

A Journey through the Seven Valleys¹ of Bahá'u'lláh

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Preamble

In this brief journey through the Seven Valleys² of Bahá'u'lláh, we will partake of its spiritual bounties, focus on its principal message, tune our hearts to the teachings it enshrines, marvel at its masterful composition and form, and recognize some of the distinctive features of this book as compared with Islamic mystic writings. This brief journey is at best an introduction to this Epistle, and is intended to encourage the readers to embark on an in-depth study of the Seven Valleys to receive the full measure of love and life it offers.

The Historical Background

This Epistle of Bahá'u'lláh was revealed during the Baghdad period, circa 1862 C.E.. It was revealed in answer to questions raised by Shaykh Muhyi'd-Dín,³ the judge of Khániqayn, a town located in Iraqi Kurdistan, northeast of Baghdad, and near the Iranian border.

The words of the beloved Guardian in describing the significance of this Epistle and its relation to other Writings of Bahá'u'lláh provides us with a perspective on this book:

To these two outstanding contributions to the world's religious literature [the Kitáb-i-qán and the Hidden Words], occupying respectively, positions of unsurpassed preeminence among the doctrinal and ethical Writings of the Author of the Bahá'í Dispensation, was added, during that same period, a treatise that may well be regarded as His greatest mystical composition, designated as the "Seven Valleys," which He wrote in answer to the questions of Shaykh Muhyi'd-Dín, the Qádí of Khániqayn, in which He describes the seven stages which the soul of the seeker must needs traverse ere it can attain the object of its existence.⁴

This Epistle was revealed in the language and the composition of the mystic Sufi Writings, and is part of a category of the mystical Writings of Bahá'u'lláh that includes Books such as the Four Valleys,⁵ the Hidden Words,⁶ and the Kitáb-i-qán,⁷ plus Tablets like the Essence (Gems) of Mysteries,⁸ and the Mathnaví-i-Mubárák (Blessed Ode).⁹ All of these Writings, with the exception of the Blessed Ode, were revealed during the Baghdad period, prior to the declaration of His ministry. The composition of the Blessed Ode probably started during His sojourn in Kurdistan but was completed in Adrianople.

The Seven Valleys describes various stages in the mystic journey of a wayfarer, and identifies the conditions prerequisite to success in this spiritual quest. This Treatise is revealed in an eloquent language and is composed in a masterful style, with beauty and brevity. Some of its poems, traditions, words of wisdom and stories can be traced back to the mystic writings of 'Attár, Rúmí, Ansá'í, Saná'í, and others. At a first glance, therefore, it appears to be a mystical book in conformity with the Islamic mystical literature of the past, encouraging the seekers to break away from the rigors of life and undertake a spiritual path. A deeper study of the language, themes, style and abundance of poems and stories that are used in this Epistle only serve to accentuate this first impression.

In spite of this resemblance to the Islamic mystic writings, it stands apart from all in its purpose, its meanings, its message, and its claims. This article will show how virtually every story, every metaphor and every poem conveys distinctly different objectives and meanings from those intended by the mystics in their writings. All these find their fulfilment in the Person of Bahá'u'lláh and His advent in this world. Examples will be offered to show how the use of mystic language and its metaphors have been used to proclaim this new Cause and its Truth through a medium commonly understood by mystics.

Some of the distinctive features of this Epistle that form the subject matter of this article on the Seven Valleys are as follows:

- i. The principal message of this Treatise is the glad-tidings of the coming of the Promised Manifestation of the Ancient Beauty amongst men. This message appears throughout this Epistle,

at times wrapped in metaphors and allusions, and at other times in abundantly clear language.

- ii. This Treatise uses mystic language and its abundant metaphors to expound on the Truth brought by the new Cause about the reality of God’s Manifestations, the relationship of man to his Creator, and the purpose and the ultimate reach of man’s spiritual quest. The contrasts between these assertions and common Sufi beliefs are at times overwhelming.
- iii. This Treatise also contains the seeds and the elements of many of the teachings of the Cause that were amplified in subsequent Writings of the Faith throughout Bahá’u’lláh’s ministry.

The Language and the Composition

This Epistle is revealed in a masterful style, eloquent composition, extreme brevity, and in apparent conformity to the traditions and language common amongst the mystic Sufis. Like many Islamic mystical writings, the Seven Valleys describes the themes that relate to the wayfarer’s path, highlights issues that they need to consider at each stage, and provides advice on the titles and requirements of these stages.

The celebrated thirteenth-century Persian mystic ‘Attár¹⁰ describes the eternal spiritual quest of man for the knowledge and companionship of the Lord in his book the Conference of the Birds (*Mantiqú’t-Tayr*).¹¹ In this book, ‘Attár uses the metaphor of birds for humanity and the human soul. He relates how the birds assembled to learn about their King. Upon learning about Him they longed so much for His company that they embarked on a harsh and long journey to reach Him. At last, thirty tired and tried birds amongst them reached the presence of their King, the Phoenix. The Phoenix is that mystical bird repeatedly reborn again from the ashes, in much the same way that God’s Manifestations grace the world of man with their frequent visits. The Persian name for this mythical Phoenix is Seymorgh, meaning “thirty (*sey*) birds (*morgh*).”

In the Conference of the Birds ‘Attár recalls these seven stages of the journey of the birds as seven valleys, and describes them as the Valleys of Search, Love, Knowledge, Contentment, Unity, Wonderment, and Poverty and Nothingness. It is noteworthy that there is a significant diversity of views amongst the mystics about these stages, their numbers and descriptions. It is sufficient to state that ‘Attár himself describes the number of these stages in his “Book of Hardship” (*Mosibat-Námeh*) as five, each with different titles.¹² These stages are described still differently by Abú-Nasr Sarraj, are counted as ten by Shaykh ‘Abdu’lláh Ansári, and later as one hundred in his other works.

Any detailed discussion of these stages and their descriptions as related by the mystics falls outside the scope of this brief article. As intended in mystic writings, “valley” relates to the treacherous and dangerous path or station that a wayfarer has to traverse. Its names, descriptions and numbers are subject to the perspective of the wayfarer, and are consequently often reported differently. It is unfortunate that throughout the years these superficial aspects of the spiritual journeys have received undue attention by the wayfarers and have actually become obstacles between them and the object of their quests.

One of the objectives of the Seven Valleys has been to assist the seeker to search and find Bahá’u’lláh, as He has proclaimed Himself in ways that all eyes can see Him and all ears can hear His melody. Bahá’u’lláh refers to the futility of the ritualistic efforts of some that have caused these numerous obstacles in the wayfarers’ paths to Him with these words:

Secrets are many, but strangers are myriad. Volumes will not suffice to hold the mystery of the Beloved One, nor can it be exhausted in these pages, although it be no more than a word, no more than a sign. “Knowledge is a single point, but the ignorant have multiplied it.”¹³

Bahá’u’lláh titles these stages of spiritual quest in the Seven Valleys as the Valleys of Search, Love, Knowledge, Unity, Contentment, Wonderment, and True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness. With a minor change in order, these are the same valleys that ‘Attár discussed.

A study of the Seven Valleys indicates that a wayfarer’s journey through these stages is intended to break him away from undue attachment to and obsession with this material world, and purify and prepare his mind and heart to perceive higher truths. The guidance given in the Seven Valleys is about knowing oneself, one’s need of spiritual bestowals, contentment and submission unto the will of God, and the desire for God’s favour. It encourages perseverance in one’s search after the Beloved, purification of one’s eyes, ears and mind from

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whatever may be unacceptable in His sight, and the opening of one's heart so that His love may enter.

This journey is a physical and spiritual endeavour to build a wayfarer's character and spirit in order to make him worthy of entering the presence of his Lord. At the same time, it is in line with the teachings of all great Faiths. The choice of 'Attár's titles for the stages in this spiritual endeavour is neither critical nor central to the main theme of this Epistle. The Seven Valleys does not intend to elevate any of the methods and descriptions of these stages over others, and it should not be our goal either. This point comes across clearly from the Words of Bahá'u'lláh when He states:

The stages that mark the wayfarer's journey from the abode of dust to the heavenly homeland are said to be seven. Some have called these Seven Valleys, and others, Seven Cities.¹⁴

As can be seen from this quote and from earlier quotes, Bahá'u'lláh places no special emphasis on the numbering or titles of these paths.

A seeker in the Sufi traditions was expected to spend a lifetime of effort and training under different spiritual guides to pass through these valleys. Bahá'u'lláh's statement in the Seven Valleys instead places the emphasis on the Lord's grace and the genuineness of the wayfarer's search, and not on mere ritualistic efforts:

These journeys have no visible ending in the world of time, but the severed wayfarer—if invisible confirmation descend upon him and the Guardian of the Cause assist him—may cross these seven stages in seven steps, nay rather in seven breaths, nay rather in a single breath, if God will and desire it. And this is of "His grace on such of His servants as He pleaseth."¹⁵

The objective is recognition of Bahá'u'lláh and obedience to His commandments in a single declaration of faith and submission, "Yes, My Lord."

Regarding the large number of metaphors and citations in this Treatise, Bahá'u'lláh explains that the mention of many of these references is in response to the wishes of the friends:

There is many an utterance of the mystic seers and doctors of former times which I have not mentioned here, since I mislike the copious citation from sayings of the past; for quotation from the words of others proveth acquired learning, not the divine bestowal. Even so much as We have quoted here is out of deference to the wont of men and after the manner of the friends.¹⁶

While most of Bahá'u'lláh's tablets are addressed to specific individuals or groups, these tablets are actually intended for a much wider audience and a large section of mankind. For example, the Book of Certitude was ostensibly revealed in answer to the questions of a maternal uncle of the Báb, but there is no doubt that this book has served to enlighten, in addition to Muslims, a large number of Jewish and Christian believers by addressing their scriptural concerns as well. Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets are written to many groups and sections of mankind, including Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Bábís, Sufis, clergymen, kings, rulers, and the learned.

In the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, Bahá'u'lláh states that His intention in revealing Tablets to the clergy, doctors of jurisprudence, and Sufis had been to teach and educate each group of people according to their capacity and provide for the transformation of individuals, thereby bringing about the peace and tranquillity of all mankind:

The purpose of the one true God, exalted be His glory, hath been to bring forth the Mystic Gems out of the mine of man. . . . That the divers communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief, should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is, in this Day, of the essence of the Faith of God and His Religion. . . . Exert yourselves that ye may attain this transcendent and most sublime station, the station that can insure the protection and security of all mankind. This goal excelleth every other goal, and this aspiration is the monarch of all aspirations. . . . At one time We spoke in the language of the lawgiver; at another in that of the truth-seeker and the mystic, and yet Our supreme purpose and highest wish hath always been to disclose the glory and sublimity of this station.¹⁷

This statement indicates that the purpose underlying Bahá'u'lláh's mystical Writings has been the same as that of the entire body of His Writings. Bahá'u'lláh's intention has not been to add to or modify any of the diverse and disparate Sufi movements.

Some of the distinctive features of the Seven Valleys from the Islamic mystic Writings are highlighted below.

Glad Tidings of the Appearance of God’s Manifestation amongst Humanity.

The principal message of the Seven Valleys is that God’s Manifestation has appeared amongst humanity. This is the Good News awaited by the faithful for centuries and even millennia. This message is also for the mystics who would prepare themselves for their entire lives for just a glimpse of the Ancient Beauty.

The Islamic mystic Writings provide spiritual guidance to seekers in their quest for communion with God. The words of Bahá’u’lláh, on the other hand, are the words of the Divine proclaiming His Manifestation in this world and calling the believers to His Presence. This Good News, which in the Seven Valleys is at times wrapped in allegories and symbolic terms and at other times in lucid terms, is unmistakably clear if taken as a whole.

As the views of some Sufi extremists regarding their communion with God have become indistinguishable from Pantheism, Bahá’u’lláh makes it clear in this Treatise that union with God as described by Sufi extremists is unattainable. He redefines and restates the goal of the mystic quest as recognition of God’s Manifestation for the age and obedience to His laws, thus uniting the goals of the mystics and the faithful in their hopes and aspirations. This is a significant change for the mystics and will be discussed in greater detail.

He emphatically states and clearly defines the limit of man’s spiritual reach:

However, let none construe these utterances to be anthropomorphism, nor see in them the descent of the worlds of God into the grades of the creatures; nor should they lead thine Eminence to such assumptions. For God is, in His Essence, holy above ascent and descent, entrance and exit; He hath through all eternity been free of the attributes of human creatures, and ever will remain so. No man hath ever known Him; no soul hath ever found the pathway to His Being. Every mystic knower hath wandered far astray in the valley of the knowledge of Him; every saint hath lost his way in seeking to comprehend His Essence. Sanctified is He above the understanding of the wise; exalted is He above the knowledge of the knowing! The way is barred and to seek it is impiety.¹⁸

Thus, the object of the ancient quest and the ultimate spiritual reach of a wayfarer in this day is recognition of Bahá’u’lláh. The Seven Valleys contains the spiritual guidance that prepares man to meet and recognize the “Lord of the Age.” In a complementary Epistle, the Four Valleys, seekers at all stages of spiritual development are guided to one of the manifold attributes and stations of Bahá’u’lláh. These two Treatises are the Lord’s guidance to His subjects to recognize and follow Him, even though the formal declaration of His message was yet to come. These messages, some of which are highlighted here, are expressions of love and excitement, hope and fulfilment.

In the opening chapter of the Seven Valleys, in response to a letter from the Shaykh, Bahá’u’lláh addresses him in these words:

And since I noted thy mention of thy death in God, and thy life through Him, and thy love for the beloved of God and the Manifestations of His Names and the Dawning-Points of His Attributes—I therefore reveal unto thee sacred and resplendent tokens from the planes of glory, to attract thee into the court of holiness and nearness and beauty, and draw thee to a station wherein thou shalt see nothing in creation save the Face of thy Beloved One, the Honored, and behold all created things only as in the day wherein none hath a mention.¹⁹

This is an invitation to the Shaykh to enter His presence and gaze on the face of the Beloved, the Honored. He is then promised that if he recognizes Him he will achieve his spiritual destiny in the “heavenly abode” in “the Center of realities,” which is the World of the Cause:

By My life, O friend, wert thou to taste of these fruits, from the green garden of these blossoms which grow in the lands of knowledge, beside the orient lights of the Essence in the mirrors of names and attributes—yeaming would seize the reins of patience and reserve from out thy hand, and make thy soul to shake with the flashing light, and draw thee from the earthly homeland to the first, heavenly abode in the Center of realities, and lift thee to a plane wherein thou wouldst soar in the air even as thou walkest upon the earth,

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and move over the water as thou runnest on the land.²⁰

The meanings of this statement and the station of Bahá'u'lláh are unmistakable, yet, to make it even clearer, Bahá'u'lláh then refers to Himself as the “Shebá of the Merciful,” and to His message as “the wind (*Sabá*) of certitude” that brings faith and certainty.

Wherefore, may it rejoice Me, and thee, and whosoever mounteth into the heaven of knowledge, and whose heart is refreshed by this, that the wind [*Sabá*] of certitude hath blown over the garden of his being, from the Sheba of the All-Merciful.²¹

For the Shaykh and other mystics like him, the meaning and intention of these metaphors was abundantly clear. For Sufis, “*Sabá*” is an easterly breeze that carries the fragrance and message of the Beloved. The east is a metaphor for the world of light and heaven, while the west is symbolic of the darksome material world. Mythology has it that Shebá, i.e., Queen of Shebá, received a message of love and compliance from King Solomon. Shebá responded positively and, in doing so, became the king’s beloved. Consequently “Shebá” in Sufi literature stands for a metaphor of the pure souls who respond to the Lord’s commands and become the Manifestation of His names and attributes in the human realm.

Therefore, it can be understood that the eastern breeze of certitude (the new Faith) has arrived from the Manifestation of the All Merciful (Bahá'u'lláh) from the heavenly abode in the Center of realities (World of Cause) to refresh the soul of this seeker (the Shaykh).

This paragraph ends with a remark often found in Islamic Writings: “Peace be upon him who followeth the Right Path.” As this expression is repeated five times throughout this Epistle it merits some additional comment.

The “Right Path” is what every practicing Muslim prays for five times a day. This is a challenge for every Muslim who professes Islam to be the Right Path, yet prays fervently to be guided to it. Islamic traditions explain that the “Right Path” is a reference to the Person and the Cause of the Promised One of Islam. In this context, Bahá'u'lláh states that He is indeed the “Way of God” and His Truth.

O Salmán! The door of the knowledge of the Ancient Being hath ever been, and will continue for ever to be, closed in the face of men. No man’s understanding shall ever gain access unto His holy court. As a token of His mercy, however, and as a proof of His loving-kindness, He hath manifested unto men the Day-Stars of His divine guidance, the Symbols of His divine unity, and hath ordained the knowledge of these sanctified Beings to be identical with the knowledge of His own Self. Whoso recognizeth them hath recognized God. Whoso hearkeneth to their call, hath hearkened to the Voice of God, and whoso testifieth to the truth of their Revelation, hath testified to the truth of God Himself. Whoso turneth away from them, hath turned away from God, and whoso disbelieveth in them, hath disbelieved in God. Every one of them is the Way of God that connecteth this world with the realms above, and the Standard of His Truth unto every one in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. They are the Manifestations of God amidst men, the evidences of His Truth, and the signs of His glory. [emphasis added]²²

This is an example of Bahá'u'lláh’s reference to Himself as the Promised One of Islam, clear and lucid to those of pure heart and mind who have eyes to see and ears to hear, and yet concealed to those who do not wish to know.

Bahá'u'lláh amplifies His intended meaning of this phrase from the words of a Muslim mystic, Khájjih ‘Abdu’lláh Ansárí,²³ when He states:

Wherefore, relevant to this, Khájjih ‘Abdu’lláh—may God the Most High sanctify his beloved spirit—hath made a subtle point and spoken an eloquent word as to the meaning of “Guide Thou us on the straight path,” which is: “Show us the right way, that is, honor us with the love of Thine Essence, that we may be freed from turning toward ourselves and toward all else save Thee, and may become wholly Thine, and know only Thee, and see only Thee, and think of none save Thee.”²⁴

As all attributes and names of God relate to the Manifestation of the Lord, the love of the Lord that this mystic equates to the “Straight Path” also means the love of His Manifestation.

It is interesting to note that “Guide Thou us on the straight path” is quite similar in meaning and purpose to

the words of Jesus Christ in the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."²⁵ These two statements are probably amongst the most often repeated and yet equally misunderstood statements by Christians and Muslims alike.

In Sufi traditions, a seeker has to follow and learn the manners of search from a spiritual guide (Murshíd), and first reach a state of union and total submission unto him. He then needs to find the highest-ranking guide of his age (*Qutb*, literally, the "Pole," signifying the station of this guide around whom all things revolve), and reach the same state of total submission and union with him. He will then be ready to contemplate union with the Lord. Bahá'u'lláh reminds this Shaykh that he needs a spiritual guide to undertake his search, and that He is that Guide who can lead him. To reiterate the significance of His assertion, He further reminds the Shaykh of an often related story of a journey in which "Moses the Law-giver" was asked to accompany Khidr to obtain wisdom. In mystic Writings Khidr was regarded as the wise and enlightened soul who was enabled to find and quaff from the water of life and obtain eternal life.

During their journey Khidr's actions and motives were questioned by Moses three times after Khidr indicated that he did not wish to go any further with Him in view of Moses' lack of confidence in him. Nevertheless he explained the just motives of his actions to Moses before parting from Him: (1) He had damaged and disabled the boat they were travelling in to protect it from being confiscated by the local ruler for military purposes; (2) He had killed a young man to avoid a pending spiritual disaster he was about to bring upon his family; (3) He had repaired the ruined wall of a garden that belonged to an orphan without asking for reward to avoid the discovery of the family treasure which had been buried under the wall by the now-deceased father, until his son becomes an adult.

In this story, related in Rúmí's *Mathnaví*²⁶ and cited twice in the Seven Valleys by Bahá'u'lláh, the contrast is made between Moses as the Law-giver and Khidr as the essence of wisdom. Despite His knowledge and powers, Moses was unable to grasp the wisdom of things and was in need of a guide. This mystic rendering of a portrait of a Manifestation of God is not in conformity with Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on the station and unity of Manifestations of God. There could be many explanations for the symbolism of this story. One may regard Moses and Khidr as two aspects of the manifold stations of Moses. One aspect of Him is portraying the significance of the Law and the other reflecting the need for wisdom in all things. The story teaches the need for a combination of wisdom and the law.

Bahá'u'lláh refers to this story in conformity to mystic traditions for a purpose:

Veiled from this was Moses
Though all strength and light;
Then thou who hast no wings at all,
Attempt not flight.

If thou be a man of communion and prayer, soar up on the wings of assistance from Holy Souls, that thou mayest behold the mysteries of the Friend and attain to the lights of the Beloved, "Verily, we are from God and to Him shall we return."²⁷

The essence of Bahá'u'lláh's message in quoting Rúmí in this story is that the Shaykh, or indeed any seeker, needs to follow Him regardless of his own knowledge and powers, just as Moses had to follow Khidr on His spiritual journey. So, Khidr is a metaphor for the Person of Bahá'u'lláh, and the mystics could not miss the implications of this statement. Furthermore, Bahá'u'lláh uses the words of Rúmí, "Then thou who hast no wings at all,/ Attempt not flight," to inform the seeker gently that he is indeed in need of His guidance.

The manner in which this mystic story has been related and used in the Seven Valleys is an example of the masterful use of an old story to convey a new message.

Bahá'u'lláh refers to His person in this passage as the "Holy Soul" and the "Friend" and "Beloved." It is noteworthy that, throughout the ages, the mystics have used the term "Beloved" as strictly referring to God. Bahá'u'lláh states that the true seeker needs His guidance to behold His mysteries and see His lights. In the *Kitáb-i-'qán*, among other titles, Bahá'u'lláh refers to Himself as the Source of all light:

And now, We beseech the people of the Bayán, all the learned, the sages, the divines, and witnesses

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amongst them, not to forget the wishes and admonitions revealed in their Book. Let them, at all times, fix their gaze upon the essentials of His Cause, lest when He, Who is the Quintessence of truth, the inmost reality of all things, the Source of all light [Núr al-anwár], is made manifest, they cling unto certain passages of the Book, and inflict upon Him that which was inflicted in the Dispensation of the Qur'án.²⁸

The term *núr al-anwár*, “the Source of all light” (lit. “Light of lights”), has been the subject of much commentary by great thinkers and philosophers such as Suhrevardí, the founder of the philosophical school of *Ishráq*, “Illumination.”²⁹ He states that “Núr al-anwár” is the pinnacle of creation, the purpose of creation, the first creation, the first wisdom, the primal reason, the universal mind, and that all lights and minds are but its creation and owe their existence to it. These terms are interchangeably used by mystic philosophers and thinkers to refer to God’s Manifestations. Bahá’u’lláh clearly chose to declare His station in the Book of Certitude and the Seven Valleys in terms that would have been unmistakably understood by those familiar with the philosophical schools of thought of the time. His use of such titles as “Quintessence of truth,” the “inmost reality of all things,” and the “Source of all light” reflects His claim.

Throughout this Treatise Bahá’u’lláh emphasizes that the seeker needs to open his inner eyes to see the Beloved, and listen attentively to His words. To succeed, he must leave aside his own preconceived ideas and abandon all prejudices. The stories in this Epistle serve to make these very points. A few examples of such stories will clearly support this view and show how each story at the same time has been given a fresh purpose and meaning in the context of the message of His advent.

The love-story of Majnún and Laylí is an old narrative of romance about the children of two Arab noblemen. In Persian literature, and especially in Persian mystic literature, this romance has evolved to symbolize a divine relationship. The most noteworthy example of this can be seen in the poetry of Nizámí Ganjaví, written around 1188 C.E.³⁰ In the Seven Valleys Bahá’u’lláh once again alludes to His station using this well-known story. He first relates the story as told by ‘Attár in the Conference of Birds. He tells how Majnún was found sifting through the dust in search of his beloved Layli. To the onlookers, who criticized him for “searching for a pure pearl in the dirt of the street,” he declares that he would seek her everywhere, that perchance he might find her. Then Bahá’u’lláh adds a short epilogue to this story that states:

Yea, although to the wise it be shameful to seek the Lord of Lords [Rabú'l-Arbáb] in the dust, yet this betokeneth intense ardor in searching. “Whoso seeketh out a thing with zeal shall find it.”³¹

This statement at first glance seems to be an affirmation of the positive effects of zeal and perseverance in achieving one’s goals. However, a closer look reveals that Bahá’u’lláh interprets the title “pure pearl” in the story to mean “Lord of Lords.” That is, Majnún really *was* searching for his Lord in the dust. Furthermore, the choice of “Lord of Lords” [*Rabú'l-Arbáb*] is deliberate, for its *abjad* number is the numerical equivalent of His own name “Husayn-‘Alí,” both adding up to 238. This may signal that if the seeker searches for the Lord of Lords with zeal, he will succeed in finding Him in the world of man.

A true test of the faith of sincere believers throughout the ages has been their ability to perceive the Manifestations of the Lord in human flesh, in circumstances common to all. It is this test that distinguished Peter in the Dispensation of Christ and Mullá Husayn in the Dispensation of the Báb from others. The difficulty of the people of His age to recognize His station is clear from the way Christ answered John the Baptist when he asked Him if He was the Messiah:

Jesus answered, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind recover their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are made clean, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the poor are hearing the good news—and happy is the man who does not find me a stumbling block.”³²

Like Christ, Bahá’u’lláh uses metaphors to overcome the handicap of people, asking them to open their inner eyes and ears to recognize Him. One example is that of His story of Jacob and his love and longing for his lost son Joseph, a well-known and often quoted narrative in the mystical literature.

In this story Joseph, the twelfth son of Jacob, was so much loved by his father that his envious brothers, wishing to dispose of him, threw him in a well and then sold him into slavery. Pretending that he had been killed by wild beasts, they then presented Jacob with his son’s bloodstained shirt. Jacob cried so much at the reported loss of his son that he lost his sight. In the meantime, Joseph was taken to Egypt by slave-traders and

sold into the house of a wealthy merchant. Years later, the lovesick lady of the house, to punish him for his honesty and chastity, accused him of ill behaviour, thereby sending him to prison.

Over the course of seven years of imprisonment, Joseph demonstrated his ability to interpret fellow prisoners’ dreams, including a high-ranking official temporarily fallen out of favour. This skill was so amazing that it resulted in his being brought to the court of the Pharaoh to interpret his dream. Pharaoh had dreamt that seven lean cows devoured seven fattened cows and seven dried out wheat bushels destroyed seven green wheat bushels. Joseph interpreted this dream to be a warning that seven lean years will follow seven years of plenty. The Pharaoh appreciated this interpretation and put him in charge of collecting surplus wheat in preparation for the coming years of famine. So ended Joseph’s undeserved years of suffering and the beginning of his prosperity and authority

In the meantime, due to famine in the land of Palestine, his brothers travelled to Egypt in search of food. Joseph recognized his brothers but did not introduce himself at first. After informing them of his identity, he sent his shirt with his brothers to Jacob to Palestine. Never having lost hope of seeing his son, Jacob, after inhaling the perfume-laden smell of his son’s shirt, regained his sight. Jacob subsequently travelled to Egypt once again to enjoy the pleasure of his son’s company.

This moving story has been the subject of many poems and mystical narratives throughout the ages. It is noteworthy that the Báb chose to reveal a commentary on the Súrih of Joseph of the Qur’án on the first night of His declaration to Mullá Husayn. The beloved Guardian refers to this book too and its references to Bahá’u’lláh as the true Joseph in *God Passes By* in these words:

A more significant light, however, is shed on this episode, marking the Declaration of the Mission of the Báb, by the perusal of that “first, greatest and mightiest” of all books in the Bábí Dispensation, the celebrated commentary on the Súrih of Joseph, the first chapter of which, we are assured, proceeded, in its entirety, in the course of that night of nights from the pen of its divine Revealer. The description of this episode by Mullá Husayn, as well as the opening pages of that Book attest the magnitude and force of that weighty Declaration. A claim to be no less than the mouthpiece of God Himself, promised by the Prophets of bygone ages; the assertion that He was, at the same time, the Herald of One immeasurably greater than Himself. . . .

Already in Shíráz, at the earliest stage of His ministry, He had revealed what Bahá’u’lláh has characterized as “the first, the greatest, and mightiest of all books” in the Bábí Dispensation, the celebrated commentary on the Súrah of Joseph, entitled the Qayyúmu’l-Asmá, whose fundamental purpose was to forecast what the true Joseph (Bahá’u’lláh) would, in a succeeding Dispensation, endure at the hands of one who was at once His arch-enemy and blood brother. This work, comprising above nine thousand three hundred verses, and divided into one hundred and eleven chapters, each chapter a commentary on one verse of the above-mentioned Súrah, opens with the Báb’s clarion-call and dire warnings addressed to the “concourse of kings and of the sons of kings”; forecasts the doom of Muhammad Sháh; commands his Grand Vizir, Hájí Mírzá Áqásí, to abdicate his authority; admonishes the entire Muslim ecclesiastical order; cautions more specifically the members of the Shí’ih community; extols the virtues, and anticipates the coming, of Bahá’u’lláh, the “Remnant of God,” the “Most Great Master . . .”³³

Bahá’u’lláh refers to this story in the Seven Valleys, the Four Valleys, and other of His works, pointing to Himself as that true Joseph, and that, like Jacob, seekers need to open their inner eyes to see Him. Some examples on this theme are quoted here from the Seven Valleys:

In this journey the seeker reacheth a stage wherein he seeth all created things wandering distracted in search of the Friend. How many a Jacob will he see, hunting after his Joseph; he will behold many a lover, hasting to seek the Beloved, he will witness a world of desiring ones searching after the One Desired. . . .

And if, by the help of God, he findeth on this journey a trace of the traceless Friend, and inhalet the fragrance of the long-lost Joseph from the heavenly messenger, he shall straightway step into THE VALLEY OF LOVE and be dissolved in the fire of love. . . .

O My Brother! Until thou enter the Egypt of love, thou shalt never come to the Joseph of the Beauty of the Friend; and until, like Jacob, thou forsake thine outward eyes, thou shalt never open the eye of thine inward

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being; and until thou burn with the fire of love, thou shalt never commune with the Lover of Longing.³⁴

When taken together, these references show that the historical Joseph is only a metaphor, and furthermore, the true Joseph is the Friend, the traceless Friend, Joseph of the Beauty of the Friend, understood in mystical Writings to point to the Lord. The news of this long-lost Joseph and His advent was to come from a heavenly messenger, as it was the subject of many of the Báb's Writings. As the beloved Guardian stated the fundamental purpose of Qayyúmu'l-Asmá was to "forecast what the true Joseph (Bahá'u'lláh) would, in a succeeding Dispensation, endure at the hands of one who was at once His arch-enemy and blood brother." A brief examination of the life of Bahá'u'lláh reveals many other similarities between Bahá'u'lláh and Joseph, including His exile and suffering, and His triumph in His earthly life. In the same way that Jacob longed for his long-lost son Joseph, a stream of believers sought Bahá'u'lláh's company at all costs and under all conditions, a fulfilment of His words when describing the condition of the seekers in the Valley of Search:

In this journey the seeker reacheth a stage wherein he seeth all created things wandering distracted in search of the Friend. How many a Jacob will he see, hunting after his Joseph; he will behold many a lover, hasting to seek the Beloved, he will witness a world of desiring ones searching after the One Desired.³⁵

Jacob's loss of his physical sight and his subsequent discovery of his lost Joseph are again used as a metaphor for directing the seekers to forsake their outward eyes. In this way, the physical persons of God's Messengers do not become tests of their faith and obstacles for them.

Sacred scriptures often contain a series of tests to measure the sincerity of believers' faith. They test the willingness of the faithful to forsake wealth and comfort, and if necessary, life itself, in the path of Truth. Furthermore, the faithful should be prepared to endure all hardship and calamities in the path of his love with contentment and gratefulness. Examples of these can be found in the Jewish Scriptures, the New Testament, Qur'án, mystical literature, and Bahá'í scriptures. In the Seven Valleys this message is given repeatedly. In one instance Bahá'u'lláh uses a well-known story to remind the Shaykh and other seekers of the prerequisites of true love. He quotes only part of a long story from Rúmí about "a man in love," who had lost his health and wealth in the path of his love to no avail:

There was once a lover who had sighed for long years in separation from his beloved, and wasted in the fire of remoteness. From the rule of love, his heart was empty of patience, and his body weary of his spirit.

Shunned by all, his longing bore no fruit until:

At last, the tree of his longing yielded the fruit of despair, and the fire of his hope fell to ashes. Then one night he could live no more, and he went out of his house and made for the marketplace. On a sudden, a watchman followed after him. He broke into a run, with the watchman following; then other watchmen came together, and barred every passage to the weary one.

Agonized with displeasure at the watchmen and in despair he finds himself at a decision point about life itself:

Then he came to a garden wall, and with untold pain he scaled it, for it proved very high; and forgetting his life, he threw himself down to the garden.

Once he made that choice to give up his life he indeed found his life and love:

And there he beheld his beloved with a lamp in her hand, searching for a ring she had lost. When the heart-surrendered lover looked on his ravishing love, he drew a great breath and raised up his hands in prayer .

..

In this way, his intense displeasure with this seemingly cruel act of the watchmen was transformed into a deep appreciation of the Lord's pleasure:

Now if the lover could have looked ahead, he would have blessed the watchman at the start, and prayed on his behalf, and he would have seen that tyranny as justice; but since the end was veiled to him, he moaned and made his plaint in the beginning. Yet those who journey in the garden land of knowledge, because they see the end in the beginning, see peace in war and friendliness in anger.³⁶

In this way, the Beloved of the world asks everyone to act in the same way. Once again this familiar story

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only serves to highlight the intended message.

Bahá’u’lláh often expresses His displeasure with people without inner eyes and ears, people who have made Him the target of their tyranny and envy. In such an address in the Seven Valleys He makes another reference to His station:

Thus it is that certain invalid souls have confined the lands of knowledge within the wall of self and passion, and clouded them with ignorance and blindness, and have been veiled from the light of the mystic sun and the mysteries of the Eternal Beloved; they have strayed afar from the jewelled wisdom of the lucid Faith of the Lord of Messengers, have been shut out of the sanctuary of the All-Beauteous One, and banished from the Ka’bih of splendor. Such is the worth of the people of this age!

And if a nightingale soar upward from the clay of self and dwell in the rose bower of the heart, and in Arabian melodies and sweet Iranian songs recount the mysteries of God—a single word of which quickeneth to fresh, new life the bodies of the dead, and bestoweth the Holy Spirit upon the moldering bones of this existence—thou wilt behold a thousand claws of envy, a myriad beaks of rancor hunting after Him and with all their power intent upon His death.³⁷

His proclamation that His word bestows new life to the dead and confers Holy Spirit upon this existence is a clear statement of His station.

A still clearer message comes when Bahá’u’lláh describes the special bounties of His day and that all should try to benefit from His presence while He is still with them:

The cloud of the Loved One’s mercy raineth only on the garden of the spirit, and bestoweth this bounty only in the season of spring. The other seasons have no share in this greatest grace, and barren lands no portion of this favor. O Brother! Not every sea hath pearls; not every branch will flower, nor will the nightingale sing thereon. Then, ere the nightingale of the mystic paradise repair to the garden of God, and the rays of the heavenly morning return to the Sun of Truth—make thou an effort, that haply in this dustheap of the mortal world thou mayest catch a fragrance from the everlasting garden, and live forever in the shadow of the peoples of this city.³⁸

He calls His day the spiritual “season of spring,” and refers to Himself as the “nightingale of the mystic paradise,” and “the rays of the heavenly morning.” In His mercy for those who have still missed His claim, He makes yet another proclamation of His advent for those who have eyes to see:

And when thou hast attained this highest station and come to this mightiest plane, then shalt thou gaze on the Beloved, and forget all else.

The Beloved shineth on gate and wall.

Without a veil, O men of vision.

Now hast thou abandoned the drop of life and come to the sea of the Life-Bestower. This is the goal thou didst ask for; if it be God’s will, thou wilt gain it.³⁹

Once a seeker recognized this Manifestation of the Lord for this age he will enter the sea of the Life-Bestower and gaze at the face of the Beloved and forget all else. Then he will discover that the light of the Beloved Who has revealed Himself is the source of all lights.

The poem that Bahá’u’lláh quotes here is a masterpiece of Persian poetry by Hatif of Isfahan⁴⁰ and carries an incredible message parallels one of the principal messages of the Bahá’í dispensation: the concept of “Progressive Revelation.”

In this poem, in a state of wonderment one night, Hatif finds his way to a Zoroastrian temple. There, he finds Zoroastrian believers engaged in ceremonies surrounding the Holy Fire. With all his being, he recognizes that there is only one God, and that all are but His signs. Hatif then makes his way to a Christian church in which worshipers are engaged in their devotions. He challenges them in their belief in the Trinity. One of the devotees explains to him that the Trinity is only a reflection of the Ancient Beauty in three mirrors. He hears this from the chime of the church bell with his inner ears that there is no One but Him, and that all are but His signs. In that state of amazement and with a pure heart and open mind he enters a mystic temple in which he

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finds the lovers of the Beloved. He asks them for guidance and after quenching his thirst once again, he becomes conscious of a melodious chant coming from the heavenly quarters stating that there is no One but Him, and that all are but His signs. It is then that he discovers that

The Beloved shineth on gate and wall

Without a veil, O men of vision.

Hatif then concludes that while the Beloved shineth like the sun it would be inappropriate to search for Him with a candle. Morning has broken while we are still in the night season. This brief reference to a single verse of this poem in the Seven Valleys speaks volumes about Bahá'u'lláh's message.

And finally Bahá'u'lláh makes the most obvious reference to His advent and His person using a poem from Rúmi:

How strange that while the Beloved is visible as the sun, yet the heedless still hunt after únsel and base metal. Yea, the intensity of His revelation hath covered Him, and the fullness of His shining forth hath hidden Him.

Even as the sun, bright hath He shined,

But alas, He hath come to the town of the blind!⁴¹

To complete our discussion on this theme, we will offer one last reference in the Seven Valleys to the Qur'án. In the Valley of Wonderment Bahá'u'lláh makes the following statement:

The pen groaneth and the ink sheddeth tears, and the river of the heart moveth in waves of blood. "Nothing can befall us but what God hath destined for us." Peace be upon him who followeth the Right Path!⁴²

In this passage Bahá'u'lláh reiterates His confidence that His fate is governed by the will of God and not by the machinations of His enemies. In evidence of His claim, He offers the Qur'anic verse "Nothing can befall us but what God hath destined for us."

An examination of the context of this verse shows the appropriateness of this statement and the extraordinary message that exists below the surface. It refers to verse 51 in the Súrat'at-Tauba (Repentance) in the Qur'án, which was revealed in Medina and, in particular, deals with the treachery and breaking of treaties by the infidels.⁴³ Muhammad foretells of their coming punishment and declares to them that the station of those who serve the Cause of God and participate in the Holy War is far above those who maintain their infidelity and yet repair the Mosque. He states that those who put their worldly interests above God's will are in a loss. In vain, the infidels wish to extinguish the Light of God, but He will protect His Light. He warns the believers that unless they serve the Cause of God, He will choose others to replace them. He then states that "nothing will happen to us except what God has decreed for us; He is our Protector; and on Him let the believers put their trust."

Bahá'u'lláh reminds those who have insight that just like the Prophet of Islam He is the target of attacks from friend and foe, alike, and that He will endure all in the pathway of His Lord. God will establish His Cause and protect His Light, that is Him, even if people oppose Him. If those around Him reject His call, He will raise up others to assist Him.

As a befitting conclusion to this section and revealing a glimpse of Bahá'u'lláh's station, below are some of the titles that appear in the Seven Valleys: Sheba of the All-Merciful, Joseph of the Beauty of the Friend, The Friend, Sun of Truth, Manifestation of the Sun of reality, the Beloved, the Eternal Beloved, the Beauty of the Beloved, the Nightingale of the Mystic Paradise, the Nightingale with Arabian Melodies and Sweet Iranian Songs, the Eternal Morning Dawn, the New Beloved One, the Light of Manifestation of the King of Oneness, the Master of the House, the Master of Love, the Tree of Knowledge, the Eternal City, the City of God, the Face of The Beloved One, the Divine Face, the Guardian of The Cause, the Sea of the Life-Bestower, the Falcon of the Mystic Heaven

Spiritual Truths in the Seven Valleys

The Seven Valleys is a repository of a great deal of spiritual truths of this Cause. Although this book is revealed in the language and form of the mystic Writings, at times the truths it contains completely contradict

the common views of the Sufis. At other times it acts to resolve, clarify, modify and harmonize many of the complex and paradoxical elements of their beliefs. In the interest of brevity, however, only a few examples of these truths are highlighted in this article.

1. The Ultimate Goal of Man’s Spiritual Quest

Over time, the Sufis came to believe that, if confirmed by the Lord’s grace, a seeker would eventually reach a state of union with the Lord. Termed “annihilation in God [*faná*]” and eternal life in Him [*baqá*],” this union has been described variously by different mystics.

Bahá’u’lláh rejects this view, stating that this goal is unattainable to humanity. He further clarifies that the ultimate goal of man’s reach in physical life is recognition of the Lord’s Manifestation for the age and service at His threshold:

However, let none construe these utterances to be anthropomorphism, nor see in them the descent of the worlds of God into the grades of the creatures; nor should they lead thine Eminence to such assumptions. For God is, in His Essence, holy above ascent and descent, entrance and exit; He hath through all eternity been free of the attributes of human creatures, and ever will remain so. No man hath ever known Him; no soul hath ever found the pathway to His Being. Every mystic knower hath wandered far astray in the valley of the knowledge of Him; every saint hath lost his way in seeking to comprehend His Essence. Sanctified is He above the understanding of the wise; exalted is He above the knowledge of the knowing! The way is barred and to seek it is impiety; His proof is His signs; His being is His evidence. . . . Yea, these mentioning that have been made of the grades of knowledge relate to the knowledge of the Manifestations of that Sun of reality, which casteth Its light upon the Mirrors. . . . Then it is clear that even for the rays there is neither entrance nor exit—how much less for that Essence of Being and that longed-for Mystery.⁴⁴

Bahá’u’lláh offers the words of ‘Alí, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, as proof of His statement: “The way is barred and to seek it is impiety.”⁴⁵ The significance of this reference to Sufis stems from the fact that most Sufi groups regard ‘Alí as their spiritual figurehead.

Bahá’u’lláh explains the meaning of the Unity of God, annihilation of self, perpetual union with God and the essence of faith and Certitude in another Tablet:

He is indeed a true believer in the unity of God who, in this Day, will regard Him as One immeasurably exalted above all the comparisons and likenesses with which men have compared Him. He hath erred grievously who hath mistaken these comparisons and likenesses for God Himself. Consider the relation between the craftsman and his handiwork, between the painter and his painting. Can it ever be maintained that the work their hands have produced is the same as themselves?

O Shaykh, O thou who hast surrendered thy will to God! By self-surrender and perpetual union with God is meant that men should merge their will wholly in the Will of God, and regard their desires as utter nothingness beside His Purpose. Whatsoever Creator commandeth His creatures to observe, the same must they diligently, and with the utmost joy and eagerness, arise and fulfil. They should in no wise allow their fancy to obscure their judgment, neither should they regard their own imaginings as the voice of the Eternal. . . . The station of absolute self-surrender transcendeth, and will ever remain exalted above, every other station. It behoveth thee to consecrate thyself to the Will of God. Whatsoever hath been revealed in His Tablets is but a reflection of His Will. So complete must be thy consecration, that every trace of worldly desire will be washed from thine heart. This is the meaning of true unity.

Do thou beseech God to enable thee to remain steadfast in this path, and to aid thee to guide the peoples of the world to Him Who is the manifest and sovereign Ruler, Who hath revealed Himself in a distinct attire, Who giveth utterance to a Divine and specific Message. This is the essence of faith and certitude.⁴⁶

From these passages, it becomes clear that the mystic Beloved for the age is Bahá’u’lláh, and that the zenith of the spiritual reach of a seeker is recognition of Him and His Cause, and obedience to His commands.

2. God’s “Most Excellent Names”

Bahá’u’lláh states repeatedly in the Seven Valleys and other tablets such as the Kitáb-i-*qán* that man cannot attain to the knowledge of God except through the knowledge of the attributes of God’s Messengers. In

fact, He states that a perfect understanding of God's unity demands negation of any names and attributes to that Essence of Essences. He once more offers the words of 'Alí, the son-in-law of the Prophet as evidence for His statement about the characters of those who have gone beyond the limitations of names and attributes and attained His recognition:

For these have passed over the worlds of names, and fled beyond the worlds of attributes as swift as lightning. Thus is it said: "Absolute Unity excludeth all attributes."⁴⁷

'Alí's complete statement is that religion begins with the Lord's recognition, His recognition is only complete by obedience and faith in Him, and faith in Him is complete only with recognition of His Oneness.⁴⁸ Recognition of His Oneness is complete with purity of Faith in Him, and completeness of Faith in Him demands negation of any names and attributes to Him, as no one and no attributes can befittingly describe Him.

During the Islamic Dispensation, a series of names and attributes referred to as "Most Excellent Names" were thought to be God's Names and Titles. This was based on a reference in the Qur'án in which all such names are attributed to Alláh and Rahmán ("Mercy"):

Say: Call upon Alláh, or call upon Rahmán: By whatever name ye call Upon Him, (it is well): For to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names.⁴⁹

These "Most Excellent Names" have been related in the words of the Prophet (hadíth) and the Imáms with minor differences. Ja'far as-Sádiq, the sixth Shí'ih Imám, was reported to relate ninety-nine of these names. In a departure from this general belief and in complete conformity to 'Alí's statement ("... completeness of Faith in Him involves negation of any names and attributes to Him, as no one and no attributes can befittingly describe Him . . ."), Bahá'u'lláh uses part of the same Qur'ánic passage and explains that all these names and titles refer to God's Messenger, Muhammad:

He who was *Ahmad* in the kingdom of the exalted ones, and *Muhammad* amongst the concourse of the near ones, and Mahmúd in the realm of the sincere ones . . . "by whichever (name) ye will, invoke Him: He hath most excellent names" in the hearts of those who know.⁵⁰

In other words, these titles and attributes belong to all of God's Manifestations. In many tablets Bahá'u'lláh refers to His Own Advent with all of these "Excellent Names." For example, in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh states:

Verily, all created things were immersed in the sea of purification when, on that first day of Ridván, We shed upon the whole of creation the splendours of Our most excellent Names and Our most exalted Attributes. This, verily, is a token of My loving providence, which hath encompassed all the worlds.⁵¹

3. Unity of Being

The concept of "Unity of Being," which at times, and for some Sufi extremists, borders on pantheism, is amongst the principal beliefs of many Sufis and other groups of mystics. For a detailed discussion of various aspects of this topic the reader is referred to other publications.^{52,53}

A short presentation of some of the main concepts about God that have been current amongst different groups would help a better understanding of the Bahá'í perspective on this subject:

1. **God of Immanence:** This means an in-dwelling God. This implies an impersonal God that is part of the order of creation and a close relationship between Him and His creation.
2. **Transcendent God:** This is a God that has caused the creation but remains as a definite and an individual entity, separate from His creation. Man is not part of God and God does not dwell in the world or in man. This is the God of prophetic religions.
3. **Pantheistic God:** Pantheism involves belief in a God that is the totality of creation. God is the whole, and the world and man are parts of it. Man is a part of God or as most Sufis believe, man possesses some elements of God within him. As a consequence of this view mystics have come to believe that either man can reach God or man can actually become united with Him. The ecstasy and the joy that accompanies moments of prayers, meditation and contemplation have been offered by the mystics as evidence to their claim of becoming united with God.

4. God of Deism: This is the belief of those who accept that the universe has been created and is controlled by an intelligent force, and furthermore, identify this force with the God of religion. However they deny that this force is a personal God who hears man’s prayers and has any interest in man’s welfare.
5. God of Theism: This is the belief of those who see God as the creator and separate from nature and yet dwells in every of its activities. This is much the same as a God that is both immanent and transcendent.

The mystery of the joining of man with God has been described in various ways by mystics. Some have made it analogous to a drop of rain that has been separated from the sea and eventually flows back to the sea. The pantheistic view of God and creation is remarkably consistent with this analogy. Some have explained the creation as a mere mirage and unreal in the same way that waves disappear after the sea becomes calm. Waves are but reflections of creation, that in essence and substance, come from the sea and unto it return.

This brings up the nature of the process of creation. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá provides us with an insight on this topic in *Some Answered Questions*:

Know that proceeding is of two kinds: the proceeding and appearance through emanation, and the proceeding and appearance through manifestation. The proceeding through emanation is like the coming forth of the action from the actor, of the writing from the writer. Now the writing emanates from the writer, and the discourse emanates from the speaker, and in the same way the human spirit emanates from God. It is not that it manifests God--that is to say, no part has been detached from the Divine Reality to enter the body of man.⁵⁴

The second kind of creation is through Manifestation, just as a tree grows from a seed. The flower manifests the seed, and in a sense, is not entirely different from the seed. This belief is at the core of the pantheistic view. Furthermore, the mystics have come to believe that the soul of man is the spiritual element in him, and that, prior to its association with man’s body, this soul existed in some form with God. It is a natural extension of the belief that we are part divine, that God dwells in us, and that our soul returns to Him. The Sufis’ interpretation of the scriptures that “one needs to know oneself to know God” comes from this premise.

Some mystics have come to define the “Unity of Being” as the unity of God with His creation. Others have come to believe God is the only true existence, and that creation is as ephemeral as sea-waves or bubbles that form and disappear at the surface of water. In Mullá Sadra’s philosophy this subject appears as the “Unity of Being” and the “Diversity of Created Things.”⁵⁵ Nevertheless he sees a common underlying unity in the diversity of the world of creation, just as light appears in different colors as it passes through differently colored glasses. In the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, our return to our Lord is not like the return of drops to the sea but more like the return of birds to the Abhá Paradise.

As opposed to the philosophically based “Unity of Being,” some Sufis have come to reach their goal through love and adoration. The founder of this school of thought is believed to be Ibn-Faridh.⁵⁶ This belief is called the “Unity of Witnesses, the Lover and the Beloved [*Shuhúd*].” Whatever these descriptions convey and under whatever definition this communion with the Lord falls, Bahá’u’lláh wishes to take the seeker to heights that go far beyond these terms and their meanings. In a reference to these views He states in the Seven Valleys that

[i]n this Valley, the wayfarer leaveth behind him the stages of the “oneness of Being and Manifestation [*Shuhúd*]” and reacheth a oneness that is sanctified above these two stations. Ecstasy alone can encompass this theme, not utterance nor argument; and whosoever hath dwelt at this stage [*Mahfel*] of the journey, or caught a breath from this garden land, knoweth whereof We speak.⁵⁷

In this statement, Bahá’u’lláh describes the station of the believers who were admitted to His banquet [*Mahfel*] and entered His garden.

It is worthwhile to ponder the station of the Lord’s Manifestation for this age. Bahá’u’lláh testifies to His station in these words:

God testifieth that there is none other God but Him and that He Who hath appeared is the Hidden Mystery, the Treasured Symbol, the Most Great Book for all peoples, and the Heaven of bounty for the whole world. He is the Most Mighty Sign amongst men and the Dayspring of the most august attributes in the realm of

creation. Through Him hath appeared that which had been hidden from time immemorial and been veiled from the eyes of men. He is the One Whose Manifestation was announced by the heavenly Scriptures, in former times and more recently. Whoso acknowledgeth belief in Him and in His signs and testimonies hath in truth acknowledged that which the Tongue of Grandeur uttered ere the creation of earth and heaven and the revelation of the Kingdom of Names. Through Him the ocean of knowledge hath surged amidst mankind and the river of divine wisdom hath gushed out at the behest of God, the Lord of Days. Well is it with the man of discernment who hath recognized and perceived the Truth.⁵⁸

He is the promise of all ages, He is the Beloved of all, He is the object of adoration for all, He is the One sought by all and the union that man seeks is union with Him.

4. The Three Realms: Realms of God, His Messengers (the Cause) and Man

It can be said that, with rare exceptions, the majority of Sufis as well as the faithful in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam believe in two realms, one the realm of God and the other in which men and other created things reside. The consequence of this belief has been a general confusion about the station and place of the Founders of great religions. In the early years of Islam, the Muslims placed Prophet Muhammad firmly on earth, the Christians, based on the Nicene Creed, raised Jesus Christ to the level of the realm of God, and some mystics and Sufis allowed man to reach God's station.

Bahá'u'lláh, however, teaches that there are three realms, the realm of God (the absolute and the Divine Essence), the world of man (the realm of all created things), and an intermediary kingdom, the realm of God's Messengers (the world of Cause). In the opening passage of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the first two realms (the World of man and the world of Cause) are explicitly mentioned, and the third (the realm of God) implicitly stated:

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation.⁵⁹

Bahá'u'lláh presents in the Seven Valleys some of His manifold stations. His titles in this book, some of which were quoted earlier, attest to this. In the Four Valleys He refers to four of His stations, i.e. His Self, Wisdom, Love and Spirit. In the Súrat'ul-Haykal (Discourse of the Temple), He clarifies the relationship between His Person (Mírzá Húsayn-'Alí), His Divine Spirit (Most Great Spirit), and God, where the concept of the three realms are expounded. It is in this context that it would be possible to understand and relate to Trinity in the context of the Bahá'í Faith, i.e. the Father = God, the Son = Jesus and the Holy Spirit = Christ/Divine Spirit).

In the early history of Islam, based on the Qur'án and Islamic traditions, the Muslims regarded the Prophet Muhammad as only another human being, the only difference being that He was the recipient of God's Revelation. In time, however, some Muslim thinkers, and in particular the Sufis, started to focus on the spirit of the Prophet and relate it to the Word, Logos, First Created, Primal Will, Light of Muhammad, etc. Bahá'u'lláh refers to these titles of the Divine Spirit of the prophet in the Seven Valleys:

And I praise and glorify the first sea which hath branched from the ocean of the Divine Essence, and the first morn which hath glowed from the Horizon of Oneness, and the first sun which hath risen in the Heaven of Eternity, and the first fire which was lit from the Lamp of Pre-existence in the lantern of singleness: He who was Ahmad in the kingdom of the exalted ones, and Muhammad amongst the concourse of the near ones, and Mahmúd in the realm of the sincere ones. . . "by whichsoever (name) ye will, invoke Him: He hath most excellent names" in the hearts of those who know.⁶⁰

These titles all refer to the Most Great Spirit that is the Divine Spirit to all Manifestations of God throughout the ages. So it can be seen that there is a consistency throughout the ages in referring to God's vicegerents Divine Spirit.

With belief in this intermediary realm confusion surrounding the meaning of the words of Manifestation of God regarding their stations clears.

5. The Relationship Between Religion, Mystic Path, and the Truth

Some Sufi orders gradually came to believe that the purpose of religion, particularly religious laws and ordi-

nances, was to purify man’s heart and mind and prepare him for undertaking a true mystic path. The purpose of the mystic quest in turn was to guide man to the “Truth.” In doing so, some Sufis saw religion as only a preliminary step in their quest. As a consequence, some Sufi orders came to believe that observance of the laws of religion was only binding on a wayfarer in the initial stages of his quest, and thereafter were not binding on him. This belief became the cause of a great deal of conflict and bloodshed amongst believers. It must be said, however, that many other Sufi orders never accepted this doctrine.

In a radical departure from this belief and its implications, Bahá’u’lláh defines the essential and complementary relationship between these stages of man’s spiritual maturation and enjoins the observance of all laws and ordinances at all times:

In all these journeys the traveler must stray not the breadth of a hair from the “Law,” for this is indeed the secret of the “Path” and the fruit of the Tree of “Truth”; and in all these stages he must cling to the robe of obedience to the commandments, and hold fast to the cord of shunning all forbidden things, that he may be nourished from the cup of the Law and informed of the mysteries of Truth.⁶¹

Bahá’u’lláh states that the “Law” (religious ordinances) is the secret of the mystic “Path,” and the “Fruit” (result) of the Tree of “Truth.” Through this relationship, these three aspects of man’s spiritual journey are eternally linked. Bahá’u’lláh strengthens this in the opening chapter of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas where He makes man’s salvation conditional on both recognition of God’s Manifestation for each age and obedience to His Laws:

It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration.⁶²

This very theme and the need for observance of all of the Lord’s ordinances have been repeated throughout the Writings.

True belief in God and recognition of Him cannot be complete save by acceptance of that which He hath revealed and by observance of whatsoever hath been decreed by Him and set down in the Book by the Pen of Glory. They that immerse themselves in the ocean of His utterances should at all times have the utmost regard for the divinely-revealed ordinances and prohibitions. Indeed His ordinances constitute the mightiest stronghold for the protection of the world and the safeguarding of its peoples.⁶³

6. Wealth, Poverty, Detachment and The Process of Living

One of the features distinguishing the Bahá’í Writings, including the Seven Valleys, from the extremist mystical Writings is the meaning of common Sufi terms such as “poverty” and “detachment.” Among some of the early puritans and Sufis in Islam there appeared the belief that this world is but transitory and worthless and that man’s salvation depends upon his complete break from it all. These believers found ample references from the Qur’án and other Islamic sources supporting their views:

47:36 The life of this world is but play and amusement: and if ye believe and guard against Evil, He will grant you your recompense, and will not ask you (to give up) your possessions.⁶⁴

Or in another verse from the Qur’án:

29:64 What is the life of this world but amusement and play? but verily the Home in the Hereafter—that is life indeed, if they but knew.⁶⁵

The works of many notable Sufi writers abound with expressions about the uselessness of this world. Few passages from the writings of Khájih ‘Abdulláh Ansárí on this subject would suffice:

O my dear, why are you wondering about the conditions of this world and why do you expect your wealth to last? How one can explain this riddle of wealth that has been earned at great sufferings, and accumulated at great hardship, and yet left behind with sorrows and disappointment? . . . This world is but a bridge on the path to the next. It is neither a place for peace nor a place for rest. It is all but the cause of hardship and calamities. This world is bent on causing you harm and mistreatment. Whoever found wealth therein is truly poor, and whoever found status he is amongst the wrongdoers. Every song that it sings says “The world is the prison of the believer and the heaven of the unbeliever,” and every speech that it makes states

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that “the world is but a place for error.”^{66,67}

The true meanings of poverty, wealth, detachment and the purpose of life and prescriptions for living are abundantly explained in the Bahá’í Writings. Study of these Writings makes it quite clear that in this Faith “poverty” is not about being materially poor, and “detachment” is not about breaking away from life and people and committing oneself to endless rituals in remote temples. The Faith intends to bring about a spiritual and a material balance to one’s life, and take away the errors of obsession with a one-dimensional material existence. Otherwise a life of isolation from society, begging for one’s existence, wasting of one’s time and resources, being utterly useless to oneself and the society, and occupying oneself with endless hard rituals in the name of worship have all been abhorred in the Writings.

The objectives of this Faith are to bring about prosperity and social justice for all, and a civilized and spiritual human society. It is about peace and harmony and the establishment of an ever-advancing civilization in this world and preparation of man for a spiritual regeneration and spiritual progress in worlds to come. The Bahá’í teachings are all about building a more suitable world and society for the future generations.

Some examples of these teachings include: compulsory education for all; learning of trades and professions; extending helping hands to all in need; building of orphanages and universal healthcare for all and all ages; elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty; enrichment of family life; equality for all; elimination of the need for wars and weapons of mass destruction; and world government

Therefore some of the references to poverty in the Seven Valleys and the Hidden Words such as these quoted below should be understood in the wider context of the Writings as a whole:^{68,69}

O friend, the heart is the dwelling of eternal mysteries, make it not the home of fleeting fancies; waste not the treasure of thy precious life in employment with this swiftly passing world. Thou comest from the world of holiness—bind not thine heart to the earth; thou art a dweller in the court of nearness—choose not the homeland of the dust.

O YE THAT PRIDE YOURSELVES ON MORTAL RICHES!

Know ye in truth that wealth is a mighty barrier between the seeker and his desire, the lover and his beloved. The rich, but for a few, shall in no wise attain the court of His presence nor enter the city of content and resignation. Well is it then with him, who, being rich, is not hindered by his riches from the eternal kingdom, nor deprived by them of imperishable dominion. By the Most Great Name! The splendor of such a wealthy man shall illuminate the dwellers of heaven even as the sun enlightens the people of the earth!

Teachings in the Seven Valleys

The Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, irrespective of the time-period, language, and form of composition all have a common purpose, and all contain elements of the Teachings of the Faith. As an example some of the Teachings that appear in the Seven Valleys and were elucidated in His subsequent Writings are outlined here:

- God is indescribable. All names and titles given to God relate to God’s Manifestations.
- The Manifestations of God are all one.
- Obedience to God’s commandments and recognition of His Manifestations at each age are both necessary for man’s salvation.
- Man is in need of God’s grace, bounty and spiritual guidance.
- The spiritual Worlds of God are innumerable.
- Man’s heart and soul becomes worthy of God’s grace when purified and cleansed from base desires and excessive materialism. The guidance given in the Seven Valleys prepares man to receive God’s grace.
- The ultimate goal of man’s spiritual progress is recognition of God’s Manifestation for the age.
- Man is essentially a spiritual being with material needs. Hence his happiness depends on the extent of his spiritual growth.

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- Physical and spiritual truths are not absolute, but relative.
- Each man receives his portion of God's grace and everyone is judged according to his or her own capacity.
- The prerequisite to success in one's search after truth is the elimination of all forms of prejudices and blind imitation.
- Man must set his vision at the outcome of all things.

Notes

- 1) This paper was presented at Louhelen and Bosch Bahá'í Schools in Michigan and California during October and November 1999.
- 2) Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys*, translated by Marzieh Gail, in consultation with 'Alí-Kulí Khán, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Ill., U.S., 1991.
- 3) Shaykh Muhiyí'd-Dín, the judge of Kháníqayn in Iraqi Kurdistan.
- 4) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 140.
- 5) Bahá'u'lláh, *Four Valleys*, translated by Marzieh Gail, in consultation with 'Alí-Kulí Khán, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Ill., U.S., 1991.
- 6) Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, translated by Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Ill, U.S., 1931
- 7) Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-qán*, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, United Kingdom
- 8) Bahá'u'lláh, The Essence (Gems) of Mysteries (*Jawáhinu'l-Asrár*). [This Epistle is in Arabic with no approved translation yet.]
- 9) Bahá'u'lláh, Mathnaví-i-Mubárák (*The Blessed Ode*). [This poem is in Persian and has the same style as that of Mathnavi of Rúmi. There is no approved English translation of this ode yet.]
- 10) Fáridu'd-Dín 'Attár (ca. 1150–1230 C.E.), one of the greatest Persian Sufi poets.
- 11) 'Attár, *The Conference of the Birds*.
- 12) 'Attár, *Book of Hardship* (Mosíbat-Náme).h).
- 13) Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, p. 24.
- 14) *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 15) *Ibid.*, p. 40.
- 16) *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 17) Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to The Son of the Wolf*, pp. 13–15
- 18) Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys*, pp. 22-23.
- 19) *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 20) *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.
- 21) *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 22) Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, U.K. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, XXI, p. 49.
- 23) Khájih 'Abdu'lláh Ansárí, (1006–1088 C.E.), a well-known Sufi, principally remembered for his Supplications and Quatrains.
- 24) Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys*, p. 16.
- 25) New Testament, Matthew 6:9–10
- 26) Jalálu'd-Dín Rúmi (1207–1273 C.E.), the founder of the “Mawlaví Whirling” dervish order and author of the Mathnaví, one of the most celebrated mystical works of all time. Bahá'u'lláh quotes Rúmi in many of His Writings.
- 27) References to the story of the journey of Moses and Khidr from Rúmi's Mathnaví appear on page 17:
Veiled from this was Moses
Though all strength and light;
Then thou who hast no wings at all,
Attempt not flight.
and on page 26:
If Khidr did wreck the vessel on the sea,
Yet in this wrong there are a thousand rights.
- 28) Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-qán*, p. 92.

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- 29) Suhrevárdí, founder of the philosophical school of Ishrâq.
- 30) Nezámí Ganjáví, *Five [Stories]*, (*Khamsih-ye Nezám'í*), written around 1188–1189 C.E.
- 31) Bahá' u' lláh, *Seven Valleys*, pp. 6-7.
- 32) New Testament, Matthew 11:4-6.
- 33) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 6, 23.
- 34) Bahá' u' lláh, *Seven Valleys*, pp. 5-9 passim.
- 35) *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.
- 36) *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.
- 37) *Ibid.*, p. 19–20
- 38) *Ibid.*, p. 38
- 39) *Ibid.*, pp. 38–39
- 40) Hatif of Isfahan
- 41) Bahá' u' lláh, *Seven Valleys*, p. 39.
- 42) *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 43) Súrat 'at-Tauba (Repentance) from the *Qur'án* 9:5.
- 44) Bahá' u' lláh, *Seven Valleys*, pp. 22–24.
- 45) 'Alí-ibn-Abí-Tálib. Related by Ishrâq Khávarí in *Qamús-i- 'qán*, vol. 2, p. 741.
- 46) Bahá' u' lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá' u' lláh*, pp. 336–338.
- 47) Bahá' u' lláh, *Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, p. 15.
- 48) 'Alí-ibn-Abí-Tálib, *A Collection of Sermons and Letters* (Nahj' ul-Balaghat).
- 49) Qur' án, S.17 (Bani-Isra' il), 110.
- 50) Bahá' u' lláh, *Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, p. 2.
- 51) Bahá' u' lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 47.
- 52) Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism. The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness*, Oneworld Publications, U.K.
- 53) Glen A. Shook, *Mysticism, Science and Revelation*, George Ronald, U.K.
- 54) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 239–41.
- 55) Mullá Sadrá
- 56) Ibn-Faridh
- 57) Bahá' u' lláh, *Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, p. 39.
- 58) Bahá' u' lláh, *Tablets of Bahá' u' lláh*, Tajallíyát (Effulgences) p. 47.
- 59) Bahá' u' lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 19.
- 60) Bahá' u' lláh, *Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, p. 2.
- 61) *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.
- 62) Bahá' u' lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 19
- 63) Bahá' u' lláh, *Tablets of Bahá' u' lláh*, Tajallíyát (Effulgences) p. 50.
- 64) Qur' án 47:36—MUHAMMAD
- 65) Qur' án 29:64—AL- 'ANKABUT.
- 66) Khájjih 'Abdulláh Ansárí. *Anwár-al-Tahqiq* (Lights of Search) in Persian, page 42. What is given here is a verb translation from Persian.
- 67) Bahá' u' lláh, *Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, p. 35.
- 68) Bahá' u' lláh, *Hidden Words*, p. 41.

