
PART II - INTERPRETATIONS (optional!) Demystifying the Tablet of the Holy Mariner

Notes: Part II is recommended for those who are particularly interested in the interpretation of the Arabic Tablet; this may not be appropriate for a general Bahá'í audience.

Part II presents multiple interpretations of the Tablet of the Holy Mariner primarily from five English language Bahá'í commentators: three are the published authors Taherzadeh, Sours and Samandari, who were quoted extensively in Part I; and two additional commentators - Mboya who has an online study guide on the Tablet, and Bau who is the preparer of this deepening and whose commentary is presented in this deepening. The references for the other four authors are listed below:

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 book, *Commentary on the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, 2008*.

Aziz Mboya's *The Tablet of the Holy Mariner-Study Compilations, 2000* is online at bahai-library.com.

Optional Audio. If you enjoyed the audio backgrounds in Part I, you may enjoy a musical background for Part II. For groups, the introductory readings below and Section 6 will take ~1½ hours, Section 7 will take 1½-2+ hours. Instead of using individual recordings for each reading, it is best to use a CD or some other long mix of recordings. The Part I Middle Eastern chants and songs were meant to create a sense of place; in Part II, the interpretations expand the focus out from Bahá'u'lláh, so other meditative music could also be appropriate. If you used the youtube recordings in Part I, try a playlist or make your own mix.

“[In] the Seven Valleys...Bahá'u'lláh praises Shaykh Muhiy'id-Dín for his interpretation of the common sparrow...then adds his own alternative interpretation that uses a seemingly arbitrary approach... In the Book of Certitude [Kitáb-i-Íqán]... Bahá'u'lláh speaks at length about the interpretation of scripture... He also criticizes religious leaders who have failed to understand the symbolic nature of the most sacred scripture, especially the prophetic verses, indicating clearly that it is an error to insist on literal interpretations of such verses... These statements indicate that personal interpretation of scripture according to methods that recognize the symbolism in the texts, is fundamental to an illumined understanding of the sacred books. Bahá'u'lláh both encourages personal interpretation as that necessary aspect of the seeker's search for truth and tries to liberate seekers from the oppression of those who try to suppress individual interpretation...

“With regard to the meaning of interpretation and the best approach to use: First, although all verses may have an inner significance, the evident or outward meaning of the commandments must not be ignored... Second, elucidating the meaning of texts via the inspired sayings and explanations of the appointed spiritual guides is acceptable... Third...is when the commentator uncovers meanings based on existing scriptural evidence rather than mere personal opinion... Unlike mere unsupported personal opinion, this method has the benefit of establishing a contextual boundary that helps limit unwarranted conjecture, even if the conclusions are in error.” *Sours, The Tablet of the Holy Mariner—An Illustrated Guide, 2002, pp.33-35.*

“In several of His Tablets, Bahá'u'lláh affirms the distinction between allegorical verses, which are susceptible to interpretation, and those verses that relate to such subjects as the laws and ordinances... The interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi are considered divinely guided and are binding on the Bahá'ís.

“The existence of authoritative interpretations does not preclude the individual from engaging in the study of the Teachings and thereby arriving at a personal interpretation or understanding. A clear distinction is, however, drawn in the Bahá'í Writings between authoritative interpretation and the understanding that each individual arrives at from a study of its Teachings. Individual interpretations based on a person's understanding of the Teachings constitute the fruit of man's rational power and may well contribute to a greater comprehension of the Faith. Such views, nevertheless, lack authority. In presenting their personal ideas, individuals are cautioned not to discard the authority of the revealed words, not to deny or contend with the authoritative interpretation, and not to engage in controversy; rather they should offer their thoughts as a contribution to knowledge, making it clear that their views are merely their own.” *Kitáb-i-Aqdas, notes #130.*

Optional – Those who would like to review the Tablet's storyline should read Sours' summary below:

“[The Tablet] is an allegory from beginning to end...divided into two main scenes...forming one dramatic narration. Bahá'u'lláh is the narrator...who in the first act is speaking to himself, the Mariner... In act one, the Mariner is called upon to launch a ship designated the “ark of eternity,” on a journey to the tree of life situated beyond the shore of the crimson seas. There the Mariner teaches the passengers the mysteries of God which enable them to ascend like angels through the realms of heaven. Some of the passengers desire a station for themselves that is beyond their nature to achieve. Consequently, they are cast out of heaven by a meteor and returned to earth by the guardian angels.

“In act two, the Maid of Heaven – a feminine personification of the spirit of God...appears and announces that the highest heaven is inaccessible to those who do not possess the love of God. The Maid of Heaven calls upon one of her handmaidens. She instructs her to seek out those who are faithful to God so that the dwellers of the celestial realm may pay homage to them. The handmaiden descends to earth and conducts her search, but finds no one. She then returns to heaven and proclaims the state of treachery that exists on earth. Stricken by grief over humanity's unfaithfulness, the handmaiden falls down and dies. Her spirit returns to God, and the other maidens of the celestial concourse gather around her body grieving. Like a theatrical drama, this tragic scene of the dying handmaiden...ends the poem.”

Sours, The Tablet of the Holy Mariner—An Illustrated Guide 2002, p.28.



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6) COMPARING INTERPRETATIONS

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This section summarizes the interpretations from five commentators; Taherzadeh (1975), Mboya (2000), Sours (2002), Samandari (2008), and Bau (2016); with some explanatory supporting texts. These interpretations focus on the Arabic Tablet. The reader may not agree with every interpretation, but these authors provide evidence to support their views, so all should be considered as appropriate contributions to the understanding of the meaning of the Tablet. Other interpretations which are also correlated to scriptures or historical events may be equally appropriate.

The interpretations are presented from the earliest to most recent and show the evolving nature of interpreting the Tablet. Later authors tend to provide multiple interpretations. All of the authors indicate that the Tablet is prophetic, so other interpretations are expected as history unfolds. Each author uses supporting scripture from the western religions: Judeo/Christian/Islamic/Bábi/Bahá'í. Different interpretations are expected as the Bahá'í writings are published in more languages and are accessible to more people. Our individual responses to these differences are essentially a practice of unity in diversity!

“In order to prevent schism within the Bahá'í community, Bahá'u'lláh made a distinction between individual interpretation and authoritative interpretation. Individuals are encouraged to investigate the truth for themselves and to arrive at their own informed understanding of scripture. But it is not permitted that they should insist that others accept their views as authoritative... Since it is taught that scripture has many meanings, this distinction between individual and authoritative interpretation has not had the effect of creating a narrow view of Bahá'u'lláh's writings, but rather has made the natural multiplicity of view less harmful to the community's unity...

“Many commentators interpret the text by way of other texts in order to make their interpretations appear authoritative... The fact that individual interpretations are not authoritative mitigates the divisive effects of multiple interpretations.”

Sours, The Tablet of the Holy Mariner—An Illustrated Guide, 2002, p.90,86.

“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.

“The Tablet of the Holy Mariner was revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad. 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 to an individual believer, March 8, 1936, Lights of Guidance, 1936, #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 Baghdád, 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 to an individual believer, August 10, 1934, Lights of Guidance, 1936, #1609.

“...the ‘Tablet of the Holy Mariner,’ in which Bahá'u'lláh prophesies the severe afflictions that are to befall Him.”

Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, 1944. p.140.

Aside from a few short quotes by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, there are no authoritative interpretations of the Tablet of the Holy Mariner. Since this is an important but mysterious Tablet, there have been numerous efforts to interpret its meaning in addition to those presented here. For a more in-depth study, deepen directly from the authors' works and other sources.

Note: Stop for comments and discussion after reading the section for each author.

TAHERZADEH – 1975 – Taherzadeh was a member of the Universal House of Justice and the author of a highly acclaimed series of books on the history and writings of Bahá'u'lláh, The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. He devoted Chapter 14 in Volume 1 of the series to the Tablet of the Holy Mariner. The high quality of Taherzadeh's interpretation and his supporting evidence set a standard; alternate interpretations should also have a similar level of quality and evidence. He relates that the entire Tablet of the Holy Mariner is about the Covenant. With a grand overview, all aspects of the relationship between the worldly and the divine can be considered to be expressions of the Covenant.

“In order to enable the soul to progress and attain spiritual qualities...God has made a Covenant with man and has required him to abide by its provisions... Whereas the body of man is bound by the laws of nature, his soul is governed by the laws of the Covenant of God. A covenant is a contract between two sides, each of whom has obligations to fulfill...”

“The relationship of God with man in this Covenant is somewhat similar to the relationship between the principal of a school and the child. As soon as a child goes to school for the first time, he enters into a covenant with the school principal, although often without really knowing it. In this contract the principal provides the means for the education of the child... The child's part in this covenant is to follow the instructions of the teacher and learn every lesson he is taught. It is through this process that the child acquires knowledge, develops his capacity, and becomes endowed with intellectual and spiritual powers. As the child grows in learning and maturity, the principal will appoint other teachers to contribute to his education.”

Taherzadeh, The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, p.1-2.

A major feature of Taherzadeh's interpretation is his focus on “true believers”; he states that the station of a true believer in Bahá'u'lláh's dispensation is Moses-like and higher than the station attainable under previous manifestations of God. He also indicates that “claimants” will be expelled by the Covenant, and that this part of the Tablet's message has been applicable throughout Bahá'u'lláh's dispensation. An interesting aspect is Taherzadeh's interpretation that the individual celestial beings; the Voice, the maid of heaven and the favored handmaiden, all represent Bahá'u'lláh. This helps to eliminate any notion of duality between Bahá'u'lláh and God, and reinforces the concept of divine unity.

“The theme of this Tablet is the story of the Covenant and man's unfaithfulness to it. Its message is applicable not only to the days of Bahá'u'lláh, but also to the ministries of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, and indeed to the present time... Bahá'u'lláh refers to Himself in this Tablet as the 'Holy Mariner' and to the believers as the 'dwellers' in the 'ark'. In His Writings the term 'ark' often symbolizes the Cause of God and the Covenant. Those who enter it are safe and secure... In the opening passages of the Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh alludes to the inconceivable greatness of His Revelation... He testifies that He Who conversed with Moses on Sinai is now, in this Day, manifested to men, that the believers--them that are within the ark' and the 'angelic spirits'--can, if they but purify their hearts, 'attain the retreats of nearness in the everlasting realm'.

“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... To be born in this Day and to be the recipient of such favours is the greatest of God's bounties to man... Among His companions there were some... souls [who] manifested such a degree of faith and devotion, such humility and detachment as had rarely been experienced by mankind in former Dispensations.

“Others would enter the presence of Bahá'u'lláh and partake of His divine knowledge, yet, because of their ego and ambition, be unable to attain the necessary qualities of lowliness, humility and submissiveness before the Manifestation of God. They were blind to Bahá'u'lláh's divine station, were filled with jealousy at His rising prestige and power, and aspired to occupy the same position as He... Such an act invokes the wrath of God and brings destruction upon man. For instance, those who broke the Covenant of the Báb and opposed Bahá'u'lláh were of this kind, as were those who broke the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and opposed the Centre of His Covenant, 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

“It is concerning such individuals that Bahá'u'lláh in the Tablet of the Holy Mariner writes... ‘Whereupon the burning meteor cast them out from them that abide in the Kingdom of His Presence’... In these words Bahá'u'lláh has, for the first time, clearly indicated that those who oppose the Centre of the Cause and break His Covenant will be cast out from the people of Bahá. The 'burning meteor' may be regarded as symbolic of a mighty instrument that Bahá'u'lláh has instituted for the protection of His Cause, namely, His Covenant. In the days of Bahá'u'lláh the authority to expel Covenant-breakers was vested in Himself alone; later it devolved upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as the Centre of the Covenant, and then upon Shoghi Effendi, as the Guardian of the Cause, to exercise this authority. In this day [1975], should anyone break the Covenant his expulsion would be by decision of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, subject to the approval of the Universal House of Justice...

“At the time that the Tablet...was revealed, Bahá'u'lláh's unfaithful half-brother Mírzá Yahyá, Siyyid Muhammad-i-Isfahání and a few others were still mingling with the believers... The violators of the Covenant of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh did everything in their power to undermine the edifice of the Cause of God; yet in spite of their concerted efforts they were unable to break its unity. This is one of the unique features of the Cause and is due to the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh through which the unity of His Faith is permanently safeguarded...

“The appearance of the 'Maid of Heaven' mentioned in the Tablet of the Holy Mariner is allegorical. In the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, He has used the 'Maid of Heaven' to refer to Himself or to one of the attributes of God, and sometimes as the personification of the 'Most Great Spirit'. He has also referred to Himself in this Tablet as the 'exalted and glorious' Youth 'that hath been hidden within the tabernacle of light', and Who 'hath remained lone and forlorn in the land of exile in the hands of the ungodly.'”

Taberzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Volume 1, 1976, pp.229,236,238-243.

At the end of the Tablet, Taherzadeh interprets the maids' grief as the community of early the Bahá'ís mourning the death of Bahá'u'lláh. Taherzadeh compared the anguish of the dying maiden to the depth of Bahá'u'lláh's own sorrows over the unfaithful. The maiden dies of grief from her extreme sensitivity to the unfaithfulness of the “claimants”. The heads of the Bahá'í Faith were all very sensitive to the misdeeds of unfaithful Bahá'ís:

“Covenant-breaking always made Shoghi Effendi ill, it was as if he were the Cause, in some mysterious way, and any attack on its body affected him who was its heart... It's as if, when someone was unsound in the Covenant, they attacked the very body of the Manifestation, or the Exemplar, or the Guardian. I have seen this. It is like poison. He recovers from it, but it causes him untold suffering and it was from such things that the Master described Himself in His Will as 'this broken-winged bird.'

“Shoghi Effendi has been talking to me about his own miseries. He says those around Him killed 'Abdu'l-Bahá as they killed Bahá'u'lláh' - he even says ‘They will kill me too.’ ...‘The Guardian said Bahá'u'lláh must have suffered terribly as He could of course foresee how Muhammad 'Ali would turn against the Master in the future. But He kept it all within Him.’”

Rúhíyyih Khánum, The Priceless Pearl, 1969, pp 119,160,162.

“Sincerity and faithfulness are the attributes of a true believer. The most painful affliction of the Manifestation of God is unfaithfulness shown by those who profess to be His followers. No other suffering, even physical torture and martyrdom, can ever hurt Him as much as this. It was the realization that Bahá'u'lláh would be afflicted by such suffering, foreshadowed in the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, that brought deepest anxiety to His companions when first they heard it.”

Taberzadeh, The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Volume 1, 1976, p.242,243.

MBOYA – 2000 – Mboya's study guide, *The Tablet of the Holy Mariner-Study Compilations*, is available online at bahai-library.com. His study guide includes; his line-by-line interpretation of the Tablet with supporting Bahá'í writings, a list of interpreted mystic symbols, and many Bahá'í writings to elucidate his interpretations of the Tablet's words and concepts.

Mboya's interpretation of the first parts of the Tablet is similar to those of the other authors, but he also notably makes a connection between the journey of the believers to The Seven Valleys. In the second half, he interprets the maid of heaven to be Bahá'u'lláh, an “independent prophet” who brings forth the Day of Resurrection; the group of handmaidens are interpreted as “dependent prophets,” and the favored handmaiden is interpreted as a future “dependent prophet.” So Mboya interprets the handmaiden story as being applicable primarily in the future, which may be supported by the Persian Tablet's phrase “for ages and centuries.” Here are some Bahá'í writings that clarify these concepts and an excerpt from Mboya's interpretation.

“The Prophets are of two kinds. One are the independent Prophets Who are followed; the other kind are not independent and are themselves followers...The independent Prophets are the lawgivers and the founders of a new cycle. Through Their appearance the world puts on a new garment, the foundations of religion are established, and a new book is revealed. Without an intermediary They receive bounty from the Reality of the Divinity...

“The other Prophets are followers and promoters, for they are branches and not independent; they receive the bounty of the independent Prophets, and they profit by the light of the Guidance of the universal Prophets. They are like the moon, which is not luminous and radiant in itself, but receives its light from the sun... Of themselves they have no power and might, except what they receive from the independent Prophets.”

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, #43.

“And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God”

The Holy Bible, King James Version, Revelation 11:16.

“In each cycle the guardians and holy souls have been twelve. So Jacob had twelve sons; in the time of Moses there were twelve heads or chiefs of the tribes; in the time of Christ there were twelve Apostles; and in the time of Muhammad there were twelve

Imáms. But in this glorious manifestation there are twenty-four, double the number of all the others, for the greatness of this manifestation requires it.”

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, #11.

“Regarding the four and twenty elders: The Master, in a Tablet, stated that they are the Báb, the 18 Letters of the Living and five others who would be known in the future. So far we do not know who these five others are.”

from a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, July 22, 1943: Bahá'í News No 171, Nov 1944, p.2; Lights of Guidance, #1713.

“Bahá'u'lláh unveils himself and manifests his signs” and the ‘Beings shaken in their mortal graves’ can be interpreted to refer to those who are ‘as dead’ and are awakened by the revelation of God on the Day of Resurrection... The Arabian Youth is the Báb... The Bábís who lack the fragrance of the Báb are not true believers, and also fail to recognise Bahá'u'lláh -- they are not acceptable to (have disbelieved in) God...

“The handmaidens are the pre-existent dependent (lesser) prophets of Bahá'u'lláh... The Independent Prophet (Bahá'u'lláh) is the Face of God and receives revelation directly from God. The dependent prophets (‘Maids of Heaven,’ ‘handmaidens,’ ‘Thy Chosen ones’) are the Face of the Independent Prophet and receive their revelation from the Independent Prophet (Bahá'u'lláh)...

“All recent major revelations have had dependent prophets -- The 12 Imams in era of Muhammad, the 12 Apostles in the era of Christ, and the 12 ‘minor’ prophets or chiefs in the era of Moses (among: David, Solomon, Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, Amos, Hezekiah, Elijah)... Also, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá explains...that there will be 24 dependent prophets in the Bahá'í era – twice the number [than] in each of the recent major revelations -- an aspect of the greatness of the Day of God....

“The dependent prophet [the favored handmaiden] declares her/his mission in a manner that is outwardly visible to all -- in ‘midmost heart of creation’... The appearance of dependent prophets, at whatever time - an unknown time, is a divine test to believers. The true believers have the fragrance of the Youth while those who fail the test (fail to recognise the dependent prophet) do not. For example, a female prophet could be a test if one has not truly embraced the Bahá'í principle of gender equality.”

Mboya, The Tablet of the Holy Mariner-Study Compilations, 2000, Chapter 1.

SOURS – 2002 – Sours’ book, The Tablet of the Holy Mariner—An Illustrated Guide to Bahá'u'lláh’s Mystical Work in the Sufi Tradition, is a particularly extensive treatise which includes his theological viewpoint, an evaluation of the symbols which are connected to the Bible and Quran and a verse-by-verse analysis. He considers the Tablet from many viewpoints and often presents multiple interpretations of the Tablet’s verses with insightful details and supporting scripture.

Sours details the connection between the journey of the ark to the exiles of Bahá'u'lláh. The meteor, which represents Mírzá Yahyá but can also describe other “claimants,” is compared to the story of Lucifer. The maid of heaven is identified as “Wisdom,” from the Bible’s Book of Proverbs who is the same maiden who visited Bahá'u'lláh at the Síyáh-Chál prison. The “claimants” are those who sought leadership in the Bábí Faith or “more broadly, it could refer to anyone who claims to be the follower of a religion or religious path but who is actually unfaithful to the spiritual life. The excerpt below presents only a fraction of Sours’ interpretation.

“Using...the ‘historical approach’...the Tablet is seen primarily in its original historic setting. In this sense, the Tablet is a prediction of the opposition Bahá'u'lláh faced as the spiritual leader of a religious community, which after 1863, was composed of both former Bábís and new converts. From this perspective, the reading of the Tablet in the garden of Baghdad among a gathering of friends and companions on the eve of Bahá'u'lláh’s departure for Istanbul suggests parallels to the account of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane prophesying his followers’ betrayal of him.

“The ark of eternity represents the teachings that preserve the unity and well being of the community of God. The rebellion and expulsion of the angels from heaven represents expulsion from the community of those who seek to create schism... The rebellious angels are...[those] who sought to murder Bahá'u'lláh in an ongoing, but failed, attempt to make themselves the leaders of the Bábí community... From the point of view of the historical development of the Bahá'í community and its unity, this prediction of betrayal, coupled with its assurance of victory over the schismatics...is the most important and central element in the Tablet.

“This same predictive and historical interpretation can also have an archetypal dimension, that is the Tablet can be understood as foreshadowing any struggle over leadership in the community initiated by persons who have no rightful claim to that position. This type of interpretation was made by ‘Abdul-Bahá in 1921...[when he] called attention to the Tablet of the Holy Mariner...[which was] 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...”

“The characteristics of this drama reflect the ancient account of the rebellion and expulsion of Lucifer... In the biblical account...Lucifer is cast out because of his pride implicit in his desire to ‘scale the heavens; higher than the stars of God’ and ‘rival the Most High.’ This theme of pride and jealousy is central to the descriptions in the Qur’an and the writings of the Báb... However, in the Tablet of the Holy Mariner...the angels are cast out because they ‘desire’ to reach a station which God has ordained to be above them. Pride and jealousy are, rather inferred by the broader connotations inherent in the traditional symbolism... In the book of Isaiah, Lucifer wishes to be like God, which means that Godhood is the station sought after. In the quranic version, God creates Adam perfect and innocent and commands all the angels to pay homage to him. Filled with pride, Satan wants to be worshipped like Adam and refuses to bow down.

“The Tablet is not, however, just about betrayal. Another dominant feature is the theme of how to draw near to God and attain the divine presence... It is understood commonly in mysticism, that the mystical path to God follows basic stages... described as purification, knowledge, and union... In the Tablet, the ark arrives at the shores of the crimson seas and the Mariner bids the passengers to leave the ark and attain a station which is a prelude to their ascent to heaven... In these verses the first steps in the mystic ascent to the center of heavenly guidance are set forth, namely, purification and the disclosure of the knowledge of God...

“The Tablet of the Holy Mariner makes numerous references to celestial beings... [T]he celestial beings are...arranged in a hierarchal structure...[and there are] various plains, or spheres, through which the faithful ascend and which are inhabited by celestial and angelic beings... The symbolism of a heavenly realm populated by celestial inhabitants with male and female genders is common to most religious traditions... The guardian angels...suggest the Cherubim who guard the entrance to paradise and whose image is put on the Ark of the Testimony in the Holy of Holies... In Bahá'u'lláh’s writings, angels refer to saintly people whether in this world or the next... In the Qur’an the maids of heaven are the brides of the faithful. In Bahá'u'lláh’s Book of Certitude, these maids of heaven (Arabic, *húris*) are given a metaphorical meaning signifying spiritual understanding or truth...

“The Maid of Heaven sends her handmaiden into the world to seek out faithful seekers so that the inmates of paradise can then pay homage to them... Although this type of symbolism exists in many ancient writings, Bahá’u’lláh’s Maid of Heaven is a personification very much like that found in Jewish wisdom literature... The Book of Proverbs describes Wisdom sending out her handmaidens to search for the faithful... [Wisdom] is described as a pre-existent reality, the source of creation, an emissary of God who appears to the saints and prophets throughout history in their hour of trial. She is associated with the Law of God...the pre-existent Logos or spirit of God... [Bahá’u’lláh’ maiden] in the *Síyáh-Chál* in 1852 [is] identified directly with Wisdom. In the *Words of Paradise*, Bahá’u’lláh writes: *‘Wisdom is God’s emissary and the revealer of His Name the Omniscient...thanks to its educating influence earthly beings have become imbued with a gemlike spirit... In the city of justice it is the unrivaled Speaker Who, in the year nine, illumined the world with the joyful tidings of this revelation.’*”

Sours, The Tablet of the Holy Mariner—An Illustrated Guide 2002, pp.36-41,48,58-59,69-71.

SAMANDARI – 2008 – Samandari’s booklet, Commentary on the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, explains the Arabic Tablet as a prophetic narrative of the Greater and Lesser Covenant. Samandari interprets the Tablet to be relevant to the Bahá’í community of 1921 since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá urged the Bahá’ís to study the Tablet several months before his death. Within this context, he connects the Tablet to events from Bahá’u’lláh’s Declaration in 1863 to the transition of authority to Shoghi Effendi after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s death in 1921; but he also acknowledges the Tablet’s prophetic nature to foresee future events.

“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

Samandari links the first half of the Tablet to Bahá’u’lláh and the Greater Covenant: His Declaration, exiles, the spiritual progress of His followers, the spread of the Bahá’í Faith, and the fall of Mírzá Yahyá. He relates the second half of the Tablet to the Lesser Covenant; where he interprets the maid of heaven’s selection of the favored handmaiden as Bahá’u’lláh’s appointment of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as His successor.

“There is, for example, the Greater Covenant which every Manifestation of God makes with His followers, promising that in the fullness of time a new Manifestation will be sent, and taking from them the undertaking to accept Him when this occurs. There is also the Lesser Covenant that a Manifestation of God makes with His followers that they will accept His appointed successor after Him. If they do so, the Faith can remain united and pure. If not, the Faith becomes divided and its force spent. It is a Covenant of this kind that Bahá’u’lláh made with His followers regarding ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá perpetuated through the Administrative Order.”

23 March 1975, from a letter written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer.

“The Covenant made by the Manifestation of God with His followers concerning His immediate successor is known as the Lesser Covenant. In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and later in His Will and Testament known as the *Kitáb-i-Ahd*, Bahá’u’lláh made such a covenant with His followers...

“One of the distinguishing features of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh...[is] a covenant whose characteristics are delineated by Bahá’u’lláh Himself, a covenant written in His own hand, unequivocal in the provisions it has made for the future of His Cause, and acknowledged as an authentic document even by those who violated it. It is through this divinely ordained instrument alone that the unity of the Bahá’í community is preserved, the purity of its teachings safeguarded, and the incorruptibility of its institutions guaranteed. ‘This is a Day that shall not be followed by night,’ is Bahá’u’lláh’s own testimony in this regard.”

Taherzadeh, The Covenant of Baha'u'llah, p. 99.

Samandari associates the handmaiden’s search with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s travels to the West and interprets the dying handmaiden to represent ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s death. He provides a dual interpretation for several passages. For example: the handmaiden’s whispered words could be interpreted as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament and/or The Tablets of the Divine Plan. Samandari also gives a dual interpretation of the “lone” Youth, as both “the youthful, dynamic and growing Cause” and “a wholly consecrated youth – Shoghi Effendi.” The “maids of heaven” are interpreted as representing future Manifestations who rush forth to welcome the spirit of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that has just left the mortal realm and entered the ‘Abhá Kingdom.”

“Any attempt to understand the content and the connotations of such a tablet would require an analytical approach to its words and verses that takes into consideration the Person of the Manifestation of God and the characters and events that interact with Him in formulating the panorama of a divine dispensation...

“ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has instructed us to ‘study the Tablet of the Holy Mariner that [we] may know the truth, and consider that the Blessed Beauty hath fully foretold future events.’ ‘Not only did [He] 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.’ This clearly demonstrates that the content of this Tablet revolves primarily around the release of the forces of the Covenant, its universal, creative influence, and the Divine expectation of a global transformation of the human race.

“As one views the mystical landscape of this Tablet, two major themes are prominent on the canvas of this heavenly masterpiece. The *first theme* is the creative forces of the Greater Covenant, and the *second theme* is the birth, movement and metamorphosis of the forces of the Lesser Covenant... A remarkably lucid, though somber panorama of events emerges as foretold by Bahá’u’lláh shortly before His declaration. A chronology of events and prophecies is identified:

- i) The portentous declaration of Bahá’u’lláh’s Mission to a close circle of sincere friends;
- ii) The exiles and sufferings of the Blessed Perfection;
- iii) Bahá’u’lláh’s trumpet call to the peoples of the world;
- iv) The treachery of Bahá’u’lláh’s half-brother, “The Calf;”
- v) The final banishment of Bahá’u’lláh to the Holy Land;
- vi) The appointment of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the Center of His Covenant;
- vii) The sufferings of “the Limb of the Law of God” at the hands of the wicked, “The Birds of the Night;”
- viii) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s prayerful and well meditated plan for the victory of His mission;
- ix) The travels of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the West;
- x) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sorrow over the limited response to His clarion call;
- xi) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s global call for teaching in the Tablets of the Divine Plan addressed to the North American subcontinent;
- xii) The completion of His well-guarded, indispensable document (whispered privily) as attested in His Will and Testament.”

Samandari, A Commentary on the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, 2008, pp.9,18-20.

BAU – 2016 – Bau acknowledges the other authors’ interpretations, but believes that Bahá’u’lláh may have interpreted something else from His visions in the Tablet; if the Arabic Tablet’s purpose was to propel Bahá’u’lláh towards His Declaration, His interpretation should have motivated Him to declare His mission. Bau’s interpretation relates to the human side of Bahá’u’lláh. Here, the Tablet is seen to address Bahá’u’lláh’s concerns; giving Him assurances of success, and alleviating His consternation over Mírzá Yahyá and the “claimants” to the Bábi Faith. This interpretation also includes references to the Persian Tablet (*quotes in italics*), which is considered to have been revealed primarily to help the 1863 Bábis onto the path towards becoming Bahá’ís.

The main premise for this interpretation is based on existing Christian and Bahá’í interpretations of the Bible’s prophetic Book of Revelation; where mystical women are commonly interpreted as representing “the Church”, or in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words “the Law of God.” Bahá’u’lláh had visions of a relationship with a heavenly maiden which can be interpreted as “marrying the Church” (see Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet of the Maiden). Bau interprets the maid of heaven as representing the eternal “Cause of God”, while the immortal handmaidens are interpreted to represent different “churches.” Thus the handmaiden’s death is interpreted as the “death” of a church. The only “church” which fits the context of the Tablet is the Bábi Faith.

“In [Revelation] chapter 12, verse 1, it is said: ‘And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.’ This woman is that bride, the Law of God that descended upon Muhammad.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, #13.

The first part of the Tablet; launching the ark, the passengers’ sea journey and the travelers’ spiritual ascent, was meant to show Bahá’u’lláh the good news; that after His Declaration, He would be successful in attracting followers and some of those followers would reach the highest heavens. More good news was revealed when the maid of heaven made her illuminating appearance, Bahá’u’lláh sees that His message would be spread across “the heaven and the earth” and “the people of dust”.

The travelers reach “*the homeland of lovers*” and are served by “*immortal attendants and holy servers*,” or houris, so they are no longer of this world and are interpreted as early Bahá’í martyrs. The story about the meteor showed Bahá’u’lláh that it would be God’s will to cast out Mírzá Yahyá and his followers as they continued their misdeeds in the path of their unacceptable ambitions. Bahá’u’lláh could turn away from mentioning the atrocities of Mírzá Yahyá and his compatriots, but God could not forgive the nearly successful attempt to murder Bahá’u’lláh by poison, since that was an attack on God Himself.

The “*guarded tablet*” refers to Bahá’u’lláh’s prophetic visions of the maid of heaven and the handmaidens; the meaning of the prophecy is intentionally “*guarded*,” which may be why there are so many different interpretations of this part of the Tablet. The maid of heaven’s test of faith to find “true believers” represents the Day of Judgment. The first test was carried out by the favored handmaiden representing the “Cause of the Báb”; she did not find any “true believers” amongst the “claimants” to Bábi leadership. The “exalted and glorious Arabian Youth” is interpreted to represent both the Báb (exalted) and Baha’u’llah (glorious). When the Youth is interpreted as Baha’u’llah, the “claimants” would be guilty of not recognizing “Him Whom God will make manifest.” However, interpreting the Youth to be the Báb reveals a much more grievous offense, since that would mean that the “claimants” to Bábi leadership throughout all time do not truly recognize even the Báb!

The harsh reality of seeing that the “claimant” Bábi leadership was “idle” throughout all time should have removed any hesitation Bahá’u’lláh would have had over creating disunity among the “claimants” in the Bábi community; seeing the death of the handmaiden for the Bábi Faith should have unequivocally eliminated any visions Bahá’u’lláh may have had of a promising future for the Bábi Faith. Thus, the handmaiden’s unsuccessful search and death showed Bahá’u’lláh that the fate of the Bábis was already sealed; this should have given Bahá’u’lláh’s human side the clarity, validation and impetus that He needed to support His Declaration at Ridván.

The other maids of heaven represent other churches/religions *and are not the type of houris who serve the faithful*. They mourn for their fallen companion but are also tremble about their own fate, since everyone in the heavens and earth would be subjected to the Day of Judgment. *Bahá’u’lláh is troubled by the handmaiden’s death and also by the distress of the maids of heaven and the potential effects of the Day of Judgment on the religions on earth, so He asks God for them to remain “undefiled”.*

“The Bábi community reached its ebb during the time of Bahá’u’lláh in ‘Iráq. The Bábi leaders were perverse and unfaithful, staining the good name of the Cause of the Báb. Consequentially the community itself became devoid of virtues and its members were spiritually dead and divided among themselves.”

Samandari, A Commentary on the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, 2008, p.46.

“His own references to this period suggest that he would have given up on the Bábi community and remained a dervish for the rest of his life had it not been for the grief he felt at the thought that all the blood shed in the path of the Báb would have been shed in vain. Bahá’u’lláh had himself been close to many of the Bábis who had been killed, some of them in their youth. That tragic period, when so many people died, would color his writings for the remainder of his life.”

Sours, The Tablet of the Holy Mariner—An Illustrated Guide, 2002, p.24-25.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON OF INTERPRETATIONS – When the five authors’ interpretations are compared to each other, it becomes clear that their interpretations of the first half of the Tablet are fairly consistent but there are significant differences in their interpretations of the last half of the Tablet.

Table of Interpreted Symbols – The Table on page C compares the five authors’ interpretations of some of the Tablet’s symbols. As previously discussed, there are five different interpretations of the handmaiden’s death!

Optional - Review the Page C summary of interpretations either individually or as a group. Read across each row to compare the interpretations from the five authors for each topic.

COMBINING INTERPRETATIONS – Comparing the details of the five interpretations of the Tablet reveals some differences. Instead of siding with one interpretation or another, here the interpretations are unified to provide a grand overview of the meaning of the Tablet. Instead of clashing, the differences can broaden our view, with the goal of illuminating various aspects within this multi-faceted revelation.

Since all of the five authors provide supporting evidence for their explanations of many details within the Tablet, they all can be considered to have reasonable individual, but not authoritative, interpretations. If we detach from judging each as being “right” or “wrong,” we can begin to appreciate each author’s sincerity in presenting their individual interpretations. This opens our eyes to recognizing that the Tablet contains a wealth of meanings, it also frees us from the burden of judgment!

The authors all had similar interpretations of the first half of the Tablet, so the first half has essentially already been combined in earlier sections. Taherzadeh, Mboya and Samandari all had similar interpretations of the second half of the Tablet, where they interpret the handmaiden to be; Bahá’u’lláh, a future “dependent prophet,” and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, respectively. The Tablet has an archetypal dimension, so these differences can be attributed to the Tablet prophesying similar events in the past and future history of the Bahá’í Faith. By accepting all three of these interpretations as reasonable, we can better appreciate the continuing efficacy of the Tablet’s prophetic nature.

Tahezadeh, Mboya, and Samandari all consider the celestial entities to be metaphors of different leaders of the Bahá’í Faith, Sours and Bau consider the celestial individuals not only as metaphors, but also to be the actual heavenly beings as stated in the Tablet; furthermore, they try to identify some of them using Bahá’í and other scripture. Sours interprets the maid of heaven as “Wisdom” from the Torah who was also the same heavenly maiden that visited Bahá’u’lláh at the Síyáh-Chál, this is compatible with Bau’s interpretation that the maid of heaven represents the eternal “Cause of God.”

One of Sours’ interpretations of the favored maiden is that she represents anyone who grows spiritually through detachment from worldliness; this connects back to the first part of the Tablet, where the travelers advance spiritually after leaving the Ark. Bau’s interpretation of the favored maiden, as representing the Bábi Faith, extends the story of the meteor; whereas the meteor represents individuals being cast out of the heaven back to earth, the maiden’s death represents the spirit of an obsolete religious institution being removed from the Concourse so it can return to God. So both Sours’ and Bau’s interpretations of the maiden’s death connect back to the Covenant where; spiritual growth is assured to the “true believer,” and spiritual death comes to unfaithful individual or obsolete institutional “claimants.”

With this viewpoint, all of the authors’ interpretations fit within Taherzadeh’s interpretation – that the Tablet is about the Covenant. The first half of the Tablet all relates to the Covenant: Bahá’u’lláh’s Declaration (Ark’s launch); the declaration of his followers (passengers of the Ark); Bahá’u’lláh’s and his followers’ exiles (Ark’s journey); the spiritual ascent of the “true believers” (travelers’ land journey); the falling out of Mírzá Yahyá (meteor’s casting out); the spread of Bahá’u’lláh’s message (maid of heaven’s illumination); and the test of faith for all in heaven and earth (love for the Youth). The different interpretations of the second half of the Tablet also relate to the Covenant, where the death of the handmaiden is interpreted as: the death of Bahá’u’lláh (Taherzadeh), the death of a future “dependent prophet” (Mboya), the death of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (Samandari), the death of a person’s worldliness resulting in spiritual advancement (Sours), and the death of an obsolete religious institution (Bau). This grand view of the Tablet as an intricately meshed allegory, gives us a greater awareness of the broad nature of Covenant and also a greater appreciation of the amazing beauty and depth of Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation.

Comments and Discussion. Consider: What do you think about these interpretations of the Tablet?



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7) INTERPRETATIONS OF THEMES

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Here the Arabic Tablet is separated into themes which are presented with multiple interpretations and some background scripture. These are not comprehensive word-for-word interpretations. Each author provides a similar thematic style of interpretations in their works, including some explanations for individual verses and words. If you have questions on specific passages that are not satisfactorily explained in this section or want to see an author's interpretation from beginning to end, please study directly from the authors' works.

VEILED LANGUAGE and LITERAL INTERPRETATIONS – Bahá'u'lláh states that:

“It is evident unto thee that the Birds of Heaven and Doves of Eternity speak a twofold language. One language, the outward language, is devoid of allusions, is unconcealed and unveiled; that it may be a guiding lamp and a beaconing light whereby wayfarers may attain the heights of holiness, and seekers may advance into the realm of eternal reunion... The other language is veiled and concealed, so that whatever lieth hidden in the heart of the malevolent may be made manifest and their innermost being be disclosed... In such utterances, the literal meaning, as generally understood by the people, is not what hath been intended. Thus it is recorded: ‘Every knowledge hath seventy meanings, of which one only is known amongst the people. And when the Qá’im shall arise, He shall reveal unto men all that which remaineth.’ He also saith: ‘We speak one word, and by it we intend one and seventy meanings; each one of these meanings we can explain.’ ”

Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán, p.255.

SYMBOLS FROM SCRIPTURES – The Arabic Tablet contains unmistakable references to stories of the Torah which are also retold in the Quran. The pages of interpreted themes include these stories either with scripture or as summaries.

Optional – Those who are not familiar with the Torah, Bible or Quran may want to read these very brief descriptions:

The Torah is comprised of the first five books of the central text in Judaic religious tradition. These books are considered to have been revealed by God and recorded by Moses (~1400-1300 BCE). They are an ancient mythical/historical record of the Jewish people and were combined with subsequent books to form the “Hebrew Bible”. The first two books of the Torah, Genesis and Exodus, contain stories which the Arabic Tablet alludes to: Adam, Noah, Joseph, and Moses.

The Christian Bible (compiled ~80 CE) essentially combined the Hebrew Bible, renamed as the “Old Testament,” with the “New Testament” which contains writings by early Christians about Jesus Christ and Christianity. The King James Bible, which was commissioned by King James I of England in the early 1600's, was Shoghi Effendi's preferred version of the Bible; he used a modified Old English language style in his translations of Bahá'u'lláh's writings.

The Quran (Qur'an, Koran) is a compilation of the words of Muhammad which were put to paper shortly after His death in 632 CE. Since Muhammad's utterances were memorized and recited by His followers during his lifetime, Bahá'is consider the original Arabic Quran to be the infallible Word of God; however, every translation of the Quran is considered to be an interpretation. The Quran has a multitude of English translation/interpretations, with dozens of English versions in publication; in this deepening, the references to the Quran also state the translator.

THEMES – The Arabic Tablet is separated into nine themes, with interpretations that were selected to relate the themes to something tangible, either from history or from supporting scriptures. The interpretations and scriptures were also selected to be interesting and broaden the reader's Bahá'í experience. Supporting texts include some passages from provisional translations of Bahá'u'lláh's mystical writings and verses from an alternate translation of the Arabic Tablet by Cole (*the same translator of the Page B Persian Tablet*). To avoid repetition, the interpretations which were already detailed in Section 6 are not presented in depth here. Remember, these interpretations are not comprehensive, not conclusive and not authoritative!

Read pages D through L. Start each page by reading the title and then the interpretations. Then skim over the supporting texts as references and read them aloud as desired. Reading the interpretations without the supporting texts and discussion will take 1+ hours.

Notes: Use your judgment whether to read or skip passages. This section uses abbreviated references.



FINALE or CONTINUE TO PART III (optional – not recommended for group study!)

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Finale – Recite and Interpret the Arabic Tablet by each verse or by passages! Alláh'u'abhá!

OR Continue- Part III is more in-depth and is primarily for those who want to study this particular Tablet to gain deeper insights; it is not recommended for a general Bahá'í audience or for group deepening. This would be a good time for a break; then continue to: Part III – Analysis.

- Those who want to deepen further on the interpretation of this Tablet should read the referenced books by Taherzadeh, Sours and Samandari, look for Mboya's study guide at bahai-library.com, and also investigate other sources. However, even with extensive study, it is impossible to grasp the all of the meanings within this Tablet due to its mystical, prophetic nature!



Arabic Tablet of the Holy Mariner	Taherzadeh (1976)	Mboya (2000)	Sours (2002)	Samandari (2008)	Bau (2016)
Original Purpose(s)/Theme(s)	The story of the Covenant and man's unfaithfulness to it; allusions to the greatness of Bahá'u'lláh's Cause	God tells Bahá'u'lláh to declare his mission and reveal the path towards God; fate of Mírzá Yahyá; a lesser prophet's search	Two part allegory to prepare the believer for the challenges from those who seek power	Foretell the story of the Greater and Lesser Covenants; the rise of Bahá'u'lláh and passing the authority to 'Abdu'l-Bahá	Handmaiden prepares Bahá'u'lláh for His Declaration by describing effects of Day of Judgment on individuals and institutions
Speaker	Bahá'u'lláh	God	Bahá'u'lláh	The Almighty	an immortal handmaiden
Holy Mariner	Bahá'u'lláh	Bahá'u'lláh	Bahá'u'lláh	Bahá'u'lláh	Bahá'u'lláh
Ark	The Covenant and Cause of God	The Bahá'í Faith	Teachings of the Bahá'u'lláh	The eternal Cause of God	The Cause of Bahá'u'lláh
Passengers of the Ark	Believers – Bahá'u'lláh's followers are safe within the ark.	Souls who are firm in the Covenant	Bahá'u'lláh's followers, the Covenant community	The "sincere ones" from previous revelations and the Bahá'ís	Bahá'u'lláh's declared followers/ Bahá'ís in the Valley of Love
Journey	Bahá'u'lláh's true believers can achieve a higher spiritual station than allowed under previous Manifestations	Bahá'u'lláh guides the believers on a spiritual journey, referencing the Valleys of Unity, Knowledge and Nothingness from the 7 Valleys	The soul's journey towards Heaven mirrors Bahá'u'lláh's entourage's journey from Baghdad to the Holy Land	The call to put into motion the new revelation of God and veiled roadmap of Bahá'u'lláh's travels from Baghdad to the Holy Land	Launch of the Bahá'í Faith; the travels of Bahá'u'lláh and His entourage to the Holy Land and the believers through the 7 Valleys
Moses	Bahá'u'lláh is the One Who conversed with Moses from the burning bush; the Báb is the flame	Hand of God assists the believers during their trials and helps them recognize the Revelation of God.	Deathless tree relates to Moses' burning bush which relates to the Tree of Life.	Bahá'u'lláh is the One Who conversed with Moses	Like Muhammad's night flight, Bahá'u'lláh is connected to previous manifestations
Voice of Grandeur	The wrath of God	God	God's voice spoken through Manifestations or angels	The Essential Pre-existence	God
Burning meteor and casting out	The Covenant casting out Mírzá Yahyá and other covenant breakers	Mírzá Yahyá and his followers are cast out. Celestial dove is Bahá'u'lláh	Koran's meteors cast out evil spirits and guard Heaven; also Bible's expulsion of the angels	Koranic meteors casting out Bahá'u'lláh's half-brother Mírzá Yahyá and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's half-brother Muhammad 'Alí.	A star is a religious leader; the falling star is Mírzá Yahyá and covenant breakers pulling their followers away from true religion
The Maid of Heaven and her actions	Bahá'u'lláh or one of the attributes of God or the personification of 'the Most Great Spirit' declares the tremendous nature of His Cause	Bahá'u'lláh reveals His mission with new teachings and laws; also carries out the earth shaking Day of Resurrection/Judgment	'Wisdom' from Judeo/Christian/ Islamic scriptures – a feminine personification of the Spirit of God who is also Bahá'u'lláh's Maiden at the Síyáh-Chál	Bahá'u'lláh's asserts the potency of His new revelation and appoints 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the head of the Bahá'í Faith	The personification of Religion (Cause of God); closes the previous era and opens a new era with Bahá'u'lláh
Handmaiden	Bahá'u'lláh	Dependent/lesser prophet(s)	Handmaiden/houri or a Bahá'í	Spirits of future Divine Revealers of God's Will / 'Abdu'l-Bahá	Houri of nearness representing the Bábi religion in the Concourse
Arabian Youth / Youth	Bahá'u'lláh	The Báb	The Báb and/or Bahá'u'lláh	Bahá'u'lláh and Shoghi Effendi	The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh
The Handmaiden's search	The Covenant casting out Mírzá Yahyá and other covenant breakers	Bahá'u'lláh (maid of heaven) summons a lesser prophet (handmaiden), who openly challenges the believers	The search for the validity of the claimants; Jacob regains sight when he identifies the scent from Joseph's robe	'Abdu'l-Bahá travels to the West, issues Tablets of the Divine Plan, grieves at the lack of response	The houri for the Bábi faith searches for fidelity in all claimants of Bábi leadership through all time
Handmaiden's death and Handmaidens' mourning	Bahá'u'lláh's suffering from the unfaithfulness of His followers, mourning of believers after Bahá'u'lláh's death	Likens the experiences of the lesser prophet to those of the Youth (Bahá'u'lláh)	Handmaiden dies from grief, a warning of the severity of the punishment to idle claimants	'Abdu'l-Bahá's death and his Will and Testament ("mystic word") and the Bahá'ís mourning his death	Death of the houri emissary of the Bábi Faith; other religions' houris mourn her death & their own potential deaths

The Holy Mariner and His Ark

The invocation “He is the Gracious, the Well-Beloved” serves to focus the attention on the divine attributes of God. Some invocations stress compassion, might or other qualities. The term “gracious” suggests God’s indulgence with His servants, His compassion and mercy. The works “Well-Beloved” reflect an intimate and very personal vision of God as one would have of a dearly-loved person. *Sours, Illustrated Guide, p.94.*

Shoghi Effendi states that the Holy Mariner is Bahá’u’lláh and the Ark represents His Cause, the Bahá’í Faith; so these metaphors are used by all of the authors in their interpretations. All of the authors interpret the launch of the ark to be Bahá’u’lláh’s Declaration at Ridván and the passengers to be His declared followers. Up to that point, Bahá’u’lláh was considered to be a Bábí who did not claim to be “Him who will be manifest”, but He had an innate talent for spirituality and leadership. Bahá’u’lláh’s Declaration challenged each Bábí and completely changed the Bábí community, it is considered by Bahá’ís to be one of the most momentous events in history. Some of the authors relate the ark’s journey to the exiles of Bahá’u’lláh, with the ark being motionless once it reaches ‘Akká.

Three other interpretations below relate verses 1-12 to; the leadership of the Bahá’í Faith, the Torah, and the Quran. These distinct interpretations are presented just to demonstrate how: a series of verses can match different historical events and/or scripture, and result in differences in interpretations which can be subtle or significant; and how a mystical passage can be a condensed format for many meanings.

While the primary interpretation is that these verses represent Bahá’u’lláh’s Declaration and His exiles; to a lesser degree, these verses can also apply to the leadership within the Bahá’í Faith. The journey of the ark over three different seas may refer to the three different leaders of the Bahá’í Faith; Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi. After Shoghi Effendi’s death, there were no appropriate lineal descendents of Bahá’u’lláh who could be appointed as the leader of the Bahá’í Faith (“motionless”). This resulted in the rise of the Bahá’í Hands of the Cause (“issue forth”) who would eventually create the nine member Universal House of Justice, which would lead the Bahá’í Faith as a unified group. Following the Tablet’s storyline, it is then the assembled group of UHJ members would have a prophetic, divinely connected, Moses-like station.

The story in these verses clearly relate to the ancient Torah’s stories of Noah and Moses. The Tablet’s ark is associated with Noah’s ark, where God sends a flood to clear the world of the wicked; those within Noah’s ark ride out the storm, and are able to restart and build a new society with higher morals. This association with Noah may have helped Bahá’u’lláh recognize that not only would His Declaration result in the creation of a new world, it required the destruction of the old. Also, God established His first Covenant with humankind through Noah (symbolized by the rainbow), and God renewed this ancient Covenant with Bahá’u’lláh. Verses 8-11 are associated with Moses’ first meeting with God at the burning bush; where God tells Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery from Egypt. This links Bahá’u’lláh’s Declaration to Moses’ acceptance of God’s mission and implies lengthy trials before the eventual triumph of His followers. So, both the Noah and Moses stories promise a more righteous future for true believers after a period of tests and difficulties.

The stories of Noah and Moses are retold and referenced in numerous places in the Quran; but Surih #23 The True Believers (also translated as “The Faithful” or “The Believers”), contains both stories. Briefly, the surih: describes the qualities and fate of true believers; tells how Noah was derided; describes progressive revelation in terms of an apostle’s rejection by the people; briefly speaks of Moses’ and His brother, Aaron’s meeting with the disbelieving Pharaoh; and then directs the apostles towards a holy life. Linking the True Believers surih to the Tablet would tell Bahá’u’lláh that; each Manifestation faced rejection and challenges, and He too would face great opposition, but that some of His followers would be true believers.

i He is the Gracious, the Well-Beloved!

ii O Holy Mariner!

1 Bid thine ark of eternity appear before the Celestial Concourse,

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

3 And let the angelic spirits enter, in the Name of God, the Most High.

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

5 Haply the dwellers therein may attain the retreats of nearness in the everlasting realm.

6 Having reached the sacred strand, the shore of the crimson seas,

7 Bid them issue forth and attain this ethereal invisible station,

8 A station wherein the Lord hath in the Flame of His Beauty appeared within the deathless tree;

9 Wherein the embodiments of His Cause cleansed themselves of self and passion;

10 Around which the Glory of Moses doth circle with the everlasting hosts;

11 Wherein the Hand of God was drawn forth from His bosom of Grandeur;

12 Wherein the ark of the Cause remaineth motionless even though to its dwellers be declared all divine attributes.

.....
“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, Lights of Guidance, #1609.

The "dwellers in the city of eternity" and the "concourse on high" are souls who are firm in the Covenant.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet to an individual believer – translated from the Persian

“And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth... I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.” *The Holy Bible, KJV, Genesis 9:11-13.*

“We sent Noah to his people. He said: ‘O my people, worship God, for you have no other god but He. Will you not take heed for yourselves?’ The chiefs of his people, who did not believe, said: ‘He is only a man like you. He wishes to acquire ascendancy over you’... ‘O my Lord,’ prayed (Noah), ‘help me against them, for they accuse me of lies.’ So We asked him to build the ark... Our sentence has been passed already and do not speak to Me for those who are wicked... When you and those with you have boarded that ark... say: ‘O Lord, disembark me in a welcome place; You are the best of deliverers.’...After them We raised a new generation. Then We set to them an apostle from among them... (The apostle prayed): ‘O Lord, deliver me, for they accuse me of lies.’ Answered (the Lord): ‘They shall wake up repenting soon.’...A good riddance of the wicked people! Then after them We raised other generations. No nation can live beyond its allotted time, or lag behind. Then We sent Our apostles one after the other. Every time an apostle came to a people they denied him. So We made one follow the other (to its doom), and turned them into bygone tales. Cursed be the people who do not believe! Then We sent Moses and his brother Aaron with our miracles and clear proofs To Pharaoh and his nobles who behaved with arrogance... And said ‘Should we believe in two men like yourselves whose people are our subjects?’ Then they accused them of lies and joined the company of those who were destroyed. And we gave the Book to Moses so that they may be guided.”

Muhammed, Quran, Ahmed Ali trans., Surih 23, The True Believers.

Journey of the Ark

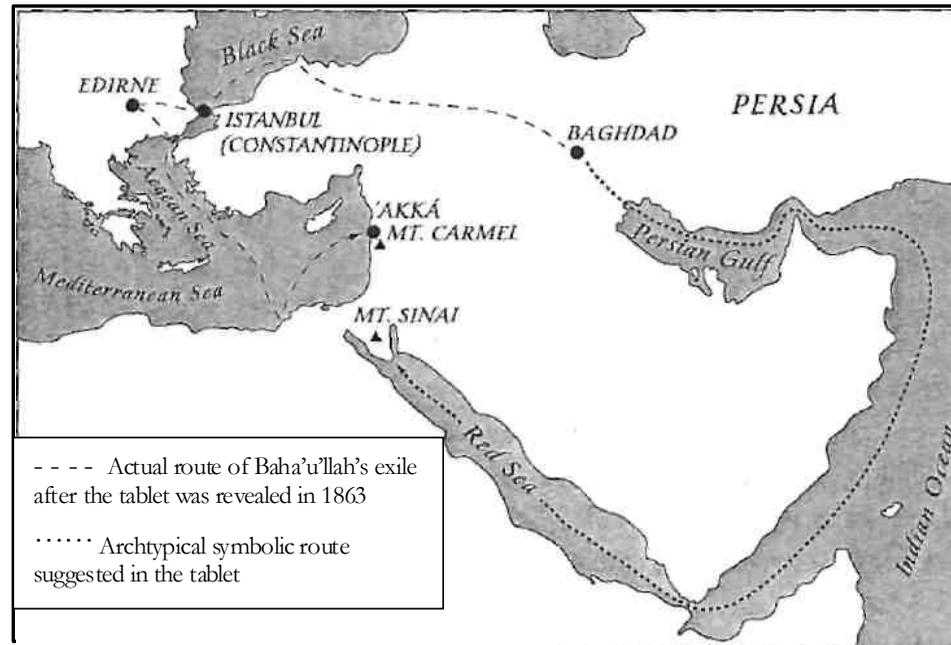
Sours compares the ark's route to Bahá'u'lláh's exiles and provides a map.

"The ark's role develops in stages – appearance, boarding, transporting – each unfolding at the bidding of God and through the mediation of the Mariner. Similarly, each stage signifies a corresponding stage in the journey of the seeker. The journey follows a route, a sacred geography, that appears to be modeled on the physical geography of the Middle East... The three references to bodies of water—the ancient sea, the ocean of glory, the crimson seas— though metaphorical, follow the course of a seafaring route from Persia to Sinai, from the Persian Gulf, to the Arabian Sea or Indian Ocean, to the Red Sea. The purpose here is not to advocate a literal reading of the Tablet, but rather to point out that it is likely that its metaphorical language is based on actual geography. The journey described, however, is an interior spiritual journey of the soul... convey[ing] something of the challenge of spiritual life. Each of the terms used to describe the three bodies of water – “ancient”, “glory”, and “crimson” – can be understood as references to the waters of revelation, representing its eternal, luminous, and redemptive nature... The use of Exodus symbolism is a way of re-affirming that the spiritual path remains a path of liberation – this is not a new teaching, but one that involves an ancient covenant and is a continuation of redemptive acts seen throughout time.

"But there is another important reason to understand this geographical symbolism. It is an evidence of the important prophetic nature of the Tablet...the geographical symbolism represents parallel events in the history of Bahá'u'lláh's life just as it was about to unfold. A comparison of the basic geography in the Tablet with the exile route of Bahá'u'lláh shows that both traverse three main bodies of water and terminate at the base of holy mountains. In the Tablet, the ark appears to traverse the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea to arrive at Mount Sinai... Bahá'u'lláh traversed a route beginning at Baghdad that would likewise cross three major bodies of water: the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea. This route terminates on the shores of Palestine at the base of Mount Carmel.

"The first stage of this seafaring prophecy is probably the basis for Shoghi Effendi's statement that “seven days after His arrival, He as foreshadowed in the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, was put on board a Turkish steamer and three days later was disembarked, at noon, together with His fellow-exiles, at the port of Constantinople... Just as the mystical ark of eternity traverses the seas in a journey to the Mountain of God, so too Bahá'u'lláh would literally traverse seas to arrive at Mount Carmel.

Map and text from Sours, Illustrated Guide, pp.67-69.



Continuing this interpretation where these verses follow Bahá'u'lláh's exiles: “the shore” would signify Akká, where Bahá'u'lláh lived in the barracks of this coastal city; and “issue forth” would refer to Bahá'u'lláh either being transferred out of the barracks into various houses in Akká or leaving the prison city to move into the house of Mazra'ih or Bahjí. The circumambulation would refer to Bahá'u'lláh's arrival at Bahjí, which is described by Hájí Muhammad Táhír in this amazing story...

“Nabíl suggested that we follow Him on foot to the Mansion to circumambulate it and then return home... When the Blessed Perfection dismounted and went inside the Mansion, we walked toward the building in order to circumambulate. But when we came a little closer we saw to our amazement that the footpaths around the walls of the Mansion were packed with people, who were standing. Crowds had assembled around the four sides of the Mansion and we could hear their murmuring as well as their breathing. Of course we knew that no one had come from 'Akká to circumambulate the Mansion, and we two had gone there without permission. Anyhow, since there was no room to walk on the footpath we stepped back, and at a distance of about thirty steps from the Mansion we circumambulated... As we circled the Mansion we could sense the presence of the multitude on the four sides of the building at some distance from us... [Nabíl's poems] described the events of the evening Bahá'u'lláh went to the Mansion, and how we both followed Him, the account of our circumambulation when we saw the souls of all the Prophets and Messengers and the Concourse on high assembled outside the Mansion, circumambulating the throne of their Lord.”

Taberzadeh, Revelation-Vol. 4, pp.106-108

- 1 Bid thine ark of eternity appear before the Celestial Concourse,
- 2 Launch it upon the ancient sea, in His Name, the Most Wondrous,
- 3 And let the angelic spirits enter, in the Name of God, the Most High.
- 4 Unmoor it, then, that it may sail upon the ocean of glory,
- 5 Haply the dwellers therein may attain the retreats of nearness in the everlasting realm.
- 6 Having reached the sacred strand, the shore of the crimson seas,
- 7 Bid them issue forth and attain this ethereal invisible station,
- 8 A station wherein the Lord hath in the Flame of His Beauty appeared within the deathless tree;
- 9 Wherein the embodiments of His Cause cleansed themselves of self and passion;
- 10 Around which the Glory of Moses doth circle with the everlasting hosts;
- 11 Wherein the Hand of God was drawn forth from His bosom of Grandeur;
- 12 Wherein the ark of the Cause remaineth motionless even though to its dwellers be declared all divine attributes.
- 13 O Mariner! Teach them that are within the ark that which we have taught thee behind the mystic veil.
- 14 Perchance they may not tarry in the sacred snow-white spot,

“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.”

*St. Ephrem, Ode on Noah and the Ark
Palmer translation.*

Moses

These verses from the Tablet have references to Moses:

a8 Flame in deathless tree – burning bush: Exodus 3.2-3.4, Quran Ta Ha 20:11

ac9 Remove sandals – remove shoes on holy ground: Exodus 3.5, Quran Ta Ha 20:12

a10 Glory of Moses – see page E for the story of the circumambulation of Bahjí

a11 Hand from bosom – proof of prophethood: Exodus 4.6-7, Quran Ta Ha 20:22

a14 sacred snow-white spot – valley of tuwa (plain of Towa): Quran Ta Ha 20:12

.....
“The passengers of the ark (v.7) are taken to a snow-white spot [v.14] likely to be the valley of Tuwa mentioned in the Qur’an at the base of Mount Sinai... These symbolic features suggest the description of Moses’ encounter with the burning bush described in the Book of Exodus and in the Qur’an... This is made more apparent by the reference to the glory-signifying splendor, light, and presence-of Moses circling the sacred Tree with the everlasting Hosts... Bahá’u’lláh’s retelling of the Sinai episode, however, is from a heightened mystical point of view. The emphasis is on disclosing the divinity of Moses to create an equation between Moses and the presence of God... In this sense, no distinction is made between the “Lord” (v.8) and Moses (v. 10, 11)... In the biblical version, Moses has doubts and God provides a series of evidences of His total sovereignty... Bahá’u’lláh’s version is told very differently using hyperbolic imagery. It is not Moses’ hand, but rather the “Hand of God” that is drawn forth...God now in effect transforms Moses’ hand into His own hand. All of these significances come together to suggest that the purpose of the ark’s journey is to enable its passengers to attain the presence of God, to realize the establishment of a new covenant. This is the destination of those who enter the ark.”
Sours, An Illustrated Guide, pp52-53.

The passengers who leave the ark can be interpreted as pilgrims who attain the presence of the Moses-like Bahá’u’lláh. Bahá’u’lláh’s state of mind can then be connected to Moses’ state of mind. In Exodus, God appoints Moses to lead the Hebrew people out of slavery. Moses hesitates at accepting the responsibility and asks God for help, so God provides Moses with miracles as proof (“white hand”). Bahá’u’lláh may have also been hesitant at accepting His mission. God provides Bahá’u’lláh with the Hand of God as proof; with perfect writings coming from His Pen and devoted followers proving His sovereignty.

Moses pleads with God for help in communicating His message since he had a speech impediment, which the Quran states was a target of mockery. God reluctantly appoints Aaron, Moses’ brother, as his spokesperson. This is an implied reference to Bahá’u’lláh, since He was instrumental in placing His half-brother Mírzá Yahyá as the figurehead for the Bábi Faith. This was a test not only for the Bábis and the Bahá’ís, but was a massive test for Mírzá Yahyá and Bahá’u’lláh. Although not perfect, in the end Aaron was faithful to Moses; but Mírzá Yahyá completely turned against Bahá’u’lláh.

.....
“Mírzá Yahyá came into prominence...through his close link with Bahá’u’lláh. In order to divert the attention of the enemies of the Faith from the person of Bahá’u’lláh...the Báb wholeheartedly approved the suggestion of nominating the youthful and relatively unknown Mírzá Yahyá as the chief of the Bábi community. This suggestion had come from Bahá’u’lláh.”
Taberzadeh, Revelation-Vol. 1, p. 53.

7 Bid them issue forth and attain this
ethereal invisible station,

8 A station wherein the Lord hath in the
Flame of His Beauty appeared within
the deathless tree;

9 Wherein the embodiments of His Cause
cleansed themselves of self and passion;

*ac9 Therein the temples of the Cause put
off the sandals of carnal desire.*

10 Around which the Glory of Moses doth
circle with the everlasting hosts;

11 Wherein the Hand of God was drawn
forth from His bosom of Grandeur;

12 Wherein the ark of the Cause remaineth
motionless even though to its dwellers
be declared all divine attributes.

13 O Mariner! Teach them that are within
the ark that which we have taught thee
behind the mystic veil.

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

.....
“Erelong shall God draw forth, out of the
bosom of power, the hands of ascendancy
and might, and shall raise up a people who
will arise to win victory for this Youth.”

Bahá’u’lláh, Tablet of the Temple, v34.

“Has the story of Moses come to you?
When he saw a fire... he approached it, a
voice called out: ‘O Moses, I am verily
your Lord, so take off your shoes, for you
are in the holy plain of Towa. I have
chosen you...so serve Me and...
remember Me. Verily the Hour (of the
great change) is about to come. I keep it
secret that every soul may be rewarded
for its endeavour. So do not let those
who do not believe in it and follow their
vain desires, turn you away from it...”

*Muhammed, Quran, Ahmed Ali translation,
Surih Ta Ha, #20:9-16.*

“ ‘Now draw thy hand close to thy side: It shall come forth white (and shining), without
harm (or stain), as another Sign.’... ”

(Moses) said: ‘O my Lord! expand me my breast [grant me self-confidence]; Ease my
task for me; And remove the impediment from my speech [when Moses was a child, he
put a hot coal in his mouth as a result of a test from Pharaoh]. So they may understand
what I say: And give me a Minister from my family, Aaron, my brother, Add to my
strength through him, And make him share my task’... (Allah) said: ‘Granted is thy
prayer, O Moses!’ ”
Muhammed, Quran, Yusef Ali translation, Surih Ta Ha, #20:22-36.

Exodus 3 – “Now Moses...came to the mountain of God... And the angel of the LORD
appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and,
behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush *was* not consumed... God called unto
him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses... Here *am* I... Draw not nigh
hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest *is* holy
ground... And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God. And the LORD
said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people... And I am come down to deliver
them out of the hand of the Egyptians...Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto
Pharaoh... And Moses said unto God, Who *am* I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that
I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? And he said, Certainly I will be
with thee; and this *shall be* a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast
brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain. And
Moses said unto God, Behold, *when* I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto
them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What *is*
his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and
he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you...
The LORD God...appeared unto me, saying...I will bring you up out of the affliction of
Egypt unto...a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Exodus 4 – “And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor
hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee...
[T]he LORD said furthermore unto him, Put now thine hand into thy bosom. And he
put his hand into his bosom: and when he took it out, behold, his hand *was* leprous as
snow. And he said, Put thine hand into thy bosom again. And he put his hand into his
bosom again; and plucked it out of his bosom, and, behold, it was turned again as his
other flesh. And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the
voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign... And Moses said
unto the LORD, O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent...but I *am* slow of speech, and of a slow
tongue... And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man’s mouth?... Now
therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say. And he
said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of *him whom* thou wilt send. And the
anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and he said, *Is* not Aaron the Levite thy
brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee:
and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart. And thou shalt speak unto him, and
put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his mouth, and will
teach you what ye shall do. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people: and he shall
be, *even* he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God.”

The Holy Bible King James Version, Exodus 3-4.

The Ascent of the Travelers

The passengers of the ark are asked to disembark and continue on a land journey. This can be connected to Bahá'u'lláh's exiles and having to be separated from many of His followers, but it also may indicate that becoming a Bahá'í can take a believer only so far, to continue to advance spiritually, the passengers must disembark and walk, so they are no longer passively being carried forward by the Ark. The glorious rewards of advanced spiritual states are balanced by the traveler's efforts and sacrifices to overcome the obstacles.

Taherzadeh considers the travelers who ascend to be “true believers” who can achieve a Moses-like station:

“In the opening passages of the Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh...testifies that He Who conversed with Moses on Sinai is now, in this Day, manifested to men, that the believers--'them that are within the ark' and the 'angelic spirits'—can...attain the retreats of nearness in the everlasting realm'... The station to which a true believer can attain in this day is extremely high... [But 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...

“The following are the words of Bahá'u'lláh concerning the station of the true believer:

‘Blessed are the people of Bahá!... They are the ones who have sailed on the ark of complete independence... Through their light the heavens have been adorned... Such is the station ordained for the true believer that if to an extent smaller than a needle's eye the glory of that station were to be unveiled to mankind, every beholder would be consumed away in his longing to attain it. For this reason it hath been decreed that in this earthly life the full measure of the glory of his own station should remain concealed from the eyes of such a believer.' 'If the veil be lifted, and the full glory of the station of those who have turned wholly towards God, and in their love for Him renounced the world, be made manifest, the entire creation would be dumbfounded.'

“And 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written these words:

‘The station which he who hath truly recognized this Revelation will attain is the same as the one ordained for such prophets of the house of Israel as are not regarded as Manifestations’...

“Whoever achieves this station will become the embodiment of selflessness, humility and servitude, will die to himself and live in God...Among His companions there were some who had reached this lofty station. These souls manifested such a degree of faith and devotion, such humility and detachment as had rarely been experienced by mankind in former Dispensations. *Taherzadeh, Revelation-Vol. 1, pp.238-240.*

Mboya made a Seven Valleys comparison to the passengers' journey, which Bau expands upon here:

Search – the seeker on a spiritual quest leaves the Valley of Search when they find Bahá'u'lláh

Love – the passenger enters the ark and begins their journey with the Holy Mariner / the seeker becomes a believer (a Bahá'í), and connects with Bahá'u'lláh through a mutual love (*HW#5 “Love Me, that I may love thee”*); those who do not leave the ark, remain in the Valley of Love (motionless)

Knowledge – the passengers who leave the ark need the teachings to be able to advance; as the believer absorbs the teachings, their relationship with Bahá'u'lláh transcends love (a Moses-like station); the believer's progress then becomes independent of their earthly environment (soar upon wings)

Unity – the believer must past all worldly limitations (“wing through space”) to reach Unity / many believers arrive at this stage upon their physical death, but some believers achieve a death of self in this world; in either case the souls become reunited (“realm of eternal reunion”)

Contentment – Persian Tablet's “homeland of lovers”, inhabitants “serve them and show them kindness”

Wonderment – Persian Tablet's “intoxication with the wine of divine knowledge”

True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness – Persian Tablet's “escape from their own being and that of existing things”

3 And let the angelic spirits enter, in the Name of God,
the Most High.

4 Unmoor it, then, that it may sail upon the ocean of glory,
5 Haply the dwellers therein may attain the retreats of
nearness in the everlasting realm.

6 Having reached the sacred strand, the shore of the
crimson seas,

7 Bid them issue forth and attain this ethereal invisible
station,

8 A station wherein the Lord hath in the Flame of His
Beauty appeared within the deathless tree;

9 Wherein the embodiments of His Cause cleansed
themselves of self and passion;

10 Around which the Glory of Moses doth circle with the
everlasting hosts;

11 Wherein the Hand of God was drawn forth from His
bosom of Grandeur;

12 Wherein the ark of the Cause remaineth motionless
even though to its dwellers be declared all divine
attributes.

13 O Mariner! Teach them that are within the ark that
which we have taught thee behind the mystic veil.

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

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,

16 May wing through space even as the favored birds in the
realm of eternal reunion;

17 May know the mysteries hidden in the Seas of light.

18 They passed the grades of worldly limitations and
reached that of the divine unity, the center of heavenly
guidance...

30 She then raised the call which no ear through all eternity
hath ever heard,

31 And thus proclaimed: “By the Lord! He whose heart
hath not the fragrance of the love of the exalted and
glorious Arabian Youth,

32 “Can in no wise ascend unto the glory of the highest
heaven.”

“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.”

Persian Tablet of the Holy Mariner, Cole translation.

The Burning Meteor

The primary interpretation from most of the authors is that the meteor that “cast them out from them that abide in the Kingdom of His Presence” represents the fall of Mírzá Yahyá; Samandari connected this to Islamic tradition, while Taherzadeh links the meteor to the Covenant. Bahá'u'lláh equates the meteor with God's wrath and uses stars as a simile for religious leaders. In HWP#77, doves refer to the Manifestations; so “they have purposed to rise” to the station of the Manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh, which prompted God's wrath.

“In Islamic tradition it was believed that whenever Satan attempts to enter the earth, God would send forth His angels to shoot him down – thus accounting for the appearance of meteors... There is more than one “guardian” angel and their role is one of protection. The authority to protect the Cause of God after the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh was invested first in ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and then in Shoghi Effendi. Subsequently, the power of protection was passed on to the Hands of the Cause of God (1957-63) and finally to the Universal House of Justice. These institutions that guard the Cause of God were each and all commanded to protect the Faith.”

Samandari, Commentary, p.41.

“The 'burning meteor' may be regarded as symbolic of...His Covenant... Never before in religious history has a Manifestation of God created the means whereby the breakers of His Covenant, and those from within the community who oppose the Centre of the Cause, are cast out... By this process the Cause of God is purged from the impurities which enter it from time to time... In every Dispensation some men have violated the Covenant of God and been unfaithful to His Manifestation. In former religions they have succeeded in dividing the Faith of God and creating schism. But in this Dispensation, which is the consummation of all past religions and cycles, although many from within the community have risen against the Centre of the Cause, they have never succeeded in dividing it. Bahá'u'lláh, in one of His Tablets, states that as the Cause in this day is very great so also are the forces of negation which oppose it; the onslaught of the unfaithful against it is formidable... Every violator of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant has been expelled from His community. A diseased branch cut from the tree at first appears full of life, but eventually it will die in isolation. This is true of the breakers of the Covenant in this day who, by reason of their attacks on the Faith, might, at first, have seemed to be creating havoc within its ranks. But cut off from the Tree of the Cause of God, they eventually perished. Today only their names are recorded; their influence has long ceased to exist.”

Taherzadeh, Revelation-Vol. 1, pp.241-242.

In 1866, the year after Bahá'u'lláh was poisoned by Mírzá Yahyá, Bahá'u'lláh wrote a tablet demanding his allegiance. When Mírzá Yahyá refused, Bahá'u'lláh withdrew from the community, ordered that His family's belongings be divided, and called for His companions to choose between being a Bábi or a Bahá'í. This event is called the Most Great Separation. From 1865-1867, there were Leonid meteor showers, with an exceptional event in 1866. Taherzadeh relates this to Christian prophecy and to Bahá'u'lláh's expectation of a decline in religion throughout the world; some Christians also made the connection to star fall prophecies, leading them to prepare for “the second coming.”

“In November 1866... a spectacular meteoric shower took place. Thousands of shooting-stars lit up the sky... This event, which has been called the 'star-fall' of 1866, was watched by millions in the East and West and for many the experience was terrifying. According to the Gospels, one of the signs of the coming of Christ in the glory of the Father is the falling of stars. Bahá'u'lláh...refers to this... ‘Among them are those who have said... 'Have the stars fallen?' Say: 'Yea, when He Who is the Self-Subsisting dwelt in the Land of Mystery (Adrianople). Take heed, ye who are endued with discernment!' ’... ”

“Although this fascinating display of falling-stars was a literal fulfillment of the prophecies of old, its real significance is to be found in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá where the words of the Gospels are interpreted. Bahá'u'lláh explains that by the falling of stars is meant the fall of religious leaders who, because they denied the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, are losing their influence over mankind... In past Dispensations, the clergy played a major part in conducting the affairs of religion. They became the most vital element in the fabric of human society, and exerted a powerful influence in the life of the community. They gained a great deal of authority which never waned until the coming of Bahá'u'lláh, when by one stroke of His exalted Pen, he stripped them of a power they had enjoyed since the beginning of time... From two ranks amongst men power hath been seized: kings and ecclesiastics. The creative influence of the words of Bahá'u'lláh in this and similar pronouncements has set in motion the process of the disintegration of religious institutions and the progressive downfall of their leaders, who are increasingly becoming aware of their impotence to exercise a meaningful influence upon their communities.”

Taherzadeh, Revelation-Vol. 2, pp.270-272.

19 They have desired to ascend unto that state which the Lord hath ordained to be above their stations.

20 Whereupon the burning meteor cast them out from them that abide in the Kingdom of His Presence,

21 And they heard the Voice of Grandeur raised from behind the unseen pavilion upon the Height of Glory:

22 “O guardian angels! Return them to their abode in the world below,

23 “Inasmuch as they have purposed to rise to that sphere which the wings of the celestial dove have never attained;

24 “Whereupon the ship of fancy standeth still which the minds of them that comprehend cannot grasp.”

“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.”

Bahá'u'lláh, Persian Tablet of the Holy Mariner, Cole provisional translation.

“The whisperings of Satan have bewitched all men: Where is the meteor of Thy fiery wrath, O Radiance of the world!”

Bahá'u'lláh, Fire Tablet.

“O concourse of bishops! Ye are the stars of the heaven of My knowledge. My mercy desireth not that ye should fall upon the earth. My justice, however, declareth: 'This is that which the Son (Jesus) hath decreed.' And whatsoever hath proceeded out of His blameless, His truth-speaking, trustworthy mouth, can never be altered... The stars of the heaven of knowledge have fallen, they that adduce the proofs they possess in order to demonstrate the truth of My Cause, and who make mention of God in My name. When I came unto them, in My majesty, however, they turned aside from Me. They, verily, are of the fallen.”

Bahá'u'lláh, Lawh-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Tablet-Tablet to the Christians, verse 14.

“Then summoned to return I beheld, and lo! certain doves of holiness were sore tried within the claws of the dogs of the earth.”

Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words from the Persian #77.

The Maid of Heaven's Radiance and Call

The second half of the Tablet can be considered as a parallel of the first half; where the maid of heaven's radiance and the favored maiden's death follow the story of the Ark and the meteor, and thus represent Bahá'u'lláh's Declaration and the fall of the claimants. However, the authors all interpret the two halves as representing different events. Taherzadeh, Mboya and Samandari consider the maid of heaven to represent Bahá'u'lláh; in Cole's translation of the Arabic Tablet (see page N), she is "the houri of the spirit" (ac25); Sours and Bau consider her to be the celestial being who represents "Wisdom" or the "Cause of God"; the Báb refers to himself as the Maid of Heaven and also the "Arabian Youth".

"The 'maid of heaven' refers to Bahá'u'lláh. With only a slight movement ('with her brow') He reveals the Word of God...When the creative Writings were revealed ('as the radiance of her beauty shone') to humankind ('people of dust'), the old, dogmatic, man-made interpretations and blind beliefs (which are 'graves') are shaken. These blind beliefs and out-worn practices...become 'mortal graves,' since they no longer speak God's Will... When a new Revelation dawns, the outworn beliefs become a sepulcher or graveyard...

"The cycle of religion is beautifully explained by 'Abdul-Bahá through the metaphor of the four seasons. Parallel to this, in the Revelation of St. John...the metaphor of four horses...[indicates] the stages through which the Christian church...will pass. The last of these steeds is a 'pale horse' upon which sits Death; its equivalent in the season metaphor is winter. This is the last season or stage of all religions when the religion loses its life-giving power and its tree becomes withered. Those who cling to a religion that is in its withered state are themselves...lying in spiritual 'graves' of dogma and blind tradition. A new revelation comes primarily for the resurrection of these slumbering souls...

" 'She then raised the call which no ear through all eternity hath ever heard,'...Whereas the Prophet of Islam...regarded 'there is no God but God' as the cornerstone of His Faith, now, in the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, this verse has been symbolically replaced by the affirmative phrase 'He is God', which signifies the reins of authority, and, unlike the Dispensation of the past, no one has the power to wrest it from Him. For the first time in religious history, the Cause of God is protected from schism by a clear, powerful and written Covenant. The violators and the breakers of Bahá'u'lláh' Covenant...were utterly impotent to introduce divisions within His Faith, or to arrest its onward march towards its glorious destiny. Bahá'u'lláh declared. 'This...is the king of days,' the 'Day of God Himself,' the 'Day which shall never be followed by night,' the 'Springtime which autumn will never overtake.' Shoghi Effendi clearly indicates that this reference is to the inviolable Lesser Covenant."

Samandari, Commentary p.43-47.

Mboya connects this passage with the "Day of Resurrection"; Bau uses the term "Day of Judgment"; Samandari uses "king of days" and "Day of God"; Shoghi Effendi considers all of these "Days" to be aspects of the "Great Announcement." Like the Covenant, the theme of the "Day of God" can be expanded to encompass the whole Tablet.

"The Báb taught that his revelation was beginning an apocalyptic process that was bringing the Islamic dispensation to its cyclical end, and starting a new dispensation. He taught that the terms 'resurrection', 'Judgment Day', 'paradise' and 'hell' used in Shi'a prophecies for the end-times are symbolic. He stated that 'Resurrection' means...the appearance of a new revelation, and that 'raising of the dead' means the spiritual awakening of those who have stepped away from true religion. He further stated that 'Judgment Day' refers to when a new Manifestation of God comes, and the acceptance or rejection of those on the Earth. Thus the Báb taught that with his revelation the end times ended and the age of resurrection had started, and that the end-times were symbolic as the end of the past prophetic cycle.

"In the Persian Bayán, the Báb wrote that religious dispensations come in cycles, as the seasons, to renew 'pure religion' for humanity. This notion of continuity anticipated future prophetic revelations after the Báb."

Wikipedia, "Bábism"; Resurrection, 2016.

With this interpretation, the maid of heaven's brilliance initiates the magnificent "Day of God." Bahá'u'lláh's "Day of God" would further advance the Báb's "Day of God", where the upheavals which started in Persia with the Báb would spread, so that all of heaven and all of earth would experience a great shaking, where some would be awakened from being spiritual dead. The new Day of God would be characterized by: God's renewed Covenant; a Resurrection where all the peoples and institutions of the earth could be reborn from the new teachings and new spiritual forces; and the Day of Judgment where everyone in the earth and heavens are subjected to a new test of faith.

25 Whereupon the maid of heaven looked out from her exalted chamber,
ac25 Behold, the houri of the spirit looked out from the most exalted chamber.

26 And with her brow signed to the Celestial Concourse,

27 Flooding with the light of her countenance the heaven and the earth,

28 And as the radiance of her beauty shone upon the people of dust,

29 All beings were shaken in their mortal graves.

30 She then raised the call which no ear through all eternity hath ever heard,

31 And thus proclaimed: "By the Lord! He whose heart hath not the
fragrance of the love of the exalted and glorious Arabian Youth,

32 "Can in no wise ascend unto the glory of the highest heaven."

33 Thereupon she summoned unto herself one maiden from her handmaidens,
.....

"I am the Maid of Heaven begotten by the Spirit of Bahá, abiding within the Mansion hewn out of a mass of ruby, tender and vibrant; and in this mighty Paradise naught have I ever witnessed save that which proclaimeth the Remembrance of God by extolling the virtues of this Arabian Youth... Magnify ye, then, His station, for behold, He is poised in the midmost heart of the All-Highest Paradise as the embodiment of the praise of God in the Tabernacle wherein His glorification is intoned.

"At one time I hear His Voice as He acclaimeth Him Who is the Ever-Living, the Ancient of Days, and at another time as He speaketh of the mystery of His most august Name. And when He intoneth the anthems of the greatness of God all Paradise waileth in its longing to gaze on His Beauty, and when He chanteth words of praise and glorification of God all Paradise becomes motionless like unto ice locked in the heart of a frost-bound mountain"

The Báb, Selections from the Writings of the Báb, XXIX, p. 217.

"Muhammad...had alluded [to this] in His Book as the 'Great Announcement,' and declared His [Bahá'u'lláh's] Day to be...the Day whereon 'thy Lord shall come and the angels rank on rank,'... To His Day [the Quran] had paid a glowing tribute, glorifying it as the 'Great Day,' the 'Last Day,' the 'Day of God,' the 'Day of Judgment,' the 'Day of Reckoning,'... the Day 'when the Decree shall be accomplished,' the Day whereon the second 'Trumpet blast' will be sounded, the 'Day when mankind shall stand before the Lord of the world,' and 'all shall come to Him in humble guise,'...the Day 'wherein account shall be taken,'...the Day when 'all that are in the heavens and all that are on the earth shall be terror-stricken, save him whom God pleaseth to deliver,'...when the earth shall shine with the light of her Lord, and the Book shall be set, and the Prophets shall be brought up, and the witnesses; and judgment shall be given between them with equity; and none shall be wronged."

Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, p.96.

The Youth and Test of Faith

The maid of heaven issues a test of faith; to find the truly faithful who love the godliness of the “Youth.” Taherzadeh, Samandari and Mboya interpret the “Arabian Youth” as Bahá’u’lláh, which matches the themes of their interpretations. Bau believes that Shoghi Effendi intentionally gave a dual identity to the Youth as both the Báb (exalted) and Bahá’u’lláh (glorious). Sours considers the Arabian Youth to be ambiguous, the Báb and/or Bahá’u’lláh.

“The term *Youth* is referred to four times in the text, using two different terms in the original language. In the first instance, it is preceded by an adjective translated as *Arabian* (*Iraqi* in the original). The Báb was a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, and as such he wore a green turban indicating this holy lineage. But in mystical literature, the ‘Arabian’ youth is so archetypal that it is not clear that this description is intended to suggest anything about the Báb’s lineage or ancestry. The Maid of Heaven’s reference to the ‘Arabian’ Youth could be interpreted as a reference to the Báb, since the Báb used this terminology to refer to himself; or it could be assumed that, like the following references to the Youth, this refers to Bahá’u’lláh...But in its inmost significance it symbolizes the Spirit of God which the seeker should recognize wherever it appears... Certainly, the other references to the Youth are likely to be references to Bahá’u’lláh.”

Sours, An Illustrated Guide, p.61,74.

The test of faith implicitly references the story of Joseph with the “fragrance of the robe.” The story of Joseph was pivotal in the Bábi Faith, since at His Declaration, the Báb revealed the Surih of Mulk, the first chapter of the Surih of Joseph, for Mullá Husayn.

“In the Book of Genesis, the youthful Joseph dreams that all will bow down in homage to him. When his brothers hear about Joseph’s dream they plot against him...[and] sell him into slavery... Joseph enters Egypt in bondage, but he proves his greatness by his devotion to God, by his prophecies, and by the many other signs he gives. Eventually, his sovereignty is established [Joseph becomes second only to Pharaoh]. Similarly, Bahá’u’lláh is exiled to ‘Akká, arriving in bondage. But through His greatness, his imprisonment is relaxed and his spiritual sovereignty is recognized.

“It is also said that the young Joseph was incomparably beautiful...[which] signifies the ancient and eternal beauty of God’s holiness. Bahá’u’lláh, referring to the Manifestations of God, frequently says, ‘by their countenance the Beauty of God is revealed.’ Hence the title, ‘Ancient Beauty.’...

“Because of his grief over the loss of his son, Jacob - Joseph’s father - lost his sight. But when the garment of Joseph was brought to his presence, Jacob recognized it immediately by its fragrance and the realization that Joseph was still alive restored Jacob’s sight. This symbolism comes to force...[in Bahá’u’lláh’s] The Four Valleys... *Methinks at this moment, I catch the fragrance of His garment blowing from the Egypt of Babá.*’... The symbolism of Joseph’s robe also has a parallel in the New Testament. This is seen in how people, whose faith is strong, are healed by touching merely the garment of Jesus.

“All these clues, the fragrance of the robe, the youthful Beloved, the exile into another land allude back to the story of Joseph to infuse the Tablet of the Holy Mariner with many layers of meaning including prophetic suggestions about the life ahead for Bahá’u’lláh.”

Sours, An Illustrated Guide, pp.62-64.

Joseph’s brothers resented him and sold him into slavery, which eventually led to his rise in Egypt. Many years later (as Joseph had predicted and planned for) there was a famine so great, that people sold themselves to Egypt as slaves to avoid starvation. When Joseph’s brothers came to Egypt to buy grain, Joseph (who was in charge of the Pharaoh’s stores) met his brothers and put them to test. At first, the brothers didn’t recognize him, but after some tests, they saw the truth of Joseph’s sovereignty and Joseph forgave them. Mírzá Yahyá never really grasped the truth of Bahá’u’lláh’s station.

Bau interprets that the test to find the “Faithful” is internal - the search delves the inmost hearts; so it is not to find those who outwardly profess their faith (like declarants and the passengers of the ark), it is to find those who inwardly love godliness and choose that path. The search points to two tests in heaven. The maids of heaven are tested to find the “Faithful” in their own “churches”, where the consequence of failure is death. The “inmates of the chambers of Paradise” are tested by being required to kiss the “hands and feet” of the Faithful. This can be compared to the story of the angel Lucifer who refused to bow down to Adam. Requiring the angels to bow down to Adam was one of the hallmarks of the opening of the Adamic cycle; likewise, requiring the concourse to pay homage to the “Faithful” signifies the close of the Adamic cycle and the opening of a new cycle. This reinforces the concept that the Tablet represents the renewal of the Covenant with a new Manifestation. In the reinvigorated Covenant, Bahá’u’lláh is closer to God than previous manifestations (“He is God”); and the “Faithful” are able to achieve a higher earthly station (like Adam and Moses) and a higher heavenly station (“the highest heaven”) than in previous revelations. With these higher stations come greater tests; verses 31-32 say that those who do not love the Youth, can not rise to the “highest heaven”; so this test is a barrier to those who are not “internally Faithful”, but it does not deny them access to other levels of heaven. The higher station of the truly Faithful is suggestive of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who is known as the “Perfect Exemplar”, the “Center of the Covenant” and the “Mystery of God”.

30 She then raised the call which no ear through all eternity hath ever heard,

31 And thus proclaimed: “By the Lord! He whose heart hath not the fragrance of the love of the exalted and glorious Arabian Youth,

ac31 She said, “By God, those who do not have in their hearts the breezes of love that waft from the radiant ‘Iraqi youth”

32 “Can in no wise ascend unto the glory of the highest heaven.”

33 Thereupon she summoned unto herself one maiden from her handmaidens,

34 And commanded her: “Descend into space from the mansions of eternity,

35 “And turn thou unto that which they have concealed in the inmost of their hearts.

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,

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;

38 “That they may all come down from their everlasting chambers and tremble,

39 “And kiss their hands and feet for having soared to the heights of faithfulness;

40 “Perchance they may find from their robes the fragrance of the Beloved One.”

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;

46 She found not in them that which she did desire, and this, verily, is but one of His wondrous tales.

50 “By the Lord! I found not from these idle claimants the breeze of Faithfulness!

51 “By the Lord! The Youth hath remained lone and forlorn in the land of exile in the hands of the ungodly.”

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—

The Maiden's Search and Death

The favored maiden's identity is the most controversial aspect amongst the cited authors: Taherzadeh, Mboya and Samandari interpret her to be Bahá'u'lláh, a future "dependent prophet," and 'Abdu'l-Bahá respectively; Bau considers her to represent the Bábi Faith; and Sours has multiple interpretations including one where she is one of "Wisdom's" handmaidens. The "claimants" are generally interpreted as the Bábis who claimed to be "Him Whom God will make manifest" after the Báb's martyrdom and before Bahá'u'lláh's Declaration; but they also can represent anyone who "claims" to be faithful, but in reality is not.

Samandari links these verses to Bahá'í history: after the maid of heaven (Bahá'u'lláh) appoints the handmaiden ('Abdu'l-Bahá) to continue the mission; the handmaiden prepares, then descends and illuminates the world (like Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá takes on the leadership of the Bahá'í faith and displays his brilliance), before conducting the search (traveling to the Europe and North America to search for true believers). The handmaiden is disappointed with the response ('Abdu'l-Bahá's efforts do not yield mass conversions as with the Bábi Faith in Persia) and returns to her heavenly mansion (to the holy land). The handmaiden's "whispered" word can be; 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, which were letters he wrote during World War I, but some were not delivered until after the war (privily) and/or 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament, which was concealed until after his death. When the maids of heaven hear the tale of the Youth (Shoghi Effendi surrounded by his unfaithful family), they mourn his situation.

Bau has interprets the maiden's death as the death of the Bábi religion and the maids of heaven as representing other religions. And furthermore interprets the maiden's dying calls and the maids' grief by combining the Arabic and Persian Tablets: the maiden's cry "aloud" (v47) is (pc38) "we have traversed the stage of expending the self"; her whispered "mystic word" (v48) denotes (pc39) "arise with justice and fairness"; her cry "within herself" (v52) that caused the Concourse to "shriek and tremble" is "We are from God and to him do we return." (pc41); the "word of the tale" of the Youth (v57) is related to (pc42) Bahá'u'lláh's plea "God willing, we maintain the hope" that the "the immortal temples of glory" remain undefiled.

The maiden's story also appears in several of Bahá'u'lláh's other mystical writings including Persian Hidden Words #77 and the Tablet of the Maiden, which does not have an authorized English translation; both were revealed before 1863 and seem to recount the same vision, but with some differences in the details. For example: in the Tablet and PHW77, the maiden and Bahá'u'lláh inhale to find the scent of "Faithfulness"; in the Tablet of the Maiden, the maiden inhales Bahá'u'lláh's fragrance - then at the end, He asks for an interpretation of this vision. Since Bahá'u'lláh had these recurring visions, the meaning of this vision must have been important to Him, even though the meaning hadn't been revealed to Him at the time of the Tablet of the Maiden.

- 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;
42 She then descended with such an adorning as to
illumine the heavens and all that is therein.
43 She bestirred herself and perfumed all things in the
lands of holiness and grandeur.
44 When she reached that place she rose to her full
height in the midmost heart of creation,
45 And sought to inhale their fragrance at a time that
knoweth neither beginning nor end.
46 She found not in them that which she did desire,
and this, verily, is but one of His wondrous tales.
47 She then cried aloud, wailed and repaired to her
own station within her most lofty mansion,
48 And then gave utterance to one mystic word,
whispered privily by her honeyed tongue,
49 And raised the call amidst the Celestial Concourse
and the immortal maids of heaven:
50 "By the Lord! I found not from these idle claimants
the breeze of Faithfulness!
51 "By the Lord! The Youth hath remained lone and
forlorn in the land of exile in the hands of the
ungodly."
52 She then uttered within herself such a cry that the
Celestial Concourse did shriek and tremble,
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.
54 Glorified be He that created her out of the essence
of love in the midmost heart of His exalted
paradise!
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.
56 They all gathered around her, and lo! they found
her body fallen upon the dust;
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—

"We have traversed the stage of expending the self for others. Arise to expend justice and fairness upon the souls that pertain to you... 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."

Bahá'u'lláh, Persian Tablet, Cole provisional translation.

"77. O SON OF JUSTICE! In the night-season the beauty of the immortal Being hath repaired from the emerald height of fidelity unto the Sadratu'l-Muntahá, and wept with such a weeping that the concourse on high and the dwellers of the realms above wailed at His lamenting. Whereupon there was asked, Why the wailing and weeping? He made reply: As bidden I waited expectant upon the hill of faithfulness, yet inhaled not from them that dwell on earth the fragrance of fidelity. Then summoned to return I beheld, and lo! certain doves of holiness were sore tried within the claws of the dogs of the earth. Thereupon the Maid of heaven hastened forth unveiled and resplendent from Her mystic mansion, and asked of their names, and all were told but one. And when urged, the first letter thereof was uttered, whereupon the dwellers of the celestial chambers rushed forth out of their habitation of glory. And whilst the second letter was pronounced they fell down, one and all, upon the dust. At that moment a voice was heard from the inmost shrine: 'Thus far and no farther.' Verily we bear witness to that which they have done and are now doing."

Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words from the Persian.

"There arose the houri, Who had dwelt in pre-eternity... This is a houri upon Whom none have gazed save God... When She arose with the ornament of God from Her palace, She looked with one glance toward the sky. The people of the heavens swooned at the rays of Her visage and at the wafting of Her perfume. Then She looked with another glance toward the earth, and it was illumined by the lights of Her beauty and the loveliness of Her splendor... I became bewildered at the pen of God's handiwork, and at what it had inscribed upon Her temple. It was as though She had appeared with a body of light in the forms of the spirit, as though She moved upon the earth of essence in the substance of manifestation. I noticed that the houris had poked their heads out of their rooms and were suspended in the air above Her... Praise be to Her creator, fashioner, and maker--to the one Who made Her manifest.

"Then she nearly swooned within herself, and with all her being she sought to inhale My fragrance... She said, 'I discern in Thee the signs of sorrow, which so sadden Thee that I find the lamp of joy in the niche of Thy heart to have been extinguished... I adjure Thee by God, other than Whom there is no God, not to conceal from Me what befell Thee.'... Behold, I saw the earth quake at the trembling of Her soul, and shake at the quivering of Her heart. She remained, before time, after time, above time.

"Then She raised Her head with a scream that cleft the sky and broke open the earth. Lands moved, and mountains were pulverized... 'By Thy life, I perceive from Thee the fragrance of the beloved. Thou art the darling of the worlds. If Thou art He, why dost Thou disguise Thy comely features? Is it because of the people of the Qur'an, or because of the people of the Bayan? Woe be unto all created things!...'... I guided Her to my soul. When She knew, She wailed, shook, lamented, trembled, and fell on Her face in the dust before my feet... the spirit had departed from Her as though She had never been created therein. Then the houris suspended in the air howled, and the purified houris in the cloud of unknowing lamented... Thus do we address you, O concourse of paradise, with a vision of eternity. Interpret it for Me, if ye can interpret the vision of the spirit."

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of the Maiden, Cole provisional translation, bahai-library.com.

The Refrains and the Heavens

Refrains - “The invocation ‘Glorified be my Lord, the All-Glorious’ occurs fifty-three times, whereas ‘Glorified be our Lord, the most High’ occurs only following the final three verses. Both refrains use derivations of the word Bahá regarded as the Greatest Name in Bahá’í spirituality. The first refrain stresses God as ‘All Glorious’, a term used in scripture to indicate God’s presence and immanence. The second refrain use of the words ‘Most High’ stresses God’s transcendence... Together they suggest the revealed and hidden nature of God.”

Sours, An Illustrated Guide, pp.94-95.

These refrains evoke the songs of angels, which have been described in many religions and are also expressed by Bahá’u’lláh as a houri’s song and the call of the Síyáh-Chál Maiden. Within the refrains, a pronoun shift from “my” to “our” occurs after “the maids of heaven hastened forth.” This implies that those maids of heaven are voicing the refrain of “our” Lord; which in turn implies that the “my” Lord refrains are voiced by an individual maid of heaven. The switch from “All-Glorious” to “Most High” indicates that the song of the single maid of heaven, who was specifically praising Bahá’u’lláh, has been replaced by the songs of the group of maids who are glorifying the unknowable God, who is “Most High” and above the Manifestations.

Heavens – The Tablet features several celestial characters who can be interpreted either as metaphors of someone else or can just be considered as heavenly beings. Taherzadeh, Samandari and Mboya generally interpret them to be metaphors; while Sours and Bau generally consider them to be heavenly beings, each with many names. The authors all essentially interpret the “Voice of Grandeur” as the Godhead. As previously discussed, each author has a different interpretation of the maiden. The maid of heaven and the favored maiden are named in Cole’s translation of the Arabic Tablet as “the houri of the spirit” and “the houri of nearness” (ac25 and ac41). Taherzadeh, Sours and Bau consider the Maid of Heaven to be a heavenly being who is associated with the Manifestations.

“The Maid of Heaven... [personifies] the ‘Most Great Spirit’... The Manifestations of God have used different terms to describe the descent of the Spirit of God upon Them. In Christianity, the term ‘Holy Spirit’ is used, while Bahá’u’lláh designates this as the ‘Most Great Spirit’ signifying thereby the Revelation of God in its fullness.”

Taherzadeh Revelation-Vol. 1, p 213, 10.

The Tablet’s celestial beings and places appear to be in a heavenly hierarchy; there also seems to be a fluid identity between Bahá’u’lláh, the Báb, and the Maid of Heaven. These can be explained by considering the spiritual universe as a continuum with realms which can be both overlapping and distinct; where some beings encompass more than one realm. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá identifies three realms with the ringstone symbol; God, Manifestations, and Man. Before Bahá’u’lláh expounded on the “seven valleys”, in the Tablet of All Food* He divulged five realms, which are briefly described below and related with the Tablet’s characters (*and linked to Creation from the Bible*).

“Let us consider the human being who, in this life, functions on three different levels simultaneously. In relation to the lower kingdoms, such as the vegetable and animal, man is superior and dominant. Within his own kingdom, however, man is created to live in unity with his fellow men; whereas, in relation to the Manifestations of God, he is vastly inferior... [A]lthough man remains the same being, he manifests three degrees of qualities... those of unity, of inferiority and superiority. *Taherzadeh, Revelation-Vol. 1, pp.57-58.*”

“Háhút” – Heaven of God’s Oneness–God’s impenetrable, unknowable Essence: *“In the beginning God.”*

“Láhút” – Heaven of Eternal Divinity – Throne of God, Seat of Glory, God’s perfections revealed: Bahá’u’lláh as “He is God,” “He is the Gracious, the Well-Beloved”; the maid and maids of heaven, Voice of Grandeur, Godhead; *“Let there be light.”*

“Jabarút” – Heaven of Dominion – realm of command, unity in absolute submission: Bahá’u’lláh as the Holy Mariner; the maid of heaven as the “Law of God”; Manifestations in unity; *“Let there be a firmament [called Heaven].”*

“Malakút” – Heaven of Justice – realm of distinction, holy souls: Bahá’u’lláh as the Mariner who teaches; the maid of heaven as the “Cause of God”; the Celestial Concourse, souls “who are firm in the Covenant”; past worldly limitations, unity of human souls; Manifestations as individuals; *“Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to divide day from night.”*

“Nasút” – Paradise of Bounty – the mortal, physical world – the human, animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms: “the world below,” “people of the dust,” “mortal graves”; “claimants”; *“Let the dry land appear,” and the creation of vegetable, animal and human kingdoms.*

**This tablet, revealed by Bahá’u’lláh in Baghdad, does not have an authoritative translation- a provisional translation by Lambden is online at bahai-library.com which also has study guides.*

1-52g Glorified be my Lord, the All-Glorious!

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.

53g,54g Glorified be my Lord, the All-Glorious!

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..one of the mysterious grievous afflictions—

57g Glorified be our Lord, the Most High!

i He is the Gracious, the Well-Beloved!

ii O Holy Mariner!

1 Bid thine ark of eternity appear before the Celestial Concourse,

13 O Mariner! Teach them that are within the ark that which we have taught thee behind the mystic veil.

16 May wing through space even as the favored birds in the realm of eternal reunion;

18 They passed the grades of worldly limitations and reached that of the divine unity...

21 And they heard the Voice of Grandeur raised from behind the unseen pavilion upon the Height of Glory:

22 “O guardian angels! Return them to their abode in the world below,

23 “Inasmuch as they have purposed to rise to that sphere which the wings of the celestial dove have never attained;

25 Whereupon the maid of heaven looked out from her exalted chamber,

ac25 Behold, the houri of the spirit looked out from the most exalted chamber.

28 And as the radiance of her beauty shone upon the people of dust,

29 All beings were shaken in their mortal graves.

34 And commanded her: “Descend into space from the mansions of eternity,

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;

ac41 Then the houri of nearness dawned from the horizon of the chambers, just as the visage of the youth rises above his robe.

49 And raised the call amidst the Celestial Concourse and the immortal maids of heaven:

50 “By the Lord! I found not from these idle claimants the breeze of Faithfulness!

“She stood before my face and gave utterance as a dove warbles in the realm of eternity, as though speaking in the wondrous music that hath no words, letters or sounds. It is as though all books appeared in commentary on the songs of Her innovation. I recognized all meaning in a single point therein. When I listened with my entire being, I heard the mention of God, the exalted, the most glorious, in Her tunes, and the name of God, the exalted, the most high, in Her melodies.”

Bahá’u’lláh, Tablet of the Maiden, Cole’s provisional translation, bahai-library.com.

“While engulfed in tribulations I heard a most wondrous, a most sweet voice, calling above My head. Turning My face, I beheld a Maiden - the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord... Betwixt earth and heaven she was raising a call which captivated the hearts and minds of men. She was imparting to both My inward and outer being tidings which rejoiced My soul, and the souls of God’s honoured servants.”

Bahá’u’lláh, Tablet of the Temple, verse 6.