

Tablet on the Right of the People (Lawḥ-i ḥaqq al-nās)

by Bahā'u'llāh

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In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

Praise be to God, who has fulfilled what He revealed to all of His prophets and His messengers, and announced to all people the glad tidings of His days. Among them is the day He promised us in His incorruptible book with the words: the day when “God will provide for each out of His abundance.”¹ That day, in truth, is this day, for He has provided for all who have entered beneath His shelter in this day from the wealth of His knowledge and His wisdom, in such wise that He has entrusted the reins of knowledge into the hands of His most insignificant servant, and the care of His humblest subject, who holds fast to the cord of His love during the days of His revelation.

Praise be to God, who inspires whom He desires with the hosts of His revelation and casts the light of His knowledge into the hearts of whom He pleases. No God is there but Him, who is so manifest through the manifestation of Himself that He has no veil except the light of His beauty and no cover besides the profusion of His manifestation.

Blessings and peace be on His most honored friend and the prince of His creation,² and on his family and his supporters, who have arisen at his bidding and remained steadfast in his love.

¹ Qur‘ān 4:130.

² Probably a reference to the prophet Muḥammad, though possibly to the Bāb. According to Armin Eshraghi, this type of ambiguity can often be observed in Bahā'u'llāh's writings and is generally done on purpose.

Your letter was read, and it is the source of gladness and joy. God willing, this blessing may always be our companion and this confirmation continue, if from time to time you would inquire about, and have compassion for, the state of those who wander in the wilderness of disappointment and humiliation.³ May God recompense you with the best of rewards and confirm you in that which He pleases and desires.

You have asked how the administration of justice in the world after death and the requital of the rights of the people during the Great Resurrection, which is known as the Day of Judgment,⁴ should be understood and conceived, given that these worldly adornments, possessions, and legal rights sought after in this vain life do not exist in the worlds after death. And even supposing they did exist, they would yield no profit and bear no fruit for those to whom they are due. Therefore, how can justice be said to be administered in those worlds? For instance, it is said that God is merciful and may sometimes waive what is due to Him and grant His pardon, but He does not waive the rights of the people, so they may receive what is justly theirs.

O beloved of my heart! You have asked about a matter that is very abstruse and difficult to explain, for understanding this question depends on understanding and comprehending the days after death and on true knowledge of the Day of Resurrection. Comprehending these two mysteries requires a pure heart and a sanctified ear, and not every ear is worthy of hearing this divine glad tidings. How can the ear that does not hear the blast of the trumpet and the sound of the horn coming from the heaven of this Revelation still hear the singing of the birds? But, since I am compelled to answer your request, I will respond with brevity and limit myself to setting forth certain comparisons and likenesses. There is no power or strength except in God, the Incomparable, the All-Compelling.

³ Armin Eshraghi explains that Bahā' u' llāh is here applying conventions of modesty expected in Persian letter writing: that the addressee has thought of the unworthy writer, namely, Bahā' u' llāh, is a great blessing and a token of his goodwill.

⁴ According to common Muslim belief, after bodily death the human soul resides in an intermediate world before the event of the Great Resurrection. Shaykh Aḥmad describes the Great Resurrection as the moment souls are summoned to appear before God in celestial archetypal bodies by the second blast of the archangel Seraphiel's trumpet, after which they receive God's judgment and obtain their just due, whether this be reward or punishment. (See H. Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, pp. 191-195.) The Islamic principle of *ḥaqq al-nās* (the right of the people) asserts that in the next world souls will receive compensation for the debts owed to them.

I submit, therefore, that whatever is seen and heard in this temporal world, this world of limitations—of every name and description, of every form and attribute—also has a presence and manifestation in every world of the worlds of God suitable to and befitting that world, where it appears and is revealed by another name and description, and in another form with other attributes. The death of things witnessed in this world applies to the form and the body only, not to the reality and the essence.⁵ Without a doubt, the realities of things appear in different guises and have diverse manifestations in every world, and countless realities are revealed in every world.

Those mature philosophers who have drunk the choice wine of true understanding have acknowledged the embodiment of deeds.⁶ The All-Glorious states: “He will requite them for their [acquired] attributes (*wasf*).”⁷ The Dayspring of the Revelation of the All-Merciful has declared: “The people will be requited for their deeds, with reward being the consequence of good deeds and punishment the consequence of wrongdoing.” It is evident, then, that deeds will be preserved and every [acquired] attribute will continue to exist, so that through the attribute or deed itself requital can be given. Every [acquired] attribute a person possesses and every deed he commits, therefore, will reveal itself and take on a particular form in

⁵ In Aristotelian philosophy, the essence and reality of “triangleness,” for example, is having three sides and three angles whose sum adds up to 180 degrees. These attributes cannot be removed from a triangle without destroying its fundamental nature. But any acquired accidental attributes, like being red or being dense, can be added or removed, as they are not essential to its nature. In the same way, the essential nature of “humanness” is having a rational mind, while accidental attributes, like being just or being oppressive, are not essential to the reality of man.

⁶ In his *Sharḥ-i-Golshan-Rāz*, al-Lāhijī explains that the term *tajassum-i-a ‘māl*, which Bahā’u’llāh uses here, refers to the embodiment of human deeds on the day of resurrection after death: “After the separation of the soul from the physical body, man will possess an ideal spiritual body (*jism ma ‘nawī mithālī*) devoid of any corporeal darkness or density. That ‘body’ is like crystal clear water, and whatever passes before it appears and becomes reflected in it. He will witness again in that mirror all of his deeds and actions distinguished and represented in appropriate images. Eventually, all the acts, deeds, and attributes preserved and firmly embedded in the soul, by reason of the removal of the dark veils of the body and nature, will become manifest in the ideal inter-world portrayed in befitting images, for that is a world wherein the manifest and the hidden are the same, and all things become revealed” (qtd. in *Farhang-i-Iṣṭilāḥāt-i-‘Irfānī*, p. 222).

⁷ Qur’ān 6:139. The verb translated here as “requite” (*jazā*) has the double implied meaning of “to reward” or “to punish”, depending on whether the deed being requited is good or bad. The context of this passage makes it clear that God, in this case, is saying He will punish these people for their wrongdoings (= shameful acquired attributes) and for their false assertions. The term *wasf*, as a synonym for *ṣifa*, means “attribute,” “characteristic,” “trait,” or “property”). It also has the meaning of “description,” “depiction,” “representation,” etc., as well as “attribution” and “ascription,” so the verse in question could also be translated “He will requite them for their [false] attribution,” as some Qur’ān translators have done.

each world “so that He may requite each soul for what it has done. He, indeed, is swift in calling to account.”⁸

Whenever we desire to make statements and give analogies that are easy to understand and comprehend, in order to explain this theme and expound on the nature of the manifestations of things in the innumerable worlds, I consider no analogy more befitting than that of the dream world. It is said that “sleep is the brother of death,”⁹ so may you recognize the brother by the likeness of his brother. Consider how in the world of vision you see certain things, and later while awake in this world, you interpret and explain them by referring to other names, forms, and representations. Then after a lapse of time, something very similar to what you interpreted and explained is witnessed.

Therefore, O my brother, when you dream and see such a thing in the world of vision, it will have another name and attribute there different from that which it has here. Recognize, then, that this same difference in forms applies to the world after death. And know of a certainty that while the reality and the essence are one, the form and the representation will vary.

If you are unable to grasp this theme through your own experience, then refer to the interpretations of the wise among those who interpret dreams, for they have an interpretation for every statement and every action, and for each thing they have an explanation. The most truthful of speakers, in His book, mentions Joseph’s vision (upon him and the Lord of our age be peace) and his interpretation of the dreams of two other individuals.¹⁰ Now consider. What kind of world is that wherein his father and mother are seen as the sun and the moon, and his brothers appear in the form of stars? And what is this world wherein the reverse is seen: the sun and the moon in the form of his father and mother, and the stars in the form of his brothers? He says (exalted be his sovereignty), “I saw eleven stars, and the sun and the moon; I saw them bowing down before me.”¹¹ The interpretation of this

⁸ Qur’ān 14:51.

⁹ From an authentic *ḥadīth* of the Prophet narrated by Jābir Ibn Abd Allāh, al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu’jam al-awsaṭ*, p. 938.

¹⁰ See Qur’ān 12:4–5 and 12:36 ff.

¹¹ Qur’ān 12:4.

vision became clear once Joseph was established upon the throne of glory, and Jacob and Joseph's eleven brothers prostrated themselves at his feet.

Now, since this question has become established and ascertained, it is evident that the rendering of each due takes place in every world in a manner befitting that world. Otherwise, assuredly the administration of justice could not be fulfilled.

I will set forth another analogy for you that, by this means, you may more easily comprehend the topic of our discourse and realize your aim. Suppose that during the season of spring someone should steal the seeds and grains of another individual and then plant those seeds in his own garden, so that after a time they grow into tender young bushes, and, finally, during the summer season, they are ready for harvest. Then it happens that a just king, during this same summer season, desires to redress the injustice done to the wronged one. What will his course of action be? Will he take steps to replace the lost seeds or grains, or will he return the shrubs themselves with their fruit on them?

Certainly, you would say the bushes, even though this form is not the same as that form, and this name and this attribute are unlike the name and the attribute the seeds had in the spring. Perhaps you would assert that those same seeds and grains no longer exist in the summer season. And assuming they did exist and the very same seeds could be returned, this would provide no benefit or gain to their owner, for the season of spring, which is the time of planting, has already passed, and the seeds and grains would be of no use.

However, it is clearly incorrect to say that the seeds no longer exist and provide no benefit, for in truth and fact, those seeds and grains do exist and have appeared in the form of the bushes and their fruit, which are superior and more valuable.

How often it happens that justice is dispensed in this very world while you remain unaware. Such is the case when one's adornments and possessions become the cloak of tests and afflictions, and tests and afflictions appear in the form of possessions. Often it happens that the loss of these possessions is the reason and cause for dispelling one's afflictions. In this case, there is no distinction between losing one's possessions through spiritual causes and losing them through the

oppression of another. Although the oppressor has seized and stolen your property, he has also removed the cause of your affliction and brought it on himself. Is any better method of dispensing justice conceivable? No, by the Lord of the worlds!

Were I to explain and remove the veil from the manifestations of the deeds, acts, and words that appear in limitless and manifold forms in the worlds of God, it is feared, on the one hand, that sanctified souls would forsake their bodies and ascend to the seats of the glory of the All-Merciful; and, on the other, that the wicked and perverse would perish out of fear for what they have committed during their futile lives.

How I long for spiritual attributes, goodly deeds, and truthful and beneficial words! For the outcome of these is an upraised heaven, an outspread earth, rising suns, gleaming moons, scintillating stars, crystal fountains, flowing rivers, gentle breezes, sublime palaces, lofty trees, heavenly fruits, rich harvests,¹² warbling birds, crimson leaves, and perfumed blossoms. Thus I say: “Protect me, protect me, O my Lord, the All-Merciful, from blameworthy attributes, wicked deeds, unseemly acts, and deceitful and injurious words!” For the outcome of these is realized in the contingent realm as hell and hellfire, and the infernal and fetid trees,¹³ as utter malevolence, loathsome things, sicknesses, misery, pollution, and war and destruction. Great God! To disclose more than this is not permissible. I declare that all majesty and greatness belong to God, the Incomparable, the All-Compelling.

I will present another example from the realm of divine legislation, which corresponds to the world of creation, by referring to the application of religious law. God willing, to the extent you are informed of the divine worlds, you will recognize and understand the metaphorical nature of this world, and will be able to extend it to the limitless worlds. I relate a parable from the religious law of Islām and the law preceding it, of which you are aware and which you acknowledge. Should a Christian, in accordance with religious law and ordinance, owe a jar of wine and a piece of pork to a debtor, and later on both should become Muslims, what course should the deputies of the sacred law follow in order to redress the

¹² Literally, “low hanging bunches of grapes,” a Qur’anic image of Paradise, see sūras 69:23, 76:14.

¹³ The trees of *Zaqqūm* and *Zarī’*, the fruits of which are said to be more bitter than aloe, more fetid than carrion, and hotter than fire, which are the food of the inmates of hell.

right of the wronged and requite the overdue debt owed to him? For in Islām, wine and pork are unlawful and have no value, and will yield no benefit to the one to whom they are due. You have no recourse except to say: either they should compensate the creditor with goods that are lawful in Islām, or they should award him its monetary value in conformity with what legal experts consider equitable and fair. Similar judgments in some legal cases are mentioned and recorded in the books of the jurists.

Should I desire it, I could unfold for you many more analogies, both common and abstruse. Through the power of God and His might, I am able to do this. But I refrain from this lest our discourse become protracted and cause you to become weary and inattentive. Thus, I conclude this discourse and give praise to God, who has guided us to recognize His Most Great Name and has acquainted us with that whereof the peoples of the world are unaware.

(From *Mā'idiy-i-Āsmānī*, vol. 7, pp. 118-125.)