

# Elucidations

## Designation of Mírzá Yahyá Azal in the Writings of the Báb

### Part 1: Memorandum from the Research Department

Universal House of Justice

To: The Universal House of Justice

Date: 1 December 2004

From: Research Department

#### **Tablet of the Báb; the Appointment of Azal and His Titles**

The Research Department has considered the questions contained in the email message of 15 January 2004 from ... to the Universal House of Justice. As a context for his queries, ... appends a number of extracts from Web sites and email communications he has had with several individuals. ... appears to be particularly interested in “the nature of the designation of Azal” and to this end seeks information about the authenticity of the Lawḥ-i-Vaṣaya, which he understands is regarded by the Azal’s as the basis for Mírzá Yahyá’s titles and position. He also enquires about the meaning of a particular verse in the Persian Bayán. We provide the following response.

#### *Tablet of the Báb*

The Tablet of the Báb, which is described as “The Báb’s Lawḥ-i-Vasaya: The Will and Testament” on the Web site [www.h-net.org/bahai/areprint/Báb/S-Z/vasaya/vasaya.htm](http://www.h-net.org/bahai/areprint/Báb/S-Z/vasaya/vasaya.htm),

referred to by ..., can be found on pages 95–102 in volume 64, published in the Iran National Bahá'í Archives (INBA) series. This volume was published in B.E. 133 and contains various Writings of the Báb. We attach for ... information a photocopy of the Tablet from that volume. It is important to call attention to the fact that, while in some quarters this Tablet has become known as the Will and Testament of the Báb, the Research Department has, to date, found no explicit evidence to suggest that the Báb, Himself, designated the Tablet as such. Indeed, from a perusal of the attached material, ... will see that the Tablet bears no title. He will also see that, while the Tablet is addressed to Azal, there is nothing in its contents pertaining to questions of successorship and authority. Rather, the recipient is enjoined to promote and protect the Faith and to invite people to follow what has been revealed in the Bayán. To date, no authorized English translation of the Tablet is available.

As to the circumstances of Mírzá Yahyá's nomination, it is interesting to note that in the Bábí Dispensation, the Lesser Covenant, that Covenant made by the Manifestation of God with His followers to accept His appointed successor, is, according to the Guardian, found interspersed in the Báb's Book of Laws, the Persian Bayán, in many passages, some of which were "designedly obscure," but mostly "indubitably clear and conclusive."<sup>1</sup> The Báb seems to have alerted His followers to the promised advent of Bahá'u'lláh, instead of designating an appointed successor. Indeed, the Guardian stated:

A successor or vicegerent the Báb never named, an interpreter of His teachings He refrained from appointing. So transparently clear were His references to the Promised One, so brief was to be the duration of His own Dispensation, that neither the one nor the other was deemed necessary. All He did was, according to the testimony of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in "A Traveller's Narrative," to nominate, on the advice of Bahá'u'lláh and of another disciple, Mírzá Yahyá, who would act solely as a figure-head pending the manifestation of the Promised One, thus enabling Bahá'u'lláh to promote, in relative security, the Cause so dear to His heart. ("God Passes By," pp. 28–29)

The following extract from a letter dated 4 August 1980, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, deals with the position of Mírzá Yaḥyá in the Bábí community:

Concerning the position of Mírzá Yaḥyá in the Bábí community, the Guardian has made it quite clear in “God Passes By” that Mírzá Yaḥyá was the Báb’s “nominee” and was the “recognized chief of the Bábí community” following the martyrdom of the Báb. He has also referred to him as “titular head” and “a mere figurehead” (see “God Passes By” page 90). The position occupied by Mírzá Yaḥyá was far different from being an appointed Successor of a Manifestation of God in the sense that St. Peter, the Imám ‘Alí or ‘Abdu’l-Bahá were appointed Successors with far-reaching authority. Obviously the Báb had no need to appoint such a Successor, for He knew that Bahá’u’lláh was already present and ready to be revealed at the appointed time. He seems, therefore, merely to have nominated a titular head for the Bábí community as a focal point of unity until such time as He Whom God will make manifest would decide to unveil Himself.

Additional details concerning the circumstances of Mírzá Yaḥyá’s nomination are contained in

- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “A Traveller’s Narrative” (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1980), pp. 37–38;
- Adib Taherzadeh, “The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh,” volume I (Oxford: George Ronald, 1974), pp. 53–54;
- Adib Taherzadeh, “The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh,” volume II (Oxford: George Ronald, 1977), pp. 241–242 and 247.

### *Titles of Azal*

As to whether Mírzá Yaḥyá’s titles were derived from Tablets of the Báb or fabricated by Azal and his followers, in his book, “Mustayqi,” Mírzá Yaḥyá attributes a number of divine names and attributes to himself, one of which is “Azal.”<sup>2</sup>

The title “Şubḥ-i-Azal” appears in an Islamic tradition which is called Ḥadīth-i-Kumayl (Kumayl was a devoted student of the first Imám, ‘Alí<sup>3</sup>), and a portion of the Ḥadīth is quoted by the Báb in “Dalá’il-i-Sab’ih” (Bábiyyih Publication, p. 58). Mírzá Yaḥyá and his followers erroneously have taken this term as a reference to Mírzá Yaḥyá.

In the book “Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahá’í Apologetics,”<sup>4</sup> the following footnote provides additional information about the origin of Mírzá Yaḥyá’s attributing to himself the title “Şubḥ-i-Azal.”

Mírzá Yaḥyá Azal was evidently known also by the name Şubḥ-i-Azal. This is, at least, the title used by Browne, and it is probably through his works that this title was first made public. In Azalí works (such as “Hasht Bihisht”) and works written under Azalí influence (such as the “Kitáb-i-Nuḡtatu’l-Káf” or Gobineau’s “Les Religions”) Mírzá Yaḥyá is referred to by the title “Ḥaḍrat-i-Azal,” not “Şubḥ-i-Azal.” The origin or first use of the title Şubḥ-i-Azal has not yet been identified. This title of honour was evidently not conferred on him by the Báb, who only called him “Thamaratu’l-Azalíyya” and “Ismu’l-Azal” (see Mírzá Yaḥyá, “Mustayqi,” pp. 391f.). However, the Báb did employ the title Şubḥ-i-Azal in reference to various other leading Báb’s (see the commentary on the Ḥadīth of Kumayl, Teheran Bahá’í Archives MS 6006 C., pp. 74ff.), so that it is quite possible that Mírzá Yaḥyá was occasionally thus designated.

*Persian Bayán, passage 2:16*

... requests assistance in understanding a passage from the Persian Bayán, 2:16, which, among other things, refers to the Mustagháth and the timing of the advent of the Promised One. Although ... specific question is not clearly stated, it would appear that he is unsure how the meaning of the verse in the Bayán is to be understood in light of a statement in H. M. Balyuzi’s “E. G. Browne and the Bahá’í Faith” concerning the Azalí view of the coming of the Promised One.

The Research Department has not, to date, been able to locate an authoritative interpretation of the particular passage from the Persian Bayán in the Writings. However, we attach for ... information a discussion of the prophesy in the Writings of the Báb concerning the advent of the Promised One that is published in “Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahá’í Apologetics.”<sup>5</sup> This discussion may well assist ... in furthering his understanding of some of the themes in the passage in question.

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See “God Passes By” (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1995), pp. 27–28.
- <sup>2</sup> A section of this book containing the divine names and attributes appears in Rawhani Bushru’í’s “Risálih-i-Rawhání,” compiled by Vahíd Ra’fatí (Ontario: Association for Bahá’í Studies in Persian, 2000), pp. 108–109.
- <sup>3</sup> In “The Encyclopaedia of Islám,” New Edition, ed. H. A. R. Gibb, et. al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), vol. I (A–B), p. 89, reference is made to “‘Risálat al-Kumayliyya,’ on the traditional answer by ‘Alí to the question of Kumayl b. Ziyád.”
- <sup>4</sup> Udo Schaefer, Nicola Towfigh and Ulrich Gollmer, “Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahá’í Apologetics,” translated by Geraldine Schuckelt (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000), p. 631.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 601–604.