

## The Mystical Dimensions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

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### Introduction

Religious thought incorporates philosophy, theology and mysticism; indeed, the mystical experience is integral to religious experience. Shoghi Effendi commented in a letter that “the core of religious Faith is that mystic feeling which unites man with God.” He further notes in the same letter that “[t]he Bahá'í Faith, like all other Divine Religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character” (*Spiritual Foundations* #40). Expanding this understanding of mysticism, religious scholar Annemarie Schimmel writes that mysticism “in its widest sense . . . may be defined as the consciousness of the One reality—be it called Wisdom, Light, Love or Nothing” (*Mystical Dimensions of Islam* 4) This consciousness cannot be reached by intellectual endeavors, as it transcends human intellect and rationalization.<sup>1</sup> The human heart, however, can engage in spiritual discovery, and tread the mystic path. Mysticism, therefore, may be defined as the quest and journey of the human soul towards its Creator.<sup>2</sup> In the Bahá'í context, this means that the human soul embarks on the mystical path through the recognition of Bahá'u'lláh. Consequently, the psychology of the soul changes<sup>3</sup> under both the gnostic and volunteristic aspects of Bahá'í spirituality.<sup>4</sup> The copper of the soul is transmuted into gold in the process of Divine alchemy and the ailments of the human soul are healed in remembrance of God.<sup>5</sup> The Bahá'í Revelation invites all human souls to partake of this Divine Elixir.<sup>6</sup>

A significant portion of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh concerns mysticism. Both the theory (doctrine) and method (practice) of the mystical experience are expounded. Many texts are primarily concerned with the mystical path. The Hidden Words, The Seven Valleys, and The Four Valleys are some of the best-known representative Writings from this group.<sup>7</sup> Even texts such as the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and the Kitáb-i-*qán*, which are not primarily intended to be mystical treatises, present and treat a variety of mystical topics. There have been a number of recent attempts by Bahá'í scholars to examine the vast corpus of Bahá'í Writings concerning spiritual and mystical topics.<sup>8</sup> As a whole, however, the author agrees with the assessment made by Jack McLean that the mystical elements of the Bahá'í Faith remain under-explored.<sup>9</sup>

The Bahá'í Revelation presents to the wayfarer a variety of vehicles for the spiritual journey. The mystical Writings of Bahá'u'lláh detail the spiritual path in sundry ways.<sup>10</sup> The Bahá'í Faith validates a number of spiritual and mystical practices as essential for one's spiritual development, whereas some of the so-called mystical practices are discounted and even forbidden, such as mortification, mendicancy and poverty. The authentically spiritual practices are however confirmed and endorsed. The Obligatory Prayers (*salát*) are indispensable to spiritual progress, as are the recitation of other prayers and meditations revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. The reading of the verses of God every day and night provides the human soul with an “occasion of encounter with the person of the divine Manifestation, Bahá'u'lláh.”<sup>11</sup> Fasting (*sawm*) and the daily invocation of “*Alláh-u-Abhá*” are also integral to the Bahá'í mystical experience. Obedience to the laws and ordinances of Bahá'u'lláh key to the Divine Elixir designed to transform the copper of the soul into gold.<sup>12</sup> Work itself is considered to be a critical element in Bahá'í mysticism.<sup>13</sup> All of the above elements are generally acknowledged and well-appreciated elements of Bahá'í spirituality. This article, however, will examine an element of the Bahá'í spiritual experience which is often neglected with regards to its mystical dimensions: the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

The thesis that the Bahá'í Administrative Order is an instrument designed by Bahá'u'lláh for the mystic wayfarer is the subject of this study. The Administrative Order has already been the subject of numerous academic examinations.<sup>14</sup> Most such studies have focused on comparative political theory. To date, the mystical dimensions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order remain largely unexplored. Some authors have acknowledged such spiritual aspects, though. Jack McLean, for example, in his formulation of Bahá'í spirituality writes:

For a Bahá'í, to further the aims and purposes of the Bahá'í revelation means to participate in the erection of a new society, whose blueprint the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith have drawn up and whose keynote is justice.

This new society is Bahá'u'lláh's new world order which is completely without parallel in the utopian societies and systems of government that have evolved until the present day. This world system of Bahá'u'lláh, which exists today in embryonic form and whose Head is the Universal House of Justice, is the visible expression of all the intangible spiritual precepts and superlative teachings that Bahá'u'lláh has revealed to humanity.<sup>15</sup>

This article advances the thesis that the Administrative Order is an indispensable component of Bahá'í mystical transformation. The author will first examine the theosophical framework and develop the nomenclature required for the study of any mystical system. This theosophical foundation will then be applied to the creation of the Bahá'í Administrative Order as a mystical entity.

### Theosophy (*Hikmat-i-Illáhi*) and Mysticism (*'Irfán*)

Any serious examination of the mystical experience must take account of theosophical considerations.<sup>16</sup> Mysticism was earlier defined as the journey of the human soul towards God. Theosophy may be defined as "that sacred philosophy which springs from such inward illumination; it is the mysticism of the mind as distinguished from the mysticism of the heart."<sup>17</sup> Thus, theosophy can be equated with *Hikmat-i-Illáhi* (Divine Wisdom, lit. *Theo-sophia*), as outlined in the Bahá'í Writings. It is within this framework that Bahá'í mystical theory should be examined.<sup>18</sup>

In the *Kitáb-i-`qán* Bahá'u'lláh introduces three distinct forms of theophany.<sup>19</sup> The three are Universal Revelation (*Tajallí-i-`ám*), the Holy Outpouring (*Fayd-i-Muqaddas*) and the Most Holy Outpouring (*Fayd-i-Aqdas*).<sup>20</sup> The Universal Revelation is that theophany by which God is manifested "upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing . . . and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes."<sup>21</sup> As such Bahá'u'lláh declares, "All created things eloquently testify to the revelation of that inner Light within them."<sup>22</sup> This universal theophany is available to all wayfarers, whether from within or outside the Bahá'í tradition and the mystic should behold the inner mysteries enshrined in all things as he traverses the path. Such speculation is integral to the Bahá'í spiritual experience.<sup>23</sup> The Most Holy Outpouring on the other hand represents the Specific Revelation of God (*Tajallí-i-Kháss*). This theophany "is confined to the innermost Essence, unto which no man can attain."<sup>24</sup> This Specific Revelation occurs in the realm of Absolute Oneness (*Ahadiyyah*) where the names and attributes of God are indistinguishable from God's Essence, and where God is both the Lover and the Beloved.<sup>25</sup>

The Holy Outpouring (*Fayd-i-Muqaddas*) that Bahá'u'lláh equates with the Secondary Revelation of God (*Tajallí-i-Thání*), however, is the theophany of immediate interest, as it refers specifically to Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. This Holy Outpouring (*Fayd-i-Muqaddas*) belongs to "the realm of the primal and original manifestation of God."<sup>26</sup> In Sufi terminology this Revelation is the locus through which the names and attributes of God are manifested.<sup>27</sup> This is in conformity with Bahá'í theology:

These Prophets and chosen Ones of God are the recipients and revealers of all the unchangeable attributes and names of God. They are the mirrors that truly and faithfully reflect the light of God. Whatsoever is applicable to them is applicable to God, Himself, Who is both the Visible and the Invisible.<sup>28</sup>

The Secondary Revelation or Holy Outpouring has been identified with the "Supreme Pen," the "First Emanation of God," and the "Creative B and E" in Sufi literature.<sup>29</sup> The above have all been identified with Bahá'u'lláh in the Bahá'í Writings.<sup>30</sup> It is this theophany that Bahá'u'lláh directly represents. It is also through this Holy Outpouring that the human soul encounters the Divine Elixir and embarks on the mystical path. Thus the volunteristic and gnostic elements of the Bahá'í mystical experience are derived from Bahá'u'lláh. The encounter of the human soul with the Holy Outpouring (*Fayd-i-Muqaddas*) in the Bahá'í Revelation is the spiritual dimension that is unique to the Bahá'í mystical experience. All the integral elements of the Bahá'í spiritual path mentioned earlier have been directly derived from this Secondary Revelation. It is this same theophany that generates the Bahá'í Administrative Order through the "mystic intercourse" described below.

### The Pen-Tablet Interaction and the Generation of the Bahá'í Administrative Order

The Pen (*qalam*)/Tablet (*Lawh*) interaction is a commonly utilized motif in the Bahá'í Writings. Both terms occur frequently in Bahá'í scripture. Sometimes their use denotes literally a pen or a tablet, but often their

meaning is symbolic, referring to Bahá'u'lláh and His Revelation. The Pen thus represents an active entity and is generative, whereas the Tablet is passive in relation to the Pen and a recipient.<sup>31</sup> The Pen generates the Tablet itself. In the Tablet of Wisdom Bahá'u'lláh explains the creation of the world of existence using this same motif:

That which hath been in existence had existed before, but not in the form thou seest today. The world of existence came into being through the heat generated from the interaction between the active force and that which is its recipient. These two are the same, yet they are different.<sup>32</sup>

This is by no means the only application of this motif. For example, later in that same Tablet Bahá'u'lláh elaborates on the Word of God as the originator of matter, through the creation of “Such as communicate the generating influence and such as receive its impact” (*fá'ilayn va munfa'ilayn*). These are generally taken to be a reference to the four elements of air, water, fire and earth, whose active/recipient interactions beget all matter.<sup>33</sup>

The Guardian applies the same motif to the generation of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. The passage below from *God Passes By* describes the interaction between active and recipient forces, where Bahá'u'lláh is the active force and 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the recipient entity. The text establishes the following relationship,

The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, on the other hand, may be regarded as the offspring resulting from the mystic intercourse between Him Who had generated the forces of a God-given Faith and the One Who had had been made its sole Interpreter and was recognized as its Perfect Exemplar. The creative energies unleashed by the Originator of the Law of God in this age gave birth, through their impact upon the mind of Him Who had been chosen as its unerring Expounder, to that Instrument, the vast implications of which the present generation, even after the lapse of twenty-three years, is still incapable of fully apprehending.<sup>34</sup>

The *Fayd-i-Muqaddas* (Holy Outpouring) or the Secondary Revelation of God is here stated to interact with 'Abdu'l-Bahá through a “mystic intercourse.” This “mystic intercourse” begets the Will and Testament, which is considered to be the charter for the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Therefore according to the text the Bahá'í Administrative Order has an unequivocal mystical linkage to Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghi Effendi had already elaborated on this in the *Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* a few years earlier:

The creative energies released by the Law of Bahá'u'lláh, permeating and evolving within the mind of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, have, by their very impact and close interaction, given birth to an Instrument which may be viewed as the Charter of the New World Order which is at once the glory and the promise of this most great Dispensation. The Will may thus be acclaimed as the inevitable offspring resulting from that mystic intercourse between Him Who communicated the generating influence of His divine Purpose and the One Who was its vehicle and chosen recipient. Being the Child of the Covenant—the Heir of both the Originator and the Interpreter of the Law of God—the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá can no more be divorced from Him Who supplied the original and motivating impulse than from the One Who ultimately conceived it.<sup>35</sup>

This passage reiterates many of the points that the passage from *God Passes By* addressed. It establishes the active/recipient relationship again and outlines the “mystic intercourse” that generates the *Will and Testament*, which is the charter for the Administrative Order. The Covenant between Bahá'u'lláh and every Bahá'í soul is also incorporated into this “mystic intercourse” and preceded the birth of the Administrative Order. The critical function of the Covenant is suggested by the reference to the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the “Child of the Covenant.”<sup>36</sup> The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and the Administrative Order are thus inseparable.

In *God Passes By* Shoghi Effendi presents the exact point again, albeit using a different metaphor. There he describes the embodiment of the Spirit of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh in the institutions of the Faith after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

The moment had now arrived for that undying, that world-vitalizing Spirit that was born in Shíráz, that had been rekindled in Tíhrán, that had been fanned into flame in Baghdad and Adrianople, that had been carried to the West, and was now illuminating the fringes of five continents, to incarnate itself in institutions designed to canalize its outspreading energies and stimulate its growth. (324)

The analysis presented is of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It is generally understood that with the passing of

'Abdu'l-Bahá the Bahá'í Faith emerged from a period of "charismatic" leadership and entered an "administrative" phase. Shoghi Effendi's examination is somewhat different and conforms well to his thought analyzed earlier: It was "that world-vitalizing Spirit" that incarnated itself in "institutions," thereby establishing the continuity of the mystical linkage with Bahá'u'lláh.

The following passage is also of interest in this regard. It makes the point that an artificial separation between the "spiritual" and the "administrative" aspects of the Cause is "tantamount to a mutilation of the Cause." He writes:

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 of Bahá'u'lláh* 5)

### Mysticism, Law, Authority and the Bahá'í Administrative Order<sup>37</sup>

As illustrated above, the Bahá'í Administrative Order was inaugurated by and derives its authority from the Manifestation, and like other expressions of Bahá'í spirituality it is accommodated into the Bahá'í prophetic schema without difficulty.<sup>38</sup> Two issues must be addressed at this point. The first concerns authority and divine guidance in the Bahá'í Administrative Order. The other concerns the divine Law and the legislative components of this Order. The issues of divine guidance, authority, and divine Laws are critical questions that every mystical system must answer. This article will briefly examine how these issues were understood in Sufism and Sufi Orders. Then the same questions will be raised regarding the Bahá'í Administrative Order as a mystical system.<sup>39</sup> Authority and Divine guidance are important in any mystical quest as Trimmingham points out in connection to Sufism:

Masters of the Way realized that the mystical tendency is highly dangerous as an individual experience, since the soul under the influence of a "state" is wide open to delusion and self-deception. There are mystic Ways to other gods than God.<sup>40</sup>

In Sufism mystical guidance was provided for the Sufi wayfarer through two interrelated sources: the Sufi master and the *Qutb* (spiritual pole). The masters are essential for spiritual development as the following passage indicates:

Connection to a master is considered a condition sine qua non for spiritual success. Without a master, without a guide, all illusions and all distractions are to be feared. This is what is meant by the well-known Sufi adage "who does not have a *shaykh* has Satan for his *shaykh*."<sup>41</sup>

The masters are all inwardly connected with the *Qutb* (spiritual pole) of their age. The *Qutb* is the central mystical locus of the Universe, from whom the masters derive their inspiration and authority. The wayfarer-master-*Qutb* hierarchy is essential to the Sufi world-view. These dynamics were accepted despite the fact that they find little textual justification in Islamic Scripture.<sup>42</sup> The second problem addresses the tension between the mystics and the jurists. It can be maintained that Sufism in general was observant of the Islamic legal ordinances, and that Sufis were to observe religious Law.<sup>43</sup> It is generally acknowledged, however, that the focus on the mystical de-emphasized the legal code and that more radical Sufism fostered and augmented anti-nomian tendencies.<sup>44</sup> The gap between the legalistic and mystical traditions in Islam was rarely bridged, and mainstream Islam has always looked upon Sufism with a degree of suspicion.

The Bahá'í Administrative Order represents a unique synthesis compared with Sufism. The mystical forces of the Bahá'í Revelation were channeled through the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá after the passing of Bahá'u'lláh. Upon the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá the "mystic intercourse" described above had taken place, and the Bahá'í Administrative Order was begotten. In other words, the mystical encounter of the human soul with the Holy Outpouring (*Fayd-i-Muqaddas*) becomes possible through the encounter with the Bahá'í Administrative Order. Bahá'u'lláh had anticipated both the Universal House of Justice and the Bahá'í Administrative Order in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*.<sup>45</sup> At present, the Universal House of Justice, designated by Bahá'u'lláh as the "Ark of God" (*Safinat'u'lláh*) in the Tablet of Carmel, is the spiritual pole and the center of Bahá'í spirituality. According to Shoghi Effendi, the Universal House of Justice is the one divinely appointed Center and the one expressly-designated pivot around which Bahá'í administration revolves.<sup>46</sup> The relationship between the human soul and the

Universal House of Justice is secured through the Covenant. It has already been demonstrated that the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is instrumental in the generation of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. The establishment of a covenant between the mystic and the object of mystical quest or the Pole (*Qutb*) is an integral part of the mystical experience. In the case of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, the Covenant between Bahá'u'lláh and the human soul also implies a relationship between that soul and the Universal House of Justice. This spiritual Covenant also serves to maintain the organic unity of the Bahá'í world.

All must seek guidance from the Universal House of Justice and turn to them.<sup>47</sup> The Will and Testament maintains that the Universal House of Justice is “the source of all good and freed from all error” and that “whatever they decide has the same effect as the Text itself.”<sup>48</sup> “God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth”<sup>49</sup> as it serves to “insure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority”<sup>50</sup> from the source of Revelation. This body also provides infallible guidance for Bahá'ís on “legislative and administrative ordinances” and “may enact laws that are not expressly recorded in the Book.”<sup>51</sup> As such, the Universal House of Justice represents a unique synthesis of the legislative and spiritual offices, naturally eliminating the tension permeating Islamic spirituality described above. For the Bahá'í wayfarer the Universal House of Justice is not a mere administrative organ elected in a three-tier process by universal suffrage; rather, it is a sanctified repository of divine guidance and the spiritual axis of the Bahá'í world. Accordingly, the establishment of a spiritual connection between the heart of the mystic and the Universal House of Justice becomes an essential component of the Bahá'í mystical experience.

The theoretical rather than the practical aspects of Bahá'í mysticism are the primary concern of this article. However, the fact that the Universal House of Justice represents the axis *par excellence* of Bahá'í spirituality should not be considered a mere theoretical or doctrinal element of the Bahá'í mystical experience. It has significant practical implications for the manner in which one traverses the mystic path. The following is a highly instructive example of the dynamics between a Bahá'í (and eventual martyr) and the Universal House of Justice. It is selected from the introduction to a report written for and addressed to the Universal House of Justice by Mrs. Jínús Mahmúdí, who at the time (1981) was an Auxiliary Board Member. The occasion for this report was the arrest of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran in August 1981. In it Mrs. Mahmúdí records an interesting account of the individual members of the N.S.A. and provides unique insights into the spiritual state of their meetings. It was written under circumstances of extreme danger. Both the relationship of the National Spiritual Assembly with the Universal House of Justice as well as her individual connection to and understanding of the Supreme Institution of the Bahá'í Administrative Order are clearly conveyed in this report:

May my life be sacrificed for you. We give thanks—We are content. You have said that whatever comes to pass is the will of God. Therefore we render thanks—We are content—We are servants—Just give us the strength to endure . . . Strengthen each one of us a thousand-fold so that we can withstand the onrush of the tribes of the earth, then we will like unto the mighty ocean send waves unto the shores of the East and the West.

Your crazed lovers are now in the prison of love. That new creation that you yourself had created. Your guidance was not withheld from them even for a moment. Your love and your igniting words would ceaselessly arrive like copious rain. At first it caused their tears to flow, then it would set them on fire. Then it bestowed upon them freshness, subtlety, power and strength. This is how you created that new creation. When Husayn<sup>52</sup> would call and say that there was a new message from the House of Justice they did not know how to get to the gathering. They began with prayers and supplications and then would consume your every word with all their existence. They derived new life from it and prepared for sacrifice.<sup>53</sup>

The implications for the mystic wayfarer are very real. These souls entered the field of martyrdom inspired and strengthened by the Universal House of Justice. Their connection to the axis of Bahá'í spirituality allowed for their mystic union with the Beloved.<sup>54</sup>

### The Feast

The Bahá'í Administrative Order encompasses all Bahá'ís at the level of the nineteen-day Feast. This insti-

tution is established in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas:

Verily, it is enjoined upon you to offer a feast, once in every month, though only water be served; for God hath purposed to bind hearts together, albeit through both earthly and heavenly means.<sup>55</sup>

The Feast is the bedrock of Bahá’í administration. The Feast also serves to remove barriers and unite the community at grass roots, and as such is rendered non-elitist. It is a sacred practice with significant spiritual and devotional character.<sup>56</sup> It has authentic counterparts in other mystical schools, such as in Sufism where regular spiritual meetings entitled *majlis* (pl. *majális*) are held “for the purpose of reading instructive texts, invocation, and singing.”<sup>57</sup> The well-known Sufi practice of *samá’* (spiritual concert) is an example of such spiritual meetings.<sup>58</sup> These sessions were the source of inspiration and ecstasy for the Sufis, and they began with and ended with Qur’anic recitation. The Bahá’í nineteen day Feast likewise is intended for inspiration and uplifting. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá elaborates on this theme as follows:

The believers of God must assemble and associate with each other in the utmost love, joy, and fragrance. They must conduct themselves (in these Feasts) with the greatest dignity and consideration, chant divine verses, peruse instructive articles, read the Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, encourage and inspire each other with love for the whole human race, invoke God with perfect joy and fragrance, sing the verses, glorifications, and praises of the Self-Subsistent Lord, and deliver eloquent speeches. The owner of the house must personally serve the beloved ones. He must seek after the comfort of all, and with the utmost humility he must show forth kindness to every one. If the Feast is arranged in this manner and in the way mentioned, that supper is the “Lord’s Supper,” for the result is the same result and the effect is the same effect.<sup>59</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá envisions music as an element of the Feast. Bahá’í scholars have acknowledged the importance of music in the Bahá’í spiritual experience.<sup>60</sup> This suggests a prominent role for music in the Bahá’í Feast. In short the Feast, as an integral component of the Bahá’í Administrative Order, presents an occasion for spiritual development for the soul.

### The Rulers (*Umará’*) and the Learned (*‘Ulamá’*)

Bahá’u’lláh has called for two branches of the Bahá’í Administrative Order in the Kitáb-i-‘Ahdí (Book of My Covenant): the Rulers (*Umará’*) and the Learned (*‘Ulamá’*).<sup>61</sup> The Universal House of Justice has stated that the “distinction is that whereas the ‘rulers’ function as corporate bodies, the ‘learned’ operate primarily as individuals.” The administrative functions of both branches are clearly defined and delineated in the Bahá’í Writings as well as in the writings of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice. Both branches are integral to the theory and practice of Bahá’í spirituality. The members of the Local Spiritual Assembly for example “should consider themselves as entering the Court of the Presence of God, the Exalted, the most High, and as beholding Him Who is the Unseen” as ordained by Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.<sup>62</sup> They are to serve both the individual Bahá’í and the community at large as “channels of divine guidance.”<sup>63</sup> This branch of the Bahá’í administration is unique in terms of mystical guidance compared to other schools of mystical thought, with respect to even though one finds parallels between the “rulers” and the function of the spiritual master in general.

It is the “learned” arm of the Bahá’í administration, however, that parallels the function of the Sufi master most closely, and as such it is also integral to the Bahá’í mystical experience. This arm consists of the Hands of the Cause, the Continental Board of Counselors and the Auxiliary Board. The functions of the Hands of the Cause as delineated in the Will and Testament are:

The obligations of the Hands of the Cause of God are to diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to promote learning, to improve the character of all men and to be, at all times and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from earthly things. They must manifest the fear of God by their conduct, their manners, their deeds and their words.<sup>64</sup>

The functions of the “Hands” as expounded above are clearly similar to that of the Sufi master as examined earlier.<sup>65</sup> These same functions of the Hands of the Cause are carried into the future by the Continental Board of Counselors, and their Auxiliary Board. Therefore the term “learned” has been applied to the Hands of the Cause, Counselors, and Auxiliary Board members.

The Hands of the Cause of God, the Counselors and the members of the Auxiliary Board fall within the definition of the “learned” given by the beloved Guardian. Thus they are all intimately interrelated and it is not incorrect to refer to the three ranks collectively as one institution.

However, each is also a separate institution in itself.<sup>66</sup>

The two arms of the Bahá’í Administrative Order are critical components of Bahá’í spirituality, both in mystical method and mystical theory. The “learned” derive their authority and inspiration from the Universal House of Justice in the same manner that the Sufi masters derive their authority from the *Qutb*. The following comments by the Universal House of Justice regarding the two arms of administration, however, must be kept in mind, where they indicate the supreme synthesis incorporated in the administrative structures of the Bahá’í Faith.

The newness and uniqueness of this concept make it difficult to grasp; only as the Bahá’í Community grows and the believers are increasingly able to contemplate its administrative structure uninfluenced by concepts from past ages, will the vital interdependence of the “rulers” and the “learned” in the Faith be properly understood, and the inestimable value of their interaction be fully recognized.<sup>67</sup>

The “newness” of this synthesis makes it difficult to fully comprehend. The Bahá’í mystic therefore stands in need of a new frame of reference, as there is nothing in our known ancient and traditional spiritual heritage that can fully compare with the Bahá’í Administrative Order.<sup>68</sup> This new paradigm requires that every Bahá’í individual heed this passage from the *Lawh-i-Hikmat*: “Abase not the station of the learned in Bahá and belittle not the rank of such rulers as administer amidst you.”<sup>69</sup>

### *Hál* (state) and *Qál* (speech)

Of particular importance for the mystic wayfarer is the distinction between the two Sufi notions of *hál* (spiritual state) and *qál* (speech). *Hál* refers to inner and authentic spiritual state of the wayfarer, whereas *qál* is what one utters by mouth. The former is a genuine spiritual and internal phenomenon, whereas the latter is an external one. Sufi literature favors the inner spiritual state, which is “real” over the spoken or outer, which may or may not reflect the inner reality. An example occurs in the narrative of Moses and the Shepherd in Rumi’s *Mathnaví* where God teaches Moses the distinction.

We look not at the exterior and the speech (*qál*),

We behold the inner and the state (*hál*).<sup>70</sup>

This distinction is maintained in the Bahá’í Writings,<sup>71</sup> for the inner state is emphasized in all matters pertaining to the Bahá’í mystical experience rather than the outer aspects. For example, if a person should go through the motions of the obligatory prayer carelessly and without any spiritual connection, that prayer may not bring about the desired mystical experience.<sup>72</sup> The Bahá’í administrative Order is also an agent for transformation of the human soul, and much like other spiritual practices can only function as such if engaged in with spirituality and with a pure intention. It is the duty of every Bahá’í wayfarer to engage the Bahá’í administration as an authentic *hál* experience rather than a *qál* one. Thus, the individual cannot practice adhering to the letter of the law with regards to the Bahá’í Administrative Order and not the spirit. Only then can the Bahá’í administration be a component of the Bahá’í spiritual experience. The following passage on behalf of Shoghi Effendi touches on the same point:

Laws and institutions, as viewed by Bahá’u’lláh, can become really effective only when our inner spiritual life has been perfected and transformed. Otherwise religion will degenerate into a mere organization, and becomes a dead thing. (*Spiritual Foundations: Prayer, Meditation, and the Devotional Attitude* #40)

### Conclusion

Writing in the 1930s, Shoghi Effendi stated that there are features and relationships in the Bahá’í Administrative Order that will be defined and analyzed by future generations. This article is a study of one such feature—the mystical dimensions of the Bahá’í Administrative Order. The thesis is advanced that Bahá’u’lláh has through the Covenant bequeathed to posterity “an excellent and priceless heritage.”<sup>73</sup> Through this heritage the wayfarer can encounter the Holy Outpouring (*Fayd-i-Muqaddas*). The Bahá’í Administrative Order has a number of unique and key features when considered as a mystical entity, one of which is the inclu-

sion of all at the level of the Feast. The full spectrum of this topic cannot be explored in this article. The reader is invited to consider this thesis in light of the scriptural evidence beyond those presented here. The implication for the human soul whether as one serving on administrative bodies or otherwise is clear: the encounter with the Administrative Order is critical to the mystical path.

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### Notes

- 1) This is not a concept peculiar to the Bahá’í tradition. For example, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* 515 defines mysticism as “a doctrine or discipline maintaining that one can gain knowledge of reality not accessible to sense perception or to rational conceptual thought.” See the *Seven Valleys* p. 33 for an elaboration on this theme by Bahá’u’lláh.
- 2) Bahá’í thought maintains that the chief endowment of the human being is the rational soul (*nafs-i-nátiqah*) also identified with the human spirit (*rúh-i-insáni*). Ontologically, the human soul is at the end of the Arc of Descent, and at the beginning of the Arc of Ascent, which is the initiation of the spiritual journey (*Some Answered Questions* 285-86).
- 3) Traditional Sufi teachings describe an elaborate psychology (*ma’rifat an-nafs*). In this system, which is based on Quránic nomenclature, the soul (*nafs*) progresses from the *nafs-i-amárah* (the commanding soul) to the *nafs-i-mutma’inah* (the confirmed soul) and the *nafs-i-mardiáh* (that has attained Divine good-pleasure). The Sufi science of the soul is treated in adequate detail in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* 294-307. Bahá’u’lláh has acknowledged and confirmed Sufi psychology (cf. *Majmú’iy-i-Alwáh-i-Hadrat-i-Bahá’u’lláh* 97). Bahá’u’lláh has elsewhere markedly simplified the Bahá’í science of the soul:
 

Much hath been written in the books of old concerning the various stages in the development of the soul, such as concupiscence, irascibility, inspiration, benevolence, contentment, Divine good-Pleasure and the like; The Pen of the Most High, however is disinclined to dwell upon them. Every soul that walketh humbly with its God, in this Day, and cleaveth unto Him, shall find itself invested with the honor and glory of all goodly names and stations (Gleanings 159).
- 4) Schimmel divides the mystical approaches into the “volunteristic” and the “gnostic.” The volunteristic mystic aims to possess the attributes of God, whereas the gnostic mystic attempts to obtain a deeper knowledge of God (*Mystical Dimensions of Islam* 6). Both elements are explicitly present in the Bahá’í Writing.
- 5) *Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh*, from the Persian, passage number 32.
- 6) Along the way, as the soul begins to change, the individual experiences new understandings of the self and its relationship to other individuals as well as to God. It is this broad complex of transformed spiritual attitudes and understandings that I will call mystical experience.
- 7) A multitude of other key tablets also present and elaborate upon the mystical dimensions of the Bahá’í Revelation. The *Qasídiy-i-Varqá’íyyih* and *Mathnaví* are two such tablets. It is regrettable that the scholarly community in general has not accorded these Tablets the close attention that they merit, from the standpoint of mystical content and teachings as well as the literary form. These texts have been examined however with respect to other aspects and there are provisional translations of the *Qasídah* available as detailed in *Secret and Symbol* (258-59) by Christopher Buck.
- 8) In general the author agrees with the assessment made by Jack McLean who states that “it is regrettable that very little Bahá’í scholarship to date has explored the topic of mysticism in a positive light . . .” (*Dimensions in Spirituality* 83). *Dimensions in Spirituality* by Jack McLean is a noteworthy attempt to compensate this deficiency. It represents the first serious attempt towards a comprehensive formulation of Bahá’í spirituality. Dr. Dáryúsh Ma’ání has also contributed a significant volume of literature on this topic in Persian. His *Kanz-i-Asrár* (Thesaurus of Mysteries), for example, only the first volume of which has been published, represents a lexicon of the terminology utilized in the *Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh*.
- 9) *Dimensions in Spirituality* (83).
- 10) To these must be added the authorized interpretations made by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi.
- 11) *Dimensions in Spirituality* (58).
- 12) *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* paragraph 4. See also *The Seven Valleys* (39-40).
- 13) *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* paragraph 33, where Bahá’u’lláh states: “We have exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship of the one true God.” This represents a radical break from the Sufi tradition where a mystic was known for his poverty, and renunciation of the world. Hence the designations *faqír* in Arabic and *darvish* in Persian, both of which mean “poor,” came to be generally accepted terms for the Sufi. These mystics were frequently inclined to beg, a practice also forbidden by Bahá’u’lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*.
- 14) An introductory outline of the development and structure of the Bahá’í Administrative Order is presented by Smith in *The Bábí and Bahá’í Religions: From Messianic Shi’ism to a World Religion* 115-35. *The Search for a Just Society* (424-33) by John Huddleston is an interesting presentation and incorporates a rare balance between the spiritual and administrative elements. Another excellent study is *An Organic Order* by Roger Coe in *The Vision of Shoghi Effendi*. The most comprehensive overall treatment remains that of Shoghi Effendi himself as detailed in his writings such as *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* 152-57.
- 15) *Dimensions in Spirituality* 126.
- 16) The word “theosophy” itself poses a problem, as it has been used to denote a variety of ideas and schools of thought.
- 17) See *The Sufi Orders in Islam* by Trimingham 138.



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- 18) This article presents a synthesis derived from Bahá'í Sacred Writings and the writings of Shoghi Effendi. Such inductive reasoning has inherent flaws and is always dangerous. The author wishes the readership to give close attention to the following guidance by the Universal House of Justice in this regard.

As you point out in your letter, divine Revelation is infallible and proceeds from an all-encompassing knowledge of the Truth, but when individual Bahá'ís attempt to apply Sacred Texts to any specific problem or situation they do so using their own minds which are of limited understanding. . . . The Bahá'í principle of harmony between religion and science requires, as you say, that a Bahá'í scholar must use his intelligence to arrive at a solution of a specific problem if there is an apparent conflict between a Sacred Text and other evidence; and also he must accept the fact that some problems may defy his comprehension. . . . (Scholarship 26)

- 19) By theophany the authors intend Self-Revelation of the Ipseity. Here the terms manifestation, revelation and theophany are utilized as synonyms. The Ipseity is identified with the Sufi *Huwa* (He), which refers to the unknowable Essence of God.
- 20) *Book of Certitude* 139-43. These definitions are presented in an attempt to arrive at an understanding of "attainment unto the divine Presence" (*Liqa' u'lláh*).
- 21) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá' u'lláh* 149.
- 22) *Book of Certitude* 140.
- 23) The seeker should achieve this state in the Valley of Search, the first of the *Seven Valleys*.
- 24) *Book of Certitude* 141. This article does not intend to treat the complex theosophical background of the Universal Revelation and the Specific Revelation. See *Hikmat-i-Ilháhi* 278-79 by Qamshí'í and *Qámús-i-'qán* 3:1194-1204 by A. Ishráq-Khávárí for further details.
- 25) Bahá'í Writings acknowledge Five Divine Presences or realms. These are in descending order *Háhút*, *Láhút* (Heavenly Court), *Jabarút* (Dominion), *Malakút* (Kingdom) and *Násút* (Corporeal World). In the Tablet of All Food (*Lawh-i-Kull-i-Ta'ám*), Bahá' u'lláh identifies the Heaven of Absolute Oneness as *Háhút* (Unknowable Essence). Even the Manifestations have no access to this realm. This paper will not deal with this very interesting topic. For a study of the Five Divine Presences in the Bahá'í Writings see *The Revelation of Bahá' u'lláh* 1: 58-59, by Adib Tahezadeh. In the Most Holy Outpouring God reveals His Self to Himself, and He is at once the Lover and the Beloved (*Makátib-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá* 2:12-13).
- 26) *Book of Certitude* 142.
- 27) The Secondary Revelation (*Tajallí-i-Thání*) corresponds to theophany in the realms of *Láhút* and *Jabarút*, where the latter represents the first stage of differentiation or substantiation (*taqyíd*). See the Tablet to Varqá (*Lawh-i-Varqá*) in Momen's "Relativism: A Basis for Bahá'í Metaphysics" 192.
- 28) *Book of Certitude* 142.
- 29) For example *Hikmat-i-Ilháhi* 330.
- 30) This nomenclature has been examined in Milani, Kavian S. and Nafeh Fananapazir, "A Study of the Pen Motif in Bahá'í Writings." (*JABS* 9:1)
- 31) *Al-Qalam* (Pen) is defined by the glossary in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* as "the instrument of God's creative act." Sachiko Murata suggests similar dynamics in her study of gender relation in the writings of Ibn-'Arabí in the *Tao of Islam*. She writes:
- The Pen writes out these words on the Tablet, thus manifesting the spiritual essences of all things . . . The Pen has two faces. With one face it looks at God, and with the other it looks at the Tablet and everything below it. In the same way the Tablet has two faces. With one face it looks at the Pen, and with the other it looks at the worlds that lie below it. In relation to the Pen, the Tablet is receptive and thereby manifests differentiation. But in relation to cosmos, the Tablet is active and manifests governing control. (The Tao of Islam 13)
- 32) *Tablets of Bahá' u'lláh* 140.
- 33) A comprehensive treatment of this subject by Keven Brown, "A Bahá'í Perspective on the Origin of Matter," appeared in the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 2.3.90. See also *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations* (464-66) for a general introduction to the topic.
- 34) *God Passes By* 325.
- 35) *The World Order of Bahá' u'lláh* 144.
- 36) The implications of the Covenant for the mystical journey of the human soul towards God will be examined in a later section. The reference to the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as "the Child of the Covenant" has clear implications for the Bahá'í wayfarer.
- 37) The reader will note that this article establishes a number of comparison and contrasts between the Bahá'í Administrative Order and mystical thought, particularly Islamic mysticism (Sufism). This serves as a lead into the central issues at hand. The author hopes that the readers note that the Bahá'í Faith is an independent world religion, and not a Sufi sect. The comparison is valid in as much as the Bahá'í Administrative Order is noted to have authentic mystical content as established by this article.
- 38) The case was different with Sufism (Islamic mysticism), as it could not be incorporated into the Islamic prophetic structure. The two were however, allowed to co-exist alongside each other as Trimmingham points out. See *The Sufi Orders in Islam* 133-46 for a detailed study on this theme.
- 39) As Sufism is not the focus of this article experts will no doubt find this treatment of the Sufi content superficial. The point of the comparison is however to demonstrate how these issues have been synthesized in the Bahá'í Administrative Order. The Sufi

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Orders (*Tá’ifas*) themselves are later developments in Sufism. Trimmingham points out:

The foundation of the orders is the system and relationship of master and disciple, in Arabic *murshid* (director) and *murid* (aspirant). It was natural to accept the authority and guidance of those who had traversed the stages (*maqámát*) of the Sufi Path. (Sufi Orders in Islam 3)

There have been a number of studies on these Sufi Orders. The most comprehensive to date is that of Trimmingham entitled *Sufi Orders in Islam*. More recent treatments are found in *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations*.

40) *Islamic Spirituality: Manifestations* 147.

41) See Nasr in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* 271-72.

42) It should not be surprising that the Sufi hierarchy was accepted without textual justification. The master-mystic dynamics are developments that were later systematized to explain the Sufi mystical experience

43) See for example *A Sufi Rule for Novices* 31.

44) See *The Mystics of Islam* by Nicholson 126-27.

45) See for example the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* paragraphs 42 and 30. The twin pillars of this Order are Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice. Cf. *World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* (147). According to the *Will and Testament* the Guardian of the Faith is the designated and authoritative “interpreter of the Word of God” among other functions. The Universal House of Justice is examined in detail shortly.

Paragraph 42 of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* is also significant for the fact that it anticipates the very situation, which occurred in the Bahá’í world in 1957, precipitated by the passing of the Guardian (Shoghi Effendi) and the absence of a Universal House of Justice. This passage will be explored later in this article.

46) See letter written on behalf of the Guardian quoted in *The Continental Board of Counselors* 44-45.

47) *Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 26.

48) *Will and Testament* 14 and 20.

49) *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 68.

50) *World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* 148.

51) *World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* 149.

52) Husayn is a reference to Dr. Husayn Nají who at the time was the chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly.

53) A copy of this historical letter came to my attention in 1986.

54) O Son of Justice! Whither can a lover go but to the land of his beloved? And what seeker findeth rest away from his heart’s desire? To the true lover reunion is life, and separation is death. His breast is void of patience and his heart hath no peace. A myriad lives he would forsake to hasten to the abode of his beloved. (Hidden Words, from the Persian, number 4).

55) *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* paragraph 57.

56) See the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, note number 82.

57) *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* 248.

58) Attendance at such gatherings is highly recommended for both the Sufi veteran and the new initiate. cf. *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* 275. The well-known practice of *samá’* (spiritual concert) characterized by music and dance to induce spiritual ecstasy is a form of such gatherings. The rules governing this spiritual practice are many and differ according to the Sufi order. (Cf. *A Sufi Guide for Novices*, by Milton, 61-66)

59) *Principles of Bahá’í Administration* 17.

60) See Rafatí in *Khúshihá-i az Kharman-i-Adab va Hunar* 2:27-28, where the following passage from the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (paragraph 51) is suggested regarding the role of music in the Bahá’í spiritual experience:

We have made it lawful for you to listen to music and singing. Take heed, however, lest listening to thereto should cause you to overstep the bounds of propriety and dignity. Let your joy be the joy born of My Most Great Name, a Name that bringeth rapture to the heart, and filleth with ecstasy the minds of all who have drawn nigh unto God. We, verily, have made music as a ladder for your souls, a means whereby they may be lifted up unto the realm on high; make it not, therefore, as wings to self and passion.

61) Cf. *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 221, where it is written:

It is incumbent upon everyone to aid those daysprings of authority and sources of command who are adorned with the ornament of equity and justice. Blessed are the rulers and the learned among the people of Bahá’.. They are My trustees among My servants and the manifestations of My commandments amidst My people. Upon them rest My glory, My blessings and My grace which have pervaded the world of being. In this connection the utterances revealed in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* such that from the horizon of their words the light of divine grace shineth luminous and resplendent.

Shoghi Effendi has provided the following clarification on these twin arms of Bahá’í Administration,

In this holy cycle the “learned” are, on the one hand, the Hands of the Cause of God, and, on the other, the teachers and

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diffusers of His teachings, who do not rank as Hands, but who have attained an eminent position in the teaching work. As to the “rulers” they refer to the members of the Local, National and International Houses of Justice. The duties of each of these souls will be determined in the future. (Continental Board of Counselors 42.)

62) *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* paragraph 30.

63) Ridvan 153 message from the Universal House of Justice paragraph 24.

64) *Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 13.

65) The comparison weakens when the entire scope of the activities of the Hands of the Cause are considered. The institution of the “learned” has the dual function of protection and promotion of the Bahá’í Faith. The “Hands” were also instrumental in conducting the affairs of the Bahá’í Faith during the years 1957-63, after the passing of Shoghi Effendi and prior to the election of the Universal House of Justice. The critical function of the “learned” was anticipated in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (paragraph 42). A comparison of paragraphs 40 and 173 further suggests this critical function of the “learned.” The scope of the activities of the “learned” therefore transcend those of the Sufi masters.

66) *Continental Board of Counselors* 42.

67) *Continental Board of Counselors* 45.

68) It is worth noting that according to the Universal House of Justice Bahá’u’lláh has “permanently excluded the evils admittedly inherent in the institutions of the ‘learned’ in past dispensations.” *The Continental Board of Counselors* 45.

69) *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 138-39.

70) For the full story see Rumi’s *Mathnaví* book 2: 1722-1817

71) See for example *Amr va Khatq* 3:445-48 by A. Mázindarání.

72) According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá “in every word and movement of the obligatory prayer there are allusions, mysteries and a wisdom that man is unable to comprehend, and letters and scrolls cannot contain” (*Spiritual Foundations* #27).

73) *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* 219.

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