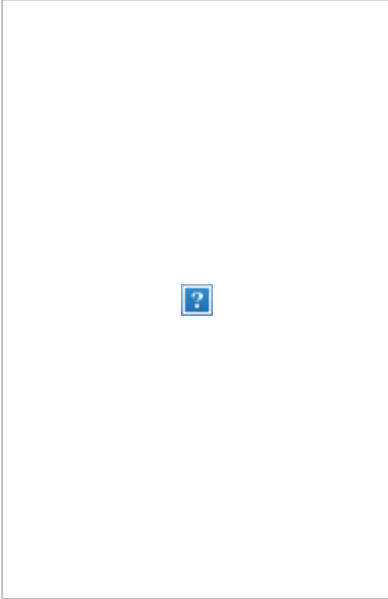




Book Review



Learn Well this Tablet,
by H. Richard Gurinsky.
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WORDS ARE THINGS of great power. Through them we communicate and understand things great and small. They shape our lives and that of our society.

Scientists have pointed out that Neanderthal man was far from being a stupid brute: his brain was large, he had skills, and, it would seem from some of the archaeological findings, spiritual yearning and an awareness of life beyond this one. Yet his society never developed past a certain basic level, and communication appears to have been the key. His remains make it clear that his anatomy would have stopped him developing a detailed pattern of speech: he did not have the means to communicate at more than a relatively basic level.

We are different, we can make many sounds, and with that capacity and the later-developed ability to record them in writing we can transcend so many of our limitations. And it is through words that the Manifestation of God gives us His most detailed message, whatever other experiences He may vouchsafe to individuals.

Among previous religions the concept of the Word of God reaches its highest development in Islám, where the eternal and uncreated Qur'án has a status not unlike that accorded to Jesus Christ in mainstream Christianity. Appreciation of the status of the creative Holy Word is vital to an understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh – and when Shoghi Effendi talks of certain prayers as having been invested by Bahá'u'lláh with a special potency and significance he is not merely paying a polite compliment. The Tablet of Ahmad is one such work of special potency and the late Richard Gurinsky rendered the Bahá'í community a valuable service by preparing this discussion and analysis of a Tablet that is widely used. He developed our understanding and appreciation of what the work is and why the Guardian noted its special status.

The author gives something of the history of the Tablet and then proceeds to a phrase-by-phrase analysis. He explains the significance of many of these phrases in the context of Bahá'u'lláh's other Writings, showing that they have meaning beyond the obvious, and discusses some of the concepts underlying them, concepts that may have been unfamiliar to a Western reader of Christian background. He is never dry or boring and always

informative.

The discussion reveals the many levels at which we can begin to develop our understanding of Scripture, while leaving one with the feeling that the process has only begun. We are reminded of the instruction of Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas to: *“Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths”* – and that oceans can have great depths and many hidden treasures.

A single indication of this is the listing of the themes touched on in the Tablet of Ahmad. There are twenty of them ranging from the call to arise and teach the Faith through the Covenant of God to the condition of the peoples of the world and the promise of divine assistance.

This book would be useful at any time, but its appearance now is especially welcome. We live in a world where people are becoming disconnected – from the appreciation and proper use of words, from reading and study, from their communities, from God and an appreciation of the sacred. Bahá'is are not immune to such processes. If we are to fulfil our spiritual potential and to serve the Faith we must connect with its Source. The Tablet of Ahmad helps us do this and to put into action its calls for unity and action.

Learn well this Tablet indeed – and benefit from the way in which this book can help develop a truer understanding and appreciation of its significance.

Iain S. Palin, July 2001