

STUDY GUIDE OF THE TABLET OF MAQSÚD

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❖ INTRODUCTION

Christians are familiar with the names of the Epistles of Paul. When we mention the "Epistle to the Hebrews" or the "Epistle to the Corinthians", these are references that are not strange to them.

What about us? Are we familiar with our Epistles? Names like the "Tablet of the World", the "Tablet of Maqsúd", the "Tablet of Carmel" and "The Most Holy Tablet"? Are these familiar to us? Besides their titles, are we familiar with their content?

This document aims to be a guideline for a study of the Tablet of Maqsúd. It can be used by teachers and speakers in conferences, schools or deepening classes.

Due to its content we consider the Tablet of Maqsúd suitable for use someone who is having their first contact with the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

❖ TABLETS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH REVEALED AFTER THE AQDAS

Shoghi Effendi stated that the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh revealed in 'Akká fall into three distinct categories of writings:

1. those writings which constitute the sequel to the proclamation of His Mission in Adrianople ;
2. the laws and ordinances of His Dispensation, which, for the most part, have been recorded in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, His Most Holy Book;
3. those Tablets which partly enunciate and partly reaffirm the fundamental tenets and principles underlying that Dispensation.¹

The Tablet of Maqsud belongs to the third category. The importance of these Tablets was described by Shoghi Effendi in these words: "These Tablets—mighty and final effusions of His indefatigable pen—must rank among the choicest fruits which His mind has yielded, and mark the consummation of His forty-year-long ministry"²

¹ God Passes By, pag. 205-206

² God Passes By, pag. 216

According to Shoghi Effendi, the main themes of these Tablets revealed after the Aqdas are:

1. The principle of the oneness and wholeness of the human race;
2. Deploras the defectiveness of the prevailing order;
3. regards the “love of mankind” and service to its interests as the worthiest and most laudable objects of human endeavor;
4. laments that “the vitality of men’s belief in God is dying out in every land.”;
5. laments that the “face of the world” is turned towards “waywardness and unbelief”;
6. proclaims religion to be “a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world” and “the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world”;
7. affirms its [religion’s] fundamental purpose to be the promotion of union and concord amongst men;
8. warns lest it [religion’s] be made “a source of dissension, of discord and hatred”;
9. commands that its principles be taught to children in the schools of the world, in a manner that would not be productive of either prejudice or fanaticism;
10. predicts “convulsions” of such severity as to “cause the limbs of mankind to quake.”
11. The principle of collective security He unreservedly urges;
12. recommends the reduction in national armaments;
13. 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;
14. extols Justice as “the light of men” and their “guardian,” as “the revealer of the secrets of the world of being, and the standard-bearer of love and bounty”;
15. declares its radiance to be incomparable;
16. that upon it [justice] must depend “the organization of the world and the tranquillity of mankind”;
17. He characterizes its “two pillars” - “reward and punishment” - as “the sources of life” to the human race;
18. warns the peoples of the world to bestir themselves in anticipation of its advent;
19. prophesies that, after an interval of great turmoil and grievous injustice, its day-star will shine in its full splendor and glory;
20. inculcates the principle of “moderation in all things”;
21. declares that whatsoever, be it “Liberty, civilization and the like,” “passeth beyond the limits of moderation” must “exercise a pernicious influence upon men”;
22. observes that western civilization has gravely perturbed and alarmed the peoples of the world;
23. predicts that the day is approaching when the “flame” of a civilization “carried to excess” “will devour the cities”;
24. establishes consultation as one of the fundamental principles of His Faith;
25. describes it [consultation] as “the lamp of guidance,” as “the bestower of understanding,” and as one of the two “luminaries” of the “heaven of Divine wisdom.”;
26. states that knowledge is “as wings to man’s life and a ladder for his ascent”;;
27. its [knowledge] acquisition He regards as “incumbent upon every one”;;
28. considers “arts, crafts and sciences” to be conducive to the exaltation of the world of being;
29. commends the wealth acquired through crafts and professions;

30. acknowledges the indebtedness of the peoples of the world to scientists and craftsmen;
31. discourages the study of such sciences as are unprofitable to men, and “begin with words and end with words.”
32. He further emphasizes the injunction to “consort with all men in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship”, and recognizes such association to be conducive to “union and concord,” which, He affirms, are the establishers of order in the world and the quickeners of nations;
33. He repeatedly stresses the necessity of adopting a universal tongue and script;
34. deplores the waste of time involved in the study of divers languages;
35. affirms that with the adoption of such a language and script the whole earth will be considered as “one city and one land”;
36. claims to be possessed of the knowledge of both, and ready to impart it to any one who might seek it from Him;
37. To the trustees of the House of Justice He assigns the duty of legislating on matters not expressly provided in His writings, and promises that God will “inspire them with whatsoever He willeth;
38. The establishment of a constitutional form of government, in which the ideals of republicanism and the majesty of kingship, characterized by Him as “one of the signs of God,” are combined, He recommends as a meritorious achievement;
39. urges that special regard be paid to the interests of agriculture;
40. makes specific reference to “the swiftly appearing newspapers,” describes them as “the mirror of the world” and as “an amazing and potent phenomenon,” and prescribes to all who are responsible for their production the duty to be sanctified from malice, passion and prejudice, to be just and fair-minded, to be painstaking in their inquiries, and ascertain all the facts in every situation;
41. He further elaborates the doctrine of the Most Great Infallibility;
42. He reaffirms the obligation laid on His followers to “behave towards the government of the country in which they reside with loyalty, honesty and truthfulness”;
43. He reemphasizes the ban imposed upon the waging of holy war and the destruction of books;
44. He singles out for special praise men of learning and wisdom, whom He extols as “eyes” to the body of mankind, and as the “greatest gifts” conferred upon the world;
45. He sets forth the fundamentals of true philosophy.³

³ God Passes By, pag. 217

❖ WORKING PROCEDURE

We suggest that you use a pencil to number every paragraph of the Tablet, for further references. There are 51 paragraphs. The first begins with the words “He is God, exalted is He, the Lord of Majesty and Power”. The second begins with the words “A praise which is exalted above every mention or description...”.

In this document, references to the Tablet paragraph are within square brackets [].

❖ SUGGESTION FOR STUDYING THE TABLET OF MAQSÚD

To study the Tablet, we suggest you to pick up a piece of paper and draw a table with 52 lines and 3 columns, similar to the following one:

Paragraph No.	Theme(s)	Notes
1		
2		
3		
...		
...		
49		
50		
51		

As you read the Tablet, write the paragraph number and its theme(s). Each theme should be identified with a word or phrase.

In the column "Notes" you can write any comments you want (eg: references to other Scriptures of Bahá'u'lláh, references to other books or any idea that may occur to you).

If you are working in group, you may want to divide a certain number of paragraphs per each group member.

❖ MAIN THEMES OF THE TABLET OF MAQSÚD

Unlike most writers, Bahá'u'lláh does not address issues in a linear manner. The different themes of the scriptures of Bahá'u'lláh appear frequently across from one another. Thus, a subject can be approached from different perspectives in alternate paragraphs and sentences in the text. This kind of writing, together with the use of metaphors and frequent reference to the attributes of God, is perhaps the most striking aspect for those who have their first contact with the Bahá'ís Writings.

It is not easy to summarize the main themes of any book or tablet of Bahá'u'lláh. In the Epistle of Maqsúd one can say that there are three central themes, each one with several sub-themes:

- Revelation and Religion
 - God
 - The Word of God
 - Religion

- Civilization
 - Turmoils affecting humanity
 - A New world Order
 - Justice
 - An Auxiliary Language

- The Human Being
 - His condition
 - A social creature
 - Human Words
 - The Wise and the Learned

In addition to these central themes, there are others, including invocations [2, 34], a praise to Mohammed [4] and several words addressed to Maqsúd.

Exercise: Try to identify the themes in the following paragraphs:

- [7] _____
- [11] _____
- [15] _____
- [27] _____
- [37] _____
- [44] _____

❖ METAPHORS

In His Writings, Baha'u'llah often uses metaphors to illustrate concepts. Metaphors are verbal images, and should not, therefore, be taken literally.

Besides their poetic beauty, metaphors also convey meanings that, if absent, we would not be able to appreciate their full significance.

Here are some examples of metaphors found in the Tablet of Maqsúd:

" I am the royal Falcon on the arm of the Almighty. I unfold the drooping wings of every broken bird and start it on its flight " [20]

" I am the Sun of Wisdom and the Ocean of Knowledge. I cheer the faint and revive the dead." [20]

" He entreateth remission of his sins from the ocean of the forgiveness of his Lord " [45]

Exercise: Try to explain the meaning(s) of the above metaphors.

❖ ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

In His writings, Bahá'u'lláh often mentions the attributes of God. Here are some examples found in the Tablet of Maqsúd:

" He is the Mighty, the Powerful, the All-Wise, the All-Perceiving. He heareth and seeth; He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing." [51]

" Verily our Lord of Mercy is the Helper, the Knowing, the Wise" [34]

"...the Adored One, the Possessor of all things visible and invisible..." [2]

In many of His writings, Bahá'u'lláh declares that God is high above all attributes and that "we cannot associate any attribute with the essence of God." Any attribute that you want to assign Him is limited, and therefore He would cease being God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá explained to us that whatever a person can possibly think about God, it is the product of his own imagination. He also states that the only way to understand God is to turn to the words of His Manifestations. The infinite can not be understood by the finite mind of human beings.

However, 'Abdu'l-Baha also says that we can associate certain attributes to God. We do this not to prove that He owns exalted attributes - attributes that are beyond our understanding - but rather to dissociate Him from the lack of attributes.⁴

❖ EXPRESSIONS

In His Writings, Bahá'u'lláh uses several expressions and titles to describe God, His Manifestations or other entities. In this Tablet the term "Great Being" is used as a reference to God, the expression "Wronged One" is used as a reference to Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

Exercise: Try to identify to Whom is Bahá'u'lláh referring to by using the following titles and expressions:

- The Pen of the Most High [14]
- The Primal Point [2]
- The Pen of Glory [2, 48]
- The True Counsellor [6]
- Him Who conversed with God [23]

Exercise: Try to identify other titles and expressions used by Bahá'u'lláh in the Tablet of Maqsúd.

⁴ See Tablet to Dr. Auguste Forel

❖ QUESTIONS ABOUT THE MAIN THEMES

CIVILIZATION: Turmoil affecting mankind

1. To refer to seizures which affect humanity, Bahá'u'lláh says that the behaviour of humanity is bewildering and confusing [6]. What is He referring to?
2. Bahá'u'lláh says that humanity refuses to use its own capabilities to cease the current turmoils [27]. What are these capabilities?
3. According to Bahá'u'lláh, what are the causes of the current turmoils facing humanity? [33]

CIVILIZATION: A New World Order

1. What does Bahá'u'lláh consider as pillars of world stability? [6] Isn't this a contradiction with "tolerance and righteousness? [21] What is the relationship between these pillars and justice? [6]
2. What will be the utility of weapons in a future New World Order? [8]
3. What does Bahá'u'lláh mean when referring to kings and rulers as a "mirror of grace and omnipotence of the name of God"? [8]
4. What should be the attitude of governments towards justice? [12]
5. What meanings can be found in the words "a union that would lead to disunity or a concord which would create discord"? [14]
6. Who can guide humanity to recognize their best interests? [26] What are these "best interests"?

CIVILIZATION: An International Auxiliary Language

1. According to Bahá'u'lláh, what procedures should we follow to adopt an international auxiliary language? [9]
2. How can an international auxiliary language be useful to unity and the harmony of all people? [9]

CIVILIZATION: Justice

1. What is the correlation between justice and tyranny?
2. Bahá'u'lláh repeatedly condemns tyranny [11, 23]. Who are the persecuted people whose persecutors are condemn in this Tablet? [23]

THE HUMAN BEING: His condition

1. What is preventing man from revealing his full potential? [3]
2. What could be the meaning of the words "Through a word proceeding out of the mouth of God He was called into being"? [3]
3. What would be the attitude of the human being if he could fully appreciate the greatness of his condition? [27]

THE HUMAN BEING: a social creature

1. What should be the attitude towards the arts, sciences and other fields of knowledge? [17]
2. Who is the "exalted Being " who sought only to foster the spirit of love and fellowship among men? [38]
3. What is the importance of consultation and moderation in human activities? [17.19]

THE HUMAN BEING: His words

1. What is the importance of human words? [29, 30]
2. What kinds of influences may words have to be compared to "Light" and "Fire"? [31]
3. How can words help men to reach his favourable condition? [31]

THE HUMAN BEING: The Wise and Learned

1. How can scientists and scholars help to unite the world? [28]
2. What is the importance of these men to humanity? [18, 24]

REVELATION AND RELIGION: God

1. What is the metaphor of the "Royal Falcon" suggest about the attitude of God to human beings? [20]
2. What are the allegories used to describe the power of God? [44]

REVELATION AND RELIGION: The Word of God

1. Describe in your own words the power of the Word of God? [32]
2. What other writings of Bahá'u'lláh describe the power of the Word of God?

REVELATION AND RELIGION: Religion

1. What is the purpose of religion? [15]
2. What benefits can religion bring to humanity? [15]

❖ SIMILARITIES WITH OTHER WRITINGS

- ① Compare the following texts with paragraphs 6, 15 and 19 in the Tablet Maqsúd. Find the similarities. How are these texts complementary?

"Religion is the greatest of all means for the establishment of order in the world and for the peaceful contentment of all that dwell therein. The weakening of the pillars of religion hath strengthened the hands of the ignorant and made them bold and arrogant."

"Religion is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world, for the fear of God impelleth man to hold fast to that which is good, and shun all evil. Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness, of justice, of tranquillity and peace cease to shine." "

[Bahá'u'lláh quoted in World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, 186-187]

"The civilization so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men... If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation..."

[Bahá'u'lláh quoted in World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, 194]

- ② Compare the following texts with paragraphs 8 and 12 in the Tablet Maqsúd. Find the similarities. How do are these texts complementary?

"The sovereigns of the world must conclude a binding treaty, and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world, and obtain for it the sanction of all the human race... All the forces of humanity must be mobilized to insure the stability and permanence of this Most Great Covenant... The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government."

[Abdu'l-Bahá quoted in World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, 192]

- ③ In The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh [pag. 187-188], Shoghi Effendi points several features of what he calls “a decadent society... that must die or reborn”
1. *The recrudescence of religious intolerance, of racial animosity, and of patriotic arrogance;*
 2. *the increasing evidences of selfishness, of suspicion, of fear and of fraud;*
 3. *the spread of terrorism, of lawlessness, of drunkenness and of crime;*
 4. *the unquenchable thirst for, and the feverish pursuit after, earthly vanities, riches and pleasures;*
 5. *the weakening of family solidarity;*
 6. *the laxity in parental control;*
 7. *the lapse into luxurious indulgence;*
 8. *the irresponsible attitude towards marriage and the consequent rising tide of divorce;*
 9. *the degeneracy of art and music, the infection of literature, and the corruption of the press;*
 10. *the extension of the influence and activities of those “prophets of decadence” who advocate companionate marriage, who preach the philosophy of nudism, who call modesty an intellectual fiction, who refuse to regard the procreation of children as the sacred and primary purpose of marriage, who denounce religion as an opiate of the people, who would, if given free rein, lead back the human race to barbarism, chaos, and ultimate extinction*

Which of these features are mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh in the Tablet of Maqsúd?

- ④ Compare the following text with paragraph 31 in the Tablet Maqsúd. Find the similarities. How are these texts complementary?

the tongue is a smouldering fire, and excess of speech a deadly poison. Material fire consumeth the body, whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart and soul. The force of the former lasteth but for a time, whilst the effects of the latter endure a century"

(Kitáb-i-Íqán, pag. 193)