

To: The Universal House of Justice
 Date: 16 May 1996
 From: Research Department

Tablet of the Holy Mariner;
the “Call of God” and Native Messengers

In his electronic mail messages dated 15 November 1995 and 22 November 1995 to the Universal House of Justice, Mr. Christopher Buck requests certain materials concerning the Tablet of the Holy Mariner and raises questions about an extract from a Tablet revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to which reference is made in memoranda prepared by the Research Department on 25 August 1994, 24 May 1988 and 22 October 1995. We respond as follows.

1. Tablet of the Holy Mariner

As Mr. Buck requested, we attach a photocopy of the original of the section of this Tablet that was revealed in the Persian language together with a short list of references from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from *God Passes By*, and from letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi concerning the Tablet of the Holy Mariner. To date, no English translation of the Persian section of this Tablet is available at the Bahá’í World Centre. However, a brief summary of the contents of this Tablet may be found in Adib Taherzadeh’s *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*, rev. ed. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1988), volume 1, page 243.

2. **Tablet Revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá**, in *Amr va Khalq*, volume 2, pages 45-46

We attach for Mr. Buck a copy of the original of the Tablet revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, part of which is published in *Amr va Khalq*, volume 2, pages 45–46. As noted in our memorandum of 25 August 1994, the beginning and final passages of this Tablet are published in *Amr va Khalq*, volume 3, pages 307–308.

The English translation of the section of the Tablet that appears in volume 2, pages 45-46 is as follows:

In ancient times the people of America were, through their northern regions, close to Asia, that is, separated from Asia by a strait. For this reason, it hath been said that crossing had occurred. There are other signs which indicate communication.

As to places whose people were not informed of the appearance of Prophets, such people are excused. In the Qur'án it hath been revealed: "We will not chastise them if they had not been sent a Messenger."

Undoubtedly in those regions the Call of God must have been raised in ancient times, but it hath been forgotten now.

As Mr. Buck observed, the final paragraph of the Tablet is cited in the Research Department memorandum of 24 May 1988. The first and last paragraphs are quoted in the letter dated 7 July 1988, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, which was attached to our memorandum of 22 October 1995, and phrases from the final paragraph are also cited in the October 1995 memorandum.

3. The "Call of God" and Native Messengers

Mr. Buck states that he regards the phrase "Call of God", mentioned in the extract above, as a technical term which "is very clearly a reference to the teachings that originate from Manifestations of God". He also indicates that this Tablet appears to provide "a textual basis for establishing in principle but not in name — the existence of Manifestations of God sent to the aboriginals of North America, and possibly, by extension, to other indigenous peoples as well". He, therefore, proposes that

... the Faith officially proclaim that God, in addition to sending the named Manifestations of God that we already have accepted, has sent "Messengers of God to Indigenous Peoples" as a principle grounded in *Amr va Khalq* (vol. 2, pp. 45-46). We should at least be able to assert that there were "Messengers of God to First Nations", as we say in Canada.

Further, Mr. Buck's understanding of the Tablet leads him to question whether the Research Department used excerpts from the Tablet to support two conflicting views. Before considering this question, it is, as Mr. Buck says, important to address the issue of the meaning of the term "Call of God".

3.1 The "Call of God"

The Persian term translated as "Call of God" in the above Tablet is "*nidáy-i-lláhí*". This term appears frequently in the Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá with differing shades of meaning. By way of illustration, we provide the following examples from *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), each of which contains the expression "*nidáy-i-lláhí*", though the English translations differ:

- Section 15, page 31: "... for this did Bahá'u'lláh raise up the call of the Lord".

- Section 195, pages 234–235: Referring to the influence of opposition to the Faith on its dissemination, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asks: "How else could His summons have been heard in the continents of America and of Africa the dark?"

- Section 219, page 274: "Although ye dwell in western lands, still, praise be to God, ye did hear His call from out the east and, even as Moses, did warm your hands at the fire kindled in the Asian Tree."

- Section 225, page 283: Describing the "Two calls to success and prosperity", 'Abdu'l-Bahá indicates that the second "is the soul-stirring call of God", which, He explains, "is founded upon the instructions and exhortations of the Lord and the admonitions and altruistic emotions belonging to the realm of morality which, like unto a brilliant light, brighten and illumine the lamp of the realities of mankind. Its penetrative power is the Word of God."

From these several examples, it is suggested that while the "Call of God" is clearly "founded" upon the teachings of the Manifestation of God, being in the physical presence of the Manifestation is but one means by which people become informed of "His summons".

3.2 Native Messengers

With regard to whether the excerpt from the Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá cited above enunciates a general principle that permits the conclusion that God sent His Messengers to indigenous peoples, specifically to the Americas, we wish to note, that, to date, the Research Department has not been able to locate any authoritative interpretation of the Master's Tablet in the Bahá'í Teachings, nor have we found a text which clearly indicates that Manifestations of God have appeared in the Americas. We offer the following points for consideration:

The Tablet

It is not clear from the context of the Tablet that the reference to raising the "Call of God" presupposes the presence of a Manifestation of God in the Americas.

The Master's Tablet appears to be a response to a question about the fate of people who live in "places" which have not been penetrated by the call of the Prophets. If this be so, then 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement about the raising of the "Call of God" could simply imply that "the people of America" were "informed about the appearance of Prophets" as a result of the contact and "other signs which indicate communication" that occurred "in ancient times"

between the peoples of America and Asia. In this regard, the following extract from a letter dated 25 November 1950, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer is of interest:

It is possible the Indians of the Americas were influenced in the remote past by Prophets in Asia. But again, as there is nothing in our teachings about it we cannot do more than speculate.

Statement in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, page 289

In one of His talks published in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is reported to have stated:

The East has ever been the dawning point of the Sun of Reality. All the Prophets of God have appeared there. The religions of God have been promulgated, the teachings of God have been spread and the Law of God founded in the East. The Orient has always been the centre of lights.

The principle enunciated in this statement is confirmed in the published letters of Shoghi Effendi. For example, in his letter addressed to the Asian Intercontinental Teaching Conference in October 1953, the Guardian refers to the “Asiatic continent” as “the cradle of the principal religions of mankind”. And, in his letter entitled “America and the Most Great Peace”, Shoghi Effendi reiterated the principle and actually cites this and other similar passages from *Promulgation* on the same subject.

Prophetic Figures

While we are unable to locate a text which clearly indicates that Manifestations of God have appeared in the Americas, the Bahá’í Teachings and the Qur’án recognize the possibility of individuals’ being centres of divine guidance for their own people, without occupying the station of Major Prophethood. In a letter dated 21 December 1986, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, the House of Justice states:

... there are also other prophetic figures who are under the shadow of the Manifestation, and personages, such as sages, seers, and divine men of learning, who because of their wisdom and guidance, profoundly influence the lives of people in certain parts of the world.

4. Two Conflicting Views?

Mr. Buck refers to Research Department memoranda dated 24 May 1988 and 22 October 1995, which, he believes, use the statement from the

Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá about the “Call of God” to support two opposing points of view. He states that, while, in one memorandum the passage argues the possibility of two Manifestations of God on earth at the same time, in the second, it is used to argue against the possibility of Native Manifestations in the Americas.

In our memorandum of 24 May 1988, the Department was addressing, among other things, the question of whether, in the past, it was possible that two Manifestations of God could have lived at the same time. In commenting on this question, we called attention to the fact that the Bahá’í Teachings contain no exact information about the dates of Dispensations prior to Muhammad, that our Writings and the Qur’án indicate that Manifestations and other prophetic figures have been sent down to mankind from the beginning of time, and that the records concerning many of these personages have been lost. Since we were not able to find any clear guidance in the Bahá’í Teachings concerning the possibility of two Manifestations of God having lived at the same time, our tentative conclusion — that it was not possible to rule out such a possibility — was based on the fact that the Teachings affirm that the traces of many such personages had been lost. The statement from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was cited in this connection, rather than to argue for the presence of Messengers in a particular place, i.e., the Americas. This usage is consistent with our reading, as outlined above, of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement as an affirmation of the fact that “In ancient times the people of America” had been “informed of the appearance of Prophets”, but that “it hath been forgotten now”.

With regard to the citation of the Master’s statement about the “Call of God” in our memorandum of 22 October 1995, we wish to note that reference to this passage was included because it is one of a small number of texts and authoritative statements which, when considered in relation to each other, help to provide insight into the question of whether or not Messengers of God have arisen in the western hemisphere. Based on these materials, it is our view that evidence for the advent of Messengers of God in the Americas does not appear to be very strong. However, we have found no text which explicitly rules out the possibility.

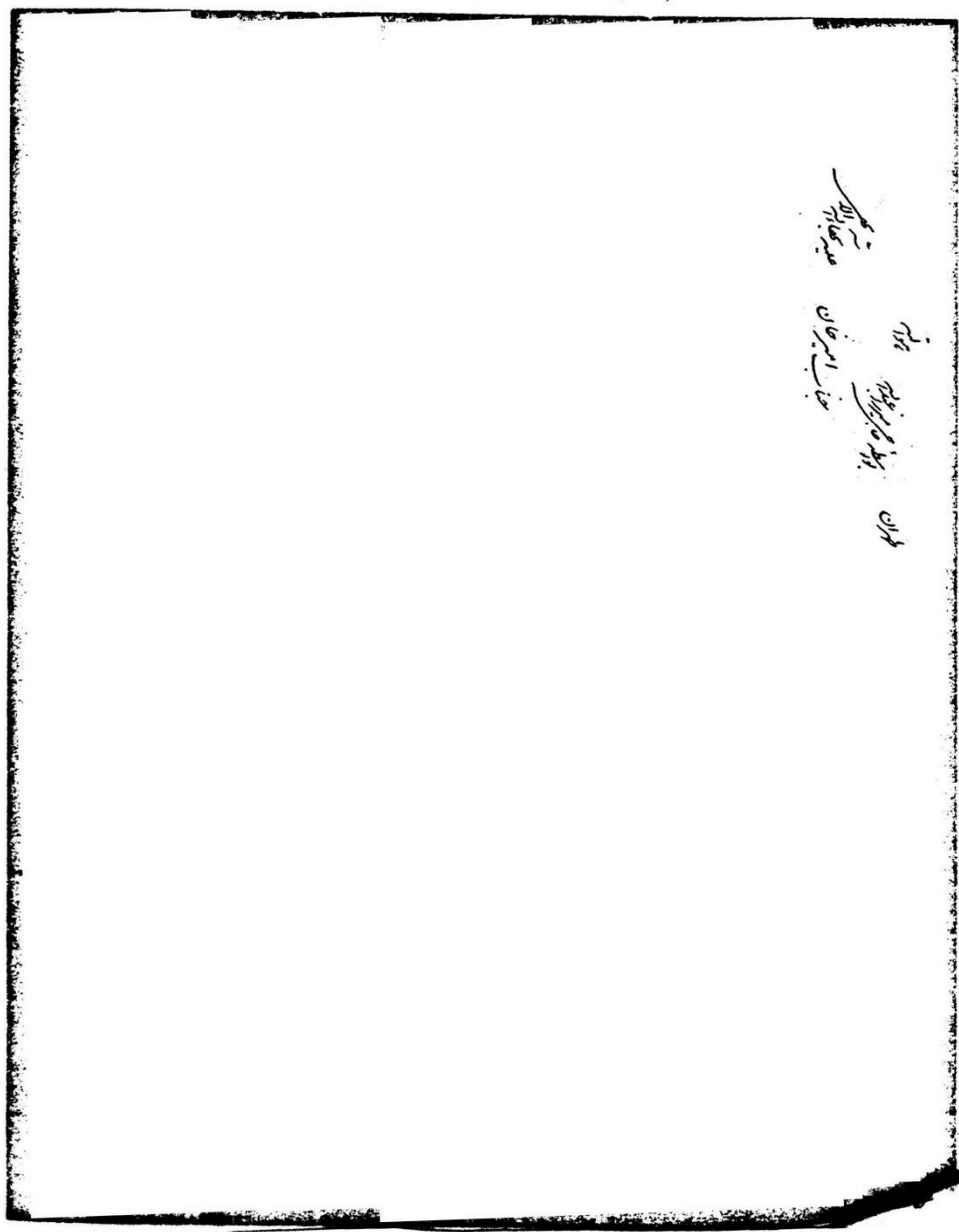


Figure 1:
Facsimile of Tablet to Amir Khan, courtesy Bahá'í World Centre (digital artifacts removed).

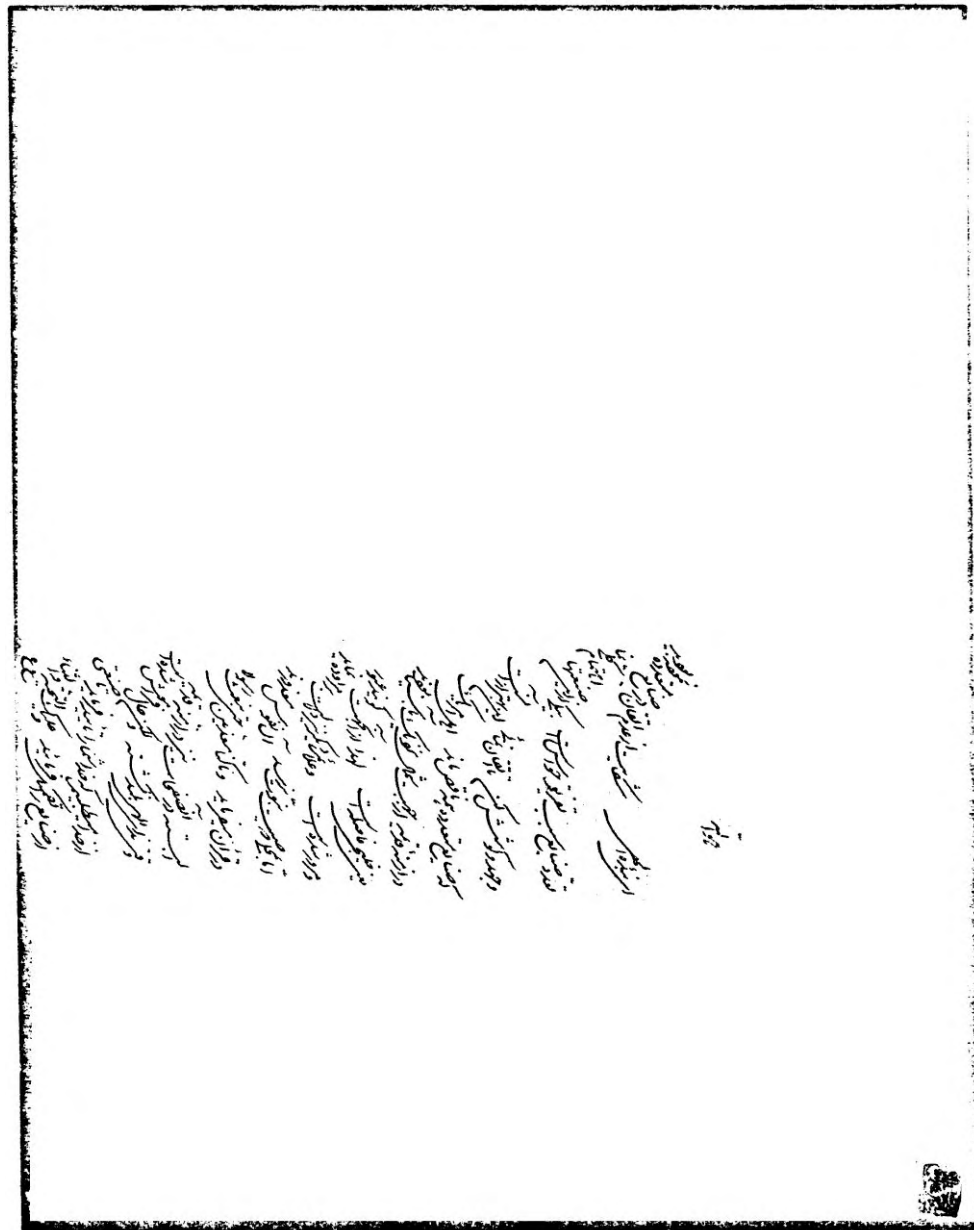


Figure 2: Facsimile of Tablet to Amir Khan, cont.