

# Concealment and Revelation in Bahá'u'lláh's Book of the River

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## **Abstract**

*This article examines the thesis proposed by Juan Cole, based on his translation and interpretation of Bahá'u'lláh's Ṣaḥífiy-i-Ṣhaṭṭíyyih (Book of the River), that Bahá'u'lláh did not consider himself a Manifestation of God until a short time prior to his Riḍván declaration and that his experience in the Síyáh-Chál in Tehran in 1852 was not a divine revelation. It is argued that such a revision of history is unwarranted. The text of the Book of the River is analyzed as well as the date and context of its revelation, and it is argued that the tablet should be viewed in terms of the dialectic of concealment and revelation that characterizes Bahá'u'lláh's early writings. Significant problems in translation and interpretation are discussed, and evidence is cited from Bahá'u'lláh's writings confirming the reality of his revelation in Tehran and his selective declaration of his station as the Promised One during the early Baghdad period.*

## **Résumé**

*Cet article examine la thèse proposée par Juan Cole, qu'il fonde sur sa traduction et son interprétation de la tablette Ṣaḥífiy-i-Ṣhaṭṭíyyih (Le Livre de la Rivière) de Bahá'u'lláh. Selon cette thèse, Bahá'u'lláh ne se considérait pas comme une Manifestation de Dieu jusqu'à peu de temps avant sa déclaration dans le jardin de Riḍván, et son expérience dans le Síyáh-Chál, à Tehran en 1852, n'était pas une révélation divine. L'article fait plutôt valoir qu'il n'y pas lieu de faire une telle révision de l'histoire. L'auteur analyse le texte du Livre de la Rivière, de même que la période et le contexte dans lequel il a été révélé, et explique que la tablette devrait être perçue à la lumière de la dialectique de non-divulgateion et de révélation qui caractérisait les premiers écrits de Bahá'u'lláh. L'article traite de problèmes importants concernant la traduction et l'interprétation de cette tablette, et cite des écrits de Bahá'u'lláh qui confirment la réalité de sa révélation à Tehran et sa déclaration sélective, au début de la période de Baghdad, de sa station de Promis.*

## **Resumen**

*Este artículo examina la tesis propuesta por Juan Cole, basada en su traducción e interpretación del Ṣaḥífiy-i-Ṣhaṭṭíyyih (Libro del Río) de que Bahá'u'lláh no se consideraba Manifestación de Dios hasta poco antes de su declaración de Riḍván y que lo que experimentó en el Síyáh-Chál en Tehran en 1852 no fue revelación divina. Se razona que tal revisión de la historia es injustificada. Se hace análisis del texto del Libro del Río como también la fecha*

*y contexto de su revelación y se razona que la tabla deberá ser comprendida de acuerdo con la dialéctica de ocultación y revelación que caracteriza los escritos iniciales de Bahá'u'lláh. Se discuten problemas de consideración en la traducción e interpretación, y se citan pruebas de los escritos de Bahá'u'lláh que confirman la realidad de su revelación en Tehran y su declaración selectiva de su condición espiritual de ser El Prometido durante el periodo inicial en Baghdad.*

It is a fundamental Bahá'í belief that the Báb's prophecy that the Promised One would appear in "the year nine" was fulfilled by Bahá'u'lláh's revelation in the Sýáh-Chál of Tehran during Muḥarram 1269 A.H. (October 1852). It is also generally accepted that, although Bahá'u'lláh disclosed his station privately to a few individuals, he did not publicly announce that he was "Him Whom God shall make manifest" until his declaration in the Riḍván Garden in Baghdad in 1280 A.H. (April 1863). Recently, however, Professor Juan R. I. Cole ("Commentary") has proposed the thesis that Bahá'u'lláh may not have considered himself to be a Manifestation of God during the greater part of the Baghdad period and that Bahá'u'lláh's experience in the Sýáh-Chál was not a divine revelation. Clearly, any proposal for such a radical revision of Bahá'í history should be expected to meet a high standard of evidence and logic before it could be seriously entertained by anyone.

Cole's basic argument rests on his reading of Bahá'u'lláh's *Ṣaḥífíy-i-Shaṭṭíyyih* (Book of the River) which Cole has translated. He maintains that in this tablet Bahá'u'lláh denies having any "divine Cause" and therefore Bahá'u'lláh's claim to a prophetic station "probably should not be dated further back than about 1859" (Cole, "Commentary"). Although acknowledging that Bahá'u'lláh speaks authoritatively in the tablet and that the word *ṣaḥífih* denotes sacred scripture, Cole nevertheless suggests that at the time Bahá'u'lláh wrote the tablet he may only have thought of himself as a "Babi Sufi shaykh" or one among the Bábí leaders, but that in any case Bahá'u'lláh's "self-conception changed mightily between the early 1850s and the late 1850s" ("Commentary").

The evidence against this thesis is so extensive and multifaceted that it is difficult to cover it all in a single article. I will argue here that Cole's translation of the Book of the River contains significant errors, particularly in almost all the points used to support the argument that in this tablet Bahá'u'lláh makes no claim to any divine revelation. On the contrary, the Book of the River clearly attests to the sublime station of Bahá'u'lláh and strongly alludes to the fact that he is none other than the Promised One of the Bayán. I will also show that in numerous tablets Bahá'u'lláh unambiguously identifies his Revelation as that promised by the Báb to appear in "the year nine." Likewise, in many of the tablets Bahá'u'lláh revealed during the Baghdad period, he tells us explicitly about his station as a new Manifestation of God. The familiar account of the

revelation in the *Síyáh-Chál* as the beginning of a new prophetic era, as recorded in the Tablet to the Shah of Iran, is confirmed and supported explicitly by numerous other writings.

The central misconception underlying the thesis is very similar to that of a few other writers who contend that the Báb's early works indicate no prophetic consciousness and suggest that it was not until some four years after his 1844 Declaration that the Báb first began to consider himself the Qá'im and a new Manifestation of God. It is also similar to some discussions of the early writings of Bahá'u'lláh—such as the Hidden Words, the Four Valleys, and the Seven Valleys—that understand those early works as reiterating typical Sufi ideas and find discontinuity and inconsistency between the conceptual content of Bahá'u'lláh's early “mystical” writings and that of his later writings, such as the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, which have a social, legal, or administrative orientation and an emphasis on covenant.

### **Early Writings of Bahá'u'lláh**

Those analyses, along with the theory which will be examined in this article, have family resemblances and are all, in my opinion, based upon a reductionistic logic which misconstrues the early and the later writings of both Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb.<sup>1</sup> Although a full discussion of all these issues is beyond the scope of this article, it can be demonstrated that Bahá'u'lláh's early texts are in perfect harmony with his later ones, including the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, as well as with the principle of covenant and with all the diverse social, historical, and legal aspects of the Bahá'í Faith. In addition, Bahá'u'lláh's early texts, like his later ones, can be seen to disclose a logic of discourse, a worldview, and a spiritual and sociological insight that are not reducible to any Eastern or Western system either in the past or in the present. The early writings of Bahá'u'lláh, in fact, embody the same logic found in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Bahá'u'lláh's Four Valleys is an explication of an epistemology which is neither solely mystical, legal, nor rational but the harmonious unity of all three in a novel creative and historical framework. The Hidden Words, rather than being solely mystical, is a discourse on covenant which includes an outline of the new world order of Bahá'u'lláh (Saiedi “*Kalimát-i-Maknúnih*”).

Moreover, these early writings of Bahá'u'lláh clearly show that the incomparable author of those texts claims the highest possible spiritual station for himself. For instance, Bahá'u'lláh describes the Hidden Words as the “inner essence” of all the divine revelations of the past. He claims that he understands that inner essence of all that has been “uttered by the tongue of power and

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1. Elsewhere (Saiedi “*Tahílíf*”) I have discussed aspects of the Báb's concept of gatehood, showing the inadequacy of that approach with regard to the Báb's writings.

might, and revealed unto the Prophets of old" (*Hidden Words* 3) so completely as to be able to condense it into the brief form of the Hidden Words. Obviously this is not just the account of a mystic's temporary sense of holy ecstasy. It implies a claim beyond any that could be made by an ordinary human being. Not surprisingly, we find the same claim to absolute knowledge of divine truth and mysteries in all the works of Bahá'u'lláh during the Baghdad period, including the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* and the *Book of the River*.

In addition to the content of these early writings, both their style of expression and their symbolic structure indicate the inception of a new divine dispensation. For example, the *Hidden Words* is in the form of *áyát*, the mode of revelation of verses in which God speaks directly, in the voice of God, to human beings. It is the same form of language and address that characterizes the *Qur'án* and the *Báb's* *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá*. And Bahá'u'lláh, significantly, breaks with the typical practice of the *Bábí* leaders, including Azal, who attempted to imitate the *Báb's* style in their writings. The new and unprecedented language Bahá'u'lláh employs is itself a clear mark of his authority and station.

But even if (and this is a counterfactual assumption) all the early writings of Bahá'u'lláh expressed only a language of utter humility and servitude and rejected any claim to a unique spiritual station, that in itself would not constitute evidence that Bahá'u'lláh did not at the time consider himself to be a Manifestation of God. Bahá'u'lláh explains that during the Baghdad period he sometimes revealed himself and sometimes concealed his station behind "veils" and "clouds." His Baghdad writings should be understood precisely in terms of that dialectic of concealment and revelation. In fact, in the *Book of the River* itself Bahá'u'lláh refers to the gradual revelation of truth in accordance with human aptitude: "Every thing hath its storehouses with thy Lord, and He sendeth them down as He pleaseth according to a measure from Him."<sup>2</sup> Any statement which may appear to indicate servitude should be viewed in that context: it might intentionally indicate no particular station. Yet at the same time, the occasional use of the language of servitude is in no way incompatible with the station of a Manifestation of God. As Bahá'u'lláh has explained in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, the Manifestations of God speak in different ways because of their multiple stations:

Were any of the all-embracing Manifestations of God to declare: "I am God!" He verily speaketh the truth, and no doubt attacheth thereto. For it hath been repeatedly demonstrated that through their Revelation, their attributes and names, the Revelation

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2. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from the *Book of the River* are provisional translations based on the Persian text of the tablet published in Iran National Bahá'í Archives Manuscript Collection (INBA)57: 10–18. The translation is published in its entirety in this issue of the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*. The version of the tablet published in *Ishráq Khávarí's Má'idíy-i-Ásmání* (used by Cole) contains a number of minor errors.

of God, His name and His attributes, are made manifest in the world. . . . And were any of them to voice the utterance: "I am the Messenger of God," He also speaketh the truth, the indubitable truth. . . . Viewed in this light, they are all but Messengers of that ideal King, that unchangeable Essence.

And were they all to proclaim: "I am the Seal of the Prophets," they verily utter but the truth, beyond the faintest shadow of doubt. For they are all but one person, one soul, one spirit, one being, one revelation. . . . And were they to say: "We are the servants of God," this also is a manifest and indisputable fact. For they have been made manifest in the uttermost state of servitude, a servitude the like of which no man can possibly attain. (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 178)

### **Date and Context of Revelation**

It should be pointed out that Cole's conclusion about the date of the "emergence" of Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic self-conception has changed. Previously Cole had argued that Bahá'u'lláh did not make any claim or have any conception of being the Promised One before 1862—that is, about a year before the declaration in the Riḍván Garden. But then he noted the undeniable evidence that Bahá'u'lláh had in fact disclosed his station to certain individuals at least four years before the Riḍván declaration. However, Cole maintained his basic position but pushed back the time of Bahá'u'lláh's first prophetic consciousness three years—to 1859 (Cole, "Commentary").

However, that clearly shows that Bahá'u'lláh's writings after 1859 employ exactly the same language and express exactly the same message as his earlier writings, a fact that is logically compatible with the generally accepted Bahá'í view of the early Baghdad period. In that case, the Book of the River should be read in terms of the same logic of wisdom and the dialectic of concealment and revelation which is present in all Bahá'u'lláh's writings of this period.

The question of the date and context of revelation of the tablet is crucial for evaluating Cole's commentary on the tablet. He dates the writing of the Book of the River to 1857, around the time Bahá'u'lláh wrote the Hidden Words. But all we really know is that in the Book of the River Bahá'u'lláh quotes one of the Hidden Words. Cole has reasoned from this that the two works were written at about the same time: "It quotes a Hidden Word, No. 1 of the Arabic (but with the grammatical difference that the plural imperative is used, whereas in the text of the Hidden Words we now have the grammar is singular). My guess is therefore that it was written around 1857 shortly before Bahá'u'lláh put the Hidden Words into final shape" ("Commentary").

But in fact, Bahá'u'lláh could have written this tablet years after the Hidden Words, anytime between 1859 and 1863—namely, during the period in which we know that Bahá'u'lláh had already privately declared his station. The reasoning in the above statement appears to be based on the assumption that because Bahá'u'lláh quotes from the Hidden Words but with a slight difference (a plural instead of a singular), *therefore* it must have been written around the

time he wrote the Hidden Words but before the text was fixed in “final” form. In other words, if the tablet had been written after the text of the Hidden Words was fixed, he would have quoted from the “final” form. But if that were true, then Bahá'u'lláh's tablet to Násiri'd-Dín Sháh, which was revealed about ten years after the Hidden Words, should also have been revealed at the same time as the Hidden Words. In that tablet Bahá'u'lláh also quotes from the Hidden Words with variation in wording—once using a different beginning, another time with a singular form instead of the plural that occurs in the “final” text (Bahá'u'lláh, *Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 1:73). The fact is that Bahá'u'lláh does sometimes reveal the same revelation in different forms in his writings.

Although we do not know the precise date of the Book of the River, given the fact that Bahá'u'lláh does quote from the Hidden Words (and as we will see, he actually indicates that it is taken from that book), it is more reasonable to infer that the tablet was revealed after the Hidden Words, sometime between 1858 and 1861. In this way the Book of the River is similar to the Kitáb-i-Íqán, in which Bahá'u'lláh also quotes from the Hidden Words (although without any mention of the source), and again with slight change of expression.<sup>3</sup> Therefore it is likely that the Book of the River was revealed within the same period which even Cole has acknowledged as the time of Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic consciousness.

Although we do not know the precise date when the tablet was written, we do know something about the context of its revelation. In a long tablet written around 1861 (Mázandarání, *Asráru'l-Áthár* 5: 312–44), Bahá'u'lláh informs us about his relation to the Bábí community in the period between 1856 and 1861. Based on this tablet we know that, as early as 1856, there was a serious debate within the Bábí community concerning Bahá'u'lláh's station. Many of the Bábís had noted Bahá'u'lláh's extraordinary spiritual and moral authority and some even perceived that he was the Promised One of the Bayán. This caused considerable envy and opposition on the part of some of Bahá'u'lláh's enemies, who threatened to kill his supporters and even prohibited other Bábís from traveling to Baghdad. At this time Bahá'u'lláh's enemies were accusing him of rejecting the Báb, his Mirrors,<sup>4</sup> and the Bayán. In response to this agitation, for a few years Bahá'u'lláh discouraged some of his Bábí followers from making the pilgrimage to Baghdad, eventually allowing visits around 1859.

It is in this context of confusion, rumors, accusations, and animosity that Bahá'u'lláh wrote the Book of the River in response to the questions of a Bábí named Javád (probably Javád-i-Káshání, who became a Bahá'í), who asks

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3. That is, in the Persian text. Shoghi Effendi, in his English translation of the Kitáb-i-Íqán, has used the translation of the passage as published in *The Hidden Words* (see *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 228).

4. A designation given to certain prominent Bábís.

Bahá'u'lláh about rumors of miracles that had been attributed to him and to other prominent Bábís. From Bahá'u'lláh's response in his tablet, it becomes clear that Javád considers miracles extremely important as justification of Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual authority and even feels miracles to be a necessary demonstration of divine power—to force the powerful and learned leaders of humanity to recognize and submit to the Cause of God. He has trouble understanding how divine dominion can be present when no miracles have occurred.

### **The Book of the River**

In the Book of the River, Bahá'u'lláh concisely and sublimely explains a universe of complex spiritual truth. After rejecting the rumors about specific miracles that had been attributed to him, he discusses the question of miracles in a multidimensional way. First he emphasizes the fact that in the sacred scriptures, particularly in the Bayán, the supreme proof and testimony of the Manifestation of God is the revelation of verses. Consequently, the only relevant question concerning the truth of Bahá'u'lláh's claim involves the revelation of verses and not the production of miracles. However, Bahá'u'lláh immediately rejects the rationalist position on miracles as well. The rationalists take human reason as the supreme standard of judgment and reject the possibility of miracles by the Prophets in the past because miracles are contradictory to reason. At this point, Bahá'u'lláh engages in a complex metaphysical and epistemological analysis. He argues that the rationalistic denial of the possibility of miracles is false because “human reason is not a sufficient standard” for understanding any natural phenomenon within the complex reality that is God's creation. It is not only strange, unnatural displays of power by the Prophets which are miraculous. In fact, he states, “all phenomena, as things endowed with power, are also miracles of God.” The miraculous nature of all reality transcends the limits of human reason. Human reason is incapable of comprehending any phenomenon independent of experience and observation. If it were not for that actual experience and observation, human reason would not believe in the existence of any phenomenon. If the rationalist argument for the rejection of miracles attributed to the former Prophets were true, then the reality of all natural phenomena must be rejected as well.

The rationalists' materialistic deductions are based on their forgetting the miraculous nature of all reality. After actual observation and experience, reason takes for granted all the wonders of natural phenomena and reduces them to necessary rational truths capable of deduction through rational analysis. In this mechanistic methodology, the rationalists contrast the “irrationality” of miracles, the existence of God, and the possibility of revelation to the “rational” character of “ordinary” natural events. Bahá'u'lláh affirms the necessity of

empirical experience for knowledge precisely in order to emphasize the miraculous and divine origin of all reality. All of reality testifies to the truth of God and His Manifestations.

The implications of this analysis are indeed far-reaching. Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes the poverty of a mechanistic conception of nature, unveils the spiritual foundations of science, affirms the symbolic character of all reality, and defines all beings as embodiments of the creative Word of God. This, however, means that some of the miracles attributed to the Prophets could also be real even if they may seem improbable to the eye of reason.

Bahá'u'lláh next rejects the rationalist argument that the miracles attributed to the Prophets of the past could not possibly be true because life at present seems to be without miracles. The rationalists argue that if miracles happened in the past, they should be happening now as well. Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes the dynamic character of life and asserts that the absence of miracles in the present does not imply the impossibility of their occurrence in the past: "For how often have events occurred in the past which have not occurred in the present, and vice versa." As a counterexample, he refers to the periodic occurrence of epidemics:

Consider, for instance, that every thirty years, according to the calculation and reckoning of men, there is an outbreak of plague in some lands. Could it be argued with disbelief during the delay of an outbreak of plague that no plagues have occurred in the past, since otherwise it must happen now? The same is true of other events that have occurred before but are not happening at present, and vice versa.

However, the most important point about miracles is that they are not necessary proof of the claim of the Manifestation of God. It is the Word of God itself which is the supreme testimony of God and conclusive demonstration of His power. Bahá'u'lláh decides to unveil different aspects of this and many other questions by using the analogy of the river (*shat*). Divine revelation is like a great river which inundates the land: "When its waters swell and flood, it rusheth forward and moveth turbulently. Whatever it doeth, it remaineth within its own sovereignty. However much the helpless people cry out from every side—clamoring that a great dam hath been rent asunder, or a barrier obliterated, or houses destroyed, or a palace crushed to ruins—the river payeth them no heed."

The mighty river is just and universalistic. It deals with all in the same way. The divines and sovereigns are not singled out for special favors: "With the utmost force and compulsion, power and sovereignty, it continueth to rush and flow, touching all places equally. For instance, before the onrush of its power it doth not matter whether a building belongeth to a prince or to a pauper; the effect is the same, unless that building hath unique fortifications."

Like the river's natural cycle of ebb and flood, revelation occurs in a

“natural” way, according to fixed laws. The miracles desired by people would involve an unnatural interruption in the natural course of divine revelation. If the river’s course were artificially changed, then some dry lands would be irrigated but many others would be destroyed and far more negative consequences would result.

This analogy unveils the mystery of divine decree (*qaḍá*) and destiny (*qadar*) as well. The details of this issue are elaborated in other writings of the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.<sup>5</sup> Human action is the product of the active interaction of divine effulgence and human free choice and reception. The sign of divine power becomes manifest in all things in accordance with their own stations and aptitudes. The Word of God is the embodiment of divine justice. Both the faith of the faithful and the rejection of the rejectors, including the powerful and the exalted, are part of divine wisdom and God’s universal justice. The divine river actualizes the hidden tendencies of the different beings and radically tests all things.

Bahá’u’lláh identifies the reason for the differences in reception and recognition in the differing capacities of the recipients:

Each person speaketh and expresseth himself according to that which is reflected within him. For example, with reference to the same analogy of the flooding river, observe that it floweth forward in one manner and its relationship to all buildings and structures is the same, yet any valley that hath more capacity is able to take in more of it, and any dam whose foundation is weaker is less able to resist it. . . . In like manner, consider the rays of the Eternal Sun, which shine with the same illumination in the heaven of human hearts but, when reflected in the forms of mirrors, differ by reason of differences among the mirrors themselves. Thus it is that some abide exalted in their essences and high in their endeavors, while others sink into the depths of lethargy and degradation. All things have their rank before God, and all return unto Him.

The cycle of the river’s ebb and flood becomes a metaphorical vehicle to describe the principle of progressive revelation as well. “[I]n every age and century, as He desireth, the Unique Hidden One and the Eternal Essence manifesteth that true River and real Sea and causeth it to flow, adorning it with a new temple and a new vesture.” But whenever a new Manifestation appears, people cling to their vain imaginations and fail to recognize the supreme Object of their expectation. “With utmost desire and thirst they drown and perish, lacking even the faintest awareness that they could quaff a draught thereof.”

Bahá’u’lláh warns Javád not to allow the sayings of the people to prevent him from recognizing the Divine Beauty, refers to belief in “the Most Exalted Countenance” and recognition of “His station as manifested after Him on the

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5. See, for example, Mázandarání, *Amr va Khalq* 1:75–85.

Throne” as sufficient “above any other knowledge or deed,” adding that “His good pleasure and faith in Him” is dependent upon “obedience unto His command in all things,” This, he says, is the “fruit of existence.” Bahá’u’lláh concludes the tablet by quoting the first of the Arabic Hidden Words.

### **Bahá’u’lláh’s Claim to a Cause**

I will now analyze Cole’s translation of the Book of the River and the deductions based on it in light of the tablet itself. In his commentary on the tablet, he says:

This work is the clearest indication I know of Baha’u’llah’s self-conception before about 1859, when he appears to have begun telling people like Fitnih and Nabil-i Akbar that he was the Promised one. Denis MacEoin pointed out in his 1989 BRISMES article that Baha’u’llah in this work disclaims having any “Cause” at that point, and my rereading it now in conjunction with my translation convinces me that Denis is right. He has no “iqbal bar amri,” is making no claim to have a divine Cause.

This work gives us a humanist Baha’u’llah, who sternly denies being able to work any miracles, who defers humbly to the Mirrors of the Babi dispensation, who gives us a catechism that includes belief in God, the Bab, Quddus, and the “Living Countenance” (Denis thinks this is Azal; I don’t know Babi terminology well enough to have an opinion). Indeed, the argument seems to be made that just as plagues no longer break out in Iraq every 30 years as they had in past centuries (owing to Ottoman quarantines, by the way), that after the Bab’s death the age of miracles is over with. This is in turn an announcement of a profound secularization of sorts, isn’t it? (“Commentary”)

The most important strand of the argument is based on the perception that Bahá’u’lláh has stated in the tablet that he makes no claim to any divine cause. This is Cole’s translation of the passage in question:

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. (“Book of the Tigris”)

The expression used by Bahá’u’lláh here (as it appears in the version of the tablet used by Cole) is: “*Valákin chih gúyam kih hích iqbál bih amrí nadáram.*”<sup>6</sup> Although he translates this as: “But what shall I say? I make no claim to a Cause,” not only does Bahá’u’lláh say no such a thing here, he says nothing remotely close to it. What Bahá’u’lláh says is:

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6. Cole incorrectly quotes the original as “*bar amri*” instead of “*bih amri*.” The more accurate version of the tablet has “*Valákin chigúnih míshavad kih híchiqbál bih amrí nadáram.*”

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.

In other words, he has no desire to discuss the issue in question in detail. This is no case of ambiguous meaning. Bahá'u'lláh has used a common polite Persian idiom which indicates reluctance or disinclination to approach an issue or engage in a task. From the text it is absolutely clear that the “issue” or “task” (*amr*) in question is nothing but the act of speech, writing, and exposition of Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual knowledge through the metaphor of the river. It is just before this statement, in the same paragraph, that Bahá'u'lláh makes the claim that he is able to unveil all spiritual mysteries and all divine truths just through the metaphor of the river! However, because of the “malice hidden in the hearts” of the people surrounding him, he does not wish to divulge all those mysteries. Obviously, this is indeed a clear indication of Bahá'u'lláh's self-conception at the time he revealed the tablet. The passage, in other words, alludes powerfully to the fact that Bahá'u'lláh is the Manifestation of God. It is worth noting that in his later writings, Bahá'u'lláh affirms that his ability to unveil all spiritual truth through one single metaphor is itself an indication of his exalted station (*Iqtidárát* 71).

The beginning of the phrase, “Yet, alas,” or literally, “What can I say?” (*Valákin chih gúyam*), also idiomatic, is not a literal confession of having nothing to say but an expression of reluctance to say something that one in fact does know. It conveys disappointment and sorrow, but Bahá'u'lláh is not expressing sorrow that he has no claim to any divine cause! Rather, he is expressing sorrow because he cannot disclose his real station, reveal his ocean of knowledge, and impart his inner secret because of the climate of hostility and the low spiritual level of the people around him.<sup>7</sup> This becomes even clearer when we note that Bahá'u'lláh speaks of the “anguish and sorrow” that have afflicted him “in these days.” His disinclination to complete the task of unveiling all spiritual truth through the metaphor of the river is due to the conditions that prevail *in these days*.

There is absolutely no word equivalent to “claim” or to “having a claim” here. It is true that the word *amr* is also sometimes used for “cause,” but that is only one of the possible uses of *amr* and not the primary meaning of the term. But it is not even a possible meaning in the expression in question. In its primary sense, *amr* (meaning any event, matter, affair, issue, task, topic, etc.) is

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7. That meaning is evident in the more accurate version of the tablet, which instead of “*Valákin chih gúyam*” has “*Valákin chigúnih mishavad.*”

used by Bahá'u'lláh—that is, not as “divine cause”—in numerous cases in his writings.

In many of Bahá'u'lláh's later tablets, he also writes that the hatred in the hearts of the people has prevented him from revealing tablets or unveiling all spiritual truth in his tablets. He also frequently uses a similar phrase to express his lack of desire to discuss particular issues. For instance, in one of his later tablets he says that he has discussed the techniques of the alchemical elixir in his Adrianople tablets because of his followers' frequent requests, but that otherwise he himself has no wish to discuss these issues. His exact words are: “*Vaillá Qalam-i-A'lá . . . iqbál bih dhikr-i-ín umúr nadásh̄t̄ih va nadárad*” (Ishráq Khávarí, *Má'idiy-i-Ásmání* 1:19). In this sentence, both key terms of the statement in the Book of the River—*iqbál* and *umúr* (plural of *amr*)—occur. But if we were to translate this sentence as Cole translates those terms in the Book of the River, it would give us the self-contradiction: “otherwise the Most Exalted Pen makes no claim to utter these divine Causes.” Clearly, Bahá'u'lláh is simply saying that the Most Exalted Pen has no desire to discuss these issues. There is also no doubt that the latter statement was revealed years after Bahá'u'lláh's public declaration of his station.

An interesting point is that, in a paragraph prior to the passage in question, Cole treats another occurrence of the word *iqbál* in a completely different way. He translates the passage as follows: “Clearly, before the mind had perceived such a thing, it would not have accepted anyone's description of it” (“Book of the Tigris”). But while *iqbál* is translated as “a claim” in the controversial sentence, it has been entirely omitted from the translation of this passage. And in fact the word “claim” would make no sense there. In both sentences *iqbál* means “inclination.” In the above instance Bahá'u'lláh actually has written: “Certainly, human reason would not *be inclined* to accept the possibility of the existence of such a thing by means of any rational definition or description without actual observation and experience” (emphasis added).

In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* Bahá'u'lláh uses a similar expression with *iqbál* to convey the same meaning, namely that he has no inclination or desire to do something. Discussing Karím Khán-i-Kirmání's book, Bahá'u'lláh writes: “*Har chand ín 'abd iqbál bih muláhiẓiy-i-kalimát-i-ghiȳr nadásh̄t̄ih va nadáram,*” meaning: “Although we never felt disposed to peruse other people's writings” (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 185). Siyyid Kázim-i-Rashtí also uses such an expression frequently in his Persian book *Majma'u'l-Asrár*, saying that since he has already discussed the topic in his previous writings, or since he is tired and ill, he has no *iqbál* to a lengthy discussion of the issue. He frequently says, for example, “*alán iqbál bih dhikr-i-án nadáram,*” meaning: “right now I have no wish to mention that issue.”<sup>8</sup> This reading of the expression as used in the Book of the River is

8. See, for example, *Majma'u'l-Asrár* 44, 56, 274, 314.

confirmed by another passage at the end of the tablet, where Bahá'u'lláh writes that he has revealed the tablet solely out of his love for Javád, "Otherwise, I have no inclination to set forth any topic, or write a single letter thereon."

But that expression is not the only mistranslation in the passage. It is not "chains" that are hidden in the breasts but hatred. However, it has apparently been assumed that the word *aghlál* is the plural of *ghull* (chain). But here *aghlál* is being used as the plural of the Arabic word *ghill* (rancor, malice, or animosity). *Mughill*, from the same root, means a person who is spiteful, deceitful, and bears malice and ill will. Bahá'u'lláh frequently uses the terms *ghill* and *mughill* in his tablets to describe the state of his enemies' hearts.<sup>9</sup> In this phrase Bahá'u'lláh creates two plurals not found in standard Arabic—*aghlál* as the plural of *ghill* and *aşđár* as the plural of *şadr* (heart). Note that creating new words and derivatives was one way in which the Báb declared his supreme authority as the Manifestation of God. However, what is indisputable is that in this context Bahá'u'lláh is not talking about chains but animosities in the hearts. The mistranslation makes it more difficult to understand Bahá'u'lláh's reference to his state of disappointment and his forced silence.

With that crucial information and the correction, now when we read the entire paragraph it becomes absolutely clear what Bahá'u'lláh is talking about in this passage:

This is especially true if the Eastern Winds begin to blow upon the flood of this heavenly river, which is rushing forth from the North of divine unity. How many exalted souls and possessors of true understanding, how many mighty castles and firm lofty edifices, will be destroyed and perish. By Him Who holdeth the heavens by His might and moveth the oceans by His command! 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 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.

Here Bahá'u'lláh is saying that although he possesses perfect knowledge of all divine mysteries, and although he can describe all of them through a single metaphor, he is forced to conceal these truths and practice wisdom (that is, the principle that words must be uttered with "due regard unto the exigencies of the occasion and the people" [Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets* 172]). He is in between silence and speech: the surging of his spiritual truth urges him to expression and

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9. See, for example, *Gleanings* 255, 273.

effulgence, while the hostile disposition of the people around him makes him reluctant to disclose those inner truths. In fact, this passage testifies not to Bahá'u'lláh's rejection of any divine claim but the exact opposite. Here he lays claim to the same absolute knowledge as he does in the preface to the Hidden Words. While he is making a claim to absolute divine knowledge, he is also affirming that he is intentionally concealing it out of prudence because the people are unready to bear it, and he offers hope that in the future, divine assistance will pave the way for a full declaration of his station.

### Alexander the Great

One additional element which should not be missed in this connection is Bahá'u'lláh's reference to Alexander. According to the Qur'anic story (Súrih 19), Alexander the Great (Dhu'l-Qarnayn) was the agent of divine deliverance from the hostile tribes of Gog and Magog. Immediately following the reference to Alexander, Bahá'u'lláh tells us that he has just made a secret allusion to an immensely important concealed truth: "Hidden allusions are concealed within these verses and holy letters are treasured up within these words. Blessed is the one who hath seized these pearls, recognized their value, and attained the presence of their Supreme Meaning." His secret allusion is to something wonderful but *concealed*. The allusion to Alexander as the agent of deliverance from Gog and Magog suggests the proximity of his own declaration, one which resolves the problem of concealment and makes possible the complete revelation of his spiritual truth.

As we have now seen, the passage that has been used to argue that Bahá'u'lláh at that time did not think of himself as a Manifestation of God is saying exactly the opposite. It affirms that Bahá'u'lláh possessed absolute divine knowledge yet also was forced to be silent and withhold unveiling his inner truth. Bahá'u'lláh's expression of sorrow for his state of concealment because of the immaturity of the people recalls the statement in his tablet of visitation for Imám Ḥusayn in which he speaks of the forced separation between "h" (*há'*) and "e" (*váv*) due to Imám Ḥusayn's sorrow (*Majmú'iy-i-Alváh* 205). On the basis of the writings of Shaykh-Aḥmad-i-Aḥsá'í and the Báb, it may be argued that "h" refers to the loving creative Word of God, and "e" to the essences and receptivities of the contingent beings. The incapacity of the latter to receive the former means the delay of spiritual creation and of the inception of a new divine Spring. The Book of the River confirms decisively the Bahá'í conception that the Baghdad period was one of concealed revelation, half-way between speech and silence.

It should be noted that Cole's translation of the tablet actually contains a number of other problems. For instance, Bahá'u'lláh quotes the Qur'anic verse "*Va man aṣḍaḍu mina'lláh hadíthan?*" ("And whose word is more true than God's?"), which Cole translates: "And whose [*sic*] believes a word from God."

In another place, Bahá'u'lláh's imperative construction in "Ponder and reflect [*Fikr va tadabbur nimúdiḥ*], that haply all the hidden mysteries may be freed from the veils of nearness and remoteness" is translated as a third-person past tense: "It [the pen] pondered and thought about the river"—and the rest of the sentence is given the wrong tense to make it consistent with that mistake, obscuring the fact that Bahá'u'lláh is here urging Javád to grasp the monumental truth just imparted to him in the parable of the river. Elsewhere, Bahá'u'lláh's statement: "Similarly, ponder upon the mysteries of divine decree [*qadā*] and destiny [*qadar*]. Whatever hath appeared or will appear is like this river," becomes translated as: "In the same way, consider the foreordained and predestined mysteries—what has appeared and shall appear," thus losing the point that Bahá'u'lláh is speaking about the specific question of the mystery of *qadar* or destiny mentioned in the Four Valleys and other writings. However, translation errors that do not play a major role in Cole's commentary on the tablet will not be pursued here.

### **Miracles as Evidence**

According to Cole's reading of the Book of the River, Bahá'u'lláh denies being a Prophet; instead, we are told, this tablet "gives us a humanist Baha'u'llah, who sternly denies being able to work any miracles, who defers humbly to the Mirrors of the Babi dispensation." To further support this conclusion Cole adds: "Indeed, the argument seems to be made that just as plagues no longer break out in Iraq every 30 years as they had in past centuries . . . after the Bab's death the age of miracles is over with. This is in turn an announcement of a profound secularization of sorts, isn't it?" ("Commentary").

However, there is absolutely nothing in Bahá'u'lláh's tablet indicating that he is unable to work miracles. Bahá'u'lláh begins by referring to specific rumors that had been circulating and says that they are not true: "Of the miracles mentioned, those which are ascribed to this humble one are fabrications contrived by impostors" (*Ánchih az zuhúrát-i-mu'jizát kih dhikr shud ánchih nisbat bih ín ḥaqír ast kidh bun iftaráhu'l-mukdhíbún*). It is obvious here that Bahá'u'lláh is in no way saying that he has not performed any miracle, nor is he saying that he is unable to work miracles. He is simply rejecting the rumor that he has performed the specific miracles Javád has asked about. But purely hypothetically, even if Bahá'u'lláh had denied performing any miracles, it does not follow that he was denying he was able to perform miracles. The equation of the two is invalid.

But we are offered a stronger, although also invalid, inference. Cole argues that in the example of thirty-year cycles of plague, Bahá'u'lláh is rejecting the possibility that miracles will occur at all after the Báb. But that inference is unwarranted on three counts. First, the issue being discussed is not whether in the future miracles will or will not happen, but whether the accounts of miracles

attributed to former Prophets were true or not. Bahá'u'lláh is saying that if those same miracles are not happening right now, that does not mean that they did not happen in the past. As we saw before, Bahá'u'lláh's passage is a rejection of the rationalist denial of miracles in the past. Second, in the example of thirty-year cycles of plague, Bahá'u'lláh is not saying that plague will never break out again. He explicitly talks about the "delay" in its occurrence. In other words, there will be outbreaks of plague again, but not necessarily in intervals of thirty years. Concerning miracles, therefore, Bahá'u'lláh seems to be saying that previously miracles have indeed happened even if they are not being repeated in the present day, and that in the future miracles can still happen, just as plague can still break out!

But in Cole's translation of this section, all reference to the *delay* of the plague has been omitted:

Now, some argue that if the miracles attributed to past prophets are true, then they must appear now, as well. But this argument is unworthy of the consideration of illumined minds and pure hearts. It is quite frequently the case that affairs occurred in the past that no longer occur today, and vice versa. . . . For instance, every thirty years as you count and reckon, in some countries a plague epidemic used to break out. Can this interval be disputed? And can it be denied that no such thing has recently occurred? Otherwise, many other things should also occur nowadays that used to take place but do not, and vice versa. ("Book of the Tigris")

Third, Bahá'u'lláh is not even talking about the non-occurrence of miracles altogether in the present. At the beginning of the tablet, he has confirmed the truth of the—presumably recent—miracles attributed to the Bábí Mirrors. However, even if he had spoken of a complete absence of miracles in the present, that in no way implies there could be no miracles in the future. Again the inference is invalid. Bahá'u'lláh is arguing that history is dynamic and that we cannot deduce either the past or the future from the conditions of the present. Therefore, Bahá'u'lláh is not talking about the inability to perform miracles, the impossibility of present miracles, or the impossibility of future miracles. The interpretation of the tablet as evidence that Bahá'u'lláh advocates a humanist or secularist doctrine on the grounds that the tablet rejects the possibility of future miracles is not supported by the text itself. Furthermore, one has to remember Bahá'u'lláh's acceptance of Mullá Ḥasan-i-'Amú's challenge, in the later Baghdad period, to perform a miracle provided that those who asked for it accepted his claim afterward.<sup>10</sup> In fact, in Bahá'u'lláh's later writings, his message with regard to miracles is exactly the same as his message in the Book of the River. On the one hand he attests to his ability to perform

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10. Recounted in *Gleanings* 131–32.

miracles (and refers to the fact that his companions have witnessed extraordinary events in his presence),<sup>11</sup> while at the same time he does not wish his followers to engage in attributing various miracles to him because his station is higher than that of mere miracle worker. In any case, miracles are not the standard of divine truth, and he does not wish to open a door to rumors and misrepresentations.

Of course the word *secularization* is somewhat ambiguous and it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss it. But Bahá'u'lláh's dismissal of miracles as evidence is not due to exclusion of the spiritual from the material realm. On the contrary, Bahá'u'lláh intends to create a form of consciousness and civilization in which all aspects of life are mirrors of divine attributes. Bahá'u'lláh's tablets and statements revealed in Baghdad, such as Panj Kanz (Five Treasures),<sup>12</sup> clearly show that he intends to spiritualize—not secularize—the life of the people of the world. He dismisses the relevance of miracles precisely because his intention is to educate humanity so that its life will reflect a systematic integration of spiritual principles, and to direct its gaze toward the revealed words of God. This fact is even evident in the Book of the River, where Bahá'u'lláh rejects the rationalist arguments by emphasizing the spiritual and miraculous nature of all reality. The fact is that Bahá'u'lláh's vision cannot be adequately described in terms of the current labels of secularization and non-secularization, but that is a different topic. In Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, one of his last tablets, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Mine aim hath ever been, and still is, to suppress whatever is the cause of contention amidst the peoples of the earth, and of separation amongst the nations, so that all men may be sanctified from every earthly attachment, and be set free to occupy themselves with their own interests. We entreat Our loved ones not to besmirch the hem of Our raiment with the dust of falsehood, neither to allow references to what they have regarded as miracles and prodigies to debase Our rank and station, or to mar the purity and sanctity of Our name.

Gracious God! This is the day whereon the wise should seek the advice of this Wronged One, and ask Him Who is the Truth what things are conducive to the glory and tranquility of men. And yet, all are earnestly striving to put out this glorious and shining light, and are diligently seeking either to establish Our guilt, or to voice their protest against Us. Matters have come to such a pass, that the conduct of this Wronged One hath, in every way, been grossly misrepresented, and in a manner which it would be unseemly to mention. (*Epistle 33*)

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11. See Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Badí'* 218, 273; *Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 1:272–73.

12. Panj Kanz is not strictly a tablet but consists of statements of Bahá'u'lláh recorded by Nabíl-i-A'zam. The Persian text is found in *'Andalib* 10.40 (Fall 1991): 10–13. Excerpts in English are quoted in Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* 4:140–43.

As we can see in this passage, Bahá'u'lláh asks his followers not to attribute rumors of miracles to him, in exactly the same way that he rejects the rumors of miracles in the Book of the River. Indisputably, in the 'Akká period Bahá'u'lláh did consider himself both a Manifestation of God and capable of performing miracles.

But in fact, in the Book of the River Bahá'u'lláh discusses miracles precisely in order to establish that he is a Manifestation of God. If Bahá'u'lláh had written nothing other than this tablet, it would have been sufficient evidence that he claimed to be a Manifestation of God and the Promised One of the Báb. But to see that point, one must note that here Bahá'u'lláh is dealing in subtle ways with one of the ordinances of the Persian Bayán.

### **A Mysterious Paradox**

If one reads the tablet carefully, a mysterious paradox becomes evident. On the one hand Bahá'u'lláh denies the specific miracles rumored of him, yet he engages in a lengthy analysis concerning the present time, the evidence and justification of his own authority, and the irrelevance of miracles to justify his truth.

Now why does Bahá'u'lláh differentiate himself from the Báb and the Mirrors of the Báb at the beginning—affirming the miracles attributed to them while denying those ascribed to himself? And why does he continue to justify his legitimacy without dependence on any miracle? If he is an independent Manifestation of God, he must offer evidence and proof. But he is not an ordinary Bábí leader like any of the Mirrors. Even the Mirrors could perform miracles, but none of them could reveal verses. In the Persian Bayán the Báb has explicitly and frequently stated that no one else except the Báb and Him Whom God shall make manifest can reveal verses. Because verses are the only legitimate evidence, no Bábí is allowed to report and attribute miracles to the Manifestation (Persian Bayán, váhid 6, ch. 8). Bahá'u'lláh distances himself from the “miracle talk” because he is affirming in a subtle way that his own station is far beyond that of any miracle worker. His refusal to report miracles for himself while admitting them for the Báb and the Bábí Mirrors indirectly indicates that he is initiating a new revelation and affirming his own authority and station as the Manifestation of God. Since the Promised One has appeared in his own person, it is the rumors of miracles attributed to himself that Bahá'u'lláh rejects. Here, the appearance of humility is the secret of Bahá'u'lláh's sovereignty.

If we look at the other writings of Bahá'u'lláh, this issue becomes much clearer. In the *Kitáb-i-Badí'*, revealed in Adrianople, Bahá'u'lláh responds to the objections and accusations of the Bábís against his claim to be the Promised One of the Bayán. Repeatedly he emphasizes that his enemies among the Bábís have always tried to insist on miracles, and not the revelation of verses, as the proof of the Promised One. In fact they had to argue for the insufficiency of

revealing verses as proof because otherwise they would have had to accept Bahá'u'lláh's claim. Bahá'u'lláh, however, demonstrates that the Báb has made it clear in all his writings that the only evidence of the Báb's station is his ability to reveal the verses of God, and that the same would constitute the sole evidence of the Promised One (*Kitáb-i-Badí'* 347–50). We can now understand the reason why Bahá'u'lláh in the Book of the River refuses to accept the relevance or necessity of miracles, rejects the rumors of miracles about himself, and emphasizes instead the revelation of verses as the true divine standard.

And yet, in the Book of the River, even while Bahá'u'lláh rejects the relevance of miracles for his authority, he implicitly identifies himself as the source of all miracles. He writes: "If anything else appeared from the mine of bounty and glory [Bahá], that was but a token of God's grace." Here again, the apparent "humility" at the beginning of the tablet is nothing less than the mysterious evidence of his exalted station. It is in a beautiful way the fulfillment of the Imám's statement that "Servitude is a substance the essence of which is Divinity."

Bahá'u'lláh's discussion of miracles has a parallel in the Báb's insistence that he should not be judged in terms of the literary rules and conventions of scholars and grammarians because his own station is far superior to the makers of those rules and traditions. Bahá'u'lláh himself is surprisingly generous in accepting as true all the miracles attributed to any famous Bábí, even while he differentiates himself from all of them. He is so generous because he is really saying that miracle making is no extraordinary feat! His gracious affirmation of the miracles attributed to various Bábí Mirrors is most interesting. It suggests that Bahá'u'lláh did not wish to provide a pretext for disunity and conflict within the Bábí community by denying the miracles attributed to prominent Bábís, even while at the same time he affirms his superior authority over all of them.

In addition to indicating that many can perform miracles but the revelation of divine verses is the unique ability of the Manifestations, he refers to Qur'anic passages to the effect that all created beings are truly the miracles of God. Since a great number of Qur'anic statements affirm the miraculous nature of all things, Bahá'u'lláh very likely does not intend reference to any one specific verse but indicates the general meaning of those numerous verses on this theme. Of all miracles, the greatest and most amazing is the creative act of God, Whose Word brings all reality into being—and this ability belongs only to the Primal Will. Here, Bahá'u'lláh implicitly equates himself with God's creative act. His evidence and justification is the same as God's supreme miracle: the creation of the world and the revelation of a new spiritual reality.

To see more clearly this mysterious paradox of Bahá'u'lláh's tablet, let us consider these five related points.

1. In his justification of his own station, Bahá'u'lláh asserts that the same thing that the Bábís accept as true with regard to the Báb's Bayán applies to

Bahá'u'lláh as well. Javád has asked why God does not reveal His might so that the Cause of God would be rendered victorious and the believers would be uplifted and exalted. Bahá'u'lláh answers that “this is indeed true in the same way as thou dost affirm it with regard to the Bayán” (*Bimithl-i-má antum fi'l-Bayán tañiqún*). That is, just as the Báb's revelation disclosed an absolute divine majesty and yet only the spiritually mature recognized it, in the same way Bahá'u'lláh's revelation at the present time is magnificent and most powerful in itself, but this does not mean that all can recognize and believe in him.

However, Cole has translated Bahá'u'lláh's reference to the Bayán literally, resulting in a meaningless redundancy. He renders the passage: “Indeed this is a truth, the like of which you speak forth in utterance” (“Book of the Tigris”). But the Bayán Bahá'u'lláh mentions here is not just any utterance; it is the Book and Revelation of the Báb. By missing Bahá'u'lláh's reference to the Bayán and the Báb's evidence—a reference establishing a clear parallel with Bahá'u'lláh's evidence<sup>13</sup>—the translation has made it more difficult for the reader to see Bahá'u'lláh's majestic language and his claim in this tablet.

The context of the phrase makes its meaning clear. Bahá'u'lláh first refers to Javád's argument that divine power requires a demonstration of its dominion over all people, and then he confirms that statement by saying that this is correct in the same way that you affirm it with regard to the Bayán. But if Cole's translation were accurate, then Bahá'u'lláh's confirmation of the statement would make no sense—because he has just explained that miracles are not necessary proof of divine dominion. Javád's statement is not accurate in the way that Javád asserts it; it is only accurate when the Báb's divine dominion and majesty is seen as being expressed in the Bayán itself.

In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* Bahá'u'lláh addresses a similar question as posed by the maternal uncle of the Báb concerning the nature of divine sovereignty. Bahá'u'lláh explains that “by sovereignty is meant the all-encompassing, all-pervading power which is inherently exercised by the Qá'im whether or not He appear to the world clothed in the majesty of earthly dominion,” his “spiritual ascendancy which He exerciseth to the fullest degree over all that is in heaven and on earth, and which in due time revealeth itself to the world in direct proportion to its capacity and spiritual receptiveness” (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 107–8). That sovereignty and power is present in the divine words themselves: “Hast thou not heard how with one single verse He hath sundered light from darkness, the righteous from the ungodly, and the believing from the infidel? . . . So mercilessly trenchant was this wondrous sword of God that it cleft asunder

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13. Bahá'u'lláh uses the same form of expression frequently in discussing the book of the Bayán. See for example, *Gleanings* 149.

every relationship! On the other hand, consider the welding power of His word,” which “fused and blended” former enemies “through their allegiance to this wondrous and transcendent Revelation” (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 111–12).

2. Bahá’u’lláh’s river metaphor is a reference to his own divine revelation and his own verses. His claim to be the Promised One of the Bayán is clearly visible in the paragraph in which he speaks of the unprecedented and unusual surging of the divine river at the present time. The flooding of the river, as Bahá’u’lláh explicitly says in the tablet itself, is a symbol for the appearance of a new Revelation. At this very moment, he says, the divine river is “rushing forth from the North of divine unity” (*shumál-i-aḥadíyyat*), and is stirred by “the Eastern Winds” (*aryáh-i-sharqíyyih*)—terms which have multiple symbolic meanings related to the revelation of the Primal Will.

Another subtle expression of Bahá’u’lláh’s station is his mention of the hidden allusions concealed in his words and his praise of those who have understood them: “Blessed is the one who hath seized these pearls, recognized their value, and attained the presence of their Supreme Meaning.” Here, the meaning of the word becomes the same as the being of Bahá’u’lláh himself.

3. Bahá’u’lláh’s concluding statement in the tablet is a subtle reference to his own station as the Promised One of the Báb: “Glory be upon those who believe in Him on the day of His meeting and who observe what He hath decreed.” The word “glory” (Bahá) is used here in a significant way in reference to the expectation of the Promised One. A full explication of this question is impossible here, but in sum: in the Bayán, the Báb made it clear that “Bahá” is the title of the Promised One. We also know that Bahá’u’lláh signed many of his Baghdad tablets as “Bahá” and he began his Hidden Words with “*Huva’l Bahíyyu’l-Abhá*” (He is the Glory of Glories). That in itself is a subtle and concealed declaration.

4. After disclosing wondrous spiritual truths through the use of the river metaphor, Bahá’u’lláh tells Javád to “ponder and reflect” so that the “hidden mysteries” may become disclosed to him; to “[r]ecognize this Sea of Seas” compared to which all others are like a drop; and to observe “how it surgeth within the Wellspring of its own blessed Essence and the mine of its own attributes.” Then he directs Javád to thank God for teaching him knowledge “through the tongue of the Manifestation of Thyself and the Wellspring of Thine Essence, He Who is the Fountainhead of Thy Cause and the Repository of Thy Decree.” Given the fact that it was through Bahá’u’lláh that the analogy of the river became the vehicle for all knowledge, it becomes clear that by the “Sea of Seas” Bahá’u’lláh is referring to himself and is identifying his tablet as the revelation of the Manifestation of God. The reference to the “Sea of Seas” surging “within The Wellspring of its Own blessed Essence” is again probably a reference to his concealed station.

Likewise, a most beautiful and powerful declaration of his true station is

visible in the subtle equation of the river of revelation with the movement of his Pen. After discussing the river as the symbol of divine revelation, Bahá'u'lláh describes his unveiling of the river analogy as the onrush of the Pen. In other words, the movement of his Pen is the same as the river that dispenses the water of divine revelation.

5. Another implicit reference to Bahá'u'lláh's majestic station can be found in his quotation, in the tablet, of the first Arabic Hidden Word: "Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting." He states that this passage is taken from the essence of the holy Books (that is, the Hidden Words). He also expounds the special significance of this particular command, calling it "a treasure that pertaineth to Heaven," "a light that shall never be extinguished, a treasure that perisheth not, a raiment that shall never be outworn, and a revelation that will never be concealed." Moreover, he refers to it as the "All-Encompassing Word" (*kalimiy-i-jámi'ih*)—a clear reference to the revealed Word of God embracing all spiritual truth. He tells Javád to "preserve" this counsel "if thou desirest to find a path to the Lord of the Mighty Throne."

A more subtle declaration of Bahá'u'lláh's station is evident in the fact that he is here using "All-Encompassing Word" to describe not only his revealed Word in the Hidden Words, but also his own being as the Manifestation of God. In the writings of both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, the title "All-Encompassing Word" is applied to both the Manifestation and his Revelation.

The significance of mentioning this particular statement from the Hidden Words becomes apparent through a careful comparison with the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* and the *Kitáb-i-Badí'*. In these texts Bahá'u'lláh outlines the preconditions of the spiritual search to recognize the Manifestation of God for the age. He calls upon the seeker to renounce all preconceived ideas and conditions, and to recognize the Manifestation through the Manifestation himself. In other words, one should not take human understandings of the previous words of God, or the conceptions of the scholars, as the standard by which to judge the authenticity of divine revelation. In the *Book of the River*, after rejecting people's notions of miracles as a standard for recognizing divine revelation, Bahá'u'lláh quotes this Hidden Word, which emphasizes the principle of sincerity of heart, as a concise epistemological principle which is the true "path" leading to recognition of the Manifestation of God.

### **Bahá'u'lláh as the Living Countenance**

Bahá'u'lláh's reference in the *Book of the River* to the "Living Countenance" (*Tal'at-i-Hayy*) is a reference to none other than himself. The title has a complex meaning and is an implicit claim to be the Promised One of the Bayán. However, the assumption that one should consult the Bábí literature to find out what Bahá'u'lláh means by the "Living Countenance" is a methodological

mistake. It is only in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh himself that we can find the explanation of what he means by "Living Countenance." In this passage he writes:

Today, every soul who believeth in the Most Exalted Countenance, and recognizeth with certitude His station as manifested after Him on the Throne, this shall sufficeth him above any other knowledge or deed. But His good pleasure and faith in Him cannot be realized except through obedience unto His command in all things. This is the greatest, most excellent, and consummate fruit of existence. There is no goal besides God and no end save Him. . . .

[W]ith a swordlike tongue sing and chant in ringing tones, clap and drum, that there is no God but Him, that 'Alí Muḥammad is the Essence of God and His eternal Being, and Muḥammad 'Alí is the Mine of the Cause of God and His everlasting Self, that the Living Countenance is the Repository of God's authority and His self-subsisting Identity, and the Letters of the Living are the first to have believed in God and His verses. We all, verily, cleave unto them.

If we examine the passage, we can see that the Báb is called "the Most Exalted Countenance," followed by an immediate reference to "His station as manifested after Him on the Throne" which indicates the return of the Báb after his martyrdom in the form of a new "Throne." In addition, Bahá'u'lláh speaks here of the Living Countenance as a person different from the Báb and from Quddús. The meaning of the title "Living Countenance" becomes obvious from the Báb's and Bahá'u'lláh's writings: the Living Countenance refers to the return of the Báb (who is the Most Exalted Countenance), but *after* his own martyrdom, and in a *living* form. This is clearly a reference to the famous statement of the Báb: "Verily, I am He that liveth in the Abhá Realm of Glory!" (*Innany ana ḥayyun fi'l-ufuqi'l-Abhá*), a statement quoted frequently by Bahá'u'lláh. In other words, the Living Báb, or the Living Countenance, is "Abhá" (Bahá).

A clear parallel with the statement in the Book of the River can be seen in one of Bahá'u'lláh's tablets in which he interprets the Qur'anic statement "We strengthened the two by the third." In that tablet Bahá'u'lláh first states: "Thus doth the Tongue of God proclaim to all beings that verily I am He that liveth in this Horizon which hath in truth been manifested, Who among the Concourse on high hath been named the Most Exalted 'Alí [the Báb], and Who in the cities of Names beareth the glorious name of Abhá [Bahá'u'lláh]." Here we can see that Bahá'u'lláh is affirming the identity of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, and defining the latter as the living manifestation of the former. After that, Bahá'u'lláh interprets the Qur'anic statement by saying: "Verily, the first Whom We sent down in truth was 'Alí. We, verily, made Him shine forth from the horizon of Fárs [*Shiráz*] . . . and the other whom We sent down was also 'Alí and We called him among the Concourse on high by our name Quddús . . . and We strengthened both of them by this Beauty Who hath appeared, shining

above the the horizon of Command with manifest dominion” (Isḥráq Khávarí, *Rahíq-i-Makhtúm* 2:104–6; provisional translation).

But the more interesting point is that Bahá'u'lláh himself in the Tablet of All Food (Lawḥ-i-Kullu't-Ṭa'ám), revealed in the first year of Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in Baghdad, before the Book of the River, explicitly identifies the Living Countenance as both Quddús and Him Whom God shall make manifest! Given the high station of Quddús, and his being the last of the primary “Unity” (Váhid) of the Bábí dispensation,<sup>14</sup> he is also the representative of the Báb in the Báb's lifetime. However, after the martyrdom of the Báb, the Living Countenance can be only the next Manifestation, who will be “living in the horizon of Abhá.” In the Tablet of All Food, Bahá'u'lláh interprets the enigmatic verse in the Qur'án: “All food was allowed to the children of Israel. . . .” (3:93). After interpreting it in several different ways, he tells the addressee that were he to wish to interpret this verse from today until the day of Mustagháth, the Day in which people arise for the new Living Countenance, he would assuredly be able to do so by virtue of that which God has conferred upon him by His bounty and grace. Bahá'u'lláh explains this by saying that the Mystery of Unity has moved and the Ocean of eternity billowed and the Countenance of Light shone forth in the Heavens of 'Amá' from the right side of the Tree of Revelation in these matchless days of the Revelation of the Sun, and yet, people do not recognize its majesty. A few paragraphs later, Bahá'u'lláh speaks of the cruelty surrounding him and says that if Quddús, who was the Last Point and the Living Countenance, were alive, he would be saddened and would weep at seeing Bahá'u'lláh's sufferings (Isḥráq Khávarí, *Rahíq-i-Makhtúm* 2: 416–26).

In the Book of the River, Bahá'u'lláh is already affirming the advent of the Báb, Quddús, and the Living Countenance. Given Bahá'u'lláh's concept of the Living Countenance, this can only mean that Bahá'u'lláh, emerging from the Abhá horizon, is the Promised One of the Bayán. Interestingly, the Báb makes the statement regarding his living in the horizon of Abhá in a tablet addressed to Yaḥyá Azal. To understand the complexity and beauty of this statement it should be remembered that Yaḥyá was one of the Mirrors. According to both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, a mirror has no significance by itself. It becomes the recipient of light only when it turns toward the sun; at that moment, all the most excellent names and attributes of God are reflected by and thus pertain to the mirror. However, the moment that the mirror turns away from the sun, it becomes darkened and deprived of all those names. The Báb is telling Yaḥyá that his titles are valid as long as Yaḥyá turns toward the Báb, and that

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14. In this context “Unity” (Váhid) refers to The Primal Point and his eighteen Letters of the Living—Quddús was the last of the Letters of the Living.

afterward the Báb will continue to be manifest in the Realm of Abhá Glory. Therefore, as long as Yaḥyá is obedient to Bahá, he will retain all his titles; otherwise he will turn into nothing. Bahá'u'lláh's reference to the Living Countenance in conjunction with the Báb is therefore a subtle but clear reference to Bahá'u'lláh as the return of the Primal Point, the Sun of Truth. Furthermore, not only is the title "Living Countenance" not a reference to Yaḥyá Azal but, on the contrary, it is an affirmation that Yaḥya's station is subordinate to Bahá'u'lláh.

In many of his writings, Bahá'u'lláh uses this same statement of the Báb to prove that he is the return of the Báb in the form of Bahá. For instance in the *Kitáb-i-Badí'* He writes: "If the people of the Bayán had the necessary insight, the blessed verse of the Báb, 'Verily, I am He that liveth in the Abhá Realm of Glory!' would have been sufficient unto them and unto all that dwell in heaven and on earth" (227; provisional translation). He emphasizes the same idea in other parts of that text as well (219–20, 348).

The Book of the River is not an ordinary text. As Bahá'u'lláh himself testifies, divine mysteries and secrets are hidden in this short tablet, which is characterized by the dialectical tension between expression and silence. The result is a magnificent work of symbols and metaphors which affirm the exalted station of Bahá'u'lláh in a beautiful, majestic, and yet concealed way.

### **Bahá'u'lláh's Reference to His 1852 Revelation**

Throughout his writings, Bahá'u'lláh frequently and explicitly affirms that he received a revelation in the year nine in the *Síyáh-Chál*, and that he declared his station as the Promised One of the Bayán to certain individuals during the early Baghdad period. Of course, Bahá'u'lláh's statement in the Tablet to the Shah of Iran is a well-known and clear testimony concerning the beginning of his Revelation in the *Síyáh-Chál*:

"O King! I was but a man like others, asleep upon My couch, when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been. This thing is not from Me, but from One Who is Almighty and All-Knowing. And He bade me lift up My voice between earth and heaven, and for this there befell Me what hath caused the tears of every man of understanding to flow." (*Epistle 11*)

Although this is sufficient evidence in itself, Cole insists that here Bahá'u'lláh is simply reporting a spiritual experience calling him to reform the Bábí community. It is curious that this most explicit statement should be termed ambiguous. In it Bahá'u'lláh speaks of the "breezes of the All-Glorious"—a clear mystic symbol of revelation—and he describes the experience as the instantaneous knowledge of all that hath been! Similarly, the statement in the *Súratu'l-Haykal* dealing with the same experience completely settles the

issue.<sup>15</sup> However, Cole, in discussing his own interpretation of the Book of the River, suggests that the tablet

raises the most acute questions about the nature of the “intimation” Baha’u’llah is said to have experienced in the Siyah Chal. If one reads the account in Epistle to the Son of the Wolf carefully, 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. (“Commentary”)

But in fact, Bahá’u’lláh has explicitly used the term *wahy* (*vahy*) and not *ilham* with regard to his Sýáh-Chál experience. In another tablet, Bahá’u’lláh gives the same account of the experience in different words and adds that this is already mentioned in the Tablet to the Shah—obviously he means the same account of what happened in the Sýáh-Chál. However, here he uses the word *vahy*. Bahá’u’lláh says:

By God! Verily I was asleep, when lo! the breezes of Revelation [*vahy*] bestirred Me. I was silent, and thy Lord, the Almighty, the All-Powerful, caused Me to speak forth. Were it not for His behest I would not have revealed Myself. Verily, His Will prevailed over My will and raised Me up to establish a Cause which hath made Me the target of the darts of the infidels. Read what We have revealed to the kings that thou mayest be assured that this Servant speaketh as bidden by the All-Knowing, the All-Informed. (*Majmú'iy-i-Alváh* 234; provisional translation)

It should also be noted in this connection that Bahá’u’lláh uses the same concept and same wording in the Kitáb-i-Badí‘, which was written at the end of the Adrianople period—the same period as the revelation of the Tablet to the Shah—to discuss his station explicitly as the Manifestation of God and the Promised One of the Bayán. These repeated statements of Bahá’u’lláh clearly show that the statement in the Tablet to the Shah unequivocally refers to the inception of Bahá’u’lláh’s new Revelation. For instance, asserting that he is the Promised One of the Bayán, Bahá’u’lláh writes the following:

O people! I am ‘Alí Himself [the Báb] and the Beauty of Muḥammad amongst you and the essence of Spirit [Jesus] between the heavens and the earth. O people, fear ye God! Verily, I am a servant Who truly believeth in God and in His verses. I was asleep upon My couch, when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and awakened Me to the Truth, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been and all that is to be, and revealed Me by the ornament of His own Self, and caused Me to speak His praise, should ye understand. O people! even if ye fail to believe in Me, at least do not protest against Me. . . . O people, fear ye God. I was

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15. See Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 101–2.

but a man like you, and wished to remain silent, but the Spirit stirred Me and moved Me to the Truth, and bade Me reveal the verses of God and His proofs, and this thing is not from Me, but from the All-Knowing, All-Mighty, and Beloved God. (*Kitáb-i-Badí'* 87–88; provisional translation)

Even a cursory look at this passage resolves any doubt concerning the meaning of the similar statement about Bahá'u'lláh's Sýáh-Chál experience found in the Tablet to the Shah of Iran. Bahá'u'lláh's statements resolving in the Sýáh-Chál to "reform" the Bábí community are themselves evidence of the abrogation of the Bayán and the initiation of a new dispensation.

Discussing his Sýáh-Chál experience, Bahá'u'lláh writes: "One night, in a dream, these exalted words were heard on every side: 'Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy pen'" (*Epistle* 21). This statement is a categorical demonstration and declaration of the prophetic station of Bahá'u'lláh. A detailed discussion of its implications is beyond the scope of this paper. However, two fundamental points should be mentioned. First "by Thyself and by Thy pen" means by his *being* and by his *verses*. Anyone familiar with the Persian Bayán and the Kitáb-i-Íqán knows that these are both the conclusive proof for the claim of the Manifestation of God. That reference is sufficient to categorize the nature of the Sýáh-Chál experience. Second, the same statement can also be seen as an implicit assertion of the annulment or removal of the "sword"—one of the principles announced by Bahá'u'lláh on the first day of his Riḍván declaration, signaling the beginning of a new era and the effective abrogation of specific laws of the Qur'án and Bayán (Mázandarání, *Asráru'l-Áthár* 4:22).

In addition to these tablets, Bahá'u'lláh has made numerous other statements affirming that he revealed himself as the Promised One of the Bayán in the year nine and revealed his station to a few individuals in the early Baghdad years. The following are a few examples. In *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, Bahá'u'lláh refers to the prophecies of the Báb concerning the advent of the Promised One in the year nine and affirms that he appeared in the year nine:

He (the Báb) saith—glorified be His utterance—addressing his honor, 'Azím: "This, verily, is the thing We promised thee, ere the moment We answered thy call. Wait thou until nine will have elapsed from the time of the Bayán. Then exclaim: 'Blessed, therefore, be God, the most excellent of Makers!' Say: This, verily, is an Announcement which none except God hath comprehended. Ye, however, will be unaware on that day." In the year nine this Most Great Revelation arose and shone forth brightly above the horizon of the Will of God. None can deny it save he who is heedless and doubteth. (*Epistle* 142)

In his tablet to Kamálu'd-Dín Naráqí (the recipient of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of All Food), Bahá'u'lláh testifies that the Báb's prophecy concerning the

appearance of the Promised One in the year nine and the experience of “all good” in that same year has been fulfilled. He writes:

O Kamál! Thou hast attained two great bounties. First, thou wert blessed by the encounter with God in the year nine, and this is what the Primal Point had promised all in His statement, “In the year nine ye shall attain unto the presence of God.” Likewise, thou wert honored to receive the Divine Word in the Qur’anic verse concerning All Food, and that is the “good” which the Primal Point has promised in His assertion, “In the year nine ye shall attain unto all good.” (*Ishráq Khávarí, Muḥádirát* 1:192; provisional translation)

In his tablet concerning the Báb’s Tablet of Nineteen Temples, Bahá’u’lláh writes:

Verily, by “nineteen” He [the Báb] intended naught but this preeminent and most exalted Revelation. But the promise made unto you in the Book concerning “nine,” through His assertion “in the year nine ye shall attain unto all good” was fulfilled in that year when the dawning of God’s Manifestation was divulged according to a preordained measure. By “nineteen” He meant those appointed years of delay as set forth in the Bayán. At the end of that period the promise was fulfilled; the Promised One appeared unto all creation in His all-embracing sovereignty. (*Ishráq Khávarí, Muḥádirát* 1:397; provisional translation)

Note in that passage Bahá’u’lláh’s discussion of his concealed revelation in the year nine, and the stage of nineteen years’ preparation, followed by the complete unveiling of his station.

In the *Kitáb-i-Badí’* Bahá’u’lláh discusses the argument of Azal’s followers, according to which the Promised One of the Bayán would not appear before the completion and perfection of the dispensation of the Bayán. Bahá’u’lláh affirms that, according to the Báb’s prophecies, that completion would take place in nine years, and this was exactly fulfilled in the year nine by his own revelation. He writes:

Thou hast made mention of the termination of the [Báb’s] Dispensation. Harken unto the utterance of the Revealer of the Bayán, may the realities of all things be a sacrifice unto Him, who stateth explicitly, “Ere nine will have elapsed from the inception of this Cause, the realities of the created things will not be made manifest. All that thou hast as yet seen is but the stage from the moist germ until We clothed it with flesh. Be patient until thou beholdest a new creation. Say: Blessed, therefore, be God, the Most Excellent of Makers! I testify that the difference between the ‘Qá’im’ and the ‘Qayyúm’ is the number nine, which marketh the period when sanctified souls were consummated and established in their own stations. That is also the difference between ‘A’ẓam’ and ‘‘Azím.’” And in another passage He saith, “Observe the difference between ‘Qá’im’ and ‘Qayyúm,’ then in the year nine ye shall attain unto all good.” Concerning this He further saith: “This, verily, is the thing We promised

thee, ere the moment We answered thy call. Wait thou until nine will have elapsed from the time of the Bayán. Then exclaim: ‘Blessed, therefore, be God, the most excellent of Makers!’” O thou who claimest to have seeing eyes and to be an upholder of justice and fairness! Open thou thine eyes to behold how a new creation hath come into being since the year nine and say: “Blessed, therefore, be God, the Most Excellent of Creators.” And again, “Hallowed be the Lord, the Most Excellent and the Most Wondrous of Creators.” Observe how He hath referred to both the maturation of the people of the Bayán and the superiority of the next Revelation through His explicit and unambiguous reference to the difference between “Qá’im” and “Qayyúm” and “A’zam” and “‘Azím.” And when the period was consummated and the appointed time ordained by God completed, the Beauty of Nine was revealed with manifest dominion. (*Kitáb-i-Badí’* 114–15; provisional translation)

It should be mentioned that the numerical difference between “A’zam,” meaning “the most great,” and “‘Azím,” meaning “the great,” is nine—the same as the difference between “Qá’im” and “Qayyúm.” Bahá’u’lláh states that the Beauty of Nine (namely “Bahá,” which is equal to nine) appeared in the year nine as the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Bayán. That same point is made in many other tablets, such as the following:

Ponder upon this exalted word revealed by the Dayspring of the utterance of the Lord of Names, the Primal Point, which is truly of the essence of the Bayán. He saith: “In the year nine ye shall attain unto all good and in the year nine ye shall attain unto the presence of God.” And addressing his honor ‘Azím, rest upon him the glory and the loftiness of God, He—may He be glorified—saith: “This, verily, is the thing We promised thee, ere the moment We answered thy call. Wait thou until nine will have elapsed from the time of the Bayán. Then exclaim: ‘Blessed, therefore, be God, the most excellent of Makers!’” Now be fair: who is the One Who appeared in the year nine? (*Isḥráq Khávarí, Qámús-i-Tawqí’* 2:487; provisional translation)

One of those to whom Bahá’u’lláh disclosed his station was Dayyán (Mírzá Asadu’lláh Khu’í). In some of his writings, Bahá’u’lláh mentions that the Báb had written of Dayyán as the third to recognize Him Whom God shall make manifest, and Bahá’u’lláh testifies that this did in fact happen in the early Baghdad period:

The Primal Point has written to him, “O thou the third Letter to believe in Him Whom God shall make manifest,” and this is the station that supersedeth all stations, and then He mentioned something in this regard which implied that Dayyán would become blessed by the encounter with God in the next Revelation, and that the Eternal Temple would declare Himself to him, as in reality he attained the presence and the Tongue of God spoke to him . . . and the Most Glorious Beauty showered him with kindness and he attained the station ordained in the tablet. (*Kitáb-i-Badí’* 102–14; provisional translation)

Note that if Dayyán was the third to recognize Bahá'u'lláh's station in Baghdad, two others should have preceded him. Of Dayyán's recognition and his martyrdom, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

We mention at this moment the Third Letter who believed in Me, who was condemned by the source of cruelty without any justification or authority. He journeyed to Baghdad till he reached and waited at the door and after permission entered and attained the presence of This Countenance and listened and said, "Praise be to Thee, the Lord of the invisible and the visible, and glory upon Thee, the Lord of Lords. I bear witness that Thou wert hidden from all eternity and that today Thou hast revealed Thyself. Blessed is the one who believeth in Thee and quaffeth the wine from Thy hand of Generosity." (*Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 2:34; provisional translation)

In at least two tablets, Bahá'u'lláh demonstrates the fulfillment of Qur'anic prophecies in his Revelation by referring to the verse relating to "After Hín" (*Ba'da Hín*). He explains that "Hín" is numerically 68 and after 68 is 69—namely, nine years after the Báb's declaration. The same Qur'anic passage had been mentioned by Shaykh-Aḥmad-i-Aḥsá'í, Siyyid Kázim-i-Raṣhtí, and the Báb in regard to the Promised One. Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Ponder upon the reference to the verse "Ye shall know of His Announcement after Hín." This blessed verse has been mentioned by his honor the late Siyyid, upon him rest the glory of God, and likewise earlier by the Shaykh, upon him rest the most glorious of all glories, and again by the Primal Point, may the souls of all that dwell within the kingdom be a sacrifice unto Him! All of them related the verse to this Most Great Revelation, for it was after the completion of the year sixty-eight and the appearance of the nine that this Most Great, Most Wondrous, and Most Exalted Cause was revealed from the horizon of the Will of the Lord of People. That is why the Primal Point, may the life of all be a sacrifice unto Him, saith: "In the year nine ye shall attain unto all good" and elsewhere: "In the year nine ye shall attain unto the presence of God." (*Ishráq Khávarí, Rahíq-i-Makhtúm* 1:567; provisional translation)

Finally, in a long tablet revealed in 1863–64, Bahá'u'lláh describes in detail his revelation in the name of the Báb in 1844 (twenty years before the tablet), and the Báb's prophecy of his return in the form of the Promised One in the year nine, as well as his concealment during the Baghdad period until his declaration in the Riḍván Garden. He says that God sent His Messengers to the people of the world solely for the sake of "this luminous, radiant, and manifest Beauty" who appeared twenty years ago (*Mázandarání, Asráru'l-Áthár* 3:174–77; provisional translation). Although his Revelation was the Day of Resurrection no one recognized him; hence in many of his books he gave the promise of his encounter in the year nine. When God fulfilled his promise and revealed His hidden beauty in the year nine, instead of receiving recognition, swords were drawn against him "by those who are known by His name."

Bahá'u'lláh goes on to tell of the people turning away from him and his retreat to the wilderness for two years, his return from concealment, and his revelation to them of glimmerings of his beauty from behind the veils in order to prepare them for the encounter with him. He says that sometimes he revealed his beauty transparently, while at other times he concealed and veiled himself “behind seventy million veils” until the time was come and the other promise appeared in the “second nine,” and the divine promise of the “year eighty” was consummated. At this time, he says, the irrevocable Will of God was to reveal himself even if no one believed in him. But when he appeared from behind the veils and revealed the lights of his countenance even to the extent of less than the tip of a hair, all fainted away and returned to nothingness.

These passages are just a few of the numerous statements of Bahá'u'lláh that affirm the reality of his concealed revelation in the year nine and his subsequent declaration of his station to certain individuals throughout the Baghdad period. In conclusion, all the evidence in so many ways confirms that the standard Bahá'í conception of the Sýyáh-Chál and the Baghdad period as a time characterized by both concealment and revelation is the only conception which is faithful to the reality of all the writings of Bahá'u'lláh himself.

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# **Şahífiy-i-Shaṭṭíyyih (Book of the River)** **Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh**

## **A Provisional Translation**

*He is God! There is none other God but Him, and we, verily, believe in Him*

The people talk constantly about this subject, but most of them comprehend not. Of the miracles mentioned, those which are ascribed to this humble one are fabrications contrived by impostors. As for the miracles ascribed to the Primal Point and the Wellspring of the First Outpouring [the Báb], and those related to the Mirrors reflecting His glory, these are truths by which the faithful are blessed. However, whatsoever was revealed in the Bayán from the heaven of loving-kindness and the cloud of mercy, naught hath been ordained as a universal testimony and a conclusive proof other than the revelation of verses. This hath ever been and ever will be God's testimony unto the peoples of the earth. If anything else appeared from the mine of bounty and glory [Bahá], that was but a token of God's grace. Otherwise, the greatest testimony is that which He Himself hath ordained; "And whose word is more true than God's?"<sup>1</sup>

However, those who entirely deny the appearance of any miracle attributed to the Prophets should not do so, for human reason is not a sufficient standard. When viewed with the eye of insight, no phenomenon on earth could be comprehended by any human, whether high or low, without prior observation and experience. Observe the sun in the heavens. To the extent that it is manifest, it giveth splendor and illumination to the entirety of the inhabitants of the earth in the east, the west, and all other directions. Certainly, human reason would not be inclined to accept the possibility of the existence of such a thing by means of any rational definition or description without actual observation and experience. It is the same with all other things in God's creation. Reflect, so that the secret of this question may become disclosed to thee. All things are miracles of the Prophets; "Repeat the gaze: seest thou a single flaw?"<sup>2</sup> In the Qur'án there are many verses which touch upon this theme. Although We do not have in mind an exact text, the purport of the verses is as follows. For example: "He it is Who created you and then provided for your sustenance. Will ye not see?" "He it is Who produced you from the earth most excellently. Will ye not believe?" "He hath sent down the rain from heaven. Will ye not give thanks?" "He hath

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1. Qur'án 4:89.

2. Qur'án 67:3.

created the heavens and the earth and whatever lieth between them, and made the mountains a shelter as a token of His grace, yet few among you understand." Thus it becometh evident that all phenomena, as things endowed with power, are also miracles of God. Is there any Creator besides God? Say: Praise be unto God. No maker is there but Him, in whose name the faithful believe.

Yea, if it is said that those miracles attributed to the former Prophets are not true unless they are revealed now, this also is not an argument worthy of enlightened minds and understanding hearts. For how often events have occurred in the past which have not occurred in the present, and vice versa. Every thing hath its storehouses with thy Lord, and He sendeth them down as He pleaseth according to a measure from Him. He is your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers. Consider, for instance, that every thirty years, according to the calculation and reckoning of men, there is an outbreak of plague in some lands. Could it be argued with disbelief during the delay of an outbreak of plague that no plagues have occurred in the past, since otherwise it must happen now? The same is true of other events that have occurred before but are not happening at present, and vice versa.

If it is said, Why should not a miracle reflecting God's absolute power and unconditioned attributes appear now in order to cause the upliftment of sanctified spirits and the exaltation of holy souls, this is indeed true in the same way as thou dost affirm it with regard to the Bayán. God possesseth the best of analogies, wert thou to comprehend. Consider the course of this river, which is visible for all to see. When its waters swell and flood, it rusheth forward and moveth turbulently. Whatever it doeth, it remaineth within its own sovereignty. However much the helpless people cry out from every side—clamoring that a great dam hath been rent asunder, or a barrier obliterated, or houses destroyed, or a palace crushed to ruins—the river payeth them no heed. With the utmost force and compulsion, power and sovereignty, it continueth to rush and flow, touching all places equally. For instance, before the onrush of its power it doth not matter whether a building belongeth to a prince or to a pauper; the effect is the same, unless that building hath unique fortifications. Thus do We create analogies for you that haply ye may be of those who are well assured. Make thy vision sharp and thy sight keen that the fragrances of joy and exultation may waft upon thy heart and thou mayest be established upon the throne of tranquility. This is the greatest of bestowals and the best of states. Would that ye might find a path unto it.

Observe, furthermore, that were a mighty person to block this river and control its course by means of his authority and sovereign power, as a consequence how many homes and dwellings would be ruined and how many people would be drowned, even though, at the same time, certain dry lands which had long been suffering from lack of rain would be irrigated, obtain fresh and wondrous life, and appear arrayed in a new and fabulous garment. Verily,

God createth what He pleaseth through the power of His command. No God is there save God, the Lord of all the worlds.

Similarly, ponder upon the mysteries of divine decree and destiny. Whatever hath appeared or will appear is like this river. Each thing moveth or repositeth in its proper place. But if something contrary to this natural flow of events is manifested, the order of the world becometh gravely disrupted. Couldst thou but grasp this subtle mystery, which is more hidden than any other mystery, thou wouldst find thyself independent of this and all other questions. It is for this reason that, in every age and century, as He desireth, the Unique Hidden One and the Eternal Essence manifesteth that true River and real Sea and causeth it to flow, adorning it with a new temple and a new vesture. All those structures of vain imaginings and palaces of the ungodly are then swept away and destroyed in its waters. With utmost desire and thirst they drown and perish, lacking even the faintest awareness that they could quaff a draught thereof. Thus doth God bestow life upon whom He willeth, and taketh it away from whom He willeth, and confirmeth whom He pleaseth, and denieth whom He pleaseth, could ye but perceive it.

This is especially true if the Eastern Winds begin to blow upon the flood of this heavenly river, which is rushing forth from the North of divine unity. How many exalted souls and possessors of true understanding, how many mighty castles and firm lofty edifices, will be destroyed and perish. By Him Who holdeth the heavens by His might and moveth the oceans by His command! 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 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.

Hidden allusions are concealed within these verses and holy letters are treasured up within these words. Blessed is the one who hath seized these pearls, recognized their value, and attained the presence of their Supreme Meaning. It is clear and evident that the root of differences, from the farthest worlds of meaning to the nearest degrees of expression, is caused by the diversity of the forms of the mirrors. Each person speaketh and expresseth himself according to that which is reflected within him. For example, with reference to the same analogy of the flooding river, observe that it floweth forward in one manner and its relationship to all buildings and structures is the same, yet any valley that hath more capacity is able to take in more of it, and any dam whose foundation is weaker is less able to resist it. These differences, therefore, have arisen from the diversity of recipients. In like manner, consider the rays of the Eternal Sun, which shine with the same illumination in the

heaven of human hearts but, when reflected in the forms of mirrors, differ by reason of differences among the mirrors themselves. Thus it is that some abide exalted in their essences and high in their endeavors, while others sink into the depths of lethargy and degradation. All things have their rank before God, and all return unto Him.

Those possessed of insight should make their vision as sharp as blades of steel and their hearts as vast as existence itself that haply, while there is yet a chance, the former may not be prevented from beholding the Divine Beauty nor the latter remain withheld from the sweet waters of everlasting life. Thus may they take delight in all foods and obtain their portion and no longer cleave unto the sayings of the people or suffer their virtue to be robbed by their deeds. All drink from the same fountain and partake of the same ocean, and all have their ranks before thy Lord, and all move in accordance with their own state. Today, every soul who believeth in the Most Exalted Countenance and recognizeth with certitude His station as manifested after Him on the Throne, this shall suffice him above any other knowledge or deed. But His good pleasure and faith in Him cannot be realized except through obedience unto His command in all things. This is the greatest, most excellent, and consummate fruit of existence. There is no goal besides God and no end save Him.

All that hath been mentioned of the attributes of the river was only one analogy which streamed forth from the Pen. Ponder and reflect, that haply all the hidden mysteries may be freed from the veils of nearness and remoteness, of loftiness and abasement, and unveil their beauty. Recognize this Sea of Seas before whose grandeur all seas are but a drop, and behold how it surgeth within the Wellspring of its own blessed Essence and the mine of its own attributes. Say: Praise be unto God! How astonishing is Thy cause and how mighty Thy power! How great is Thy sovereignty and how compelling Thy grandeur! We know naught of Thee except what Thou hast taught us through the tongue of the Manifestation of Thyself and the Wellspring of Thine Essence, He Who is the Fountainhead of Thy Cause and the Repository of Thy Decree. Verily, Thou knowest all that hath been and will be created. Thou, indeed, art the Truth, the Knower of things unseen.

O Javád! We shall impart unto thee a single word which We have taken from the essence of the Sacred Books and Scriptures as a token of Our mercy and loving-kindness, that the water of immortality may rain from the clouds of God's unity upon thy reality and the realities of His servants, and that thou mayest attain unto eternal and everlasting life. That word is this: "Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting." This is a treasure that pertaineth to Heaven. Were it to be quickened and to rise, it would never die or perish. This is a light that shall never be extinguished, a treasure that perisheth not, a raiment that shall never be outworn, and a revelation that will never be concealed. Through

it many will go astray and others will be guided. Render thanks unto God that thou hast become the recipient of this All-Encompassing Word, this celestial melody and heavenly song. Had I found a word more conclusive, I would have divulged it. There is no greater counsel than this word. Preserve it if thou desirest to find a path to the Lord of the Mighty Throne.

It is because of the love this servant holdeth for thee that this answer hath been written. Otherwise, I have no inclination to set forth any topic or write a single letter thereon. God is a sufficient witness unto Me, and a protector for thee. Wherefore, rise up with legs of iron and set forth upon this path which We have rolled out upon the snow-white earth of the spirit. With eyes of consuming flame gaze upon its pillars and its stature, and with ruby ears hearken unto what hath appeared therefrom in regard to thy question. With palms of gold and fingers of power seize what is in and upon it, and with a swordlike tongue sing and chant in ringing tones, clap and drum, that there is no God but Him, that 'Alí Muḥammad is the Essence of God and His eternal Being, and Muḥammad 'Alí is the Mine of the Cause of God and His everlasting Self, that the Living Countenance is the Repository of God's authority and His self-subsisting Identity, and the Letters of the Living are the first to have believed in God and His verses. We all, verily, cleave unto them. This is the Word by which truth shall be distinguished from falsehood until the Day when the Hour shall strike, when all shall present themselves before God and abide by His command. Glory be upon those who believe in Him on the day of His meeting and who observe what He hath decreed.