

Explanation of the Symbol of the Greatest Name



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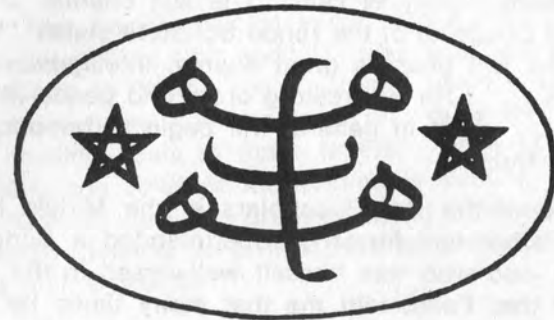


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“From eternity Thou hast been removed far above the reach and the ken of the comprehension of Thy servants, and immeasurably exalted above the strivings of Thy bond-slaves to express Thy mystery.”
-Bahá'u'lláh

EXPLANATION OF THE SYMBOL OF THE GREATEST NAME



The identity of the Greatest Name — a mystery concealed from time immemorial “behind the mystic veil” and preserved in the treasure house of the knowledge of God, was to be revealed and manifested to men’s eyes at its appointed time in accordance with the Divine Plan, like the other manifold and basic truths of the New Age. Allusions had been made to it by the Messengers of old, under the impact of Whose Revelations, man has made spiritual progress and gradually attained a clearer understanding of its hidden meanings. Like a brilliant sun wrapt in clouds, the Greatest Name remained hidden and unknown. Those who longed to catch a glimpse of its splendour drew close, but enjoyed only a dim vision of its radiance. Throughout past centuries, in accordance with the inscrutable wisdom of God’s progressive revelation of truth, the veils remained until gradually, one by one, were removed from this precious and all-embracing Name.

1 — Anticipated in Past Religions

The eager followers of past religions, in their deep desire to witness a flickering of the approaching majestic dawn, found that the new Name of the Great One to come meant "light", "splendor" and "glory". The followers of Krishna, for instance, expected His return under the name of "Vishnu Yasha", which in Sanskrit means "Glory of God". The last chapter of the Shrimad Bhagwad of the Hindu Scripture states: "Vishnu Yasha will possess great energy, intelligence and prowess He will restore order and peace in this world Man in general will begin to honour and practise truth."¹

One of the Baha'i scholars in the Middle East, whose father had formerly superintended a Buddhist Temple, and who was himself well-versed in the writings of that Faith, told me that many times he had read the entire Gospel of Buddha in Sanskrit, every word of which he had understood with the exception of the meaning of a word composed of "b", "h" and "a", which occasionally appears in Buddhist Scripture. When he learned of the Baha'i Faith, the mystery was solved. The letters, joined together, formed the name of "Baha".

The references by Buddha, are exceptionally clear. Ananda, one of His disciples, asked Him: "Who shall teach us when Thou art gone?" Buddha replied in these clear terms: "I am not the first Buddha who came upon earth, nor shall I be the last. In due time another Buddha will arise He shall reveal to you the same eternal truths which I have taught you. He will preach to you His religion, glorious in its origin, glorious at the climax and glorious at the goal, in the spirit and in the letter."²

1. Prof. Pritam Singh, 'The Second coming of Shri Krishna', P. 10.

2. Sermon of the Great Passing.

It is most interesting to note that in Buddhist Scripture, particularly in the Amitayus Sutra, clear reference is made to "AMITABHA" as the "Infinite Light of Revelation", the "Unbounded Light" and the "Source of Wisdom, of Virtue and of Buddhahood." When giving the qualities of a "true follower" Buddha stated that it was he who "relies with his heart upon Amitabha the unbounded Light of Truth."³

The Jewish mystics knew of the significance of the two letters "b" and "h" and attached much importance to them. Their spiritual leaders and philosophers wrote commentaries and drew the attention of seeking souls to these letters. There is a legend among the Jews about Solomon's Seal, a Seal said to have carried the Greatest Name from which it reputedly derived its power over all creation including the animal world.

In Isaiah, we read, ". . . Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down; Sharon is like a wilderness; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits."⁴ Isaiah also says, ". . . The glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the glory of the Lord and the excellence of our God."⁵ It is interesting to compare this last verse with its Arabic version which, when translated literally, into English, reads as follows: "God will render to Lebanon its glory: the Baha of Carmel and Sharon shall be manifested, and they shall see the glory of God, the Baha of our Lord."⁶ When Jesus spoke to the Jews who were familiar with these terms, He told them that He would return "in the glory of the Father."

3. Shirin Khanum, 'Lord Buddha and Amitabha', pp 13, 17-19.

4. 'Isaiah', chapter 33, verse 9.

5. 'Isaiah', chapter 35, verse 2.

6. 'Holy Bible', Arabic translation, 1881, Third Ed., also: Ishraq Khavari, Rahiq-i-Makhtum (The Sealed Wine) pp. 218-219.

As the Islamic Faith immediately preceded the New Day, followers of Islam found that the veils covering this hidden treasure had become more diaphanous, allowing the heavenly rays of light to penetrate deeper, and to reveal in sharper detail the reality of this mystery. Explicit references had been made to the Greatest Name, and as the seekers found clear indications of these references, they became encouraged to persevere in their search.

The words of Imams and divines of Islam served to draw the longing souls to the fountainhead of true knowledge. There is a very powerful prayer which the Shi'ah Muslims chant as a dawn prayer during the month of the fast. The faithful believer awakens at dawn to catch the melody of its tune as it is chanted from the minarets of mosques or, in these days, is broadcast from the radio stations. In introducing this prayer, Imam Rida has said, "I swear by God that the Greatest Name is found in this prayer. Had you known this, you would have fought with swords to possess this prayer." The opening words of this prayer read as follows: "O God! My God! I beseech Thee by Thy Baha, Thy Baha in its entirety. I beseech Thee by all Thy Baha." The prayer then goes on mentioning other Names of God including "Beauty", "Splendor", and all the Names which are a part of the Baha'i calendar.

2 — Acclaimed by Poets

Poets and philosophers found this mystic secret and openly acclaimed it. At the time of Shah 'Abbas, the Persian King and contemporary of Queen Elizabeth I, the greatest of all the divines of that age went to Persia from Lebanon and established his residence in Isfahan which was then the royal seat and the

7. Mafatih'u'l Jannan, 'Keys of Paradise', compilation of Muslim Prayers,

country's capital. This man had an encyclopaedic mind and he wrote outstanding books on the arts, sciences, the literature and philosophy of his age. There are many stories about him and his unique erudition and genius. It is even said that he had invented a machine which reproduced voices from distant lands. One of his discoveries was the Greatest Name, and he adopted the name of "Baha'i" for himself. Shaykh Baha'i is unquestionably the most renowned of all Persian divines. In one of his poetical works he says, "The Greatest Name is unknown to man, but in the list of all the Names of God it stands first." No doubt he had in mind the dawn prayer mentioned above which opens with the name of Baha.

Mawlavi, the greatest of all the mystic poets of the East, whose poems are known for their elucidations of the spiritual journey of man and his attainments in the realms of God, has stated, "We have found Baha and we hasten to offer our life as a sacrifice to Him. He is our ransom."⁸

Hafiz, the most renowned of all lyric poets of the East, addressed Persia, saying, "May this land remain forever prosperous. From its sacred soil at every breath the breezes of the Merciful are wafted. Glad tidings to the glorious Kings of Persia! Glad tidings for a blissful ending! The power of the Greatest Name has stayed away the hand of evil from that country."

While I was in Arabia, I examined the manuscript of a book on Mystic Philosophy from one of the learned men there. In one chapter the author speaks of the conditions to be observed by the Seeker of the path to God, and says, "Those who tread the path and knock at the door of the knowledge of the Light

8. 'Nabil's Narrative', p. 72, "whoso seeketh Me, shall find Me..." (a Tradition).

are sincere and forbearing. They stand face to face with angels who greet them, cleanse, and purify them. They pour for them water from the fountain head of Baha. When they open their eyes they behold God passing by with great majesty. His name appears above the horizon of the Kingdom. Those people, though they wander on earth, have their hearts attached to the Exalted Spot and the dwellers in the Great Tabernacle."⁹

3 — Made known to Babis

With the inauguration of the New Age and the appearance of its Herald, the Bab, the remaining veils were torn asunder through the movement of His Exalted Pen. The people began to know more and more clearly that "Baha" was, without any shadow of doubt, the name so dearly treasured and destined to be manifested with all splendor and majesty. The explicit nature of the Bab's reference to Baha'u'llah and the glowing terms with which He praised Him, made, 'Baha' the focus of adoration.

The Bab singled out the Greatest Name in the manuscript copies of His matchless Writings. Years ago, I had the honour to read three volumes of His Writings before they were despatched to the beloved Guardian. The books were written down by Mulla Ali Akbar Ardestani¹⁰ in the first year of the Bab's Dispensation. These books were written in black ink, but whenever the many references were made to "Baha", *this word* always appeared in red. During the very first year of His ministry, the Bab had instructed His amanuensis to write in this manner in order that those who had no time or patience to read all His Writings would be helped to see this Name.

9. Maqum A'ala is the name given by Abdu'l-Baha to the Shrine of the Bab. It means "the Exalted Spot."

10. 'Nabil's Narrative,' p. 146, Footnote No. 3.

There are innumerable references to "Baha" in all the Writings of the Bab and to quote them all here is beyond the scope of this essay. It is sufficient to note, that He has said, "Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the order of Baha'u'llah and rendereth thanks unto his Lord."¹¹

When the followers of the Bab gathered under special circumstances at Badasht, it was there that everyone received a new name. It was then that they knew this shining diadem of majesty and might found its eternal manifestation, not on the forehead of one who was clad in the garments of the learned; but shone instead on that of a Youth who was majestic in appearance, glorious in gait and manners, and godly in every atom of His being. So exalted was He in the eyes of the people, so highly respected and adored, that out of sheer homage and love they did not dare to mention His name. Instead He was referred to as "Ishan."¹²

The Letters of the Living and the early believers now knew the Bearer of this Name and recognized in Him such heavenly attributes that, even though they had quaffed from the newly-found stream of life, they prayed and longed for the even more glorious day when they could be drowned in the powerful, celestial ocean of the Utterance of this Great One.

Tahirih, in one of her epistles, says, "O my God! O my God! The veil must be removed from the face of the Remnant of the Lord. O my God! Protect Husayn the mystery of Muhammad and advance the day of reunion with him . . . Make the point of Baha, O my God, to circulate . . . O my God! Protect all who circumambulate the twin points and keep them stead-

11. Shoghi Effendi, 'God Passes By', p.25

12. Honorific form of Persian pronoun for the third person singular

fast in Thy most Great Cause, so that they might behold the point sending forth light upon them."

It was no wonder that so many hundreds of learned and outstanding divines of the East sacrificed their lives with devotion and faith in the path of the promulgation of the Great Name. They waited for its advent, waited for the moment when the effulgences would emanate from it. The instant they felt it was ascending toward the dawning point, they burnt themselves in its light and rose like glowing lamps. They became the "Dawn Breakers."

There are numerous references to the name, the place of birth, the date of declaration, the places of banishment, the imprisonment and the fate of the Central Figures of our Faith. For the purposes of this essay it is sufficient to know this great, authentic Islamic tradition: "All the followers of the Promised Qa'im shall be put to death except One Whose face shall shine with Abha beauty in the plain of 'Akka."

From this introduction we gather that the Greatest Name is "Baha". This point should be well understood and borne in mind, as we proceed to fathom with our limited means this tremendous divine mystery. It will be necessary to proceed slowly and patiently, step by step, in order to discuss each phase of this essential theme so that we might have a full grasp of all the problems pertaining to the subject.

The Bab adored the name "Baha" and used it profusely in all His Writings. He even made many derivatives from this one word and wrote them out in a Tablet which had the form of a five pointed star, symbolizing the human temple.

Far from attempting to make an exhaustive study of this subject, we merely set forth a few points at

random to pave the way for a clearer understanding of this theme, the "Symbol of the Greatest Name".

4 — The Symbol of the Greatest Name

Our explanation of the symbol of the Greatest Name is based mainly on Tablets revealed by the beloved Master and will cover the topics as follows in this article.

5 — Who Designed the Symbol?

One of the believers who had the bounty and privilege of attaining the presence of the beloved Master has recorded one of His oral statements which shows that this emblem was initiated by Him. No less a person than 'Abdu'l-Baha could have designed this emblem, for who else could have condensed so much of the divine mystery into so little space and into so few letters! Some of the mystic divines among the Israelites have emphatically drawn the attention of their followers to the two letters "b" and "h" indicating that they have some idea about the Greatest Name. It has been said that the Greatest Name was the leading decoration of the Temple. The Muslims were better acquainted with it but not in this form and finality. One finds in the Islamic laws governing worship and reverence that whoever possesses a ring bearing the symbol of the Greatest Name must wear the ring on their right hand.

The friends are not obliged by Baha'u'llah to wear a ring carrying this emblem since there is no specific law by Baha'u'llah in the Aqdas or in His Tablets regarding this. The beloved Master told the friends in the West that the ring should be placed on the right hand, which is a perpetuation of the Islamic law referred to above.

6 — Some Derivatives of the Name Baha

Baha — Light or Glory

بهاء

Abha — Most Glorious.

أبهى

Al-Abha (sometimes used as ElAbha) The All Glorious — The Most Glorious.

الأبهى

Bahiyih meaning Full of Glory.
The Greatest Holy Leaf.

بهاء

Allah'u'abha.

اللَّهُ أَبهى

Allah'u'Abha — God, the All-Glorious. This is a Baha'i greeting initiated and used since the days of Adrianopole.¹³ Its use ninety-five times each day, according to an instruction written on behalf of the beloved Guardian, "is not absolutely binding." "Allah'u'Abha" is to be repeated in the long obligatory prayer where instructions call for use of the Greatest Name.

اللَّهُ أَبهى

Ya Baha'u'l-Abha — This is an invocation. It means "O Glory of the All-Glorious." In this connection we recall the soul stirring message of the Guardian in 1953 to the Intercontinental Conferences where he refers to "Ya Baha'u'l-Abha" and "Ya 'Aliyu'l-'Ala" as the "battle cry" of the pioneers and teachers in the many fields of this world-embracing spiritual Crusade. The first, as already stated, means "O Glory of the All-Glorious", while the second means "O Exalted of the Most Exalted One." (The Bab) There is nothing in the Writings which says we have to repeat such an invocation a specific number of times each day. However, what a thrill it would be for us in times of dire need, to seek God's guidance, His support and strength, by addressing Baha'u'llah and the Bab directly with these beautiful invocations! Ya Baha'u'l-Abha is symbolized above.

Explanations.

We will begin with basic pattern of the design and, as we proceed, the picture will be complete:



13. Shoghi Effendi, 'God Passes by', p. 176.

This part of the symbol comprises three levels, each level indicated by a number. Together they represent the underlying belief which is the basis of all the religions of God. They are as follows:

- (1) The World of God — The Creator
- (2) The World of the Prophets or Manifestation —Cause, or Command
- (3) The World of Man — Creation.

The followers of all religions believe that man, left to himself, can never recognize God and attain His presence; nor is man able to fathom the mystery and purpose of his own creation. God, in His unlimited bounty has singled out His Chosen Ones and will continue to do so, sending them to man at different times and ages in order to grant him penetrating insight and to enable him to have a glimpse of the unfading glories of the innumerable worlds beyond.

The Prophets accept descent from their realms on high and suffer the abasement of living in human temples, walking amongst men and speaking their languages. The Manifestations are invariably denied, ridiculed, humiliated and even put to death. Were it not for their spiritual upliftment and leadership, man would have continued to live as a wild beast and would have been eternally doomed to deprivation and loss.

These functions of the Prophets are clearly demonstrated in the design of the Greatest Name by having the world of the Prophets (shown in horizontal line) repeated in vertical line, thus joining the world of the Creator to that of His creation.





Contrary to this, mystics believe in only two worlds; the world of God and the world of man. They proclaim that should man cleanse himself from all worldly desires and earthly attachments, he will be enabled to attain the presence of his Lord, the Creator. The mystics claim there is no need for an intermediary link between God and His creation. They therefore believe in, and practise, ascetic life which sometimes takes them to secluded corners of the world, occasionally in the mountains, forests, and jungles. This hermit's life is utterly forbidden by the mighty Pen of Baha'u'llah because He desires every man to be a fruitful member of the society he lives in.

The Baha'is believe that no matter what height of spiritual, scientific and material success man may reach, he is and will forever be in need of divine guidance bestowed upon him by the Prophets of God. It is only through Them that man can comprehend the secrets of true civilization and recognize the Will of God and His Purpose. The Baha'is also believe that it is through a complete understanding and the full establishment of Their highly valued and vital precepts and teachings that man can attain the highest state of happiness, and eventually rejoice in the presence of his Lord.

Let us ponder once more upon this design and behold with our own eyes the perfect realization of Christ's prayer. The lights of the Kingdom on High are mirrored forth by the Manifestations of God upon the plane of creation, thus fulfilling the promise of the appearance of God's Kingdom on earth, as it is in heaven.

7 — The Letters it Contains

Let us study the letters in the symbol to discover what they signify.

The letters "b" and "h" in the Original script are written as  and  respectively. "b" stands for the name of Baha and "h" stands for the name of Bab"

To grasp the significance and the important implications of this beautiful and artistic combination, we must bear in mind that among the Near-Eastern people the Phoenicians were the first to sail their boats to distant lands. Wherever they travelled, they established trading centres, and as traders found themselves forced to adopt some practical way of recording their commercial transactions. The characters they adopted became their alphabet and in the course of centuries this alphabet developed and gradually became a pattern of alphabets used in both the East and the West. Gibbon says "Phoenicia and Palestine will forever live in the memory of mankind; since America as well as Europe, have received letters from the one, and religion from the other."

"The use of letters was introduced among the savages of Europe about fifteen hundred years before Christ; and the Europeans carried them to America about fifteen centuries after the Christian era. But in a period of three thousand years, the Phoenician alphabet received considerable alteration; as it passed through the hands of the Greeks and Romans."¹⁵

Will Durant, in his monumental Story of Civilization, describes this contribution as the most precious legacy of the ancient cultures.

14. Aboo Basseer says that he asked the Imam Jaafar as to the meaning of "BESMELLAH" (In the name of God) The Imam answered, "The letter 'b' stands for Baha'u'llah..." 'Fazilat Basmellah' p 44 by Abbass Rezai, Teheran.

15. Gibbon, "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire", ch. 1 p 32.

8 — Ancient Alphabets

The Phoenicians used their alphabet for both letters and numbers, therefore each letter had a numerical value. Their alphabet starts as follows.¹⁶

Letter	Numerical value	Letter	Numerical value
a	1	h	8
b	2	t	9
j	3	i	10
d	4	k	20
h	5	l	30
w	6	m	40
z	7	n	50

When the Phoenicians wished to say, "One house; two years; or nine letters", they would write, "a house; b years; t letters." There are some very interesting remnants of the influence exerted by this very ancient people of the Near East still to be found in the western languages of today. The four letters, "K", "L", "M" and "N" are in the same order in English, French and some other western alphabets just as they appeared in the Phoenician alphabets, illustrated above.

The next stage in the science of numbers was the acquisition of numbers by the Moslems who acquired them from the Indians. To the nine digits of the Indians, the "zero" discovered by the Arabs completed the science of numbers. The world is indebted to the Indians for this very valuable and fundamental contribution. Had it not been for these numbers, the science of mathematics would have stood still, and without mathematics man could not have progressed in technology, nor could he have fashioned instruments with which he changes the face of the earth today.

16. The Hebrew alphabet used by Israeli people today is exactly the same.

The people of the East continued to give numerical values to the letters of their alphabet even though they had the Indian numbers. Today it is still common to find that poets, doctors of religion and writers convey their thoughts through this symbolic method of letters and their numerical value.

This method was used a great deal by the Bab. He very often gave people and places surnames which had the same numerical value as the original names. For example, he called Mah-ku, "Basit" (open). Mah-ku and Basit have the same numerical value of 72. He called Chihrig, "Shadid" (Grievous). Both of these have a numerical value of 318. Likewise, the great author of the "Dawn Breakers" was named Muhammad, but surnamed Nabil; both names have a numerical value of 92. It is this same method which is used for the designs of the symbols of the Greatest Name.

9 — The Names of the Bab and Baha'u'llah

We repeat that the two letters "b" and "h" stand for the names of Baha'u'llah and the Bab respectively.

The numerical value of "Bab" is :

$$\begin{array}{r}
 B = 2 \\
 A = 1 \\
 B = 2 \\
 \hline
 5 \\
 \hline
 \end{array}$$

The numerical value of Baha is :

$$\begin{array}{r}
 B = 2 \\
 A = 1 \\
 H = 5 \\
 A = 1 \\
 \hline
 9 \\
 \hline
 \end{array}$$

Nine is the perfect number, on the top of the ladder of the numerical progressive elevation. It is very mysterious, and more than any other number, full of special qualities and potencies. The numbers end with nine. After nine whatever we write in the form of digits is repetition of the same figures. Mankind throughout ages will gradually fathom the mysteries of this special number which is the numerical manifestation of the Greatest Name : Baha.

10 — Adam and Eve are included.

Number nine contains all the digits from one to nine and number five from one to five which when added respectively will be :

$$\begin{array}{r}
 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7 + 8 + 9 = 45 \\
 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 = 15
 \end{array}$$

Now the name of Adam and Eve in the Oriental scripts are written as follows: ADM and HWA the numerical values of which are as follows respectively.

A = 1	H = 8
D = 4	W = 6
M = 40	A = 1
—	—
45	15
—	—

Thus we find that two traditional names, Adam and Eve, God's first two spiritual creations, referred to in the Scriptures of old and held in such reverence and love by men throughout the ages, are linked with the twin Manifestations referred to in all the Books of God, and Whose appearance was promised to be on the Last Day. Thus Adam and Eve are connected with the Bab and Baha'u'llah in this great symbol, which becomes a token of oneness between the past and the present.

11 — The Essence of Sacrifice and the Essence of Servitude



The two five pointed stars on both sides of the emblem represent the human body: a head, two hands and two feet. These two stars represent the twin Manifestation of God in this Day. Their advent is the fulfilment of all the writings of God's prophets in by-gone ages, Who, emphatically, repeatedly and often, in a language clearer than the light of sun, assured mankind of the undoubted appearance of these Twin Luminaries, Who would rescue the world from the fetters of prejudice and the dictates of self.

In conclusion, may I venture to suggest another approach to the meaning of the two stars. This approach is merely a personal one, therefore not authoritative. Could we not visualize God as manifested in His most resplendent glory in the majestic figure of Baha'u'llah, and standing on either side of Him, two towering personalities of unsurpassed beauty: the Bab, the Herald, the incarnation of sacrifice and of self-effacement and the highest expression of true love ever possible in this contingent life; and Abdu'l-Baha, the Center of the Covenant, the true Exemplar of the teachings and the highest embodiment of servitude. These two exemplify the mysteries of sacrifice and servitude, calling on all men to hasten and offer their potentialities as humble gifts for the establishment of God's redeeming Order, the very reflection of His Kingdom on earth.