ship for the ocean of knowledge and a shining luminary for the realm of perception.<sup>35</sup>

### Feminine Virtues

Although Bushido influenced and trained all people including women and civilians, it was essentially designed for male warriors who were ready to fight in the battle field. In contrast, Abdu'l-Baha states that humankind will acquire more feminine qualities in this new age:

The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is

<sup>32</sup> Baha'u'llah, *Tablets*, Tablet of the World, p.88

<sup>33</sup> Baha'u'llah, *Tablets*, Tarazat, p.39

<sup>34</sup> Baha'u'llah, *Tablets*, Words of Wisdom, p.155

<sup>35</sup> Baha'u'llah, *Tablets*, Words of Paradise, p.68



already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals, or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced<sup>36</sup>.

What is more important here is that Abdu'l-Baha talks about the balance of masculine and feminine qualities to be manifested in the civilization. In the Baha'i Faith, such qualities as utterance, eloquence, assertiveness and consultative attitude are also emphasized; these are relatively lacking in Bushido. Thus, humankind at large is expected to acquire more virtues in a harmonious manner. In other words, we need to be more "round" in virtues.

### Universality of Virtues

Another major difficulty of Bushido, especially in contemporary society, is that its values are limited to the Japanese culture and in military context. If we simply talk about cultural values and norms, conflicts are inevitable. One culture says silence is gold and another says eloquence is gold. How do we reconcile the difference? After all, what we need most in this global age is the common foundation of values from which to work together in peace and harmony. The Baha'i Faith presents the very foundation we need; it is the new value system from God intended for this modern age. Although the Baha'i Faith emphasizes preservation and respect for cultural and individual diversity, it is so in the context of essential unity.

This "unity in diversity" is the ultimate goal of the Baha'i Faith. Some people worry that this idea of "unification" might lead to extinction of freedom and self-expression. On the contrary, the Baha'i Faith affirms that there will still be room for an infinite number of individual, local and national differences even they are all based on the common foundation. No, it is the very lack of common foundation that will eventually dissipate and destroy the beauty and greatness of diversity as its signs are apparent in today's chaotic society. The virtues extolled in the Baha'i faith are universal and applicable to all peoples.

### Sources of Virtues

According to the Baha'i teachings, what determines right and wrong is the teachings of God. In contrast, according to Bushido, the balance of right and wrong comes from the lord samurais serve though the very foundation of values is based on the teachings of Buddhism, Shinto and Confucianism.

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<sup>36</sup> Abdu'l-Baha, cited John Esselmont, *Baha'u'llah and New Era* by, Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1980. p.149 Originally in *Star of the West*, viii, No. 3, p. 4 [from report of remarks made aboard the S.S. Cedric on arrival in New York].

Nevertheless, the values are not necessarily clear-cut in Bushido. As depicted in *The Last Samurai*, the conflict was essentially in loyalty to the emperor or the merits of the Western civilization, not necessarily in the values and ideas themselves.

Thus, according to the Baha'i Faith, the source of all virtues is God. In fact, Baha'u'llah states that when God created humanity He bestowed divine virtues potentially into their souls:

O SON OF MAN! I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, the Biblical expression that God has created man in His image means that God has infused divine qualities into our souls potentially so that in accordance with our own volition and effort we may develop and cultivate these qualities. That is our duty. Abdu'l-Baha also confirms that our purpose of life is to acquire virtues<sup>38</sup>

In comparing and contrasting Bushido and the Baha'i Faith, there are great similarities and distinct differences. In terms of the former, the strong emphasis on spiritual virtues, even over intellectual capacities and skills, is a common foundation. In terms of the latter, these virtues of Bushido are clearly confined to the Japanese culture and especially in the context of samurai swordsmanship whereas the Baha'i virtues are more universal and global, encompassing both women and men, young and old and peoples of all national and cultural backgrounds.

### **Influence of Bushido on Japanese Society**

Bushido was the root and flower of people; gifts from heaven flowed through samurais. They established the moral standard and guided people through their examples. Thus themes of performing arts were often taken from warriors' stories.

Bushido was originally initiated as an elite course for those soldiers to be; however, it also inspired the mass over time. Although the commons did not reach the same high standard of the warriors, the concept of "Japanese soul" permeated among the people, representing the entire ethnicity.

Bushido was often likened to cherry blossoms, the indigenous flower to Japan. Cherry blossoms possess grace and beauty and yet they are simple. Below the beauty, no blade or poison is hidden. Their color is no glamorous. Their odor is sweet, which floats and ascends to heaven. When the morning

<sup>37</sup> Baha'u'llah, *Hidden Words*, Arabic No. 4

<sup>38</sup> Abdu'l-Baha, *Paris Talks*, Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1978, p.177

sun rises, their odor spreads and freshest our senses. Similarly, Bushido is simple, beautiful and graceful and yet not glamorous but diffuses refreshing atmosphere to those around.

### **Future of Bushido**

Bushido, which blossomed and guided the people for so long, however, had to eventually succumb to the trend of the times. When chivalry departed from the European feudalism, church protected warriors and chivalry thus prolonged its longevity. Japan, however, lacked in major religion to play the same role; Shinto which had sustained Bushido simply aged and Confucianism was replaced by Western philosophies. Plus, the modern war utilized completely different methods and weapons from those of Bushido. The life of Bushido was thus terminated rather quickly after the end of feudalism in the late 1800's.

Nevertheless, Nitobe claims that it was Bushido that acted as a moving force in the transformation witnessed during the Meiji Restoration. He explains that Japan did not simply look for materials development and wealth accumulation, imitating the Western nations. It was the sense of pride which Bushido had cultivated among the masses that drove them to work hard and demonstrate what they could do once they put their mind to it. Industrial developments were simply results of their hard work.

Abdu'l-Baha also seems to acknowledge the Japanese virtue of hard working ethics and expects the Japanese to do the same for spiritual development as they did for material development:

Japan has made wonderful progress in material civilization, but she will become perfect when she will also make spiritual developments and the Power of the Kingdom become manifest in her.<sup>39</sup>

The form of Bushido, however, reached an end after the Meiji Era started as shown in the recent movie *Last Samurai*. The underlying spirit nevertheless remained, which drive Nitobe to quote a prophecy uttered by his contemporary:

It has been predicted...that the moral system of Feudal Japan, like its castles and its armouries, will crumble into dust, and new ethics rise phoenix-like to lead New Japan in her path of progress.<sup>40</sup>

Nitobe thus expected coming of a new moral system which will take over the outdated Bushido and guide Japan to a new path. But what might that be?

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<sup>39</sup> Abdu'l-Baha, A Tablet written to Saichiro Fujita on May 29, 1907, in Barbara Sims (ed.) *Japan Will Turn Ablaze! Tablets of Abdu'l-Baha, Letters of Shoghi Effendi and Historical Notes about Japan*. Tokyo: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974., p.189

<sup>40</sup> Nitobe, *Bushido*, p.189

## Christianity

As Bushido disappeared in its form, a possible ethical system that could have replaced it was Christianity. In fact, Nitobe himself was a Christian and so were his friend Uchimura Kanzo and his student Yauchibara Tadao, who were all great educators and thinkers representing the Meiji, Taisho and early Showa Eras. Nitobe said, "Christianity and materialism...will divide the world between them. Lesser systems of morals will ally themselves to either side for their preservation. On which side will Bushido enlist?"<sup>41</sup>

Thus, Nitobe apparently hoped that Christianity would take the place of Bushido. Yet, contrary to his wish, Christianity failed to spread among the Japanese masses. He gives the following analyses of the causes of this failure:

One cause of the failure of mission work is that most of the missionaries are entirely ignorant of our history.<sup>42</sup> ....if presented in intelligible words...if expressed in the vocabulary familiar in the moral development of a people...[Christianity] will find easy lodgment in their hearts, irrespective of race or nationality."<sup>43</sup>

Should a propagator of the new faith uproot the entire stock, root, and branches, and plant the seeds of the Gospel on the ravaged soil?.....it is a process which Jesus Himself would never have adopted in founding His kingdom on earth."<sup>44</sup>

In the Baha'i Faith, there are certain conditions that teachers of the Faith must meet before undertaking pioneering work in foreign lands. One is to learn about the history, culture, language and customs of the land. They must also use terminology which the people are used to. They must also think about the true happiness of the people they are coming into contact with, not caring about themselves.

Coercive proselytizing is also prohibited in the Baha'i Faith. Rather, we are told to search for truth together with those we intend to share the teachings with:

In accordance with the divine teachings in this glorious Dispensation we should not belittle anyone and call him ignorant, saying: 'You know not but I know.' Rather we should look upon others with respect, and when attempting to explain and demonstrate, we should speak as if we are

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<sup>41</sup> Nitobe, *Bushido*, p.191

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p.179

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p.180

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

investigating the truth, saying: 'Here these things are before us. Let us investigate to determine where and in what form the truth can be found.'

The teacher should not consider himself as learned and others ignorant. Such a thought breeds pride and pride is uncondusive to influence. The teacher should not see in himself any superiority; he should speak with the utmost kindliness, lowliness and humility, for such speech exerts influence and educates the souls.<sup>45</sup>

Naturally, argumentative attitude is not conducive to influencing souls:

Do not argue with anyone, and be wary of disputation. Speak out the truth. If your hearer accepteth, the aim is achieved. If he is obdurate, you should leave him to himself, and place your trust in God. Such is the quality of those who are firm in the Covenant.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, we need to be understanding, loving and kind to those we teach the Faith.

### **Militarism and Materialism**

As Christian missionary work failed, Japan dashed towards militarism. She withdrew from the League of Nations, which Nitobe served so faithfully, isolated herself from the world, betrayed allied nations and eventually got caught in the quagmire of the Pacific War until the tragic events in Hiroshima and Nagasaki put an end to it. In this war, Shinto as state religion was abused and misused, which caused the nation to shun religion away after the war.

After the war ensued intensive economic activity propelled by strong materialism. There was no more war using weaponry. Instead, the nation ran itself into economic war using money and goods. It started during the economic miracle of the 1960's and reached the peak with the bubble economy in the 1980's. The Japanese products were rated only the third-class during the 1970's. But the Japanese people worked themselves so hard that they were even called "economic animals" and now their goods are regarded as among the world's best.

These activities and hard labor can be recognized as positive qualities in themselves. However, as Nitobe had alarmed, Japan had neglected the development of a large portion of spiritual civilization. As a counter-reaction to this, there have been several religious booms during the last 50 years to fill the gaps made in society through all this material development. Many new religious organizations have appeared, some of which possess millions

<sup>45</sup> Nozomu Sonda (comp.) *Asu e no Tobira*. Tokyo: Baha'i Publishing Trust Japan, 2002, p. 342, No. 78

<sup>46</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Ibid, p.344, No. 87)

of followers. However, some of them have caused scandals and even committed crimes, bringing harm to society and its people. People became even more skeptical of religion.

### **Revival of Bushido?**

The economic miracle of Japan reached its prime stage in the 1990's and now Japan is going through some hard times. People are starting to understand that material prosperity cannot satisfy their need completely, seeking for spiritual sustenance. This trend is represented and symbolized by nostalgia for "the good old days." Even among the youth generations can this phenomenon be observed. Many enjoy appreciating the old art works, literature, tea ceremony and flower arrangement. Some seek comfort and healing by living in traditional wooden structure homes. As commented in the introduction of this paper, the recently released Hollywood movie *The Last Samurai* has also stimulated this trend. Many people are now showing greater interest in the spirit of samurais and Bushido. Japanese baseball players join the Major League Baseball and talk about playing baseball with the samurai spirit.

Just as Nitobe mentioned, the contemporary Japanese society is now searching for a new system of morals. Especially the educational world is at loss currently, not knowing where to turn to for guidance. When we review the historical trends and changes described in previous sections, namely, the crumbling of feudalism and the subsequent decline of Bushido, the quoted prophecy of the appearance of new moral ethics, Nitobe's hope for Christianity to take over Bushido's role, yet its failure to spread, will the Faith of Baha'u'llah not clearly stand out as the new ethics prophesied and the new moral system which Nitobe hoped would appear and guide Japan? For the Baha'i Faith was revealed by Baha'u'llah for this new age where old values would be tested for the contemporary need and diverse cultural values would come into conflict with each other.

The teachings of Baha'u'llah renewed and revived virtues clothed in new attire fit for the modern world. Baha'u'llah spoke the same truth which Buddhism, Shintoism and Confucianism had taught centuries and thousands of years before, yet in new language understandable to modern humanity. Baha'u'llah talked about virtues that are universally applicable to all humanity including women and men, young and old, and diverse ethnic groups of the world. He also talks about the end of adolescent years of humankind when wars and fighting were the "norms." Baha'u'llah now talks about the coming of age of humanity where humankind is to approach various issues and problems with mature attitude and consultative manner. Swords must be returned to the sheath and words must be used instead.

According to Baha'u'llah, even religions of God must be renewed and updated. Buddhism and Shintoism have served their times, exerting great

influences on formation and development of Bushido. But the time must come to be replaced by a new religion of God. Even Christianity had to face the same destiny. Thus, religions of God must be periodically renewed in order to meet needs of each age and place. The same exact medicine cannot cure various diseases that afflict humanity. Humanity and its society also grow and develop. Thus teachings of God must also change. This concept of change of religious teachings according to growth and development of humanity is called "progressive revelation." The historical conditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries clearly indicate that the time was very ripe for a new revelation from God. According to Baha'u'llah, the Baha'i Faith was the new revelation for this modern age.

### Conclusion

"Japan will turn ablaze! Japan is endowed with a most remarkable capacity for the spread of the Cause of God! Japan, with (another country)....will take the lead in the spiritual reawakening of the peoples and nations that the world shall soon witness!" On another occasion,--how vividly I recall it!--as He reclined on His chair, with eyes closed with bodily fatigue, He waved His hand and uttered vigorously and cheerfully these words in the presence of His friends:--"Here we are seated calm, quiet and inactive, but the Hand of the Unseen is ever active and triumphant in lands, even as distant as Japan."<sup>47</sup>

The form of Bushido has disappeared. There are no more samurai swords or feudal system. However, the spirit of Bushido still seems to remain in minds and hearts of Japanese people. The basis of Abdu'l-Baha's prophecy that Japan will turn ablaze may lie in this spirit of Bushido. Just as Nitobe said:

Bushido as an independent code of ethics may vanish, but its power will not perish from the earth...Like its symbolic flower, after it is blown to the four winds, it will still bless mankind with the perfume with which it will enrich life.<sup>48</sup>

In conclusion, the present author would like to pose questions to the readers by borrowing the words and style of Nitobe's own question quoted earlier: The Faith of God revealed for this age and materialism will continue to divide the world between them. Lesser systems of morals will ally themselves to either side for their preservation. On which side will Japan enlist? And on which side will the spirit of Bushido find its revival?

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<sup>47</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Turn Ablaze*, p.73 from a letter written to early believers in Japan, January 26, 1922, *Japan Will Turn Ablaze!*)

<sup>48</sup> Nitobe, *Bushido*, p.192

## Prayer for Shaykh Kázim Samandar

### Authorised Translation of Bahá'u'lláh's Múnáját-i-Jináb-i-Samandarí

The following prayer was recently translated by the Bahá'í World Centre. By way of introduction, we cite here excerpts from two explanatory letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice regarding, first, the provisional translation of this prayer, and subsequently its authorized translation in its present form.

From a letter to an individual from the Department of the Secretariat, Universal House of Justice, dated 29 August 2001.<sup>1</sup>

“Your email of 16 August 2001, enquiring on behalf of a few believers in your community about the authenticity of a prayer which begins with the words “O my God! Thou seest me detached...”, was received at the Bahá'í World Centre. The Research Department of the Universal House of Justice has advised that the prayer in question was revealed by Bahá'u'lláh to Jináb-i-Samandar [Shaykh Kázim Samandar], the father of the Hand of the Cause of God, Ṭarázu'lláh Samandarí, to assist him in making a difficult decision. The prayer was to be recited 19 times, followed by meditation on the problem, the formulation of a solution, and the implementation of the conceived solution. There is no authorized translation for this prayer. However, as it was noted that the electronic copy of the prayer which you appended to your message differs from the version held at the World Centre, we provide the following provisional translation for your information. You may be interested to know that the Research Department has ascertained that the prayer was revealed in Arabic and is published in Majmú'iy-i-Alváh-i-Mubarakiy-i-Hadrat-i-Bahá'u'lláh (Tíhrán: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 132 B.E.), page 9, transcribed by 'Andalib.”

From a letter to an individual from the Department of the Secretariat, Universal house of Justice dated 1 Jan 2006

“Your email of 2 November 2005 has been received at the Bahá'í World Centre and forwarded to our Department for response. The prayer that you quote is authentic. It was revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in Arabic for Jináb-i-Samandar (Shaykh Kázim Samandar), the father of the Hand of the Cause of God :Ṭarázu'lláh Samandarí, to assist him in making a difficult decision. The Research Department has no information about the date of its revelation. As you may be aware, until now only provisional translations of this prayer were available.

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<sup>1</sup> See [Prayer for Shaykh Kázim Samandar](#), Translated by Baha'i World Center. Originally written as "Múnáját-i-Jináb-i-Samandarí"



Recently, however, an authorized English translation of the prayer and its context has become available at the World Centre, and it follows ...”

### **Short Prayer for Decision**

Sín Mím [Samandar], upon him rest My glory, hath ever been the recipient of divine favours, and there hath befallen him in the path of God that which His knowledge alone can encompass. In regard to his affairs, let him repeat nineteen times: “Thou seest me, O my God, detached from all save Thee and cleaving unto Thee. Guide me, then, in all mine affairs unto that which profiteth me for the glory of Thy Cause and the loftiness of the station of thy loved ones.” Let him then reflect upon the matter and undertake whatever cometh to mind. This vehement opposition of the enemies will indeed give way to supreme prosperity.

## The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

### Notes on recent secondary literature, and material from the Bahá'í World Centre.

Steve Cooney  
Wellington, Independent Scholar

What follows is a very useful Memorandum from the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice. It includes an earlier memorandum "World Government and the Universal House" which was an important source for Wendi Momen's paper trying to answer the question "How close are we to the Lesser Peace?"<sup>1</sup> and was the principal reason for initiating the request to the Research Department. It's almost a dozen years since that first European Bahá'í Conference on Law and International Order and another five since this Research Department memo which is formally published here.<sup>2</sup> It seems then an opportune place to introduce this memorandum, which itself so helpfully points to published material on the theme of world order evolution, by making a few notes on other Bahá'í material about World Order available since the turn of the twentieth century.

World Order represents a very broad terrain. In the process of writing an elaborate defence of their religion, Schaefer, Gollmer and Towfiqh<sup>3</sup> spent considerable time discussing the nature of the Bahá'í World Order. Gollmer is a political scientist whose work has recently been reviewed<sup>4</sup>. Unfortunately his thesis on Bahá'í political thought remains unpublished<sup>5</sup>. Schaefer, a jurist, is an important intellectual in the present Bahá'í community of scholars, who has had an interest since his university days concerning the features of the Bahá'í World Order system. Recently his landmark thesis was reprinted making it much more widely available<sup>6</sup>. Subsequently he has looked at some of the theological and ethical

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<sup>1</sup> Wendi Momen, 'How Close Are We to the Lesser Peace?' in *Law and International Order: Proceedings of the First European Bahá'í Conference on Law and International Order* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), 103-150.

<sup>2</sup> The memorandum includes a letter dated 27 April 1995 which has already been widely discussed and circulated on the Internet. See also fn.44.

<sup>3</sup> Udo Schaefer, Nicola Towfiqh, and Ulrich Gollmer, *Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahá'í Apologetics*, (trans. Geraldine Schuckelt, Oxford, UK: George Ronald, 2000)

<sup>4</sup> Arash Abizadeh, 'Politics beyond War: Ulrich Gollmer's Contribution to Bahá'í Political Thought', *World Order*, 2004, 35(3), 19-23

<sup>5</sup> Ulrich Gollmer, *Gottesreich und Weltgestaltung. Grundlegung einer politischen Theologie im Bahá'í-tum*. Unpublished thesis. See also the recent dissertation in ecclesiastical law by Emanuel Vahid Towfiqh, *Die rechtliche Verfassung von Religionsgemeinschaften. Eine Untersuchung am Beispiel der Bahai* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006, Series: Jus Ecclesiasticum 80) and book reviews of the same by Reinmar Wolff, *JuristenZeitung*, February 2007, 62(4) 184-185, Jörn Thielmann, 'Die rechtliche Verfassung von Religionsgemeinschaften. Eine Untersuchung am Beispiel der Bahai', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 2007, 138. An additional recent study from Europe is Farshad Mohammad-Avvali, *Globales Recht oder plurales Recht? Der rechtstheoretische Diskurs zum Rechtspluralismus unter Berücksichtigung der Position der Bahá'í Lehre im Kontext der Globalisierung* (München: GRIN Verlag, 2007, Series: Lektüreseminar: Grundlagen der aktuellen Rechtslehre und Rechtsphilosophie)

<sup>6</sup> Udo Schaefer, *Grundlagen der Gemeindeordnung der Bahá'í* (Hofheim: Bahai Verlag, 2003, Series: Studien Zum Bahá'í-tum 3)

underpinnings<sup>7</sup> of this world order as well as interesting discussions of its legal and constitutional basis<sup>8</sup>.

Making the Crooked Straight inspired a whole issue of *World Order* magazine<sup>9</sup> devoted to reviewing its implications especially notable the article by Roshan Danesh<sup>10</sup> which joins another well thought out paper on the constitutional dimensions of a putative Bahá'í world order<sup>11</sup> essential reading for any serious reader of Bahá'í thought on the topic of world order and how to approach its gradual unfoldment rather than to prematurely crystallise it. *World Order* magazine has also produced interesting issues on post nationalism<sup>12</sup> and the international criminal court<sup>13</sup> and germane discussions on global electoral process<sup>14</sup>.

A number of the leading publishers of Bahá'í material have contributed new collections of material in the area of world order studies. These include a collection of articles from the Bahá'í Politics and International Law Special Interest Group of the Association of Bahá'í Studies, English-Speaking Europe<sup>15</sup>, and practitioners and academics in the fields of law, governance, conflict resolution economics linguistics and international relations have assembled a provocative collection of Bahá'í perspectives on peace and conflict resolution<sup>16</sup>. The North American Association for Bahá'í Studies

<sup>7</sup> Udo Schaefer, *Beyond the Clash of Religions: The emergence of a new paradigm*, (trans. Geraldine Schuckelt, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Hofheim: Bahá'í Verlag, 2005. See also his *Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture Volume 1-Doctrinal Fundamentals* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2007) especially Chapter 9 'Liberty and its Limits' 313-330.

<sup>8</sup> Udo Schaefer, 'An Introduction to Bahá'í Law: Doctrinal Foundations, Principles and Structures', *Journal of Law and Religion*, 2002-2003, 18(2), 307-372. See also the response by Roshan Danesh, 'Imagining Baha'i Law: Commentary on Udo Schaefer, 'An Introduction to Baha'i Law'', *Baha'i Studies Review*, 2007, 14, in press.

<sup>9</sup> *World Order*, 2004, 35(3). Special issue: Roundtable discussions of 'Making the Crooked Straight': Scholarship and Building a World Community.

<sup>10</sup> Roshan Danesh, 'The Politics of Delay – Social Meanings and the historical Treatment of Bahá'í Law', *World Order*, 2004, 35(3), 33-45

<sup>11</sup> Roshan Danesh, 'Internationalism and Divine Law: A Bahá'í Perspective', *Journal of Law and Religion*, 2003-2004, 19(2), 209-242. See also fn. 31.

<sup>12</sup> *World Order*, 2003, 34(4). Special issue: Postnationalism. Challenging and redefining our views of national identity and citizenship.

<sup>13</sup> *World Order*, 2002-2003, 34(2). Special issue: The International Criminal Court. Building block for a global community.

<sup>14</sup> Arash Abizadeh, 'Democratic Elections without Campaigns? Normative Foundations of National Bahá'í Elections', *World Order*, 2005, 37(1), 7-49 and also Arash Abizadeh, 'Informational Constraint and Focal Point Convergence: Theoretical Implications of Plurality-Rule Elections for the New Institutionalism.' *Rationality and Society*, 2001, 13(1), 99-136.

<sup>15</sup> Babak Bahador & Nazila Ghanea (eds.), *Processes of the Lesser Peace* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2002, Series: George Ronald Bahá'í Studies Series) particularly Jeffrey Huffines, 'Baha'i Proposals for the Reformation of World Order', 1-45; Daniel Wheatley, 'Global Governance: Has a Paradigm shift in World Government Theory Brought the Lesser Peace Closer?', 227-249. See also the book review by William P Collins, *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 2004, 14(1-2), 97-103.

<sup>16</sup> Charles O. Lerche (ed.), *Healing the Body Politic: Bahá'í Perspectives on Peace and Conflict Resolution* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2004, Series: George Ronald Bahá'í Studies Series). See especially Graham Hassall, 'Contemporary Governance and Conflict Resolution: A Baha'i Reading', 84-116; Olivia Lopez, 'Reforming the United Nations: Issues and Opinions', 177-211; Ariane Sabet, 'Baha'u'llah's Concept of Collective Security in Historical and Theoretical Perspective', 212-254.

has used its periodical to publish papers of continuing interest and relevance to a growing understanding of Bahá'í notions of world order<sup>17</sup>

Elsewhere in North America, Bahá'í publishers have also contributed to this body of work. Kalimat press assembled a diverse group of reflections and scholarly papers on global issues<sup>18</sup> while Brian Lepard, a specialist in human rights published his vision for a global ethic<sup>19</sup> which tries to establish the core values which would underpin a globally federated world order congruent with Bahá'í principles and mankind's faith traditions, written in a style appealing to the general public. Similarly John Hatcher, in the has updated his model of the ascending society in the bookstore friendly Baha'i Publishing series which effectively recaps the main features of the Bahai world order models<sup>20</sup>. Hong Kong based Juxta electronically published an excellent collection of papers on human rights, a key component of a just world order<sup>21</sup> which has proved popular enough to recently issue in a print version.

Outside of the Bahá'í publishing system, a number of authors have been able to publish perspectives on social evolution<sup>22</sup>, terrorism and secession<sup>23</sup>, international law<sup>24</sup>, education<sup>25</sup>, interreligious dialogue<sup>26</sup>, world theology<sup>27</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Brian Lepard, 'Protecting the Human Family: Humanitarian Intervention, International Law, and Bahá'í Principles', *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 2003, 13(1-4), 33-53. Wendy Heller, 'The Religious Foundations of Civil Society Part 1', *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 2000, 10(1-2), 27-69. Wendy Heller, 'The Religious Foundations of Civil Society Part 2', *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 2000, 10(3-4), 25-56. Sohrab Abizadeh, 'Will Globalization Lead to A World Commonwealth?', *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 2005, 15(1-4), 41-71.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Fitzgerald (ed.) *Earth Circles: Bahá'í Perspectives on Global Issues* (Los Angeles, Kalimat Press, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Brian D. Lepard. *Hope for a Global Ethic: Shared Principles in Religious Scriptures* (Wilmette, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2006). See also, more generally his *Rethinking Humanitarian Intervention A Fresh Legal Approach Based on Fundamental Ethical Principles in International Law and World Religions* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002) and the book review by Dwight N. Bashir in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 2004, 14(1-2), 91-96.

<sup>20</sup> John S. Hatcher, *The Ascent of Society: The Social Imperative in Personal Salvation*, (Wilmette, Illinois, Baha'i Publishing, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Tahirih Tahririha Danesh (ed). *Bahá'í-Inspired Perspectives on Human Rights* (Hong Kong:Juxta Publications, 2001/2007). See also the dissertation by Hale Enayati, *Die Garantie der individuellen Religionsfreiheit im Völkerrecht unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Stellung der Bahá'í*, (Berlin: Weißensee-Verlag, 2002, Series: Berliner Beiträge zum Völkerrecht, Bd.1).

<sup>22</sup> John Woodall, 'Humanity's Coming of Age: The Bahá'í Faith and World Order' in *Toward a Global Civilization? The Contribution of Religions* (Patricia Mische & Melissa Merkling (eds), New York/Wien:Peter Lang, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Merchant AK, 'Rise of terrorism & secessionism in South Asia: Bahá'í viewpoint', *Journal of Dharma*, 25, no.3-4 (2000), 376-382 reprinted also Merchant, AK, 'Rise of Terrorism and Secessionism in South Asia- A Bahai Viewpoint' in *Rise of Terrorism and Secessionism in Eurasia*, (VD Chopra (ed), New Delhi:Gyan Publishing House, 2003), 89-95.

<sup>24</sup> Danesh Sarooshi, 'International Law and Peace between the Nations: The Contribution of the Bahá'í Faith', in *Law and Religion Current Legal Issues* (Richard O'Dair & Andrew Lewis (eds), vol 4, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> Marie Gervais, 'The Bahá'í curriculum for peace education' *Journal of Peace Education*, 2004 1(2), 205-224; Zena Sorabjee, 'Education for a global society: Bahá'í view' in *Education for a Global Society : Interfaith Dimensions* (Marmar Mukhopadhyay (ed),. Delhi:Shipra, 2003), 53-63 and Merchant, AK 'Inter-faith education for an ever-advancing global society' *idem*, 64-85.

<sup>26</sup> Merchant AK, 'Social Harmony and World Peace: A Bahá'í Perspective' in *Interfaith Dialogues: Different Perspectives* (Dharam Singh (ed), Patiala: Publication Bureau Punjabi University, 2002), 137-151.

social identity<sup>28</sup> and sociology of linguistics<sup>29</sup>. Globalization is a phenomena which has not only been of interest to Bahá'ís<sup>30</sup>, but was the theme of a conference on Globalization and the Bahá'í Faith held at the University of Copenhagen and which has produced a diverse collection of views and perspectives: 'the first comprehensive treatment of the Bahá'í religion viewed in the light of globalization'<sup>31</sup>.

Another source of valuable essays is those published in the annual survey of activities and reporting's in the series *The Bahai World*. These include the evolution of consciousness<sup>32</sup>, world order and global governance<sup>33</sup>, human obligations and responsibilities in constructing a world civilization,<sup>34</sup> law and religion<sup>35</sup> and most recently an essay questioning Western liberal democracy as an inevitable pattern for the future<sup>36</sup>. This issue of the Online Journal of Bahá'í studies has an important study by Nalinie Mooten of I-R theory, cosmopolitanism and the Bahá'í Faith<sup>37</sup>.

There has been several book length, highly original contributions that have deepened and broadened the corpus of Bahá'í material in this field. In particular Michael Karlberg's study of the opposing cultures of contest and mutualism<sup>38</sup>, Mark Perry's review of the history of racist culture and the requirements of moving to a future of racial oneness<sup>39</sup>, and Huschmand

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<sup>27</sup> Juan RI Cole, 'World theology and the Bahá'í Faith' in *The Comity and Grace of Method: Essays in Honor of Edmund R. Perry* (Thomas Ryba, George Bond and Herman Tull, (eds), Evanston, Ill:Northwestern University Press, 2004), 391-414.

<sup>28</sup> Siew Sim Chin, 'I Am a Human Being, and I Belong to the World: Narrating the Intersection of Spirituality and Social Identity' *Journal of Transformative Education*, 2006, 4(1), 27-42.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory Meyjes, 'Language and world order in Bahá'í perspective' in *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion* (Tope Omoniyi and Joshua A. Fishman (eds), Amsterdam: J.Benjamins, 2006, Series: Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture 20), 26-41.

<sup>30</sup> Suheil Bushrui. *The Ethics of Globalization: A Bahá'í Perspective* (Paris:Librairie Bahá'íe. 2004). Greg Dahl, *One world, one people: how globalization is shaping our future* (Wilmette:Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Annika Hvithamar, Margit Warburg & Morten Warmind (eds.), *Bahá'í and Globalisation* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2005, Series: Renner Studies on New Religions 7). Of interest here Zaid Lundberg, 'Global Claims, Global Aims: An Analysis of Shoghi Effendi's 'The World Order of Baha'u'llah'', 119-140; Wendi Momen, 'Globalisation and Decentralisation: The Concept of Subsidiarity in the Baha'i Faith', 175-193. See a review: Jobeen Eslahpazir, '[Baha'i and Globalisation](#)', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 138 (2007).

<sup>32</sup> Robert Atkinson, 'Culture and the Evolution of Consciousness' in *The Bahá'í World 2000-2001* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2002), 145-173.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Vreeland, 'World Order and Global Governance: A Bahá'í Perspective' in *The Bahai World 2001-2002* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2003), 157-187.

<sup>34</sup> Hoda Mahmoudi, 'Obligation and responsibility in Constructing a World Civilization' in *The Bahá'í World 2002-2003*. (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2004), 147-177.

<sup>35</sup> Roshan Danesh, 'Beyond Integration and Separation: The Dynamic Nature of Bahá'í Law'; in *The Bahá'í World 1999-2000* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2001), 223-264.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Karlberg, 'Western Liberal Democracy as New World Order?' in *The Bahá'í World 2005-2006* (Haifa, World Centre Publications, 2007), 133-156.

<sup>37</sup> Nalinie Mooten, '[The Bahá'í Contribution to Cosmopolitan International Relations Theory](#)', *OJBS: Online Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 2007, 1(1), 4-70.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Karlberg, *Beyond the Culture of Contest: From Adversarialism to Mutualism in an Age of Interdependence* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2004). See also Michael Karlberg, 'The Paradox of Protest in a Culture of Contest', *Peace & Change*, 2003, 28(3), 329-351.

<sup>39</sup> Mark Perry, *The Last War Racism, Spirituality and the Future of Civilization* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2005)

Sabet's analysis of the forces forming world identity<sup>40</sup> are warmly recommended. Equally useful are Guy Sinclair's detailed study of the constitution of the Universal House of Justice<sup>41</sup> and Ali Nakhjavani's focussed collection of notes<sup>42</sup> on the World Order of Baha'u'llah both projects relying heavily on the scope and range of the World Order of Baha'u'llah as explicated by Shoghi Effendi. We can also add Foad Katirai's excellent monograph on the Bahá'í proposals for global governance including a convocation of world leaders<sup>43</sup>. In press is Sovaida Ma'ani Ewing's 'Collective Security Within Reach' which promises detailed proposals for Security Council reform<sup>44</sup>.

The Head of the Bahá'í Community, the Universal House of Justice has also remained active in promoting peace and world order with two influential documents; an open letter to the "world's religious leaders"<sup>45</sup> asking them to take steps to put out the fires of religious fanaticism and hatred, identifying that as a real threat to the world's present order and a document aimed primarily internally at their own community, and designed to remind them that in the Bahá'í view the emergence of a global socio-political order had to be grounded in a fundamental moral and attitudinal re-orientation to mankind's religions which re-visioned them as one common faith<sup>46</sup>.

Externally, national Bahá'í communities represent themselves to the body of mankind, through their external affairs agency, the Bahá'í International Community. This agency has a long tradition promoting world order in international fora most especially at the agencies of the UN system. In this period the BIC issued several documents essential to understanding the Bahá'í vision of a global world order. These include freedom of religion<sup>47</sup>, UN institutional reform<sup>48</sup> and overcoming corruption in human institutions<sup>49</sup>.

Until recently the Bahá'í view of its world order has been remarkably unified and self consistent, with the general scheme widely accepted for

<sup>40</sup> Huschmand Sabet, *From Global Crash to World Identity* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> Guy Sinclair, *Study Guide to the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice* (Oxford:George Ronald, 2005).

<sup>42</sup> Ali Nakhjavani, *Towards World Order* (Acuto:Casa Editrice Bahá'í, 2005).

<sup>43</sup> Foad Katirai, *Global Governance and the Lesser Peace* (Oxford:George Ronald, 2001).

<sup>44</sup> Sovaida Ma'ani Ewing, *Collective Security within Reach* (Oxford:George Ronald, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> The Universal House of Justice, *Letter to the Worlds Religious Leaders*. April 2002. See the version 'A Challenge to the Worlds Religious Leaders: a Statement by The Universal House of Justice', *World Order*, 2002, 33(4), 9-16.

<sup>46</sup> The Universal House of Justice. *One Common Faith* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2005)

<sup>47</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Freedom to Believe: Upholding the Standard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Bahá'í International Community's Statement on the Freedom of Religion or Belief October 2005* BIC Document #05-1001.

<sup>48</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *The Search for Values in an Age of Transition A Statement of the Bahá'í International Community on the Occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the United Nations New York, USA October 2005*. BIC Document #05-1002.

<sup>49</sup> Bahá'í International Community, *Overcoming Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity in Public Institutions: A Bahá'í Perspective. Prepared by the Bahá'í International Community and presented at the intergovernmental Global Forum on Fighting Corruption II. The Hague, Netherlands 28-31 May 2001*. BIC Document #01-0528.

more than a century. Recent challenges narrowing the scope and functions of the Bahá'í world order and indeed its desirability or theological feasibility have not been received enthusiastically<sup>50</sup>, largely because they are marred by problems of selective assembly of materials, highly idiosyncratic readings and a general failure to satisfactorily engage the existing consensus of Bahá'í scholars. In religious communities preferred world orders are often juxtaposed against catastrophes and apocalypses. There have been a few such recent studies in this area as well<sup>51</sup>

In concluding our brief survey, students of the Bahá'í world order can enjoy a reissue of an important compilation, available twenty years ago which assembles in one volume key texts from the Bahá'í central figures and authorities<sup>52</sup> on the theme of peace and a new volume from Craig Loehle on the spiritual power inherent in the Revelation of Baha'u'llah and its ability to recreate human society.<sup>53</sup> Recently published also is a study of the common ground offered by the world's scriptures as the foundation for a new world order<sup>54</sup>. Electronic publishing and text digitization capabilities have lead to rejuvenating long out of print titles using print on demand technology. Examples of this include a compilation which was influential at the time of the First World War, recently re-issued.<sup>55</sup> and which still contains very useful sources for research on the Bahá'í approach to World Order, and the recent reprint of an early but idiosyncratic attempt at re-organising Bahá'í thought into a humanistic utopia<sup>56</sup> by a former secretary of the Bahá'í leader Abdu'l-Baha.

<sup>50</sup> Sen McGlinn, *Church and State: A Postmodern Political Theology Book One* (Leiden: Sen McGlinn, 2005, Series: Studies in the Babi and Bahá'í Religions 19). *ibid*, 'Theocratic assumptions in Bahá'í literature' in *Reason & Revelation: New Directions in Bahá'í Thought* (Seena Fazel & John Danesh (eds), Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2002, 39-80, Series: Studies in the Babi and Bahá'í Religions 13). *ibid*, 'Bahá'í Meets Globalization: A new Synergy?' in *Bahá'í and Globalisation*, 269-286. *ibid*, 'A Difficult Case: Beyer's Categories and the Bahá'í Faith', *Social Compass*, 2003, 50(2), 247-255; See also Adbullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, 'Review of Sen McGlinn, *Church and State: A Postmodern Political Theology Book One*', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 2007, 39(1), 158-159, and the forthcoming thesis by Tajan Tober, *Staat und religiöse Ordnung in der Bahá'í Theologie. Ein Beitrag zum politischen Denken der Bahá'í* which critically analyzes McGlinn's presuppositions, conclusions and methodology.

<sup>51</sup> William Collins, '[Apocalypse and Millennium: Catastrophe, Progress, and the Lesser Peace](#)', *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 2002, 12(1-4), 1-29; Stephen Lambden, 'Catastrophe, armageddon and millenium: Some aspects of the Babi-Bahá'í exegesis of apocalyptic symbolism', *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 1999-2000, 9, 81-99. See also Stephen Lambden, 'The Messianic Roots of Babi-Bahá'í Globalism' in *Bahá'í and Globalisation*, 17-34. David Piff & Margit Warburg, 'Millennial Catastrophism in Popular Bahá'í Lore' in *New Religions in a PostModern World* (Mikael Rothstein & Reender Kranenborg (eds), Aarhus, Aarhus University Press, 2003, Series: Renner Studies on New Religions 6), 123-136.

<sup>52</sup> Anne G. Atkinson, Betty J. Fisher, Richard A. Hill, Anne Marie Scheffer (eds), *Peace--more than an end to war: selections from the writings of Baha'u'llah, the Bab, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice*. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2007)

<sup>53</sup> Craig Loehle, *Blueprint for a New World: Using the Power of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* (Oxford: George Ronald 2007)

<sup>54</sup> Allen McKiel, *Beyond Tolerance: Religion and Global Community*. (Heltonville, Indiana: Special Ideas, 2007).

<sup>55</sup> Anon. *Compilation Of The Holy Utterances Of Baha 'O' llah And Abdul Baha: Concerning The Most Great Peace, War And Duty Of The Bahais Toward Their Government*, [1918]. Reprinted. (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2007).

<sup>56</sup> Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, *The New Humanity: A Compendium of the Ideals of Universal Civilization*. New York: JH Sears and Company/New History Foundation 2<sup>nd</sup> printing, 1929. Reprinted (Montana: Kessinger Publishing n.d [2007])

## MEMORANDUM

To: The Universal House of Justice

Date: 5 May 2002

From: Research Department

### Request for Materials about the World Order of Baha'u'llah

In his email message of 19 December 2001, Mr. .... requests a copy of a Research Department memorandum dated 10 September 1990, entitled "World Government and the Universal House of Justice", which was cited in the Proceedings of the First European Bahá'í Conference on Law and International Order, De Poort, The Netherlands, 8-11 June 1995. In addition, he seeks copies of "any subsequent memoranda or papers which bear upon any aspect of the World Order of Baha'u'llah".

We attach for Mr. .... copies of the following materials:

The memorandum dated 10 September 1990 prepared by the Research Department entitled "World Government and the Universal House of Justice", and a compilation entitled "Extracts from Letters Written by and on Behalf of the Universal House of Justice on Evolution Towards World Order", which was originally prepared in conjunction with the memorandum. The compilation was revised in 1995.

- A letter dated 27 April 1995 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer in response to questions on such subjects as theocracy, church and state, and related matters. An extract from a letter dated 14 January 1996 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual on global governance.
- A 1999 statement prepared at the instruction of the Universal House of Justice entitled "Peace Among the Nations".

In addition, Mr. .... might find it helpful to refer to the following items: a letter dated 19 April 2001 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer in response to a question about the unity of nations and the Lesser Peace, and a memorandum of the same date prepared by the Research Department with the heading "Attainment of the Unity of Nations and the Lesser Peace". As these materials were subsequently shared with all National Spiritual Assemblies, it is suggested that Mr. .... request copies of these documents from his National Assembly.

With respect to Mr. ....'s request for papers that address "any aspect of the World Order of Baha'u'llah", the Research Department regrets that, given the limitation of resources, it is not possible, at this time, to undertake a comprehensive search of the literature of the Faith on this broad theme. We note, however, that there are a number of recent statements by the Bahá'í International Community with such titles as *Prosperity of Humankind*, *Turning Point for all Nations*, and *Who is Writing the Future? Reflections on the Twentieth Century*, which impinge on his area of interest. Likewise, the volumes of *The Bahá'í World* contain essays on



Request for materials on the World Order of  
Baha'u'llah

5 May 2002  
Page 2

various aspects of world order, as do the issues of journals published by the Associations for Bahá'í Studies. Finally, Mr. .... might be interested in perusing Nader Saiedi's *Logos and Civilization, Spirit, History, and Order in the Writings of Baha'u'llah* (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2000). Part III of this work analyses the relationship between the Kitab-i-Aqdas and the establishment of the World Order.

Attachments 5

1. See, for example, Wendy M. Heller, "Covenant and the Foundations of Civil Society" in *The Bahá'í World 1995-96* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1997), pp. 185-222; Martha Schweitz and Bill Barnes, "Dimensions of Unity in an Emerging Global Order" in *The Bahá'í World 1998-99* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2000), pp. 193-228.

## MEMORANDUM

**To**        The Universal House of Justice  
:

**Date:** 10 September 1990

**From:**    Research Department

### WORLD GOVERNMENT AND THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

The Research Department has studied the questions raised by Mr ..... and Mr ..... in their letter postmarked 10 July 1990 to the Universal House of Justice. Messrs ..... and ..... are law students who are preparing a research paper relating the concept of sovereignty in international law to the Bahá'í World Order. As a background to their questions, they refer to the following statements:

The remark attributed to 'Abdu'l-Baha in "The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Baha during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912", 2nd. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 455, in which the Master indicates that the Universal House of Justice "is endowed with a political as well as a religious function, the consummate union and blending of church and state" .

Shoghi Effendi's comments about the non-political character of the Faith and his assertion that, no matter how "advanced their institutions," the Bahá'ís will not "violate, under any circumstances, the provisions of their country's constitution" nor "allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries." See "The World Order of Baha'u'llah: Selected Letters" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 65-66.

The reference in "The Promise of World Peace" (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1985), p. 15, to the means by which a World Parliament will be constituted, namely, its members will be elected by the people of each country and confirmed by their respective governments.

Mr .... and Mr .... note that a future world government will consist of an international executive, legislature, and a supreme tribunal, and they pose a number of questions that pertain to the relationship between the institutions of the world government and the future role of the Universal House of Justice. We provide the following comment.

Before addressing the specific questions raised by Mr .... and Mr .... , it is useful to consider, in broad terms, the nature of the evolution of systems of world government, the unfoldment of the Bahá'í Administrative Order into the World Order of Baha'u'llah, and the ultimate convergence of these two evolutionary trends into the Bahá'í World Commonwealth in the Golden Age of the Faith.

### **Stages in the development of world government**

The letters of Shoghi Effendi outline two stages in the development of world government. The first stage in this evolution is the emergence of "a world superstate" which will be associated with the establishment of the Lesser Peace. See "The Goal of a New World Order" in "The World Order of Baha'u'llah: Selected Letters". The "World Parliament" referred to in "The Promise of World Peace" is an institution associated with this "superstate". In relation to the Lesser Peace, it is interesting to note that Shoghi Effendi, in a letter dated 14 March 1939 written on his behalf, indicated that it "will come about through the political efforts of the states and nations of the world, and independently of any direct Bahá'í plan or effort".

A second, more distant, stage in the evolution of a system of world government, i.e. the "world commonwealth", is described in "The Unfoldment of World Civilization", in the book "The World Order of Baha'u'llah", The "world legislature" mentioned on p. 203 of this book is a term applied to the institution which performs the legislative function in the Bahá'í World Commonwealth. This same term can also be applied to the "World Parliament" associated with the Lesser Peace that was mentioned in the paragraph above. The following extract from "The Promised Day Is Come" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 123, explicitly links not only the two stages in the evolving world government but also allies them with the "New World Order" of Baha'u'llah.

To the general character, the implications and features of this world commonwealth, destined to emerge, sooner or later, out of the carnage, agony, and havoc of this great world convulsion, I have already referred in my previous communications. Suffice it to say that this consummation will, by its very nature, be a gradual process, and must, as Baha'u'llah has Himself anticipated, lead at first to the establishment of that Lesser Peace which the nations of the earth, as yet unconscious of His Revelation and yet unwittingly enforcing the general principles which He has enunciated, will themselves establish. This momentous and historic step, involving the reconstruction of mankind, as the result of the universal recognition of its oneness and wholeness, will bring in its wake the spiritualization of the masses, consequent to the recognition of the character, and the acknowledgment of the claims, of the Faith of Baha'u'llah - the essential condition to that ultimate fusion of all races, creeds, classes, and nations which must signalize the emergence of His New World Order.

### **Development of the World Order of Baha'u'llah**

The development of Baha'u'llah's New World Order, as outlined in the writings' of Shoghi Effendi, is an evolutionary process. In "The Unfoldment of World Civilization", the World Order of Baha'u'llah is described as "evolving within the framework of the Administrative Order of His Faith". The Administrative Order precedes the emergence of the New World Order. For example, it is referred to as, among other things, "the precursor, the nucleus and pattern" of "that Order" and as the "sole framework" of the "Bahá'í Commonwealth of the future".

Shoghi Effendi also identifies a number of stages in the evolution of the Faith. For instance, in "The Advent of Divine Justice" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), p. 15, he refers to

### **World Government and the Universal House of Justice**

... the successive stages of unmitigated obscurity, of active repression, and of complete emancipation, leading in turn to its being acknowledged as an independent Faith, enjoying the status of full equality with its sister religions, to be followed by its establishment and recognition as a State religion, which in turn must give way to its assumption of the rights and prerogatives associated with the Bahá'í state, functioning in the plenitude of its powers, a stage which must ultimately culminate in the emergence of the worldwide Bahá'í Commonwealth, animated wholly by the spirit, and operating solely in direct conformity with the laws and principles of Baha'u'llah.

Further, in "Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), p. 155, Shoghi Effendi refers to the anticipated impetus to the development of the Faith provided by the World Crusade and he designates the point in time when the Faith will begin to assume responsibility for "religious and civil matters". The Guardian states:

This present Crusade, on the threshold of which we now stand, will, moreover, by virtue of the dynamic forces it will release and its wide repercussions over the entire surface of the globe, contribute effectually to the acceleration of yet another process of tremendous significance which will carry the steadily evolving Faith of Baha'u'llah through its present stages of obscurity, of repression, of emancipation and of recognition - stages one or another of which Bahá'í national communities in various parts of the world now find themselves in - to the stage of establishment, the stage at which the Faith of Baha'u'llah will be recognized by the civil authorities as the state religion, similar to that which Christianity entered in the years following the death of the Emperor Constantine, a stage which must later be followed by the emergence of the Bahá'í state itself, functioning, in all religious and civil matters, in strict accordance with the laws and ordinances of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy, the Mother-Book of the Bahá'í Revelation, a stage which, in the fullness of time, will culminate in the establishment of the World Bahá'í Commonwealth, functioning in the plenitude of its powers, and which will signalize the long-awaited advent of the Christ-promised Kingdom of God on earth - the Kingdom of Baha'u'llah - mirroring however faintly upon this humble handful of dust the glories of the Abha Kingdom.

Finally, in relation to the future of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi indicates that it is

... destined to attain, in the fullness of time, the status of a world-embracing Commonwealth, which would be at once the instrument and the guardian of the Most Great Peace announced by its Author.

("The World Order of Baha'u'llah: Selected Letters", p. 196)

And, the Universal House of Justice in a letter dated 23 December 1985 written on its behalf to an individual believer states that

... the interests of the entire world ... and those of the Faith are destined to merge in the Most Great Peace.

## World Government and the Universal House of Justice

4

### Compilation

The Research Department has been able to find few references that pertain specifically to the questions raised by Mr .... and Mr ..... To assist them in their study we attach a compilation of extracts from letters written by and on behalf of the Universal House of Justice. These letters amplify aspects of the evolution toward World Order and comment on the relationship between the Bahá'í institutions and the new institutions referred to in the Guardian's letters. A number of important general points emerge from consideration of these extracts, for example:

1. As mentioned earlier, the letters of Shoghi Effendi describe successive stages in the evolution of the institutions of the Faith and their relationship to the world at large. At the time of the establishment of the Bahá'í Commonwealth, of which the Universal House of Justice is the "supreme organ", the House of Justice indicates that "the religious and secular aspects are clearly merged into one set of institutions, i.e., the institutions of the World Order of Baha'u'llah". See extract I.
2. The future "governmental functions" of the Houses of Justice have not been clearly defined. See extract 2.
3. The nature of the relationship between the evolving World Order of Baha'u'llah and the institutions of a "slowly awakening world" will require further elucidation by the Universal House of Justice. Extracts 3 and 4 contain statements written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi concerning the International Executive, the Universal Court of Arbitration and the International Tribunal.
4. The process of evolution toward the Bahá'í World Commonwealth is a long and gradual one. See extracts 5 and 6.
5. While the Writings of the Faith contain many passages with "guidance for the changing conditions under which the followers of Baha'u'llah will be labouring during the passing centuries, ... it is not possible to see in advance the details of how they will be applied". See extract 7.

### Question 1: Relationship between the international legislature and the Universal House of Justice

In a letter dated 27 May 1966, published in "Wellspring of Guidance: Messages 1963-1968" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976), p. 90, the House of Justice is described as both the "highest legislative body of the Faith" and as the "supreme organ" of the Bahá'í Commonwealth. The Universal House of Justice has indicated that this system of government coincides with the "Bahá'í system". See extract 4 of attachment. Further the House of Justice confirms that at the time of the establishment of the Bahá'í Commonwealth the "religious and secular aspects are clearly merged into one set of institutions, i.e., the institutions of the World Order of Baha'u'llah." See extract 1.

## World Government and the Universal House of Justice

5

### **Question 2: Enforcement of the laws of the Universal House of Justice on the peoples of the world**

With regard to the question about the manner in which the laws of the Universal House of Justice will be enforced on the peoples of the world, this needs to be understood within the context of the gradual evolution of the Faith and the emergence of the world commonwealth. From the extract from "Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957", p. 155, already cited, it is clear that the "Bahá'í state" will function, "in all religious and civil matters, in strict accordance with the laws and ordinances in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas".

With respect to how the laws of the Universal House of Justice will be enforced, information on this subject is fragmentary. It is interesting to note that 'Abdu'l-Baha, in His Will and Testament (see "Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), pp. 14-15), refers to the fact that the Universal House of Justice enacts the laws and the government enforces them. He states:

This House of Justice enacteth the laws and the government enforceth them. The legislative body must reinforce the executive, the executive must aid and assist the legislative body so that through the close union and harmony of these two forces, the foundation of fairness and justice may become firm and strong, that all the regions of the world may become even as Paradise itself.

Further, Shoghi Effendi, in a letter dated 18 April 1941 written on his behalf in response to a question about the "government" referred to in the above excerpt, provided the following clarification:

By "Government" ... is meant the executive body which will enforce the laws when the Bahá'í Faith has reached the point when it is recognized and accepted entirely by any particular nation.

And, the Universal House of Justice in a letter dated 9 March 1977 written on its behalf to an individual believer in response to a question about the rights of the minority of non-Bahá'í citizens in a Bahá'í state indicated:

As to your question concerning the rights of the minority of non-Bahá'í citizens in a Bahá'í state, it is clear from the writings of our Faith that under a Bahá'í system the rights of the minorities of any type must always be respected and upheld. Just as Bahá'ís today show obedience and loyalty to the government but refuse to bow to the majority if they are asked to deny their Faith, so in the future, when the majority is represented by the Faith the Bahá'ís will not force the minority to become followers of Baha'u'llah but they will expect the minority to be similarly obedient and loyal.

The ultimate safeguard in the Faith of Baha'u'llah to ensure that this principle and all its other fundamental tenets are not violated is the Universal House of Justice, which, as its Constitution clearly stipulates, is charged with the responsibility of maintaining the integrity of the teachings and of safeguarding their inviolability.

**World Government and the Universal House of Justice**

6

**Question 3: Sacred order and secular order**

Mr .... and Mr .... make reference to the historical Western model of the division between church and state. They enquire whether or not it is valid, in the Bahá'í model, to draw a distinction between a sacred order (the Bahá'í Commonwealth) and a secular order (the political institutions of the world). From the foregoing discussions, it is apparent that the sacred and secular begin to merge with the emergence of the Bahá'í state and that, by the time of the establishment of the world commonwealth, the "religious and secular aspects are clearly merged into one set of institutions".

The historical division between church and state which characterizes the Western model of government provides a means for preserving a clear distinction between the religious and political powers in society and for curbing any unwarranted interference of the church in the affairs of the state. Such provisions were particularly relevant to the relations between church and state during the late Middle Ages and the Reformation. It is suggested that, as part of their research, Mr .... and Mr .... might give some attention to a consideration of the uniqueness of the Bahá'í system and the provisions it contains for avoiding the problems and difficulties associated with other religious and governmental systems. In this regard they may well be familiar with the material contained in "The World Order of Baha'u'llah: Selected Letters", pp. 18-22 and pp. 152-54.

Attachment

27 April 1995

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your email of 19 February 1995 addressed to the Research Department was referred to the Universal House of Justice. In it you quote two phrases which appear in a book you have recently read, and which seem from the context to be citations from Shoghi Effendi. These phrases are "Bahá'í theocracy" and "humanity will emerge from that immature civilization in which church and state are separate". You ask whether these references can be authenticated and dated. We have been instructed to send you the following reply.

A reference to "Bahá'í theocracy" is to be found in a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual Bahá'í on 30 September 1949. This reads as follows:

He thinks your question is well put: what the Guardian was referring to was the theocratic systems, such as the Catholic Church and the Caliphate, which are not divinely given as systems, but man-made, and yet, being partly derived from the teachings of Christ and Muhammad are in a sense theocracies. The Bahá'í theocracy, on the contrary, is both divinely ordained as a system and, of course, based on the teachings of the Prophet Himself.

The other passage does not comprise words of Shoghi Effendi, although its purport was approved by him. As you yourself have since discovered, it can be found in *The Bahá'í World*, volume VI, on page 199, in a statement entitled "Concerning Membership in Non-Bahá'í Religious Organizations", about which the Guardian's secretary had written on his behalf on 11 December 1935: "The Guardian has carefully read the copy of the statement you had recently prepared concerning non-membership in non-Bahá'í religious organizations, and is pleased to realize that your comments and explanations are in full conformity with his views on the subject."

The complete paragraph in which the words appear is as follows:

In the light of these words,<sup>1</sup> it seems fully evident that the way to approach this instruction is in realizing the Faith of Baha'u'llah as an ever-growing organism destined to become something new and greater than any of the revealed religions

<sup>1</sup>. Reference to a letter of 15 June 1935 from Shoghi Effendi, published in the United States *Bahá'í News*, no. 95, October 1935, p. 2, and in *Messages to America: Selected Letters and Cablegrams Addressed to the Bahá'ís of North America, 1932-1946* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1947), pp. 4-5.



27 April 1995  
Page 2

of the past. Whereas former Faiths inspired hearts and illumined souls, they eventuated in formal religions with an ecclesiastical organization, creeds, rituals and churches, while the Faith of Baha'u'llah, likewise renewing man's spiritual life, will gradually produce the institutions of an ordered society, fulfilling not merely the function of the churches of the past but also the function of the civil state. By this manifestation of the Divine Will in a higher degree than in former ages, humanity will emerge from that immature civilization in which church and state are separate and competitive institutions, and partake of a true civilization in which spiritual and social principles are at last reconciled as two aspects of one and the same Truth.

You also ask how these statements could be reconciled with Shoghi Effendi's comment on page 149 of *Bahá'í Administration*, which appears to anticipate "a future that is sure to witness the formal and complete separation of Church and State", and with the following words in his letter of 21 March 1932 addressed to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada:

Theirs is not the purpose, while endeavoring to conduct and perfect the administrative affairs of their Faith, to violate, under any circumstances, the provisions of their country's constitution, much less to allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries.

A careful reading of the letter dated 6 December 1928 in which the Guardian's comment about the separation of Church and State occurs would suggest that, rather than enunciating a general principle, Shoghi Effendi is simply reviewing "the quickening forces of internal reform" that had "recently transpired throughout the Near and Middle East", and enumerating a number of factors that impinge on the development of the Faith in those parts of the world.'

As for the statement made by Shoghi Effendi in his letter of 21 March 1932, the well-established principles of the Faith concerning the relationship of the Bahá'í institutions to those of the country in which the Bahá'ís reside make it unthinkable that they would ever purpose to violate a country's constitution or so to meddle in its political machinery as to attempt to take over the powers of government. This is an integral element of the Bahá'í principle of abstention from involvement in politics. However, this does not by any means imply that the country itself may not, by constitutional means, decide to adopt Bahá'í laws and practices and modify its constitution or method of government accordingly. The relationship between the principle of abstention from involvement in politics and the emergence of the Bahá'í State is commented on later in this letter. In the meantime we can quote the following extracts from letters written on behalf of the Guardian in response to queries from individual believers, which indicate that the relationship is an evolving one:

Regarding the question raised in your letter, Shoghi Effendi believes that for the present the Movement, whether in the East or the West, should be dissociated entirely from politics. This was the explicit injunction of 'Abdu'l-Baha .... Eventually, however, as you have rightly conceived it, the Movement will, as soon

<sup>2</sup> *The World Order of Baha'u'llah: Selected Letters* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> *Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 147.

27 April 1995  
Page 3

as it is fully developed and recognized, embrace both religious and political issues. In fact Baha'u'llah clearly states that affairs of state as well as religious questions are to be referred to the Houses of Justice into which the Assemblies of the Bahá'ís will eventually evolve.

(30 November 1930)

The Bahá'ís will be called upon to assume the reins of government when they will come to constitute the majority of the population in a given country, and even then their participation in political affairs is bound to be limited in scope unless they obtain a similar majority in some other countries as well.

(19 November 1939)

The Bahá'ís must remain non-partisan in all political affairs. In the distant future, however, when the majority of a country have become Bahá'ís then it will lead to the establishment of a Bahá'í State.

(19 April 1941)

A proper understanding of all the above passages, and of their implications, requires an acceptance of two fundamental principles for the exegesis of Bahá'í Texts.

The first, which derives from the Covenant, is the principle that the writings of 'Abdul-Baha and the Guardian are thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the Revelation of Baha'u'llah and intimately linked with the Teachings of Baha'u'llah Himself. This principle is clearly expounded in two paragraphs from a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer on 19 March 1946:

Whatever the Master has said is based on the teachings of Baha'u'llah. He was the perfect Interpreter, had lived with Him all His life; therefore what He says has the same standing, even if a text of Baha'u'llah is not available ....

We must take the teachings as a great, balanced whole, not seek out and oppose to each other two strong statements that have different meanings; somewhere in between, there are links uniting the two. That is what makes our Faith so flexible and well balanced. For instance there are calamities for testing and for punishment - there are also accidents, plain cause and effect!

Baha'u'llah has given us a Revelation designed to raise mankind to heights never before attained. It is little wonder that the minds of individual believers, no matter how perceptive, have difficulty in comprehending its range. It is the words of 'Abdu'l-Baha and the Guardian which elucidate this vast Revelation and make clear the manner in which different statements relate to one another and what is implied by the Revealed Word. Without the bright light of the • Covenant, this Faith, like all those before it, would be torn to pieces by the conflicting opinions of scholars applying limited human reasoning to divinely revealed truths.

The second fundamental principle which enables us to understand the pattern towards which Baha'u'llah wishes human society to evolve is the principle of organic growth which requires that detailed developments, and the understanding of detailed developments, become available only with the passage of time and with the help of the guidance given by that Central Authority in the Cause to whom all must turn. In this regard one can use the simile of a tree. If

27 April 1995  
Page 4

a farmer plants a tree, he cannot state at that moment what its exact height will be, the number of its branches or the exact time of its blossoming. He can, however, give a general impression of its size and pattern of growth and can state with confidence which fruit it will bear. The same is true of the evolution of the World Order of Baha'u'llah. For example, we find the following illuminating explanation in a letter written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís in America on 23 February 1924:<sup>4</sup>

And as we make an effort to demonstrate that love to the world may we also clear our minds of any lingering trace of unhappy misunderstandings that might obscure our clear conception of the exact purpose and methods of this new world order, so challenging and complex, yet so consummate and wise. We are called upon by our beloved Master in His Will and Testament not only to adopt it unreservedly, but to unveil its merit to all the world. To attempt to estimate its full value, and grasp its exact significance after so short a time since its inception would be premature and presumptuous on our part. We must trust to time, and the guidance of God's Universal House of Justice, to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its provisions and implications. But one word of warning must be uttered in this connection. Let us be on our guard lest we measure too strictly the Divine Plan with the standard of men. I am not prepared to state that it agrees in principle or in method with the prevailing notions now uppermost in men's minds, nor that it should conform with those imperfect, precarious, and expedient measures feverishly resorted to by agitated humanity. Are we to doubt that the ways of God are not necessarily the ways of man? Is not faith but another word for implicit obedience, whole-hearted allegiance, uncompromising adherence to that which we believe is the revealed and express will of God, however perplexing it might first appear, however at variance with the shadowy views, the impotent doctrines, the crude theories, the idle imaginings, the fashionable conceptions of a transient and troublous age? If we are to falter or hesitate, if our love for Him should fail to direct us and keep us within His path, if we desert Divine and emphatic principles, what hope can we any more cherish for healing the ills and sicknesses of this world?

Pending the establishment of the Universal House of Justice, whose function it is to lay more definitely the broad lines that must guide the future activities and administration of the Movement, it is clearly our duty to strive to obtain as clear a view as possible of the manner in which to conduct the affairs of the Cause, and then arise with single-mindedness and determination to adopt and maintain it in all our activities and labours.

At this time we have the benefit of many subsequent interpretations by Shoghi Effendi and also the initial guidance of the Universal House of Justice, which will continue to elucidate aspects of this mighty system as it unfolds. In striving to attain a "clearer and fuller understanding" of the World Order of Baha'u'llah, we need to contemplate the operation of the Bahá'í principles of governance and social responsibility as they persist through changing sets of conditions, from the present time when the Bahá'í community constitutes a small number of people living in a variety of overwhelmingly non-Bahá'í societies, to the far different situation

4 *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 62.

27 April 1995  
Page 5

in future centuries when the Bahá'ís are becoming, and eventually have become, the vast majority of the people.

The Administrative Order is certainly the nucleus and pattern of the World Order of Baha'u'llah, but it is in embryonic form, and must undergo major evolutionary developments in the course of time. Certain passages in the writings on this subject establish matters of principle, certain ones describe the ultimate goal of the Most Great Peace, and certain of them relate to stages of development on the way to the attainment of that goal. For example, in this familiar passage in His Will and Testament, 'Abdu'l-Baha states:<sup>5</sup>

This House of Justice enacteth the laws and the government enforceth them. The legislative body must reinforce the executive, the executive must aid and assist the legislative body so that through the close union and harmony of these two forces, the foundation of fairness and justice may become firm and strong, that all the regions of the world may become even as Paradise itself.

In response to a question about the "government" in the above passage, Shoghi Effendi's secretary wrote on his behalf, on 18 April 1941, the following clarification:

By "Government" ... is meant the executive body which will enforce the laws when the Bahá'í Faith has reached the point when it is recognized and accepted entirely by any particular nation.

The same relationship between legislature and executive is expressed in the well-known passage in "The Unfoldment of World Civilization"<sup>6</sup>, showing how one principle is applied over successive periods.

A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth.

**In** relation to other international institutions, the Guardian has given the following guidance:

Touching the point raised in the Secretary's letter regarding the nature and scope of the Universal Court of Arbitration, this and other similar matters will have to be explained and elucidated by the Universal House of Justice, to which, according to the Master's explicit Instructions, all important fundamental questions must be referred.<sup>7</sup>

**In** his letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada written on 27 February 1929,<sup>8</sup> Shoghi Effendi stated:

<sup>5</sup> *Will and Testament of 'Abdu 'l-Baha* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), pp. 14-15.

<sup>6</sup> *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 203.

<sup>7</sup> *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> cf. *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, pp. 6-7.

27 April 1995  
Page 6

Not only will the present-day Spiritual Assemblies be styled differently in future, but they will be enabled also to add to their present functions those powers, duties, and prerogatives necessitated by the recognition of the Faith of Baha'u'llah, not merely as one of the recognized religious systems of the world, but as the State Religion of an independent and Sovereign Power. And as the Bahá'í Faith permeates the masses of the peoples of East and West, and its truth is embraced by the majority of the peoples of a number of the Sovereign States of the world, will the Universal House of Justice attain the plenitude of its power, and exercise as the supreme organ of the Bahá'í Commonwealth all the rights, the duties and responsibilities incumbent upon the world's future superstate.

Complementing these words are the Guardian's repeated and forceful requirement that Bahá'ís strictly abstain from involvement in politics. This requirement has far-reaching implications for the method by which Baha'u'llah's Administrative Order will evolve into His World Order. We can consider, for example, the well-known passage in his letter of 21 March 1932 to the Bahá'ís in the United States and Canada<sup>9</sup>

Let them refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with the policies of their governments and the schemes and programmes of parties and factions .... Let them affirm their unyielding determination to stand, firmly and unreservedly, for the way of Baha'u'llah, to avoid the entanglements and bickerings inseparable from the pursuits of the politician, and to become worthy agencies of that Divine Polity which incarnates God's immutable Purpose for all men ....

... Let them beware lest, in their eagerness to further the aims of their beloved Cause, they should be led unwittingly to bargain with their Faith, to compromise with their essential principles, or to sacrifice, in return for any material advantage which their institutions may derive, the integrity of their spiritual ideals.

As one studies these words, one begins to understand the processes at work in the gradual unfoldment and establishment of the Bahá'í System.

Clearly the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth is a "political" enterprise, and the Teachings of the Faith are filled with "political" principles - using the word in the sense of the science of government and of the organization of human society. At the same time the Bahá'í world community repeatedly and emphatically denies being a "political" organization, and Bahá'ís are required, on pain of deprivation of their administrative rights, to refrain from becoming involved in "political" matters and from taking sides in "political" disputes. In other words, the Bahá'ís are following a completely different path from that usually followed by those who wish to reform society. They eschew political methods towards the achievement of their aims, and concentrate on revitalizing the hearts, minds and behaviour of people and on presenting a working model as evidence of the reality and practicality of the way of life they propound.

The Bahá'í Administrative Order is the "nucleus and pattern" of the divinely intended future political system of the world, and undoubtedly non-Bahá'í governments will benefit from

*9 The World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 64-65.*

27 April 1995  
Page 7

learning how this system works and from adopting its procedures and principles in overcoming the problems they face. Nevertheless, this Administration is primarily the framework and structure designed to be a channel for the flow of the spirit of the Cause and for the application of its Teachings. As the Guardian wrote: <sup>10</sup>

It is surely for those to whose hands so priceless a heritage has been committed to prayerfully watch lest the tool should supersede the Faith itself, lest undue concern for the minute details arising from the administration of the Cause obscure the vision of its promoters, lest partiality, ambition, and worldliness tend in the course of time to becloud the radiance, stain the purity, and impair the effectiveness of the Faith of Baha'u'llah,

The gradual process of the evolution of the Bahá'í Administrative Order into the World Order of Baha'u'llah has been described by Shoghi Effendi in many of his writings, as in the following excerpt from his letter of 30 April 1953 to the All-America Intercontinental Teaching Conference: <sup>11</sup>

This present Crusade, on the threshold of which we now stand, will, moreover, by virtue of the dynamic forces it will release and its wide repercussions over the entire surface of the globe, contribute effectually to the acceleration of yet another process of tremendous significance which will carry the steadily evolving Faith of Baha'u'llah through its present stages of obscurity, of repression, of emancipation and of recognition - stages one or another of which Bahá'í national communities in various parts of the world now find themselves - to the stage of establishment, the stage at which the Faith of Baha'u'llah will be recognized by the civil authorities as the State Religion, similar to that which Christianity entered in the years following the death of the Emperor Constantine, a stage which must later be followed by the emergence of the Bahá'í state itself, functioning, in all religious and civil matters, in strict accordance with the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitab-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy, the Mother-Book of the Bahá'í Revelation, a stage which, in the fullness of time, will culminate in the establishment of the World Bahá'í Commonwealth, functioning in the plenitude of its powers, and which will signalize the long-awaited advent of the Christ-promised Kingdom of God on earth - the Kingdom of Baha'u'llah - mirroring however faintly upon this humble handful of dust the glories of the Abha Kingdom.

In answer to those who raise objections to this vision of a worldwide commonwealth inspired by a Divine Revelation, fearing for the freedom of minority groups or of the individual under such a system, we can explain the Bahá'í principle of upholding the rights of minorities and fostering their interests. We can also point to the fact that no person is ever compelled to accept the Faith of Baha'u'llah and moreover, unlike the situation in certain other religions, each person has complete freedom to withdraw from the Faith if he decides that he no longer believes in its Founder or accepts His Teachings. In light of these facts alone it is evident that the growth of the Bahá'í communities to the size where a non-Bahá'í state would adopt the Faith as the State Religion, let alone to the point at which the State would accept the Law of

<sup>10</sup> *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> *Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), p. 155.

27 April 1995  
Page 8

God as its own law and the National House of Justice as its legislature, must be a supremely voluntary and democratic process.

As the Universal House of Justice wrote in its letter of 21 July 1968 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States:

It is not our purpose to impose Bahá'í teachings upon others by persuading the powers that be to enact laws enforcing Bahá'í principles, nor to join movements which have such legislation as their aim. The guidance that Bahá'í institutions offer to mankind does not comprise a series of specific answers to current problems, but rather the illumination of an entirely new way of life. Without this way of life the problems are insoluble; with it they will either not arise or, if they arise, can be resolved.

Two quotations from the writings of the Guardian bear particularly on these principles of the rights and prerogatives of minorities and of individuals. In *The Advent of Divine Justice* is a passage which is of fundamental significance for Bahá'í constitutional law<sup>12</sup>:

Unlike the nations and peoples of the earth, be they of the East or of the West, democratic or authoritarian, communist or capitalist, whether belonging to the Old World or the New, who either ignore, trample upon, or extirpate, the racial, religious, or political minorities within the sphere of their jurisdiction, every organized community enlisted under the banner of Baha'u'llah should feel it to be its first and inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority belonging to any faith, race, class, or nation within it.

As for the protection of the rights of individuals, there is the following translation of a forceful passage which appears in a letter from Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of Iran, written in July 1925, in relation to a situation involving a Covenant-breaker:

... the mere fact of disaffection, estrangement, or recantation of belief, can in no wise detract from, or otherwise impinge upon, the legitimate civil rights of individuals in a free society, be it to the most insignificant degree. Were the friends to follow other than this course, it would be tantamount to a reversion on their part, in this century of radiance and light, to the ways and standards of a former age: they would reignite in men's breasts the fire of bigotry and blind fanaticism, cut themselves off from the glorious bestowals of this promised Day of God, and impede the full flow of divine assistance in this wondrous age.

All Bahá'ís, and especially those who make a profound study of the Cause, need to grasp the differences between the Bahá'í concepts of governance and those of the past, and to abstain • from measuring Bahá'í institutions and methods against the faulty man-made institutions and methods hitherto current in the world. The Guardian graphically stressed these differences in his letter of 8 February 1934, known as "The Dispensation of Baha'u'llah":<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 35.

<sup>13</sup> *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, p. 152.

27 April 1995  
Page 9

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. No form of democratic government; no system of autocracy or of dictatorship, whether monarchical or republican; no intermediary scheme of a purely aristocratic order; nor even any of the recognized types of theocracy, whether it be the Hebrew Commonwealth, or the various Christian ecclesiastical organizations, or the Imamate or the Caliphate in Islam none of these can be identified or be said to conform with the Administrative Order which the master-hand of its perfect Architect has fashioned.

Among the many complementary Teachings in the Faith which resolve the dilemmas of past societies are those of the unity of mankind on the one hand, and loyalty to the Covenant on the other. As already mentioned, no one in this Dispensation is compelled to be a Bahá'í, and the division of humankind into the "clean" and the "unclean", the "faithful" and the "infidels", is abolished. At the same time, anyone who does choose to be a Bahá'í accepts the Covenant of Baha'u'llah and, while free expression of opinion within the Bahá'í community is encouraged, this cannot ever be permitted to degenerate to the level of undermining the Covenant, for this would vitiate the very purpose of the Revelation itself.

One of the major concerns of the Universal House of Justice, as the Bahá'í Administrative Order unfolds, will be to ensure that it evolves in consonance with the spirit of the Bahá'í Revelation. While many beneficial aspects of human society at large can be safely incorporated into Bahá'í Administration, the House of Justice will guard against the corrupting influence of those non-Bahá'í political and social concepts and practices which are not in harmony with the divine standard.

The House of Justice appreciates your concern about such a fundamental issue, and asks us to assure you of its prayers in the Holy Shrines for the confirmation of your services to the Cause of God.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

For Department of the Secretariat

cc: International Teaching Centre  
Board of Counsellors in Europe  
National Assembly of the Netherlands



**EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS WRITTEN BY AND ON BEHALF OF  
THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE ON EVOLUTION TOWARDS  
WORLD ORDER**

You have also asked whether the institutions of the Faith will in the future only concern themselves with the spiritual affairs of the community or whether they will also be engaged in matters of state and be identical with the civil government. We have been asked to state that a careful reading of the words of the beloved Guardian will reveal that what you describe are two future stages in the development of the Faith. Thus, he wrote: "Not only will the present-day Spiritual Assemblies be styled differently in future, but they will be enabled also to add to their present functions those powers, duties, and prerogatives necessitated by the recognition of the Faith of Baha'u'llah, not merely as one of the recognized religious systems of the world, but as the State Religion of an independent and Sovereign Power." ("The World Order of Baha'u'llah", pp. 6-7)

The statement quoted above envisages the development of the institutions of the Faith purely as agencies conducting the affairs of the community of the followers of Baha'u'llah. In "The Advent of Divine Justice" (p. 12), however, Shoghi Effendi goes beyond the stage when the Faith becomes the "State Religion". This stage, he explains, "... must give way to its assumption of the rights and prerogatives associated with the Bahá'í state, functioning in the plenitude of its powers, a stage which must ultimately culminate in the emergence of the worldwide Bahá'í Commonwealth, animated wholly by the spirit, and operating solely in direct conformity with the laws and principles of Baha'u'llah". This last stage is described in slightly different terms in the following words of Shoghi Effendi: "And as the Bahá'í Faith permeates the masses of the peoples of East and West, and its truth is embraced by the majority of the peoples of a number of the Sovereign States of the world, will the Universal House of Justice attain the plenitude of its power, and exercise, as the supreme organ of the Bahá'í Commonwealth, all the rights, the duties, and responsibilities incumbent upon the world's future superstate." (Cf. "The World Order of Baha'u'llah", p. 7) It is obvious that in these last stages the religious and secular aspects are clearly merged into one set of institutions, i.e., the institutions of the World Order of Baha'u'llah. This concept is further confirmed by Shoghi Effendi when he clearly states that the "Administrative Order" will in the future "assert its claim and demonstrate its capacity to be regarded not only as the nucleus but the very pattern of the New World Order destined to embrace in the fullness of time the whole of mankind". ("The World Order of Baha'u'llah", p. 144) (9 March 1977 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [1]

In answer to your question on future governmental functions of Houses of Justice, ... we have been directed to quote the following from two letters written on behalf of the Guardian to 'individual believers:

I This extract appears on p. 15 of the 1984 edition of "The Advent of Divine Justice".

The Bahá'ís will be called upon to assume the reins of government when they will come to constitute the majority of the population in a given country, and even then their participation in political affairs is bound to be limited in scope unless they obtain a similar majority in some other countries as well.

You asked regarding the status of the different governments when the House of Justice will be established: this is not fully explained in the teachings, and what is not definitely provided for, it is for the House of Justice to legislate upon once that body is formed.

The Universal House of Justice points out that as the World Order of Baha'u'llah unfolds, these points will become clearer to the believers, and at this time it does not wish to go beyond what Shoghi Effendi has already expounded in his letters.

(8 January 1979 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[2]

Your last question concerns the relationship of the evolving World Order of Baha'u'llah to the institutions of a slowly awakening world. The following three extracts from letters written on behalf of the Guardian to individual believers should prove helpful to your study of this subject.

As regards the International Executive referred to by the Guardian in his "Goal of a New World Order", it should be noted that this statement refers by no means to the Bahá'í Commonwealth of the future, but simply to that world government which will herald the advent and lead to the final establishment of the World Order of Baha'u'llah. The formation of this International Executive, which corresponds to the executive head or board in present-day national governments, is but a step leading to the Bahá'í world government of the future, and hence should not be identified with either the institution of the Guardianship or that of the International House of Justice. (March 17, 1934)

The Universal Court of Arbitration and the International Tribunal are the same. When the Bahá'í State will be established they will be merged in the Universal House of Justice. (17 June 1933)

You asked regarding the status of the different governments when the House of Justice will be established: this is not fully explained in the teachings, and what is not definitely provided for, it is for the House of Justice to legislate upon once that body is formed. (12 January 1933)

(5 July 1982 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[3]

... the five questions which arose concerning the world legislature, the world executive, and the world tribunal during your study of the letters of the beloved Guardian collected and published under the title of "The World Order of Baha'u'llah" have been conveyed to us.

Regarding the five questions you have asked, it is clear from the text on pages 203-204 of "The World Order of Baha'u'llah" that the system the Guardian is describing is the Bahá'í system under which "the causes of religious strife will be permanently removed", and "whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation." In support of his theme, Shoghi Effendi quotes 'Abdul-Baha's statement "that all nations and kindreds will be gathered together under the Shadow of this Divine Banner ...".

As to the relationships of these three bodies, on page 7 of "The World Order of Baha'u'llah" the Guardian has referred to the Universal House of Justice as "the supreme organ of the Bahá'í Commonwealth".

We have so far also noted in Shoghi Effendi's writings two other elucidations which we share with you.

Touching the point raised in the Secretary's letter regarding the nature and scope of the Universal Court of Arbitration, this and other similar matters will have to be explained and elucidated by the Universal House of Justice, to which, according to the Master's explicit Instructions, all important and fundamental questions must be referred. ("Bahá'í Administration", p. 47).

The Universal Court of Arbitration and the International Tribunal are the same. When the Bahá'í State will be established they will be merged in the Universal House of Justice. (Letter to an individual believer, dated June 17, 1933, written on the Guardian's behalf by his secretary).

The Universal House of Justice at this time does not wish to go beyond the general guidelines found in the Writings. When the time is ripe, however, it will have to provide further necessary elucidations.

(23 June 1971 from the Universal House of Justice to a Local Spiritual Assembly) [4]

As you are no doubt aware, the Guardian indicated that the development of mankind from its present chaotic condition to the stage of the Bahá'í World Commonwealth would be a long and gradual one. The coming into existence of a World Authority and the initiation of the Lesser Peace constitute one major transformation in this process, and will be followed by other stages of the development of the Faith as outlined by Shoghi Effendi in his writings. Undoubtedly, as these developments are taking place, the counsel the institutions of the Faith can give to governments, the pattern of world administration offered by the Bahá'í community and the great humanitarian projects which will be launched under the aegis of the Universal House of Justice will exercise a great influence on the course of progress.

(19 January 1983 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[5]

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 13 December 1984 inquiring about the Lesser Peace and the Supreme Tribunal referred to in the writings of the Faith. We are asked to convey the following comments.

Baha'u'llah's principal mission in appearing at this time in human history is the realization of the oneness of mankind and the establishment of peace among the nations; therefore, all the forces which are focused on accomplishing these ends are influenced by His Revelation. We know, however, that peace will come in stages. First, there will come the Lesser Peace, when the unity of nations will be achieved, then gradually the Most Great Peace the spiritual as well as social and political unity of mankind, when the Bahá'í World Commonwealth, operating in strict accordance with the laws and ordinances of the Most Holy Book of the Bahá'í Revelation, will have been established through the efforts of the Bahá'ís.

As to the Lesser Peace, Shoghi Effendi has explained that this will initially be a political unity arrived at by decision of the governments of various nations; it will not be established by direct action of the Bahá'í community. This does not mean, however, that the Bahá'ís are standing aside and waiting for the Lesser Peace to come before they do something about the peace of mankind. Indeed, by promoting the principles of the Faith, which are indispensable to the maintenance of peace, and by fashioning the instruments of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, which we are told by the beloved Guardian is the pattern for future society, the Bahá'ís are constantly engaged in laying the groundwork for a permanent peace, the Most Great Peace being their ultimate goal.

The Lesser Peace itself will pass through stages; at the initial stage the governments will act entirely on their own without the conscious involvement of the Faith; later on, in God's good time, the Faith will have a direct influence on it in ways indicated by Shoghi Effendi in his "The Goal of a New World Order". In connection with the steps that will lead to this latter stage, the Universal House of Justice will certainly determine what has to be done, in accordance with the guidance in the Writings, such as the passage you quoted from "Tablets of Baha'u'llah", page 89. In the meantime, the Bahá'ís will undoubtedly continue to do all in their power to promote the establishment of peace.

(31 January 1985 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[6]

The process leading to the ultimate achievement in all its aspects of "the world-wide sovereignty of Baha'u'llah", the establishment in its fullness of His New World Order, will necessarily be a long one, and the world during that time will pass through many stages. The details of that process cannot now be discerned. Only through the passage of time and the enactments of the Universal House of Justice can such details be gradually unfolded before the eyes of the friends and of the world.

There are in the Sacred Texts and in the writings of Shoghi Effendi passages replete with guidance for the changing conditions under which the followers of Baha'u'llah will be labouring during the passing centuries, but it is not possible to see in advance the details of how they will be applied. The eternal verities, the laws and guiding principles of the Faith are, however, clearly revealed for all to see, and it will be in accordance with these, and through the power of the Covenant, which 'Abdul-Baha called "the axis of the oneness of the world of humanity", that the Cause will advance.

(26 November 1979 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

[7]

Extract from a letter regarding global governance

Any activity on the part of Bahá'ís to influence the processes toward the Lesser Peace, such as the convocation of world leaders, should be undertaken with the understanding that the achievement of the Lesser Peace is dependent on the initiatives of non-Bahá'í leaders and not on the basis of any Bahá'í scheme. In this regard, the following reply was written on behalf of the beloved Guardian in a letter dated 14 March 1939 to an individual believer:

Your view that the Lesser Peace will come about through the political efforts of the states and nations of the world, and independently of any direct Bahá'í plan or effort, and the Most Great Peace be established through the instrumentality of the believers, and by the direct operation of the laws and principles revealed by Baha'u'llah and the functioning of the Universal House of Justice as the supreme organ of the Bahá'í superstate-your view on this subject is quite correct and in full accord with the pronouncements of the Guardian as embodied in "The Unfoldment of World Civilization". (See *The World Order of Baha'u'llah: Selected Letters* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), pp.161-206)

It is clear, then, that the friends must respect the prerogatives of political leaders in this matter and allow them the latitude to exercise the initiative that only they can effectively take towards the establishment of the Lesser Peace. It should be borne in mind in this regard that because of the political gravity of the decisions involved in the establishment of the Lesser Peace, and the differing political attitudes which it evokes, certain actions on the part of the Bahá'í community would embroil the friends in partisan politics. There is quite a difference between identifying the need for a convocation of world leaders, as does the Peace Statement, and initiating the political processes towards its realization. Even though the establishment of the Lesser Peace, of which the conference of leaders will be a related event, will come about independently of any Bahá'í plan or action, Bahá'ís should not be inert. Indeed, they may promote the concept of world peace with all that it implies without allowing their activities to assume a character that could be identified with the political processes which its realization will require.

It is not the wish of the House of Justice to dampen anyone's enthusiasm for assisting in developments towards peace, but it is critical that the friends understand the proprieties to be observed by the Bahá'í community in a matter of such vital importance. If, for example, the Bahá'ís attempt to take a leading role in organizing events associated with the anticipated convocation of world leaders, their motives could be misunderstood. The risk is that Bahá'ís might act in a manner which would put non-Bahá'ís in the awkward position of appearing to endorse a specifically Bahá'í vision or make them feel that they are seeking to impose the requirements of our religion upon others. One needs to be aware that we Bahá'ís can, in our zeal, easily overwhelm others and even, owing to the wariness that we might inadvertently engender, cause them to lose sight of the practical importance of establishing world peace.

(From a letter dated 14 January 1996 written to an individual on behalf of the Universal House of Justice)

## PEACE AMONG THE NATIONS

World Peace, a hallmark of the emerging global civilization, will be realized as a tangible expression of the principle of the oneness of humankind. This assurance is given in the teachings of Baha'u'llah,

Such a peace will result from the culmination of two distinct but simultaneous and mutually reinforcing processes: one leading to the spiritual unity of the human race, referred to as the "Most Great Peace"; the other to the political unity of nations and known as the "Lesser Peace". The former is a distant goal, requiring a monumental change in human conduct that only religious faith can ensure; the other is more immediate and can already be detected on the political horizon. The one is directly related to the efforts of the Bahá'í community in promoting the pivotal principle of their Faith; the other is dependent on the actions of world political leaders and not on any Bahá'í plan or action.

The political unity of nations implies the achievement of a relationship among them that will enable them to resolve questions of international import through consultation rather than war and that will lead to the establishment of a world government. The attainment of peace in the political realm is discernible through the workings of a process that can be seen as having been definitely established in the twentieth century amid the terror and turmoil that have characterized so much of this period. It is noteworthy that the majority of the nations have come into being during this century and that they have opted for peaceful relations with one another by joining in the membership of the United Nations and through participation in regional organizations that facilitate their working together. Moreover, the process of political unification is gaining acceleration through the awakening of a consciousness of peace among the world's peoples that validates the work of the United Nations, and through advances in science and technology, which have already contracted and transformed the world into a single complex organism.

The horrific experiences of two world wars which gave birth at first to the League of Nations and then to the United Nations; the frequency with which world leaders, particularly in the decade of the nineties, have met and agreed on the resolution of global issues; the call for a global order that issued from the participation of these leaders in the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations; the multiplication of organizations of civil society that focus attention on a variety of international concerns through the operation of an ever-expanding network of activities; the widespread debates on the need for global governance and numerous organized efforts towards world peace; the emergence of international tribunals; the rapid developments in communications technology that have made the planet borderless-these are among the voluminous evidences of a momentum toward peaceful international relations that has clearly become irreversible.

The Bahá'í writings indicate that peace among the nations will be established in the twentieth century; they do say, however, that a universal fermentation and horrendous social upheavals would mark the transition from a warlike world to a peaceful one, but they do not point to the occurrence of any specific cataclysmic event at the end of the century. Inevitably, the movement leading to world unity must encounter opposing tendencies rooted in stubborn habits of chauvinism and partisanship that refuse to yield to the expectations of a new age. The torturous suffering imposed by such conditions as poverty, war, violence, fanaticism, disease,

and degradation of the environment, to which masses of people are subjected, is a consequence of this opposition. Hence, before the peace of nations matures into a comprehensive reality, it must pass through difficult stages, not unlike those experienced by individual nations until their internal consolidation was achieved. But that the process toward peace is far advanced can hardly be denied.

# # #

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Thomas Linard  
Paris, Independent Scholar

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1982 ; 10 décembre 1982 ; 6 janvier 1983 ; 4 février 1983 ; 22 mars 1983 ; 18 mai 1983 ; 28 juillet 1983 ; 17 janvier 1984 ; 9 février 1984 ; 4 avril 1984 ; 29 mai 1984 ; 21 janvier 1986 ; 23 décembre 1986 ; 31 décembre 1986 ; 14 janvier 1987.

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## Accessing literature on the Bahá'í Faith: emerging search technologies and recent results

Graham Hasall  
Suva, University of the South Pacific

### Abstract

This article surveys some current search technologies that can be used to find documentation on the Bahá'í religion, and provides a summary of results of such searches for the period 2003-2006. It suggests that increase in the capacity to search in the past three decades has increased at a phenomenal pace. Search technologies have multiplied and become more effective and more accessible. More data has become accessible. Emphasis has shifted from seeking information toward making best use of the information found. Deeper access to information has expanded the range of research questions that we may dare to ask.

Access to literature relating to the Bahá'í religion and its emerging global community has expanded phenomenally with the advent of new communications technologies. Scholarly literature is appearing in academic presses, in Bahá'í-sponsored or affiliated presses, in the media, and on the Internet.<sup>1</sup> Systematic posting of essays on the World Wide Web is now widely regarded as "publication". Consider, for instance, Moojan Momen's commentary "A Change of Culture", published on H-Bahai on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2003.<sup>2</sup> Significant references to the Faith appear in the literature of religious studies and the social sciences generally, as well as in current affairs literature. However, there is also an increasing volume of scholarship published on the web only.<sup>3</sup>

The rapid emergence of electronic information services is revolutionising access to information on the Bahá'í Faith. Electronic sources range from websites that are freely accessible, to journal databases and full-text books available only by subscription, to discussion groups that allow researchers to communicate back and forth. By combining these sources the researcher may learn not only of such traditional sources of scholarly information as books and academic papers, but of such other sources as news services and newspaper articles. Judicial and other official records such as those of the United Nations Organisation are also becoming available, as are book lists supplied by booksellers. A search at the on-line bookstore "Amazon.com" in March 1999, for example, found 264 references to "Bahá'í", 304 references the following October, and 1,681 in April 2007. A CD ROM from Newsbank called REDEX has an "Index to UN Documents" which when

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<sup>1</sup> A project to survey current Bahá'í literature, the "Report on Scholarship" (three editions, 1997, 1998 and 1999) are online at <http://www.bahai.org.au/abs/reptof98.htm> and on the Bahá'í-library.org website.

<sup>2</sup> And numerous others, such as "A Fragmentary Contribution to the Biography of Taj al-Saltana" posted to H-Bahai by R. Jackson Armstrong-Ingram on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2002.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, an article by Saïd Amir Arjomandin [Islam, Politics, and Iran in Particular](#) in Silk

searched in March 1999 yielded 209 references to "Bahá'í". A search in the EBSCO database, in the "World Magazine Bank" file, yielded 107 references.

I find it extraordinary that I now have the opportunity to search a database such as *FirstSearch* and learn that author D.C. Lewis referred to the Bahá'ís of Tartarstan in an article that appeared in the journal *Central Asian Survey* in 1997,<sup>4</sup> or to find in *America: History and Life* a reference to an article in the *Armenian Review* quoting "newly discovered English-Language materials" of Dr Reuben Darbinian of Boston, which:

Presents the concluding extract from the daily journals of Dr. Reuben Darbinian, the editor-in-chief of the Harenik publications of Boston; the entries from November 1931 through April 1932 cover daily life and thoughts on Bahá'í and foreign relations.<sup>5</sup>

This search capacity is quite extraordinary, even if now taken for granted. In an earlier period, "publication" referred to the physical printing of "hard-copy" books, newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, theses, official reports, and academic journals. This printed literature was accessed by browsing through collections in libraries and bookstores, card catalogues, printed indexes, and archives. Information deemed useful by a researcher was then either copied out by hand or "photocopied" page by page. In some cases, access to such institutions was limited by membership, such as being a student or faculty member of a university, or by being recognised as a legitimate researcher by an institutional archive. The most open form of search and retrieval in this phase was through purchase of materials into one's personal collection, or through visiting a public library.<sup>6</sup> Of course, in the context of such limited access, researchers had minimal access to "official" records of governments or other agencies. Search projects from this period include E.G. Browne's *Materials for the study of the Babi Religion*<sup>7</sup> and Momen's survey of "Contemporary Western Accounts" of the

<sup>4</sup> Lewis, D.C., "Ethnicity and religion in Tatarstan and the Volga-Ural region", *Central Asian Survey* 16, no.2 (1997) p. 215-236. Abstract: This paper explores the link between religion and ethnic identity among the Tatars people of Tatarstan and the Volga-Ural region. It traces the history of Islam, Russian Orthodoxy, paganism, and the Bahá'í faith in this area, highlighting periods of conflict including current tensions between Tatar Muslim nationalists and some Protestant groups. The paper provides detailed statistics of the geographical distribution of ethnic groups within Tatarstan focusing mainly on the indigenous peoples of the Volga-Ural region, and concludes that one widespread legacy of Communism is that many people find it easier to call themselves atheists than anything else..

<sup>5</sup> Darbinian, Reuben. "The newly-discovered English-language journals or work books of Reuben Darbinian (part iii)". *Armenian Review* 1981 34(4): 389-402. *America: History and Life* database accessed June 27, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> This is still one of the most enjoyable and rewarding experiences in searching. When writing the present article during a visit to Auckland, New Zealand, in April 2007, my browsing second-handbook bookshops was rewarded by finding three unique books with Bahá'í references: Boulton, M. (1960). *Zamenhof Creator of Esperanto*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul., Bell, F. (1947). *The Letters of Gertrude Bell*. London, Ernest Benn. Fraser, D. (1910). *Persia and Turkey in Revolt*. Edinburgh and London, William Blackwood and Sons.

<sup>7</sup> Browne, E. G. (1918). *Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Bábí and Bahá'í Religions<sup>8</sup>; the premier bibliography of the period is Collins' *Bibliography of English Language works on the Babi and Bahá'í Faiths*<sup>9</sup>.

In a second phase of access, catalogues were computerised and made available at site-specific locations, particularly institutional and academic libraries. Access to full-text documents shifted from such technologies as micro-fiche to "digitized" images. The rapid emergence of general access to the internet then made possible not only the "online" interrogation of computerised catalogues, but the retrieval of full text articles whether in "read-only" or "Optical Character Recognition" (OCR) format. The significance of OCR technology is that a researcher can now by-pass manually constructed catalogues and indexes, and seek any "string" (ie, sequence of letters and symbols) imaginable, across a range of "platforms" (ie, software programs that provide an interface between digital text and the reader – such as html, Adobe's PDF, or Microsoft Word).

The practical effect of this technological advance is that the researcher may now find obscure (or not so obscure) references of interest that have evaded previous detection (At this stage we are setting aside the issue of "quality" in search results; a discussion of quality versus quantity of search results will follow). A large number of "Bahá'í" references are in one sense "small" and inconsequential.<sup>10</sup> Yet even the smallest inclusion of a reference can represent a significant shift on the part of an author. A second issue concerns the 'boundaries' of Bahá'í literature, which potentially includes literature by Bahá'ís, or concerning Bahá'í themes, which does not make explicit Bahá'í references. Note, for instance, Frank Lewis' study of Rumi;<sup>11</sup> Andy Knight's studies on the United Nations system and international order<sup>12</sup>; Danesh Sarooshi's works on international law<sup>13</sup>; Bill Huitt's encyclopaedia entry on "moral education", etc<sup>14</sup> The question can similarly be asked about scientists whose work is "Bahá'í-inspired".

## Search

<sup>8</sup> Momen, M., Ed. (1981). *The Babi and Baha'i Religions, 1844-1944. Some Contemporary Western Accounts*. Oxford, George Ronald

<sup>9</sup> Collins, W. P. (1990). *Bibliography of English-Language Works on the Babi and Baha'i Faiths 1844-1985*. Oxford, George Ronald.

<sup>10</sup> Morton, R. (2000). *The Experience of Religion in Britain*. London, Thames & Hudson; Gittler, J. B. (2000). *Ideas of concord and discord in selected world religions*. Stamford, Conn., JAI Press; Runzo, J. and N. M. Martin (2000). *The Meaning of Life in the World's Religion*. Oxford, Oneworld. p.3.

<sup>11</sup> Lewis, F. D. (2000). *Rumi Past and Present, East and West. The Life, Teachings and Poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi*. Oxford, Oneworld.

<sup>12</sup> Knight, W. A. (2000). *A changing United Nations : multilateral evolution and the quest for global governance*. Houndmills England ; New York, Palgrave.

<sup>13</sup> Sarooshi, D. (2001). " International Law and Peace between the Nations: The Contribution of the Baha'i Faith." *Current Legal Issues* 4: 497-508.

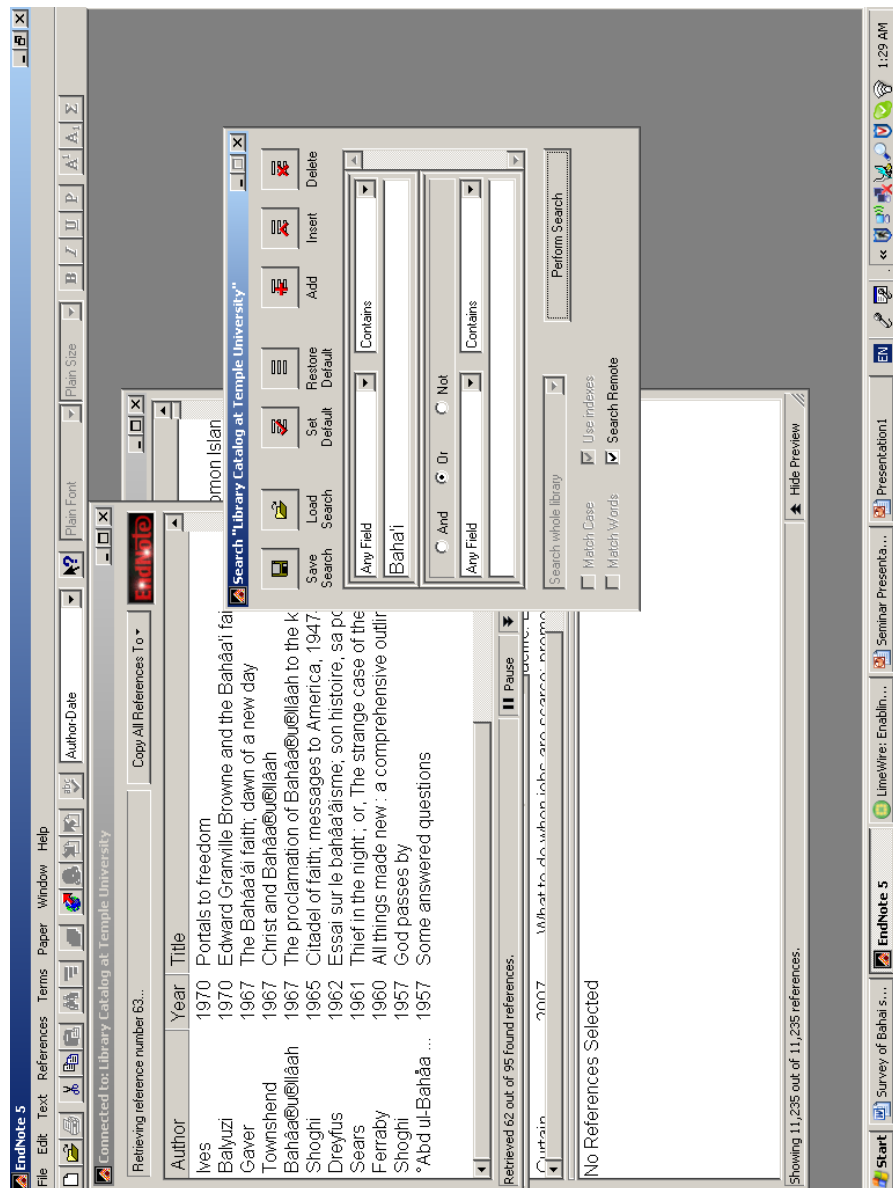
<sup>14</sup> The examples would extend to every field of science: in Management one can think of the work of Kambiz Maani's learning organization and Mehrdad Baghai's publications on organizational growth.

It is now possible to keep track of references in print media through e-tracker, Lexis-Nexis, Westlaw, etc., and in discussion groups (eg through Dejanews); Full text retrieval of articles is available through such subscription services as “Expanded Academic” and such electronic libraries as Ebrary and Questia. It is possible monitor closely the activities of the Bahá’í International Community in the various agencies of the United Nations Organization; and it is possible to track the work of Bahá’í institutions, whether schools and institutes, individual scholars, scholarship portals (eg: Bahá’í Faith Index, Bahá’í Library), and associations for Bahá’í Studies. In sum, the search capacities currently unfolding present exciting opportunities for bringing together extremely diverse and seemingly esoteric but potentially crucial and invaluable information in the service of scholarship. Electronic sources are being supplemented both forwards and backwards in time. This means that older publications are gradually becoming indexed. Commonly used web browsers remain Internet Explorer and Firefox – however, regardless of choice of browser, the researcher should customise with add-ons, commencing with the “Google toolbar”, and if using Firefox, [selected journal search add-ons](#) are available

### Library catalogues

Traditionally, library catalogues comprised cards that could be searched by author, title, and subject. Some large libraries printed their catalogues in book form so as to enable searches from beyond their physical location, wherever such printed catalogues were placed. I first encountered the “facsimile” of the British Museum’s card catalogue in the Michael Somare Library of the University of Papua New Guinea. The catalogues of most libraries are now searchable on-line and while the most common way to do this is to first visit the library’s website, bibliographic software such as *Endnote* facilitate this without the need to visit the website directly. Libraries that deploy what is known as the “Z39” protocol have “opened up” their catalogues to such searching. The Zetoc database, for instance provides Z39.50-compliant access to the [British Library's](#) Electronic Table of Contents (ETOC), allowing search through the contents of approximately 20,000 current journals and 16,000 conference proceedings published per year:

“With around 20 million journal and conference records, the database covers every imaginable subject in science, technology, medicine, engineering, business, law, finance and the humanities. Around 100,000 of the journals included are available for electronic data delivery (EDD) download. The database covers the years from 1993 to date and is updated daily. A list of [journal titles](#) covered by the database is available. Copies of all the articles and conference papers listed on the database can be ordered online from the British Library's Document Supply Centre in Yorkshire.”



The accompanying graphic shows a search being conducted using *Endnote*. While online, I have connected to the library catalogue at Temple University and conducted a search for materials catalogued with the term “Baha’i” in any field. This search yielded 95 entries for materials dating between 1911 and 2006.

## Publication catalogues

## Serial and subject indexes

Serial indexes may index an individual serial or multiple serials. *America: History and Life*, *African Studies*, and *Canadian Periodical Index* typify titles devoted to the indexing of serials from geographic regions, while *Arts and Humanities Citation Index*, *Combined Retrospective Index to Journals in Sociology 1895-1974*, vol.3: *Subjects*, and *Religious & Theological Abstracts* exemplify serial indexes devoted to specific fields and disciplines. I have inspected at least 136 such serial indexes which, over a period of time, have become subsumed in the larger electronic libraries and for the most part discontinued as distinct hard-copy publications.

The advent of digital libraries, which enable full text searching within serials, has rendered serial and subject indexes obsolete – apart, of course, from indexes to materials not yet online. Services of interest include in *ATLA Religion Database + ATLAS*, which holds records from 1949 to the present.<sup>15</sup> A search in this database on February 18, 2002 for the term ‘Bahá’í’ yielded 439 records; a search through *Hein Online - the modern link to legal history* on 4<sup>th</sup> August 2003 found Bahá’í references in 27 volumes; while a search in the *Periodicals Contents Index Web*,<sup>16</sup> 15 February 2002, yielded 25 references in English, German and Italian.<sup>17</sup>

### Dissertation Indexes

Various degree qualifications at tertiary institutions require their students to submit a dissertation (also known as a thesis). Dissertation indexes seek to compile lists of completed theses. Within academic environments, there are also departmental publications which have a low volume of circulation and minimal accessibility. Whereas theses are becoming more accessible through indexes, it is still possible to find unique citations in specific university catalogues. In March 2003, for instance, I found while searching the library catalogue at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, the hard-copy Master’s thesis “Bahá’í - a Study in Planned Syncretism” by Benson<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> A July 2001 search was conducted using “Silver Platter” ERL Webspurs. The “[database guide](#)” at gives the following information About ATLA Religion Database + ATLAS: “ATLA Religion Database + ATLAS is produced by the American Theological Library Association's Center for Electronic Resources in Theology and Religion. The ATLAS (American Theological Library Association Serials) project was created for religion scholars by religion scholars. It provides online versions of the entire runs of a core collection of more than fifty significant scholarly periodicals in the field of religion, most of which go back to 1949. ATLAS journals represent a wide selection of Christian traditions (including Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Evangelical, and Pentecostal), Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Shinto, Taoism, Confucianism, and other religious traditions.”

<sup>16</sup> Described as “the most comprehensive index to journals in the Humanities and Social Sciences, a Chadwyck-Healey publication from ProQuest Information and Learning Company: <http://pcift.chadwyck.co.uk>

<sup>17</sup> These are set out here for interest: Rosenkranz, Die Baha'i (Book Review) Journal Section(s): Besprechungen Citation: *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 77 (1952) 79 Moojan Momen, The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions 1844-1944 (Book Review) Author: Schumann, Olaf Journal Section(s): Literatur Citation: *Welt des Islams* n.s.:25 (1985) 237 H. M. Balyuzi: Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith (Book Review) Author: Ess, J. van Journal Section(s): Literatur/Literature Citation: *Welt des Islams* n.s.:14 (1973) 230

<sup>18</sup> Benson, B. T. (1956). *Bahai - a Study in Planned Syncretism*. Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University: 206



While dissertation indexes were formerly in hard-copy only, a number online dissertation indexing projects now exist. Hard copy dissertation indexes include the *Comprehensive Dissertation Index*, *Dissertation Abstracts International: A The Humanities and Social Sciences*; *Doctoral Dissertations*; and *American Doctoral Dissertations*; [Index to Theses accepted for higher degrees by the Universities of Great Britain and Ireland](#); and *Union List of Higher Degree Theses in Australian Libraries*. One innovative project to expand digital access to theses is the “[Networked Digital Library of theses and dissertations](#)”. A search at this site in April 2007 yields 45 theses having a Bahá’í reference.

### Bibliographies

Typically, Babi and Bahá’í references are found bibliographies of religion and of countries. To date, I have inspected 92. This is in addition to the bibliographies devoted to Bahá’í literature, the main ones being those by Bjorling<sup>19</sup>, Collins<sup>20</sup> (Collins 1990), and Stockman and Winters<sup>21</sup> (Stockman and Winters 1997), with an earlier contribution by Braun<sup>22</sup>. The [Resource Guide for the Scholarly Study of the Bahá’í Faith](#) is online, while additional bibliographies of Bahá’í materials have been gathered by Jonah Winters at <http://bahai-library.com/resources/>

### Archives

Archives collect documents and other artefacts that may not exist in published form. Traditionally, the contents of such collections were accessible only those able to visit the archive’s physical location. The advent of online catalogues allows for off-site searching of contents, if not of the documents and artefacts themselves. In January 2003 a “[World Association for Bahá’í libraries and archives](#)” was established at a conference at Landegg, Switzerland. Although this initiative has not been followed up sufficiently, it provides the groundwork for later development of policies and procedures for the organization of materials held by Bahá’í communities and institutions. While the major portion of significant archival materials are stored in the archives of National Assemblies and at the Bahá’í World Centre, other archives do hold materials of interest.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Bjorling, J. (1985). *The Baha’i faith : a historical bibliography*. New York, Garland Pub.

<sup>20</sup> Collins, Bibliography

<sup>21</sup> Stockman, R. and J. Winters (1997). *A Resource Guide for the Scholarly Study of the Baha’i Faith*. Wilmette, Research Office of the Baha’i National Center.

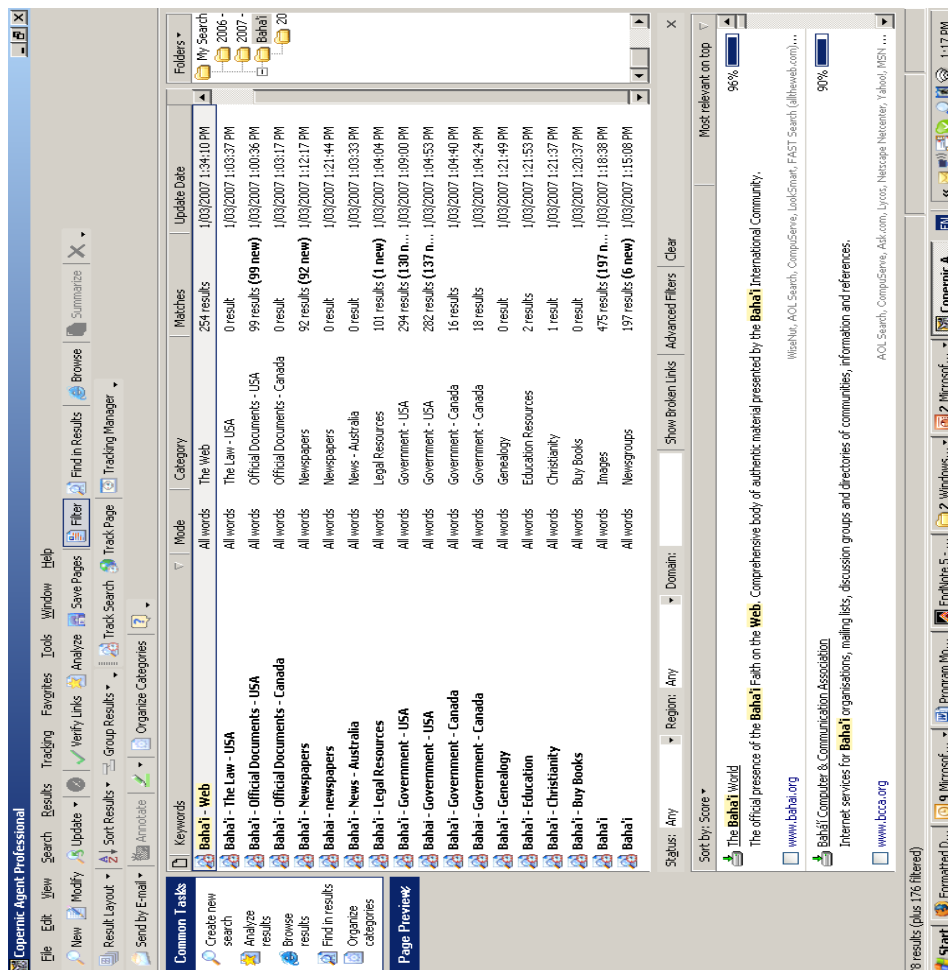
<sup>22</sup> Braun, E. (1959). *Know Your Baha’i Literature*. Wilmette, Baha’i Publishing Trust.

<sup>23</sup> A search by web at the National Union Catalogue of Manuscript Collections (NUCMC) points to archival materials having Bahá’í Content in fourteen repositories: The Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, the Johns Hopkins University Special Collections, in Baltimore, Dept. of Special Collections, Stanford Univ. Libraries, Stanford, CA, Presbyterian Historical Society., Philadelphia; Manuscripts & Archives Section, The New York Public Library; Princeton University Library; the National Bahá’í Archives (Wilmette, Ill.); University of Utah Marriott Library; University of Washington Libraries (Seattle); Union Theological Seminary. Burke Library, New York; DeWitt Historical Society of Tompkins County, Clinton House, 116 North Cayuga Street, Ithaca, New York; and the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

## Search engines

### General

Simple searching is achieved through ‘open source’ searching of the World Wide Web. Most internet users are familiar with Google, Yahoo, and many other such search engines. Each has its strengths and weaknesses as a search tool. General search engines can be helpful if one is seeking broad information about Bahá’í communities and their activities; more specialised engines are required if one is looking for information from scholarly, or more authoritative, sources. Current information about what search engines and technologies are available is easily found, ironically, but writing a direct query into one’s current browser search facility.<sup>24</sup>

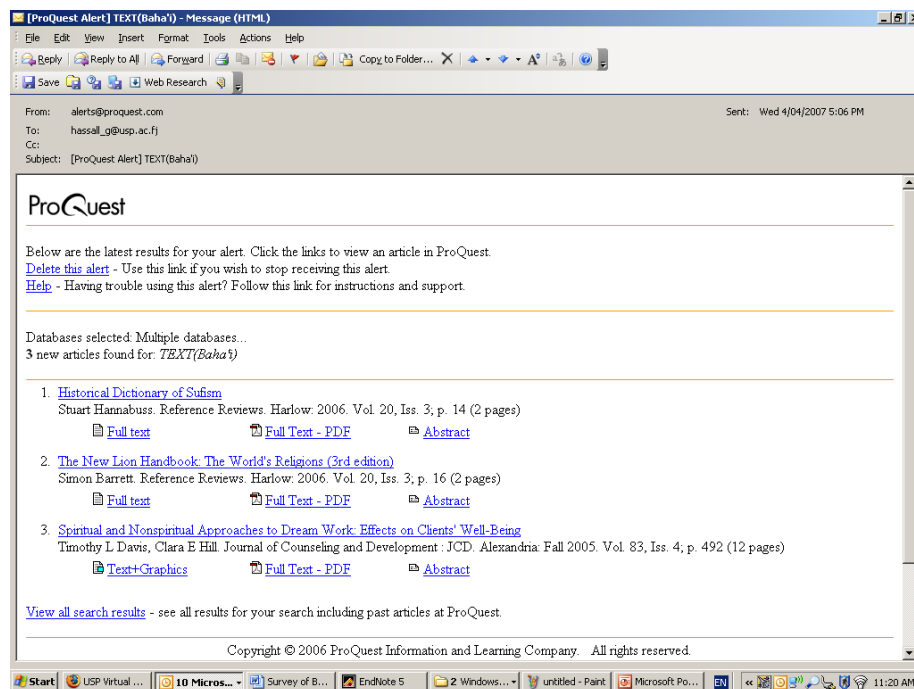


<sup>24</sup>There are even specialised websites at <http://www.searchengines.com> and <http://www.searchenginewatch.com>

## Specialized

There are specialised search engines and also meta-search engines. A specialised search engine will focus, for example, on providing results for a particular country, or for a specific subject area, or from within a specific news-source such as newspapers, or official documents. “Google Scholar”, for instance, provides for searches from within scholarly materials, rather than from the WWW generally.

There are also “meta-search” engines such as Copernic ([www.copernic.com](http://www.copernic.com)), which combine the results from multiple searches into one consolidated results list. The professional edition of this software (Copernic Agent Professional) allows the researcher to nominate the target for searches as well as the frequency. It is possible to search, for instance, on a daily, weekly or monthly basis, for Bahá’í references within news sources for Australia, or Brazil, or the UK, to name a few. Searching databases on the WWW are another branch of specialised search. Such resources are sometimes called the “hidden web” since an ordinary search may find the homepage of a database, but does not have the capacity to enter into the database to find specific resources. See, for example, the information



## Alerts and intelligent agents

Alert services allow the researcher to nominate topics about which he or she seeks notification. When the nominated topic appears within a product of the information provider, the researcher can receive special notification – usually by email. Such alert services are provided by digital libraries such as

*Proquest*, periodical publishers such as Blackwell, book sellers (new and used) such as Amazon.com, and news aggregators such as “Google News”. The accompanying graphic shows the latest alert from Proquest, showing three articles containing a Baha’i reference.

**The British Library’s “zetoc Alert”** is an example of a current awareness service that can be requested to email alerts on specific keywords. It emails tables of contents of targeted journals or details of articles which match some pre-defined search criteria such as an author's name or keywords from the title. These email Alerts are sent on the day the new data is loaded into the database.<sup>25</sup>

“Intelligent Agents” undertake customised internet searches and automatically return the results to the searcher. Some agents are available for free subscription, while those having more sophisticated capacities are available for purchase or subscription. The powerful software *Copernic Agent* is a meta-search tool that can retrieve searches in specialised areas of the internet according to a pre-set schedule.

## Homepages

In the past decade a significant quantity of information on Bahá’í communities has been posted on the world wide web. Significant portals include bahai-library.org,<sup>26</sup> H-Bahai, Bahaindex.com and the official site [www.bahai.org](http://www.bahai.org). The religious press now has dedicated websites and search engines, and such sources can track Bahá’í references at such events as, for instance, the Parliament of the World’s Religions. For instance, Kung and Kuschel’s report of Bahá’í participation in the signing of a “Global Ethic” at the World Parliament of Religions which met in Chicago in 1993<sup>27</sup> was reported in an article on “Women's multifaith perspectives on global child advocacy” in 2000<sup>28</sup>. The third international meeting of the Parliament of the World's Religions, held in Cape Town in December 1999, was subject to articles exploring ecumenism: Ruether reported that that there were probably more members of the Bahá’í and the Mormons than Methodists” present<sup>29</sup>. Calame notes the participation of the Bahá’í community in an initiative to draft a charter for a “responsible, plural and united world”<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> See <http://zetoc.mimas.ac.uk/about.html>, accessed 8/8/2002 10:42 AM.

<sup>26</sup> [Baha'i academic resource library](#) is described in the “*Humbul Humanities Hub*” as “...one of the best all-round introductory sites to the Bahá’í faith available anywhere on the Web.” *Catalogued by Jeff Dubberley on 2001-09-29*(accessed 21 March 2002).

<sup>27</sup> Kung, H. and K.-J. Kuschel (1993). *World Parliament of the World's Religions: A global ethic*. London, SCM Press.

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<sup>30</sup> Calame, P. (2000). "The charter for a responsible, plural and united world: Its origin, purpose and process." *The Ecumenical Review* **52**(4): 513-525.

## Associations for Bahá'í Studies

There are now at least twenty Associations for Bahá'í Studies worldwide<sup>31</sup>, some of which maintain homepages.<sup>32</sup> A few, but not all, of their homepages provide bibliographic information about their respective publications.

## Bahá'í communities

The websites of Baha'i communities are listed at numerous sites on the web. Two comprehensive sites are [www.bcca.org](http://www.bcca.org) and [www.bahaidirectory.org](http://www.bahaidirectory.org), while of course Casper Voogt's site, [www.bahaindex.com](http://www.bahaindex.com), is an invaluable source for all manner of information on Bahá'í communities and activities. Entire websites can be copied using such feely available software tools as winHTTrack. Individual pages can be selectively copied with such commercially available software as [Web Research Professional](#).

## Official Documents

Official documents include statutes, court judgements, and very many other types of bureaucracy-generated documentation. A search on the Lexis database on January 24, 2003 (Commonwealth and Irish Cases, Combined - Grouped by Country – Bahá'í) yielded 85 references; numerous judgements from US courts have Bahá'í references; the findings of all Australian judicial environments are searchable over the internet ([austlii.com.au](http://austlii.com.au)), including refugee and immigration tribunals, which are a particularly fruitful source of information. A significant number of references in official documents at all levels of the US government can be found by searching [firstgov.gov](http://firstgov.gov). United Nations Documents are a fertile source of Bahá'í references. The holdings of the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library are available through [UNBISnet - Bibliographic Search](#). A significant number of documents are available through careful searching at the UN site: [www.un.org](http://www.un.org)

## Digital libraries

Most internet-based databases are only available through subscription. They may be better described as 'portals' through which a far greater number of individual databases are made available. Some of these individual titles are accessible through a number of databases or portals, and quite a few commenced long before the Internet age. The database FirstSearch, for instance, includes a large subset of discipline-specific databases. A search on

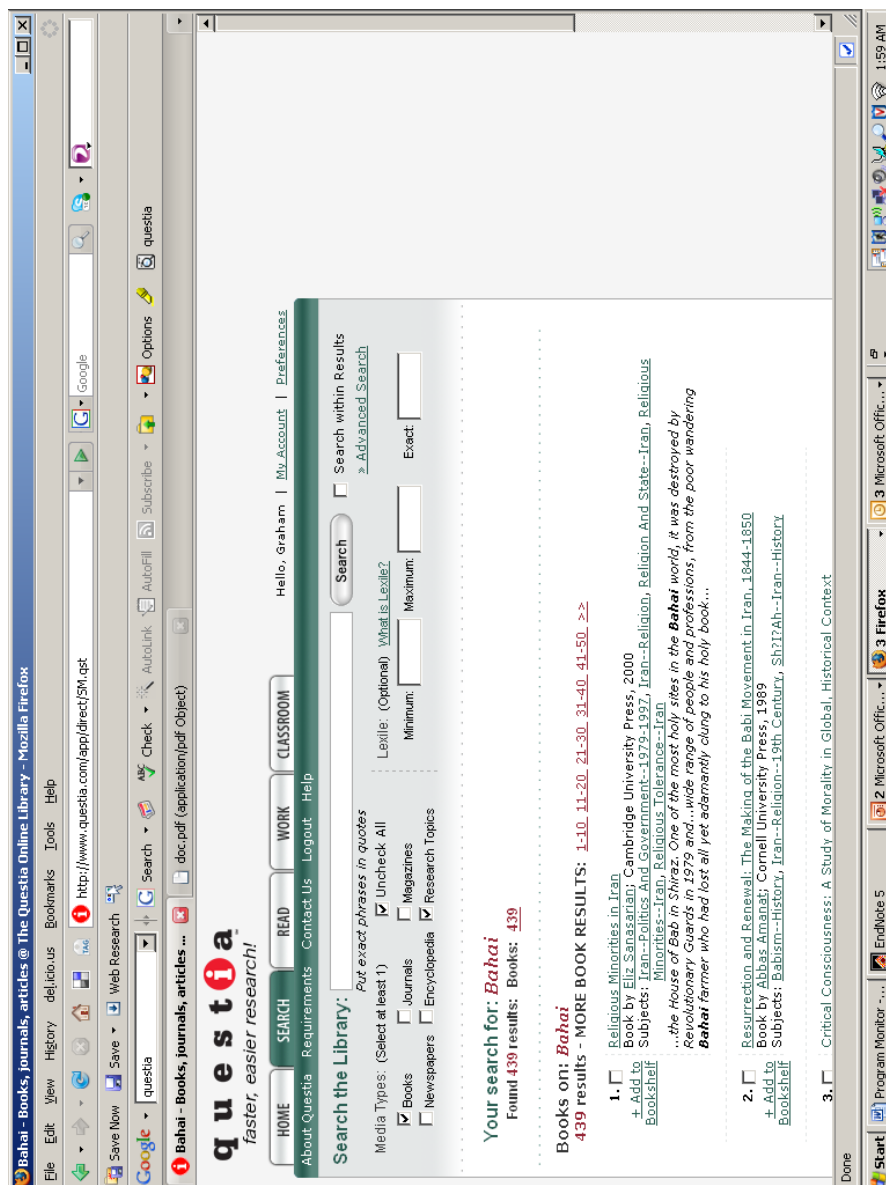
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<sup>31</sup> The internet addresses for these associations are listed at such sites as <http://www.bahai-studies.org/> and <http://www.bahai-studies.ca/affiliates.php>

<sup>32</sup> An incomplete list of Associations for Bahá'í Studies includes Africa; Australia; Chile; United Kingdom; French Speaking Europe; German Speaking Europe; India; Japan; Malaysia; New Zealand; North America; Northern Mariana Islands; Persian Language; Philippines; Russia; Singapore; and Venezuela

21st March 2000 in the World Catalogue yielded 1939 records, including 37 for 1999. The database “Paper1st” yielded 13 papers; CWI - Contemporary Women's Issues on health and human rights – yielded 9 references; and Librarylit - Materials on libraries and librarianship – found 3 references.

The accompanying graphic shows a search for “Bahá’í” in the commercially available library, Questia ([www.questia.com](http://www.questia.com)). This search on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2007 yielded 439 references within the full-text of books.







### Implications for search

All of the sources for searching for Baha'i materials and references noted above suggest that the field of possibilities is expanding exponentially. The serious researcher must keep track of search activities completed to ensure minimal duplication of effort at a later date. To store references and materials, bibliographic software is essential. I use Endnote, although other packages are also available. In addition to capturing references with this bibliographic software, I record searches in an Excel file.

Tabs are used in Excel for different categories of search (such as alert services, bibliographies, bookshops, dissertation indexes, search engines, etc) and on each tabbed page a list is kept of the site searched, the date of search, and the number of references found.

Although source materials for Bahá'í scholarship are becoming more accessible a range of resources that are essential to Bahá'í scholarship including Bahá'í journals, out of print books, and much primary data, remain hard to access. Despite the recent expansion of access there remains no central indexing system, no central clearing house, and there is need for a systematic project to compile a Bahá'í bibliography on global scale.

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