

Demystifying Bahá'u'lláh's

Tablet of the Holy Mariner

History, Translations, Interpretations & Analysis

Part I: Background

- 1) History
- 2) Story and Style
- 3) The Persian Tablet of the Holy Mariner
- 4) Introduction to Interpretations
- 5) The Tablet and You

Part II: Interpretations (optional)

Part III: Analysis (optional – not recommended for groups)

Required for this deepening: a prayer book with the Tablet of the Holy Mariner

Optional materials: Musical recordings; CD's, online, or other

Optional reference materials: dictionary, Bahá'í writings including some provisional translations on bahai-library.com, the Quran, Bible, and books referenced below



Copy of the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, rendered in the calligraphy of 'Abdu'l-Bahá from the Bahá'í World Centre Archives as presented on Bahauallah.org

Notes: The purpose of this deepening is to “demystify” the Tablet of the Holy Mariner by providing historical background, comparisons to other works, interpretations from different authors, and supporting analyses. Keep in mind that there are no authoritative interpretations of the actual meaning of the Tablet. Any passages which are not referenced are by the preparer. The pages are sized for legal paper (8.5”x14”) so that the “condensed” Tablet on page A can be printed on one page. This gives the reader the visual impact of seeing the story of the Tablet as a complete work. Parts I and II can be used for individual or group study. For group study, the facilitator should present the most appropriate portions for the group, as time and interest permit; each participant should have a copy of the deepening, then just read the material and follow the instructions for the exercises. For groups, without comments and discussion: Part I-Background will take ~2 hours to complete; Part II-Interpretations will take 3+ hours.

prepared by H. Bau, 2017

References - several sources are used extensively and referenced in this deepening:

Adib Taherzadeh's *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Volume 1, 1975*. Chapter 14 is devoted to the Tablet of the Holy Mariner.

Michael Sours' *The Tablet of the Holy Mariner—An Illustrated Guide to Bahá'u'lláh's Mystical Writing in the Sufi Tradition, 2002*.

Jamsheed Samandari's booklet, *Commentary on the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, 2008*.

Christopher Buck's thesis book, *Paradise and Paradigm, 1999*, compares symbols in the Bahá'í Faith with Persian Christianity.

Juan Cole's provisional translations of the Arabic and Persian Tablets of the Holy Mariner are online at bahai-library.com.

PART I – BACKGROUND

There are two versions of the Tablet of the Holy Mariner: the Arabic version, which has an authorized English translation by Shoghi Effendi that has been printed in some English language Bahá'í prayer books; and the Persian version, which does not yet have an authorized English translation, so many Bahá'ís are unaware of its existence. In this deepening, the Tablet of the Holy Mariner is referred to as “the Tablet.” Shoghi Effendi's translation of the Arabic version of the Tablet of the Holy Mariner is referred to as “the Tablet” or “the Arabic Tablet.” The Persian version of the Tablet of the Holy Mariner is referred to as “the Persian Tablet.” The authors quoted in this deepening are generally commenting about the Arabic Tablet, so when they refer to “the Tablet” they typically mean the Arabic Tablet.

Notes: Part I is intended for a general Bahá'í audience.

Do not recite the references during group deepenings. Participants can see the references as they follow along with the text.

“The Tablet contains many precious gems of knowledge, and many verities of His Cause are hidden therein. These can be discovered only through deepening in the Faith and meditation upon His words.”

Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Vol. 1, 1976, p.243*.

“In Bahá'u'lláh's writings, the condition of the seeker is linked with the seeker's ability to unveil the meaning of the scriptures and understand the divine teachings... The seeker reading the Tablet of the Holy Mariner will not want to merely pick up the text and read it as if it were any kind of literature. A determined seeker will want to give consideration to situating one's self in a reverent manner, freeing one's thoughts of material concerns and centering one's attention on God. Rather than just reading the text, the seeker participates with the text in a quest for illumination... The process is twofold. The reader prepares his or her heart through detachment and sanctification, and in this way attains a condition of spiritual receptiveness while the text imparts meaning.”

Sours, *The Tablet of the Holy Mariner—An Illustrated Guide, 2002, pp.35-36*.

“We have no direct, authoritative interpretation for the Tablet. In fact, none of the two appointed Interpreters of the Words of Bahá'u'lláh has left a full commentary on or interpretation of any of the works of the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith... To understand a text like the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, one needs to ‘feel’ its significance, in the first place, before proceeding to comprehend its connotations in a rational manner. In other words, the heart and mind of the reader need to interact in order to get closer to what is behind the veils of words in the allegorical writings of Bahá'u'lláh.”

Behmardi from the review of Samandari's *A Commentary on The Tablet of the Holy Mariner, 2008, pp.10-11*.

“As Bahá’ís, we are encouraged to strive to understand the Sacred Word and to share the fruit of our contemplative labor with others in a spirit of earnest and mutual search for truth... [This] is one person’s understanding of some of the mysteries hidden in the Tablet of the Holy Mariner... [These words] have no authority and are subject to human limitations and shortcomings. However, they are presented to the reader in a sincere desire to discover the hidden realities of this pre-Ridván gift of the Blessed Beauty to humanity.” *Samandari, A Commentary on The Tablet of the Holy Mariner, 2008, p.15.*

Recite Shoghi Effendi’s English translation of the Tablet of the Holy Mariner in its entirety from a prayer book.



1) HISTORY

The *Tablet of the Holy Mariner* was revealed by Bahá’u’lláh on March 27, 1863 at the end of a Naw-Rúz celebration, a month before His Declaration at Ridván. Shoghi Effendi disclosed that the Holy Mariner referred to Bahá’u’lláh and the ark was the “Ark of His Cause”, so the launch of the Holy Mariner’s ark is interpreted as Bahá’u’lláh’s Declaration at Ridván. After the Tablet was written, Bahá’u’lláh’s amanuensis chanted the Tablet to His companions. The Tablet was revealed in two parts, Arabic and Persian. The Persian Tablet does not yet have an authorized English translation (*as of 2016*); so provisional translations are included in this deepening.

“At the time Bahá’u’lláh wrote the Tablet of the Holy Mariner he was forty-six years old [1863]. In the following month of April, Bahá’u’lláh announced that he was the one the Báb had referred to as ‘Him Whom God shall make manifest.’ This claim...was within a short period acknowledged by nearly all Bábis. Sometime after 1866, [those] Bábis came to be known as ‘Bahá’ís’, followers of Bahá’u’lláh.” *Sours, The Tablet of the Holy Mariner—An Illustrated Guide, 2002, p.25-26.*

Optional - Audio. Some of the Bahá’í writings are available as recordings on CD’s or online as readings, songs or chants in various languages. Part I contains several sections with optional audio. All of the suggested recordings are songs or chants in Middle Eastern languages to give you a sense of place; they are intended to stir the spirit and are timed to last throughout the reading. Many of the most appropriate texts were not found as recordings in this desired form, so alternates are suggested which have a proper length, theme, and beauty. This deepening should be revised when appropriate recordings become available! Some of the suggested youtube.com videos also show Bahá’í scenes, which adds a visual dimension to the readings. Those who are native speakers of the recordings’ languages may find the recordings distracting. The facilitator should select the recordings in advance (online, CD’s, etc.) and adjust the volume to accommodate the group.

Find the Tablet of Visitation for Bahá’u’lláh as recording in chant or song – suggested recording on youtube.com – search for: “Tablet of Visitation Baha’u’llah” by Payam-i-Badí (*published Oct. 6, 2012, 17:23*). Play the recording on low volume as a background while reading the passages below on the history surrounding the Tablet of the Holy Mariner. Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet of Visitation calls for a special reverence, more so than the other recordings suggested in this deepening.

“In 1850, only six years after the Báb first made his claims, he was executed... [T]he authorities identified Bahá’u’lláh as a prominent leader of the movement and arrested him [1852]. He was imprisoned in the infamous “Síyáh-Chál” (Black Pit) of Tehran. Cleared of charges, he was released four months later and then exiled from Persia for the rest of his life. He chose the city of Baghdad...and many Bábis followed.” *Sours, The Tablet of the Holy Mariner—An Illustrated Guide, 2002, p.24.*

“In 1853, with limited supplies and food, and through the cold of winter, Bahá’u’lláh and His family travelled from Persia to Baghdad. Mírzá Yaḥyá had been appointed by the Báb to lead the Bábí community, and had been traveling around Persia in disguise. He decided to go to Baghdad and join the group using funds given to him by Bahá’u’lláh.

“An increasing number of Bábí’s considered Baghdad the new center for leadership of the Bábí religion, and a flow of pilgrims started coming there from Persia. However, as time went on, people began to look to Mírzá Yaḥyá for leadership less and less, and instead saw Bahá’u’lláh as their leader. As a result Mírzá Yaḥyá started to try to discredit Bahá’u’lláh and further divided the community. The actions of Mírzá Yaḥyá drove many people away from the religion and allowed its enemies to continue their persecution.” *bahaikipedia.org, “Bahá’u’lláh”, 2016.*

“The Báb had taught his followers to expect the imminent appearance of ‘Him Whom God will make manifest,’...and during the 1850s many individuals claimed to be this promised one, the anticipated spiritual leader. Rather than become a source of contention among these vying claimants...[in 1854] Bahá’u’lláh chose to leave the Bábí community... He left Baghdad to retire in the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan. There he spent his time in solitude, and according to his own words, he ‘contemplated no return.’ He was, however, discovered by the Sufis...and invited to the...seminary in the Kurdish town of Sulaymaniyh. When accounts of Muhammad-i Írání’s holiness and wisdom reached the Bábí community in Baghdad, his identity was suspected...[and] a messenger was sent to seek him out and persuade him to return.

“The situation among the Bábis had become grave; the believers were in a state of moral disintegration. The community was, in fact, edging toward extinction. Those who had assumed the leadership of the community had failed to offer any real guidance. Many of the remaining Bábis...welcomed the return of Bahá’u’lláh... After his return to Baghdad in 1856 things began to improve [and] Bahá’u’lláh wrote several of his most important works – the Seven Valleys, the Kitáb-i-Íqán (the Book of Certitude), and...the Hidden Words. These works provided much needed spiritual guidance, doctrinal clarity, and ethical inspiration to the Bábí community.” *Sours, The Tablet of the Holy Mariner—An Illustrated Guide, 2002, p.24-25.*

“It had been ten years since the Blessed Beauty first set foot in the city of Baghdád. Spring usually comes early to the region surrounding the Tigris River, and in 1863, as had been done in previous years in preparation for the New Year, the faithful brother of Bahá’u’lláh, Áqáy-i-Kalím, rented the Mazra’iy-i-Vashshásh, a farm in the environs of Baghdád. A main tent was pitched for Bahá’u’lláh, which through the divine effulgences of its Occupant, would become even as the tabernacle of the Daystar of Justice. In its shadow other smaller tents were raised. Bahá’u’lláh’s family and those faithful believers who had gathered around Him resided in these tents. They would spend several days together in the gardens of the Mazra’í in celebration of Naw-Rúz.

“The pure-hearted, sincere and well-favored followers of the Báb who lived in Baghdád had, for many years, basked in the life-giving and life-sustaining warmth of the sun of Bahá’u’lláh’s boundless grace. Each year, the believers would throng to

these gardens to witness the divine drama that would be played out before them... Fixed upon the tent of Bahá'u'lláh, they would wait breathlessly, expectant to hear a new tablet, a fresh oratory pour forth from His 'sugar-shedding lips.' The glory of these sublime verses would pierce the gloom of their anguished hearts and fill their beings with eternal life and happiness... Once again, in the spring of 1863, the believers waited anxiously to be immersed in His abounding grace."

Samandari, A Commentary on The Tablet of the Holy Mariner, 2008, p.16.

"Outings at this time of year when the spring season had just begun and the weather was mild were extremely pleasant, and Bahá'u'lláh always enjoyed nature and beautiful scenery and loved to be in the country... On the fifth day of Naw-Rúz, the Lawh-i-Malláhu'l-Quds (Tablet of the Holy Mariner) was revealed. Mírzá Áqá Ján, Bahá'u'lláh's amanuensis, emerged from the tent of Bahá'u'lláh, gathered the believers around him and chanted that mournful Tablet to them. Although during the last year of His sojourn in 'Iráq He had, on several occasions, alluded to trials and tribulations which were to come, His companions had not felt previously such sadness as they did on that day."

Taberzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Volume 1, 1976, p.228.

"'Oceans of sorrow,' Nabil affirms, 'surged in the hearts of the listeners when the Tablet of the Holy Mariner was read aloud to them'... It was evident to every one that the chapter of Baghdád was about to be closed, and a new one opened, in its stead. No sooner had that Tablet been chanted than Bahá'u'lláh ordered that the tents which had been pitched should be folded up, and that all His companions should return to the city. While the tents were being removed He observed: 'These tents may be likened to the trappings of this world, which no sooner are they spread out than the time cometh for them to be rolled up.' From these words of His they who heard them perceived that these tents would never again be pitched on that spot. They had not yet been taken away when the messenger arrived from Baghdad."

Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, 1944, p.147.

"An emissary...handed to Bahá'u'lláh a communication inviting Him to come for interview with the Governor at his headquarters. Bahá'u'lláh...suggested that the meeting take place instead in a certain mosque in the city on the following day... [When] the grievous news of the Sultán's decision to call Bahá'u'lláh to Constantinople reached Him...Bahá'u'lláh accepted, requiring only that His family and a number of His companions accompany Him and that they be allowed a month to prepare for the journey.

"During this period, Bahá'u'lláh showered His love especially upon those of His followers who were to stay behind and prepared them for the day when they would be left alone... He revealed in His own hand a Tablet for each one of them, including the children. In these Tablets He often alludes to Mírzá Yahyá's future rebellion, anticipates the most severe crisis to appear within the Cause, and urges the believers to be steadfast in the days of test and trial..

"Before Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in Baghdad, the followers of the Báb in that city did not dare associate with each other in public for fear of being persecuted. The [Bábi] Faith was regarded as a heresy and its adherents ran the risk of losing their lives if they openly declared their faith. Yet, soon after His arrival there, Bahá'u'lláh decided to appear in public. He often went into the streets and bazaars of Baghdad and frequented certain cafes. Although He was well-known as a leading figure in the newly-born Faith, the people of Baghdad were charmed by His innate love and dignity, and many of them became His admirers... For no less than eight years the Supreme Manifestation of God lived freely among the inhabitants of Baghdad... Although He did not disclose His station to them, yet multitudes of people from all walks of life were attracted to His person and longed to attain His presence, to hear His words, or even catch a glimpse of Him as He walked in the streets or paced along the banks of the Tigris rapt in meditation...

"The love and admiration of the people for Bahá'u'lláh was fully demonstrated on the day of His departure from His 'Most Great House' in Baghdad. Then His majesty and greatness were evident to both friend and foe. The news of His forthcoming departure for Constantinople had spread rapidly among the inhabitants of Baghdad and its neighbouring towns, and large numbers wished to attain His presence and pay their last tributes to Him. But soon it became apparent that His house was too small for the purpose. When Najib Pasha, one of the notables of the city of Baghdad heard of this, he immediately placed his garden-park, Najíbiyyih, at the disposal of the Bahá'u'lláh. This beautiful garden, designated by His followers as the Garden of Ridván (Paradise), was situated on the outskirts of Baghdad, across the river from Bahá'u'lláh's house.

"Thirty-one days after Naw-Rúz, on 22 April 1863, in the afternoon, Bahá'u'lláh moved to this garden, where He remained for twelve days... Of the twelve days that Bahá'u'lláh stayed in the Garden of Ridván, three are regarded as Holy Days: the first day on which He declared Himself, the ninth day when all His family joined Him and rejoiced at His Declaration, and the twelfth day when He left that garden.

"The companions of Bahá'u'lláh had, for some time, known the Declaration of His station to be imminent. This realization came to them not only as a result of many remarks and allusions made by Him during the last few months... but also through a noticeable change in His demeanor. Another sign which unmistakably pointed to its approaching hour was the adoption, on the day of His departure from His house in Baghdad, of a different type of head-dress known as *taj* (tall felt hat), which He wore throughout His ministry.

"'Abdu'l-Bahá has described how upon His arrival in the garden, Bahá'u'lláh declared His station to those of His companions who were present, and announced with great joy the inauguration of the Festival of Ridván ... Sadness and grief vanished and the believers were filled with delight at this announcement... Although Bahá'u'lláh was being exiled to far-off lands and knew the sufferings and tribulations which were in store for Him and His followers, yet through this historic Declaration He changed all sorrow into blissful joy and spent the most delightful time of His ministry in the Garden of Ridván. Indeed, in one of His Tablets, He has referred to the first day of Ridván as the 'Day of supreme felicity', and has called on His followers to 'rejoice, with exceeding gladness' in remembrance of that day.

"The manner of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh's Mission is not clear, neither is the identity of all who heard Him. One thing, however, is clear... He [previously] had never designated Himself as "Him Whom God shall make manifest'. It was in the Garden of Ridván that in the course of His Declaration He unequivocally did so, announcing Himself as the One whose advent the Báb had proclaimed, for Whose sake He had sacrificed Himself and for Whom He had established a covenant with His followers...

"With the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh the prophecies of the Báb concerning the appearance of 'Him Whom God shall make manifest' were fulfilled. The Báb had alluded in His Writings to the scene of Bahá'u'lláh's Declaration in 'Ridván' and to the wafting of the breezes of His Revelation from 'Baghdád'. He had also foretold in the Persian Bayán that He would be manifested on the completion of the first Vahíd (nineteen years) of the Bábi Dispensation, which began in 1844. In the first chapter of the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá', which was revealed when the Báb communicated His Message to Mullá Husayn, He referred to the 'people of Bahá' as the only 'companions of the Crimson-Coloured Ark' moving upon the 'Crimson Sea'.

The 'Crimson Ark' was a reference to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, which was launched on the first day of Ridván. The community of the Most Great Name emerged on that day, when the followers of Bahá'u'lláh acknowledged His station.”

Taberzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Volume 1, 1976, pp.229,244,258,259,261,262,280,281.

“Not only did 'Abdu'l-Bahá ask the believers to study this Tablet during His own ministry, when the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh was being violated by the Covenant-breakers, but He urged them shortly before His passing to study it again. For He knew too well that there were a few among His followers who would violate the Covenant and rise up against Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Cause of God.”

Taberzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Volume 1, 1976, p.230.

“[During Ridván, 1921, a few months before his death in November,] 'Abdu'l-Bahá called attention to the Tablet of the Holy Mariner in a letter to the Bahá'í community. He pointed out that the community was strong and prospering, but that there were some who sought to stir up trouble. In this letter he wrote, ‘exercise the utmost care and day and night be on your guard that thereby the tyrant may not inflict an injury. Study the Tablet of the Holy Mariner that ye may know the truth, and consider that the Blessed Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh] hath fully foretold future events. [Let them who perceive, take warning!]' The warning in this letter is understood widely among Bahá'ís as an anticipation of how some from among the believers would betray 'Abdu'l-Bahá by turning against his appointed successor, Shoghi Effendi - which in fact did happen...

“This letter was translated by Shoghi Effendi while he was at Balliol college at Oxford, England, and shortly after published in the November 23, 1921 edition of *Star of the West*, an early Bahá'í periodical. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's message was probably addressed primarily to the Bahá'ís in the East, as the Tablet of the Holy Mariner was not yet available to the Bahá'ís in the West who probably knew little if anything about it. It was after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that the... Arabic version was translated into English by Shoghi Effendi and first published in the May 1922 edition of the early Bahá'í periodical *Star of the West*. At that time, it was printed with the title a ‘Song of the Holy Mariner.’ Since each verse is followed by a refrain with the words ‘Glorified be my Lord, the All-Glorious!’ with the exception of the last three verses that are followed by the refrain ‘Glorified by our Lord, the Most High!’ the refrains were regarded as a chorus to the main verses, and this is probably why it was designated as a song. This early translation is the one still in print today.”

Sours, The Tablet of the Holy Mariner—An Illustrated Guide, 2002, pp.37,87,27.

“One can appreciate why Shoghi Effendi, in his new capacity as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith following the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921, chose this tablet to be the first complete work of Bahá'u'lláh to offer, in translation, to the Bahá'í community. It is as though the entire allegory was reenacted when Shoghi Effendi took the helm and, as the new Mariner, steered the course of the Bahá'í world from 1921 to 1957. The Tablet of the Holy Mariner is an archetypal allegory replayed in transitions of leadership in Bahá'í history. The so-called Covenant Breakers – those who challenged the designated leadership prerogatives, in succession, of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and now the Universal House of Justice – seriously threatened the integrity of the community. Thus, the import of the Mariner allegory is never lost on Bahá'ís, even though the rest of the imagery is difficult, complex, and recondite. This is why this particular allegory arguably constitutes the core Bahá'í myth, in the voyage of an Ark that is launched in Baghdad and finally comes to rest on the slopes of Mount Carmel.”

Buck, Paradise & Paradigm, 1999, p.225.

Comments and Discussion. Consider – How does the Tablet relate to the events of the time when it was revealed?



2) STORY & STYLE

The poetry and symbolic allegory of the Arabic Tablet highlights its importance as a revelation specifically to prepare Bahá'u'lláh for His upcoming Declaration. However, the dramatic story within the Tablet is obscured by the poetic form, with the refrains after each verse. When the refrains are removed and the Tablet is printed on one page, it is easier to see the themes within the Tablet as a single story. The Tablet's striking storyline has been related to Persian dramatic performances typical during Bahá'u'lláh's time. The Tablet's style and content seems to be related to an early Syriac Christian hymn.

STORYLINE - In the attached “condensed” version of Shoghi Effendi's translation of the Arabic Tablet, the refrain “Glorified be my Lord, the All-Glorious!” is read only the first time it occurs. By not reading the repetitive refrains, the story within the Tablet becomes more evident. Other condensed versions of the Tablet have been published, including one by Taherzadeh in *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Volume 1, Chapter 14.*

Recite and summarize the passages from the “condensed authorized” version on page A. First, read the few verses up to the stop lines, “G! ____”. Then summarize the events in that passage in your own words. In this exercise, do not attempt to interpret the passages, just summarize or paraphrase them. Do not read the abbreviated refrains. Continue reading and summarizing each group of verses. After you finish the Tablet, go back and briefly summarize the events of the whole Tablet. This exercise, along with having all of the verses printed on one page, will help you visualize the Tablet's complete story line.

Comments and Discussion. Consider: How does the storyline connect to the historical context of the Tablet?

PERSIAN DRAMA.

“It is worth pointing out that in Bahá'u'lláh's homeland there were a number of cultural currents that Bahá'u'lláh may have drawn upon to create the Tablet's form and symbolic content. One may have been the growing interest in theatrical performances in Persia, and the other devotional practices such as those practiced by the Sufi orders... With regard to theatre, such performances...focused originally on the reenactment of a series of tragic tales all connected in some way to the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn...[and] incorporated narration, dramatic performance, song or chanting, and a high degree of audience participation. This was a well-known, widely performed annual event that reached all levels of society. Its content was essentially spiritual in focus, rather than historical, and it was accepted that participation had a redemptive value for the audience. There are certain characteristics in the Tablet of the Holy Mariner that suggest affinity with this cultural phenomena. Anyone reading the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, with its refrains, will easily perceive that this Tablet

was intended to be read aloud... If recited effectively, the Tablet has an extraordinary aesthetic quality that is profoundly moving.”

Sours, The Tablet of the Holy Mariner—An Illustrated Guide, 2002, pp.28-29.

ST. EPHREM. The poetic form of the first verses of the Tablet of the Holy Mariner seem to be derived from verses in St. Ephrem’s Hymn (or Ode) on Noah and the Ark.

Optional-Online Audio. There are several online recordings of St. Ephrem’s hymns, even though the original compositions have been lost. Do an online search for St. Ephrem’s hymn on Noah and the Ark (*not found online in 2016*). Suggested alternate - a Maronite recording “Hymn of Light - St. Ephrem” (*uploaded Feb. 24, 2009, 5:00*) on youtube.com, sung in the original Aramaic with English subtitles. Listen to the recording as a low volume background to the readings below.

St. Ephrem the Syrian was a prominent fourth century deacon of the Syriac Christian church and a prolific hymn writer. His writings are still studied and translated into different languages by theologians, often from the original text in the Syriac dialect of Aramaic. His hymns are still in use by some Christians; especially the Maronites, who have their origins in the ancient city of Antioch, which was known as “the cradle of Christianity” and is in modern day Turkey. Bahá’u’lláh revealed the Tablet of the Holy Mariner in 1863, about 1500 years after St. Ephrem’s hymn on Noah and the Ark.

“Metaphors and symbols in the Bahá’í Faith appear to compare closely with those in Syriac Christianity... Persian Christianity was... a historical development of East Syriac Christianity... Bahá’í texts betray some intriguing affinities with Syriac texts... The symbolic roots of Persian Christianity [are]... exemplified in the hymns of St. Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373 CE), [who is] acclaimed to have been the greatest poet [of the period, and]... the only Syrian Christian to have been canonized as a saint in the Catholic Church.”

Buck, Paradise & Paradigm, 1999, pp.33,6,7,8.

**From St. Ephrem the Syrian
An Ode on Noah and the Ark**

O NOBLE NOAH!

Chorus: Glory, Lord, to Thee!
Afloat in the Flood, the All-Ruler’s Ark emerged
from the East; she winged to the West
wheeled South and then sealed the North ...
To her Saviour sing!
Her sequence sketched her Defender’s Device:
her course traced a cross!

With water and wood, Noah, salt of the sea,
the Church did portray...
Myth and mystery,
Ark and Torah tell the self-same story!...

Naves echo the Ark, whose meaning they mark...
Faith (though I be frail) shall be, Lord, my ship!
All those drown in doubt, who would work Thee out!
To Thy Sire we shout!

Saint Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373 C.E.)
An Ode on Noah and the Ark (363-373) (*Hymns on Faith XLIX* 1: 3-6)
Translated by Andrew Palmer (1993, 175).

**From Bahá’u’lláh
“Song of the Holy Mariner”**

O HOLY MARINER!

Refrain: Glorified be my Lord, the All-Glorious!

Bid thine Ark of eternity appear before the Celestial
Concourse.

Launch it upon the ancient sea, in His Name the Most
Wondrous...

Unmoor it, then, that it may sail upon the ocean of glory...

O Mariner!

Teach them that are within the ark that which We have taught
thee behind the mystic veil.

Perchance they may not tarry in the sacred snow-white spot.

But may soar upon the wings of the spirit unto that station which
the Lord hath exalted above all mention in the worlds below...

May know the mysteries hidden in the Seas of light.

Bahá’u’lláh (d. 1892 C.E.)
Song [or Tablet] of the Holy Mariner (1863) (Arabic section)
Translated by Shoghi Effendi (1922)

Buck, Paradise & Paradigm. 1999, p.vii.

These few verses and formats are amazingly similar! Bahá’u’lláh based many of His writings on religious texts which were not authored by the Manifestations, such as The Seven Valleys. By doing so, Bahá’u’lláh affirms various religious traditions of the past, but also expands on these traditions with His Creative Word.

Comments and Discussion. Consider: How do you think the Tablet will mainly be used in the future; as a reading, a chant, a hymn, a dramatic presentation, a deepening subject, a personal guide, and/or other?



3) PERSIAN TABLET OF THE HOLY MARINER

“The Tablet of the Holy Mariner...went through two phases of revelation. The first was in Arabic, and consists of fifty eight verses. The second phase of revelation was in Persian, and in a pattern that differs from that of the Arabic one.”

Behmardi from the review of Samandari’s, A Commentary on The Tablet of the Holy Mariner, 2008, p.9.

“The Arabic and Persian versions can be read as separate works as each stands easily on its own. The Persian prose text contains the same allegory (of the Mariner and the Ark) as the first portion of the Arabic text, but the Persian Tablet uses different symbolism more characteristic of Persian mystical literature and contains more explicit exhortations. Both the Persian and the Arabic present a beautiful and compelling use of allegory, but the allegory in the Arabic text is more detailed and occupies the full content of the Tablet. The Arabic version is also very different in style from the Persian, being more opaque and rhythmic.”

Sours, The Tablet of the Holy Mariner—An Illustrated Guide, 2002, p.27.

In 1922, after the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi translated the Arabic Tablet into English, but not the Persian Tablet. Shoghi Effendi's translation of the Arabic Tablet is well known to English speaking Bahá'ís. However, the Persian Tablet, which is mostly rhymed prose, does not yet have an authoritative translation, so many Bahá'ís are not aware of it.

PROVISIONAL TRANSLATION OF THE PERSIAN TABLET – Several provisional English translations of the Persian Tablet are available; a translation by Cole is shown on page B and is from bahai-library.com.

Optional - Audio. Search for a good recording of the Persian Tablet of the Holy Mariner chanted or sung in Persian (*not found online in 2016*) - suggested alternate – “Lohe Maryam Tablet of Baha’u’llah” by Jorj sayar (*uploaded Feb 29, 2008, 10:54*) on youtube.com. (*Maryam was one of Bahá’u’lláh’s few faithful family members; she was His cousin, sister-in-law and devoted friend; Maryam was of such caliber that after her death, Bahá’u’lláh revealed a tablet of visitation for her; in the tablet’s prologue He states that it could also be used by those who wish to pay homage to Tabirih. The tablet in this recording is not Maryam’s Tablet of Visitation; an English translation is on the youtube page.*) Play the recording on low volume as a background while reciting Cole’s translation of the Persian Tablet.

Recite Cole’s English translation of Bahá’u’lláh’s Persian Tablet of the Holy Mariner on page B.

“The Tablet of the Holy Mariner in Persian is, for the most part, similar in content to the Arabic Tablet. In addition, it contains some of Bahá’u’lláh's choicest exhortations and counsels to His followers. For example, He urges the believers not to barter the bounty of His presence for all that is in earth and heaven and not to seek nearness to anyone but Him. He reminds them that the heart is the seat of the Best-Beloved and warns them not to allow a stranger to enter it. He calls on them to arise and emerge from the sepulchre of self and passion, and exhorts them to be faithful; even if they are unable to reach the lofty summits of detachment and sanctity they should at least try to become sincere, should strive earnestly that their conduct may faithfully reflect the secrets of their hearts.” *Taberzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, Volume 1, 1976, p.243.*

Bahá’u’lláh clearly did not create a literal translation of the Arabic Tablet into the Persian language. Bahá’u’lláh expanded topics which were pertinent to his Persian Bábi companions with clear spiritual guidance and Persian cultural symbols. He also omitted topics which were irrelevant to the believers at that time. In the Arabic Tablet, it is easy for the reader to relate to being a passenger of the ark while “they” are cast out. In the Persian Tablet, the reader/listener is the one who is warned that they are in spiritual danger.

Comments and Discussion. Were you aware of the existence of this Persian Tablet? Why do you think Shoghi Effendi chose to translate the Arabic Tablet instead of the Persian Tablet? If you were a Bábi back in 1863 when the Tablet was revealed, what parts of the Persian Tablet would be appropriate to you?



4) INTRODUCTION TO INTERPRETATIONS

Just prior to his death, 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged the Bahá'ís to study the Tablet, so we can assume not only that Bahá'ís are supposed to try understand the Tablet, but that the Tablet itself is comprehensible. This section provides a very brief summary of interpretations of the Arabic Tablet, which is intended to provide the readers with a background to help them find their own meaning in the Tablet. Part II provides more in-depth interpretations. Please keep in mind:

“As there are many mysterious passages in this Tablet for which we have no direct, authoritative interpretation, undoubtedly in the coming years, there will be others who will put pen to paper to share their understanding of this profound and prophetic work of Bahá'u'lláh... [The] insights enclosed... have no authority and are subject to human limitations and shortcomings.” *Samandari, A Commentary on the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, 2008, p.15.*

"The Holy Mariner is a reference to Bahá'u'lláh Himself, and the Ark mentioned in that Tablet is the Ark of His Cause." *from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, March 8, 1936, Lights of Guidance, #1609.*

"Concerning the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, it is one of the most significant Tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh during the last days of His stay in Baghdad, and refers to the sad though momentous events which were to transpire soon after His arrival in Adrianople. Its main significance lies in the fact that in it Bahá'u'lláh clearly foreshadows the grave happenings which eventually led to the defection of Subh-i-Azal, and to the schism which the latter thought to create within the ranks of the faithful." *from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, August 10, 1934, Lights of Guidance, #1609.*

“The ‘Tablet of the Holy Mariner,’ in which Bahá'u'lláh prophesies the severe afflictions that are to befall Him...and a host of other writings, in the form of epistles, odes, homilies, specific Tablets, commentaries and prayers, contributed, each in its own way, to swell the ‘rivers of everlasting life’ which poured forth from the ‘Abode of Peace’ and lent a mighty impetus to the expansion of the Báb's Faith in both Persia and `Iráq, quickening the souls and transforming the character of its adherents.” *Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, 1944, p.140-141.*

“The Tablet of the Holy Mariner is revealed in symbolic language. To appreciate it one must acquire for himself a knowledge of the spiritual verities enshrined within Bahá'u'lláh's Writings and meditate upon His words. Although the allegorical terms Bahá'u'lláh has used in this Tablet assume various meanings, He has nonetheless manifestly foreshadowed coming events and conveyed some aspects of the Covenant.” *Taberzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, Volume 1, 1976, p.230.*

“The tablet's main theme is the covenant between man and God, and man being unfaithful to it. In the tablet, Bahá'u'lláh refers to himself as the ‘Holy Mariner,’ uses an ‘ark’ to symbolize the Covenant of God, and symbolized the believers in the covenant as the ‘dwellers’ in the ‘ark;’ He writes that those people who are in the ark are safe and will acquire salvation. In the tablet, Bahá'u'lláh also alludes to His station as ‘He whom God shall make manifest’, as predicted by the Báb, and the fate of Mírzá Yahyá, Bahá'u'lláh's half-brother.”

Wikipedia, “Tablet of the Holy Mariner”, Cole, 2016 and Taberzadeh, 1976, The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, Vol. 1.

“In the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, the Supreme Pen, in rich figurative language, sketches the sublime drama of the awe-inspiring process of the birth and evolution of the Divine Covenant. This marvelous Tablet of Bahá’u’lláh echoes the timeless story of the summons of God to humanity and humanity’s neglect and opposition to the divine call of love.

“Indeed, the Tablet of the Holy Mariner is a veiled road map that charts the travels of the divine ruby Ark from Its launch on the banks of the Tigris river, to the shores of the sacred and lofty Gate of Hope, to the blessed foothills of the vineyard of the Lord, and, finally, to the promised dawn of the Formative Age, warning, all along, the perceptive reader of the pitfalls that await even the most eminent of believers.” *Samandari, A Commentary on The Tablet of the Holy Mariner, 2008, p.17,18.*

“The Tablet has been interpreted primarily from the point of view of internal strife within the community of believers. However, the archetypal nature of its symbolism enables the Tablet to be viewed in a broader spiritual context. Many passages of the Tablet also deal with various aspects of spiritual development. At one time or another, most every spiritual seeker has to confront the issues raised by this Tablet, whether from within or without.” *Sours, The Tablet of the Holy Mariner-An Illustrated Guide, 2002, p.26.*

“Contents: include the following taken from Taherzadeh, Balyuzi, and Shoghi Effendi, and others:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1) To teach of the dangers of departing from the Covenant | 6) Rejection of the Faith by the public at large |
| 2) To foretell of coming events | 7) Coming times of difficulties, importance of keeping faith |
| 3) To show ways to protect oneself in the Covenant | 8) Sorrow in exile |
| 4) More direct allusion to Bahá’u’lláh’s station. | 9) Many other mystical meanings...” |
| 5) Allusion to the unfaithfulness of some of Bahá’u’lláh’s followers; especially Mírzá Yahyá and Sayyed Muhammad-i-Isfahani. | |

Winters, Tablet of the Holy Mariner – Tablet study outline, babai-library.com, 1999.

SUMMARY OF INTERPRETATIONS - Most interpretations of the first half of the Arabic Tablet are similar. The second half of the Tablet have much more varied interpretations... In summary:

The first part of the Tablet - the travels of the passengers and the ark - is typically interpreted as being connected physically to Bahá’u’lláh’s Declaration (launch of the Bahá’í Faith) and His moving exile from Baghdad to the Holy Land; and spiritually to His followers’ spiritual ascent.

The second part of the Tablet - the casting out – is consistently interpreted as being associated with the spiritual descent of Mírzá Yahyá and his followers, and is also applied to future covenant-breakers and their followers.

The meaning of the third part of the Tablet, the maid of heaven and her initial actions, is generally interpreted as stressing the magnificence of Bahá’u’lláh’s Declaration and its impact on the world.

The final part of the Tablet, the favored maiden’s search and death, has a different interpretation from each of the authors cited in this deepening! The interpretations of the three published authors are briefly described here and in more detail in Part II. In light of Bahá’u’lláh’s opinion of interpretation, multiple interpretations can be appropriate.

Two authors interpret the favored maiden to be a head of the Bahá’í Faith who dies in anguish after realizing that the “claimants” are unfaithful: Taherzadeh considers the dying maiden to represent Bahá’u’lláh’s death, leading to the conclusion that the whole Tablet is about the Covenant; Samandari interprets the dying maiden to represent ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, leading to the conclusion that the last story in the Tablet is about the Lesser Covenant. Sours compares the maiden to a “true seeker” who finds corruption within her religious community; she becomes disillusioned and part of her “dies”, but that allows her to able to get closer to God through detachment from the world and greater spiritual awareness.

Since Bahá’u’lláh, as the Holy Mariner, is the recipient of this Tablet, we can assume that He knows the intended meanings. However, the best and most relevant interpretations for you are the ones that help you get closer to God.

Comments and Discussion. What do you think of these interpretations? Do you have your own?



5) THE TABLET AND YOU

While it can be satisfying to gain a better understanding of one of Bahá’u’lláh’s important Tablets, this effort doesn’t reach its full potential until you internalize the messages within the Tablet. The original purpose of the Arabic Tablet was to prepare Bahá’u’lláh for His Declaration; the original purpose of the Persian Tablet was to prepare the Bábis to accept Bahá’u’lláh and become Bahá’ís; in 1921, the purpose was to prepare the Bahá’ís to be steadfast during the attacks on the Covenant. The Arabic Tablet was Shoghi Effendi’s first major translation after He became Guardian, so it also helped to prepare him for the Guardianship. Over the years, the Tablet has been a source of inspiration and strength; it can also help to prepare you to grow spiritually and to take your next step in your mystical journey towards God.

Optional - Audio. Search for the chant of Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá (“O Thou Glory of the Most Glorious”) from the Second Bahá’í World Congress in 1992 – suggested recording on youtube.com – “Bahai Melody - Ya Baha'u'l-Abha” (uploaded Nov 13, 2007, 5:25, with Bahá’í landscape scenes). Play it on low volume as a background for the following readings.

“It is also possible to read the Tablet from a personal point of view – identifying our own spiritual natures with the forces of light and darkness described in the Tablet. The ark of eternity, the fallen angels, the land of exile, the Mariner, the Arabian Youth, or the celestial maidens described in the Tablet can all be understood as personal and interior. From this perspective, the reader is not a passive observer, but rather an active participant.

“In Bahá’u’lláh’s writings, the unity of God, unity of religion, and unity of humankind are the greatest and most central spiritual truths. In its broadest sense, entering the ark of eternity is the realization of this unity, which has its origin in the oneness of God... Division arises from human perceptions and limitations. Through this realization, the dweller in the ark can sail safely over all religious seas. Religious strife, whether originating in envy, ambition, or ignorance leads to expulsion from heaven. Likewise, every seeker’s attachments and prejudices have caused the Beloved to be exiled to a distant land.”

Sours, The Tablet of the Holy Mariner-An Illustrated Guide, 2002, pp.38-39.

.....
“To grasp the significance of this Tablet we must remember that with the coming of Bahá’u’lláh, the Day of God Himself has been ushered in, and that mankind has been given the most precious gift of His Faith. Throughout His Writings there are many references to the greatness of His Revelation...

‘Great indeed is this Day! The allusions made to it in all the sacred Scriptures as the Day of God attest its greatness. The soul of every Prophet of God, of every Divine Messenger, hath thirsted for this wondrous Day. All the divers kindreds of the earth have, likewise, yearned to attain it,’...

“To be born in this Day and to be the recipient of such favors is the greatest of God’s bounties to man. But this privilege carries with it great responsibilities, too. For once the believer has recognized the Manifestation of God, his function is to obey His commandments faithfully. If such loyalty and devotion are not whole-hearted and unqualified, he cannot be called steadfast in the Covenant of God. The destiny of the true believer and the heights to which he can attain are dependent upon his sincerity and faithfulness in the Cause of God.

“When the individual recognizes Bahá’u’lláh and is assured of His divine station, he enters the ‘ark’. The spiritual energies released by Bahá’u’lláh, as well as His Teachings, will assist him to advance and deepen in the Cause, but at the same time his tests will correspondingly multiply. For the faith of a believer is tested in various ways. Some are afflicted with suffering and persecution, others have spiritual battles which may last a lifetime. But if one has faith and is ready at all times to surrender his will fully to that of Bahá’u’lláh, he can win through. Otherwise, any trace of self or passion, of desire for and attachment to earthly things, will bar his spiritual advancement, and may in the end kill the spark of his faith altogether.

“The station to which a true believer can attain in this day is extremely high... Whoever achieves this station will become the embodiment of selflessness, humility and servitude, will die of himself and live in God. Such a believer is indeed worthy as Bahá’u’lláh mentions in the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, to ‘soar upon the wings of spirit unto that station which the Lord hath exalted above all mention in the worlds below’, to ‘wing through space even as the favored birds in the realm of eternal reunion’, and to ‘know the mysteries hidden in the Seas of light’.”

Taberzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, Volume 1, 1976, pp.256-259,243.

.....
“The Tablet’s symbolism suggests that human beings have a spiritual destiny, that this destiny is attained through the direct intervention of God, unfolds in stages, and is determined by free will... While the seeker can ascend spiritually, God is ultimately beyond human attainment or comprehension... The Tablet’s core ethical and spiritual teaching is expressed in its message about detachment, purity, humility, servitude, self-sacrifice, truthfulness, faithfulness, and love. The Tablet warns of the errors of pride, vanity, idleness, infidelity, and deception. God’s part in human redemption is evident in the presence of the Mariner, the Guide, who directs the way to the spiritual life.”

“Whichever way the Tablet is understood, the reader who is able to relate the spiritual import of each verse to his of her own self will be approaching the text in a most beneficial light.”

Sours, The Tablet of the Holy Mariner—An Illustrated Guide, 2002, pp.40-41,36.

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Comments and Discussion. Consider: What or who can you relate to in the Arabic and/or Persian Tablets? What would a Tablet meant for you sound like? What would a Tablet meant for your Bahá’í community sound like?



CONTINUE TO PART II or FINALE

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Continue- If you would like to study more, this would be a good time for a break. Continue to Part II - Interpretations, which will take 3+ hours to complete as a group, without optional exercises and discussion. Part II is for those who are particularly interested in the interpretation of the Tablet and presents multiple interpretations, none of which are authoritative.

Or for a shorter add-on to Part I’s deepening, consider:

Part II pages 9, 15, 16 and C – L. These pages introduce and summarize the different interpretations from five authors, then present several themes from the Tablet with interpretations and supporting scripture. For groups, this will take ~90 minutes without discussion.

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OR Finale – This is a good place to end a group deepening; especially for those who like to formulate their own personal interpretations of the writings and do not wish to hear others’ interpretations.

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Optional - Audio. Search for a good recording of the Tablet of the Holy Mariner chanted in the original Arabic (*not found online in 2016*). Suggested alternate – Tablet of Ahmad (*chanted in Arabic*) – the suggested recording on youtube.com does not have an English title, the video is by Ezzatollah Rouhani Seissan (*uploaded Oct. 21, 2010, 14:35*), the chant is by Adieh. Another suggested alternate – the songs of angels – search for a ~15 minute recording that is reminiscent of angelic maidens singing “Glorified be my (our) Lord, the All-Glorious (Most High)!” Play the recording as a background while reciting the Arabic Tablet as recommended below.

.....
Recite the Arabic Tablet (with optional audio) from a Bahá’í prayer book using two readers; one reader for the verses and another reader for the refrains. Try to imbue this reading with a moving spirit!

Alláh’u’abhá!



Tablet of the Holy Mariner *by Bahá'u'lláh*

- translated from the Arabic by Shoghi Effendi - condensed

“Study the Tablet of the Holy Mariner that ye may know the truth, and consider that the Blessed Beauty hath fully foretold future events. Let them who perceive, take warning!” - ‘Abdu’l-Bahá – Ridván, 1921

- i He is the Gracious, the Well-Beloved!
- ii O Holy Mariner!
- 1 Bid thine ark of eternity appear before the Celestial Concourse,
- 1g Glorified be my Lord, the All-Glorious! (=G!)
- 2 Launch it upon the ancient sea, in His Name, the Most Wondrous, G!
- 3 And let the angelic spirits enter, in the Name of God, the Most High. G!
- 4 Unmoor it, then, that it may sail upon the ocean of glory, G!
- 5 Haply the dwellers therein may attain the retreats of nearness in the everlasting realm. G! ____
- 6 Having reached the sacred strand, the shore of the crimson seas, G!
- 7 Bid them issue forth and attain this ethereal invisible station, G!
- 8 A station wherein the Lord hath in the Flame of His Beauty appeared within the deathless tree; G!
- 9 Wherein the embodiments of His Cause cleansed themselves of self and passion; G!
- 10 Around which the Glory of Moses doth circle with the everlasting hosts; G!
- 11 Wherein the Hand of God was drawn forth from His bosom of Grandeur; G!
- 12 Wherein the ark of the Cause remaineth motionless even though to its dwellers be declared all divine attributes. G! ____
- 13 O Mariner! Teach them that are within the ark that which we have taught thee behind the mystic veil. G!
- 14 Perchance they may not tarry in the sacred snow-white spot, G!
- 15 But may soar upon the wings of the spirit unto that station which the Lord hath exalted above all mention in the worlds below, G!
- 16 May wing through space even as the favored birds in the realm of eternal reunion; G!
- 17 May know the mysteries hidden in the Seas of light. G!
- 18 They passed the grades of worldly limitations and reached that of the divine unity, the center of heavenly guidance. G! ____
- 19 They have desired to ascend unto that state which the Lord hath ordained to be above their stations. G!
- 20 Whereupon the burning meteor cast them out from them that abide in the Kingdom of His Presence, G!
- 21 And they heard the Voice of Grandeur raised from behind the unseen pavilion upon the Height of Glory: G!
- 22 “O guardian angels! Return them to their abode in the world below, G!
- 23 “Inasmuch as they have purposed to rise to that sphere which the wings of the celestial dove have never attained; G!
- 24 “Whereupon the ship of fancy standeth still which the minds of them that comprehend cannot grasp.” G! ____
- 25 Whereupon the maid of heaven looked out from her exalted chamber, G!
- 26 And with her brow signed to the Celestial Concourse, G!
- 27 Flooding with the light of her countenance the heaven and the earth, G!
- 28 And as the radiance of her beauty shone upon the people of dust, G!
- 29 All beings were shaken in their mortal graves. G! ____
- 30 She then raised the call which no ear through all eternity hath ever heard, G!
- 31 And thus proclaimed: “By the Lord! He whose heart hath not the fragrance of the love of the exalted and glorious Arabian Youth, G!
- 32 “Can in no wise ascend unto the glory of the highest heaven.” G! ____
- 33 Thereupon she summoned unto herself one maiden from her handmaidens, G!
- 34 And commanded her: “Descend into space from the mansions of eternity, G!
- 35 “And turn thou unto that which they have concealed in the inmost of their hearts. G!
- 36 “Shouldst thou inhale the perfume of the robe from the Youth that hath been hidden within the tabernacle of light by reason of that which the hands of the wicked have wrought, G!
- 37 “Raise a cry within thyself, that all the inmates of the chambers of Paradise, that are the embodiments of the eternal wealth, may understand and hearken; G!
- 38 “That they may all come down from their everlasting chambers and tremble, G!
- 39 “And kiss their hands and feet for having soared to the heights of faithfulness; G!
- 40 “Perchance they may find from their robes the fragrance of the Beloved One.” G! ____
- 41 Thereupon the countenance of the favored damsel beamed above the celestial chambers even as the light that shineth from the face of the Youth above His mortal temple; G!
- 42 She then descended with such an adorning as to illumine the heavens and all that is therein. G!
- 43 She bestirred herself and perfumed all things in the lands of holiness and grandeur. G!
- 44 When she reached that place she rose to her full height in the midmost heart of creation, G!
- 45 And sought to inhale their fragrance at a time that knoweth neither beginning nor end. G!
- 46 She found not in them that which she did desire, and this, verily, is but one of His wondrous tales. G! ____
- 47 She then cried aloud, wailed and repaired to her own station within her most lofty mansion, G!
- 48 And then gave utterance to one mystic word, whispered privily by her honeyed tongue, G!
- 49 And raised the call amidst the Celestial Concourse and the immortal maids of heaven: G!
- 50 “By the Lord! I found not from these idle claimants the breeze of Faithfulness! G!
- 51 “By the Lord! The Youth hath remained lone and forlorn in the land of exile in the hands of the ungodly.” G!
- 52 She then uttered within herself such a cry that the Celestial Concourse did shriek and tremble, G!
- 53 And she fell upon the dust and gave up the spirit. It seemeth she was called and hearkened unto Him that summoned her unto the Realm on High. G! ____
- 54 Glorified be He that created her out of the essence of love in the midmost heart of His exalted paradise! G!
- 55 Thereupon the maids of heaven hastened forth from their chambers, upon whose countenances the eye of no dweller in the highest paradise had ever gazed.
- 55g Glorified be our Lord, the Most High!
- 56 They all gathered around her, and lo! they found her body fallen upon the dust;
- 56g Glorified be our Lord, the Most High!
- 57 And as they beheld her state and comprehended a word of the tale told by the Youth, they bared their heads, rent their garments asunder, beat upon their faces, forgot their joy, shed tears and smote with their hands upon their cheeks, and this is verily one of the mysterious grievous afflictions—
- 57g Glorified be our Lord, the Most High!

Tablet of the Holy Mariner (Persian
version)

Lawh-i Malláhu'l-Quds

by **Bahá'u'lláh**

Provisional translation by Juan R. I. Cole

He is the Foreigner, the Persian, the Iraqi.

When the passengers on the divine ark had clung to one of the names, with the permission of the holy mariner in the pre-existent vessel, then did it set sail upon the sea of names. They traversed the stations of limitation, so that they might make for the Yemen of the powerful sovereign of oneness, arriving at the shore of divine unity. Thus might they drink from the chalice of transcendence. Indeed, by the aid of the lord, that eternal ark set sail upon and plied the spiritual waters of wisdom.

Then they reached a place where the name, the Still, became dominant over their course, so that the ship of the spirit was becalmed, unable to move. At that moment, the impregnable command of the lord descended from the holy and everlasting heavens. The mariner of eternity was ordered to teach a single letter of the hidden word to the people of the ark. Thus did they, by the succor of the Unseen, pass through the valley of psychological bewilderment and arrive at the great court of spiritual unity, attaining the Mount Qaf of eternal life and the presence of the lord of souls. When the people of the ship attained to the word of the spiritual friend, they were

immediately filled with meaning and soared into the sacred sky. By the divine grace and mercy, they passed beyond the peaks of carnal desire and the deepest levels of negligence and blindness. At that moment the breezes of paradise wafted upon their bodies from the sanctuary of the All Merciful. After they soared in the heavens of divine nearness, they traversed the spiritual stations in the place of safety and security. Finally, they halted at the homeland of lovers. The inhabitants of this station arose to serve them and show them kindness. The immortal attendants and the holy servers poured ruby wine liberally. Intoxication with the wine of divine knowledge, and the cup of eternal wisdom induced such love and distraction that they escaped from their own being and that of existing things. They gave their hearts to the beauty of the friend. For ages and centuries they settled and dwelt in that pleasant and spiritual station, in that divine and holy rose garden, with perfect joy and happiness.

Then the gales of divine tests and the winds of lordly temptation blew from the Sheba of the everlasting Cause. They became distracted by the beauty of the wine server and grew heedless of the immortal countenance, to the extent that they imagined the shadow to be the sun and phantoms to be light. They set out for the ladders of the greatest name so that they might scale those heavens and arrive at that seat and place. When they rose toward it, the divine assayers descended upon them with the sacred touchstone, by the irresistible decree of the lord. When these emissaries did not perceive the scent of the spiritual youth, they forbade entry to all.

Afterwards, there occurred what is inscribed upon the guarded tablet.

Then, you who dwell upon the plain of divine love and drink the wine of unceasing forgiveness, do not exchange nearness to the beauty of the friend for both worlds. Do not prefer the presence of the wine server to meeting him, and do not give your heart to the intoxicant of ignorance and heedlessness in preference to his wine of knowledge and wisdom. Lips are for mentioning the beloved; do not defile them with filthy water. The heart is the home of everlasting mysteries, do not busy it with perishable things. Seek the water of life from the fountain of the beauty of the All-Praised, not from the manifestations of Satan.

Yes, this ephemeral youth here mentions the highest station of the love of the divine friends. He does so by reference to the wonders of the text of divine unity and the gems of the wisdom of the self-sufficient sovereign. Thus, perhaps some might recognize the value of courage and gallantry, and put off the shirt of negligence and carnal appetites. Perhaps they will visit the illumined beauty of the pure, radiant and sanctified friend in the land of love, detachment, amiability and exaltation. Thus would they receive the lights dawning from the morn of his brow and the effulgence of the perspicuous day, to at least the extent that they would be enabled to unite their inner and outer selves. We have passed beyond the loftiness of abstraction, the sublimity of divine oneness, the ultimate recognition that God is above all attributes, and the most great sanctification. Now, they must put forth their

utmost effort and give their unswerving attention, so that their inward secrets not be contrary to their overt behavior, nor their outward deeds at variance with their inner mysteries. We have traversed the stage of expending the self for others. Arise to expend justice and fairness upon the souls that pertain to you.

In the end, however, you prefer the cloak of carnal longing and desire to the robe of divine benediction, and you exchange the song of the nightingale of immortality for the disagreeable croaking of death that issues from the throats of the hateful and rebellious. How miserable a trade you make! We are from God and to him do we return. God willing, we maintain the hope that the immortal temples of glory shall, through the adornment of holiness and the divine attributes, appear illumined, gentle, pure and undefiled like the eternal sun. This is not difficult for God.