

## *Reviews/Critiques/Reseñas*

### **UNVEILING THE HIDDEN WORDS: THE NORMS USED BY SHOGHI EFFENDI IN HIS TRANSLATION OF THE HIDDEN WORDS**

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Bahá'u'lláh begins the Hidden Words with the statement:

This is that which hath descended from the realm of glory, uttered by the tongue of power and might, and revealed unto the Prophets of old. We have taken the inner essence thereof and clothed it in the garment of brevity, as a token of grace unto the righteous, that they may stand faithful unto the Covenant of God, may fulfill in their lives His trust, and in the realm of spirit obtain the gem of Divine virtue. (3)

The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh occupy a central place in Bahá'í sacred scripture, only ranking lower than the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy Book, and the Kitáb-i-Iqán, his Book of Certitude, according to Shoghi Effendi. From the reader's point of view, the Hidden Words, in their short passages of discrete prose, are easier to peruse than many longer passages. Furthermore, they contain memorable, pithy statements. The first Arabic Hidden Word, which reads, "O SON OF SPIRIT! My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting," (3) is probably one of the most widely memorized passages in the Bahá'í writings.

While the Hidden Words may be brief, they nevertheless contain, as Bahá'u'lláh indicates, "the inner essence" of the Revelations of God from ages past. Their true meanings were hidden and are now, in this day of fulfillment, revealed—or "unveiled." Thus, these brief statements are not to be read and dismissed lightly. Each word in them is illumined through its relation to that same word as it occurs in many other passages of Bahá'u'lláh's writings. The Hidden Words, then, are both accessible and yet a befitting object of profound scholarly pursuit that will, no doubt, continue for hundreds of years to come.

Diana Malouf's *Unveiling the Hidden Words* is a welcome contribution to the early days of this study. Appearing as the second volume in the Bahá'í Studies series from George Ronald, Publishers, the volume carries the subtitle "The Norms Used by Shoghi Effendi in His Translation of the Hidden Words," which clarifies the approach taken by the author. But while the author's work contributes to the "unveiling" of these "gemlike utterances" and thus addresses the goal indicated by her title, she also conducts a wider-ranging discussion than her subtitle would have us believe.

She begins with an outline of the "qualifications" of Shoghi Effendi as a translator of Bahá'í sacred scripture, followed by a discussion of the style of the

Hidden Words and the influences of various literary and religious traditions found in them. The translation history of the work is then recounted, followed by a discussion of the style chosen by Shoghi Effendi as appropriate for rendering the Hidden Words into English. All of these topics will be of interest to the general reader who wishes to know more about the background of this central sacred work in the Bahá'í Faith. A main point of the book's thesis is the difference between other translators and Shoghi Effendi, who was also the Guardian of the Faith and vested with special authority to interpret the sacred texts that he translated. Indeed, several appendices at the end of the volume offer a clear appreciation for the Guardian and his role, outlining his position in the line of authority in the Bahá'í Faith and providing an account of his other accomplishments as well as a list of his major writings.

The latter portion of the book, in which the author treats the theory of norms, is rather heavier going for readers who are not conversant with translation theory. Nevertheless, careful attention is rewarded, and the tenacious reader will come away from the book with at least some further appreciation for the detailed choices made by Shoghi Effendi—and for the standards he thus set for future generations of translators of Bahá'í literature. As the author states at the end of the introduction to the book, "The investigation of the norms Shoghi Effendi used in his translation of the Hidden Words will throw light on his function of interpreter and will, it is hoped, broaden our assessment of how norms act in a translation" (7).

Particularly interesting is the discussion of the various English-language renderings of the Hidden Words that have been produced by different translators. The author supplies an appendix containing the prologue and the first twenty of the Arabic Hidden Words as construed by the three people who undertook translations before Shoghi Effendi, as well as the Guardian's earlier and later versions of them. The differences are often subtle, but sometimes breathtaking from both a stylistic and a substantive point of view. Take, for example, Arabic Hidden Word 17, translated by Kheiralla to read as follows: "O SON OF MAN! Let thy satisfaction be in Myself and not in those who are inferior to Me, and seek not help from any beside Me, for nothing beside Me will ever satisfy thee." This was rendered by Shoghi Effendi in 1929 as "O SON OF MAN! Be thou content with Me and seek no other helper. For none but Me can ever suffice thee" (Malouf 211–12). There is no disputing the improvement in economy, beauty of expression, and clarity of meaning.

The "unveiling" of the Hidden Words—and of other Bahá'í scriptural works—is an exciting prospect. Diana Malouf's understanding of both the field of translation theory and the role and station of the Guardian of the Faith has resulted in a valuable contribution to Bahá'í Studies that has laid a solid basis for future scholars.