

Unsealing the Choice Wine at the Family Reunion

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Presented at the Association for Bahá'í Studies Symposium on *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*,
McGill University, Montréal, Canada, June 17, 1993.

Abstract

Bahá'í scripture portrays human progress as propelled by two distinct but inextricably related capacities: independently acquired knowledge coupled with social action. A complementary ingredients of one integral process, this dynamic relationship is symbolized in the Bahá'í revelation by *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, the principal doctrinal work and *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, the means by which that doctrine becomes expressed in action. Shoghi Effendi states that the resulting changes wrought by the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh should be regarded as “the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society.” The revelation of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* thus heralds the reunion of the human family and the fulfillment of various widely regarded prophecies about such an event: the marriage of the bride with the bridegroom, the New Jerusalem descended from heaven, and the unsealing of the “choice sealed wine.”

Résumé

Les Écrits bahá'ís décrivent le progrès humain comme dynamisé par deux capacités distinctes mais inextricablement reliées: l'acquisition indépendante de la connaissance associée à l'action sociale. Ingrédients complémentaires d'un même processus, il s'agit d'une relation dynamique qui est symbolisée dans la révélation bahá'íe par le *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, le principal ouvrage de doctrine, et le *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, le moyen par lequel la doctrine se traduit en action. Shoghi Effendi déclare que les changements provoqués par l'Ordre mondial de Bahá'u'lláh devraient être considérés comme «la limite extrême de l'organisation de la société humaine (trad. Libre)». La révélation du *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* annonce donc la réunion de la famille humaine et la réalisation de diverses prophétie largement respectées concernant un tel avènement: l'union de l'épousée et de l'époux, la Nouvelle Jérusalem descendue du ciel, et le «vin choisi scellée» qui est décacheté.

Resumen

Los escritos bahá'ís representan el progreso humano como impulsado por dos habilidades diversas pero inseparablemente relacionadas: el conocimiento adquirido independientemente acoplado con acción social. Canto ingredientes complementarios a un proceso integral, esta relación dinámica está caracterizada en la revelación bahá'í par el *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, la obra doctrinaria principal, y el *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, el medio por cual esa doctrina se expresa en acción. Shoghi Effendi declara que los cambios efectuados por la Orden Mundial de Bahá'u'lláh deberán considerarse los límites máximos de la organización de la sociedad humana. La revelación del *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* anuncia, por lo tanto, la reunión de la familia humana y el cumplimiento de variadas ampliamente conocidas profecías que hablan de tal suceso: el matrimonio de la novia con el novio, la Nueva Jerusalén descendida del cielo, y el destape del “vino lacrado predilecto.”

In the opening passage of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, we find a familiar but infinitely subtle statement of human purpose enunciated in terms of two duties: (1) the “recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation” and (2) the observance of “every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world” (19). On the surface, this mandate seems clear enough—it describes human responsibility in the eternal covenant whereby God provides divine guidance through the Prophets and we, in turn, must attempt to recognize these teachers and follow their guidance. However, a more thorough examination of this obligation reveals a two-part paradigm that frames the entire process of divine enlightenment, defines the fundamental properties that distinguish all human activity, and establishes with clarity the unique position and status of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* in the evolution of humankind on our planet.¹

Part of the subtlety in these twin duties derives from the fact that recognition and obedience are not two separate and independent actions, but two, parts of one integral process, something Bahá'u'lláh implies in this same preamble to *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* when he states that neither action is sufficient or “acceptable without the other.” If we apply this principle to the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, for example, we might observe that it is not sufficient to

recognize the station and authority of Bahá'u'lláh as personal lord and savior unless we express or signalize that recognition through the daily regimen of actions that Bahá'u'lláh has instituted to train us.

Consequently, obedience to the Prophet's guidance is not so much a distinct process as it is a completion of the process of recognition. Or stated conversely, without those actions that confirm one's willingness to accede to the beneficent wisdom of the Prophet, one cannot properly be said to have understood the authority, station, and the essential purpose of the Manifestation.

Another even more subtle property of these twin duties is the implicit reciprocity between these inextricably related actions. For while there may be a primacy of order (one must know before one can act on that knowledge), the more one implements understanding in metaphorical acts (which is what the laws of the Prophet are designed to have us do), the more one comes to understand the spiritual principle underlying that action. For example, as one attempts to be fair and equitable with others, one comes to acquire a greater understanding of the abstract notion of justice itself. Spiritual awakening begets action; action induces a greater perception of the verity being acted out; and that enhanced understanding yields a more ample and complete expression of that abstraction in deeds.

While the interplay between these twin duties of recognition and obedience is evident throughout the Bahá'í sacred texts in a number of profound and revealing ways, perhaps the most blatant statement of this process is found in the short obligatory prayer, which functions virtually as a credo for the Bahá'í: "I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations* 314). For most Bahá'ís, this testimony of faith is hardly difficult to comprehend, but there is a subtlety here that may elude a casual reader.

Bahá'u'lláh observes in *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* that knowledge of God is achieved solely through the appearance of the Manifestations. Therefore, "to know Thee" would necessarily imply recognition of Manifestation. But recognition in this context implies not merely the designation of a personality or historical figure as having a certain spiritual status. Recognition here clearly implies individual perception of the spiritual attributes of God as given earthly expression. Furthermore, the Bahá'í scriptures define worship as any act which expresses in concrete form our recognition of the Manifestation—work, for example.

Could we not infer, then, that the short obligatory prayer and the opening passage of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* are both describing precisely the same paradigm? Human purpose is a process of (1) coming to understand spiritual concepts as they are made apparent to us through the dramatic appearance of the Prophet (who is but a metaphorical statement of godliness in human form) and then (2) expressing that perception in metaphorical acts, which, when performed with pure motive, discipline, and consistency, result in the transformation of the human soul.

But there is a corollary to this axiomatic statement of human purpose. Not only is this inescapable duty at the heart of any human endeavor; the capacity to accomplish these twin tasks is tantamount to a definition of the distinctive character of human reality. That is, the ability to discern abstractions metaphorized in concrete forms and then to reinvest the perceived concept with a personally instigated course of metaphorical action is a capacity unique to human beings among all physical creation:

Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation.... (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 65)

Thus, when 'Abdu'l-Bahá observes that creation is eternal and that the human being as the fruit of that creation has always existed (*Some Answered Questions* 201), he is implying that there have always existed in the created universe beings capable of performing these two acts—recognition and obedience. Whether or not such beings have always had a physical appearance that we commonly associate with human existence or whether the expression of that recognition was always in terms that we might easily comprehend is largely irrelevant.

Because these twin capacities constitute an essential definition of human nature, we can discover how they underlie the entire Bahá'í paradigm of physical reality. For example, the Bahá'í writings are commonly perceived as portraying physical reality as transient, unreliable, a shadowy and illusive imitation of the eternal changeless spiritual reality:

Know thou that the Kingdom is the real world, and this nether place is only its shadow stretching out. A shadow hath no life of its own; its existence is only a fantasy, and nothing more; it is but images reflected in water, and seeming as pictures to the eye. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 178)

Yet, a number of related axioms in the Bahá'í scriptures demonstrate the possibility of a radically different attitude. First, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts that physical reality is an eternal, essential, and calculated expression of spiritual reality. In *Some Answered Questions* 'Abdu'l-Bahá observes that "as the Essence of Unity (that is, the existence of God) is everlasting and eternal—that is to say, it has neither beginning nor end—it is certain that this world of existence, this endless universe, has neither beginning nor end" (180), even though parts of the universe "may come into existence, or may be disintegrated..." (180). Second, the Bahá'í writings assert that all creation has as its principal and animating purpose the rendering of spiritual attributes in sensually perceptible forms: "Know thou that every created thing is a sign of the revelation of God. Each, according to its capacity, is, and will ever remain, a token of the Almighty" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 184). Third, Bahá'u'lláh observes that without this capacity, "the entire universe would become desolate and void" (184). Fourth, the Bahá'í writings affirm that the physical world is a classroom designed specifically for human enlightenment: "Out of the wastes of nothingness, with the clay of My command I made thee to appear, and have ordained for thy training every atom in existence and the essence of all created things" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words* 32).

But this essential purpose inherent in the relationship between the physical and the spiritual goes quite beyond the Platonic doctrine whereby the physical world functions solely to give us clues about the world of ideas and abstract forms. The commonly accepted Platonic perspective of the human goal in the physical life is to abstain from the things of this world and thereby escape from this illusory "cave,"² thereby ascending to the eternal realm. The Bahá'í writings, however, portray the physical world as a thoroughly spiritualized expression of the unseen spiritual world, a "Great Workshop" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet to August Forel* 14), a classroom not to be disdained, but to be respected, esteemed, and utilized:

The spiritual world is like unto the phenomenal world. They are the exact counterpart of each other. Whatever objects appear in this world of existence are the outer pictures of the world of heaven. ('Abdu'l-Bahá *Promulgation* 10)

This observation leads to yet another axiom—whatever inherent capacity the physical world may have to manifest the attributes of the divine reality, the most significant expression of divine principles in human existence is an evolutionary process, described by Bahá'u'lláh as a paradigm of social progress, "an ever-advancing civilization" (*Gleanings* 215). This continual advancement, Bahá'u'lláh explains, is brought about through the critical linkage between divine ordination and human volition. Thus, if we liken the relationship between the spiritual world and the physical world to the relationship between the human soul and the human body, we can observe that this linkage is from the beginning. It is an inherent property of creation itself.

This linkage or interplay between the two realities is clearly demonstrated in the Bahá'í concept of how human society advances through the process of progressive revelations. For example, it is commonplace in discussions of Bahá'í theology to observe that the Manifestations bring two sorts of information—a reiteration of the eternal and changeless spiritual verities aid an updating of laws, ordinances, and institutions that translate these spiritual concepts into a daily regimen for the individual and into a social program for society as a whole. Bahá'u'lláh discusses this distinction as relating to the two stations of the Prophet. In the station of essential unity, the Manifestation is the eternal voice of God and is indistinguishable from God or the other Prophets (*Kitáb-i-Iqán* 152). In the station of distinction, the Manifestation possesses a particular personality, appears in a particular social and historical context, and ministers to the exigencies of that age (*Kitáb-i-Iqán* 176). Each successive Manifestation thus unveils ever more completely a vision of the spiritual world and ordains a course of action whereby that enhanced vision can be translated into an ever more complete concrete social expression of spiritual reality.

These two stations of the Prophet thereby parallel the twin aspects of the revelation, as well as the twin duties ordained in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. In each case the purpose is constant: to clothe understanding with the garment of action, the unseen with visible representation. Similarly, in every expression of this duality, neither part of this complementarity is acceptable or sufficient or complete without the other.

Christ alludes to this relationship in a series of potent analogies describing the need for a new edifice to contain the new revelation:

No man putteth a piece of new cloth onto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved. (Matt. 9:14–17)

So it is that when in the course of religious history the spiritual teachings of a Dispensation become separated from or antithetical to the social laws and ordinances, or when one aspect of this duality excels or exceeds the other in its progress, the religious edifice as a whole is rent to pieces, its purposes perverted, the new wine poured out useless onto the dust.

It is in this context that Shoghi Effendi cautions against any perception of the spiritual or doctrinal teachings of the Bahá'í Faith as being distinct or separable from the laws or administrative principles: "To dissociate the administrative principles of the Cause from the purely spiritual and humanitarian teachings would be tantamount to a mutilation of the body of the Cause, a separation that can only result in the disintegration of its component parts, and the extinction of the Faith itself" (Shoghi Effendi *The World Order* 5).

Certainly the schism between the essentially spiritual doctrines of Christ and of Muhammad and the institutions and laws that now bear their names gives eloquent testimony to the mutilation that is wrought when these twin parts of the process of spiritualization become dissevered. Indeed, we in the modern age endure the inheritance of this schism in virtually every aspect of our lives, especially in the often adversarial relationship between religion and science, in the Western political dichotomy between Church and State, in the fragmentation of our personal lives between spiritual and secular aspirations.

The revealed writings of Bahá'u'lláh, containing as they do explicit guidance for integrating the sacred and the secular aspects of human advancement, thus represent a strategic reunion for the human body politic. In fact, because this revelation signals the first instance in which a Prophet has securely established both the spiritual insight and an explicit edifice to disseminate that guidance through divinely ordained social structures, the new "wine" of this revelation might well be thought of as the wine of reunion for our planet. Likewise, because *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* provides the means by which that wine can be conveyed to the entire body politic through the creation of evolving social and administrative institutions, as well as a progressive daily regimen; the revelation of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* represents the completion or consummation of planetary social evolution:

The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture—all of which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden Age of the Bahá'í Era—should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop. (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order* 163)

The reunion thus symbolized by the revelation of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* is, from the perspective of religious history, the consummate fusion of the sacred with the secular, the spiritual kingdom of heaven translated into earthly form.

Here again the two-part paradigm is at the center of this process, particularly as regards the revelation of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, since this work is the repository of those laws, ordinances, and institutions that will provide outward or visible aspect to the spiritual concepts enunciated in Bahá'u'lláh's doctrinal works, particularly *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*. Indeed, we can see in the relationship between these two works a symbolic representation of this two-fold paradigm. As an enunciation of the eternal plan of God and as an explication of the divine rationale by which God manifests attributes and the pre-existent Word through divinely empowered Manifestations, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* represents the new wine. In fact, Shoghi Effendi affirms that *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* has "preeminence among the doctrinal" (*God Passes By* 140) works of Bahá'u'lláh. He also observes that *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* "proffered to mankind the 'Choice Sealed Wine,' whose seal is of 'musk' ... (*God Passes By* 139).³

The "Choice Sealed Wine" referred to here by Shoghi Effendi alludes to a passage of the Qur'án in which Muhammad discusses the redemption of humankind at the time of the resurrection. In that day, Muhammad observes, the faithless shall be made to understand the truth about what they have rejected: "This is / The (reality) which ye / Rejected as false!" (83:17). Whereas the righteous shall be greatly rewarded: "Their thirst will be slaked / With Pure Wine Sealed: / The Seal thereof will be / Musk" (83: 24–26). Since one purpose of *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* as the preeminent doctrinal work is to induce certitude by explaining the divine rationale and essential benignity underlying the divine process by which God educates humanity, we might well consider *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* as that choice wine. Of course, the "wine" of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation is not contained solely in *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*; all of the essentially spiritual or doctrinal works of Bahá'u'lláh are part of that vintage. But as an essay explicating the station and methodology of the Prophets, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* proffers to humanity the first clear statement of the abiding theological verities that govern human existence.

If *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* is that choice wine, however, the proffering of this wine of knowledge, while inducing a kind of certitude that might derive from an intellectual appreciation of the justice that pervades the divine plan, cannot by itself complete the process of resurrection and reunion alluded to by Muhammad. We are proffered the

vintage. We can behold it and become attracted by the musk of its seal, but we cannot yet imbibe this precious source of transmutation because the “choice wine” is yet sealed. We still lack some means of unsealing the wine and a proper receptacle to contain its contents that we might convey it to our lips and become nourished by the wisdom it can induce.⁵ Stated more plainly, it is not sufficient that the Manifestation unveil for us the divine logic underlying God’s pedagogy. Resurrection and reunion can occur only when the Prophet provides us a means of applying that knowledge towards a useful course of social action.

This is precisely what Bahá’u’lláh does with the revelation of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*—enunciate in a series of laws, ordinances, and exhortations the methodology for expressing the new knowledge in creative action. It is in this context that Bahá’u’lláh in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* refers to this work as the “mother book” of his Dispensation, as his “Most Holy Book.” It is also in this context that he alludes to *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* as unsealing the choice wine: “Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power” (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 21).

The revelation of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* thereby completes the twofold process of recognition and obedience, of knowing and worshipping, by delineating a pattern of behavior that will give outer form to spiritual insight, a new wineskin for this choice wine of reunion. Here, too, we find several sorts of significance to the concept of “reunion.” Through this two-fold process, the individual believers are reunited with their Lord. Through the creation of a world commonwealth, Bahá’u’lláh has reunited the body politic of humankind. Through the establishment of a divinely ordained social order, the Manifestation has put in place the final stage whereby human society can be organized and administered according to spiritual principles (i.e., the divine kingdom becomes expressed in material form). Shoghi Effendi confirms this when he observes that the form of social organization revealed by Bahá’u’lláh establishes the “furthest limit” of human social organization on this planet:

The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture—all of which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden Age of the Bahá’í Era—should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthest limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop. (*The World Order* 163)

Of course, we can envision a future in which a paradigm of social order might transcend the limits of our planetary society—an interplanetary order or an intergalactic order. The point is that for this planet, the future will consist of an ever more refined version of what Bahá’u’lláh has revealed, and it is perhaps in this sense that the revelation is aptly alluded to as the “wine of reunion” because Bahá’u’lláh has introduced a “divine economy” for our single household.

Consequently, in works written after the revelation of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* in 1873, Bahá’u’lláh frequently employs this same metaphor to indicate that the choice wine has now been unsealed:

Whoso faileth to quaff the choice wine which We have unsealed through the potency of Our Name, the All-Compelling, shall be unable to discern the splendours of the light of divine unity or to grasp the essential purpose underlying the Scriptures of God, the Lord of heaven and earth, the sovereign Ruler of this world and of the world to come. Such a man shall be accounted among the faithless in the Book of God, the All-Knowing, the All-Informed. (*Tablets* 105)⁶

In fact, in his final tablet, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* written in 1891, Bahá’u’lláh alludes to the “Sealed Wine” as a symbol of God’s Revelation in five different passages. In one of these he states: “... ponder upon the things which have been mentioned, perchance thou mayest quaff the Sealed Wine through the power of the name of Him Who is the Self-Subsisting, and obtain that which no one is capable of comprehending” (113–14).⁷ In still another passage, Bahá’u’lláh alludes to this choice wine as the “Wine of Reunion”: “Take heed lest anything deter thee from extolling the greatness of this Day—the Day whereon the Finger of majesty and power hath opened the seal of the Wine of Reunion, and called all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth” (*Gleanings* 28).

But intriguing as the symbolism of this prophecy is regarding the unsealing of the choice wine of reunion, this is not the only major prophecy indicating how *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* completes this two-fold process of knowing and doing. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has discussed that the various biblical allusions to the advent of the “the Holy City, the Jerusalem of God” symbolize the “Law of God” become manifest in human society (*Some Answered Questions* 67). Similarly, the “new heaven” and the “new earth” allude to the fundamental verities of the spiritual world clothed in the garment of human society and governance (67–68).

Possibly the most potent and useful of these allusions to this two-fold process as it pertains to the revelation of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* is the concept of the reunion of the bride with the bridegroom. Shoghi Effendi states that *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* is “the principal repository of that Law which the Prophet Isaiah had anticipated, and which the writer of the Apocalypse had described as the ‘Bride’...” (*God Passes By* 213). We may recall from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s explication of the Adamic myth in *Some Answered Questions* that the beloved or the bride in some poetic traditions often symbolizes the spiritual or intellectual aspect of the self, while the male represents the physical dimension. The adorned bride in this prophecy might thus represent that same spiritual insight symbolized by the choice wine. In fact, this bride may well be the same veiled maiden whose image is for Bahá’u’lláh the source of the word of God:

There, in a vision, the “Most Great Spirit,” as He Himself has again testified, appeared to Him, in the guise of a “Maiden” “calling” with “a most wondrous, a most sweet voice” above His Head, whilst “suspended in the air” before Him and, “pointing with her finger” unto His head, imparted “tidings which rejoiced” His “soul.” (Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 101)

This marriage or wedding of the bride (the unseen world) with the bridegroom (the visible or physical world) likewise serves as a powerful metaphor alluding to the marriage or reunion of the two-fold aspect of the human reality. In fact, in the concluding passages of *The Hidden Words*, a work comprising mostly spiritual axioms, Bahá’u’lláh alludes to the mystic bride as having revealed the truth, but concludes that it is now the duty of the believer to flesh out that understanding with deeds:

The mystic and wondrous Bride, hidden ere this beneath the veiling of utterance, hath now, by the grace of God and His divine favor, been made manifest even as the resplendent light shed by the beauty of the Beloved. I bear witness, O friends! that the favor is complete, the argument fulfilled, the proof manifest and the evidence established. Let it now be seen what your endeavors in the path of detachment will reveal. (51–52)

It is then obvious that applications of this two-part paradigm pervade the Bahá’í revelation and are endlessly fascinating. In the Bahá’í administrative order we find evidence of this complementarity, for example, in the conjoining of the “learned” (the appointed institutions such as Hands of the Cause, Counsellors, Auxiliary Board members and their assistants) and the “rulers” (the elected institutions such as the Universal House of Justice, the secondary and local Houses of Justice).⁸

I suspect that it is this very same process that is being alluded to when Bahá’u’lláh in the long obligatory prayer refers to the Manifestation as the one “through Whom the letters B and E (Be) have been joined anti knit together” (*Prayers and Meditations* 321). That is, the Prophet of God links the eternal, changeless world of the spirit with the contingent reality by creating a social edifice capable of translating that unseen reality into a visible but divine edifice, an organic form wherein we ourselves collaborate as artisans—or to use one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s favorite metaphors, as fellow laborers in the vineyard of God (*Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 121).

Notes

1. See John S. Hatcher, *The Arc of Ascent: The Purpose of Physical Reality II* for a lengthy explication of this theme. In fact, this theme is one of the organizing principles of that study.

2. In Book VII of Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates makes an elaborate conceit commonly known as the “allegory of the cave,” in which he compares the physical world to an inferior expression of the ineffable world of forms and ideas that the physical world reflects. However, one may see in this Socratic doctrine an appreciation for physical reality inasmuch as it provides the images of that spiritual world and thus the means for our ascent.

3. “Revealed on the eve of the declaration of His Mission. it proffered to mankind the ‘Choice Sealed Wine,’ whose seal is of ‘musk,’ and broke the ‘seals’ of the ‘Book’ referred to by Daniel, and disclosed the meaning of the ‘words’ destined to remain ‘closed up’ till the ‘time of the end’” (139).

4. Citations from the Qur’án are from *The Holy Qur’an: Text, Translation and Commentary*, trans. Abdu’llah Yusuf Ali.

5. Reference to the use of “wine” in an allegorical sense—such as being the cause of spiritual ecstasy—is found, not only in the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh but also in the Bible, in the Qur’án, and in ancient Hindu traditions. For example, in the Qur’án the righteous are promised that they will be given to drink of the “choice sealed wine.” In his tablets, Bahá’u’lláh identifies the “choice Wine” with his Revelation whose “musk-laden fragrance” has been wafted “upon all created things.” He states that he has “unsealed” this “wine,” thereby disclosing spiritual truths that

were hitherto unknown and enabling those who quaff thereof to “discern the splendours of the light of divine unity” and to “grasp the essential purpose underlying the Scriptures of God. In one of His meditations, Bahá’u’lláh entreats God to supply the believers with ‘the choice Wine of Thy mercy, that it may cause them to be forgetful of anyone except Thee, and to arise to serve Thy Cause, and to be steadfast in their love for Thee’” (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 165–66).

6 According to Balyuzi, this tablet belongs to what Shoghi Effendi terms one of three “distinct categories” (*God Passes By* 205) of Bahá’u’lláh’s writings during this period, the category of tablets which “partly enunciate and partly reaffirm the fundamental tenets and principles underlying that Dispensation” (quoted in *Bahá’u’lláh: King of Glory* 382).

7. See also p.44, l.12; p.83, l.16; p.88, l.16; and p.105, l.5.

8. The terms “learned” and “rulers” distinguish between those institutions that are in advisory capacities and those with legislative authority; the terms themselves were used by Bahá’u’lláh. See *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968–1973* 92ff.

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