

LIGHTS OF  
'IRFÁN



Papers Presented at the 'Irfán  
Colloquia and Seminars

---

Book Twenty

# Lights of ‘Irfán

Studies in the Principal Bahá’í Beliefs

*Papers Presented at the  
‘Irfán Colloquia and Seminars*



Book Twenty

*‘Irfán Publications  
Wilmette, Illinois, USA*

Papers published in *Lights of 'Irfán* represent the views of their authors. Reproductions from this compilation are permitted provided that the sources and authors are clearly indicated.

'Irfán Colloquium  
Bahá'í National Center  
1233 Central Street  
Evanston, IL 60201  
Phone: (847) 733-3501  
Fax: (847) 733-3527  
E-mail: [contact@irfanco colloquia.org](mailto:contact@irfanco colloquia.org)  
[www.irfanco colloquia.org](http://www.irfanco colloquia.org)

General editor Iraj Ayman  
Cover design by Majid Nolley, [majidnolley.com](http://majidnolley.com)  
Typeset and edited by Jonah Winters, [winterswebworks.com](http://winterswebworks.com)

Sponsored by the Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund

176 B.E. 2019 C.E.  
ISBN 978-890688-76-2

Copyright © 2019, Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund

*Behold, how many are the mysteries that lie as yet unravelled within the tabernacle of the knowledge of God, and how numerous the gems of His wisdom that are still concealed in His inviolable treasuries! Shouldest thou ponder this in thine heart, thou wouldst realize that His handiwork knoweth neither beginning nor end. The domain of His decree is too vast for the tongue of mortals to describe, or for the bird of the human mind to traverse; and the dispensations of His providence are too mysterious for the mind of man to comprehend. His creation no end hath overtaken, and it hath ever existed from the “Beginning that hath no beginning”; and the Manifestations of His Beauty no beginning hath beheld, and they will continue to the “End that knoweth no end.” Ponder this utterance in thine heart.*

— Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, ¶178

# Table of Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Preface .....  | 3   |
| The Manifestation of God in the View of Process Theology<br>Roland Faber .....   | 7   |
| The Mystery of Consciousness: Learning from Neuroscience and Insights<br>from Bahá'í Sacred Writings<br>Jena Khadem Khodadad.....  | 55  |
| Sow the Seeds of My Divine Wisdom in the Pure Soil of Thy Heart:<br>Towards Coordinating Langs' Communicative Approach of<br>Psychoanalysis with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh<br>Wolfgang Klebel..... | 75  |
| The Baha'i Writings and the Buddhist Doctrine of Emptiness: An Initial<br>Survey<br>Ian Kluge .....  | 99  |
| Two Episodes from the Life of Bahá'u'lláh in Iran<br>Moojan Momen.....   | 139 |
| Qá'im-Maqám Faráhání in the Bahá'í Writings<br>Vahid Rafati, trans. Adib Masumian .....  | 161 |
| Dei Verbum: A Bahá'í Perspective on the Roman Catholic Dogmatic<br>Constitution on Divine Revelation<br>Marco Oliveira .....   | 197 |
| An Analysis of the Salient Features of <i>Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih</i><br>Foad Seddigh .....  | 219 |
| A Commentary on the Occultation Prayer, or <i>Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih</i><br>Provisional translation by Foad Seddigh.....  | 248 |
| Elucidation  |     |
| Social Action, Public Discourse, and Non-Involvement in Political<br>Affairs<br>The Universal House of Justice .....   | 253 |

In Memoriam

Dr. Mehrangiz Afnan (1937-2018)..... 259

Sohrab Arjmand (1935-2019) ..... 262

Lily Ayman (Áhy) (1929-2018)..... 264

Appendices

Bibliography of the Bahá'í Writings and Their Abbreviations used in  
this book ..... 271

Contents of *Lights of 'Irfán* Books 1-19..... 273

Publications of the 'Irfán Colloquium ..... 288

Distributors of 'Irfán Publications..... 288

Vision and Aims of the 'Irfán Colloquium ..... 289

## Preface

Publication of this volume of the *Lights of Irfan* coincides with the bicentennial celebration of the birth of The Báb, the dawn of a new cycle in the spiritual development of mankind. The manifestation of The Báb was soon followed by the divine manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh, leading human society to the final fulfillment of the prophecies of previous religions that have appeared from time to time and spread in various regions of the world. Both The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh revealed a very large volume of written texts containing their teachings and plan of action for the realization of the final goal, establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. `Irfán project aims at encouraging and promoting deeper and systematic studies in those revealed words.

The Writings of the Báb, revealed in Persian and Arabic, are, so far, only available in those two languages of revelation. The first step is finding the original manuscript or authorized and reliable text for each item of writing. The second step is publishing and making it accessible. Then necessary action is taken to produce an authorized translation of each item. A good example is a compilation of the Writing of the Báb published in both original Arabic and Persian as well as in English translation by the Bahá'í World Center. We welcome articles conveying the contents of some of the texts revealed by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

In this volume the contents of one of the major Writings of the Báb, “Risaliy-i-Ja‘fariyyih”, is presented in two successive articles. This treatise is revealed in Arabic, toward the very beginning of His ministry. It is concerning, but not exclusively, the commentary on a particular Islamic prayer for the advent of the promised Qá‘ím. It has fourteen chapters, only three of them are mainly concerning that prayer. In the other chapters, He discreetly alludes to His real station.

“The Bahá'í Writings and the Buddhist Doctrine of Emptiness” and “Dei Verbum: A Bahá'í perspective on the Roman Catholic Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation” are in the category of comparative studies of Bahá'í Faith and various religious traditions. The former article is an expansion of the section on emptiness in a

previous paper by the same author, “Buddhism and the Bahá’í Writings: An Ontological Rapprochement” (*Lights of Irfan*, Vol. 8, 2007). This paper provides further evidence that despite differences of expression, the Bahá’í Writings and Buddhist sutras show agreements and strong convergences on the subject of emptiness and offer additional support for Bahá’u’lláh’s teaching of the essential unity of all religions. The latter article is an attempt to compare the contents of each chapter of *Dei Verbum* (“Word of God” in Latin) with the Baha’i teachings. *Dei Verbum* is described as Roman Catholic authentic doctrine on divine revelation.

An example of interface of Bahá’í Faith and scientific disciplines is discussed in “The Mystery of Consciousness: Learning from Neuroscience and insights from Bahá’í sacred Writings” and “Towards Coordinating Langs’ Communicative Approach of Psychoanalysis with the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh.” It is hoped that such an interface studies are further increased and cover more branches of science. “The Manifestation of God in the View of Process Theology” is another example of such interface studies. It discusses the resonances of the concept of Manifestation of God with the philosophical tradition of process thought which is steeped in history from Heraclitus to Hegel, yet it connects with Alfred North Whitehead’s “philosophy of organism” and its religious explanation in “Process Theology.”

Bahá’í sacred texts occasionally include accounts of history or history related materials. In this volume, we have two examples of studies of Bahá’í Writings related to historical subjects. “Two Episodes from the life of Bahá’u’lláh in Iran” is an attempt to clarify an event occurred to Bahá’u’lláh during the time that He lived in Iran and reported in two of His Tablets which is different from what has been recorded in history books. The other article is the translation of an article on “Qá’im-Maqám Farahání in the Bahá’í Writings,” which was published in *Safini-yi- Irfán*, Vol. 18. We always wished some of the articles written in Persian or German and published in *Irfan* publications in those languages be translated into English to be presented in the *Lights of Irfan*. Now we are pleased that for the first time one of the articles written and published in Persian is translated into English and is included in this volume. This article contains a brief biography of Qá’im-Maqám Farahání, Grand Vazir of

Muhammad Shah Qájár and a close friend and associate of Bahá'u'lláh's father, and some samples of his writings and texts of the Baha'i Writings related to him.

The section on Elucidations contain a recent message of the Universal House of Justice clarifying various aspects of the principle of non-involvement in politics, differentiating participation in partisan politics from involvement in civil services which are also considered political activities.

During the recent months we regretfully lost three of our dear colleagues: Dr. Mehrangiz Afnan, Sohrab Arjmand, and Lily Ayman (Áhy). Short biographies of these colleagues are presented in the section "In Memoriam."

'Irfán publications are supported by the generous and voluntary contributions of the friends of the 'Irfan Colloquium. It is hoped that the continuation of such supports as well as the most valuable collaboration of scholars would make it possible to continue 'Irfán project and services.

Iraj Ayman  
May 2019

# The Manifestation of God in the View of Process Theology

Roland Faber

Shoghi Effendi presented the Bahá'í community with the challenge to connect with current progressive movements of thought and action;<sup>1</sup> it is even envisioned that another institution on the Arc at the Bahá'í World Center in Haifa will be built, a library of sorts that would institutionalize such efforts permanently.<sup>2</sup> One of these movements, given my training and professional engagement in the areas connecting religion and philosophy over several decades, is process theology.<sup>3</sup> Process Theology is a venerable tradition of philosophical theology or a philosophy that does not exclude spiritual and religious realities, even a very elaborate concept of God. It originated with the Anglo-American mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), especially his work as a philosopher at Harvard University commencing in the 1920s.<sup>4</sup> Process philosophy developed along with its theological sister in mutual interaction with other concurrent streams of philosophical and religious discourse, but found its most persistent form in "Process Theology" as an expression of the implications of questions regarding ultimate reality and God, cosmology and the place of humanity in the cosmos.<sup>5</sup> Although historically process theology found its first home within progressive transformations of Christian thought, engaged in social justice and ecological sensibility, feminist and liberation theology, and discourses on science and religion,<sup>6</sup> it is especially its

ability to address interreligious questions of religious pluralism and the unity of religions across the boundaries of the east and the west<sup>7</sup> and in light of Whitehead's emphasis on the development of a future society of peace<sup>8</sup> that should be of interest to Bahá'í thought and scholarship.

Of the many points of contact between Whitehead, process theology, and the Bahá'í universe of discourse that one could elaborate on, I will focus on one of the central questions to which process theology has developed its most creative contribution, namely, how ultimate reality or God can be all-present in the world and, at the same time, be manifest in the form of human figures such as Christ, the Buddha, or Avatars such as Krishna, all of whom Bahá'ís understand to be Manifestations of God. Process thinkers have developed unique approaches of understanding “Christology” in the sense of a human and divine figure<sup>9</sup> in such a way that it genuinely explicates the concept of the Manifestation of God (*mazhar-i ilahi*) of Bahá'í provenance within its own thought patterns,<sup>10</sup> but also translates it in the multireligious context that the Bahá'í universe accepts as central basis for claiming the fundamental unity of religions.<sup>11</sup>

The following considerations will introduce to this unique connection between process theology and related Bahá'í concepts by highlighting their convergence in concentric movements from general relations on matters of philosophy and theology to the view on religion and cosmos, and to the notion of ultimate reality and God, to finally flow into a discussion of the congruence and convertibility of the concept of the divine Manifestation issuing from these approximations. For this endeavor, I will pursue original quotes from Whitehead's works in this regard and comment on them in the Bahá'í context, which also means to demonstrate the idea of Manifestation as translatable in a multireligious context.

## 1: Philosophy in Process

The exploration of philosophy for the Bahá'í universe is still very much in the making, that is, specifically in the western context.<sup>12</sup> Yet several elements can be identified as influential in the constitution of conceptuality in the Bahá'í writings, and several implications for

future explorations may be noted. First of all, it is, of course, necessary to recognize the philosophical influences that form the historical context and commencement of the articulation of the Bábi-Bahá'í religious complex: the immediate Shaykhi milieu of the birth of the Bábi movement and its influence on the Báb as well as his immediate disciples, the original Letters of the Living (and their writings), who were mainly recruited from this background, several of whom were highly educated and erudite thinkers in this tradition;<sup>13</sup> the wider Shi'í and Sufi patterns of thought and living that were primary modes of mediation for the message of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh;<sup>14</sup> the influx of Jewish and Zoroastrian modes of thought, as well as a wider Hindu context for some of the elaborations on the implications of Bahá'u'lláh teachings, as well as being a fainter context for Sufism, visible in the direct contacts of Bahá'u'lláh with Sufi orders and inquirers, but also his occasional elaborations on Hindu thought;<sup>15</sup> and, finally (but not last), the Christian and diverse western molds in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, themselves studying in, and traveling to, Europe and America, transposed the Arabic and Persian linguistic complexities of the original Bábi-Bahá'í writings with their own philosophical undercurrent into western thought patterns and languages.<sup>16</sup>

On another level, philosophy proper itself became a mode of critical and creative engagement of the Central Bahá'í Figures: with comments on the worth and dangers of thought images, concepts, and procedures;<sup>17</sup> with references to diverse philosophers and sages, often embracing the theological and religious connotations of their own philosophies, sometimes criticizing their methodological or ideological reductionisms as expression of a certain culture of material progress over and against the association with spiritual development;<sup>18</sup> in exploring certain philosophical concepts themselves such as were engrained in long-standing problems of the mind-body or matter-soul-spirit discussions, evolution and cosmology, epistemology (modes of knowing) and ontology (modes of being);<sup>19</sup> in explorations of philosophical theories with regard to ultimate reality in monistic and dualistic categories;<sup>20</sup> by intensely probing questions of human nature and its status in a world of impermanence;<sup>21</sup> and in following diverse philosophical developments of the time in the form of a differentiation of their qualities and claims to truth.

Finally, all Central Figures made comments on philosophy or philosophies, or more broadly, different concepts of philosophy in more eastern and western instantiations: on “Theosophy” or “Divine Wisdom” (*hikmat*), philosophical wisdom teachings in the wake of Ibn ‘Arabi and his diverse streams of philosophical tradition, including the Persian metaphysical tradition manifest in Suhrawardi (philosophy of light, Illuminist philosophy) and Mulla Sadra, as well as the Persian Poet-philosophers, such as Rumi and Hafez (among many others) – a term that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá retained even in western contexts to indicate philosophy, or philosophical theology, in contradistinction to materialist philosophies of the west;<sup>22</sup> on Greek philosophy, such as that of Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle as fundamental expressions of western philosophy;<sup>23</sup> and in general with statements relating the importance and worth of philosophy as field of knowledge, different from, but related to, religion and its specific theological expressions, but especially as connecting to an interreligious context or comparative studies of religion in which many philosophies in the east and the west are harbored or from which they have emancipated themselves.<sup>24</sup>

In all of these engagements with, and appellation to, philosophy as valuable expression of humanity *as* humanity and as important instrument of reflecting on deep questions of existence, we can sense a fundamental affirmation of the philosophical project by the Bahá’í writings.<sup>25</sup> While sheer intellectualism is viewed through a critical lens,<sup>26</sup> any overstatement against thought and reason are refuted in strongest terms. “*The Reality of man is his thought,*” [PT #2] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, indicating that investigations of the intellect are a primary gift of God to humanity and inevitable for the continuing relevance of religion.<sup>27</sup> “*When religion is upheld by science and reason we can believe with assurance and act with conviction, for this rational faculty is the greatest power in the world*” [ADP 102].

Philosophy as methodological use of intellect and reason in order to engage with questions of reality and truth is, therefore, an implication of the spiritual search after reality, often translated as “independent investigation of truth” – a basic Bahá’í principle of utmost importance, so much so that it is often mentioned first in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s conveyance of fundamental principles of the Bahá’í teachings in the west.<sup>28</sup> Yet, as mind, intellect, and reason, are not the

only sources of human insight – at least in need of coherences with empirical testing (especially in the western context) and intuition (the mystical insight, *irfan*, of generally more eastern provenience) as well as tradition (be it religious or philosophical), this cannot lead us into assuming that philosophy itself must end in any rationalist reductionism;<sup>29</sup> on the contrary, as Whitehead's whole philosophy demonstrates, all philosophical insights must be in resonance with art and poetry, on the one hand, and coherently relating reason and empirical experiment, on the other.<sup>30</sup> In fact, this makes philosophy an indefinite endeavor of approximation to reality and truth, an adventure in thought, as "all productive thought has proceeded either by the poetic insight of artists, or by the imaginative elaboration of schemes of thought." Hence, "[r]ationalism never shakes off its status of an experimental adventure."<sup>31</sup>

As, in Whitehead, philosophy is open to religious experience and empirical reality,<sup>32</sup> so does 'Abdu'l-Bahá value both approaches of philosophy to reality. "*Philosophy is of two kinds: natural and divine. Natural philosophy seeks knowledge of physical verities and explains material phenomena, whereas divine philosophy deals with ideal verities and phenomena of the spirit*" [PUP #105]. And as this duality cannot become a dualism without destroying the fabric of experience of reality as one interrelated whole, Whitehead with 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirms the search for the philosophical understanding of the *one* Reality that expresses itself in infinite modes, but is, nevertheless, an emanation of unity in which nothing can be (viewed) in mere opposition to one another.<sup>33</sup> Rather, in the last analysis, we must seek to overcome intellectualism with its binary categories of thought in the non-duality of mysticism (*'irfan, ma'rifa*) and its fresh articulation in ever-new categorizations of relationality.<sup>34</sup> Hence, says 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "*I will speak to you upon the intrinsic oneness of all phenomena. This is one of the abstruse subjects of divine philosophy*" [PUP #110]. And Whitehead confirms that "philosophy is mystical. For mysticism is direct insight into depths as yet unspoken. But the purpose of philosophy is to rationalize mysticism: not by explaining it away, but by the introduction of novel verbal characterizations, rationally coordinated."<sup>35</sup>

While the term process philosophy has mainly been used for Whitehead's philosophy and philosophies in the wake of his work,<sup>36</sup> it

is, in fact, an ancient tradition of which Whitehead is aware and in which he positions himself consciously. In the eastern context, it goes back to radically processual forms of thought and understanding of reality in Indian and Chinese modes of thinking to which Whitehead feels his articulation of Process more akin than to most western expressions of substance thinking so that his philosophy “seems to approximate more to some strains of Indian, or Chinese, thought, than to western Asiatic, or European, thought,” because “[o]ne side makes process ultimate; the other side makes fact ultimate.”<sup>37</sup> In the western context, Whitehead commits himself to the ancient preference of Becoming over Being, Heraclitus over Parmenides. While the famous circumscription of process in Heraclitus proposes that “you cannot step into the river twice”<sup>38</sup> and “everything changes and nothing stands still,”<sup>39</sup> Whitehead illuminates this insight with the paraphrase: “No thinker thinks twice; and ... more generally, no subject experiences twice.”<sup>40</sup>

Thought is always in process, as is reality. “We are in the present; the present is always shifting; it is derived from the past; it is shaping the future; it is passing into the future. This is process, and in the universe it is an inexorable fact.”<sup>41</sup> Process is fundamental to reality because of the infinite potentials that are unrealized in the world of becoming. It is, then, an infinite process of the actualization of potentials inherent in the past realizations of the cosmos for which “philosophy should make it easier to conceive the infinite variety of specific instances which rest unrealized in the womb of nature.”<sup>42</sup> Without going into any detail of the inner workings of this Process in Whitehead's philosophy at this point,<sup>43</sup> we can identify its basic meaning by understanding the world as *process of processes* of which all things are expressions, that is, themselves processes of their becoming. Yet the *character* of this processual nature of all happenings in this world of becoming, and on every level of existence from stars to human beings, is not just actualization of potentials, but realization of values,<sup>44</sup> a process of deciding between potentials to be realized or to be excluded in order to create a more and always (in any situation) most valuable world: “The generic aim of process is the attainment of importance, in that species and to that extent which in that instance is possible.”<sup>45</sup>

## 2: Theology in Process

It is interesting to recognize that the Bahá'í Writings' attitude toward the study of religion, at times, seem to exhibit a critical access to what in western parlance generally is called "theology," yet in the Islamic context was reflecting less on the Christian notion of theology but on the Islamic combination of dogmatic theology and legal reasoning of divines often harboring direct impacts on local or more general definitions of orthodoxy. It is not theology as intellectual engagement with religion, revelation, and scripture, however, with which the Bahá'í writings are primarily concerned in critical counter-distinction, but with expressions of religious orthodoxy that leans to establish power structures in religion and society, be it through striving for positions of power or the hybrids of intolerance and ignorance.<sup>46</sup> Of course, this situation is no stranger to Christian orthodoxies at different times with their similar powers of restriction by which any deviant view could be in danger of persecution and death.<sup>47</sup>

While this has not much to do with theology as practiced in contexts of critical distance to such orthodox expressions of power, instead seeking truth and creative innovations leading thought into liberating modes of engaging society for justice and peace,<sup>48</sup> we find Whitehead in line with such a criticism akin to the Bahá'í writings if theology was to be understood as such an expression of power over and against the impulses of the scriptural radicalism of humility and non-violence, tolerance and inclusivism, exhibited by the biblical representation of the Jesus tradition.<sup>49</sup> Hence Whitehead can concur in spirit with the Bahá'í writings when he affirms that "[w]hen the Western world accepted Christianity, Caesar conquered; and the received text of Western theology was edited by his lawyers," but that this development contradicted "[t]he brief Galilean vision of humility flickered throughout the ages, uncertainly."<sup>50</sup>

While Whitehead is disappointed in Christian theology insofar as it followed Cesarean expressions of power, he did not dismiss the *philosophical* engagement with theology and the relation it bears with religion, revelation, and scripture.<sup>51</sup> In fact, he understood the best in the Christ event as an expression in practice, or as a manifestation, of the best in philosophical theology: of a move away from viewing

God as a coercive force to that of a persuasive “force without power”; of peace, not war; and of a tenderness of love operating in the world of humanity and the cosmos alike.<sup>52</sup>

It is the business of philosophical theology to provide a rational understanding of the rise of civilization, and of the tenderness of mere life itself, in a world which superficially is founded upon the clashings of senseless compulsion. I am not disguising my belief that in this task, theology has largely failed. The notion of the absolute despot has stood in the way.<sup>53</sup>

Whitehead, therefore, related the independent investigation of truth, the business of philosophical theology, to the adventure of truth over against that of power — philosophy as impassionate look at all motivations in light of truth and reality, but not impassionate to the non-violent creation of a future civilization of peace while critical to any such passion if it motivates and degenerates into blockages hindering this process to succeed.<sup>54</sup> Truth in a world of becoming must allow for the recovery of the suppressed and of novelty, as in a world of process reality must *become*, realize new possibilities, and its best potentials in new situations; and God becomes an expression of this movement.<sup>55</sup> In other words, as Bahá’í teachings would suggest: divine grace has never stopped engaging with the world; revelation is an ongoing process of creating such a civilization of peace and of seducing us to means and ends coherent with such a vision.<sup>56</sup> It is in this precise sense, and not any predilection for the way Aristotle bound his vision to a substance view of reality (over against a process view),<sup>57</sup> that Whitehead accepts and takes up anew Aristotle’s project.

Aristotle found it necessary to complete his metaphysics by the introduction of a Prime Mover — God. ... [H]e was entirely dispassionate; and he is the last European metaphysician of first-rate importance for whom this claim can be made. After Aristotle, ethical and religious interests began to influence metaphysical conclusions.<sup>58</sup>

In dispassionately following the impulse of truth over power, Whitehead relates to Aristotle’s notion of God as Prime Mover. It is

of utmost importance to understand this move in the sense it is introduced here. Interpretations of this concept have generally always gone astray when they identify God as Cause of everything. While Aristotle accepts the notion of efficient causation, we have, today, not the least because of science, come to identify the effective cause with the *only* causality allowing us to rationally and empirically explore the world over and against all mythological and fantastic, supernatural and religious, claims of divine action on and in the world. In a closed causal circle, only natural causes are allowed, excluding not only spiritual renderings of reality, but in effect all non-material references to human reality: that of aesthetics and ethics; of motivation and purpose; and of meaning and general human values such as love, peace, justice, unity, and relationality.<sup>59</sup> Against such materialist reductionisms, unfortunately, certain renderings of efficient causation were applied to divine activity by defining God as First Cause, as efficient cause of creation, as ultimate causation of world – in the sense of one of Thomas Aquinas’s primary demonstrations of the existence of God from nature (*quinque viae*).

Yet this is not the meaning Aristotle gave his Prime Mover and it is not the meaning that Whitehead recovers from this statement. What Aristotle means, here, is not any efficient cause that creates an effect by coercion, by pull and push, by external setting or influencing, but what he called a final cause. This means a cause that operates from the front, from the future, from the ideal; its power is persuasion, seduction, creating desire for fulfillment. This is an internal cause that awakens that which happens to its best possibilities, luring it to their realization and to become the best it can be at any moment and in any situation. God as Prime Mover is not at the beginning, not a ground of creation, not in the past as pusher, not a powerful tyrant who crushes, but the attractor, the aim, the goal of fulfillment and satisfaction.<sup>60</sup> In Whitehead’s words, God “is the supreme Eros incarnating itself as the first phase of ... the new process of actuality.”<sup>61</sup> And as God lures toward the realization of the best possible in any given situation, this God is not the creator of the world from nothing, but the aim and goal of any happening in an eternal creation, an infinite world without beginning and end.<sup>62</sup> Whitehead’s universe involving this divine process is as infinite and always in process of becoming and renewal as is the universe according to the Bahá’í sources and scriptural references.<sup>63</sup>

We can immediately sense what difference such a theology in process would make: tenderness instead of force; love instead of power; persuasion instead of coercion; freedom instead of oppression; the immanence of God in all happening instead of distance; finding reality in lures of fulfillment instead of arbitrary and merely external rules.<sup>64</sup> Hence, for Whitehead, the task of theology is this insight into this attractive eternity within impermanence: “We ask of Theology to express that element in perishing lives which is undying by reason of its expression of perfections proper to our finite natures. In this way we shall understand how life includes a mode of satisfaction deeper than joy or sorrow.”<sup>65</sup>

The philosophical element of this theology, then, has important critical and creative functions. It is an expression of the fundamental unity of reality<sup>66</sup> that, while “independent” from any limited motivation, is essentially related to both science and religion – hence also essentially *relating* religion and science, as the Bahá’í writings categorically insist.<sup>67</sup> “Philosophy frees itself from the taint of ineffectiveness by its close relations with religion and with science, natural and sociological. It attains its chief importance by fusing the two, namely, religion and science, into one rational scheme of thought.”<sup>68</sup> Yet it is also an expression of the pre-rational intuition or universal vision by which we perceive of the whole of reality before and beyond conceptual differentiation, to which it must give ear because in it has already enveloped the potential of divine revelation before and beyond human categories and intellectual limitations.<sup>69</sup> And considering the implication this has for the transformation of human society, the philosophical mind seeks the adventure of such a vision in process in order to revivify civilization.<sup>70</sup> Hence, “philosophy is akin to poetry,” as “both of them seek to express that ultimate good sense which we term civilization,” and the “use of philosophy is to maintain an active novelty of fundamental ideas illuminating the social system. It reverses the slow descent of accepted thought towards the inactive commonplace.”<sup>71</sup> It is in this sense that theology is held open for the unprecedented, the event of divine presence, and new forms of understanding the world in process. Nothing is foreclosed, and we are immersed in an infinite process of becoming for which we must learn to use the articulations of our experiences and insights in a *destabilizing* way so that all

conceptual stabilizations can “remain metaphors mutely appealing for an imaginative leap.”<sup>72</sup>

Process theology, now, based on the work of Whitehead, has become a very differentiated endeavor following these prompts toward a cosmology of becoming; an epistemology of transformation and novelty; a social understanding of revivification in ever new forms of organic developments; and a theology that can transgress fixed boundaries of religious integrities and orthodoxies engaging diverse religions in the east and the west with their different pattern of thought and outlook of worldview.<sup>73</sup> It has in the last hundred years or so embraced diverse and diversified positions regarding all of these matters, which I will not rehearse here, but which I have documented, interpreted, and developed in a host of publications over the last two decades.<sup>74</sup> What I want, instead, to demonstrate, here, is rather how these multireligious developments rest on Whitehead's understanding of ultimate reality and the availability of this understanding for the central Bahá'í concept of the Manifestation of God.

We have already encountered three basic parameters of Whitehead's process theology: God as Eros, as Attractor, internally evoking movement as one of novelty and the establishment of value; the infinite openness of such a world process to the ever-new production of value and meaning; and the unending processual openness of divine reality to this world process, or its grace of unending revelation. Three further elements will suffice, here, establishing the conceptual relevance of Whitehead's philosophical parameters for a theology of this world process. First, ultimate reality in a world of process is *immanent* to it as a measure of achievement and perfection and can be expressed as the personal character of a friend: “There is a rightness [in things, which] ... is a revelation of character, apprehended as we apprehend the characters of our friends. But in this case it is an apprehension of character permanently inherent in the nature of things.”<sup>75</sup> Beyond simple alternatives between a personal God or an ultimate reality as moral law (*dharma*), Whitehead immediately connects with Bahá'u'lláh's affirmation of the mystery of the “The Friend” in which reality achieves its existence and meaning, but also its non-dual limit and ego-less nothingness.<sup>76</sup>

Second, Whitehead affirms that all religions, when in conjunction with reason can, in a philosophical theology,<sup>77</sup> be understood in such a way that they express a *unique* outlook on existentiality as manifestations of their unique divine experiences that always transgress mere reasonability and closed mental projections. “The doctrines of rational religion,” Whitehead says, “aim at being that metaphysics which can be derived from the super-normal experience of mankind in its moments of finest insight.”<sup>78</sup> These insights, which are related to the extraordinary figures of saints and sages, but also to figures to which religions relate as their founders and inspirers, prophets and divine appearances,<sup>79</sup> are not irrational, but “surrational,”<sup>80</sup> that is, in their own right valuable to and inexchangable in the philosophical endeavor, which in their multiplicity is to be expected in a world of becoming in which divine novelty has never ended.<sup>81</sup>

Third, for process theology, religion is an *unending* process that, in accordance with these unique revelations of divine reality, must, therefore, itself never recoil into its own sedimentations. In other words, no religion can claim finality; there will always be a new measure of revelation. Religion must become the home not of conservation of the past, but in even greater measure of novelty and inspiration by reality, divinity, and temporality.<sup>82</sup> It is in this sense that Whitehead understands religion akin to science: “Religion will not regain its old power until it can face change in the same spirit as does science. Its principles may be eternal, but the expression of those principles requires continual development.”<sup>83</sup> In accordance with Bahá’u’lláh’s criticism of the opposite attitude, that of the orthodox limitation of understanding to the past, theology must be the endeavor to appreciate this changeability in light of new experiences and revelations, being the basis of, and motivation for, new religions.<sup>84</sup> I will come back to the implications of these features of process theology in relation to religion and God later. But first, I must venture deeper into the inner workings of Whitehead’s philosophy that make these parameters possible.

### 3: Event, Creativity, and the Universe

Whitehead expounds a fundamentally relational understanding of the universe, which, in its impermanence or permanent becoming, is

not just an expression of fading and illusion, but of creativity, of divine encouragement to become – become what it could be, what it should be, what it already is and always was, but with the potential of an ever anew actualization of its hidden creative and relational essence.<sup>85</sup> Hence, the universe does not consist of things or of (for unclear reasons) fixed states of brute facts and essences, substances and stabile entities the movement of which is and remains external to them. On the contrary, the universe, as it harbors only beings that are already internally related to everything else, is a moving whole of relations that actualize themselves in events of becoming, always anew and unceasingly. Nothing is just what it is, unchanging, and moving only as an external exhibition of a clash of forces like billiard balls. The universe is not constructed from either atoms in empty space or independent things encountering one another just by accident or an external order of push and pull or of decreed laws of nature or of God. Rather, everything that exists *is* already the whole universe, however faint the influences may be of the vast background of the myriad happenings that constitute the universe as a whole, in *this* moment, in *this* actualization, at *this* place, unique and unrepeatable.<sup>86</sup> Yet, as there *are* persistent things and beings without which there would not be any groupings of events to things, persistent throughout time, for instance, as societies and persons, structures appear as *repetition* of these influences on every happening in the universe in ever-new series of events, forming more or less stable organisms, societies, and persons. And since every happening is also a decision whether to repeat or to change such structures to the extent that it is in its situation and on its level of complexity able to do so, everything on whatever level of existence, from the elementary particle to human persons, has some degree of freedom and creative potential for becoming different, for better or worse.<sup>87</sup>

So the fundamental “entities” in this universe are not substances, independent and needing nothing in order to exist, or being able to persist through time as the same, but events, that are all-relational, constituted by everything: the facts of their past and the potential inherent in them, but as of yet unrealized, and even possibilities not actualized anywhere. The basic event-constitution of the universe in its becoming (or stability as repetition of the same structure in always new generations of happenings) is not external to it like an acting

subject on passive objects or a mathematical axiom on its mathematical entities, but (almost in reverse) the *internal perception* (Whitehead calls this relation “prehension”)<sup>88</sup> of the relational influences out of which an event actively constitutes its unique unification, as a realization of its creative potential, and its *self-surrender* to the flow of becoming beyond itself in which it will have importance and influx for the process at large.<sup>89</sup> “The novel entity is at once the togetherness of the ‘many’ which it finds, and also it is one among the ... ‘many’ which it leaves; it is a novel entity ... among the many entities which it synthesizes. The many become one, and are increased by one.”<sup>90</sup>

All beings are becomings in the same sense that “[i]n the language appropriate to the higher stages of experience, [its] primitive element is sympathy, that is, feeling the feeling in another and feeling conformally with another.”<sup>91</sup> And, hence, such sym-athy, the feeling of others, which are themselves feelings of other relations they accept as internal “essence” of their self-constitution, demonstrates that the “general common function exhibited by any group of actual occasions is that of mutual immanence.”<sup>92</sup> While “‘becoming’ is a creative advance into novelty,”<sup>93</sup> on the scale of the structural complex organization of the cosmos into nested spheres of organisms and environments with their own emergent and mutually sensitive rules, such an organization is the more alive the more it allows *novelty* to enter the picture, change to alter fixed structures, history to create new conditions, and so on.<sup>94</sup> The ingredient of novelty in any event varies according to the overall organization of the environment and the organisms that allow for more or less integration of novelty and change in their becoming such “that an organism is ‘alive’ when in some measure its reactions are inexplicable by any tradition of pure physical inheritance.”<sup>95</sup>

In Whitehead's universe, *creativity* is the ultimate reality immanent in all events.<sup>96</sup> “‘Creativity’ is the principle of novelty. An actual occasion is a novel entity diverse from any entity in the ‘many’ which it unifies. Thus ‘creativity’ introduces novelty into the content of the many, which are the universe disjunctively.”<sup>97</sup> Creativity is the moving “energy” (without doing anything since it is not a thing or event or substance) of unification and multiplication, growing together and transitioning into a new context in which all unification

becomes again a moment in the ongoing process of the renewal of the universe.<sup>98</sup> “For the creativity is not separable from its creatures. Thus the creatures remain with the creativity. Accordingly, the creativity for a creature becomes the creativity with the creature, and thereby passes into another phase of itself. It is now the creativity for a new creature. Thus there is a transition of the creative action,”<sup>99</sup> by which the universe never comes to a standstill – no beginning or end constrains that process; only the process itself, in the decisions imposed by every event on the universe, constrains its “history” and renewal. Or in more poetic language: “The creativity of the world is the throbbing emotion of the past hurling itself into a new transcendent fact. It is the flying dart, of which Lucretius speaks, hurled beyond the bounds of the world.”<sup>100</sup>

In this sense, we can “speak in the singular of The Universe, ... which can be translated as Process. There is the one all-embracing fact which is the advancing history of the one Universe.” This universe is the whole community of the world’s becomings exhibiting an all-embracing, immanent, and relational “matrix for allbegetting, ... whose essence is process with retention of connectedness.”<sup>101</sup> As every event in this relational matrix becomes in the actualization of potential directed toward the realization of values of more intensity and harmony, creating a world suggesting (but not forcing to realize) the greater good, the wonder, the harmony of ever more refinement, Whitehead understands the “teleology of the Universe [as being] ... directed to the production of Beauty. Thus any system of things which in any wide sense is beautiful is to that extent justified in its existence.”<sup>102</sup>

Because the world process proceeds in the production of beauty, that is, maximal intensity with maximal harmony at any given moment, in any given society, and in the universe as a whole, as its very *movens*, Whitehead, in a subtle and suggestive move, sees this inherent “worthing” as the place of the witnessing, experience, perception, and intuition of God in the universe.<sup>103</sup> Instead of imagining God as effective cause, as controlling power, as chief moralist and external force (as the substance model would imply and the monarchical model of a king merely complements by suggesting the subduction of “his subjects”), here, God is the internal beauty,

intensity, and harmony of harmonies, internally motivating and driving the universe to its most refined realization of its potentials.<sup>104</sup>

The order of the world is no accident. ... The religious insight is the grasp of this truth: That the order of the world, the depth of reality of the world, the value of the world in its whole and in its parts, the beauty of the world, the zest of life, the peace of life, and the mastery of evil, are all bound together – not accidentally, but by reason of this truth: that the universe exhibits a creativity with infinite freedom, and a realm of forms with infinite possibilities; but that this creativity and these forms are together impotent to achieve actuality apart from the completed ideal harmony, which is God.<sup>105</sup>

God comes into play as the ideal harmony, as the “harmony of harmonies”<sup>106</sup> and as the reality in which this harmony is always most intense. The universe, in its own turn, is a process of the actualization of its harmonies and intensities that are available in any event at any given cosmic situation, on different levels of existence (from the stone to human persons), and to the degree that this history of the cosmos and the organismic structures of environments and beings to which such environments are patient allows. As this process is never external in its relational becoming, and because God appears in it as the harmonious ideal (the prime mover) seducing the becoming relations of the universe as they actualize themselves in events and complex societies of events, into patterns of degrees of order and freedom, experience and consciousness, and aesthetic and ethic valuation in all existents, the picture that arises from this process universe is one of an unimaginable, infinite process, a world of great beauty and the risk of failing its realization, of an adventure that lives from the mutual immanence of God and the world, and the mutual immanence of potentials to be realized, creativity to be actualized, and divine wisdom to be the ideal inherent in any such actualization as well as its whole process.<sup>107</sup>

The present type of order in the world has arisen from an unimaginable past, and it will find its grave in an unimaginable future. There remain the inexhaustible realm

of... forms, and creativity, ... and God, upon whose wisdom all forms of order depend.<sup>108</sup>

It is a universe of becoming *and* perishing, to be sure, but one in which nothing is lost.<sup>109</sup> Like the phoenix, it is a universe of spiritual ascension from the ashes of perpetual perishing. "The universe shows us two aspects: on one side it is physically wasting, on the other side it is spiritually ascending."<sup>110</sup> As this is both a process of becoming and fading, of indefinite impermanence, the presence of the ideal harmony (God) as the *movens* of the whole process is not enough: the creation of order in any form will be exhausted; no structure is salvific per se; no achievement of goodness and beauty, intensity and harmony in this universe will bring solace to the impermanence on which it is built. This all may be a sign of this ideal, but also a question: In what way can God be salvific? In what way can the ideal harmony of harmonies, immanent in the whole process, also be the harvest of its achievements? These questions direct us back to the function of the religions and the meaning of the concept of God as they relate to a world in becoming.

#### 4: Religions and God

Before venturing somewhat into the inner workings of the process universe, we have left the question of religion and God with six characteristics that can now be taken up again in order to understand more clearly the impact of process theology on their reality and conceptualization. These six characteristics (without being exhaustive) have been: (1) God as internal Attractor, not as external cause; (2) the immanence of God in the world process as production of value, not as controlling the perpetuation of a world in vain; (3) the unending revelation of God to the world as novelty, not as self-same order; (4) religion as recognition of a rightness inherent to the process of the universe revealing a character of the divine Friend, not any tyrannical power obsessing with arbitrary rules; (5) the diversity of the characteristics of religious harvests of this divine character as unique forms of divine presence, not as deviations from a fixed pre-ordained program; and (6) the unending process of religious renewal in light of such dynamic divine presence, instead of an fixation on

certain limited appearances as definition of divine reality, binding it to the past as if it were fulfilling all possibilities of realization.

Religions, for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, are embodiments of divine Reality, pointing to the One beyond and in all things and happenings so as to discern the value in them and of them for themselves and beyond themselves for the All and God;<sup>111</sup> they are the yearnings towards the eternal in the impermanent, the realization of meaning in the temporal (realizing oneness), and the expression of divine peace<sup>112</sup> – not as a mere idea, but as the foundation of existence.<sup>113</sup> These are also the insights conveyed by Whitehead's philosophy based on the cosmological and experiential premises just reviewed.<sup>114</sup> Three quotes may substantiate this resonance. The first quote is one of the most beautiful and poetic renderings of the nature of religion, its intention and meaning, in philosophical literature.

Religion is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind, and within, the passing flux of immediate things; something which is real, and yet waiting to be realized; something which is a remote possibility, and yet the greatest of present facts; something that gives meaning to all that passes, and yet eludes apprehension; something whose possession is the final good, and yet is beyond all reach; something which is the ultimate ideal, and the hopeless quest.<sup>115</sup>

This vision of religion clearly embodies the six characteristics: religions are about the integration of the ineffable Beyond, the unknowable and inconceivable divine Reality, into our human and cosmic reality by recognizing the becoming world as enveloped and permeated by, and being attracted to, the greatest of “facts”, the “final good,” the “ultimate ideal,” the ultimately “real” within the flux of things, which within is beyond and always before its movements, realized in the actualization of its attributes and always moved to transcend any realization as just one in a process that is already always, through divine grace, beyond itself transmuted into divine Reality.<sup>116</sup> The vision of religion, here, is that of a *salvific* experience in the midst of impermanence, elucidated in the second quote.

The fact of the religious vision, and its history of persistent expansion, is our one ground for optimism. Apart from it, human life is a flash of occasional enjoyments lighting up a mass of pain and misery, a bagatelle of transient experience.<sup>117</sup>

The experience of salvation, here, is not one of finding only individual meaning in a sea of misery and pain, the rumination of desire for and enjoyment of fulfillment, but a process of cosmic importance in which the universe as a community of becoming extracts from its expansion an unconstructed Reality at its heart, and references experiences of undeconstructable meaning; a meaning that flows through the world process with an unobstructed vision of realization.<sup>118</sup> Religion, as the third quote demonstrates, is, therefore, if it fulfills this vision, the true energy of unification for civilization.

The great social ideal for religion is that it should be the common basis for the unity of civilization. In that way it justifies its insight beyond the transient clash of brute forces.<sup>119</sup>

This brings us to the concept of God in such a cosmology of flux and permanence, implicit in Whitehead's rendering of the function of religion, in the ideal sense embodying (though in practice not always following the experience of the ideal) divine Reality as the true *movens* of the world process toward the realization of its utmost values and their ultimate unity.

[God] is the binding element in the world. The consciousness which is individual in us, is universal in him: the love which is partial in us is all-embracing in him. Apart from him there could be no world....<sup>120</sup>

God and the world – in Whitehead's process view of the universe (of which humanity is a highly developed expression) – exhibit a *mutual* movement: of that of the world toward the ideal divine Reality, which, however, is not an empty ideal in front of it, but the very ground permeating every event as its ideal of realization in the flux of actualizations of its best potentials in any given situation; but also that of Reality toward the world, offering its own transcendent

vision of the creative process as that of a “divinization” by becoming embodied in it as initial “eros” and as “final aim.”<sup>121</sup>

The theme of Cosmology, which is the basis of all religions, is the story of the dynamic effort of the World passing into everlasting unity, and of the static majesty of God’s vision, accomplishing its purpose of completion by absorption of the World’s multiplicity of effort.<sup>122</sup>

What is more, both movements find their confluence in the passing of the world, in every moment of its actual achievement of events and patterns of approximation to this Reality, into God’s perception of the world, transmuted into God’s perfection, and released again into the world process.<sup>123</sup>

[God’s] purpose in the world is quality of attainment. ... Every act leaves the world with a deeper or a fainter impress of God. [God] then passes into his next relation to the world with enlarged, or diminished, presentation of ideal values.<sup>124</sup>

It is in this sense of mutual immanence that Whitehead – in his *Six Antitheses*<sup>125</sup> – ventures into one of his most challenging and audacious formulations on the relationship of these two movements. The last three of the six antitheses will suffice to feel the impact they may have on any non-relational, monarchical model of conceptualizing God.

It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World. It is as true to say that God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God. It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God.<sup>126</sup>

Mutual immanence, mutual transcendence, and mutual creation!<sup>127</sup> God and the world are entangled in a non-dualistic movement beyond dualism and monism, illusory conceptual differentiation and identification, non-different, but in mutual alterity, beyond simple categorization.<sup>128</sup> In another mode, Whitehead circumscribes this mutual movement as the essence of the creative process itself, a process that captures our epistemological limitations by which we try

to simply differentiate God from the world by opposing them – the world of impermanence, the God of permanence, and so on – transforming them into *one creative* movement beyond simplification, but always only finding their meaning in actualizations of the movements themselves, the religious experience in which they become the essential character of religious existence.

God and the World are the contrasted opposites in terms of which Creativity achieves its supreme task of transforming disjoined multiplicity, with its diversities in opposition, into concrescent unity, with its diversities in contrast.<sup>129</sup>

Because of the mutual immanence of God and the world as these non-different movements towards one another, never identical, never simply different, this non-dual movement of mutuality stated, here, is not only that *between* the world and God, but also one between all happenings *in* the world and *in* God. If no event is non-relational, but is rather always the becoming-one of such relations into a novel unity of events that then again become part of the rhythm of the world process of a moving whole of processes of this nature, all processes are *dipolar*, that is, in flux and permanent, in time and beyond, material and ideal, physical and mental, and so on, in which polarity Whitehead paradigmatically captures at once the inescapability of relationality and process *as* the mutual immanence of God and the world: mind and matter, consciousness and senses, ideal and perception, and so on.<sup>130</sup> And so does God exhibit both poles non-dually, which Whitehead names the Primordial and Consequent Natures of God:<sup>131</sup> divine *Consciousness* of all possible worlds and divine *Perception* of all actualizations of creativity in the myriads of creatures and their relationships, broken or whole; divine *Creativity*, hosting and providing all possibilities as values of best realization, and divine *Transmutation* of the worlds achievement and misses of value or divine attributes; divine *Attraction* through immanent ideals that release every event into its own creativity and divine *Harvest* of this creativity in patient suffering of its outcomes, but also in divine Judgment and transformation into God's all-relational nature; divine *Wisdom*, seducing to the Good, and divine *Love*, saving everything into God.

[God] has a primordial nature and a consequent nature. The consequent nature of God is ... the realization of the actual world in the unity of his nature, and through the transformation of his wisdom. The primordial nature is conceptual, the consequent nature is the weaving of God's physical feelings upon his primordial concepts.<sup>132</sup>

Again, this conceptualization of God is not of violent action, oppression, or the arbitrary sovereignty of despots, but of love and attraction; not of "power," but of harmony: not of subduing and control, but of the mutual immanence of the *Poet* of the world; not of division, but of the movement of harmony of harmonies.<sup>133</sup>

God's role is not the combat of ... force with ...force ...; it lies in the patient operation of ... harmonization. [God] ... is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness.<sup>134</sup>

Regarding one direction, the non-dual movement of mutual immanence from *God* toward the *world* (in which both natures are involved, of God and all world processes), this means: The order of the world, its evolution, history, realization, and perfection, is not that of arbitrary laws or external decrees, but one of inherent patterns of processes of *attraction*, of a *love* that tends to all happenings, of mutual perception and relationality, of *sympathy*, that is, mutual knowing and patient suffering of one's existence by the All and God; it is "aesthetic" order, refinement in light of the Beauty of Reality. *Beauty* is the "form" of the immanence of God in the world as a whole and in any process and all of them, attracting to patterns of mutual recognition and creative movements of unification that value such interrelatedness.

All order is therefore aesthetic order, and the moral order is merely certain aspects of aesthetic order. The actual world is the outcome of the aesthetic order, and the aesthetic order is derived from the immanence of God.<sup>135</sup>

Regarding the other direction, the non-dual movement of mutual immanence from the *world* toward *God* (in which all events and God engage with their inherent polarity), this means: Salvation,

transformation of the world into the *Kingdom* of God (Consequent Nature), is the realization of the truth and revelation of the true value of any happening for itself, for the world as it happened and happens, and for God, in God's *Wisdom* (Primordial Nature), regardless of any world that has been or will be realized.<sup>136</sup> This salvation is harvest, perception, judgment, and transformation *in* God for all events and any world.

[God] saves the world as it passes into the immediacy of his own life. It is the judgment of a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved. It is also the judgment of a wisdom which uses what in the temporal world is mere wreckage.<sup>137</sup>

Together, in the *mutuality* of these non-dual processes between God and the world and within them, a view of the universe arises that can now address the becoming of the world in light of the divine Reality as a *unity in becoming* that, at no point, lacks divine presence, but never, at any point, fulfills it, either.<sup>138</sup> The "unity of being" (*wahdat al-wujud*) is not a monistic dissolution of reality into Reality, here, but the *mutuality of love* in which the polarity of these movements non-dually become one, *one* movement of mutuality, *one* love in unity of diversity, *one* adventure of existence, in its beauty exhibiting its only justification for existence, but aware of the risks and failures of such an adventure and the salvific nature of its relationality becoming the expression of peace.<sup>139</sup>

The Adventure of the Universe starts with the dream and reaps tragic Beauty. This is the secret of the union of Zest with Peace: – That the suffering attains its end in a Harmony of Harmonies. The immediate experience of this Final Fact, with its union of Youth and Tragedy, is the sense of Peace.<sup>140</sup>

God, the unknowable Beyond – beyond any access of praise or imagination of projected worldly power into God's nature – has become the unimaginable greatness that our existence hides and only reveals if it discovers the immanence of God in which all becomes revealed as immanent in God, and in which immanence the world process becomes transparent as a process of the realization of God,

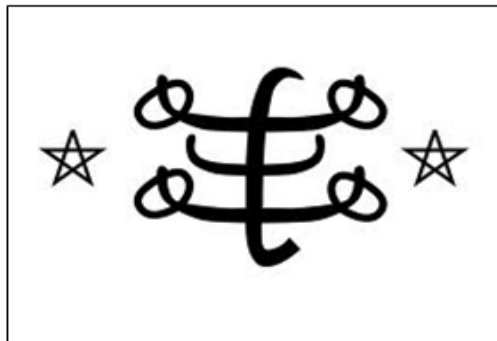
because “[e]very event on its finer side introduces God into the world.”<sup>141</sup>

The depths of [God’s] existence lie beyond the vulgarities of praise or of power. [God] gives to suffering its swift insight into values which can issue from it.<sup>142</sup>

## 5: The Manifestation of God

The figure and concept in which all of these elements collected so far come together, in the Bahá’í universe, is that of the Manifestation of God – as *process*, God-manifesting (*zuhur*), and as *event*, God-manifest (*mazhar*). It means (1) the *figure* in which (in Whitehead's terminology) the non-dual movements of mutual immanence of God and the world reside; (2) the *theophany* in which the Adventure of the Universe converges, as in it the process of Youth and Tragedy, Eros and Harmony of Harmonies becomes visible; (3) the *concept* that always points beyond praise and power; and (4) the *sacred person* in which the suffering of the world is transformed in the transparency of (the love of) Reality – as divinization and as humanization; as permeation and as transcendent circumambulation; as hidden silence and as brilliant light; as immanent soul of the cosmic body and as the One beyond all characterization, even that of being and nothingness.<sup>143</sup>

In perhaps no other symbol than the Bahá’í Ringstone pictogram do we find the coalescence of these elements more intensely harmonized, the symbol of the whole divine-cosmic process being eminently and as a whole “identified” as that of the (figure, site, concept, and theophany of the) Manifestation itself.<sup>144</sup>



Yet before I proceed to explore these connections further, I must acknowledge two questions that might have arisen in the meantime so as to clear the way from potential misunderstandings. The questions are these: As Whitehead's notion of God is eminently interwoven with that of the world process: in what sense does this *mutual* immanence reflect or differ from the insistence of Bahá'u'lláh on the unknowability of God and the ir-relationality between God and the world?<sup>145</sup> And, if Whitehead's God is so eminently "incarnated" in *every* event of the world process: how are we to understand the extraordinary theophany in rare sacred figures in the history of humanity as *the* Manifestations of God?

Without being able to go into any technical details about the concept of the Manifestation, in its complexity and background,<sup>146</sup> but in light of the previous exploration of Whitehead's understanding of the world process as divine process, the answer to both questions is quite simple: For Whitehead, we cannot talk about God beyond relationality; hence, no access to God beyond the world process is possible. The general "incarnation" of Whitehead's God in the world process as its attractive and attracting *eros* is, therefore, most intense in processes that have been transformed into nothing but the transparency of this universal divine process in the world, that is, exhibit this all-relationality (of love) in the life of persons that *are*, thereby, the theophany of divine Reality, being in this sense concurrently both (fully) divine and human.<sup>147</sup> The insight that I hope is arising from this characterization is this: that the divine-cosmic process of mutual immanence *is* the universal process of God becoming manifest (*zuhur*) and that, therefore, Whitehead's "God" *is*, in fact, (nothing but and precisely) the Manifestation of God (*mazhar-i ilahi*).<sup>148</sup>

Let me back up this approach by a few quotes of Whitehead, approximating this point of insight, before elucidating the thesis directly in my final considerations. First, Whitehead is well aware that religions cannot be reduced to doctrines and rituals, but must be anchored in *human persons* who present themselves to the world as *ultimate Reality "in person."*<sup>149</sup> Although the relation between religions and Manifestations in the Bahá'í understanding is in itself complex,<sup>150</sup> they can be exemplified directly, for instance, in Christ

and the Buddha, as the following corroborating quotes from Whitehead demonstrate.

Religions commit suicide when they find ... inspirations in their dogmas. The inspiration of religion lies in the history of religion.<sup>151</sup>

Buddhism and Christianity find their origins respectively in two inspired moments of history: the life of the Buddha, and the life of Christ.<sup>152</sup>

The lives of these Manifestations of God exhibit the “life of God” in the form of exemplification, realization, and sacrifice, and imply a whole different mode of divine power than we might assume in anthropomorphic modeling of divinity on clashes of force, conflictions, and coercion. In fact, as in Bahá’u’lláh’s recollection of the history of such Manifestations in his *Book of Certitude* and many other writings, it is a sign of their transparency of Reality that they rather suffer the world than to imitate human impulses of violence.<sup>153</sup> So says Whitehead about the impact of the life of Christ:

The life of Christ is not an exhibition of over-ruling power. Its glory is for those who can discern it, and not for the world. Its power lies in its absence of force. It has the decisiveness of a supreme ideal, and that is why the history of the world divides at this point of time.<sup>154</sup>

As this would be true for all Manifestations, the following quote can be generalized to all of them, too – with regards to the characterization of Manifestations as revelation of the nature of God and the character such a life exhibits in making divine agency in the word transparent.<sup>155</sup>

The essence of Christianity is the appeal to the life of Christ as a revelation of the nature of God and of his agency in the world. ... [It] evoked a response from all that is best in human nature. The Mother, the Child, and the bare manger: the lowly man, homeless and self-forgotten, with his message of peace, love, and sympathy: the suffering, the agony, the tender

words as life ebbed, the final despair: and the whole with the authority of supreme victory.<sup>156</sup>

In light of these characterizations of the Manifestations of God as persons in which the nature and agency of God in the world process becomes transparent, Whitehead risks a prophecy on the future of religion as the future of such a religion that would become the site of *such* a manifestation of God (*zuhur*), and which may exhibit it in a Manifestation of God (*mazhar*) of *that* very nature.

I hazard the prophecy that that religion will conquer which can render clear to popular understanding some eternal greatness incarnate in the passage of temporal fact.<sup>157</sup>

In what sense, then, does the Manifestation of God display these characteristics of a divine-cosmic process, transparent in a person of such nature as to manifest the divine permanence in the flux of things? For this, I return to the Ringstone symbol and its congruence with the divine-cosmic movement of mutual immanence in Whitehead's process theology.

The Ringstone symbol is a complex image consisting of artistic renderings of the two Arabic letters *ba* and *ha*. They do not only form the initials of Bahá'u'lláh (while the third letter of BHA', the *alif*, remains hidden) with which he, for instance, signed his *Book of Certitude*.<sup>158</sup> They are rather "real symbols" of a complex cosmology of creative divine letters presenting and initiating the realities of the hiddenness of God's inaccessible essence, God's *huwiyah* (*ha*), and the creative process, which begins with the hidden *alif*, but manifests with the second letter of the Arabic alphabet, the *ba*, a pictogram of a ship afloat with a point below it, the point from which all creation flows.<sup>159</sup> Their mutual interweaving in the Ringstone symbol, then, indeed, presents us with the process of creation as a divine process in which the hiddenness *and* manifestness of God intertwine<sup>160</sup> and, as a whole, form the divine-cosmic process of the manifestation of God (*zuhur*) besides which there can nothing be or become.<sup>161</sup>

The understanding of this creative process implies, in the Ringstone symbol, another feature that is vital for the further discussion of its congruence with Whitehead's process theology, namely, that the universe is not a mere impermanent flux of events

and processes, but exhibits layers of intensity and complexity that in the mystical cosmologies of the Sufi background and the writings of the Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá amounts to infinite worlds beyond the physical one, which can on occasion be signified into three or five layers of emanation or spiritualization, but form altogether the *one* world process as a divine process.<sup>162</sup> Sometimes they are in their writing symbolically simplified into the triad of the World of God, the World of Command or Revelation, and the World of Creation.<sup>163</sup> In other contexts, they can be expanded to another correlated symbolization (used by Bahá'u'lláh and also symbolized in Sufi language) of five layers: the world of Creation and Humanity (*khalq, nasut*), the Kingdom of God (*malakut*), the realm of divine Powers (*jabarut*), the world of the Will and Mind, Spirit, and Word of God (*lahut*), and the Hidden Inaccessible Divinity (*hahut*).<sup>164</sup>

What is important in either of these differentiations is this: the whole process of emanation (creation) and spiritualization (return to God) symbolized with these worlds and spheres not only indicates the divine-cosmic process of manifestation (*zuhur*), but *as a whole* and its *layered* differentiation *comprises* the Bahá'í concept of the Manifestation of God (*mazhar*). The human person in which Reality as a whole is transparent *is* the transparency of this whole process. The Ringstone symbol *as a whole* stands for the immensity of what it means to be *the Manifestation* of God. I will now correlate these differentiations as enshrined in the Ringstone symbol of Bahá'í mystic cosmology of the manifestation of God (*zuhur*) with Whitehead's divine-cosmic process and his concept of God, indicating it to present us with the expansive concept of the Manifestation of God (*mazhar*).<sup>165</sup>

Although Whitehead for many of his interpreters seems to have developed a "flat cosmology" in which the Process of the Universe is a connected micro- and macro-cosmic, interpenetrated, creative movement of ordering that, while infused by divine Eros in any event of its happening, seems to represent the physical universe we perceive as the only one we live in, he was well aware of the necessity to differentiate this universe into layers of organization.<sup>166</sup> From the widest form of expansiveness, as the space spanned by all events of the universe, he builds up a nested cosmology in which the wider "society" of processes forms a "field" of reference that is the

environment of organisms such an environment allows to exist, but in turn makes such organisms organizations of a layer of the universe that are themselves environments for more developed, specified, and sophisticated organisms. Dimensions, forces, fields, material organizations, life, and mind, appear as such nested environments and organizations of related organisms – with the greatest liberation of life and mind in human persons and societies, as they allow for degrees of freedom and creativity as well as embodiments of originality, which expresses itself in consciousness, reason, intellect, and spiritual sensitivities.<sup>167</sup> As these characteristics are not just appearing out of nothing in humanity, but are enshrined in the *whole* process of existence in various degrees of intensity and organization, the world has in *all* of its layers a *spiritual* dimension.<sup>168</sup> Like ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s all-pervading divine Spirit, all “worlds” of matter, life, and mind are expressions of degrees of freedom of the embodiment of Spirit.<sup>169</sup>

Yet Whitehead goes further – again like ‘Abdu’l-Bahá<sup>170</sup> – in claiming that there is no end to possible worlds beyond and above such expressions, for instance, by audaciously stating that there is no metaphysical reason that all worlds in their organization necessarily must imply the loss of their past achievements when allowing for novelty, new and possibly more refined forms of life and mind, or degrees of spiritual embodiments.<sup>171</sup>

The most general formulation of the religious problem is the question whether the process of the temporal world passes into the formation of other actualities, bound together in an order in which novelty does not mean loss.<sup>172</sup>

With this general trans-temporal assumption, we can now follow the cosmic-divine mutual immanence of the relationship of God and the world in *direct resonance* with the threefold or fivefold movement of emanation and spiritualization as represented by the Ringstone symbol.<sup>173</sup> On the material, human, and historical plane of the world process – the World of Creation, *nasut*, represented by the lower horizontal *ba-ha* of the Ringstone symbol – Whitehead senses the spiritual Beyond as immanent, but different from it, namely, as a sense of the Kingdom of God (*malakut*) in the immediacy of its happenings. Again exemplified by the figure of Christ, Whitehead says:

[This] Galilean origin of Christianity ... does not emphasize the ruling Caesar, or the ruthless moralist, or the unmoved mover. It dwells upon the tender elements in the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love; and it finds purpose in the present immediacy of a kingdom not of this world.<sup>174</sup>

This spiritual Kingdom – the World of Command, the Kingdom of Life, *malakut*, represented by the intermediate horizontal *ba* of the Ringstone symbol – Whitehead identifies as the perceptive, saving, and transformative Consequent Nature of God.<sup>175</sup> In a sense, like in Sufi and Bahá'í renderings, everyone lives in both worlds, *nasut* and *malakut*, as every event forms a person in the physical world and in the divine transformative memory.<sup>176</sup> It is the transhistorical dimension of all human Manifestations, in which they are divine Persons of different character and mission.<sup>177</sup>

[God] is the ideal companion who transmutes what has been lost into a living fact within his own nature. He is the mirror which discloses to every creature its own greatness.<sup>178</sup>

Yet beyond this transformative perceptivity of God (the Consequent Nature), Whitehead knows of the initiative, creative, and ideal aspect of God, the Primordial Nature, as the one in which all possibilities and possible worlds are conceived, related, and suggested to every event and process for its own fulfillment of greatest intensity and harmony with the whole universe (and the particular societies and organisms to which it is immediately related).<sup>179</sup> This layer presents us with the higher aspect of the intermediate *ba* of the Ringstone symbol, *jabarut*, the World of Ideal Powers, the transhistorical world of divine values and purposes, in which all Manifestations are interwoven in the manifold of all divine attributes, powers, virtues, and potentials.<sup>180</sup> Of this divine dimension, Whitehead says:

This ideal world of conceptual harmonization is merely a description of God [God]self. Thus the nature of God is the complete conceptual realization of the realm of ideal forms.<sup>181</sup>

Insofar as Whitehead can summarize both the Primordial and the Consequent aspects of God, *jabarut* and *malakut*, as the (ideal and actual) Kingdom of God, and *identifies* this Kingdom with *God*,<sup>182</sup> we approach the “identity” of the upper horizontal *ha-ba* of the Ringstone symbol, the “World of God” in a more focused sense, differentiated (in the fivefold formula) into *lahut* and *hahut*. When Whitehead says: “The kingdom of heaven is God,”<sup>183</sup> he indicates the divine creative-receptive act of unification, in which both aspects of God are indifferenced into the Oneness of the Wisdom of God.<sup>184</sup> It represents the indifferenced unity of all Manifestations in the Manifest-Divine, the Mind, Will, Sprit, Word, and Wisdom of God.<sup>185</sup> While *lahut*, for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, presents us with the unity of all divine attributes and the hidden divine sphere of all ideals and forms, it also signifies its emanation from the hidden inaccessibility of the Unmanifest-Divine, *hahut*, which cannot be represented.<sup>186</sup> In a turn of Whitehead’s insight that nothing can be said of anything that has no relation to the all-relational divine-cosmic process as a whole, we may now understand this limitation not as a closure toward or from nothingness (as there can be no absolute nothingness, neither for Whitehead nor Bahá’u’lláh),<sup>187</sup> but as surrender to the mystical unknowability of the unmanifest Godhead Beyond.<sup>188</sup>

[A]ll related experience must exhibit the same texture ... of bearing in itself its own warrant of universality throughout all experience, provided that we confine ourselves to that which communicates .... But what does not so communicate is unknowable, and the unknowable is unknown ...<sup>189</sup>

Finally, we are left with the vertical *ba* of the Ringstone symbol, which some have identified with the divine Spirit spanning all of these worlds from *lahut* to *nasut*, hiding *hahut* as its background,<sup>190</sup> which could now also be understood as the *interwovenness* of all the worlds, the divine cycle of love though all worlds, cutting through any mutual isolation, indicating the mutual immanence of the movements of emanation and spiritualization, and the *unity* of the Manifestation of God (in the symbol) *as a whole* as the *Divine Manifold* in which it operates between indifferenced unity and historical embodiment.<sup>191</sup> Whitehead characterizes this cycle of love thus:

What is done in the world is transformed into a reality in heaven, and the reality in heaven passes back into the world. By reason of this reciprocal relation, the love in the world passes into the love in heaven, and floods back again into the world. In this sense, God is the great companion – the fellow-sufferer who understands.<sup>192</sup>

In summary, in my understanding, we can say: The divine-cosmic process presents us with the immanence of God in all events, while Whitehead's concept of God indicates the divine dimension of this process of mutuality in the mutual embrace of emanation and spiritualization in an unending cycle of love.<sup>193</sup> As a whole this divine-cosmic process *is* the Manifestation of God of which the human persons in which it becomes transparent are its Manifestations.<sup>194</sup> In apophatic silence, Whitehead and the Bahá'í writings acknowledge the unknowable Beyond as inaccessible, and, therefore, identify "God" with the manifestation of the divine dimension of Process.<sup>195</sup>

## 6: Conclusion

The central Bábi-Bahá'í concept of the Manifestation of God not only has its own history related to diverse religious and philosophical traditions confluent in its uniqueness, such as that of divergent Islamic denominations, Sufism, and other Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian, and even Hindu streams of thought and belief. It also displays exciting resonances with the philosophical tradition of process thought, which is itself steeped in history from Heraclitus to Hegel in the west and Daoism and Buddhism in the east. Yet it connects especially with Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy of process and relationality, and its religious explications in what has come to be called process theology. As process theology asks deep philosophical questions regarding God and ultimate reality as well the spiritual and cosmological reality of the world and humanity, it has provided a connecting place within a multiplicity of religious traditions of the east and the west. Its ability to perform the role of a contact theory in interreligious discourses and religious pluralism renders it a preeminent candidate for the reflection on the profound expression of God's Manifestations in the Bahá'í writings, in the

search for mutual interreligious understanding, the vision of a unison of religions, and the establishment of universal peace. In the present considerations, I concentrated on the way process theology may facilitate such a mediation between diverse religious traditions by highlighting its potential of understanding the concept of Manifestation as a universally accessible reality from within diverse religious traditions and, thereby, of connecting to notions such as Incarnation, Avatar, and Buddha-body in amicable and non-distorting ways, but without losing its own uniqueness among them.

Several authors in the field have succeeded in relating Whitehead's notion of the world process and God to questions of human Manifestations of God in these diverse traditions, for instance, by exploring how the Christian claim to Incarnation, of the concurrent divine and human natures of Christ, can be understood without violating either divinity or humanity, that is, by avoiding simplifications of absorption, in the Bahá'í context identified with the Islamic theory of the "incarnation" of Godself into a body (*hulul*), or of the Arian bifurcation, by which the Manifestation of God is not "really" God, but a being in between.<sup>196</sup> Several authors have also tried to differentiate such a process view of Incarnation from the reality of the Buddha,<sup>197</sup> such that the latter one would not indicate a personal presence of the Process God (in both natures), but the "other" ultimate in Whitehead's metaphysical thought, namely, Creativity – the nameless, immanent, and non-personal absolute of the creative process itself.<sup>198</sup> Others have connected the general "incarnation" of God in any world event (Whitehead's aesthetic immanence of God in the world process) with personal approximations of extraordinary saints such as represented in Jainism or Hinduism, without claiming their divinity, although expressing divine attributes such as omniscience.<sup>199</sup>

In the preceding considerations, I have suggested an entirely different approach: that, without denying the usefulness of the other theses, the more expansive perspective on the concept of God and the mutual immanence of the divine-cosmic process in Whitehead would indicate that "God" in Whitehead's rendering is the divine aspect of the Manifestation, emanating from its oneness and circulating through the creative process, manifesting itself on the cosmic level and in human reality, and reabsorbing the process in a cycle of love

again into its inaccessible unity, without violating the different spheres or worlds while they remain intertwined and inextricably interwoven; instead, relating them as *one* divine process of differentiation and unification. Thus, in fact, all Manifestations of God would be (the transparence of) ultimate Reality “in person” by embracing all of these levels of ideal, transhistorical, historical differentiation, *and* of unification in the divine identity of the Will, Mind, Word, Wisdom, and Spirit of God, which *is* God, that is, everything we can name and know of God,<sup>200</sup> without violating the inaccessible Beyond from which the whole divine process arises “without syllable and sound”<sup>201</sup> and in which it is absorbed and without a trace.<sup>202</sup>

As with the symbol of the Dao, the inaccessible mystery of God that releases the Manifest from the Unmanifest in the Ringstone symbol cannot be symbolized: the Dao that can be named is not the Dao.<sup>203</sup> Yet it releases in its symbolization the myriad processes of unification and diversification from which the universe springs and in which it is harbored.<sup>204</sup> In this sense, the Manifestation of God *is* God in Whitehead's sense (the Manifest Divine), and is *not* God (the Unmanifest Divine). Yet the same Manifestation is the expansion of the whole divine-comic process of the mutual immanence of God and the world in the non-dual processes of emanation into difference and reabsorption into indifferentiated unity.

*Were any of the all-embracing Manifestations of God to declare: “I am God,” He, verily, speaketh the truth, and no doubt attacheth thereto. For it hath been repeatedly demonstrated that through their Revelation, their attributes and names, the Revelation of God, His names and His attributes, are made manifest in the world. ... And were they to say, “We are the Servants of God,” this also is a manifest and indisputable fact. For they have been made manifest in the uttermost state of servitude, a servitude the like of which no man can possibly attain. Thus in moments in which these Essences of Being were deep immersed beneath the oceans of ancient and everlasting holiness, or when they soared to the loftiest summits of Divine mysteries, they claimed their utterances to be the Voice of Divinity, the Call of God Himself. [GWB #22]*

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ‘Abdu’l Bahá, *Commentary on the Islamic Tradition ‘I Was a Hidden Treasure’*, transl. by Moojan Momen, in *Bahá’í Studies Bulletin*, 3:4 (1995): 4-35.
- Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality (Lawh Basít al-Haqíqa)*. Introduced and Translated by Moojan Momen: “Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality (Lawh Basít al-Haqíqa). In *Lights of Irfan*, 11 (2010): 203–21.
- Joseph Bracken, *The Divine Matrix: Creativity as a Link between East and West*. New York: Orbis Books, 1995.
- Keven Brown, “A Bahá’í Perspective on the Origin of Matter.” In *The Journal of Bahá’í Studies*, 2:3 (1990): 15–44.
- Keven Brown, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Response to the Doctrine of the Unity of Existence,” in *The Journal of Bahá’í Studies*, 11:3-4 (2001): 1-29.
- Keven Brown, “Hermes Trismegistos and Apollonius of Tyana in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh’s In Jack McLean, ed., *Revisioning the Sacred: New Perspectives in Bahá’í Theology*. Studies in the Bábi and Bahá’í Religions. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1997, 153-88.
- Keven Brown, ed., *Evolution and Bahá’í Belief: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Response to Nineteenth-Century Darwinism*. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2001.
- Keven Brown, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Response to the Doctrine of the Unity of Existence,” in *The Journal of Bahá’í Studies*, 11:3-4 (2001): 1-29.
- Vahid Brown, “The Beginning that Hath No Beginning: Bahá’í Cosmogony,” in *Lights of Irfan* 3 (2002): 21-40.
- Christopher Buck, “A Unique Eschatological Interface: Bahá’u’lláh and Cross-cultural Messianism,” in Peter Smith, ed., *In Iran: Studies in Bábi and Bahá’í History*. Vol. 3. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1986, 157-180.
- John Cobb, *Beyond Dialog: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1982.
- John Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975.
- John Cobb, *Process Theology as Political Theology*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982.
- John Cobb, ed., *Religions in the Making: Whitehead and the Wisdom Traditions of the World*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.
- John Cobb and David Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1976.
- John Cobb and Christopher Ives, eds., *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990.
- Juan Cole, “Behold the Man: Baha’u’llah on the Life of Jesus.” In *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 65:1 (1997): 47–71.

- Juan Cole, "The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings," in *Bahá'í Studies* 9 (1982) @ [http://bahai-library.com/cole\\_concept\\_manifestation](http://bahai-library.com/cole_concept_manifestation).
- Juan Cole, "I am All the Prophets': The Poetics of Pluralism in Bah.' Texts." In *Poetics Today*, 14:3 (Fall 1993): 447-76.
- Juan Cole, "The World as Text: Cosmologies of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i," in *Studia Islamica*, 80 (1994): 145-163.
- A Compilation on Scholarship*. Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'í World Centre, February 1995.
- Brianne Donaldson, *Creaturely Cosmologies: Why Metaphysics Matters For Animal and Planetary Liberation*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015.
- Garry Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, and Postmodernity 1950-2005*. Louisville, KY: WJK, 2006.
- Roland Faber, "Baha'u'llah and the Luminous Mind: Baha'i Gloss on a Buddhist Puzzle," in *Lights of Irfan* 18 (2017): 53-106.
- Roland Faber, *The Becoming of God: Process Theology, Philosophy and Multireligious Engagement*. Portland, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017.
- Roland Faber, *The Garden of Reality: Transreligious Relativity in a World of Becoming*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2018.
- Roland Faber, "De-Ontologizing God: Levinas, Deleuze and Whitehead," in Catherine Keller and Anne Daniell, eds., *Process and Difference: Between Cosmological and Poststructuralist Postmodernism*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2002, 209-234.
- Roland Faber, "Laozi, A Lost Prophet? The Challenge of the Dao De Jing for the Bahá'í Universe of Discourse," in *Lights of Irfan* 19 (2018), 37-110.
- Roland Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*. Louisville: WJK, 2008.
- Roland Faber, *The Divine Manifold*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014.
- Roland Faber, *Prozestheologie. Zu ihrer Würdigung und kritischen Erneuerung*. Mainz: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 2000.
- Roland Faber, "'Must 'religion' always remain as a synonym for 'hatred?': Whiteheadian Meditations on the Future of Togetherness," in Roland Faber and Santiago Slabodsky, eds., *Living Traditions and Universal Conviviality: Prospects and Challenges for Peace in Multireligious Communities*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016, 167-82.
- Roland Faber, "The Sense of Peace: A Para-doxology of Divine Multiplicity," in Catherine Keller and Laurel Schneider, eds., *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation*. London: Routledge, 2011, 36-56.
- Roland Faber, "Surrationality and Chaosmos: A More Deleuzean Whitehead (and a Butlerian Intervention)," in Roland Faber and Andrea Stephenson, eds., *Secrets of Becoming: Negotiating Whitehead, Deleuze, and Butler*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010, 157-177.

- Roland Faber, "The Mystical Whitehead," in Marc Pugliese and Gloria Schaab, eds., *Seeking Common Ground: Evaluation and Critique of Joseph Bracken's Comprehensive Worldview*. Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2012, 213-34.
- Seena Fazel, "Religious Pluralism and the Bahá'í Faith," in *Interreligious Insight* 1:3 (2003): 42-49.
- Lewis Ford, *The Emergence of Whitehead's Metaphysics 1925-1929*. Albany: SUNY, 1984.
- William Garland, "The Ultimacy of Creativity," in Lewis Ford and George Kline, eds., *Explorations in Whitehead's Philosophy*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1983, 212-38.
- David Griffin, ed., *Deep Religious Pluralism*. Louisville, WJK, 2005.
- Idris Hamid, *The Metaphysics and Cosmology of Process According to Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i: Critical Edition, Translation and Analysis of Observations in Wisdom*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1998.
- Charles Hartshorne, "Whitehead's Revolutionary Concept of Prehension," in Charles Hartshorne, ed., *Creativity in American Philosophy*. Albany: SUNY, 1984. 103-13.
- Brian Henning, *The Ethics of Creativity: Beauty, Morality and Nature in a Processive Cosmos*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005.
- Helen Hornby, *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*. New Deli: Bahá'í Publishing, 2010
- Thomas Hosinski, *Stubborn Fact and Creative Advance: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993.
- Paul Humphrey, *Metaphysics of Mind: Hylomorphism and Eternality in Aristotle and Hegel*. Albany: SUNY, 2007.
- Rick Johnson, "The Active Force and That Which Is Its Recipient: A Bahá'í View of Creativity," in *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 27:4 (2017): 29-60.
- Gordon Kaufman, *God – Mystery – Diversity: Christian Theology in a Pluralistic World*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996.
- Ian Kluge, "Philosophy and the Bahá'í Writings," (2009) @ [www.bahaiphilosophy.com/philosophy-and-the-baha-i-writings.html](http://www.bahaiphilosophy.com/philosophy-and-the-baha-i-writings.html).
- Ian Kluge, "Process Philosophy and the Bahá'í Writings," in *Lights of Irfan* 5 (2004): 109-162.
- Stephen Lambden, *Some Aspects of Isrā'īliyyāt and the Emergence of the Bābī-Bahā'ī Interpretation of the Bible*. Dissertation: Newcastle University, 2002.
- Stephen Lambden, "The Background and Centrality of Apophatic Theology in Bābī and Bahá'í Scripture," in Jack McLean, ed., *Revisoning the*

- Sacred: New Perspectives in Bahá'í Theology. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1997.
- Laozi, Tao De Ching: The Definite Edition. Translation and Commentary by Jonathon Starr, New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2001.
- William Leue, *Metaphysical Foundations of a Theory of Value in the Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead*. Ashfield: Down-to-Earth Books, 2005
- Jeffrey Long, "Anekanta Vedanta: Toward a Deep Hindu religious Pluralism," in David Griffin, ed., *Deep Religious Pluralism*. Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 2005, 130-145.
- Zaid Lundberg, "The Bedrock of Bahá'í Belief: The Doctrine of Progressive Revelation," in *Lights of Irfan* 1 (2000): 53-67.
- Bijan Ma'sumian, "Baha'u'llah's Seclusion in Kurdistan." In *Deepen*, 1:1 (1093): 18-26.
- Jay McDaniel, *Gandhi's Hope: Learning from Other Religions as a Path to Peace*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.
- Michael McCarron, "Symbolic Cosmology in the Sufi and Bahá'í Traditions." Bahá'í Reference Library (1997) @ [http://bahai-library.com/mccarron\\_symbolic\\_cosmology\\_sufism](http://bahai-library.com/mccarron_symbolic_cosmology_sufism).
- Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Jack McLean, "Introduction," in Jack MacLean, ed., *Revisioning the Sacred: New Perspectives in Bahá'í Theology*. Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1997.
- Jack McLean, "Prolegomena to a Bahá'í Theology." In *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 5:1 (1992): 25-67.
- Robert Mesle, *Process Theology: A Basic Introduction*. St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1993.
- Moojan Momen, *Bahá'u'lláh: A Short Biography*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2007.
- Moojan Momen, "The God of Bahá'u'lláh," in Moojan Momen, ed., *The Bahá'í Faith and the World's Religions*. Oxford: George Ronald, 2003.
- Moojan Momen, *Hinduism and the Bahá'í Faith*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1990.
- Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'í Islam*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Moojan Momen, *Islam and the Bahá'í Faith*. Oxford: George Ronald, 2000.
- Moojan Momen, "Mysticism and the Bahá'í Community." In *Lights of Irfan*, 3 (2002): 107-20.

- Moojan Momen, "Relativism: A Basis For Bahá'í Metaphysics," in Moojan Momen, ed., *Studies in Honor of the Late Hasan M. Balyuzi*. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1988, 185-218.
- Moojan Momen, ed., *Scripture and Revelation: Papers Presented at the First Irfan Colloquium*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1997.
- Nicholas Rescher, *Process Metaphysics: An Introduction to Process Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.
- Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart: Understanding the Writings of the Báb*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010.
- Julio Savi, *The Eternal Quest for God: An Introduction to the Divine Philosophy*. Oxford: George Ronald, 1989.
- Julio Savi, *Towards the Summit of Reality: An Introduction to the Study of Baha'u'llah's Seven Valleys and Four Valley*. George Ronald, 2008.
- Peter Smith, *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Bahá'í Faith*. Oxford, Oneworld, 2008.
- Michael Sours, *The Station and Claims of Bahá'u'lláh*. Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1997.
- Robert Stockman, *'Abdu'l-Bahá in America*. Wilmette: BPT, 2012.
- Robert Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith: A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.
- Marjorie Suchocki, *The End of Evil: Process Eschatology in Historical Context*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988.
- Bonnie Taylor, *One Reality: The Harmony of Science and Religion*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing, 2013.
- Michael Weber, *Whitehead's Pancreativism. The Basics*. Heusenstamm:ontos, 2006.
- Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*. New York: Free Press, 1967.
- Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*. New York: Free Press, 1968.
- Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. ed. by D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherburne. New York: Free Press, 1978.
- Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1996.
- Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*. New York: Free Press, 1967.

---

 NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Cf. Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day*, I (on progressive movements); and: “It is hoped that all the Bahá’í students will follow the noble example you have set before them and will, henceforth, be led to investigate and analyse the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Bahá’í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth,” in *Compilation*, 17 (#50).
- <sup>2</sup> Cf. Smith, *Encyclopedia*, 48.
- <sup>3</sup> Cf. Faber, *Prozestheologie* (2000); *God as Poet* (2003; 2004; 2008); *Becoming of God* (2017). The presentation of A. N. Whitehead and process theology is, of course, mine. While I teach, develop, research, and apply process philosophy and theology in a decade-long professional effort to creatively contribute to the academic study of the interface between philosophy and religion, and the insights this can provide for their exercise, I have developed an understanding of these matters that does not necessarily reflect other process thinkers or speak for the field as such. With regard to Bahá’í thought, all reflections and comparisons are, of course, only mine, without any claim to anything except excitement for its depth.
- <sup>4</sup> Whitehead's main works in this time at Harvard between 1924 and 1937 are: *Science* (1925); *Religion* (1926); *Process* (1929); *Adventures* (1933); and *Modes* (1037). For the emergence of Whitehead's metaphysical thought, cf. Ford, *Emergence*.
- <sup>5</sup> Cf. Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*.
- <sup>6</sup> Cf. Dorrien, *Making*, chs. 2, 4.
- <sup>7</sup> Cf. Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, chs. 4-5, 8-9; Griffin, ed., *Pluralism*; McDaniel, *Hope*.
- <sup>8</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Adventures*, ch. 15; Faber, “Religion,” 167-182.
- <sup>9</sup> Cf. Cobb, *Christ*, chs. 4-5.
- <sup>10</sup> Cf. Cole, “Manifestation.”
- <sup>11</sup> Cf. Faber, *Garden*, ch. 7; Fazel, “Pluralism,” 42-49; Buck, “Interface,” 157-180.
- <sup>12</sup> A notable exception in this context is the work of Ian Kluge who, in many substantial articles on comparison of western philosophers and philosophical movements, as well as some eastern philosophies, with the Bahá’í writings has promoted a “Bahá’í philosophy” in the making; cf. [https:// www.bahaiphilosophy.com](https://www.bahaiphilosophy.com). He is also maybe the only one, or at least the first one, who has engaged with Whitehead and process philosophy; cf. Kluge, “Process Philosophy,” 109-162.

- <sup>13</sup> Cf. Lambden, *Aspects*; Smith, *Bábi-Bahá'í Religions*; Cole, "World"; Hamid, *Metaphysics*.
- <sup>14</sup> Cf. Momen, *Introduction; Islam*; "Mysticism," 107-120; McCaron, "Cosmology";
- <sup>15</sup> Cf. Savi, *Summit*; Momen, *Bahá'u'lláh*, 38-42; *Scripture; Hinduism*; Ma'sumian, "Seclusion."
- <sup>16</sup> Cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Questions; Divine Philosophy*; Stockman, *Bahá'í Faith*, chs. 8-9; 'Abdu'l-Bahá.
- <sup>17</sup> Cf. Savi, *Quest*.
- <sup>18</sup> Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, #9 (Tablet of Wisdom); Brown, "Hermes," 153-188; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, SAQ #5, 51; PUP #35; PT #51; Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* (The Unfoldment of World Civilization).
- <sup>19</sup> Cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablet; Promulgation*, #111; Brown, *Evolution*; "Perspective," 15-44.
- <sup>20</sup> Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality*; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Commentary*; "'Abdu'l-Bahá's Response," 1-29.
- <sup>21</sup> Cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Questions*, part 4.
- <sup>22</sup> Cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, PT #54; PUP #12, 20, 24, 96, 105; SAQ #5.
- <sup>23</sup> Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tables*, #9; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, #75; *Paris Talks*, ##51, 111; *Questions*, ##7, 83; Hornby, *Lights*, #1682.
- <sup>24</sup> Cf. Shoghi Effendi, *Destiny*, 445; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, #121.
- <sup>25</sup> Cf. Kluge, "Philosophy." (2009) @ <https://www.bahaiphilosophy.com/philosophy-and-the-baha-i-writings.html>.
- <sup>26</sup> Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets*, #10. 'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasizes the importance of the equal development of the intellectual, spiritual, and material capacities as the condition for the unification of humankind; cf. *Promulgation*, #82.
- <sup>27</sup> Cf. *Promulgation*, ##89, 97, 111; *Paris Talks*, # 29; *Selections*, #121.
- <sup>28</sup> Cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, #105 (among the many instances 'Abdu'l-Bahá referred to this principle in America, but here especially in conjunction with philosophy); *Paris Talks*, #41; *Questions*, #34.
- <sup>29</sup> Cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Questions*, ##58, 83; Faber, *Garden*, 34, 45.
- <sup>30</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Science*, chs. 5, 9; *Adventures*, ch. 9; *Modes*; Faber, *Becoming*, vii-xviii; *Sphere 2*.
- <sup>31</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 9.
- <sup>32</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Religion*, part 1.
- <sup>33</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Process*, 4, 21; *God as Poet*, part 2; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Questions*, #27; *Paris Talks*, #15.

- 
- <sup>34</sup> Cf. Faber, *Garden*, chs. 6-7.
- <sup>35</sup> Whitehead, *Modes*, 174; Faber, "Mystical Whitehead," 167-182.
- <sup>36</sup> Cf. Rescher, *Metaphysics*.
- <sup>37</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 7.
- <sup>38</sup> Heraclitus quoted in Plato, *Cratylus*, 401d.
- <sup>39</sup> Heraclitus quoted in Plato, *Cratylus*, 402a.
- <sup>40</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 29.
- <sup>41</sup> Whitehead, *Modes*, 52-53.
- <sup>42</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 17.
- <sup>43</sup> Cf. Faber, *God as Poet*, parts 2-3.
- <sup>44</sup> Cf. Leue, *Foundations*.
- <sup>45</sup> Whitehead, *Modes*, 12.
- <sup>46</sup> Cf. McLean, "Prolegomena," 25-67.
- <sup>47</sup> Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, #23; but, contrarily, see #66; 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation, ##57, 118; McLean, "Introduction," xiii-xix; Faber, "Sense of Peace," 36-56.
- <sup>48</sup> Cf. Dorrien, *Making*; Kaufman, *God*.
- <sup>49</sup> Cf. McFague, *Body*; Cobb, *Process Theology*.
- <sup>50</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 342.
- <sup>51</sup> Cf. Faber, *God as Poet*, §36. In this function, philosophical theology may be compared with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's rendering of "Divine Philosophy"; cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, #96; McLean, "Prolegomena."
- <sup>52</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Religion*, parts 1, 4; *Science*, ch. 11; *Process*, part 5; Whitehead, *Adventures*, ch. 10.
- <sup>53</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures*, 170.
- <sup>54</sup> Cf. Faber, *Divine Manifold*, chs. 10-12.
- <sup>55</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Process*, 350-351.
- <sup>56</sup> Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, ##13, 19; *Tablets*, #7.
- <sup>57</sup> Cf. Faber, "Bahá'u'lláh," 53-106.
- <sup>58</sup> Whitehead, *Science*, 173.
- <sup>59</sup> For Whitehead's criticism of scientific materialism of this sort, cf. *Concept*, ch. 2; *Science*, chs. 6-8; Faber, *God as Poet*, §§41-44; *Becoming*, Spheres 1-2.
- <sup>60</sup> Cf. Humphrey, *Metaphysics*; Aristotle, *Met.*, 1072a 26-27.
- <sup>61</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures*, 198.
- <sup>62</sup> Cf. Faber, *God as Poet*, §35.
- <sup>63</sup> Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, #79; Brown, "Beginning," 21-40.

- 
- <sup>64</sup> Cf. Mesle, *Process Theology*.
- <sup>65</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures*, 172.
- <sup>66</sup> Cf. Faber, *God as Poet*, §24.
- <sup>67</sup> Cf. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, #44; Taylor, *Reality*.
- <sup>68</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 15.
- <sup>69</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Religion*, 31; *Process*, 4; *Science*, 168-169; Weber, *Pancreativism*, chs. 2-3; Faber, *Garden*, 19, 36, 62.
- <sup>70</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Adventure*, part 1; Faber, *God as Poet*, §46.
- <sup>71</sup> Whitehead, *Modes*, 174.
- <sup>72</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 4; McFague, *Body*, ch. 1.
- <sup>73</sup> Cf. Cobb, ed., *Religions*.
- <sup>74</sup> Cf. Faber, *God as Poet*, part 2; *Becoming*, Sphere 4.
- <sup>75</sup> Whitehead, *Religion*, 61.
- <sup>76</sup> Cf. Bahá’u’lláh, *Seven Valleys*, 11-12, 58; Faber, “Bahá’u’lláh”; *Garden*, ch. 7, section 5.
- <sup>77</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, also understands religion (with science) as expression of “pure reason”; cf. *Promulgation*, ##44, 49.
- <sup>78</sup> Whitehead, *Religion*, 31-32.
- <sup>79</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Religion*, 18-20; *Adventures*, 165-166.
- <sup>80</sup> Cf. Faber, “Surrationality,” 155-175.
- <sup>81</sup> Cf. Faber, *Divine Manifold*, part 1.
- <sup>82</sup> Cf. Griffin, ed., *Pluralism*, chs. 1-2; Faber, *Becoming*, Exploration 3.
- <sup>83</sup> Whitehead, *Science*, 189.
- <sup>84</sup> Cf. Lundberg, “Bedrock,” 53-67.
- <sup>85</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Process*, parts 1, 2; Faber, *God as Poet*, parts 2-4.
- <sup>86</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Process*, 36.
- <sup>87</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Concept*, chs. 7-9; *Process*, part 2; *Adventures*, chs 11-13; Hosinski, *Fact*, chs. 2-6.
- <sup>88</sup> Cf. Hartshorne, “Concept,” 102-113.
- <sup>89</sup> Cf. Faber, *Becoming*, Sphere 1.
- <sup>90</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 21.
- <sup>91</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 162.
- <sup>92</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures*, 203; Faber, *Prozestheologie*, §21; *God as Poet*, part 3; *Becoming*, Exploration 10.
- <sup>93</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 28.
- <sup>94</sup> Cf. Faber, *Becoming*, Exploration 2.

- 
- <sup>95</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 104;
- <sup>96</sup> Cf. Faber, *God as Poet*, §16; *Becoming*, Sphere 3. For a comparable, but unrelated, appreciation of cosmic creativity in the Bahá'í context, cf. Johnson, "Force," 29-60.
- <sup>97</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 21.
- <sup>98</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 236; Garland, "Ultimacy," 212-38; Bracken, *Matrix*, ch. 4.
- <sup>99</sup> Whitehead, *Religion*, 92.
- <sup>100</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures*, 177.
- <sup>101</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures*, 150; Faber, *God as Poet*, §§16, 24.
- <sup>102</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures*, 265; Henning, *Ethics*.
- <sup>103</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Process*, 31-32; Faber, *God as Poet*, part 3.
- <sup>104</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 294-295.
- <sup>105</sup> Whitehead, *Religion*, 119-120.
- <sup>106</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures*, 285, 296; cf. Faber, *Divine Manifold*, chs. 1, 4, 8; *Becoming*, Sphere 4.
- <sup>107</sup> Cf. Faber, *Becoming*, Sphere 3, Exploration 10.
- <sup>108</sup> Whitehead, *Religion*, 160. As Whitehead and process theology do not necessitate only one world or a limited creation of only one finite universe, this infinity is so inscribed in Whitehead's and the process conceptualization of God and God's mutual immanence with the world that, while this understanding does not easily satisfy certain orthodox expressions of Abrahamic traditions, it allows for substantial communication with Dharmic and Daoic religions of the east.
- <sup>109</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Process*, 347; Faber, *Divine Manifold*, ch. 10.
- <sup>110</sup> Whitehead, *Religion*, 160.
- <sup>111</sup> Cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, #47, 96, 113.
- <sup>112</sup> Cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation*, ##63, 82, 109.
- <sup>113</sup> Cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Questions*, #40.
- <sup>114</sup> Cf. Faber, *Becoming*, Explorations 3, 13.
- <sup>115</sup> Whitehead, *Science*, 191-192; cf. Faber, *Garden*, 39.
- <sup>116</sup> Cf. Suchocki, *Process Eschatology*.
- <sup>117</sup> Whitehead, *Science*, 192.
- <sup>118</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Process*, 346-351; Faber, *God as Poet*, §39.
- <sup>119</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures*, 172.
- <sup>120</sup> Whitehead, *Religion*, 158.
- <sup>121</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 294-295.

- 
- <sup>122</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 349.
- <sup>123</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Process*, 351.
- <sup>124</sup> Whitehead, *Religion*, 158-159.
- <sup>125</sup> Cf. Faber, *God as Poet*, §31; *Divine Manifold*, chs. 2-3; *Becoming*, Exploration 8; *Garden*, ch. 5.
- <sup>126</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 348.
- <sup>127</sup> Cf. Faber, *Becoming*, Exploration 10.
- <sup>128</sup> Cf. Faber, “De-Ontologizing God,” 209-234; *God as Poet*, §40; *Garden*, ch. 6.
- <sup>129</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 348.
- <sup>130</sup> Cf. Faber, *God as Poet*, part 2.
- <sup>131</sup> Cf. Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, ch. 2; Hosinski, *Fact*, part 2; Faber, *God as Poet*, part 4.
- <sup>132</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 345.
- <sup>133</sup> Cf. Faber, *God as Poet*, Introduction; *Divine Manifold*, part 1.
- <sup>134</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 348.
- <sup>135</sup> Whitehead, *Religion*, 105.
- <sup>136</sup> Cf. Faber, *God as Poet*, §§38-39.
- <sup>137</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 346.
- <sup>138</sup> Cf. Faber, *God as Process*, §§16, 24, 32.
- <sup>139</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Process*, 351; *Adventures*, 295; Faber, *Becoming*, Exploration 9. This correlates to Bahá’u’lláh’s interpretation of the often monistically understood Sufi doctrine of the “unity of being”; cf. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablet of Uncompounded Reality*; Faber, “Bahá’u’lláh.”
- <sup>140</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures*, 296.
- <sup>141</sup> Whitehead, *Religion*, 155-156.
- <sup>142</sup> Whitehead, *Religion*, 154-155.
- <sup>143</sup> Cf. Momen, “God”; Cole, “Manifestation.”
- <sup>144</sup> Cf. Faber, *Garden*, ch. 1.
- <sup>145</sup> Cf. Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings*, #27.
- <sup>146</sup> Cf. Sours, *Station*.
- <sup>147</sup> Cf. Faber, *God as Poet*, §38.
- <sup>148</sup> Cf. Faber, *Becoming*, Exploration 16; *Garden*, chs. 6-7.
- <sup>149</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 167.
- <sup>150</sup> Cf. Faber “Laozi,” section 10.
- <sup>151</sup> Whitehead, *Religion*, 144.

- <sup>152</sup> Whitehead, *Religion*, 55-56. While most of the consideration of process theology, early on, develop in a Christian theological context so that the incarnation of Christ was a natural matter of reflection, that is, how in this person God and Humanity can be fully present and united without diminishing either side, the seeming “defect” (sometimes mentioned or even criticized from Christian orthodox views) that process theology was not able to “prove” the uniqueness of the Incarnation in Christ, must now be seen as its advantage: as there are infinite worlds, so is there also no reason that, expressed in process categories and in exploring Whitehead's notion of God, there should only be one Manifestation of God “in person” in either this or any other world; cf. Faber, *God as Poet*, §38.
- <sup>153</sup> Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Iqan*, part 1; Cole, “I am all the Prophets”; “Behold the Man.”
- <sup>154</sup> Whitehead, *Religion*, 57.
- <sup>155</sup> This correlates with the Bahá'í writings; cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, #21; Momen, “God.”
- <sup>156</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures*, 167.
- <sup>157</sup> Whitehead, *Adventures*, 33.
- <sup>158</sup> Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Iqan*, 257.
- <sup>159</sup> Cf. Lambden, “Background”; Saiedi, *Gate*, chs. 1, 7.
- <sup>160</sup> Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, #14.
- <sup>161</sup> Cf. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Commentary*; Momen, “Relativism,” 191-192.
- <sup>162</sup> Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, #82; Faber, *Garden*, Epilogue, section 4; the cycle of emanation and spiritualization, or arc of descent and ascent, in the Bahá'í writings, is a truly cosmic cycle, as well as a spiritual one, all at once; cf. Saiedi, *Gate*, ch. 2; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Questions*, #81; and it correlates with Whitehead's cycle (or ecology) of love; Faber, *God as Poet*, §30; *Garden*, ch. 5, section 3.
- <sup>163</sup> Cf. *Hornby*, Lights, ##907-11; Momen, “God,” 30; Faber, *Garden*, chs. 1, 5, 7. The twin star, indicating the Twin Manifestations of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are not explicated in the following comparative interpretation, although it does in no way contradict it; rather, it indicates the symbol to be that of the Manifestations of God.
- <sup>164</sup> Cf. Momen, “God,” 23-26; Faber, *Garden*, chs. 1, 5, 7.
- <sup>165</sup> Cf. Faber, *Garden*, ch. 7; Momen, “Relativism,” 197-198.
- <sup>166</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Process*, part 2, ch. 4.
- <sup>167</sup> Cf. Faber, *God as Poet*, parts 2, 3; *Becoming*, Sphere 1.
- <sup>168</sup> Cf. Faber, *God as Poet*, §24, 32; *Becoming*, Sphere 3.
- <sup>169</sup> Cf. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Questions*, #55.

- 
- <sup>170</sup> Cf. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections*, #12; *Questions*, #81; *Promulgation*, #19.
- <sup>171</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Process*, 340; Faber, *God as Poet*, §39; *Divine Manifold*, ch. 7; *Garden*, ch. 5.
- <sup>172</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 340.
- <sup>173</sup> I have explored this connection in detail in Faber, *Garden*, chs. 7-8.
- <sup>174</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 346.
- <sup>175</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Process*, 343, 350.
- <sup>176</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Process*, 350; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections*, #92; *Promulgation*, #81.
- <sup>177</sup> Cf. Momen, “God,” 27-28; “Relativism,” 192.
- <sup>178</sup> Whitehead, *Religion*, 155.
- <sup>179</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Process*, 31-32.
- <sup>180</sup> Cf. Momen, “God,” 26-27.
- <sup>181</sup> Whitehead, *Religion*, 154.
- <sup>182</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Process*, 350.
- <sup>183</sup> Whitehead, *Religion*, 154.
- <sup>184</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Process*, 346; and so does process theology; cf. Cobb, *Christ*, chs. 2-3.
- <sup>185</sup> Cf. Saiedi, *Gate*, ch. 7; Momen, “God,” 23-26.
- <sup>186</sup> Cf. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Commentary*; Momen, “God,” 23; Lambden, “Background”; Momen, “relativism,” 190-191; Faber, *Garden*, ch. 6.
- <sup>187</sup> Cf. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Questions*, ##47, 60; Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* (The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh), 101; Whitehead, *Process*, 95; *Adventures*, 236; Faber, *God as Poet*, §§35, 43.
- <sup>188</sup> Cf. Faber, “Mystical Whitehead.”
- <sup>189</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 4; Faber, *Becoming*, Exploration 16.
- <sup>190</sup> Cf. Sour, *Station*, chs. 6-7.
- <sup>191</sup> Cf. Faber, *Divine Manifold*, part 3; *Becoming*, Sphere 5; *Garden*, ch. 7.
- <sup>192</sup> Whitehead, *Process*, 351.
- <sup>193</sup> Cf. Faber, *Becoming*, Exploration 9.
- <sup>194</sup> Many interesting interreligious resonances could be harvested from such a correlation between the concept of the Manifestation of God in the Bahá’í context with Whitehead’s God and God-world relationship, some of which I have pondered on in other places. For instance, how, with such a solution, the identification of Whitehead’s God and mutual immanence with the world, the Bahá’í understanding of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity could be conceptualized; how Trinity could be understood as interreligious rendering of that God-world mutuality; how it would

explicate the mutuality of divine and human nature of the Incarnation without intermediary being (Arianism) or substance inherence (*hulul*); and how this again would fit a universal category for the consideration of a fundamental unity of religions as it would also allow to integrate Hindu categories of *saguna* and *nirguna brahman* as well as the Buddhist categories of *thatagatagarba* and the manifestations of the *dharmakaya*. Cf. Faber, *Garden*, chs. 7-8.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. Momen, “God,” 25; “Relativism,” 193.

<sup>196</sup> Cf. Faber, *God as Poet*, §38; Cobb, *Christ*, chs. 4-5.

<sup>197</sup> Cf. Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*; Cobb and Ives, eds, *Emptying God*; Griffin, *Pluralism*; McDaniel, *Gandhi’s Hope*; Faber, *God as Poet*, §32.

<sup>198</sup> Cf. Bracken, *Divine Matrix*.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. Donaldson, *Cosmologies*; Long, “Vedanta.” Yet in the same interreligious context, there also remain fascinating questions demanding further reflection. As conceptualizations integrated into the Bahá’í understanding of Manifestation, such as that of Jewish major and minor prophets, the Islamic concepts of *rasul*, *nabí*, and *walí*, but also points of contact and resonance with Buddhist and Hindu renderings of embodiments of ultimate Reality or God (“reincarnation”) in the Buddha and Krishna as well as many holy figures are plenty, one wonders about the extent to which the many *avatars* and *tulkus* can be related to the claim of the one Manifestation of God (for an era), especially if they were proclaimed *at the time and after Bahá’u’lláh*, such as that of famous holy Hindu and Sufi and Parsi figures like Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo, Shirdi Sai Baba, and Meher Baba. Cf. Faber, *Garden*, chs. 8-9.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. Whitehead, *Adventures*, 168; Momen, “God,” 24-26. Whitehead's insistence on the “immanence” of God – contrary to Platonic transcendence, which leaves only simulacra in the cosmic interchange of relationality – is, therefore, the best indication of the equivalency of Whitehead's “God” with the Bahá’í understanding of Manifestation as “God,” which, again, in both universes of discourse is identified with the Logos or Wisdom of God (*lahut*); cf. Faber, *God as Poet*, §38. This does, of course, not substitute the transcendence of the manifest “God” beyond any world; cf. Whitehead, *Process*, 93-94.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets*, #9.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. Bahá’u’lláh, *Seven Valleys* (Valley of Love).

<sup>203</sup> Cf. Laozi, *Tao De Ching* (*Dao De Jing*) verse 1; Faber, *Garden*, ch. 3.

<sup>204</sup> Cf. Faber, “Laozi.”

# The Mystery of Consciousness

## Learning from Neuroscience and Insights from Bahá'í Sacred Writings

Jena Khadem Khodadad

### Abstract

This paper limits its approach to the extensive and expansive theme of consciousness. First, it places its focus, on current knowledge on the neural basis of consciousness. It next explores the concepts of mind, soul, and rational soul gleaned from Bahá'í writings and reflects on the insights therein. This writing draws attention to an unusual supposition set forth by a few neuroscientists – that consciousness may continue after the death of the brain. This paper concludes that the concepts of mind, soul, rational soul, and consciousness are incomprehensible and that we may be facing a dimension akin to that of the quantum world.

### Introduction

Consciousness is at the center of considerable discourse and research in a variety of disciplines. Within its compass, it includes several essential realities, among them: individual 'human consciousness' and 'the collective consciousness' of humankind. Robert Lanza, a noted researcher and scientist, by introducing the concept of 'biocentrism', posits that consciousness is a fundamental

property of the universe and that the material world ‘evolved to support consciousness’; he thus views spirit rather than matter of primary importance to consciousness in the universe (See *Biocentrism*).

Consciousness in humans has intrigued multitude of scholars and researchers from numerous fields: philosophy, psychology, psychiatry, theology, and neuroscience; enigmas yet persist. Research probing consciousness has resulted in a number of theories and hypotheses; yet consciousness continues to remain a mystery. In 2005, the journal, *Science*, published a special anniversary issue that featured one hundred and twenty five questions scientists have failed to answer. The second of the two top questions was: What is the biological basis of consciousness? Now, some years after, we have reached only few understandings but are faced with yet more questions.

This article introduces one facet of the extensive field of consciousness. Its aim is to first present briefly few fundamentals on the neural basis of higher consciousness in the human. Addressing multitude of questions at the forefront of the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, and psychiatry, are neither the intent nor within the scope of this writing. This paper will next introduce the concepts of mind, soul, the rational soul, and the immortality of the soul gleaned from Bahá’í writings and will reflect on the insights therein.

There is little clarity on certain fundamental questions: Where in the brain can we locate consciousness? Is consciousness dependent on the brain or can it exist independent of it? Though at some level, answers to these questions are inconclusive, nevertheless it may be anticipated, that fundamental learning from neuroscience may provide a path toward their exploration. It is hoped that at the very least, this discussion can raise our level of consciousness about the question and puzzle of consciousness.

My interest in the theme, ‘consciousness’, is an outcome of years of teaching neuroanatomy and neuroscience to medical and graduate students. Lecture and laboratory instruction on the dissection of the human brain raised multitudes of questions on the relationship between the brain, mind, and consciousness. Intricate and fascinating

structures of the brain, each exquisitely specialized for a highly specific function, continued to intrigue me, evoking a sense of awe and wonderment. These led invariably to the resurgence of perennial questions on the purpose of human existence and the reality of human uniqueness. As Shakespeare's Hamlet had poetically expressed:

What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason!

how infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express  
and admirable!

in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god!

the beauty of the world! The paragons of animals! (*Hamlet*, act  
2, scene 2)

Dissecting, probing, identifying, and demonstrating various regions of the human brain, each exquisitely assigned to a specific function, among them: hearing, sight, olfaction, sensation, language, writing, and muscle movements, invariably instill a sense of wonderment and reverence. In particular, I remember an occasion in my brain dissection laboratory. A student with a human brain in his palm – a brain which had been made available, in a bucket, to each group of four students – approached me asking dispassionately, “how much do you pay for this?” Deeply stirred by the tone of his question, I turned to address all students – to emphasize the importance of reverence while handling, probing, dissecting and studying such invaluable specimen, as at one time these were the instruments of the thought and consciousness of their noble owners. Such priceless human brains were indeed bought at a paltry price. I continued on this theme until overwhelmed with emotion, I had to bring my comments to an end. Now, each year at the termination of such studies on human remains, a memorial service is held, dedicated to their unknown owners.

A befitting appreciation of those nameless donors of such brains finds expression through the essential knowledge humankind has gained on the marvel and workings of the human brain, in health and disease. At this point, I am moved to dedicate this article to those countless men and women whose brains I dissected and probed over many years of instruction. To them, we all remain indebted.

## Consciousness In Humans

There is a general agreement that consciousness is the state of being wakeful, conscious and self aware. How should we, more precisely, define consciousness in humans? Can we define it as the state of being aware of one's surroundings? Does this sufficiently describe human consciousness? If so, all animals have heightened awareness of their surroundings. We know, however, that there must be much more to human consciousness. Is consciousness characterized by being sensate – sentient? If so, we know that the senses of animals are significantly sharper than those of the human.

Does consciousness in humans imply the capacity to feel emotion? If so, many animals are capable of feeling and showing emotion. Does consciousness in humans imply thinking and volition? If so, it can be argued that some animals are capable of thinking and the decision to act.

Does consciousness in humans imply biographical memory and the capability of planning for the future? If so, some animals are capable of biographical memory and can plan for their future, such as: the beaver building its dam; the bird building its nest and the ant collecting and storing food for its future use. It can be argued, however, that these may be attributed to instinct – inborn pattern of behavior rather than reasoning, thinking and decision making. August Forel, a distinguished entomologist, discusses the question of consciousness. He shows that insects have highly developed sensory organs as well as memory (*Some Ants and other Insects: An Inquiry into The Psychic Powers of Animals*).

Does consciousness in humans imply the ability to feel the sufferings of others; that is the capacity for empathy? If so, there are indications that some animals are capable of empathy, such as a dog who comes to the rescue of its master, or to one in distress. Does consciousness in humans imply the ability to converse through language? If so, it can be argued that animals may have their own mode of communication, their own language.

The question remains: What do humans possess that is over and above the consciousness of lower animals? 'Abdu'l-Bahá provides definitive answers to this question: The human has the unique power

of rational, analytical thinking and reasoning. The distinguishing feature, ‘the power of intellectual investigation into the mysteries of outer phenomena’, endows to the human a station beyond lower animals.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserts:

*[H]uman – the highest specialized organism of visible creation, embodying the qualities of the mineral, vegetable and animal plus an ideal endowment absolutely absent in the lower kingdoms – the power of intellectual investigation into the mysteries of outer phenomena. The outcome of this intellectual endowment is science, which is especially characteristic of man. This scientific power investigates and apprehends created objects and the laws surrounding them. It is the discoverer of the hidden and mysterious secrets of the material universe and is peculiar to man alone. The most noble and praiseworthy accomplishment of man, therefore, is scientific knowledge and attainment. [PUP 29]*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá emphasizes that man’s hallmark is love of transcendence:

*Praise be to God! Man ever aspires to greater heights and loftier goals. He ever seeks to attain a world surpassing that which he inhabits, and to ascend to a degree above that which he occupies. This love of transcendence is one of the hallmarks of man. [SAQ 217]*

Fundamental to higher consciousness in humans, is the state of being conscious of one’s reality. That reality, lacking in animals, is the human spirit.

*This spirit, which in the terminology of philosophers is called the rational soul’, encompasses all things, and as far as human capacity permits, discovers their realities and becomes aware of the properties and effects, the characteristics and conditions of earthly things. [SAQ 242]*

### ***Association of consciousness with the brain***

We now come to a puzzling and unavoidable question: Is consciousness associated with the brain? As we strive to grasp the meaning of consciousness, it must be recognized that not all neuroscientists are in agreement on the extent to which consciousness is associated with the brain. Few propose that consciousness may not be a byproduct of the brain and that the brain's job is simply to facilitate a dynamic pattern of interactions among the body, brain, and the world.

### ***Elements indispensable to the state of being conscious***

There is a general agreement that the body (a person), the self, the brain, and the mind are indispensable to the state of being conscious. Antonio Damasio, a distinguished neuroscientist, in his recent book, discusses and elaborates on three developmental levels of the Self; these he names successively: the Protoself, the Core self and the Autobiographical self (see *Self Comes to Mind*). Though we may not wish to dwell on his logic and arguments, regarding these levels of the Self, nevertheless it is evident that a self is essential for being conscious. The brain, the source of neuronal activity, is also necessary to consciousness and the mind is fundamental to being conscious.

Though the relationship of the brain to the mind and the relationship of the mind to consciousness have been extensively discussed, these yet remain enigmas. How should we define the mind? There is a general understanding that the mind includes perception, thinking, judgment, memory and consciousness. Yet there is not an agreement on what the mind is and whether the concept 'mind' also applies to animals or is it restricted to the human? Some believe that animals also have a mind. Others may argue that the general concept of mind is exclusive to the human and yet others link the mind to the human soul. Furthermore, there are a number of philosophical schools of thought, with varying viewpoints on the relationship between the brain and the mind. These range from the dualism of Rene Descartes to several other viewpoints. The view promoted by Descartes was that of 'substance dualism of mind and brain'; that is the mind is a nonphysical substance and separate from the brain.

Is the mind emergent from the brain as many neuroscientists believe? If so, what does ‘emergent’ signify? We understand through insights imparted by Bahá’í writings, that ‘emergent’ does not describe the relationship between the brain and mind. The term ‘manifests’ is more suitable. Between emergent and manifests is a subtle but critical difference. Emergent implies emerging or rising from; that is coming into existence, being produced by the brain, whereas ‘manifests’ implies displaying, revealing, or making known. Though the structure of the brain and its activity contribute to the mind, the brain must also manifest the mind. In explanation of this point, we can consider that if the brain becomes defective, it cannot manifest the mind, though we understand that the mind, nevertheless exists.

We can now look briefly at the human brain and several of its neuro-anatomical structures that are essential to consciousness, before we reflect further on the concepts of mind, soul, and rational soul in Bahá’í writings.

## The Neural Basis of Consciousness

The five lobes of the human brain – frontal, parietal, temporal, occipital, and limbic – can be readily examined and studied in a number of views of the brain: superior, basal, lateral and sagittal – a view obtained through a cut that yields two symmetrical halves, the right and the left hemispheres.

The external surface of the human brain displays an impressive abundance of intricate folds and furrows. The folds, called gyri (plural of gyrus), are separated by furrows called sulci (plural of sulcus). Folds significantly increase the surface area of the brain. This leads to the question: Is increase in surface area key to higher consciousness in humans? In response, we know that the brain of a large non human mammal, a whale, has more cortical folds and greater surface area than that of the human brain. Can we conclude that the whale has a level of consciousness higher than the human? We know that the total number of neurons in the cortex of a Minke whale is 12.8 billion.<sup>1</sup> This is 13 times that of the rhesus monkey and 500 times more than a rat, but only two thirds of the human. Thus, the surface area of the brain of the whale is more extensive than the

human, but the number of neurons are fewer. However, neither the surface area of the brain, nor the number of neurons can explain the higher level of consciousness in the human. There must be more to the story; the mystery of human consciousness goes far beyond folds and neurons. Other factors make humans unique.

The internal structure of the brain examined on a horizontal section – made at right angle ( $90^\circ$ ) to the long axis of the body – reveals two distinct areas: an outer area of gray coloration, called ‘cortex’, surrounding an inner area of white coloration, called ‘medulla’.

The Cortex, often referred to, as the ‘Gray matter’, includes neurons and supporting cells called glia. The Medulla, often referred to, as the ‘White matter’, contains mostly axons; these are the long projections of neurons specialized for conducting nerve impulse. Axons are surrounded by a covering, a sheath of insulation made of myelin. Myelin is composed of fatty material; thus it imparts a white coloration to the medulla.

Gray matter comes in two varieties: layered in cerebral cortex and cerebellar cortex and nonlayered, made up of aggregations of neurons, called “nuclei”. Nuclei are distributed throughout the central nervous system and have essential functions.

**Neurons.** The brain has billions of neurons; neurons make trillions of connections among themselves. Connections are made according to patterns. Such patterns constitute a wiring diagram, or depending on the sector of the brain, many wiring diagrams. The billions of neurons are organized in circuits, some are very small microcircuits. When many microcircuits are put together they form a region. Collection of axons with common origin and destination form tracts. Neurons come in a variety of sizes but all are variations on the same theme. Each neuron has three main anatomical parts: cell body, dendrites, and axon. Neurons are connected with one another through the highly specialized synapse. Neurons can be non active or active; active neurons fire as a result of voltage change. A neuron fires, due to change in electrical potential, known as ‘action potential’ which is propagated from the cell body and down its axon. When the firing current arrives at a synapse, it triggers the release of chemicals known as neurotransmitters, synthesized by neurons.

We are now faced with an intriguing question. How do neurons with such impressive structures, intricate machinery, extensive connections and rapid firing at the rate of  $10^{27}$  operations per second, contribute to consciousness? Electroencephalograms (EEG) show significant brain activity with continuous waves sweeping across it. These prompt a fundamental question: Is consciousness simply a drifting wave of electrical currents over widespread areas of the brain or is there more to consciousness? Where in the brain can we locate consciousness?

### **Where in the brain does consciousness reside?**

Studies in neuroscience tell us that consciousness is associated with the brain but it does not reside in a single entity in any part of the brain. The brain *facilitates* but does not *store* consciousness. Few neuroscientists go so far as to say that the brain does not actually produce consciousness.

We know that a normal intact cerebrum is incapable of functioning in a conscious manner by itself. The brainstem – the stem like connection at the base of the brain between the cerebrum and the spinal cord – plays a lead role in consciousness (*The Human Brain, An Introduction to its Functional Anatomy* 283). Sustaining input is required from a structure in the brainstem, called ‘the reticular formation’.<sup>2</sup> The portion of the reticular formation that provides the required input for consciousness is known as the ‘ascending reticular activating system’. It is known that the modulation of this system has a basic role in sleep and wakefulness and that bilateral damage to its neurons and nerve fibers passing through it results in prolonged coma.

When the significant role of the brainstem in consciousness was first discovered and established, neuroscientists found it quite surprising that the brainstem, considered the more primitive part of the brain, should play a lead function in consciousness, rather than the well developed and highly evolved part of cerebrum, known as neocortex.<sup>3</sup>

Consciousness is the result of massive integration of signals across many regions in the brain. Neuroscientists speak of the ‘triads of conscious mind’; the brainstem, the thalamus<sup>4</sup> and the cerebrum

contribute to what is known as ‘the conscious mind triad.’ There are few other structures involved in consciousness: the hypothalamus <sup>5</sup>, amygdala <sup>6</sup> and hippocampus.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the spinal cord sensory and motor reflexes are required for being fully conscious.

## **Levels of consciousness**

Different levels in state of consciousness exhibit different electroencephalograms (EEG) (See *Clinical Neuroanatomy and Neuroscience* 333). Electroencephalograms are graphic records of the electrical activity of the brain. Five types of waves, measured as cycles per second, are described during various states of consciousness. From the fastest waves to the slowest, these are: gamma waves (during meditation and active thought); beta waves (during attentive wakefulness); alpha waves (during resting wakefulness with eyes closed); theta waves are widespread and recorded during drowsiness and sleep or trance; and delta waves, (slow wave sleep) are widespread and recorded during deep sleep.

## **Certain Bahá’í Concepts That Relate to Consciousness**

Having briefly referred to few neuro-anatomical components that are fundamental to consciousness, we can now turn to insights provided by the Bahá’í concepts of the mind, the spirit, the soul, and the rational soul. Though of little interest to neuroscientists, these are fundamental to the reality and uniqueness of human consciousness.

In reflecting on these concepts and their current usage in Bahá’í writings, we face several challenges as well as barriers. It is important to recognize that the terminologies used in Bahá’í texts are translations from the original Persian into English, of concepts which are in essence: profound, shrouded with numerous understandings, and surrounded with layers of meaning. Furthermore, several rounds of translation, over time, have added to this complexity. Therefore, in these discussions we face the challenge of translation of concepts whose depths are difficult to plumb. At the same time, we are encouraged to reflect and meditate on them, perchance we can uncover some of the mysteries therein.

In Bahá'í writings, the terms: 'mind', 'soul', 'rational soul', as well as 'spirit' are frequently used. How should we relate these to the concept of 'consciousness', in vogue in our times? Does the term, 'consciousness' as used in neuroscience and other related disciplines, resonate with the Bahá'í concepts of mind, soul and specially with the rational soul – an entity we believe endures beyond the death of the brain? It should be noted that few neuroscientists have used expressions, such as: 'the continuing of consciousness' and 'endless consciousness' (*Consciousness Beyond Life* 245, 283). We can reasonably infer that these allude to an entity which survives the death of the brain and continues on. Avoiding the word, 'soul', used by followers of many religions, they employ such innocuous terms. These clearly imply belief in an entity which can endure beyond the death of the brain. Several eminent neuroscientists, such as Penfield and Eccles, unabashedly declare their conviction in the immortality of the human soul, as presented further down below.

Can we relate these to the concepts: 'soul', 'rational soul' or 'spirit' found in Bahá'í writings? In these sacred texts, 'soul' and 'rational soul' take on additional significance and specific meaning. It is of value to probe and discuss these concepts while remaining mindful of the challenges of translations and the incomprehensibility of their essence.

## **Does Consciousness Survive the Death of the Brain?**

As we reflect on consciousness in humans, we are faced with an inescapable question: Does consciousness survive the death of the brain? Where does consciousness go after the death of the brain? Where does the mind go after the death of the brain? Classic Studies on death and dying can provide few valuable insights. Elizabeth Kubler Ross and Raymond Moody are credited with introducing this theme, thus encouraging the development of a sizable literature on the question: Does some mode of consciousness endure the death of the brain?

In response to this question, several noted neuroscientist have expressed their convictions. Wilder Penfield, based on a lifetime of experience in neurosurgery and research, came to the understanding

of the duality of brain and mind. He considered the nature of the mind a mystery and believed in its immortality. He writes that in order to survive after death, the mind must establish a connection with the source of energy other than the brain.

If, however, during life, when the brain and mind are awake, direct communication is sometimes established with the minds of other men or with the mind of God, then it is clear that energy from without can reach a man's mind. In that case, it is not unreasonable for him to hope that after death the mind may waken to another source of energy. (*The Mystery of the Mind: A Critical Study of Consciousness and the Human Brain*, 88)

Sir John Eccles, neurophysiologist, recipient of Nobel prize for his research on the neuron and its synapse, became a staunch believer in the reality of the human soul. Based on his experiments on brain-mind relationship, he came to the belief that the conscious selfhood of man is endowed with an immortal soul. He writes poetically about the uniqueness and immortality of the human soul (*Evolution of the Brain: Creation of the Self* 238, 243).

On the spiritual reality of the human, he writes.

I maintain that the human mystery is incredibly demeaned by scientific reductionism, with its claim in promissory materialism to account eventually for all of the spiritual world in terms of patterns of neuronal activity. This belief must be classed as superstition ...we have to recognize that we are spiritual beings with souls existing in a spiritual world as well as material beings with bodies and brains existing in a material world. (*Evolution of the Brain: Creation of the Self* 241)

Eccles expresses unequivocally, his belief in the human Soul:

Since materialistic solutions fail to account for our experienced uniqueness, I am constrained to attribute the uniqueness of the Self or Soul to a supernatural spiritual creation. To give the explanation in theological terms, each soul is a new Divine Creation which is implanted into the

growing fetus at some time between conception and birth.  
*(Evolution of the Brain: Creation of the Self 237)*

## Insights from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

We can now turn to the insights ‘Abdu’l-Bahá provides in His Tablet to Professor August Henri Forel, a distinguished Swiss entomologist. Forel was also an eminent neuroscientist who had made significant discoveries on the structure of the human brain – the deep connections named after him, as “Fields of Forel”. Professor Forel wrote to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In response, he received a letter known as ‘The Tablet of Forel’. In this Tablet, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes significant contributions to the discussion of consciousness. Subsequently, August Forel professed his belief in the Bahá’í Faith, both in his writings as well as in his will.

Forel wrote:

“This is the true religion of human social good, without dogma or priests, uniting all men on this small terrestrial globe of ours.” I have become a Bahá’í. May this religion live and prosper for the good of mankind, this is my most ardent wish. *(For the Good of Mankind, August Forel, 18 and Baha’i World Volume 18, 970)*

In this Tablet, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, with scientific and spiritual logic, proves the existence of God and expounds on the reality of the human soul, mind, and spirit. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá affirms that the soul is: limitless, changeless, free from all agencies, has full strength, continues to exist despite loss of reason and is imperishable. The following are few quotes from this Tablet.

*The soul hath limitless manifestations of its own.*

*The soul changeth not. It dependeth not upon the body. It is through the power of the soul that the mind comprehendeth, imagineth and exerteth its influence,*

*The soul is a power that is free from all agencies. The soul as thou observest, whether it be in sleep or waking, is in motion*

*and ever active. Possibly it may, whilst in a dream, unravel an intricate problem, incapable of solution in the waking state.*

*The soul is ever endowed with full strength.*

*Despite the loss of reason, the power of the soul would still continue to exist. The soul hath limitless manifestations of its own. [TAF 37-43]*

In the Tablet to Forel, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá draws a connection between the mind and the soul but also makes distinctions between the two. He explains that ‘concerning mental faculties, they are inherent properties of the soul’ and likens the connection of the mind to the soul as to the connection of rays of the sun to the sun. He asserts that: mental faculties can change but the soul is changeless; the mind is limited, but the soul is without limits; and that the mind comprehends ‘*by the aid of such senses as those of sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch*’ while ‘*the soul is free from all agencies.*’ He further explains that the soul is in motion and active whether in sleep or waking.’ It can dream and unravel mysteries, whereas the mind ‘*understandeth not whilst the senses have ceased to function*’ and asserts that ‘*the soul is ever endowed with full strength.*’ [TAF 37-43]

Therefore, we understand that the soul is changeless, limitless and independent of the senses while the mind is limited, dependent on senses and subject to change. Yet the mind has essential connection to the soul. Despite the loss of reason, the power of the soul continues to exist.

It is important to note that both terms: ‘soul’ and ‘rational soul’ are used throughout Bahá’í writings, at times interchangeably. Rational soul can be viewed as the soul of man, endowed with higher consciousness. We understand from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s writings that the terms ‘spirit’ and ‘rational soul’ both refer to the human soul, distinct from the soul of animals lower than the human.

As to the relationship of the rational soul to the body, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá responds to the following question: “After the body has been cast off and the spirit has taken flight, through what will the rational soul subsist?”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s answer:

*Some hold that the body is the substance and that it subsists by itself, and that the spirit is an accident which subsists through the substance of the body. The truth, however, is that the rational soul is the substance through which the body subsists. If the accident – the body – is destroyed, the substance – the spirit – remains. [SAQ 276]*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá continues his response to this seminal question, shedding further insights on the association of the rational soul with the body:

*Secondly, the rational soul, or the human spirit, does not subsist through this body by inherence – that is to say, it does not enter it; for inherence and entrance are characteristics of bodies, and the rational soul is sanctified above this. It never entered this body to begin with, that it should require, upon leaving it, some other abode. No, the connection of the spirit with the body is even as the connection of this lamp with a mirror. If the mirror is polished and perfected, the light of the lamp appears therein, and if the mirror is broken or covered with dust, the light remains concealed. [SAQ 276-277]*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá expounds further on this theme:

*The rational soul – that is to say, the human spirit – has neither entered this body nor existed through it to begin with, that it should require some substance to depend upon after the constituent parts of the body have decomposed. On the contrary, the rational soul is the substance through which the body depends. The rational soul is endowed from the beginning with individuality; it does not acquire it through the intermediary of the body. At most, what can be said is that the individuality and identity of the rational soul may be strengthened in this world, and that the soul may either progress and attain to the degrees of perfection or remain in the lowest abyss of ignorance and be veiled from and deprived from beholding the signs of God. [SAQ 277]*

That entity which survives the death of the brain, is the immortal human soul. Life after death is discussed in numerous passages from the vast treasury of Bahá'í Writings on this theme.

Baha'u'llah describes the transition at death, as an unveiling:

*O My servants! Sorrow not if, in these days and on this earthly plane, things contrary to your wishes have been ordained and manifested by God, for days of blissful joy, of heavenly delight, are assuredly in store for you. Worlds, holy and spiritually glorious, will be unveiled to your eyes. [GWB 329]*

As to the state of the human soul, Baha'u'llah affirms:

*Verily I say, the human soul is exalted above all egress and regress. It is still, and yet it soareth; it moveth, and yet it is still. It is, in itself, a testimony that beareth witness to the existence of a world that is contingent, as well as to the reality of a world that hath neither beginning nor end. [GWB 162]*

We understand, from numerous passages in Bahá'í writings, that a departed soul can make discoveries in the 'heavenly' world and be informed of mysteries. Departed souls can be conscious of one another, associate, commune and be aware of one another's state and condition [GWB 169-170]. We understand that the departed soul can remember its earthly life and recognize persons with whom it had been associated.

However, through insights provided in the Tablet of Forel, we also understand that memory is an attribute of the mind and that the mind is dependent on the senses. Here, we face an enigma which compels us to reflect on the relationship of mind and memory to the soul. Such matters are mysteries and are ultimately paradoxical.

## **The Enigma of Consciousness**

We are faced with enigmas on two fronts:

On one front, in neuroscience, we are faced with an enigma in understanding the relationship of neurons and their connections to

mind and consciousness and that neither the mind nor consciousness can be located in the brain.

On another front, we are faced with the enigma of relationships between the mind and the rational soul. Notwithstanding the complexities of semantics and translation of concepts, their nature and essence remain elusive and incomprehensible. Baha'u'llah writes:

*Thou hast asked Me about the nature of the soul. Know verily that the soul, is a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel.* [GWB 158]

At some level, these mysteries are paradoxical. Paradoxes are intrinsic to the nature and essence of reality. Reality is vast and multi dimensional; thus it can never be fully explained, fully stated nor fully grasped. In the quantum world, light is both particle and wave; this is clearly a paradox. As we attempt to explore these concepts and the insights therein, it is likely that we may be facing mysteries comparable to those of a quantum world, as proposed by several neuroscientists.

## **Consciousness may be on the edge between the quantum and classical worlds**

It has been suggested that observations and findings in quantum mechanics, may bear relevance to the relationships between the brain, mind, soul, and consciousness. Few, among such phenomena are: complementarity, quantum entanglement, nonlocality, the uncertainty principle and ‘the observer effect’. A brief reference to these follows.

The phenomenon of complementarity, is demonstrated by the behavior of light which acts either as particle or as wave – never both at the same time – depending on the design of the experiment. Quantum entanglement, implies that a pair (or pairs) of particles generated from the same source remain correlated, intimately and permanently connected. Nonlocality, is an outcome of entanglement, as entangled particles remain connected over time and space creating

non local relationships. Their connection is such that when one particle is measured or manipulated, its counterpart is affected instantaneously, regardless of the distance that separates them. The uncertainty principle, known as Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, is a fundamental property of wavelike systems, such as the quantum system. It places limits on precision in which measurements can be made of particle position and momentum. Furthermore, 'the observer effect' contributes to uncertainty in measurements as it implies that the mere measurements of certain systems can fundamentally alter the observed object.

Einstein, the co-founder of the quantum mechanic theory, referred to nonlocal action – an absurdity of the quantum world – a 'spooky action at a distance'. Among many who have expounded on this theme, are Robert Lanza (*Biocentrism; How Life and Consciousness are Keys to Understanding the True Nature of Universe*) and most recently, George Musser (*Spooky Action at a Distance*).

In summary- Consciousness may be at the edge, between the quantum and classical worlds. Realities exist in multiple states simultaneously: unified but separated realities remain connected over time; multiple realities can condense into one unified entity; precise location and momentum of quantum realities are indeterminate. The quantum world is a world difficult to comprehend, as expressed by Richard Feynman, Nobel Prize physicist in 1965, "I think I can safely say that nobody understands quantum mechanics."<sup>8</sup>

## Conclusion

Human consciousness, remains a mystery. The concepts of mind, rational soul, and spirit can be probed, reflected on and explored in order to garner the insights therein. At some level, however, these remain elusive as our brains are limited and can grasp only partially and incompletely. Our senses are limited: our vision can only detect a limited range of the electromagnetic spectrum and our hearing only a limited range of frequency.<sup>9</sup>

In trying to grasp the mystery of consciousness, we arrive at an impasse. While yet in this earthly plane of existence, we can not overpass this limit. We can, nonetheless, continue to seek understanding, inspiration, enlightenment and contentment from the

rich treasury of Bahá'í writings on the reality of the human soul, its immortality and progress in the realms beyond.

This article started with, “The Mystery of Consciousness” and concludes with, “The Enigma of Consciousness”. With a sense of reverence, we stand in awe before the mysteries of the mind, consciousness, soul, and the functioning of the human brain – its billions of neurons and trillions of synapses and the rapid firing of its neuron, at the rate of  $10^{27}$  operations per second.

Sir John Eccles has suggested that the body and the brain may be regarded as a superb computer, with the Soul or Self as its programmer? (*Evolution of the Brain: Creation of the Self* 238). The metaphor of the brain as computer has few proponents as well as numerous opponents.

It has been expressed: “Nothing rendered in silicon even remotely resembles a conscious mind.”<sup>10</sup>

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Damasio, Antonio. *Self Comes to Mind: Constructing the Conscious Brain*. Vintage Books, a Division of Random House, Inc. New York, 2012
- Dehaene, Stanislas. *Consciousness and the Brain: Deciphering How the Brain Codes Our Thoughts*. Penguin Books, 2014
- Eccles, John C. *Evolution of the Brain: Creation of the Self*, Routledge, New York, 1991
- Fitzgerald, M.J. Turlough, Gruener, Gregory, Muti, Estomi. *Clinical Neuroanatomy and Neuroscience*, Elsevier, Saunders, Fifth Edition, 2007
- Forel, August. *Some Ants and other Insects: An Inquiry into The Psychic Powers of Animals*, translated from German by Professor William Morton Wheeler, American Museum of History, New York, Chicago, The Open Court Publishing, 1904
- Goldberg, Elkhonon, *The Wisdom Paradise*, Gotham Books, Published by Penguin Group, 2005
- Kubler Ross, Elizabeth. *Is There Life After Death*. Scribner Classics, N.Y., 1969
- Lanza, Robert and Berman, Bob. *Biocentrism; How Life and Consciousness are Keys to Understanding the True Nature of Universe*. Benbella Books, Inc, Dallas, TX, 2009

- Lommel, Pim Van. *Consciousness Beyond Life*. Harper One, an Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2010
- Musser, George. *Spooky Action at a Distance*. Scientific American, Farrar, Straus and Giroux. New York, 2016
- Nolte, John. *The Human Brain, An Introduction to its Functional Anatomy*, Sixth Edition, Mosby Elsevier, 2008
- Penfield, Wilder. *The Mystery of the Mind: A Critical Study of Consciousness and the Human Brain*. Princeton University Press, 1975
- Vader, John Paul. *For the Good of Mankind, August Forel and the Bahá'í Faith*., George Ronald Oxford, 1984
- 

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> [blogs.scientificamerican.com/news-blog/are-whales-smarter-than-we-are](https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/news-blog/are-whales-smarter-than-we-are)
- <sup>2</sup> Reticular formation is a diffuse network of neurons and nerve pathways in the brainstem
- <sup>3</sup> Neocortex is the part of cerebral cortex which serves as the center of higher functions in humans.
- <sup>4</sup> Among the numerous functions of thalamus is: It acts as relay between different subcortical areas and the cerebral cortex..
- <sup>5</sup> Hypothalamus is part of the brain, below thalamus, concerned with body temperature, hunger, thirst and other autonomic functions.
- <sup>6</sup> Gray matter (neurons) inside each cerebral hemisphere involved in experiencing emotions
- <sup>7</sup> The hippocampus plays an important role: in consolidation of information from short term memory to long term memory; and in spatial memory.
- <sup>8</sup> See Richard Feynman, *the Character of Physical Law*. MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1995, 129
- <sup>9</sup> Between 20- and 20000 KHz
- <sup>10</sup> J. McFadden. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 9 (4):23-50, 2002.

# Sow the Seeds of My Divine Wisdom in the Pure Soil of Thy Heart

## Towards Coordinating Langs' Communicative Approach of Psychoanalysis with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh

Wolfgang Klebel

A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi in 1949<sup>1</sup> states the following:

It seems what we need now is a more profound and coordinated Bahá'í scholarship in order to attract such men as you are contacting.

The world has—at least the thinking world—caught up by now with all the great and universal principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh over 70 years ago, and so of course it does not sound “new” to them. But we know that the deeper teachings, the capacity of His projected World Order to re-create society, are new and dynamic. It is these we must learn to present intelligently and enticingly to such men!

What was true then is even more true today, almost 70 years later.

The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell

others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world. [SCHC 4]

The Universal House of Justice, the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, stated on 6 February 1973 the following about psychology:

Psychology is still a very young and inexact science, and as the years go by Bahá'í psychologists, who know from the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh the true pattern of human life, will be able to make great strides in the development of this science, and will help profoundly in the alleviation of human suffering. [SCHC 12]

The Guardian stated in a letter written on his behalf:

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. [SCHC 18]

While psychology is not mentioned here, it certainly is included as one of the areas of study that must be correlated with the Bahá'í teachings. Therefore, it must be seen as an obligation for a psychologist who is a Bahá'í and has studied one of these sciences to make an effort to correlate these areas of human knowledge with the Bahá'í faith.

The purpose of this paper is to show another unexpected finding in this search for correlating between today's "thinking world" and the Bahá'í Revelation. A known psychoanalyst, Robert Langs, who wrote many volumes about his form of psychoanalytic practice, which he calls the Communicative or Adaptive Approach, authored a book late in his life about psychoanalysis and religion. He applied his psychoanalytic technique to religious writings. He came up with surprising ideas. Reading the book *Beyond Yahweh and Jesus*,

*Bringing Death's Wisdom to Faith, Spirituality, and Psychoanalysis*<sup>2</sup> gave birth to the following thoughts.

Robert Langs talks about divine wisdom and indicates that it is a moral guidance of high quality and is placed in the unconscious mind, only reachable by a specific psychoanalytic technique he calls *trigger decoding*. While obviously having no idea of the Bahá'í Faith, and not understanding Progressive Revelation and the fact that all Manifestation are limited by the capacity of their audiences, he appears to reach conclusions consistent with the Bahá'í Writings about his interpretation of divine wisdom and the placement of it in the deep unconscious mind. Obviously, his understanding of religion was limited by the prevailing Christian faith he was familiar with. The mentioning of the idea of divine wisdom immediately brought to attention the use this term has in the Bahá'í Faith.

Bahá'u'lláh, in His Writings frequently refers to "Divine Wisdom," and clearly places it into the human heart, like in this Hidden Word:

*O SON OF MY HANDMAID!*

*Quaff from the tongue of the merciful the stream of divine mystery, and behold from the dayspring of divine utterance the unveiled splendor of the daystar of wisdom.*

*Sow the seeds of My divine wisdom in the pure soil of the heart, and water them with the waters of certitude, that the hyacinths of knowledge and wisdom may spring up fresh and green from the holy city of the heart. [HW 78]*

He further connects divine wisdom with consultation and compassion, indicating human mutual consultation as an element in this Wisdom.

*The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion ... [TB 126]*

From this understanding, the bridge can be made to the psychoanalytic therapy, which in Langs' approach is communicative

and brings new truth from the unconscious to the conscious mind when practiced with compassion and understanding.

This presentation makes the daring assumption that the concept of Divine Wisdom in the Bahá'í Writings can be coordinated with the same concept in the writings of Robert Langs. This can help us to not only better understand Langs' writings, but also to understand the Bahá'í Revelation in a new way, as reflected in modern psychology.

It is this author's opinion that the psychoanalytic unconscious can be placed in the heart since in heart transplants dream memories have been transplanted with the physical heart. With this assumption a better understanding of psychology is possible and the findings of the HeartMath Institute about the human heart are supported as well.

The Bahá'í Writings use the word heart frequently and even state that the heart is the seat of the Divine Revelation. Usually, this is understood as a metaphorical use of the term heart. In this paper a different interpretation is presented, which is only the opinion of this author, and is presented to the Bahá'í Community for consultative critique. As has been presented in previous papers the author understands the Bahá'í concept heart not in a metaphorical sense, but rather believes that the physical heart with its nervous system is used by the rational faculty as an instrument, like the brain is used in the same way as Bahá'u'lláh stated when talking about the mind.

*Say: Spirit, mind, soul, and the powers of sight and hearing are but one single reality which hath manifold expressions owing to the diversity of its instruments. [SLH 235]*

This is understood by this author as meaning that all senses and the brain and the heart are inspired or are used by the human spirit as instruments to express what the spirit or soul of man intends to express in thought, word, or action. It appears to this author that Bahá'u'lláh sees the unity of man in a new way and it is difficult to express this in our present-day way of thinking and many attempts will have to be made to present a better understanding of this truth, as can be done in this paper.

This kind of coordination is valuable, and recommended by Shoghi Effendi. It is leading to a deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and assists the teaching efforts of scholars as well.

Langs, who seemed to be unaware of the Bahá'í Writings, recommended something that was already revealed and had been part of the Bahá'í Faith for over a hundred years. He did not know that what he predicted for the future was already expressed and happening in a religious community. What is new about his approach is the fact that he believed that this wisdom lies in the deep unconscious of the human mind.

When the assumption is made that the deep unconscious mind of Langs is in the heart—and we will develop this thought below—both the heart as described in the Bahá'í Writings and the deep unconscious mind as explained by Langs can be correlated for a better understanding of both the heart and the unconscious mind.

Religion must not only add divine psychological wisdom to its belief system, it also must be able to find gentle but firm ways to enforce our deep unconscious moral guidelines....

For the new religion, this much needed moral enforcer should be modeled on our deep unconscious system of morality and ethics....

Showing humankind, the grim reality of such unconsciously orchestrated punishments is likely to be one of the most fearsome messages delivered by the new version of God to which this book is pointing.

This last sentence Langs formulated after he analyzed the story of Cain and Abel in the Bible, where he found that evil deeds have punishment as an internal unconscious consequence.

Bahá'u'lláh stated: *"The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion."* This appears to indicate that the role of communicative therapy, which could be understood as a special form of consultation, is important to the understanding of divine wisdom. Additionally, Bahá'u'lláh stated that *"the canopy of world order is upraised upon the two pillars of reward*

*and punishment*" [TB 126], the understanding of which does underscore what Langs found in analyzing the biblical stories of the Old and New Testament. Langs described at length the connection between denial of death and violent action, and attributes this to our unconscious mind. What is an unusual occurrence is the fact that Langs was not a religious person most of his life and he mentioned this fact in his book. But what he found in analyzing his patients made him eventually believe in the truth of religion and in the importance of it.

According to Langs, all these processes are in the unconscious mind. The conscious mind ignores these facts, but deep down we know, and psychoanalysis brings these motives into the open. Langs makes a very interesting statement. He connects death anxiety with evil and immorality when talking about the Garden of Eden, stating it this way.

Finally, it is well to notice that while wisdom, sin, and death are at issue, neither evil nor morality are as yet manifest in the picture. This too speaks for failed wisdom and unmastered death anxiety as the fundamentals from which evil and immorality emerge. [Langs, 76]

This coordination of the writings of a psychoanalyst with the Bahá'í Faith is one small step towards a more profound and coordinated Bahá'í scholarship as indicated by the Guardian.

## Correlation

Shoghi Effendi uses this word whenever he talks about scholarship and the need to correlate the Bahá'í Writings with modern thought and thinking. What does this mean, and how do we have to understand it? Merriam-Webster, among other dictionaries, defines the word *correlate* this way:

A phenomenon that accompanies another, also paralleling it, and being related in some way to it.

Further, the word *correlation* is defined this way:

The state or relation of being correlated; specifically: a relation existing between phenomena or things or between mathematical or statistical variables which tend to vary, be associated, or occur together in a way not expected on the basis of chance alone.

This seems to be the way Shoghi Effendi understood this word, and this is the way it will be used in this paper. We talk about a relationship between phenomena that is not expected on the basis of chance alone but is based on a real relationship. The relationship between ideas and thoughts that constitutes such a correlation is an internal relationship in this case because we can exclude any physical or external relation, since most of these modern thinkers we quote as being correlated with thoughts expressed in the Bahá'í Writings did not know these writings.

Consequently, we must explain how a correlation can exist without a physical or external relationship.

If there is the possibility that ideas expressed in the Bahá'í Writings are correlated with ideas of today's thinkers, we must consider the following facts.

1. According to Shoghi Effendi, there is a relationship between the Bahá'í Writings and thoughts of modern thinkers, there is a correlation.
2. These ideas and thoughts occur together.
3. This relationship is not accidental or a product of chance alone.
4. Logically, this relationship can be caused either by a dependency of one side on the other or by a mutual third party influencing both sides of the correlation.
5. Considering the case of the Bahá'í Writings and modern thinkers, most of these thinkers had never heard about the Bahá'í Faith or read any of the Writings
6. If there was no direct influence from the Writings to modern thinkers, how can this relationship be explained?

Bahá'u'lláh gives us the explanation.

*Erelong shall We bring into being through thee exponents of new and wondrous sciences, of potent and effective crafts, and shall make manifest through them that which the heart of none of Our servants hath yet conceived. Thus, do We bestow upon whom We will whatsoever We desire, and thus do We withdraw from whom We will what We had once bestowed.* [SLH 35]

In this statement, it is revealed that the power of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh creates these modern sciences and new thoughts and gives it to whomever He decides. Here is the talk of a spiritual influence that creates new understanding, knowledge, and sciences and crafts—or we could say technologies—that were unheard of before. When it is proven that there were ideas expressed in the Bahá'í Writings and 50 or 100 years later the same ideas surfaced in modern writers who never heard of the Bahá'í Faith, what must be assumed? Especially when these writers very painstakingly documented every source in their writings and never even mentioned anything about Bahá'í Writings. What must we think?

Sometimes ideas surface in more than one place.

*Physical nearness or remoteness is of no importance; the essential fact is the spiritual affinity and ideal nearness. Judas Iscariot was for a long time favored in the holy court of His Holiness Christ, yet he was entirely far and remote; while Paul, the apostle, was in close embrace with His Holiness.* [TAB3, 719]

Here we are reminded by 'Abdu'l-Bahá that it is not the physical contact, or the actual physical texts read between writers that makes a correlation of ideas possible, but that there can be a nearness of ideas and spiritual affinity that can be the cause of such a correlation. If these modern writers had never read one sentence of the Bahá'í Revelation, there still can be a spiritual affinity and a nearness of ideas expressed that becomes evident in closer observation and studies. The example of the Apostle Paul explains that fact. He only saw Jesus in a vision, never heard him talk, and he still was so close to his ideas that he is regarded as his apostle. Naturally, he did hear about Jesus when he was introduced into the Christin faith after his

conversion. On the other hand, Judas heard every word of Jesus directly and was not following Him but betrayed his Master.

There is, we must assume, a spiritual transition of ideas possible between people who have never met. This is what Bahá'u'lláh indicates when stating that He brings into the world "*wondrous sciences, potent and effective crafts*" (SLH 35) through any people, scientists, and business people, not necessarily through Bahá'ís who believe in Him and read His words, but through many other people, most of whom have never heard of Him.

In this paper, we are following up this affinity of ideas as observed in the reading of the book of Robert Langs and comparing the ideas expressed in it to the Bahá'í Writings, finding in this process a correlation between them.

In this paper, the following is attempted.

1. To correlate the Bahá'í Revelation with psychoanalysis as presented by Robert Langs in his book *Beyond Yahweh and Jesus, Bringing Death's Wisdom to Faith, Spirituality, and Psychoanalysis*.
2. The points of correlation are:
  - Divine Wisdom
  - Consultation and Compassion
  - The Unconscious and the Heart

When reading Langs, we must realize that he did not know the Bahá'í Faith. Consequently, he could not have known the following Bahá'u'lláh ideas. The Bahá'í reader of his books must make the necessary correction of his findings with these principles in mind.

- Progressive Revelation
- Unknowability of God
- Role of Manifestation

What Langs found, when analyzing his patients, was the idea of divine wisdom, which he places in the deep unconscious mind and connects with profound moral and ethical understanding and other basic ideas that seem to be general human ideas, because he calls them archetypes in the Jungian sense. All human beings have these

archetypes in their deep unconscious mind, or we would say in their heart, but often they are denied and repressed and have no influence in life. It is religion that has in the past explored this fact. Langs found access to it through his kind of analysis. What Langs calls archetypes in the unconscious, which are common to all humans and which are moral principles, is compared in the following by this author with conscience.

## Conscience

What is meant by the term *conscience*? Etymologically, the word means “knowing with,” which implies that there is another knowing besides the normal conscious knowing that comes with it. This knowing is not conscious but, as we say today, it is unconscious, yet is somehow known in a derived way. This is explained to children as an inner voice that tells you what is right or wrong. You can ignore it and do something that is wrong. If you do that, you will have a bad conscience, a bad feeling, a feeling of guilt. You can keep ignoring it and eventually the bad feeling will go away, but then you will be a bad person doing bad things. This was the story I learned in my family, which was a good Catholic family going to Mass every Sunday and praying together every day.

In fact, psychologically this makes good sense, especially if we consider that there is, in the deep unconscious, a divine guidance, a divine wisdom, that gives us moral standards. The difference is only the awareness. Langs claims that this deep unconscious can only be found in psychoanalysis, but it is told to children that they can feel it. He found it in analyzing his patients, and he recognized that these patients had little or no awareness of this in their conscious mind, which is given to denial and ignorance.

Freud stated that analysis is after-education, seeming to imply that what went wrong in the childhood of his patients must now be corrected in analysis.

Langs felt that religion was not doing its job, so he tried to invent a new profession, called theological psychoanalysis.

All of this points to the need to establish a new science and profession that can effectively unit psychoanalysis with

religion, and clinical and quantitative scientific data with matters of faith and belief. I would call this profession *theological psychoanalysis*. (Langs, 176, italics in the original)

Langs really expects that these psychoanalysts can develop a “rational secular spirituality,” contrary to this opinion, it is this writer’s idea that the religion providing this connection between psychology and theology exists already in the Bahá’í Faith and this spirituality is already present and needs only to be connected with psychological and psychoanalytical understanding of the human nature.

This is how Langs describes the difference between conscious mind and Divine Wisdom:

The conscious mind ... is too devoted to the denial and ignorance. We must seek answers that come from an understanding that God - or nature - has chosen to locate our greatest mental resource and divine wisdom where it is out of the reach of conscious awareness and thinking in the *Deep Unconscious Mind*, which we can access only through trigger decoding. (Langs, 175, italics added)

What Langs found in his kind of psychoanalysis as a knowledge and what he calls an archetype and what he finds in the deep unconscious mind, which he studied extensively, is known as conscience, a “knowing with knowing” that is a knowing based on feelings and coming from the knowing heart, as will be explained later in this paper.

How can we explain this knowing with knowing? In this writer’s understanding, this is similar with the knowing of dreams. This author assumes that dreamwork is performed in the heart, because heart transplants have proven that dream memory is in the heart and can be transplanted with the heart. Heart experiences are not as much known as primarily felt. They can become known, but only as a knowing with knowing; a knowing that is more felt than known and is organized differently than logical knowing. When we know and talk about our dreams, we know this is not the whole story; this is not the full meaning of what we dreamt. But this is all we can rationally know and tell. The rest is feelings.

If it is a feeling, it does not come from the brain; it must come from the heart. This is what this paper will present; that the divine wisdom is in the heart, where the deep unconsciousness is located, and the heart expresses itself in feelings, not in concepts and words. That is the reason in psychoanalytic dream analysis, dreams are not logically understood but are associated with and developed and interpreted in that way.

Another question is, how is conscience developed? Langs calls it Divine Wisdom, so it must be from God. In the Catholic Church the same is believed, but children must learn it from their parents, from their educators in school, and from the priest in church. As it will be demonstrated, even psychoanalysis today has found that this is true; children have a real understanding of God at an early age, and so attribute this inner voice as coming from God, or of being related to the word of God, or the revelation of God.

Langs calls the Divine Wisdom an archetype, referring to this Jungian term. In my opinion, it is better called something related to and depending on culture, and the question of whether it is inherited or learned is difficult to solve. Most likely it is both; there is an inherited ability to develop conscience, and the actual content of conscience—the moral principles—are learned from the culture a person is growing up in or developed later through life experiences. What is innate is the fact that every human being immediately knows when something bad happens to them, and according to the Golden Rule, this knowledge should then be generalized to all people. During the growing-up process, these learned principles should be developed and changed according to the investigating mind in adulthood. If it is seen that way, it becomes clear why the Bahá'í writings place a high value on education.

By and large, in modern Western society, this knowledge of conscience is getting lost, and no longer used in the education of children. Consequently, children—and then adults—have no inner moral guidance, so their behavior is becoming increasingly destructive, criminal, and evil, a fact that can be observed today.

## Divine Wisdom is in the Heart

We must ask how Langs, who was a classical psychoanalyst, came to author a book about the Christian and Hebrew Bible and his version of psychoanalysis. using the term *Divine Wisdom* as a central concept. He explains it as a case of serendipity and not a plan. He describes the fact that he was confronted with Buddhist thinking when he found:

Striking parallels between my new version of psychoanalysis and Buddhist thinking about the design of the human mind. ...

Sensing that there was some kind of broad and meaningful connection between my adaptive version of psychoanalysis and spirituality — as a classically trained Freudian psychoanalyst, spirituality and religion were not on my radar screen — I embarked on a new and unexpected adventure.

(Langs, X)

After authoring over a hundred books about psychoanalysis and his version of it, he discovered this connection and followed it up, applying it later to Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, authoring the book we are here correlating with the Bahá'í Writings six years before his death at age 86.

It has been mentioned that Langs places the divine wisdom in the deep unconscious mind, when he said that this part of the mind is unconscious, so it cannot be reached by normal consciousness, and divine wisdom is deep within this unconsciousness, yet it is still part of the mind. How do we define *mind* in a way that this process is possible and understandable? It seems mind means here all human possible ways of understanding reality: physical reality and spiritual reality. When mind is defined this way, it includes all understanding, all knowledge, even the unconscious knowledge that might be denied and ignored by the conscious mind, as Lang mentions in his description of divine wisdom.

We assume here that this deep unconscious mind is in the heart, like the conscious mind is in the brain. Or we can say, maybe more accurately, the mind uses the brain for the conscious operations and the heart for the unconscious operations. In other words, only when

the mind uses the brain, we are aware of what happens. When the mind uses the heart, we are unaware; these processes are unconscious. But we have feelings and dreams that we eventually become aware of in some way.

To understand that the heart can function like the brain this author uses the findings of the HeartMath Institute, which demonstrates that the heart has a collection of nerves that together make something like a “little brain of the heart”

The heart is a sensory organ and an information encoding and processing center with an extensive, intrinsic nervous system, enabling it to learn, remember and make functional decision independent of the cranial brain.<sup>3</sup>

In fact, the research into this new knowledge has produced a healing process that can improve the lives of people suffering from diverse illnesses that plague modern man, as is used by this psychologist and author in his clinical practice.

There are two reasons why we assume the unconscious mind is in the heart, or better, that the human mind uses the heart when unconscious processes and contents are involved. All that is in the heart is unconscious. All we know about it are the feelings these processes create in the body. Consequently, the brain—or the mind using the brain—recognizes these feelings, gives them names, and thinks about them.

We all have observed when somebody gets angry; he will show it in his body behavior. And when an observer tells that person he is angry, he will often yell back that he is not angry. This fact demonstrates that he is angry in his heart. His body already shows this, but his brain has not recognized that he is angry, so he wants to say, “I am not angry.” But unknown to his conscious mind, he yells, because in his heart and body, he is already angry.

This is easily observable in anger; but even in loving feelings, the mind often does not know what happens, the fact of which is exploited in many novels and shows where the loving actions are described while the person in question denies being in love.

The other reason we assume the unconscious is in the heart are the Bahá'í Writings. No matter how we understand heart, metaphorically, or as an instrument of the spirit, Bahá'u'lláh states clearly that Divine Wisdom is in the heart and nowhere else.

*I swear by God, O esteemed and honoured friend! Shouldst thou ponder these words in thine heart, thou wilt of a certainty find the doors of divine wisdom and infinite knowledge flung open before thy face. [KI 102]*

One must ponder the words of Bahá'u'lláh in one's heart, and this will open the doors of Divine Wisdom and fling the knowledge before thy face. This process is certain; but how can we describe it psychologically? In another Word, Bahá'u'lláh uses a similar picture to describe this process, when it happens to somebody who arises to proclaim his cause.

Here Bahá'u'lláh speaks about a flood of Divine Knowledge that will gush out of the heart of the believer.

*Arise in the name of Him Who is the Object of all knowledge, and, with absolute detachment from the learning of men, lift up your voices and proclaim His Cause. I swear by the Day Star of Divine Revelation!*

*The very moment ye arise, ye will witness how a flood of Divine knowledge will gush out of your hearts, and will behold the wonders of His heavenly wisdom manifested in all their glory before you. Were ye to taste of the sweetness of the sayings of the All-Merciful, ye would unhesitatingly forsake your selves, and would lay down your lives for the Well-Beloved. [GWB 83]*

What we are told here are two things. The first is the fact that when a believer ponders the Word of the Manifestation in his heart, a door opens in our heart and the Divine Wisdom will open itself up and be seen before our face. How can we describe this in psychological terms? First, it is said the words or writings must be pondered in the heart, which means not only an intellectual or factual understanding is necessary.

This fact indicates that these words are written not only for the intellect, but especially for the heart. The words must move us emotionally not only intellectually. This emotional movement is then experienced in front of our face; it is something we see more than we understand it. This is similar to our understanding of poesy or dreams; we read them intellectually and we remember them like a story, but when we do this, something else happens.

These poems or dreams become an experience, an emotional experience that is perceived in a different way. It is perceived as if the truth of these words stand in front of our face. The same must happen with the words of Revelation; it is like a surprising knowledge or understanding that comes to us like a vision, like an insight of a deeper kind, which then cannot be intellectually or logically analyzed. It must be experienced. It is life-changing, and experienced with total certitude.

In the other verse, Bahá'u'lláh presupposes that the words of the Revelation are in the heart and he describes what happens when the believer arises to teach the cause. Again, this is a happening, it cannot be deliberately produced. Bahá'u'lláh describes it like a flood or fountain erupting from the heart of the speaker. The flood of this emotional truth will gush out from the speaker and Bahá'u'lláh describes this event as life-changing. It appears it is changing not only the speaker, but also the listener—if he is open to this message. Or in other words, if he is a seeker for truth and if his heart is ready to hear the truth of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

This emotional and life-changing event will make anyone who experiences it *“forsake your selves, and would lay down your lives for the Well-Beloved”* (GWB 83). It causes a total life change, a *conversion* as it is usually called, that converts or turns around the life of a person. The condition for this event to happen is the openness of the heart or what is described as having a pure heart and the honest desire to find the truth. Also called independent investigation.

This inner voice, this inner feeling can be communicated from the speaker to the listener as it is described above, and Bahá'u'lláh described this inner meaning of the heart in his mystic book, *The Seven Valleys*.

*The tongue faileth in describing these three Valleys, and speech falleth short. The pen steppeth not into this region, the ink leaveth only a blot. In these planes, the nightingale of the heart hath other songs and secrets, which make the heart to stir and the soul to clamor, but this mystery of inner meaning may be whispered only from heart to heart, confided only from breast to breast.*

*Only heart to heart can speak the bliss of mystic knowers; No messenger can tell it and no missive bear it. [SVFV]<sup>4</sup>*

What Langs describes as our “greatest mental resource and divine wisdom” seems to be described by Bahá’u’lláh much better and more profoundly as mystic knowing, which is in the heart and is communicated from heart to heart, while words and writings are called ineffective and falling short because if there is no response of the heart, this Divine Wisdom is not communicated. Langs discovered this, stating that the conscious mind is given to denial and ignorance as far as the Divine Wisdom is concerned.

## **Consultation and Compassion**

The next question that arises is the issue of why Langs, who describes himself during his life as a-religious, authored this book about divine wisdom and religion a few years before his death. Langs himself gives us the answer, describing that he found this truth in his patients when he was analyzing them in his newly developed approach, which he called communicative psychoanalysis. He found religion in analyzing his patients and finding the truth about the deep unconscious, the death anxiety, and what he called divine wisdom. Then he attempted to analyze some books of the Christian Bible, especially the book of Genesis, which he described in his book. This is the basis of this investigation, as well as its correlation to the Bahá’í Writing.

We must ask, how is it possible that a therapist can find religion when treating his patients? What is happening in therapy that can bring the truth of religion into the open, so it can be seen by the therapist? Actually, Bahá’u’lláh gives us an answer that explains this possibility.

*The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion and the canopy of world order is upraised upon the two pillars of reward and punishment.* [TB 126]

Bahá'u'lláh here states that the light that brings about divine wisdom, the light that *illuminates* it, is *consultation and compassion*. So, if Langs' psychoanalytic approach has both ingredients, consultation, and compassion, it makes sense that one can find divine wisdom by practicing this approach.

This writer has been supervised in this approach and has used this approach in his therapy and when supervising students. The characteristic of this approach is to learn a specific form of listening to the patient, which is systematic and difficult, but it brings out the deepest concern of the patient. Langs wrote a whole book about the listening process, and from this writer's experience, it is a process that deeply and compassionately involves the therapist with the patient and brings out the most profound emotions and most hidden thoughts of the client. When this listening process is used, the talk of the client can be interpreted as the unconscious reasons and motives that move the client during the interview.

Anybody familiar with the consultation process as it is practiced according to the instruction of Bahá'u'lláh and his interpreters, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, the son and great-great son of Bahá'u'lláh, will admit that it is based on the duty of all members of a group to listening with an open heart to all that is said by any member of the group, disregarding any consideration of education or age or other reasons. It has very much in common with the listening process as described by Langs, even though the latter had developed this process and described it in psychological terms.

It is this writer's personal conviction that Langs had been influenced in a spiritual way by the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and was guided by him to find religion and divine wisdom at the end of his long life, a life devoted to listening and understanding his patients on the deepest level. Langs developed his listening process on his own and from the psychoanalytic tradition, and he never mentioned knowledge of the Bahá'í writings or religion,

When Bahá'u'lláh talks about consultation and compassion, we can easily find these ideas in Langs' description of psychoanalytic therapy and psychoanalysis. Empathy and compassion are closely related; actually, compassion includes empathy, and is the active part, which is supported by the empathic understanding that leads to helpful action, like in therapy where true understanding leads to interpretation that allows the client to change. Langs stated that empathy is an essential part of therapy. The therapist must have:

a capacity for empathy, which must operate first on a manifest level, so that the therapist experiences along with the patient aspects of his or her manifest struggles. Empathy must also operate on a derivative level and involve unconscious communication. Here the therapist must temporarily share and immediately experience the patient's unconscious fantasy constellations, unconscious perceptions, and unconscious affects and conflicts. Most present-day studies of empathy have been naive, surface-oriented, and lacking in validating methodology.<sup>5</sup>

Again, Langs indicated that this empathy must go beyond the manifest observation and include the unconscious truth that is communicated. When the assumption is made that the unconscious is in the heart, we have a psychological process that includes the heart. It is a heart-to-heart process, and what is communicated is something that is unknown. Coming towards knowledge in this process, it is interpreted in a known way and understood as something unconscious, and is now known and can be used for the healing of the patient.

Bahá'u'lláh described this process as mystic knowing when stating: "*but this mystery of inner meaning may be whispered only from heart to heart, confided only from breast to breast.*" One could conclude from this verse that mystic knowing is knowing the unconscious, where the truth, the divine wisdom is located. The psychoanalytic listener reaches into the depth of the heart of his patient and can, when his heart is open for this message, encounter a place where religion in its mystic understanding can be found, as the Bahá'í writings say.

According to Bahá'u'lláh, this understanding is not facilitated by human learning, but only by the “*purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit*” (KI 210). It is dependent on the morality or honesty of the investigator, not on their education. It is a quality of the heart that is crucial in this knowing. It is hoped that every therapist has this quality and this freedom of spirit to understand what is going on in the heart of the patient he/she is treating. Bahá'u'lláh talks here about the understanding of His Revelation, which is given to anyone who has these qualities. We apply this understanding to the understanding of the heart of each other, so this heart-to-heart understanding is possible.

*The understanding of His words and the comprehension of the utterances of the Birds of Heaven are in no wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit. This is evidenced by those who, today, though without a single letter of the accepted standards of learning, are occupying the loftiest seats of knowledge; and the garden of their hearts is adorned, through the showers of divine grace, with the roses of wisdom and the tulips of understanding. Well is it with the sincere in heart for their share of the light of a mighty Day! [KI 210]*

We are repeating here again the quote of Bahá'u'lláh where he stated:

*In these planes, the nightingale of the heart hath other songs and secrets, which make the heart to stir and the soul to clamor, but this mystery of inner meaning may be whispered only from heart to heart, confided only from breast to breast.*

It makes sense that this heart-to-heart communication happens between people who sincerely talk to each other. This happens in therapy when the therapist tries to understand the deepest feelings and unconscious thoughts of his patient. What is a mystic knower? one could ask. Originally, the word *mystic* meant secret, a knowledge that is secret until it is revealed. Today the word *mystic* implies something that is spiritual or supernatural, not belonging to the world of the senses, being beyond all physical reality. So, a mystic

knower would be described as a person that can reach into the deep unconscious thoughts of others and can understand the deep meaning of the revelation; someone who speaks to the heart and not only to reason.

## Religion and Death Anxiety

In his books written at the end of his life, Langs talked increasingly about death and death anxiety. He claimed that this anxiety is not in the conscious brain, but in the deep unconscious mind. According to our understanding, it is in the heart.

Many of the most hurtful and damaging aspects of emotionally charged incidents fail to register in awareness, but instead, are perceived subliminally or unconsciously and processed by a deep unconscious mental system.

Perception without *conscious awareness* is a basic capacity of the emotion processing mind. [Langs, 12]

What Langs calls here emotion processing mind, we would call the heart. While the mind using the brain does not have any awareness of it, the conscious mind avoids and denies these perceptions.

Once these unconsciously perceived inputs have been registered deep unconsciously, they are silently processed adaptively by the deep unconscious mind.

The results of the entire unconscious experiences are then encoded in dreams and other storied forms. These incidents are always linked to the experience of death.

The conscious mind is intent on avoiding the recognition and impact of these disturbing emotionally charged incidents. [Langs, 13]

Here it is explained what dreams are doing; they deal with unconscious fears and threats and attempt to solve them. If they cannot do this, we experience a nightmare and wake up full of anxiety. The new aspect Langs presented in this book and in others is

the importance of death anxiety and the fact that we all experience it, but deny it consciously, yet try to deal with it unconsciously, in the heart. Langs further claimed that only religion can deal with this anxiety.

Not understanding the meaning of progressive revelation, he blamed the Mosaic religion and the Christian religion for not having solved this problem properly. That is expressed in the title of his book *Beyond Yahweh and Jesus* with the subtitle: *Bringing Death's Wisdom to Faith, Spirituality, and Psychoanalysis*. In the Bahá'í understanding of progressive revelation, the Manifestation can only communicate what the people at the time can understand, so blaming Yahweh and Jesus does not make sense. Additionally, Langs does not understand that *Yahweh* is the word for the unknown God, while it is Moses and Jesus who brought the new Revelation described in the Bible and both are Manifestations, on the same level, but only communicating to the world what can be understood at their time.

## Conclusion

What Langs perceived correctly is the fact that the answers of both religions are not satisfactory for our times and the maturational stage the world has achieved today. Not knowing the Bahá'í faith, he hoped that psychoanalysis could be the solution for this lack of understanding, inventing a new profession of "theological psychoanalysis" (Langs, 176). He asked those who would take up this avocation to be versed in theology and in his special approach to psychoanalysis, which he called the adaptive approach, because "the therapy situation is, at present, the arena where expressions of divine wisdom and morality are most accessible and best investigated." [Langs, 176]

Langs found the relationship between religion and psychoanalysis when he stated:

The bottom line is that because the adaptive approach is centered on how we cope with emotionally charged traumatic incident and thus on death related traumas, it bridges over to and joins forces with religion in seeking ways to understand the nature of these traumas and finding the best possible

means of coping with them using divine cognitive insights in one case and divine religious insights in the other. [Langs, 160]

It is this writer's opinion, this is only true in a limited sense, because Langs was not aware that this experience was fully realized in the Bahá'í writings, where it is clearly stated that the divine wisdom is experienced in the heart. The importance of this fact cannot be overestimated. It is rather encouraging for a Bahá'í reader of Langs' book to find what Langs found from treating his patients and that these findings, with the necessary corrections, were expressed in the Bahá'í writing more than a century before Langs found them.

What is added here is the fact that this is divine wisdom, and maybe understood as Langs' deep unconscious is in the heart. This is a new idea that makes the findings about the unconscious mind more real and more understandable, and this understanding is an improvement beyond the thoughts of Freud and Jung and all of their followers, including Langs, about this topic.

This paper demonstrated what Shoghi Effendi stated half a century ago when he said: "The world has—at least the thinking world—caught up by now with all the great and universal principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh." One of these universal principles is the idea of divine wisdom, which comes from the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and is placed in the heart. This is the guide we have for moral behavior, and ultimately depends on the revelation from God, be it manifested in Jesus, or Moses, Bahá'u'lláh, or any other Messenger of God. It appears that what is called conscience, or the inner voice of the heart, is based on the divine wisdom in the heart. When an unreligious psychoanalyst, at the end of his life, finds a similar concept and authors a book about religion and psychoanalysis, that fact demonstrates the power and effectiveness of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh in our world. Bahá'u'lláh, quoting the Bible, said it this way to everyone who can hear, see, or perceive the divine wisdom of His Truth.

*By Him Who is the Desire of the world!*

*This is the day for eyes to see and for ears to hear, for hearts to perceive and for tongues to speak forth.*

*Blessed are they that have attained thereunto; blessed are they that have sought after and recognized it!*

*This is the day whereon every man may accede unto everlasting honour, for whatsoever hath streamed forth from the Pen of Glory in regard to any soul is adorned with the ornament of immortality.*

*Again, blessed are they that have attained thereunto. [TU ¶18]*

---

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Written on 3 July 1949 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, *Compilations*, Scholarship, p. 27.
- <sup>2</sup> Jason Aronson, New York, 2008.
- <sup>3</sup> Rollin McCraty, Mike Atkinson, and Raymond Trevor Bradley: “Electrophysiological Evidence of Intuition.” Part 1, “The Surprising Role of the Heart” in *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 10, no. 1, (2004): 140.
- <sup>4</sup> This is quoted from the third paragraph of the Valley of Contentment and in the last two lines Bahá’u’lláh quotes from Ḥáfiz: Shamsu’-d-Dín Muḥammad, of Shíráz, died ca. 1389 A.D. One of the greatest of ersian poets.
- <sup>5</sup> Robert Langs, MD, *Psychotherapy, a Basic Text*. Jason Aronson Inc, London (1990): 549-560.

# The Baha'i Writings and the Buddhist Doctrine of Emptiness: An Initial Survey

Ian Kluge

## 1. Preface

This paper is an expansion of the section on emptiness in a previous paper, "Buddhism and the Bahá'í Writings: An Ontological Rapprochement" (*Lights of Irfan*, Vol. 8, 2007). The purpose of the 2007 paper was to show that the Bahá'í Writings and key Buddhist teachings were either in agreement or on a convergent path in regards to key ontological issues. The current paper carries that project further by focusing specifically on the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness and exploring the extent of the agreements and convergences with the Bahá'í Writings.

For Bahá'ís, there are at least four major reasons to study the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness. In the first place, emptiness is the signature teaching of Buddhism, the culmination of its teachings about impermanence, dependent origination and 'no-self' however these may be interpreted by the various schools. Thus, an understanding of Buddhism requires acquaintance with the doctrine of emptiness. Since the Bahá'í Faith recognizes Buddhism as a revelation from God, such understanding is also important because Buddhism is part of the history of God's unfolding revelation to humankind and, as such, offers knowledge about our relationship to the transcendent. However, it should be noted that we can only be

sure of the Four Noble Truths – from which the doctrine of emptiness is derived – and the Eight-fold Noble Path as originating with the Buddha Himself; these two doctrines on which the diverse interpretations of the Buddha’s Teachings are based, are common to all the schools and sects of Buddhism.

Second, if we wish to live peacefully with our neighbors, we must know what they believe in order to understand and appreciate them as human beings. There are over 379 million Buddhists in Asia, and countless more living in cultures influenced by its teachings.<sup>1</sup> Third, knowledge of Buddhism and its key doctrines is necessary for understanding intellectual and spiritual developments in the modern world. Buddhism is making significant and well-publicized in-roads into the intellectual and religious life of North America and Europe. The Dalai Lama, the charismatic leader of Tibetan Gelugpa Buddhism, is now a universally recognized figure who speaks to packed sports stadiums about Buddhist philosophy and living, as well as about the independence of Tibet. His books are best-sellers. Obviously what he says meets some spiritual needs in large numbers of people. Fourth, a better understanding of Buddhism in general and its signature doctrine of emptiness allows Bahá’ís to engage in intelligent and in-depth inter-faith dialogue with Buddhists and those with Buddhist sympathies. Such dialogue can also help deepen our understanding of the Bahá’í Writings from new perspectives.

This paper will provide further evidence that despite differences of expression, the Bahá’í Writings and Buddhist sutras show agreements and strong convergences on the subject of emptiness and its associated doctrines. The author interprets this as additional support for Bahá’u’lláh’s teaching of the essential unity of all religions.

## **2. Introduction to Emptiness**

The Buddhist doctrine of emptiness is the logical culmination of the Buddha’s teachings on suffering, impermanence, dependent origination and ‘no-self.’ The reasoning process begins with the Buddha’s First Noble Truth, viz. “life is suffering,” i.e. that being alive is inherently unsatisfactory insofar as frustration, disappointment or unsatisfactoriness are inevitable and apparently

inescapable. The root cause of this suffering is the impermanent or transitory nature of all things and mental states and, consequently, our inability to ‘hang on’ to them or to find rest and peace. The Buddha says,

Impermanent are all component things,  
They arise and cease, that is their nature,  
They come into being and pass away <sup>2</sup>

When all things are in perpetual flux, rest, peace, satisfaction and happiness are impossible because none of these conditions can be more than momentary. We are constantly being tossed about by the storms of change. This, of course, means that all things and mental states have only a momentary existence. However, we need not be ‘tempest-tossed’ if we analyze our situation and discover the fact of dependent origination according to which all things come into existence in dependence on other things. Things always change because everything is influenced by everything else, indeed, depends on everything else for its temporary existence. Nothing is ontologically independent or stands by itself. According to the Buddha,

When there is this, that is.  
With the arising of this, that arises.  
When this is not, neither is that.  
With the cessation of this, that ceases.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, everything arises or falls in dependence on previous conditions or causes, and nothing arises without such conditions or causes. Things do not exist in and of themselves but only in relation to other things; consequently, their existence is relative and provisional, not absolute. In Buddhist terms, they have no essence, i.e. they have no substantial and no unchanging or ‘eternal’ nature. Furthermore, they lack an independent self-nature or self which is to say they are ‘empty.’ This does not mean that things do not exist but that they do not exist as we tend to think they do: “emptiness defines how things exist – relationally and impermanently – and is not, therefore, the assertion that things somehow do not exist at all.”<sup>4</sup>

Things have a provisional or conventional existence that we may agree on for the sake of convenience but, if we analyze them, they have no ultimately real nature. There is no enduring substance 'behind' or 'within' them; nothing is immune from change.

This leads to what is perhaps the most debated feature of Buddhist thought: the concept of 'no-self.' If we analyze a human being – the way Nagasena analyzed King Milinda's chariot – we would find no part that is the 'self' just as King Milinda found no part that is the 'chariot.'<sup>5</sup> Simple and straightforward as this sounds, there is no agreement among the major Buddhist schools about what the 'no-self' teaching actually means. For example, the Tathagatagarba tradition (which includes Zen and the Pure Land) asserts that the 'no-self' teaching refers to the ego and personality which has been deluded, misled and defiled by the world and that beneath this ego lies a pure Buddha-nature. 'No-self' simply means that disappearance of the defilements and the appearance of the Buddha-nature. In the Theravada, the Nikayas view the 'no-self' teaching not as a metaphysical doctrine about what does or does not exist but rather as a soteriological doctrines meant to gain release from enslavement to the ego or sense of self. Its orientation is purely practical as illustrated in the Buddha's story about a man shot with an arrow. His only interest is in having the arrow removed, not in the nature of the arrow, the personality of the enemy archer or the reason he was shot.<sup>6</sup>

The Anatta teaching is not a doctrine of no-self, but a not-self *strategy* for shedding suffering by letting go of its cause, leading to the highest, undying happiness. *At that point, questions of self, no-self, and not-self fall aside.* Once there's the experience of such total freedom, *where would there be any concern about what's experiencing it, or whether or not it's a self?*<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, the Madhyamika School in the Mahayana tradition rigorously insists that from the ultimate perspective of dependent origination no self exists at all insofar as a permanent and autonomous 'self' or ego or personality have only has a conventional or provisional existence. Even here, the exact meaning of the Madhyamika claim is subject to debate. Moreover, as we shall see

below, still other versions of the ‘no-self’ teaching exist, notably the Yogacara version.

Before we explore these ideas in greater detail, let us briefly review what the Bahá’í Writings have to say about these issues. Regarding the Buddha’s First Noble Truth that ‘life is suffering’ or unsatisfactory we recall ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement about the San Francisco earthquake: “*Such events ought to awaken people and they should attach themselves less to the mortal world; for the earthly world hath such painful experiences and offers such cups from the bitter wine*” [TAB1 509]. In a similar vein, he says, “*This mortal world is fickle and unstable like unto a shifting shadow, and the human life is like unto a mirage and a reflection on the water*” [TAB1 202]. Elsewhere, he states, “*man . . . in this world of being toileth and suffereth for a time, with divers ills and pains, and ultimately disintegrates, leaving no trace and no fruit after him*” [TAF 13]. The agreement with the First Noble Truth is obvious and requires no further elaboration.

The Bahá’í Writings also agree with the doctrine of impermanence. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says,

*nothing which exists remains in a state of repose – that is to say, all things are in motion. Everything is either growing or declining; all things are either coming from nonexistence into being, or going from existence into nonexistence . . . This state of motion is said to be essential – that is, natural; it cannot be separated from beings because it is their essential requirement, as it is the essential requirement of fire to burn.*

*Thus it is established that this movement is necessary to existence, which is either growing or declining. [SAQ 233]<sup>8</sup>*

It is important to notice the categorical nature of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements: “*nothing*” is in repose, “*all things are in motion*” and movement is “*necessary to existence.*” This universal language implies that not just material things or beings are subject to constant change, but also thoughts, feelings, personal identities and the whole gamut of events in our psycho-spiritual existence. As Bahá’u’lláh says we

*should regard all else beside God as transient, and count all things save Him, Who is the Object of all adoration, as utter nothingness.* [GWB 266, emphasis added]

Here, too, the categorical language is essential: everything except God is impermanent and all other beings are contingent. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “*Transformation from condition to condition is the attribute of contingent realities*” [PUP 173]. Thus, it is clear that both the Bahá’í Writings and Buddhism agree that impermanence is the fundamental nature of all phenomenal existence. From this it logically follows that we are self-condemned to suffering and dissatisfaction if we allow ourselves to become too attached to the things of this world and try to hold on to them. What else but frustration and suffering can follow from trying to do the impossible? Speaking in terms of the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states,

*For attachment to the world has become the cause of the bondage of spirits, and this bondage is identical with sin, which has been transmitted from Adam to His posterity. It is because of this attachment that men have been deprived of essential spirituality and exalted position.* [SAQ 124-125]

These attachments cause us, and others, a great deal of suffering insofar as they force us to live in “bondage,” i.e. as a slave to the things of this world. Moreover, these attachments degrade us from our “exalted position” and deprive us of our “essential spirituality” (cf. Buddha-nature). The only escape from this oppression is detachment which the Writings and the Buddhist Scriptures praise as the necessary condition for freedom: “*Cast away that which ye possess, and, on the wings of detachment, soar beyond all created things*” [GWB 139]. Elsewhere, Bahá’u’lláh says that His

*sole purpose in revealing to thee these words is to sanctify thee from the transitory things of the earth, and aid thee to enter the realm of everlasting glory, that thou mayest, by the leave of God, be of them that abide and rule therein....* [GWB 237]

For Buddhists, this “realm of everlasting glory” is nirvana which can only be attained when the struggle against impermanence ends.

The doctrine of impermanence is the basis of the concept of dependent origination or dependent arising. The importance of this teaching is made clear by the Buddha’s statement that “Whoso understands dependent origination, understands the Law [*Dhamma* or *Dharma*], and who understands the Law understands dependent origination.”<sup>9</sup> The “Law” in this case is that everything arises as a result of causes or conditions beyond itself and that everything declines as a result of causes and conditions itself. As noted above, the usual Buddhist formula for causality is

When there is this, that is.

With the arising of this, that arises.

When this is not, neither is that.

With the cessation of this, that ceases.<sup>10</sup>

It should be noted that the views on what constitutes causality differ among various traditions such as the Theravada and the Madhyamika, but there is no argument about dependent origination itself. Nothing is fully independent or uncaused and/or unconditioned by anything else; we exist as long as the appropriate causes and/or conditions are present. Therefore, things do not exist in and of themselves which in effect is to say that their being is relative and not absolute. In other words, all things are inter-dependent. The following statement by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá conveys the same idea:

*For all beings are connected together like a chain; and reciprocal help, assistance and interaction belonging to the properties of things are the causes of the existence, development and growth of created beings. It is confirmed through evidences and proofs that every being universally acts upon other beings, either absolutely or through association. Finally, the perfection of each individual being – is due to the composition of the elements, to their measure, to their balance, to the mode of their combination, and to mutual influence. When all these are gathered together, then man exists. [SAQ 178]*

Clearly, our existence is not independent; indeed, “man exists” only when the right conditions are “gathered together” which is another way of saying that we are contingent, dependent beings. Only God is absolute, i.e. not dependent on conditions and, therefore, transcends the processes of the phenomenal world. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement emphasizes that all created beings are radically contingent, i.e. their existence and their attributes depend not only ultimately on God but also immediately on their interactions with the other elements of creation. Here, too, there is basic agreement between the Writings and the Buddha’s teachings.

Provisional existence — Buddhists often refer to it as ‘conventional’ existence — does not mean that things are unreal but that they do not have absolute, eternal reality in-and-of themselves. For that reason, they are called ‘empty’ and the fact of their absolute contingency i.e. inter-dependence is described as ‘emptiness.’ However, there is something else to remember: the provisional or conventional reality has self-sufficient existence or is ‘real’ from its own standpoint but lacks self-sufficient existence and is ‘unreal’ from the standpoint of dependent origination itself. In other words, the existence or reality things possess is relative and one of our tasks to is see through this to the “ultimate truth”<sup>11</sup> of their emptiness. We shall say more about this subject below.

### 3. Emptiness in the Madhyamika School

With this background in mind, it is time to examine the concept of emptiness in several Buddhist schools and in the Bahá’í Writings. We shall start with the Madhyamika tradition because the Madhyamika school represents the most radical interpretation of ‘emptiness.’ It says not only that things are empty but also that emptiness itself is empty.<sup>12</sup> From this position numerous radical consequences follow.

The Madhyamika school of Mahayana Buddhism began in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century C.E. with the work of Nagarjuna, an Indian philosopher. His principle work is the *Mulamadhyamakakarika* (*Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way*; usually abbreviated as MMK) is a philosophical explication of the *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras<sup>13</sup> which appeared in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and include the famous *Heart Sutra* with its

eloquent emphasis on the emptiness of all things, thoughts and conditions.<sup>14</sup> In the MMK, Nagarjuna presents his philosophical/logical explications of the Buddha's doctrine of emptiness in a series of four-line verses based on a four-value logic called *tetralemmas*. By means of these tetralemmas, Nagarjuna and the Madhyamikas who followed him attempted to show how any positive philosophical statement about reality leads to contradictions and even absurd conclusions.<sup>15</sup> Our goal is to free ourselves from any kind of conceptual thinking and, therefore, from all purely intellectual viewpoints.<sup>16</sup>

Here is an example in which Nagarjuna discusses the relationship between past, present and future.

If the present and the future  
 Depend on the past,  
 Then the present and future  
 Would have existed in the past.

If the present and future  
 Did not exist there,  
 How could the present and future  
 Depend upon it?<sup>17</sup>

The goal of these verses is to make us doubt our concepts of time by showing how they lead to contradictions. In this example, he demonstrates how the common belief that the present and the future are based on the past leads to a problem: if that is so, the present and future must somehow have existed in the past. But that is counter-intuitive – obviously if they already existed in the past, they would not be the present and the future. However, if they did not exist in the past, how could they eventually depend on it? Where did they come from? How are they related to the past? The purpose of the exercise is to make us realize that our concepts or conventions do not really apply to time at all. The puzzles exist only because we are 'trapped' within certain concepts or conventions for which all philosophical statements about its nature are untenable. As Nagarjuna writes in the dedicatory verses at the start of the MMK,

Whatever is dependently arisen is  
 Unceasing, unborn,  
 Unannihilated, not permanent,  
 Not coming, not going,  
 Without distinction, without identity,  
 And free from conceptual construction.<sup>18</sup>

According to Nagarjuna, all descriptions or statements about reality are imputations or constructions. They are our own conceptions or constructions and do not provide any information about reality. This is because whatever we say about any aspect of reality consists of nothing but our imputations and attributions, and, therefore, our statements are purely conventional: “the criteria for identity we posit will end up being purely conventional.”<sup>19</sup> For example, we call an arrangement in which a flat surface is mounted on four vertical sticks a ‘table’ – but that is simply a matter of our agreement. What a table is – or a flower or river or clothes – are all mere matters of convention, i.e. constructions. Of course, as conventions, they are quite real; their mode of existing is as a convention and the Madhyamika do not deny this. What they deny is the idea that there is an unchanging essence, a ‘tableness’ that is not subject to dependent origination and that lasts through the destruction of the table itself. Similarly, they – and all Buddhists – deny that there is a human essence or self apart from the combination of components that compose us. Ultimately, all things are conventions or human constructions, and, therefore, empty, i.e. have no ultimate reality.

Is there anything in the Bahá’í Writings that converges with or even accommodates the Madhyamika outlook? There are, indeed, various passages in the Bahá’í Writings conveying a convergent viewpoint. For example, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes,

*The second proposition is that existence and nonexistence are both relative. If it be said that such a thing came into existence from nonexistence, this does not refer to absolute nonexistence, but means that its former condition in relation to its actual condition was nothingness . . . Man, like the*

*mineral, is existing; but the existence of the mineral in relation to that of man is nothingness, for when the body of man is annihilated it becomes dust and mineral. . . . Though the dust – that is to say, the mineral – has existence in its own condition, in relation to man it is nothingness. Both exist, but the existence of dust and mineral, in relation to man, is nonexistence and nothingness . . .*

*Therefore, though the world of contingency exists, in relation to the existence of God it is nonexistent and nothingness. . . . In the same way, the existence of creation in relation to the existence of God is nonexistence. [SAQ 280]*

The theme of these statements is the relativity of existence – and it converges with the Madhyamika position. This becomes clear once we realize that the Madhyamika term ‘emptiness’ and the Bahá’í terms ‘nothingness’ and ‘contingent’ convey similar, if not identical meanings. Let us recall that ‘emptiness’ refers to an object’s dependence on the process of dependent origination; it has no existence on its own and certainly no permanent existence. In Bahá’í language, it is absolutely ‘contingent.’ From the ultimate viewpoint of dependent origination, it does not exist inherently, intrinsically from “its own side,”<sup>20</sup> although from its own, conventional viewpoint it does. In the same way, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that a thing “has existence in its own condition,” that the “world of contingency exists,” but in relationship to God’s existence, their existence is “nonexistent and nothingness.” In short, they are ‘empty’ to use the Buddhist term. ‘Emptiness,’ provisionality and conventionality are their mode of existence whether in relation to God or dependent origination. The Writings describe this situation as “nothingness.” However, it is a relative “nothingness” not the absolute “nothingness” which the Writings – and the Madhyamika – categorically reject.<sup>21</sup> It should also be noted that in addition to relative nothingness or emptiness vis-à-vis God, the Writings support the idea of ‘emptiness’ from the perspective of the processes of phenomenal reality, i.e. the interactions and influences among the cosmic elements. Everything that exists depends on those universal cosmic process.

Other passages in the Writings point us out the ‘emptiness’ of the phenomenal world. For example, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says,

*Know thou that the Kingdom is the real world, and this nether place is only its shadow stretching out. A shadow hath no life of its own; its existence is only a fantasy, and nothing more; it is but images reflected in water, and seeming as pictures to the eye.* [SWAB 178, emphasis added; cf. SWAB 177]

Words like “fantasy,” “shadow” and “pictures” clearly express the idea of a world that is less than absolutely real. However, these words are more than striking metaphors. Fantasies and pictures are things we make or construct in some way, i.e. images in the human mind. These are often rooted in our lower animal nature. How many of these conventions or constructs are based on greed, selfishness, hatred, lust, power-hunger etc.? Thus, if we take these images as ultimately real, then we are deceived, either because of a lack of thought, and/or our enslavement to imitations. Bahá’u’lláh says,

*Verily I say, the world is like the vapor in a desert, which the thirsty dreameth to be water and striveth after it with all his might, until when he cometh unto it, he findeth it to be mere illusion.* [GWB 328, emphasis added]

In examining this image, we note that the phrase the “thirsty [man] dreameth,” i.e. he imputes attributes to the vapors and thereby creates for himself a ‘world.’ What makes the dream illusory is that our concepts, beliefs and attitudes, i.e. our conventions create a world-picture that we confuse with reality. In truth, however, this world or, more accurately, this ‘world-picture’ is empty not only because of dependent origination but because it is no more than a human-made construct or set of conventions. In a similar vein, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “*If we suffer it is the outcome of material things, and all the trials and troubles come from this world of illusion.*” [PT 110] It is we who make this world-picture on the basis of our own imputations, and consequently suffer from it. Of course, the goal is to attain freedom: “*Release yourselves, O nightingales of God, from the thorns and brambles of wretchedness and misery, and wing your flight to the rose garden of unfading splendor.*” [GWB 319]

The foregoing discussion has shown how the Writings and Madhyamika teachings are on a convergent path on the issue of dependent origination and some of its consequences. However, this only opens up a new issue: whether or not anything transcends or is exempt from dependent origination. These issues are not clear in Buddhism. As Jay Garfield says,

Exactly how this dependency [dependent origination] is spelled out and exactly what its status is, is a matter of considerable debate within Buddhist philosophy . . . Nagarjuna was very much concerned to stake out a radical and revealing position.<sup>22</sup>

For example, nirvana itself has been suggested as one such exception to dependent origination. The Buddha describes nirvana in the following words:

There is, monks, an unborn, a not-become, a not-made, a not-compounded. If, monks, there were not this unborn, not-become, not-made, not-compounded, there would not here be an escape from the born, the become, the made, the compounded. But because there is an unborn, a not-become, the compounded.<sup>23</sup>

Clearly, in this passage, nirvana – whether it be a condition or an ontological entity – is not subject to dependent origination and in that sense is an absolute. The Tathagatagarbha schools accept that the Tathagatagarbha itself transcends dependent origination and is eternal i.e. unchanging and also possesses positive and essential attributes purity, bliss (satisfactoriness) and even self.<sup>24</sup> The Yogacara philosophers, for example, pointed out that Nagarjuna had forgotten to take into account the consciousness to which his arguments appeared; no matter what turn his arguments took, no matter what one believed about dependent origination, consciousness of them remained. Thus, the Yogacara accept dependent origination but develop into a different direction in which mind transcends dependent origination. Consciousness endures; it is.

These different views are significant because from the perspective of the Writings, the minimal ontological requirement for God is

absolute or “pure independence”<sup>25</sup> which obviously transcends dependent origination. Thus, from the perspective of the Writings, any Buddhist philosophy which accepts the idea that something transcends dependent origination, and, therefore, transcends conventionality and emptiness has met the minimal ontological requirement for some version of theism. As we shall see in more detail later, the Writings converge more clearly in this respect with the Tathagatagarbha and Yogacara traditions about emptiness than they do with Nagarjuna’s MMK and its Madhyamika successors. If we accept Nagarjuna’s claims on this issue at face value, there is a clear divergence with the Writings on this issue.

The radical nature of Nagarjuna’s theory of emptiness is evident insofar as he holds that even emptiness itself is empty.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Huntington suggests that “the Madhyamika be read as a radical attempt at abandoning the obsession with a metaphysical absolute.”<sup>27</sup> Although this view is highly influential, this is not a universal view for as already noted above, various Buddhist traditions disagree with this understanding of emptiness. However, if even emptiness is empty, i.e. is subject to dependent origination and is a mere convention, then it also follows that dependent origination itself is empty, subject to dependent origination and a convention. Obviously, there is no room for metaphysical absolutes in this version of the Madhyamika; moreover, no philosophical statements can lead to knowledge of the truth of emptiness. As Huntington points out, “The truth of emptiness must be realized in direct awareness of the paradox and mystery of mundane experience.”<sup>28</sup> It cannot be put into philosophic statements without causing serious difficulties.

This view accords somewhat with the Bahá’í teachings about the unknowability of God but not with the Bahá’í teachings about our knowledge of reality. According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, proof that an absolute, God, exists can be known<sup>29</sup> but the nature of God “*is beyond our comprehension; for the essential names and attributes of God are identical with His Essence, and His Essence is above all comprehension*” [SAQ 148]. Whatever we say – in distinction to what the Manifestations say – about God is strictly conventional, a product of our time, place and culture, i.e. our knowledge of Him is conventional, and subject to dependent origination. Verbal

descriptions and philosophic statements cannot do more than provide conventional and/or intellectual understanding of God's nature. Indeed, this view is an integral part of progressive revelation in which the human knowledge of God from one dispensation is renewed and expanded in another.

However, in contrast to Nagarjuna and Madhyamika successors, the Bahá'í Writings do not teach that all statements about reality are doomed to self-contradiction or absurdity. Genuine knowledge about reality is certainly possible and, thereby, progress in knowledge and understanding. Otherwise, why would we need progressive revelation if humankind did not make progress, leaving behind untenable views and ultimately requiring a new revelation? Progress, of course, is one of the reasons the Writings put so much emphasis on science since without science genuine progress is impossible. Scientific progress is not only convention.

#### 4. Emptiness, Essence and Self

One of the key features of the Madhyamika understanding of dependent origination is the concept of no essence. Because everything is constantly coming into and passing out of existence, there is no such thing as an essence, i.e. a stable and substantial aspect that remains the same throughout all the changes and which can be identified as such by us. Garfield says that for Nagarjuna everything is

empty of inherent existence or self-nature, or, in more Western terms essence. . . that [the table's] existence *as the object that it is – as a table* – depends not on it, nor on purely nonrelational characteristics but depends on us as well.<sup>30</sup>

If a table – as table – has no inherent, i.e. independent existence apart from the components that compose it, then neither does anything have a self, including human beings. 'Self' is simply what happens when the right components interact in the right way. When the required inter-action ends, so does the 'self.' As Donald Lopez Jr. says, "The Madhyamika claim is that nothing is ultimately findable under analysis. Everything is empty, even emptiness."<sup>31</sup> There is no

mysterious ‘self’ to be found within us. Neither things no people have essences; “Buddhism leaves no room for an essentialist conception.”<sup>32</sup>

Only some Bahá’í teachings converge with Madhyamika Buddhism on these issues. As we have already seen, Bahá’í views about the phenomenal world converge with Madhyamika beliefs about dependent origination. Both accept that the phenomenal world is in perpetual flux, that “*all else beside God as transient*” [GWB 266], that things come into existence and exist by virtue of universal influence, and that the appearance of any being requires the correct combination of inter-actions.

*Finally, the perfection of each individual being – is due to the composition of the elements, to their measure, to their balance, to the mode of their combination, and to mutual influence. When all these are gathered together, then man exists. [SAQ 178]*

Consequently, the Bahá’í Writings can accept that all things in the phenomenal are “empty” insofar as their dependence on other things as well as God is concerned. Moreover, the emptiness forms the foundation for an ethical outlook based on detachment from the phenomenal world which because of its endless changing nature, inevitably disappoints.

The question arises as to how far the concept of emptiness goes in the Bahá’í teachings. Does it, for example, apply to the concept of ‘self’? The answer to this question is that in one aspect it does, and in another it does not. This is because there are two concepts of self or ego at work in the Bahá’í Writings. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says,

*In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone. Signs of both these natures are to be found in men. In his material aspect he expresses untruth, cruelty and injustice; all these are the outcome of his lower nature. [PT 60]*

The ‘lower ego’ or ‘self’ is based on our animal nature, i.e. it is purely physical; it is a product of evolution with all the necessary instincts, drives and psychological tendencies. Moreover, to some extent it is a

product of our time, place and historical circumstances because it is also through these we may be attached to the phenomenal world. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes, “*This lower nature in man is symbolized as Satan – the evil ego within us, not an evil personality outside*” [PUP 287]. However, in addition, we have a “*spiritual or higher nature*” [PT 60] of which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “*A man may converse with the ego within him saying: “May I do this? Would it be advisable for me to do this work?” Such as this is conversation with the higher self*” [PT 179]. From this distinction it follows that that “*[o]ur greatest efforts must be directed towards detachment from the things of the world; we must strive to become more spiritual, more luminous*” [PUP 60]. In other words, we must overcome the lower ego and eliminate its domination in our lives.

The Bahá’í emphasis on overcoming our lower animal nature and our attachments to the phenomenal world converges with the Buddhist teachings about the unreality of the ‘ego’ or ‘self.’ On the basis of the Bahá’í descriptions of our lower nature, self, or ego, we may conclude that it is ultimately not real, a product of the interactive processes of the phenomenal world at both the material and socio-historical level, i.e. a product of what Buddhists call dependent origination. As Bahá’ís, we are to detach ourselves from this lower nature and the world, to let it go, to recognize it for the ephemerality it is. Bahá’u’lláh says, His

*sole purpose in revealing to thee these words is to sanctify thee from the transitory things of the earth, and aid thee to enter the realm of everlasting glory, that thou mayest, by the leave of God, be of them that abide and rule therein....* [GWB 237]

This leads to the conclusion that there is no obstacle to accepting the Buddhist doctrine of ‘noself’ insofar as the lower self and its attachments to the phenomenal are concerned; these are not ultimately real and must be overcome, left behind or outgrown.

## 5. Emptiness and the Tathagatagarbha Tradition

The difficult debate begins when we ask what, if anything, remains once we achieve complete detachment from our lower nature or

lower self. The Madhyamika, of course, deny that anything remains: there simply is no self at all. It is an empty convention without more than temporary existence in the process of dependent origination. Such is not the view of the widespread Tathagatagarbha tradition which accepts the concept of an eternal and changeless ‘Buddha-Nature’ in all beings. Because the Buddha-Nature is eternal and changeless, it is not subject to dependent origination and, therefore, is not empty in the Madhyamika sense of the term. According to the Tathagatagarbha tradition, the Madhyamika have only taken account of part of the Buddha’s revelations about the ‘self.’ More precisely, the Madhyamika schools represent only the second turning of the Buddha’s wheel of revelation for which reason their understanding is incomplete, whereas the Tathagatagarbha tradition is the third and final turning of the wheel of revelation. In this final turning, ‘emptiness’ and related concepts receive their final form.

The Tathagatagarbha or Buddha-Nature lies hidden in all sentient beings. According to *The Tathagatagarbha Sutra*

*The Buddha sees that all kinds of beings Universally possess the tathagatagarbha. It is covered by countless klesas, [defilements] Just like a tangle of smelly, wilted petals. So I, on behalf of all beings,*

*Everywhere expound the true Dharma, In order to help them remove their klesas And quickly reach the Buddha way.*

*I see with my Buddha eye*

*That in the bodies of all beings*

*There lies concealed the buddhagarbha.*<sup>33</sup>

According to the *Tathagatagarbha Sutra*, “the tathagatagarbhas of all beings are eternal and unchanging”<sup>57</sup> which, as noted before, means they are unconditioned and exempt from dependent origination and, therefore, are not empty in the Madhyamika sense. In *The Srimala Devi Sutra*, one of the central Tathagatagarbha sutras, we read:

But, Lord, the Tathagatagarbha is not born, does not die, does not pass away to become reborn. The Tathagatagarbha *excludes the realm with the characteristic of the constructed.*

The Tathagatagarbha is permanent, steadfast, eternal. Therefore the Tathagatagarbha is the support, the holder, the base of constructed.<sup>34</sup>

Of special significance here is the distinction between the eternal realm of the Tathagatagarbha and “the realm with the characteristic of the constructed” which refers to what the Madhyamika call the conventional world which we ‘construct’ by identifying things and giving them discrete names. This is the realm of phenomenal change. Such passages emphasize that unlike the Madhyamika, Tathagatagarbha Buddhism recognizes the real, independent existence, of something eternal, i.e. something that is an exception to the process of dependent origination, and, consequently, something not empty.

Lord, the Tathagatagarbha has *ultimate existence* without beginning or end, has an unborn and undying nature, and experiences suffering; hence it is worthy of the Tathagatagarbha to have aversion towards suffering as well as longing, eagerness, and aspiration towards Nirvana.<sup>35</sup>

The last statement already suggests that it is the Tathagatagarbha within us that seeks to escape the suffering of the phenomenal world of dependent origination and aspires towards the Nirvana. This is the noble desire that dwells deep within all of us. In the *Srimala Devi Sutra*, the Buddha says,

‘Good sons, do not consider yourselves inferior or base. You all personally possess the Buddha nature.’ If you exert yourselves and destroy your past evils, then you will receive the *title of bodhisattvas or world-honored ones*, and convert and save countless sentient beings.<sup>36</sup>

In passing, let us note that this statement has its counterpart in the Bahá’í Writings in which Bahá’u’lláh says, “*O SON OF SPIRIT! Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created*” [HW Ar. #22]. Being a bodhisattva or “world-honored one” is a noble and honored status and so, the Buddha’s and Bahá’u’lláh’s statements may be understood to express the same spirit and meaning. Moreover, if we possess the

Tathagatagarbha, then obviously, contrary to Madhyamika doctrine, there is something enduring within us not subject to dependent origination. This is the true self.

'Self' means 'tathagatagarbha.' Every being has the Buddha Nature. This is self. Such a self is, since the very beginning, under cover of innumerable illusions [defilements] . . . I now let persons see the Buddha Nature that they possess, which is overspread by illusion [defilements] . . . <sup>37</sup>

As evident here, the Tathagatagarbha tradition differs significantly from the Madhyamika, regarding the existence of an absolute, eternal exception to dependent origination and regarding the existence of a 'self.' Self is not necessarily empty as taught by the Madhyamika since this transcendent self is exempt from dependent origination. The self that is, indeed, empty, is the 'ego' or personality that is shaped by the processes of dependent origination but this must not be confused with — as the Madhyamika have done — with the Buddha-Nature within us. According to the Buddha, we do not seem to have a self because the Buddha-Nature or Tathagatagarbha is always covered with defilements so that we do not know what our real self is, and, therefore, do not possess it.<sup>38</sup> In other words, according to the Tathagatagarbha tradition, the Madhyamika possessed an earlier understanding of the Buddha's teachings. The Madhyamika teachings are not wrong but incomplete. Their doctrine that self is empty, is not the full teaching of the Buddha and must be re-thought in light of the revelations of the various Tathagatagarbha sutras.

There is a remarkable agreement between the Tathagatagarbha tradition and the Bahá'í Writings on the subject of a transcendent aspect within all individual beings. Bahá'u'lláh writes, "*No thing have I perceived, except that I perceived God within it, God before it, or God after it*" [GWB 178]. Both agree that all things are characterized by something that is not subject to dependent origination and, therefore, is not empty in the Madhyamika sense, i.e. is not conventional, and by contrast, has positive inherent qualities and existence. Our human task is to uncover and actualize that aspect within ourselves in order to overcome the conventional and worldly ego. As we shall see, in the Bahá'í system and the Tathagatagarbha tradition, emptiness means cleansing ourselves of defilements.

In general terms, we may say that the Buddha-Nature within us corresponds, in Bahá'í terms, to our spiritual nature.

*This spiritual nature, which came into existence through the bounty of the Divine Reality, is the union of all perfections and appears through the breath of the Holy Spirit. It is the divine perfections; it is light, spirituality, guidance, exaltation, high aspiration, justice, love, grace, kindness to all, philanthropy, the essence of life. It is the reflection of the splendor of the Sun of Reality. [SAQ 118, emphasis added]*

Our spiritual nature is a reflective presence of the divine in us, and, as expected, includes positive attributes that are “divine perfections,” i.e. they are not mere conventions as required by Madhyamika thinking. These are real virtues latent within us and they are the ‘real’ self inasmuch as it is more God-like and because it represents enduring values and attributes for which we are to strive. Our task is to follow the spiritual discipline laid down by Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu'l-Bahá in order to overcome and transform the qualities of our lower nature and its ego and, thereby, to submerge or lose them in our higher spiritual nature. That way our lower qualities will no longer conceal and defile the spiritual nature within us. That way our spiritual nature will become visible in our lives. As we shall see in more detail below, this corresponds to the Tathagatagarbha concept of emptiness which requires making our higher nature – or Buddha-Nature – “empty of what is changing, afflicted and worldly”<sup>39</sup> to reveal the beauties of the Buddha-Nature.

The concept of the presence of the omnipresent Buddha-Nature is also evident in the teaching that the “names of God” are necessarily inherent in all things:

*Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light. Methinks, but for the potency of that revelation, no being could ever exist. How resplendent the luminaries of knowledge that shine in an atom, and how vast the oceans of wisdom that surge within a*

*drop! . . . For in him [man] are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed. [GWB 177]*

The names or attributes of God are eternal and, therefore, uncreated and not in any way susceptible to dependent origination because God Himself is ‘eternal’ and absolutely independent from anything except Himself. Just as the Buddha-Nature within all sentient beings is eternal and not empty, so the names of God in all things are not empty.

There is yet another way in which the Tathagatagarbha doctrine converges with the Bahá’í Writings. The Writings state,

*Souls are like unto mirrors, and the bounty of God is like unto the sun. When the mirrors pass beyond (the condition of) all coloring and attain purity and polish, and are confronted with the sun, they will reflect in full perfection its light and glory. In this condition one should not consider the mirror, but the power of the light of the sun, which hath penetrated the mirror, making it a reflector of the heavenly glory. [TAB1 19]*

Here, too, we observe how the presence of the divine or Absolute appears in the soul, which in its purest state, is free of “coloring” or extraneous elements or defilements and simply reflects the perfection of the sun. The purity of the soul is, in fact, its original state: “*Know thou that every soul is fashioned after the nature of God, each being pure and holy at his birth*” [SWAB 190]. This original “pure and holy soul [that] is the tathagatagarbha or Buddha-Nature that exists in all things. It is continues when the soul is cleansed of defilements and when our ego and our lower nature are overcome. For this reason, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us,

*The most important thing is to polish the mirrors of hearts in order that they may become illumined and receptive of the divine light. One heart may possess the capacity of the polished mirror; another be covered and obscured by the dust and dross of this world. [defilements] Although the same Sun is shining upon both, in the mirror which is polished, pure*

*and sanctified you may behold the Sun in all its fullness, glory and power revealing its majesty and effulgence, but in the mirror which is rusted and obscured there is no capacity for reflection.* [PUP 14, emphasis added]

The deficient, defiled mirror, of course, is the one still facing or attached to the world instead of to the light of the sun, or, to view it from a Buddhist perspective, the ego is still visible and thus the divine, the Tathagatagarbha is obscured – not itself actually marred – by various defilements. In this view, emptiness is not so much something we understand intellectually as something we achieve by cleansing the “dross” from the mirror of the soul.

It is evident that the definition of ‘emptiness’ used in the Tathagatagarbha tradition is dramatically different from that used by the Madhyamikas who maintain nothing whatsoever has inherent existence: emptiness, the Buddha,<sup>40</sup> the teachings and the distinction between samsara, and nirvana are empty as are all intellectual and conceptualized understandings of them. According to Paul Williams, there is an

opposition between the Madhyamaka view of emptiness as an absence of inherent existence in the object under investigation and the tathagatagarbha perspective on emptiness . . . which sees emptiness as the radiant, pure mind empty of its conceptual accretions.<sup>72</sup>

The “pure mind,” the Tathagatagarbha itself is found to be empty of all intellectual imputations, i.e. empty of all convention. It is “empty of all defilements, including the defilements of conceptuality.”<sup>41</sup> As Tony Page writes,

So-called “Emptiness”, which is an absolutely key concept of Mahayana Buddhism, reveals itself here to be only *empty of what is changing, afflicted and worldly* – not of the changeless and positive attributes of total Bliss, Joy, Imperturbability and Eternity. The “Emptiness” of nirvanic Liberation is something that was never constructed or put together and so can never die. And it is integrally linked to a knowing being – the Buddha himself .<sup>42</sup>

By removing these various defilements, we find our Buddha-Nature, our Tathagatagarbha, which is “never constructed,” i.e. is not a conventional imputation and which is connected to the Buddha. Emptiness is precisely this condition of lacking the defilements and imputations that cover the true Buddha-Nature within. Just as noteworthy is the fact that the Buddha-Nature has eternal, i.e. changeless positive attributes such as bliss and joy which are not mere conventions we have imputed to it. (In this sense, of course, the Tathagatagarbha tradition converges with Platonism and its eternal Ideas.)

The Bahá’í Writings present the same idea. When the mirror of the soul (or heart) is cleansed of all defilements, the radiance of the Sun becomes visible in its splendor and all our awareness of the lower ego is lost, at least for a time as we reflect “*the full glory of the Sun of Truth*” [PT 95]. This reflection is not, of course, an ontological unity between the mirror and the Sun, but rather an analogical unity in which the sun in the mirror is the analogue of the divine Sun, i.e. both different and similar. To be cleansed of defilements, we must seek to become detached “*from all else save God*” [SWAB 86] and to practice self-sacrifice and the “*evanescence*” [TAB2 460] and to “*to reflect the love of the Highest on all men*” [PT 87]. In doing so, we find what remains in our souls and hearts is our attachment to or love for God which is precisely what makes us spiritually noble beings. It is also that aspect of us which is more real than the ego or self. We might call this ‘the practice of emptiness.’

It is evident that in the Tathagatagarbha tradition and the Bahá’í Writings agree that ‘emptiness’ is the lack of defilements. The Buddha-Nature is empty not in itself – for it has inherent existence and positive qualities – but because it is clean of all emotional, intellectual and behavioral imperfections. Thus, emptiness does not mean a lack of inherent existence as it does in the Madhyamika schools but rather it means a lack of defilement. “In this sense the Buddha essence is indeed empty – it is empty of adventitious defilements which simply do not exist at all from the point of view of its own innate purity.”<sup>43</sup> In Tibet, the Jo nang pa school knows this as the “other-empty” view in contrast to Ge lug pas who espouse the “self-empty” view of the Madhyamikas.<sup>44</sup> (The Dalai Lama is a Ge lug pa.)

In the Bahá'í context, the Manifestation in “*the condition of divine appearance and heavenly splendor*” [SAQ 151] may also be described as ‘empty’ in the Tathagatagarbha sense:

*The third station is that of the divine appearance and heavenly splendor: it is the Word of God, the Eternal Bounty, the Holy Spirit. It has neither beginning nor end, for these things are related to the world of contingencies and not to the divine world. For God the end is the same thing as the beginning.* [SAQ 151]

If the Manifestation in the third station is free of time because time is related to the contingent world, then, by implication, He is also free of the other defilements associated with the contingent world. Consequently, in the Tathagatagarbha sense, the Manifestation may be described as ‘empty.’ The same is true of God Who is also empty in the Tathagatagarbha sense of the term.

However, we should not conflate the Bahá'í doctrine of the unknowability of God with any form of Buddhist emptiness teaching. The Bahá'í doctrine of the unknowability of God is a teaching about human capacity, or incapacity, in light of the ontological difference between God and humankind. In contrast, Buddhist emptiness teaching concerns either the Buddha-Nature's lack of defilement or the mere conventionality of any such supposed entity. From a Bahá'í viewpoint, saying that God lacks defilements is superfluous, and saying that the existence of God is a mere convention is contrary to the Writings since God does not depend on us.

We now arrive at the thorny issue of the ‘self’ in the Tathagatagarbha tradition and the Bahá'í Writings. In the Madhyamika tradition, the concept of ‘self’ is empty, i.e. a convention imputed by us on the process of dependent origination. However, in the Tathagatagarbha tradition, matters are not so straight-forward. On one hand, the Tathagatagarbha tradition makes it clear that the Buddha-Nature within us should not be understood as a personality, ego or self.<sup>45</sup> Yet, despite repeated emphasis on this point, it has often been said the Tathagatagarbha schools have – perhaps inadvertently – re-introduced the concept of self into Buddhism. Donald Lopez Jr. states that “another controversy [about the Tathagatagarbha doctrine] derives from the fact that the

tathagatagarbha is often described in such a way that it sounds like a self."<sup>46</sup> It is not difficult to see why as shown by the following quotation from the Buddha:

O Kasyapa!

Know well of the three refuges. The nature  
Of the three refuges is that of self. If one knows  
Clearly that the nature of self has the Buddha Nature,  
Such a one well enters the undisclosed house.<sup>47</sup>

Inevitably, such statements raise questions. How can "the nature of the self" have the Buddha-Nature without that "nature of the self" also having something essential or 'eternal' about it, something exempt from dependent origination, and, therefore, not empty? This suggestion seems reinforced by statements like "The nature of self is none but the undisclosed storehouse of the Tathagata."<sup>48</sup> Since the Tathagata (The Buddha) is exempt from dependent origination, the same appears to be true of the self.

Moreover, from a strictly philosophical point of view, one might also reason as follows. If the Buddha-Nature is present in all sentient beings, then it is present individually in all beings. In other words, every being is a particularized appearance of the Buddha-Nature and insofar as it is particular, it is difficult to avoid suggestions of individuality or self. Bare particularity is the minimal logical requirement for the existence of a self and each sentient being seems to meet that minimal requirement. The Buddha-Nature that appears in all things may be the same, but this 'sameness' makes individual appearances in all particular things. While this particularity is not a 'self' in the sense of a fully-developed ego or personality, it is, at least, something possessing the minimum logical foundation for individuality. This seems to be recognized by David Kalupahana who says the Tathagatagarbha view (among others) brings us "dangerously close to the theory of self . . . advocated by the heretics."<sup>49</sup> Rupert Gettin writes that the issue is difficult to resolve because "its [the self's] metaphysical and ontological status is, however, open to interpretation in terms of the different Mahayana philosophical schools."<sup>88</sup>

While we are unable to resolve these tensions and ambiguities among Buddhist traditions, we are able to conclude the Tathagatagarbha tradition and the Bahá'í Writings seem to converge in regards to the subject of self. There is something transcendent in us – be it called the Buddha Nature or spiritual nature or names of God – that must be revealed by us. The definition of the self as the Tathagatagarbha also means that a different view of emptiness is at work – emptiness as the removal of defilements of the Buddha-Nature. In the Jo nang pa this is called being ‘other empty.’ The Bahá'í Writings do not share this language but they do share a similar view of emptiness.

## 6. Emptiness in the Yogacara Tradition

The Yogacara tradition is generally regarded as being a form of philosophic idealism in which there is

an ultimate reality, real beyond anything which can be asserted of what comes within the range of [human] experience. This is thought (*citta*) or mind, not mind as existing in the variety in which it is experienced, but without any differentiation, and called store-consciousness (*alaya-vijnana*).<sup>50</sup>

Self and all apparently external objects are empty insofar as they have no inherent or independent existence and no enduring essence. Moreover, all objects – whether they appear to exist outside us or whether they are thoughts, feelings and perceptions, are, in Vasubandhu's phrase “ideation only.”<sup>51</sup> Even in regards to apparently external objects, all we can know are our own experiences and nothing more. If we kick a rock, as Dr. Johnson famously did to refute the idealist Bishop Berkeley, we still only have our sensory impression – an ‘idea’ – of the rock we just kicked. We experience ‘hardness’ or ‘resistance’ but those are still our experiences. This applies to the self as well. If we examine our inward life, all we find is a stream of changing perceptions and impressions, but we do not find a ‘self’ in that stream. The seemingly external world arises because “[d]ue to our beginningless ignorance we construct these perceptions into enduring subjects and objects.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, as in the Madhyamika philosophy, all objects of perception and thought exist

‘conventionally’ and have no inherent existence or essence. In that sense they are ‘empty.’ However, the Yogacara position goes beyond the Madhyamika view which only tells us what things are ultimately not and says nothing about what they are and which does not explain how things come to appear in the way they do.<sup>53</sup> From this perspective, Madhyamika views are negative whereas the Yogacara tradition is positive insofar as it provides a positive explanation for the nature of existence and human perception.

While the Yogacarins agree that things that appear to us as the world or self are conventional and empty, it also asserts that consciousness itself is the real substratum that underlies all appearances. It alone has inherent existence and essence. Hence the Yogacara tradition is sometimes called the “mind-only” school, since consciousness or mind – though not the individual mind – is recognized as being ultimately real. “Highest knowledge yields the realization that reality is pure and undiscriminated consciousness.”<sup>54</sup> The apparently separate existence of all other things – including the ‘self’ – is explained as the result of the “store-consciousness.” The store-house consciousness

is the particular repository of all the seeds sown by the defilements of a being’s active consciousness’ it is the result of the being’s past karma . . . as such the store consciousness is also the condition for the perpetuation of these defilements in present and future active consciousness.<sup>94</sup>

The ultimate reality or universal consciousness contains the “seeds” or potential future consequences or dispositions of all past actions and defilements by all entities. These seeds are a metaphor for karma. As the seeds ‘mature,’ or the potentials actualize through dependent origination, certain consequences arise and these lead to the appearance of self and world, subject and object, perceiver and perceived, experiencer and experienced. In the words of the Dalai Lama, the Yogacarins “argue that the perception of the external world arises as the result of the imprints [seeds] that exist within the consciousness.”<sup>55</sup> However, the ultimate truth is that none of these dualities are true – they are empty – and that all things are one in the universal consciousness. Even to say they are ‘one’ may already go

too far inasmuch as this universal consciousness exists beyond all human categorizations.

For Yogacarins, emptiness refers to lack of any distinction between subject and object, between perceiver and perceived, and between the 'experiencer' and the experience. They are all one and same – 'parts' of the universal consciousness on which we impose arbitrary constructions as a result of karmic seeds. None of these 'objects' have inherent existence or essence. This is exactly the emptiness revealed by enlightenment. Emptiness, therefore, may be characterized as the recognition that no ontological differences are real and that ontologically speaking, we are all one.

The relationship between the Bahá'í Writings and the Yogacara concept of emptiness has two aspects, one ontological and the other spiritual or moral. From a strictly ontological point of view, it is possible to argue that the Bahá'í Writings and Yogacara doctrine converge insofar as they both see all created things as ontologically equal. Unlike the universal consciousness which has the ontological marks of traditional concepts of divinity, i.e. absolute independence, eternity and exemption from change, every self, every subject and object is absolutely dependent – and thus, as the Writings indicate – relatively unreal or 'conventional.' Things also lack inherent existence and are inextricably subject to change. In a word, they are empty. In this sense a chair, a human being and a mountain are ontologically identical. From the ultimate ontological perspective of the universal consciousness, the differences we perceive are conventional 'add-ons' to our common ontological nature, and, therefore, not ultimate. Recognizing our ontological emptiness vis-à-vis the universal consciousness or God is the necessary first step to attaining freedom from the conventional delusions that imprison us.

The Bahá'í Writings agree with much of this analysis. For example, recognizing that much of what we purport to know is conventional in nature, i.e. human constructions based on time, place, circumstance and level of cultural development is a key element in the Bahá'í teachings. In Yogacara terminology, these individually or culturally determined constructs are empty, i.e. they are the delusions caused by individual and cultural factors or 'seeds' that we impose on them. (From the ultimate perspective of universal consciousness, we cannot even say we 'impose' these attributes, since

the subject/object division is not real.) Our task is to overcome our enslavement to these imitative delusions to attain true freedom, hence the Bahá'í emphasis on the independent investigation of truth.

*Happy are those who spend their days in gaining knowledge, in discovering the secrets of nature, and in penetrating the subtleties of pure truth! Woe to those who are contented with ignorance, whose hearts are gladdened by thoughtless imitation, who have fallen into the lowest depths of ignorance and foolishness, and who have wasted their lives!*  
[SAQ 137]

Because the Bahá'í Writings mainly applies the task of recognizing and overcoming conventions in knowledge to religion and social issues, we should not be blinded to the fact that it applies equally to all other kinds of knowledge – including self-knowledge. Many of our difficulties originate in our responses not to things as they are but to our conventional or imitational understanding of them. The only way to overcome this problem is to free ourselves from entanglement in our conventions and to recognize the emptiness of things. Here, too, the Bahá'í Writings and Yogacara philosophy converge.

Of course, there remains the question of whether or not the subject/object dichotomy can also be overcome at least from an ontological perspective. As we recall, in the Yogacara view all differences between subject/object and indeed, between all things are known to be empty vis-à-vis the “pure and undiscriminated consciousness.”<sup>56</sup> From the ultimate perspective, the differences between them are empty. Is there any convergence with Bahá'í teachings on this matter? Perhaps. One could argue that all created things are simply appearances of the creative power of God's Will. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, “*Throughout the universe the divine power is effulgent in endless images and pictures*” [PUP 14]. Given this point of view, it seems to follow that all things and all distinctions between things are not ultimate insofar as they are dependent on the “divine power.” To this extent, at least, the Bahá'í Writings converge with the Yogacara view. However, while the Bahá'í Writings suggest that at least some distinctions and attributes are imposed on things, and, thereby, empty, they do not believe that all distinctions are necessary

empty. For example, the rational soul distinguishes humans from animals in a definitive, nonempty way [SAQ 208]. Only at the most fundamental ontological level is this distinction vitiated.

The Bahá'í Writings diverge from Yogacara teaching regarding the ontological difference between created things and God – or the universal consciousness.<sup>57</sup> This distinction is not empty, not conventional and not bridgeable. In the Yogacara teaching, when the self recognizes the emptiness of all distinctions between itself and the universal consciousness, it becomes indistinguishable from the universal consciousness, i.e. it overcomes the dualism of subject and object, and discovers emptiness. This discovery is “nonconceptual knowledge”<sup>58</sup> empty of both the experiencing subject and its object which are no longer distinguished. Thereby, a human “becomes one with the Ultimate Reality.”<sup>59</sup> This view may be interpreted ontologically or epistemologically.<sup>60</sup>

If we adopt an ontological interpretation of this Yogacara teaching, there is an outright conflict with the Bahá'í Writings. The Writings are most emphatic that we, as contingent beings, are not God and can never hope to be, ontologically ‘one with Him’ i.e. can never “join partners with God” [ESW 101]. Mystics may feel as if they have achieved such unity, but in reality they have not and claims to the contrary are mistaken interpretations of their experience. There is an unbridgeable difference between absolute independence and absolute dependence that the latter can never cross. The difference between God and humankind is not empty. In a similar vein, the Writings are clear that except for our basic ontological attributes such as dependence and mutability, some differences between kinds of beings are not empty or conventional, and, therefore, real.

If we adopt an epistemological interpretation of the Yogacara position, there are fewer complexities vis-à-vis the Bahá'í Writings. For example, we may under certain circumstances feel ourselves so much in harmony with the divine will, that all sense of being a self with a separate will is extinguished. The distinction between our will and God's will has been vitiated and is, therefore, empty. This condition is traditionally described by Christians as ‘kenosis.’ However, this ‘self-emptying’ is a psycho-spiritual condition and is not an ontological state. We are who we are and God is Who He is.<sup>61</sup>

The Bahá'í and Yogacara teachings also converge when we apply them to morals. Morally speaking, one of our tasks is precisely to recognize the emptiness of any imputed differences between ourselves and others. Indeed, we must realize that these differences insofar as they separate us and generate animosity, are empty, i.e. are, to use Yogacara terminology, the products of the seeds of our own 'karma' or personal history and, therefore, not real in comparison with our common spiritual nature.

*For now have the rays of reality from the Sun of the world of existence, united in adoration all the worshippers of this light; and these rays have, through infinite grace, gathered all peoples together within this wide-spreading shelter; therefore must all souls become as one soul, and all hearts as one heart. Let all be set free from the multiple identities that were born of passion and desire, and in the oneness of their love for God find a new way of life. [SWAB 76]*

The identities "born of passion and desire" may well be those identities which, in the Yogacara metaphor, 'sprout' from the karmic seeds. In the Yogacara view, these seeds originate in past lives, whereas in the Bahá'í view they may be the consequences of earlier good and bad actions. In either case, we are to recognize that the differences between ourselves and others, are empty, i.e. non-essential vis-à-vis our common spiritual nature and goals. What is most real about us is our spiritual nature. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "[m]an is, in reality, a spiritual being, and only when he lives in the spirit is he truly happy" [PT 72]. This implies that our moral goal is to achieve emptiness or non-duality between our empirical, 'every-day' self and our spiritual self, i.e. to overcome any difference between the two. Only thus can we become "as one soul."<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, the Bahá'í Writings seek to apply this principle not only to individuals but also socially, to races, nationalities and social classes: "*The divine Manifestations since the day of Adam have striven to unite humanity so that all may be accounted as one soul*" [PUP 150]. It is not enough that individuals realize their emptiness vis-à-vis the universal consciousness or God – rather, we must recognize that, from spiritually speaking, racial and even cultural differences are empty conventions. This is not to say these differences are not

valuable, but we must never forget that they are not ultimate, i.e. empty and allow them to stand in the way of progress to a more peaceful and productive world. In this way the Bahá'í Faith tries to put the concept of emptiness into practice.

## 7. Emptiness in the Theravada Tradition

In the Theravada tradition which predominates in Southeast Asian nations such as Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, the concept of emptiness plays a very different role than it does in the various Mahayana schools. Edward Conze, one of the greatest Buddhologists, informs us that the Theravada thinkers “knew the term *empty*, but used it very sparingly. In the Pali Canon it occurs only in a few places.”<sup>63</sup> Not only are there fewer references to emptiness in the Theravada tradition than in the Mahayana, but the Theravada has emphasis is on practices that lead to the experience of ‘liberation’ or ‘*nibbana*’ (*nirvana* in Sanskrit), also known as ‘awakening.’ Liberation refers to the condition in which ignorance and the resulting desire, suffering and *kamma* (*karma* in Sanskrit) are left behind or transcended. This brings with it serenity and bliss. Liberation must be personally experienced to be understood. Unlike the Mahayana tradition which is rich in metaphysical reflections on emptiness as a lack of inherent existence, the Theravada tradition is more pragmatic than speculative in its approach to emptiness. It is concerned with how the practice of emptiness can help us overcome the unsatisfactoriness or suffering of life and to attain *nibbana*, i.e. awakening or liberation.

In the Theravada there was greater emphasis on self-discipline and individual achievement. The goal was *arhatship*, which symbolized the extinction of the fires of lust and craving in the individual brought about by his or her own efforts.<sup>64</sup>

Theravadin monk and scholar Thanissaro Bhikkhu states,

This is where this sort of emptiness differs from the metaphysical definition of emptiness as “lack of inherent existence.” Whereas that view of emptiness doesn't necessarily involve integrity – it's an attempt to describe the ultimate truth of the nature of things, rather than to evaluate

actions – this approach to emptiness requires honestly evaluating your mental actions and their results. Integrity is thus integral to its mastery.<sup>112</sup>

Two *suttas* (the Pali term for ‘*sutras*’ or Buddha word) stand out in this regard, *The Greater Discourse on Emptiness* and *The Lesser Discourse on Emptiness*. According to Thanissaro Bhikkhu, the Pali Canon has three perspectives on emptiness. The first concerns acquiring and maintaining the mental state of emptiness, i.e. learning how to empty the mind of all distractions and keep it empty. Step by step the Buddha explains how to empty the mind of the perception of social distractions, of natural distractions and eventually the distractions of space, nothingness and consciousness and all the humanly-constructed concepts of “perception and nonperception.”<sup>113</sup> This brings the seeker to “his entry into emptiness, accords with actuality, is undistorted in meaning, pure – superior [and] unsurpassed.”<sup>65</sup> Here we observe emptiness as goal of meditation; ‘emptiness’ is freedom from disturbing intrusions. This first perspective on emptiness is the focal point of this discourse.

The second perspective on emptiness concerns the question, ‘What does it mean to say the world is empty?’ The answer is that the world is empty insofar as nothing has any ‘self.’

Insofar as it [the world] is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self: Thus it is said, Ananda, that the world is empty. And what is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self? The eye is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self. Forms... Eye-consciousness... Eye-contact is empty of a self or of anything pertaining to a self.<sup>66</sup>

The intellect, ideas, consciousness are also empty of self and, therefore, any attributes we impute to objects of consciousness, i.e. the world, are empty of self as well. We create this illusion of self in our desire to be happy, and, consequently seek to control the world around us, engaging in “my-making” and “I-making”<sup>67</sup> which inevitably incites struggles with others trying to do the same. When we perceive without implicitly or unconsciously tainting our perceptions with notions of self, i.e. engage in self-centered

perception, they cease to cause us dissatisfaction and suffering. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, we are to become “*wearry of self*” [SWAB 76].

“Emptiness in its third meaning, as a type of awareness-release”<sup>68</sup> which is an application of the second meaning of emptiness in concrete situations. For example, in an empty house, we may consider how every room in the house is empty of self, which, according to the Theravada tradition is different from the first kind of emptiness as we eliminate distractions. The finer details of this kind of emptiness need not detain us here, except to say that this kind of emptiness may “lead to Awakening”<sup>68</sup> which is the end of ignorance, desiring, suffering and karma, and the attainment of supreme, unconditioned tranquility.

The Theravada teachings and the Bahá’í Writings are convergent about several issues in regards to emptiness. The first of these concerns the practical application of emptiness as freedom from intrusive distractions. According to the Writings, “*No thing have I perceived, except that I perceived God within it, God before it, or God after it*” [GWB 178]. As a guide to practicing emptiness vis-à-vis distractions, this statement can be the basis of training ourselves not to see anything but the signs of God in all things much as the aspiring Theravadin excludes a variety of intrusive perceptions and ideas. In other words, Bahá’ís will practice setting aside or emptying their vision of the ‘defilements,’ i.e. the short-coming of things and/or people, and strive to see only the presence of the divine names in them.

The chief of these distractions is the notion of ‘self’ – which, as in the Buddhist scriptures, must be transcended for any spiritual progress to occur. This message is conveyed in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s story of Christ and the dead dog. Whereas the disciples were repelled by the gross sights and smells, Christ, so to speak, emptied His perception of these negative distractions and saw only the positive [SWAB 169]. We might also say that the disciples were imprisoned by their self-centered perception of the decaying dog – they focussed exclusively on how the dog affected them personally, i.e. how it affected the self. Christ’s response, on the other hand, demonstrated that he had emptied His perception of self and was awakened to the presence of the divine. He was liberated from self and self-centered perception.<sup>69</sup> This emphasis on over-coming self-centered perception and living is,

of course, the main point of the second meaning of emptiness in the Theravada teachings. The Writings agree that what Thanissaro Bhikkhu calls “I-making” and “my-making”<sup>70</sup> are the source of conflicts as we perceive the world in terms of ‘I’ and ‘mine,’ i.e. self-centered perception. Consequently, this perceptual habit must be overcome.

Finally, Bahá’u’lláh commands us to become “one soul,” [GWB 169] a command which requires us to empty our minds of all the intrusive distractions of negative differences. As we can see, a similar emptying process is at work as distractions from our goal are repelled. On this score, the Bahá’í Writings and the Theravada teachings converge. However, the Writings practice emptying more in an ethical context than the Theravada teachings which also concern themselves with eliminating ‘metaphysical’ distractions such as time, space and the humanly-constructed concepts of “perception and non-perception.”<sup>71</sup> The difference between the Bahá’í and Theravada teaching is largely a matter of emphasis.

Both the Theravada tradition and the Bahá’í Writings share the idea that understanding and practicing emptiness is necessary to awakening. Theravadins practice emptiness in order to achieve liberation, *nibbana* or awakening to humankind’s true condition beyond ignorance, desire, suffering and *kamma* (*karma*). On the other hand, Bahá’ís practice emptiness to awaken to and experience the divine presence in all. From a Bahá’í perspective, this divine presence is also the true human condition and the defilements we add to our lives are the self-driven falsifications we need to overcome.

## 8. Conclusion

Our survey of the Bahá’í Writings and the Buddhist concept of emptiness leads to three major conclusions. First: there are a surprising number of agreements and convergences on this subject especially regarding the ontological basis for the concept of emptiness. This does not seem to change whether we discuss the Madhyamika, the Tathagatagarbha or the Yogacara traditions. The key elements of dependent origination, ubiquitous change as the basis of emptiness, as well as the role of conventions and the necessity for seeing through them remain constant. In the Theravada tradition we

observe similarities regarding the practice of emptiness. Second: the Buddhist tradition with which the Bahá'í Writings have the clearest convergences is the Tathagatagarbha tradition. The concept of the presence of the divine or Buddha-Nature in all things and the definition of emptiness as the removal of defilements are clearly in harmony with the Writings. Third: the study of the Buddhist concepts of emptiness and the Bahá'í Writings requires more study to work out the details of these convergences which have only been adumbrated here.

---

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> "Buddhism Rising," National Geographic, Vol. 208, No. 6, December 2005, p. 98.
- <sup>2</sup> Buddha, The Theravada Mahaparinirvana Sutta, in Piyadassi, The Spectrum of Buddhism, p.104.
- <sup>3</sup> P.A. Payutto, Dependent Origination, p.4.
- <sup>4</sup> Dale S. Wright, The Six Perfections, p. 221.
- <sup>5</sup> The Questions of King Milinda, trans. by T.W. Rhys Davids, Bk II, chp. 1. <http://www.sacredtexts.com/bud/milinda.htm>
- <sup>6</sup> Majjhima-Nikaya, Sutta 63, trans by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.063.than.html>
- <sup>7</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "The Concept of No-Self in Buddhism;" emphasis added. <http://www.angelfire.com/electronic/awakening101/noself.html>
- <sup>8</sup> See also Foundations of World Unity, 83, 57; The Promulgation of Universal Peace 160, 284, 285;
- <sup>9</sup> Majjhima Nikaya 28 in The Path of the Buddha: Buddhism Interpreted by Buddhists, p. 81; see also Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition, p. 66.
- <sup>10</sup> P.A. Payutto, Dependent Origination, p.4.
- <sup>11</sup> Gadjin M Nagao, Madhyamika and Yogacara, p. 178.
- <sup>12</sup> C.W. Huntington with Geshe Wangchen, The Emptiness of Emptiness.
- <sup>13</sup> A sutra or sutta (in Pali) is a text that is considered to be a revelation of the Buddha.
- <sup>14</sup> The Heart Sutra, trans. by E. Conze. <http://kr.buddhism.org/zen/sutras/conze.htm>

- 
- <sup>15</sup> Hsueh-Li Cheng, *Empty Logic: Madhyamika Buddhism from Chinese Sources*, p. 50.
- <sup>16</sup> Hsueh-Li Cheng, *Empty Logic: Madhyamika Buddhism from Chinese Sources*, p. 51.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, trans. and commentary by Jay L. Garfield, p. 50.
- <sup>18</sup> *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, p. 100.
- <sup>19</sup> *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, p. 101.
- <sup>20</sup> Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, p. 70.
- <sup>21</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 280.
- <sup>22</sup> *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, p. 91.
- <sup>23</sup> *The Buddha, Udana 80 -81 in Buddhist Texts Through the Ages* ed. by Conze and Waley, p. 95.
- <sup>24</sup> Heng-Ching Shih, “The Significance of Tathagatagarbha: A Positive Expression of Sunyata,” <http://www.viet.net/anson/ebud/ebdha191.htm>
- <sup>25</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 203.
- <sup>26</sup> C.W. Huntington and Geshe Namgayl Wangchen, *The Emptiness of Emptiness*. p. 26.
- <sup>27</sup> *The Emptiness of Emptiness*. p. 29.
- <sup>28</sup> *The Emptiness of Emptiness*. p. 37.
- <sup>29</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, p. 4.
- <sup>30</sup> *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, p. 89.
- <sup>31</sup> Donald S Lopez Jr., *The Story of Buddhism*, p. 250.
- <sup>32</sup> David J Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*, p. 51.
- <sup>33</sup> *The Tathagatagarbha Sutra*, trans. by William H Grosnick; emphasis added. <http://www.webspawner.com/users/bodhisattva/index.html> <sup>57</sup>  
*The Tathagatagarbha Sutra*, trans. by William H Grosnick.
- <sup>34</sup> *The Srimala Devi Sutra*, trans. by Alex and Hideko Wayman; emphasis added <http://www.purifymind.com/SrimalaDeviSutra.htm>
- <sup>35</sup> *The Srimala Devi Sutra*, trans. by Alex and Hideko Wayman.
- <sup>36</sup> *The Tathagatagarbha Sutra*, trans. by William H Grosnick.
- <sup>37</sup> *The Mahaparinirvana Sutra*, trans. by Kosho Yamamoto, Chapter 12. <http://nichirenscoffeehouse.net/books/NirvanaSutra12.html>
- <sup>38</sup> Tony Page, *Appreciation of the Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutra.*” <http://www.nirvanasutra.org.uk/basic teachings.htm>
- <sup>39</sup> Tony Page, *An Appreciation of the Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutra*, Section 4.

- 
- <sup>40</sup> Paul Williams, “Buddhist Concept of Emptiness.”  
<http://www.texttribe.com/routledge/B/Buddhist%20concept%20of%20emptiness.html>
- <sup>72</sup> Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, p. 195.
- <sup>41</sup> Paul Williams, “Buddhist Concept of Emptiness.”
- <sup>42</sup> Tony Page, Appreciation of the “Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutra.”  
 Emphasis added.
- <sup>43</sup> Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, p. 105.
- <sup>44</sup> Taranatha, *The Essence of Other-Emptiness*, trans. and annotated by  
 Jeffrey Hopkins, p. 12.
- <sup>45</sup> Tony Page, Appreciation of the “Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutra.”  
 Section 2. <http://www.nirvanasutra.net/>
- <sup>46</sup> Donald Lopez Jr., *The Story of Buddhism*, p. 99.
- <sup>47</sup> *The Buddha, Mahayana Parinirvana Sutra*, trans. by Kosho Yamamoto, Ch.  
 12.
- <sup>48</sup> *The Buddha, Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutra*, trans. by Kosho  
 Yamamoto, Ch. 12.
- <sup>49</sup> David J Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy*, p.182, <sup>88</sup> Rupert  
 Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, p. 252.
- <sup>50</sup> Edward J Thomas, *The History of Buddhist Thought*, p. 233-234.
- <sup>51</sup> David J Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis*, p. 143.
- <sup>52</sup> Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Philosophical Foundation*, p. 84.
- <sup>53</sup> Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, p. 245.
- <sup>54</sup> Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Philosophical Foundation*, p. 146.
- <sup>55</sup> Dalai Lama, *The Spirit of Manjushri, Part Three, “Emptiness.”*  
<http://www.lamayeshe.com/index.php?sect=article&id=253&chid=510>
- <sup>56</sup> Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Philosophical Foundation*, p. 146.
- <sup>57</sup> With the ontological concept of God, the Yogacara consciousness shares  
 absolute independence, eternity, and an essential nature and real  
 attributes. It functions much like God as a necessary ground-of-being.
- <sup>58</sup> Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, p. 246.
- <sup>59</sup> David J. Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis*, p. 149.
- <sup>60</sup> Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism*, p. 248.
- <sup>61</sup> The nature of the Manifestation is different and not to be confused with  
 the nature of the rest of creation.
- <sup>62</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 76; see  
 Gleanings LXXXVI, CVII, CXXII.

- 
- <sup>63</sup> Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, p. 132. See also Conze, *A Short History of Buddhism*, p. 52.
- <sup>64</sup> John M Koller, *Oriental Philosophies*, p. 151. <sup>112</sup> Thanissaro Bhikku, “The Integrity of Emptiness,” <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/integrityofemptiness.html>
- <sup>65</sup> The Buddha, *The Lesser Discourse on Emptiness* (MN 121).
- <sup>66</sup> “Suñña Sutta: Empty” (SN 35.85), trans. from Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Access to Insight, 30 June 2010, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn35/sn35.085.than.html>.
- <sup>67</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *The Integrity of Emptiness*, [www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/integrityofemptiness.html](http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/integrityofemptiness.html)
- <sup>68</sup> Thanissaro Bhikkhu, “Introduction” to *The Greater Discourse on Emptiness*, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.122.than.html>
- <sup>69</sup> These statements, of course, refer to Christ in His human station.
- <sup>70</sup> Thanissari Bhikkhu, *The Integrity of Emptiness*.
- <sup>71</sup> The Buddha, *The Lesser Discourse on Emptiness* (MN 121).

# Two Episodes from the Life of Bahá'u'lláh in Iran

Moojan Momen

## Summary

This article examines two episodes in the life of Bahá'u'lláh in Iran. The first involves an examination of the events, trajectory and timeline of Bahá'u'lláh's journeying between the end of the Conference of Badasht and His arrival at the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí. There appear to be different versions of this among three sources: Nabíl's Narrative, the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This article attempts to examine these events more closely and come to a conclusion about what probably occurred. The second episode involves a close examination of a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh which is interpreted as revealing fresh information about the experience of Bahá'u'lláh while in the Siyáh Chál.

In the writing of history, it is frequently necessary to examine a number of sources about a particular event and come to a conclusion about what probably happened. This paper will focus on two episodes in the life of Bahá'u'lláh in Iran that require closer examination. In this study, use will primarily be made of passages from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, supported by other evidence.

## **A. The period between Bahá'u'lláh's departure from the Conference of Badasht until His Arrival at Shaykh Tabarsí**

The first episode to be dealt with is the question of Bahá'u'lláh's activities between His departure from the Conference of Badasht until His visit to the Bábís at the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí. This period in the life of Bahá'u'lláh needs to be examined more closely because there are different accounts of events, trajectories and time-lines suggested by different sources: Nabíl's Narrative, the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. We will here examine all three and make a suggestion as to which sequence of events seems the most likely.

### **1. Nabíl's Account**

If one reads Nabíl's Narrative, one finds that Bahá'u'lláh left Badasht and travelled with other Bábís as far as the village of Niyálá. Niyálá is 115 kilometres in a straight line<sup>1</sup> from Badasht but must have take at least 10 days distance, given that it is through mountainous country. There the Bábís were attacked by the villagers and dispersed. Nabíl states that the incident at Niyálá occurred in the middle of Sha`ban 1264 (mid-August 1848).<sup>2</sup> From reading Nabíl's account, it would appear that after this episode, Bahá'u'lláh proceeded to Núr and it was there that orders arrived for Him to be arrested, conveyed to Tehran and there executed, orders that were then annulled the next day by the news of the death of Muhammad Sháh. The following is Nabíl's account of what happened at Niyálá and afterwards.

I have heard Bahá'u'lláh Himself describe that incident:

“We were all gathered in the village of Niyálá and were resting at the foot of a mountain, when, at the hour of dawn, we were suddenly awakened by the stones which the people of the neighbourhood were hurling upon us from the top of the mountain. The fierceness of their attack induced our companions to flee in terror and consternation. . . . None of our companions had remained in Niyálá except Táhiri and a young man from Shiraz, Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh. . . I found no one

into whose custody I could deliver Táhirih except that young man, who displayed on that occasion a courage and determination that were truly surprising. . .”

Bahá'u'lláh, accompanied by Táhirih and her attendant, proceeded to Núr. He appointed Shaykh Abu-Turab to watch over her and ensure her protection and safety. Meanwhile the mischief-makers were endeavouring to kindle the anger of Muhammad Sháh against Bahá'u'lláh, and, by representing Him as the prime mover of the disturbances of Sháh-Rud and Mazindaran, succeeded eventually in inducing the sovereign to have Him arrested. “I have hitherto,” the Sháh is reported to have angrily remarked, “refused to countenance whatever has been said against Him. My indulgence has been actuated by my recognition of the services rendered to my country by His father. This time, however, I am determined to put Him to death.”

He accordingly commanded one of his officers in Tihiran to instruct his son who was residing in Mazindaran to arrest Bahá'u'lláh and to conduct Him to the capital. The son of this officer received the communication on the very day preceding the reception which he had prepared to offer to Bahá'u'lláh, to whom he was devotedly attached. He was greatly distressed and did not divulge the news to anyone. Bahá'u'lláh, however, perceived his sadness and advised him to put his trust in God. The next day, as He was being accompanied by His friend to his home, they encountered a horseman who was coming from the direction of Tihiran. “Muhammad Sháh is dead!” that friend exclaimed in the Mazindarani dialect, as he hastened to rejoin Him after a brief conversation with the messenger. He drew out the imperial summons and showed it to Him. The document had lost its efficacy. That night was spent in the company of his guest in an atmosphere of undisturbed calm and gladness.<sup>3</sup>

The next time that Nabil's Narrative picks up the story of Bahá'u'lláh is His arrival at the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí shortly after Mullá Husayn and his companions had arrived there and just as they completed the task of creating some makeshift fortifications to defend themselves against the attacks that they knew were about to occur:

The work had scarcely been completed when Shaykh Abú-Turab arrived bearing the news of Bahá'u'lláh's arrival at the village of

Nazar Khán. He informed Mullá Husayn that he had been specially commanded by Bahá'u'lláh to inform them that they all were to be His guests that night and that He Himself would join them that same afternoon.<sup>4</sup>

Given that the last place that Nabíl had mentioned as Bahá'u'lláh's location was Núr and given that Shaykh Abu-Turab [Isthtihardi] is mentioned as having been in Núr with Bahá'u'lláh and Táhiri in the first quotation above and now appears in this second passage bringing news of Bahá'u'lláh's arrival, we are led to believe that Bahá'u'lláh must have come from Núr to be among the Bábís at Shaykh Tabarsí.

## 2. The decree for the arrest of Bahá'u'lláh

Problems begin to arise when we set the above account by Nabíl against statements made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in one of His Tablets. The following is a provisional translation:

*And so the Blessed Beauty (may my soul be a sacrifice to His loved ones) went to Bandar Jaz and the notables of Jaz showed Him the utmost respect and deference. Then Muhammad Sháh issued, through Hájí Mírzá Áqásí, the decree (farmán) for the execution of the Blessed Beauty. News of this arrived confidentially in Bandar Jaz. As it happened, on the next day, Bahá'u'lláh was invited to one of the villages of a local notable. The Russian officials and some of the local notables were insisting that Bahá'u'lláh should go to the Russian vessel [that was anchored in the port]. However much they urged and insisted, He would not agree. Then on the next day, He proceeded with a large crowd to that village. On the way, a rider came up and gave a paper to the adjutant of the Russian admiral (daryá-bigí). When he opened it, he shouted out with the utmost joy and said in the Mazandarani language "Mardí bimurd", which meant that Muhammad Sháh is dead. And so, on that day, when the local notables and the others present learned that Muhammad Sháh had issued a decree for the execution of the Blessed Beauty, they held a great feast and were in the utmost joy until late at night.*<sup>5</sup>

Jaz or Gaz is a town at the far eastern end of Mazandaran and Bandar Jaz or Bandar Gaz is the port of that town. From the above, it is clear that this is the same episode (of Muhammad Sháh's decree for the execution of Bahá'u'lláh and its annulment caused by his death) that Nabíl is describing in the first passage from Nabíl quoted above. It cannot be a decree of Muhammad Sháh given on a different occasion since both accounts describe how the decree was nullified by Muhammad Sháh's death. But instead of happening in Núr as the context in Nabíl would seem to indicate, in this account it happened in Bandar Jaz. Both places are in what was then considered to be Mazandaran but they are at the opposite ends of Mazandaran, 200 kilometres apart.

In fact Jaz and Bandar Jaz are situated a distance of about 40 kilometres to the north-east of the village of Niyálá. It therefore seems much more likely that Bahá'u'lláh went to Bandar Jaz immediately after the Niyálá episode. This would make sense of the fact that Nabíl records that Bahá'u'lláh entrusted Táhirih's safety to Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh Shírází, as mentioned in the passage from Nabíl above. He would not have needed to entrust Táhirih's safety to anyone if He had been accompanying her back to Núr Himself. He entrusted her safety to Mírzá 'Abdu'lláh because, after the attack at Niyálá, He was going to go towards Bandar Jaz and He needed someone to accompany Táhirih to Núr.

### **3. Arrival of Bahá'u'lláh at Shaykh Tabarsí**

The death of a king in Iran, as indeed in most countries, was a major event and most people would accurately remember where they were when they first heard of it. Muhammad Sháh died in Tehran on 4 September 1848. News of it would have gone out by couriers (*chapar*) who rode from station to station only stopping briefly to change horses. It would have reached Bandar Jaz within three or four days. We can therefore place Bahá'u'lláh at Bandar Jaz on about 7th or 8th of September 1848.

We also know that Mullá Husayn Bushrú'í raised the black standard, signaling according to a well-known Islamic Tradition the advent of the Mahdí, just outside Mashhad on 19 Sha'bán 1264 (21 July 1848) and marched westwards with a band of Bábís. News of the

death of Muhammad Sháh reached Mullá Husayn when he and his companions had reached Chishmih-'Alí, about 60 kilometres north-west of Damghán.<sup>6</sup> Chishmih 'Alí is situated about 56 kilometres almost due south of Bandar Jaz and both are about equidistant from Tehran. News of Muhammad Sháh's death would have reached Mullá Husayn at about the same time as it reached Bahá'u'lláh. Thus we know where both Bahá'u'lláh and Mullá Husayn were on about the same date of 7th or 8th September 1848. From these two locations and this point in time, both were travelling westwards (Bahá'u'lláh almost due west towards Núr, Mullá Husayn in a west north-westerly direction, probably heading for Barfurush, Quddús's hometown, to try to find him).

Bahá'u'lláh would however have spent at a few more days in Bandar Jaz after the news of the death of Muhammad Sháh reached there. Then as He travelled, being a member of one of the notable families in Mazandaran, at each town and village that He came to, custom would dictate that the leading notable of that place would have invited Bahá'u'lláh to remain a few days and at the very least to remain for a substantial feast that would be given in His honour. Bahá'u'lláh's dignity and position in society would have demanded that He remain in each location a requisite length of time to show due honour to His host. Thus Bahá'u'lláh would have travelled slowly. In one Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh alludes to this when He says that He came to that region heading for Núr (provisional translation):

*This Wronged One came from the direction of Sháhrúd [near which Badasht is located] until we entered Gaz and visited that area. And from there we went on to Ashraf [the next town west of Gaz, now called Behshahr] and before reaching there to the district of Hizár Jaríb, village by village, town by town.*<sup>7</sup>

The phrase "village by village, town by town" indicates the slow nature of His progress. Mullá Husayn was however travelling with no such considerations. He did not need to stay in any place for longer than for a night's rest. He was therefore travelling westwards much more rapidly.

The route of Mullá Husayn took him to Bárfurúsh (now called Babol). He probably thought that he would find Quddús there in his

hometown. But Quddús had been arrested at Sári on his way back to Bárfurúsh from Badasht. After a clash with the mob that had been stirred up by Sa`idu'l-`Ulamá, the religious leader of that town, Mullá Husayn and his companions proceeded to the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí where they arrived on 14 Dhu'l-Qad`ih 1268 (11 October 1848).<sup>8</sup>

The route that Bahá'u'lláh was taking westwards from Bandar Gaz and Ashraf would take Him through Sári and then `Aliyábád. Near `Aliyábád is the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí. Thus Bahá'u'lláh, travelling much more slowly than Mullá Husayn's party, would have arrived in the vicinity of Shaykh Tabarsí a couple of weeks after Mullá Husayn and his companions first arrived there and would have heard of the presence of the Bábís at Shaykh Tabarsí from the local inhabitants. Bahá'u'lláh would moreover have passed through Sári on His way and was able to give Mullá Husayn news of Quddús's whereabouts. And so a party was sent to Sari to rescue Quddús.<sup>9</sup> Thus it seems very likely that when Bahá'u'lláh arrived at Shaykh Tabarsí, He was returning from the Conference of Badasht, coming from an easterly direction and not arriving from Núr to the west of Shaykh Tabarsí.

This sequence of events then makes better sense of why Bahá'u'lláh left Shaykh Tabarsí shortly after His arrival there. Nabíl has Bahá'u'lláh arriving in Shaykh Tabarsí from Núr. Firstly, it is a long way from Núr to Shaykh Tabarsí, more than 70 kilometres. It is not clear how news of the arrival of Mullá Husayn at Shaykh Tabarsí could have reached Bahá'u'lláh in Núr so quickly. Second, if Bahá'u'lláh had come from Núr upon hearing of the arrival of Mullá Husayn and his companions in Shaykh Tabarsí, why did He leave again after so short a time, only to try to return again a few weeks later? If Bahá'u'lláh was coming from the east, returning from Badasht to Núr, however, this makes a great deal more sense. Firstly, His route would have taken Him very close to Shaykh Tabarsí, so it is likely that He heard of the Bábís at Shaykh Tabarsí from the villagers and townspeople of that area. Secondly, since He was returning from Badasht, He would have depleted all of the money that He had taken with Him. For the conference of Badasht, Bahá'u'lláh not only rented the gardens where the 81 Bábís attending the conference stayed but He also paid for their food for the twenty-two days of the conference. By the time he arrived at Shaykh Tabarsí on His way

back, He must have used up all of the money that He had taken with Him. Seeing the Bábís gathered at Shaykh Tabarsí, requiring provisions that needed to be bought in the surrounding villages, Bahá'u'lláh determined to return to Núr, where He could refurbish His supply of money and provisions. That is why He left Shaykh Tabarsí so soon after arriving. His intention to return was however thwarted when He was arrested with His companions, imprisoned and bastinadoed at Amul on His way back.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. Further details about Bahá'u'lláh's activities at Bandar Jaz

There are two other points that need to be cleared up about this period of time concerning a certain Mírzá Masíh Núrí who died while Bahá'u'lláh was at Bandar Jaz. Mr Hasan Balyuzi assumed that Mírzá Masíh lived in Bandar Jaz and died during Bahá'u'lláh's visit to that town and this is how he describes it at the beginning of Chapter Nine of his book *Bahá'u'lláh, the King of Glory* (p. 48). Mírzá Masíh Núrí was the nephew (sister's son) of Mírzá Áqá Khán Núrí who at this time was the minister of the army (*vazír lashkar*) and was later Prime Minister.<sup>11</sup> This family were distantly related both by blood and marriage to Bahá'u'lláh and their hometown was Baladih which was close to Bahá'u'lláh's home village of Tákur, in Núr, Mázandarán. Mírzá Masíh became a Bábí through Bahá'u'lláh and frequented Bahá'u'lláh's home in Tehran.<sup>12</sup>

The research for all of the above points of history was done at the time that I was assisting Mr Balyuzi with the research for his book *Bahá'u'lláh, the King of Glory*. I suggested on the basis of this research that the episode of Bandar Jaz be placed at the beginning of Chapter Nine (p. 48, where it now is) on Bahá'u'lláh's way back from Shaykh Tabarsí rather than at the end of Chapter Eleven after Bahá'u'lláh's detention at Amul as Mr Balyuzi had originally placed it and as the above Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá seems to suggest.<sup>13</sup>

There is, however, further information about Mírzá Masíh in other Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh. In one Tablet written by Bahá'u'lláh in the voice of Mírzá Áqá Ján, He replies to a person who had asked about a phrase "Masíh in Rayy" which appears in another Tablet (provisional translation):

*This refers to His Honour Hájí Mírzá Masíh Núrí (may the glory and mercy of God be upon him). I have on many occasions heard of him from the lips of the Ancient [Beauty]. On a journey which the Desire of the World undertook in the direction of Khurásán, he was in attendance and later he died and is buried between His Holiness [Sháh] 'Abdu'l-'Azím and Imámzádh Hamzih.<sup>14</sup>*

The Bab had directed His followers to proceed to Khurásán to assist Quddús and Mullá Husayn there. Consequently Bahá'u'lláh, Táhirih and a number of other Bábís set off towards Khurásán. They then met Quddús who was coming from Mashhad at Badasht and the Conference of Badasht occurred. Thus the phrase “journey which the Desire of the World undertook in the direction of Khurásán” is a reference to the journey to Badasht and indicates that Mírzá Masíh accompanied Bahá'u'lláh from Tehran to the Conference of Badasht. Thus when he died in Bandar Jaz, he was not resident there (as is stated in *Bahá'u'lláh King of Glory*, p. 48), but had just arrived accompanying Bahá'u'lláh. Indeed as Mr Balyuzi states, Bahá'u'lláh fell ill after arriving at Bandar Jaz and it is likely that Mírzá Masíh suffered from the same infectious disease but he died of it.

The above point is confirmed by Nabíl who writes that when Bahá'u'lláh left Tehran in the direction of Khurasan, Mírzá Masíh could not bear the separation and hurried after Him. However this account by Nabíl creates another historical problem. As it is published in books by both Fadil Mázándarání and 'Abdu'l-Hamíd Ishráq-Khávarí, this quotation from Nabíl goes on to say that Mírzá Masíh accompanied Bahá'u'lláh as far as Darrih Gaz and died there.<sup>15</sup> Darrih Gaz is situated in the remote north-western corner of Iran, close to the present-day border with Turkmenistan. In those days it was an extremely dangerous area to visit. There were frequent Turkomen raids into that area from the north which resulted in deaths, looting and the carrying off of prisoners to be sold as slaves in the markets of Central Asia. No-one would visit Darrih Gaz unless there was a pressing reason to do so and then only as part of a military convoy. There is no reason to suppose that Bahá'u'lláh visited Darrih-Gaz. It would appear that both Israq-Khavari and Mazandarani had a manuscript of Nabíl's Narrative where there was scribal error. “Darrih Gaz” was written instead of “dar Gaz” (in Gaz),

a difference of one letter in the Persian text. Indeed in another work, Ishraq Khavari correctly quotes Nabil and says that Mírzá Masíh died “dar Gaz” – in Gaz.<sup>16</sup>

## 5. The Evidence Against

Having presented the evidence for the version of events that I favour, it is necessary to also necessary to present the evidence against it.

First, there is a Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that has been referred to above. This Tablet, written to the Bahá’ís of Bandar Jaz, seems to suggest the following sequence of events: Bahá’u’lláh was heading towards Shaykh Tabarsí when His party was surrounded and attacked near Shaykh Tabarasí at Niyála, by Mírzá Taqí, the governor of Amul. Bahá’u’lláh was arrested and taken to Ámul. On the intervention of ‘Abbas Qulí Khán, He was released from there, but prevented from going to Shaykh Tabarasí. So Bahá’u’lláh proceeded to Bandar Jaz. While there, the decree of Muhammad Sháh for Bahá’u’lláh's arrest and execution arrived. Bahá’u’lláh was pressed to board the Russian ship that was in the harbour but refused. The next day, the news arrived that Muhammad Sháh had died and the decree was therefore void.<sup>17</sup>

Most of the description of events in this Tablet concurs with the rest of the historical evidence that we have and, indeed, I have quoted from this Tablet in the account given above. However the sequence of events presents problems. The attempt by Bahá’u’lláh to reach Shaykh Tabarsí and His imprisonment in Amul, which other accounts place as having occurred in late October 1850, over a month after the death of Muhammad Shah, is here placed before the death of Muhammad Sháh, the news of which only reaches Bahá’u’lláh after He has left Amul and arrived in Jaz. It is for this reason that preference has been given to the sequence of events suggested by the Tablet of Bahá’u’lláh that His visit to Bandar Jaz occurred on His way back to Núr from the Conference of Badasht.

A second piece of evidence that does not fit the sequence of events that we have suggested is Nabil’s account that Mírzá Masíh was present in the house of Bahá’u’lláh when Hujjat-i Zanjani reported on his delivery of the Bab’s tablet *Khutbih-yi Qahriyyih* (the

Sermon of Wrath) to Hájí Mírzá Áqásí.<sup>18</sup> This Tablet dates from immediately after the Bab's return to Chihriq after His trial in Tabriz, which would have been about the first week in August 1848. Thus this places Bahá'u'lláh and Mírzá Masíh Núrí in Tehran at a date in mid-August 1848 and certainly after the conclusion of the Conference of Badasht (early July 1848) and before Muhammad Sháh's death (4 September 1848). According to the sequence of events we have suggested, at this time in mid-August 1848, Bahá'u'lláh would still have been journeying back from Badasht and may have reached Bandar Jaz. In any case, Mírzá Masíh never returned to Tehran after the Conference of Badasht as he died in Bandar Jaz on his way back. It is just possible that Bahá'u'lláh travelled with Mírzá Masíh to Tehran immediately after the episode of Niyálá and there Hujjat came to His house in about mid-August. Then they travelled all the way back to Bandar Jaz, which is close to Niyálá, in about the end of August. It is not immediately clear however why Bahá'u'lláh should have zigzagged backwards and forwards in this manner over a distance of some 400 kilometres. The only possibility that presents itself is that, according to one unverified account,<sup>19</sup> the person with whom Bahá'u'lláh was with His brother-in-law Mírzá Majíd Áhí, who was the Persian secretary at the Russian Legation in Tehran, when the *farmán* (decree) of Muhammad Sháh for Bahá'u'lláh's arrest and execution arrived but was subsequently annulled as a result of the death of Muhammad Sháh. It could be that Mírzá Majíd Áhí was sent to Bandar Jaz in order to translate for a Russian admiral who had arrived there aboard a Russian warship (as 'Abdu'l-Baha's tablet seems to suggest) and that Bahá'u'lláh had decided to accompany him together with Mírzá Masíh Núrí, who then died in Jaz. This would then mean that after Shaykh Tabarsi, Bahá'u'lláh's itinerary was: Badasht, Núr, Tehran (where He met with Hujjat); He then set out for Jaz (with Mírzá Masíh Núrí and Mirza Majíd Áhí); in Jaz, Mírzá Masíh Núrí died and Muhammad Sháh's decree arrived, then Baha'u'llah set out for Núr, visiting the Bábís at Shaykh Tabarsí on the way. There would just about have been enough time for this sequence of events to occur but it seems contrary to Baha'u'llah's statement that He came to Jaz from Shahrúd (i.e. Badasht), unless we assume two visits to Jaz (one on the way from Badasht and then one coming from Tehran with Mírzá Masíh).

Another resolution of the anomaly presented by Nabíl's account that can be suggested is that the Bab wrote several Tablets to Hájí Mírzá Áqásí and Muhammad Sháh and this episode of Hujjat coming to Bahá'u'lláh's house and reporting on his giving a Tablet of the Bab to Hájí Mírzá Áqásí refers to one of the Tablets that the Bab wrote before the Khutbih-yi Qahriyyih.

## B. Bahá'u'lláh's experience in the Siyah Chal

What Shoghi Effendi describes as the "the birth of the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh" was a spiritual experience that Bahá'u'lláh had while He was imprisoned in the Siyáh Chál.<sup>20</sup> The attempt on the life of the Nasiru'd-Din Sháh by three Bábís occurred on 15 August 1852. Following this, all the known Bábís in Tehran were arrested and thrown into an underground dungeon that had formerly been a cistern, the Siyah Chal. At the beginning of the summer when it was customary for the notables of the town to retire to country estates to the north of Tehran in the cooler foothills of the Alborz mountains, the Prime Minister, Mírzá Áqá Khán Núrí, had ordered Bahá'u'lláh to go to his (the Prime Minister's) estate at Afchih to the north-east of Tehran. Bahá'u'lláh was there when the attempt on the life of the shah occurred. The Prime Minister's brother, Ja'far-Quli Khan, who was acting as His host, urged Him to flee to the Caspian coast and catch a ship to Russian territory, but Bahá'u'lláh refused. Instead He set off towards Tehran. On the way, He stopped off at Zargandih to visit His sister who was married to Mírzá Majíd Áhí, the Persian secretary of the Russian Legation in Tehran. He was seen entering the Legation and the Iranian government demanded His being handed over to them as He was a known Bábí. The Russian minister in Tehran agreed to this but asked however that he be shown any evidence that was found against Bahá'u'lláh. This was reported in the official government newspaper, *Rúznámih-yi Vaqáyi'-i Ittifáqiyyih* of 10 Dhu'l-Qa'dih 1268 (26 August 1852, p. 2, column 2) – this being probably the first published reference to Bahá'u'lláh in the world:

One of these [Bábís], named Mírzá Husayn `Alí Núrí, fled to Zargandih where the honoured Minister Plenipotentiary of the Russian Government was. The latter, as soon as he realized that [the fugitive] was from this wretched people, he

acted in accordance with the dictates of the accord that exists between the two governments. With the utmost wisdom, he forbade this and the servants of the embassy sent Him to the officials of the exalted [Iranian] government.

Once in the custody of Persian officials, Bahá'u'lláh was taken on foot to Tehran and thrown into the Siyáh Chál along with the other Bábí prisoners. The same issue of the same newspaper records the execution of thirty-five Bábís. According to the evidence in the reports of the British Minister in Tehran, Justin Sheil, ten of these were executed by the shah's executioners on about 21 August. Then on about 25 August, the remaining Bábís were handed over one by one to the members of various departments of the government and sections of society, each group vying with the other to find ever more gruesome ways of killing their prisoner on the streets of Tehran.<sup>21</sup> The same issue of this newspaper (p. 2, col. 2) also reports that Bahá'u'lláh was condemned to imprisonment:

[As for] Mírzá Husayn `Alí Núrí, Mírzá Sulayman-Qulí, Mírzá Mahmúd and his nephew, Áqá `Abdu'lláh, the son of Áqá Muhammad Ja`far, and Mírzá Javád Khurázání, since investigations did not show that they were involved with the others in this corrupt and evil action, His Majesty the Shah ordered that they be imprisoned perpetually.

The exact date that Bahá'u'lláh entered the Siyáh Chál is not known but from the date of the attempt on the life of the shah and the above reports, we can surmise that it must have been on 16 or 17 August 1852. It was while Bahá'u'lláh was in the Siyah Chal that he had a spiritual experience that, as with all spiritual experiences, is very difficult to describes in this-worldly language. Bahá'u'lláh therefore uses various images, similes and metaphors to describe it in various passages of His writings. In the Súrih-yi Haykal, He describes it thus:

*While engulfed in tribulations I heard a most wondrous, a most sweet voice, calling above My head. Turning My face, I beheld a Maiden – the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord – suspended in the air before Me. So rejoiced was she in her very soul that her countenance shone*

*with the ornament of the good pleasure of God, and her cheeks glowed with the brightness of the All-Merciful. Betwixt earth and heaven she was raising a call which captivated the hearts and minds of men. She was imparting to both My inward and outer being tidings which rejoiced My soul, and the souls of God's honoured servants.*

*Pointing with her finger unto My head, she addressed all who are in heaven and all who are on earth, saying: By God! This is the Best-Beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within you, could ye but understand.*<sup>22</sup> [SLH 6]

In the Tablet to Násiru'd-Dín Sháh, the episode is described thus:

*O King! I was but a man like others, asleep upon My couch, when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been. This thing is not from Me, but from One Who is Almighty and All-Knowing. And He bade Me lift up My voice between earth and heaven, and for this there befell Me what hath caused the tears of every man of understanding to flow.*<sup>23</sup> [SLH 95]

In the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

*One night, in a dream, these exalted words were heard on every side: "Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy Pen. Grieve Thou not for that which hath befallen Thee, neither be Thou afraid, for Thou art in safety. Erelong will God raise up the treasures of the earth – men who will aid Thee through Thyself and through Thy Name, wherewith God hath revived the hearts of such as have recognized Him. [ESW 21]*

And again in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

*During the days I lay in the prison of Tihran, though the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of*

*slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear. [ESW 22]*

Bahá'u'lláh was released from the Siyáh Chál and spent about a month at the home of His half-brother Mírzá Ridá-Qulí and his wife Maryam (Bahá'u'lláh's cousin), recuperating. Since the date of His departure from Tehran for exile in Iraq is stated to be 1 Rabi' II 1269 (12 January 1853), it appears that he left the Siyah Chal on about 13 December 1852. Thus Baha'u'llah's Siyah-Chal spiritual experience must have been between about 16 August and about 13 December 1852.

It is suggested by this writer that some extra information about Bahá'u'lláh's Siyah Chal experience can be obtained from the close examination of a Tablet that He wrote in the 'Akka period. The following is a provisional translation of a short passage from this Tablet. After writing about how in the Holy Scriptures of some religions there is mention of the burning of books and the killing of people, He writes about how, in His childhood, He saw an account of the killing of the tribe of Banú Qurayza. This was an episode in the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Banú Qurayza was a tribe of Medina that had been allies of the Muslims but had then betrayed them in battle. After the battle, the Muslims returned to Medina to deal with Banú Qurayza, who surrendered to them. Muhammad had given the judgement of their fate to the leader of another Medinan tribe who had always been allies of the Banú Qurayza. This man sentenced all the men of the tribe to death and the women and children to be sold into slavery. This is a provisional translation of the passage that I wish to focus on:

- *When this Wronged One was a child, He read about the attack on the Banú Qurayzah, in a book attributed to Mullá Báqir Majlisí, and immediately became so grieved and saddened that the Pen is unable to recount it, even though what occurred was the command of God and had no purpose except the rooting out of the oppressors. Despite this, with the ocean of forgiveness and boundless mercy before His eyes, He*

*beseeked the One True God, exalted be His glory, at that time for that which would be the cause of universal love, fellowship, and the unity of all the peoples of the earth.*

- *Until (tá án kih) before sunrise on the second day of the month of [His] birth, all His comportment, speech and thought were thrown into turmoil, a tumult that gave glad tidings of exaltation (urúj). This tumult was sent down and manifest repeatedly, without interruption, for twelve days, after which the waves of the ocean of utterance became manifest and the effulgences (tajalliyyat) of the sun of certitude dawned,*
- *Until (ilá an) it culminated in the moment of Manifestation. Thus I attained unto that which God hath made the source of joy to all mankind and the dawning-place of His bounty to all who are in heaven and on earth.*
- *And after that (va ba'd), by means of an ineluctable and irrevocable decree of the Most Exalted Pen, we eliminated whatever had been the cause of suffering, distress, and discord, and rained down the instruments of unity and fellowship.<sup>24</sup>*

The original is given here for those who read Persian and wish to check the translation:

- این مظلوم در طفولیت در کتابیکه نسبتش بمرحوم ملا باقر مجلسی بوده غزوه اهل قریظه را مشاهده نمود و از آن حین مهموم و محزون بود بشأنیکه قلم از ذکرش عاجز اگر چه آنچه واقع شده امرالله بوده و مقصود جز قطع دابر ظالمین نبوده ولکن چون دریای عفو و فضل بیکران مشاهده میشد لذا در آن ایام از حقّ جلّ جلاله میطلبید آنچه را که سبب محبت و الفت و اتحاد کلّ من علی الارض بوده
- تا آنکه در دویم ماه مولود قبل از طلوع جمیع اطوار و ذکر و فکر منقلب شد انقلابی که بشارت عروج میداد این انقلاب تا دوازده یوم متتابع و متوالی نازل و ظاهر بعد امواج بحر بیان مشهود و تجلیات نیر اطمینان مشرق و موجود
- الی ان انتهى الامر الی حین الظهور اذا فزت بما جعله الله مبدء فرح العالمین و مشرق العطاء لمن فی السموات و الارضین
- و بعد از قلم اعلی آنچه سبب زحمت و مشقت و اختلاف بوده بامر مبرم محتوم برداشتیم و آنچه علت اتفاق و اتحاد نازل و جاری

It is the hypothesis of this article that this passage records how, after learning of the killing of the Banú Qurayzah, a desire formed in the mind of Bahá'u'lláh as a child to be the instrument of bringing unity and harmony to the world and His description of how this desire was realized through the rest of His life. In describing this life-long process, Bahá'u'lláh has laid out four stages in the realization of His desire. These four stages are separated by three expressions each of which express the passing of a period of time, that may be short or long: “*tá án kih*”, “*ilá an*”, and “*va ba'd*”. The above translation has been laid out so as to emphasize and clarify these four stages.

The first stage is easy enough to identify since Bahá'u'lláh states that it was in His childhood. The other three stages have to be assessed according to Bahá'u'lláh's description of them. In the last stage He states that He “*eliminated whatever had been the cause of suffering, distress, and discord, and rained down the instruments of unity and fellowship*”. From among His writings, this description most closely resembles the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and the Tablets that He revealed in Akka after the Kitáb-i Aqdas in which he outlined His social teachings; Tablets such as Ishráqát, Tajalliyyát, the Tablet of the World and the Book of the Covenant. In these Tablets Bahá'u'lláh writes about those things which human beings must do to bring about peace and unity. The most important of these Tablets have been published in a volume called *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*.

The most difficult of these four phases to identify is the second stage. With the mention of twelve days in this passage, it is tempting to think of the Declaration by Bahá'u'lláh of His mission in the Garden of Ridván in 1863. However, a specific date is given for the first of these twelve days: the “second of the month of birth”. It is most likely that “birth” here refers to Bahá'u'lláh's own birth and would thus be a reference to the month of Muharram in the Islamic calendar. However, the twelve days of Ridván did not fall in Muharram in 1863. There is a slight possibility that it refers to the month of the birth of Prophet Muhammad. Although the term *mevlid* is used in Turkish to designate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad and the celebrations associated with it, the word *mawlúd* by itself does not specifically refer to the birth of Muhammad in the Persian usage, according to the dictionaries consulted by the present writer.

It is usual to say *mawlúd-i nabí*. Occasionally the month of the Prophet's birth is called Rabi` al-Mawlúd, but the writer was unable to find "Máh-i Mawlúd" referring to the month of the Prophet's birth, except in Kurdish. But in any case the twelve days of Ridván also did not fall during the month of the Prophet Muhammad's birth (Rabi` al-Avval) in the year 1863. So this reference to "twelve days" in this Tablet cannot be a reference to the twelve days of Ridván.

If one turns to the description of what occurred during and after these twelve days, one finds that what happened during the twelve days is described as having three features. First, it was of a sufficiently important nature as to throw Bahá'u'lláh's "comportment, speech and thought" into turmoil. Indeed the author is unable to find any other occasion when Bahá'u'lláh expresses Himself so strongly about His inner turmoil. Second, it gave tidings of exaltation (*'urúj*). The word *urúj* may be significant in that it does not just signify exaltation as a description of an elevated emotive state but rather points to an elevation of a person's state. It is from the same root as the word *mi`ráj* (the night ascent of the Prophet Muhammad). In all it connotes a elevation in Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual state. Third, following this event, the "ocean of utterance" (*bahr-i bayán*) surged forth and "the effulgences (*tajalliyyát*) of the sun of certitude dawned". Both of these expressions "ocean of utterance" (*bahr-i bayán*)" and "effulgences (*tajalliyyát*)" are used repeatedly in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh to refer to His Manifestation and Revelation.<sup>25</sup> Thus this passage states that some episode occurred which caused a great tumult within the self of Bahá'u'lláh, which caused an elevation in His state and after which He began to reveal verses. All of these point to Bahá'u'lláh's Siyáh Chál experience as being the episode that is being referred to here. This experience which He variously describes as quoted above led to a tumult within Him, it led to an elevation of His spiritual state – He was wakened to His role as the Manifestation of God (as 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes this<sup>26</sup>); and after this, He began to reveal verses – the Rashh-i `Amá poem in the Siyáh Chál and all of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh during the Baghdad period.

This then leaves the third stage in this passage to be studied. The explanation seems clear from the first words of this passage. The words say: "Until (*ilá an*) it culminated in the moment (or time) of

Manifestation (*hín-i zuhúr*)." The moment or time of Revelation appears to be a reference to the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh at the Garden of Ridván in 1863. This is confirmed in the next sentence where the phrase "that which God hath made the source of joy to all mankind and the dawning-place of His bounty to all who are in heaven and on earth" could well refer to the Manifestation of God and the whole sentence says that Bahá'u'lláh attained to this state at this point, which would again point to the events of the Garden of Ridván.

We could therefore paraphrase this whole passage from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh thus:

Bahá'u'lláh writes that reading the story of the sufferings and killing of the Banú Qurayza filled Him with such sorrow that He beseeched God to bring about what would be the cause of love and harmony among the people for the world. Then in the Siyáh Chál, He had an experience that caused great turmoil with Him and elevated His spiritual state. After this He began to reveal verses. Later He openly manifested Himself in the Garden of Ridván. Finally he revealed the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and then a series of Tablets in which he gave all of the guidance necessary to eliminate the causes of suffering, distress, and discord and to bring about unity and fellowship, thus fulfilling what He had longed for in His childhood.

If this interpretation of this passage of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh is correct, then it gives us valuable new information about the birth of the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh in the Siyáh Chál. We can now say that the spiritual events that Bahá'u'lláh describes in the passages quoted above as the appearance of the Maid of Heaven, the breezes of the All-Glorious wafting over Him, or something flowing from the crown of His head over His breast like a mighty torrent, which signalled the birth of His Prophetic Mission, the beginning of His mission as a Manifestation of God, occurred repeatedly over a twelve day period from 2 Muharram to 13 Muharram 1269, which equates to 16 October to 27 October 1852 A.D. or 1 'Ilm to 12 'Ilm 9 B.E.

There are a number of things to note with regard to this finding. First, we can eliminate the slight possibility that the word *mah-i*

*mawlúd* (month of the birth) refers to the month of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. Whether taking the Shí'í date of 17 Rabí` I or the Sunní date of 12 Rabí` I, neither of these dates falls within the period that Bahá'u'lláh was in the Siyáh Chál. Second, this event is placed just after the start of the Islamic year 1269, thus fulfilling the words of Shaykh Ahmad that the mystery of this Cause would be revealed after the year 1268:

The Mystery of this Cause must needs be made manifest, and the Secret of this Message must needs be divulged. I can say no more, I can appoint no time. His Cause will be made known after Hin (68) (i.e., after a while). [GPB 97]

And the references by the Báb to “after Hin” and to the “Year Nine”:

“In the year nine,” He, referring to the date of the advent of the promised Revelation, has explicitly written, “ye shall attain unto all good.” “In the year nine, ye will attain unto the presence of God.” And again: “After Hin (68) a Cause shall be given unto you which ye shall come to know.” “Ere nine will have elapsed from the inception of this Cause,” He more particularly has stated, “the realities of the created things will not be made manifest. All that thou hast as yet seen is but the stage from the moist germ until We clothed it with flesh. Be patient, until thou beholdest a new creation. Say: 'Blessed, therefore, be God, the most excellent of Makers!’” “Wait thou,” is His statement to Azim, “until nine will have elapsed from the time of the Bayan. Then exclaim: 'Blessed, therefore, be God, the most excellent of Makers!’” [GPB 29]

It is also of significance that, although Baha'u'llah was in the Siyáh Chál from late August 1852, Shoghi Effendi began the Holy Year to commemorate the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's experience in the Siyáh Chál in October 1952 and closed the Holy Year in October 1953 (which corresponds to the centenary of the “Year Nine”, the Islamic year 1269).<sup>27</sup>

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> All distances in this article are given as the straight line between the two places. The actual distance travelled would be more, sometimes much more. I am grateful to Bijan Masumian for his comments on this paper.
- <sup>2</sup> Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970), p. 301.
- <sup>3</sup> Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 298-300.
- <sup>4</sup> Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 347-8.
- <sup>5</sup> 'Abdu'l-Hamíd Ishráq-Khávarí (ed.), *Má'idih-yi Ásmání* (9 vols., Tehran: Mu'assisih-yi Millí-yi Matbú'at-i Amrí, 106 BE/1950) vol. 5, pp. 170-71.
- <sup>6</sup> Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 326.
- <sup>7</sup> Asadu'lláh Fádíl Mázandarání, *Asrár al-Áthár*, (5 vols., Tehran: Mu'assisih-yi Millí-yi Matbú'at-i Amrí, 124-29 B.E), vol. 1, pp.140-41; Asadu'lláh Fádíl Mázandarání, *Zuhúr al-Haqq*, vol. 3 ([Tehran]: n.p., n.d.), p. 112.
- <sup>8</sup> Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 345.
- <sup>9</sup> Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 349-53.
- <sup>10</sup> Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 369-72.
- <sup>11</sup> Ishráq-Khávarí, *Má'idih-yi Ásmání*, vol. 7, p. 127.
- <sup>12</sup> Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 323.
- <sup>13</sup> Ishráq-Khávarí, *Má'idih-yi Ásmání*, vol. 5, pp. 169-71.
- <sup>14</sup> Mázandarání, *Zuhúr al-Haqq*, vol. 3, p. 217.
- <sup>15</sup> Ishráq-Khávarí, *Má'idih-yi Ásmání*, vol. 7, pp. 126-7; 'Abdu'l-Hamíd Ishráq-Khávarí, *Qamus-i Iqan*, vol. 2 (Tehran: Mu'assisih-yi Millí-yi Matbú'at-i Amrí, 128 BE/1971), pp. 812-3; Mázandarání, *Zuhúr al-Haqq*, vol. 3, pp. 216-7.
- <sup>16</sup> 'Abdu'l-Hamíd Ishráq-Khávarí, *Aqdáh al-Faláh* (2 vols. 130-132 B.E./1974-1976) vol. 1, p. 40.
- <sup>17</sup> Ishráq-Khávarí, *Má'idih-yi Ásmání*, vol. 5, pp. 169-71.
- <sup>18</sup> Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 323.
- <sup>19</sup> Dr Iraj Ayman informed me (in a telephone conversation on 1 January 2019) that Mr. Abu'l-Qásim Afnán, when he had just returned from a pilgrimage visit to the Holy Land, informed him that he had an opportunity to read the manuscript of the materials that Nabil had written for the second volume of his Narratives. He had photocopied and brought for Dr Ayman some pages in which was an account of the friendly relationship between Bahá'u'lláh and Mírzá Majíd Áhí; that they

had gone horseback riding together and, while they were riding, one of their people reached them on horseback to give them the news that was received from Tehran. He called on them and in Mazandarani dialogue said “*Mardi bemardeh*” i.e. Mohammad Shah has passed away. I have not however seen this text.

<sup>20</sup> MBW 124

<sup>21</sup> Moojan Momen, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions, 1844-1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), pp. 134-36.

<sup>22</sup> SLH para. 1.6-1.7. It is not immediately obvious from the context of this passage that it relates to Bahá'u'lláh's experience in the Siyah Chal, but Shoghi Effendi describes it as such in *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, rev. ed. 1995), pp.101-2.

<sup>23</sup> GPB 102.

<sup>24</sup> Fádil Mázandarání, *Asrár al-Áthár* vol. 2, pp. 17-18; Ishráq-Khávarí, *Má'idih-yi Ásmání*, vol. 7, pp. 136.

<sup>25</sup> The occurrences of these two expressions with this meaning are too numerous to list here comprehensively. A few examples of each will be given here: “Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths.” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), v. 182, p. 85). “O Shaykh! I swear by God! The River of Mercy floweth, and the Ocean of Utterance surgeth, and the Sun of Revelation shineth forth resplendent.” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), p. 142). For “*tajallí*”, there is the whole of the Tablet known as *Tajalliyát*, where each of the sections of the Tablet is described as a “*tajallí*” (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), pp. 47-55). See also: Briefly, there hath been revealed in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Book of Certitude) concerning the Presence and Revelation (*tajallí*) of God that which will suffice the fair-minded. (ESW 118).

<sup>26</sup> SAQ 95-6.

<sup>27</sup> MBW 40, 52

# Qá'im-Maqám Faráhání in the Bahá'í Writings

Vahid Rafati

trans. Adib Masumian

## Foreword by the Translator

What follows is my translation of Vahid Rafati's *Qá'im-Maqám Faráhání dar Áthár-i-Bahá'í*, originally published in *Safíniy-i-'Irfán*, *Daftar-i-Hizhdahum* [no. 18], 2015, pp. 268-293. This article constitutes the most comprehensive survey of references to the Qá'im-Maqám in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá produced to date.

While rendering this article into English, I elected not to retain some of Rafati's technical discussions of certain terms – discussions which occur in both the body of his article, and also in some of his endnotes – as this would have benefited only the Persian-speaking audience of his original article. These enlightening explanations of certain terms, however, naturally informed the way I ultimately translated them. For instance, immediately after quoting a letter from the Qá'im-Maqám in which he uses the word *gúdiḥ*, Rafati explains that this word means “body” in Azerbaijani. Rather than preserving the word in transliteration as *gúdiḥ*, and following it with a translation of Rafati's helpful explanation, I chose to incorporate his explanation into my translation of the word by simply rendering it as

“body.” Much of this commentary by Rafati, therefore, has been preserved in my translation of his article by way of sensible incorporation. Beyond these instances, Rafati offers other explanations that I have relegated to the endnotes to preserve the flow of the main article itself.

In Persian, the Qá’im-Maqám’s name is often written as Mírzá Abu’l-Qásim Qá’im-Maqám Faráhání, or, as is the case with the title of this article, simply Qá’im-Maqám Faráhání. Such renderings appear to indicate that “Qá’im-Maqám,” which was his title, is generally treated as part of his name. For the sake of clarity, I have recast all instances of “Mírzá Abu’l-Qásim Qá’im-Maqám Faráhání” where they occur in the original Persian to “Mírzá Abu’l-Qásim Faráhání, the Qá’im-Maqám.” I have, however, chosen to leave “Qá’im-Maqám Faráhání” as is, since it is clearly an abbreviation of his full name and can thus be read as an epithet which represents it.

The reader should be aware that all translations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words in this article – as well as those of Bahá’u’lláh, with the exception of the passage from His *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih* – are mine, and are thus provisional renderings.

I am exceedingly grateful to my parents, Bijan and Farnaz Masumian, for their suggested improvements to the general accuracy of this translation, and also to Naeem Nabiliakbar for helping me to understand the meaning of several words and expressions used by the Qá’im-Maqám in those passages from his letters which Rafati has quoted in his article.

– Adib Masumian

— — — — —

## Introduction

In this article, a brief account of Mírzá Abu’l-Qásim Faráhání, the Qá’im-Maqám, will first be given, and a number of primary sources on his writings and the details of his life will be presented. Passages from research and articles on the Qá’im-Maqám that have been included in Bahá’í books and other publications will also be reproduced in a way that follows the discussion of the

aforementioned subjects. In the next section, this article will offer a sample of those Writings from Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá that extol the virtues, celebrate the praise, and enumerate the most excellent qualities of the Qá'im-Maqám, and which the present author has deemed appropriate to share. Lastly, statements from the Qá'im-Maqám himself that have been quoted or cited in the Bahá'í Writings will be presented for the dear reader's perusal.

## Mírzá Abu'l-Qásim Faráhání, the Qá'im-Maqám

In the spheres of Iranian literature and politics, Mírzá Abu'l-Qásim Faráhání, the Qá'im-Maqám, ranks among the most august of the men who lived during the Qájár era. Abu'l-Qásim was the son of 'Ísá Faráhání, who also held the title of "Qá'im-Maqám." Abu'l-Qásim was born in 1779, and was killed in the Nigáristán garden of Ṭihrán in 1835. In 1821, while in Tabríz, he became a minister under 'Abbás Mírzá, and in the early autumn of 1822, he was given the title of Qá'im-Maqám. Following the death of Fath-'Alí Sháh, the Qá'im-Maqám prepared the means for Muḥammad Sháh's accession to the throne, and was then appointed his prime minister. In the realm of politics, the Qá'im-Maqám was a worthy and experienced man who was favorably disposed towards reformist ideals. It is for this reason that, with time, he became the object of the envy of those around him, and especially of his political rivals, including Ḥájí Mírzá Áqásí. Eventually, he was brutally put to death at the age of 58 [*sic*],<sup>1</sup> and was then buried in the shrine of Sháh 'Abdu'l-'Azím in the city of Rey.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond his political pursuits, when it comes to the field of Persian poetry and literature in general – whether composed in verse or in prose – the Qá'im-Maqám is regarded as one of the greatest littérateurs, orators, and writers of the Qájár era. He composed his poetry under the pen name "Thaná'í," and pioneered a style of Persian prose that was simple, unaffected, and novel – a style that was all his own. The concision of his sentences, the elegance and sweetness of his diction, the omission of anything superfluous from his speech, the brevity he observed in his writing, and the special attention he devoted to literary witticisms when setting forth his points – all these are accounted as among the most salient features of the style employed by the Qá'im-Maqám in his prose. His was a

mellifluous kind of prose that has come to occupy a rank of incontestable and abiding significance in the realm of literature. Indeed, the qualities that characterized the Qá'im-Maqám's prose have ultimately influenced the compositional style of the writers who succeeded him.



Mírzá Abu'l-Qásim Faráhání, the Qá'im-Maqám

A compilation of the Qá'im-Maqám's writings has been published under the title *Munsha'át-i-Qá'im-Maqám* ["The Compositions of the Qá'im-Maqám"], and a collection of his poetry has also been published.<sup>3</sup> Various treatments of the political life and literary works of the Qá'im-Maqám have been produced to date. Sources for biographical accounts of the Qá'im-Maqám can be found in *Farhang-i-Sukhanvarán* ["An Encyclopedia of Orators"], vol. 1, p. 201. In addition, a biographical account of the Qá'im-Maqám – as well as the most significant sources on the details of his life and his literary works – have been published in *Dá'iratu'l-Ma'árif-i-Tashayyu'* ["The

Encyclopedia of *Shí'ism*"], vol. 12, p. 544. Likewise, articles on the Qá'im-Maqám that have appeared in Iranian publications have been reproduced in the volumes of *Fihrist-i-Maqálat-i-Fársí* ["The Index of Persian Articles"]. *Zindigíy-i-Síyásí va Adabíy-i-Qá'im-Maqám* ["The Political and Literary Lives of the Qá'im-Maqám"], written by Mír-Ḥusayn Yikrangiyán and published in Ṭihrán by Intishárát-i-'Ilmí in 1955 – as well as *Qá'im-Maqám-Námih* ["A Compendium on the Qá'im-Maqám"], prepared by Muḥammad-Rasúl Daryágasht and published in Ṭihrán by Intishárát-i-'Ilmí va Farhangí in 1998, and which includes several articles and transcripts of talks from Iranian researchers – are considered the most important available sources for studying the life and writings of the Qá'im-Maqám. One transcript of a talk given by Jahángír Qá'im-Maqámí – entitled *Marájí' va Manábí'-i-Taḥqíq dar báriy-i-Qá'im-Maqám* ["References and Sources for Research on the Qá'im-Maqám"], and published in *Qá'im-Maqám-Námih* (pp. 126-136) – offers sources for the biographical details, the literary pursuits, the personal life, the beliefs, and the administrative and political affairs of the Qá'im-Maqám.

As for Bahá'í works on the subject, an article entitled "The Prince of the City of Statesmanship and Literary Accomplishment" by Dr. Nosratullah Mohammad Hosseini has been published in the nineteenth year of the *Áhang-i-Badí'* ["The New Melody"] periodical, no. 9, November/December 1964, issue no. 213, pp. 305-307, and an article entitled "A Remembrance of Mírzá Abu'l-Qásim Faráhání, the Qá'im-Maqám" by Ezzatollah Ghaemmaghami has also been published in the *Payám-i-Bahá'í* ["The Bahá'í Message"] magazine, no. 263, October 2001, pp. 39-45. Additionally, 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd Ishráq-Khávarí has provided a brief account of the Qá'im-Maqám's life and writings in *Muḥáḍirát* ["Conversations"], vol. 2, pp. 928-934, and Fáḍíl Mázandarání has also included a concise discussion of the Qá'im-Maqám's life and the members of his family in *Zuhúru'l-Ḥaqq* ["The Manifestation of Truth"], vol. 8, pp. 267-278.

## References to Qá'im-Maqám Faráhání in the Bahá'í Writings

Now that the essential points concerning the biographical accounts and sources for the study of the life of the Qá'im-Maqám

have been discussed, those Bahá'í Writings which contain remarks from Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá in praise of the Qá'im-Maqám will be presented below for the dear readers.

In His *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih* ["Words of Paradise"], Bahá'u'lláh states:

*O people of God! Beseech ye the True One – glorified be His Name – that He may graciously shield the manifestations of dominion and power from the suggestions of self and desire and shed the radiance of justice and guidance upon them.*

*His Majesty Muḥammad Sháh, despite the excellence of his rank, committed two heinous deeds. One was the order to banish the Lord of the Realms of Grace and Bounty, the Primal Point [the Báb]; and the other, the murder of the Prince of the City of Statesmanship and Literary Accomplishment [the Qá'im-Maqám].*

*The faults of kings, like their favors, can be great.*<sup>4</sup>

With reference to the aforementioned remarks, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written the following in one of His Tablets to Mírzá Áqáy-i-Qá'im-Maqámí:<sup>5</sup>

*Ṭíhrán*

*To Mírzá Áqáy-i-Qá'im-Maqámí, upon him be the glory of the All-Glorious*

*He is God*

*O you who are the scion of the Prince of the City of Statesmanship and Literary Accomplishment, and are descended from the ruler of the realms of reason and understanding! It has been some time since I last conversed and discussed inner secrets with you. Now, without premeditation, I have begun to write this letter, for I was suddenly reminded of that face and temperament of yours, and am apprised of the services you are rendering in the Cause. You are indeed firm in your belief with the utmost*

*conviction, and serve the Cause with all your might. No ingenious method remains that you have not employed to secure the good-pleasure of God, and no strategy is there that you have not executed to exalt His Word. In truth, you are an illustrious descendant of your august ancestor, and unto the lineage of that supremely righteous man, you are even as a brilliant candle. We are deeply gladdened that that family has laid an unshakable foundation, and built a mighty mansion, the highest room of which reaches the loftiest heavens. At such a sight the soul of that distinguished personage swells with pride in the Abhá Kingdom. What can I say? For through your sincere intentions, your prodigious efforts, your reverence for the truth, and your servitude at the threshold of God, that faithful friend exults with unbridled joy and fervor. Upon you be the glory of the All-Glorious.*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá ‘Abbás

8 June 1919<sup>6, 7</sup>

Similarly, the following has been recorded in another Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

*To Dabír-i-Mu’ayyad, upon him be the glory of the All-Glorious*

*He is God*

*O renowned Dabír! He Who is the Ever-Living, the Almighty,<sup>8</sup> has lauded the Prince of the City of Statesmanship and Literary Accomplishment. This title has left behind traces so astonishing as to have enraptured and dumbfounded people of every stripe. That celebrated one of the Concourse on High<sup>9</sup> now appears resplendent as the shining moon, and is even as the master of this world and of the next. Such a bounty will manifest itself, through his descendants, in a form as beauteous as roses and flowers.*

*And now, the Pen of the Covenant<sup>10</sup> has addressed you as Dabír-i-Mu’ayyad. It is my hope that you will be even as a*

*billowing wave of that ocean, and will discover the loftiest summit. Upon you be the glory of the All-Glorious.*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá ‘Abbás  
14 November 1921<sup>11, 12</sup>

In another one of His Writings, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated the following:

*He is God*

*The musk-laden message which you had written to your kind father was read, word for word, with the utmost joy and delight. I inhaled from the flower-garden of its themes and the rose-bushes of its inner meaning a most pleasant fragrance. It gave the glad-tidings of the triumph of the Cause of God and heralded the exaltation of His Word. It betokened, moreover, your firmness, your steadfastness, and your ardent desire to serve God. Although you have decided not to travel to Paris, I hope that you shall nonetheless attain the station of Idrís, inasmuch as it has been revealed in the Qur’án: “Verily, We uplifted him to a place on high.”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, I hope that your travels throughout the villages in the vicinity shall inaugurate a myriad bounties. Blast the trumpet, that that country may acquire new life from that soul-sustaining breath. Thereby shall the fame of this wondrous Cause stir both the East and the West.*

*You had written concerning the rugs of the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh. God willing, you will succeed in completing this endeavor. It is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s greatest wish that the kindred of the Prince of the City of Statesmanship and Literary Accomplishment, the late Qá’im-Maqám, may all repose beneath the shade of Him Who is the Ever-Living, the Almighty, and become the means through which the Word of God is exalted and His fragrances diffused. May each one of them become the brilliantly burning candles of every assemblage, and the blossoming hundred-petaled roses of every garden.*

*I feel the utmost love towards you, and was delighted to receive the portrait of the late Qá'im-Maqám you sent me. That portrait now hangs in my bedroom. Every morning when I wake from my slumber, my eyes fall upon it. Consider, then, how great is my fondness for him, inasmuch as the Ancient Beauty<sup>14</sup> – may my life be a sacrifice for His loved ones – felt unreserved loving-kindness for that outstanding personage, and always spoke highly of him. Upon you be the glory of the All-Glorious.*

'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbás<sup>15, 16</sup>

The following has been recorded in yet another Writing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

*Delivered by way of Áqá Siyyid Asadu'lláh*

*Mírzá Ḥabíbu'lláh – a descendant of the Qá'im-Maqám, who abides in Paradise – upon him be the glory of God*

*O you who yearn for the threshold of that One Beloved! That which you had written, as well as what was latent within your radiant mind, have been seen and understood. The Ancient Beauty harbored abundant favor and immense affection for that family. Most of the time, He had some occasion to mention the Qá'im-Maqám. In so doing, His face would be wreathed in the evidences of cheerfulness, and this indicated conspicuously the favor and tenderness of that Brilliant Star. Now, praised be God, for the fruits of that tenderness are becoming increasingly apparent with every passing day. Some from that family have entered beneath the shade of the blessed Tree; they have found new life from the living waters that stream in the blissful Paradise, and been created anew. The hope I have placed in the abounding grace of God is this – that all the members of that family be inebriated with the cup of the Covenant, and be moved, through the wondrous melody of this divine springtime, to render fervent praise to the Ancient Beauty.*

*As to the question of your being here in these days, this is a dangerous prospect. God willing, permission to that effect shall be granted at the appropriate time. Upon you be salutations and praise.*<sup>17, 18</sup>

In another one of His Writings, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says:

*O servant of Bahá’u’lláh! Your message has arrived, and the letter from Jináb-i-Qá’im-Maqámí was read, from beginning to end, with careful attention. ... Jináb-i-Qá’im-Maqámí must follow the example of his august ancestor. At a time when all the Qá’im-Maqám’s enemies in Persia were assailing him, and when the Sháh himself had inwardly directed his ill will and teeming wrath towards him, he never deplored his situation. On a certain day, the late Mírzá [‘Abbás Núrí] said to him, “Your enemies are determined to the utmost; something must be done.” To this the Qá’im-Maqám responded, “I know well that they are intent upon my murder, and in the end this will undoubtedly come to pass. Indeed, it is certain that I will be slain. You are aware that it is within my power to exact vengeance upon the Sháh, but I am not disloyal. I will continue to arise faithfully until my final breath, and have left such treachery for the disloyal to commit.” Behold the radiant acquiescence and exemplary forbearance he demonstrated! It is my hope that Jináb-i-Qá’im-Maqámí will likewise tread this path ...*<sup>19, 20</sup>

In a Tablet addressed to Jináb-i-Amín (Hájí Mírzá Abu’l-Ḥasan-i-Amín), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written the following:

*O trusted one<sup>21</sup> of the Blessed Beauty!<sup>22</sup> Your letter dated 12 August 1919 was received, and a brief reply is included herewith.*

*Mírzá Áqá Khán Qá’im-Maqámí is a gem descended from his august ancestor – a gleaming pearl enveloped in the embrace of his majestic shell. He is a man of courage in every respect, and a true servant of the Beloved.*<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, in a Tablet addressed to Áqá Mírzá Áqá<sup>24</sup> – the son of Áqá Mírzá Buhlúl 'Iráqí [Arákí], who was the grandson of the Qá'im-Maqám – 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written the following:

*O scion of that illustrious personage, and O descendant of that peerlessly great one! ... The Blessed Beauty – may my life be a sacrifice for His loved ones – felt the utmost loving-kindness for your august ancestor, and praised him in His Tablets. He spoke constantly of the Qá'im-Maqám's distinguishing characteristics, and would always describe how that celebrated personage was, in the thirteenth century of the Islamic calendar,<sup>25</sup> the ruler of the realm of statesmanship and a writer without peer or parallel. The very act of mentioning the Qá'im-Maqám was enough to wreath His face in manifest gladness, and this betokened clearly the profound tenderness He felt towards him. Render thanks unto God, for you have lighted his lamp, have made his descendants the brilliantly burning candles of every assemblage, and have secured for yourself an eternal place in the Most Glorious Paradise ...<sup>26, 27</sup>*

There are likewise numerous instances in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's oral discourses in which He recounted the virtues of the Qá'im-Maqám with great acclaim. Among these is the following, which Mírzá Maḥmúd Zarqání has recorded in his work entitled *Badáyi'u'l-Áthár* ["The Wondrous Traces"]:

... When the subject of Persia was mentioned, 'Abdu'l-Bahá expressed His great loving-kindness for the late Qá'im-Maqám. Among the things He said in his honor was that, if the Qá'im-Maqám were still with us, the whole of Persia would be revived.<sup>28, 29</sup>

Elsewhere in that same work, the following remarks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá have also been recorded:

*... That night, ['Abdu'l-Bahá] described the capability and insight of the Qá'im-Maqám, recounted the grave mistake made by Muḥammad Sháh in ordering his execution, and spoke extensively of the history of Persia. Among the words*

*He spoke were these: "Had they not killed the Qá'im-Maqám, Persia would never have fallen into ruin, and had they heeded the divine counsels, her ancient glory would not have been cast to the wind." He then stated: "We, of course, do not at all involve ourselves in the political affairs of Persia. Had this Cause, however, appeared in the midst of any one of the peoples or nations of the West, that people would vaunt this bounty over all the world."*<sup>30, 31</sup>

In an oral discourse which He delivered on 22 January 1916, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated the following concerning the Qá'im-Maqám:

*Mírzá Abu'l-Qásim, the Qá'im-Maqám, was the foremost man of Persia and a highly capable individual, so much so that he influenced Fath-'Alí Sháh to appoint Muḥammad Sháh — his great-grandson — as the crown prince, rather than one of his seventy sons. ... Muḥammad Sháh put him to death, and what he did was a terrible thing indeed. Had he not killed the Qá'im-Maqám, Persia would now be superior to the nations of today.*<sup>32, 33</sup>

## The Words of the Qá'im-Maqám in the Bahá'í Writings

Beyond the characteristics and virtues of the Qá'im-Maqám that have been mentioned in the Bahá'í Writings, a sample of which has been included in the foregoing pages, a number of the Qá'im-Maqám's own statements have also been quoted and cited, both directly and indirectly, in the Bahá'í Writings. In the lines that follow, the exact words of the Qá'im-Maqám will first be reproduced, and then those Bahá'í Writings which include quotes of those remarks or allusions to them will be presented.

First, we have a letter which the Qá'im-Maqám wrote to his father, Mírzá Buzurg,<sup>34</sup> at the instruction of the crown prince,<sup>35</sup> and in which the Qá'im-Maqám reprimands the inhabitants of Tabríz.<sup>36</sup> Among the Qá'im-Maqám's remarks in this letter are the following:

... If he seeks<sup>37</sup> to associate with men of supreme virtue, know that such individuals as Ḥájí Fáḍílí<sup>38</sup> and Ḥájí 'Abdu'r-

Razzáq Bayk-i-Kámilí<sup>39</sup> reside in that city. They are sedulous men, disinclined to indulge the whims of their appetite, who subscribe to the exercise of reason, the pursuit of a proper livelihood, and the observance of frugality. I take refuge with God!<sup>40</sup> The body of the *mullá*<sup>41</sup> is the object of God's ridicule. However much you say to them, "Have you been filled?", they respond only with, "Is there yet more?"<sup>42</sup> They are like beasts of burden that wish only to eat and are loath to run — the devourers of hay and the ravagers of barley ...<sup>43</sup>

In a Tablet addressed to Áqá 'Alí Najafábádí, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written the following with reference to the remarks of the Qá'im-Maqám:

*Tíhrán*

*To Áqá 'Alí Najafábádí, upon him be the glory of the All-Glorious*

*He is God*

*O you who are firm in the Covenant! You had written that the government has initiated legal proceedings on the pretext of establishing justice, with the stated aim that the outcome of these proceedings shall clearly distinguish the oppressor from the oppressed. Such a course of action would be sensible only if that government were not already apprised of the truth, and this notwithstanding that it is plain as day unto every statesman and minister that the friends of God are the persecuted while the others are the persecutors. There can be no doubt whatever that the true purpose of these proceedings is to discount the importance of the matter, such that it may come to be forgotten entirely, inasmuch as the government is obliged to turn a blind eye to the actions of the oppressors, and to regard these ferocious beasts and ravening animals with favor. They imagine that, if justice were truly to be established, some harm would be caused and a great uproar be raised by these "beasts of burden that wish only to eat and are loath to run" — in the words of the Qá'im-Maqám, "the devourers of hay and the ravagers of barley." Alas for them!*

*Gracious God! Time and again has experience shown that such people have naught to their name but flowing robes redolent of the opulent court of Pharaoh, or prayer beads that resemble the cords of a magician from a contemptible tribe. Even as an afflictive nightmare have they descended upon this hapless and despairing people, and imposed themselves as a dreadfully weighty and unfortunate burden upon them. So long as their influence endures, one may as well abandon the thought of cultivating any virtue ...<sup>44</sup>*

Furthermore, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written the following in a Tablet addressed to Áqá Mírzá Áqáy-i-Qá’im-Maqámí:

*He is God*

*O you who are firm in the Covenant! The letter which you had written to Áqá Siyyid Asadu’lláh has been perused. It was replete with profound meaning and imbued with the utmost sweetness, such that it brought a smile to my face. In the words of the great Qá’im-Maqám, that man who has attained unto the presence of his Lord, “The body of the mullá is the object of God’s ridicule.” Such men have ever been “like beasts of burden that wish only to eat and are loath to run – the devourers of hay and the ravagers of barley”; but may God have mercy on them, for they have now become the bane of sweets. And yet, if they would only content themselves with this indulgence, they would still be worthy of our consideration. Such a prospect appears difficult, however, when one realizes that such men exemplify this verse: “On the Day We will say to Hell, ‘Have you been filled?’ and it will say, ‘Is there yet more?’”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, you must pledge to give them sweets and rice from time to time to keep them quiet.*

*I hope that in all your affairs you will be confirmed and successful, and that assistance from the Most Glorious Paradise will be vouchsafed constantly unto you ...<sup>46, 47</sup>*

Additionally, in a Tablet addressed to Mírzá Muḥammad-Báqir Khán Shírází and dated 7 October 1919, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written the following:

*O companion of my travels! ... The great Qá'im-Maqám has said, "The body of the mullá is the object of God's ridicule," and that they, moreover, are "like beasts of burden that wish only to eat and are loath to run – the devourers of hay and the ravagers of barley." These are the words of the Qá'im-Maqám; they have nothing to do with me. You must consider this point carefully ...*<sup>48, 49</sup>

Second, in a letter to Mírzá Buzurg Núrí,<sup>50</sup> minister to Imám-Virdi Mírzá,<sup>51</sup> the Qá'im-Maqám has written the following:

An old victim of pillage has made this plea for justice: Alas for these Afshárs!<sup>52</sup> Alas for this people! Alas for that moment!<sup>53</sup> And yet, all this is nothing. Alas for the exacting of fines, the edicts of plunder, the Qájár tax-collectors, and the lack of all recourse but to hand over one's possessions! May I find refuge from knives and shears! They ordered two heads, we gave them four; one they pronounced, two did we send ...<sup>54</sup>

The phrase of the Qá'im-Maqám, "the Qájár tax-collectors, and the lack of all recourse but to hand over one's possessions," has been cited and quoted in various forms, both directly and indirectly, in the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In one of His Tablets to Hájí Áqá Muḥammad 'Aláqihband, He has written the following:

*O you who have been enraptured by the fragrances of God! ...*

*In these days, that Turkish tax-collector – namely, Ibn-i-Abhar – has also arrived. In these past few days, he has made demands on several occasions. In truth, this tax-collector has put up a difficult resistance. The great Qá'im-Maqám complained of "the Qájár tax-collectors, and the lack of all recourse but to hand over one's possessions," but he knew nothing of the Turkish tax-collectors and them that make indisputably well-founded demands! For the time being, he has granted me a brief period to accede to his demands; let us see what will happen next! I have, of course, made all these remarks in jest to gladden you ...*<sup>55, 56</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has likewise written the following in one of His other Tablets:

*Mashhad*

*Delivered by way of Mírzá Aḥmad*

*To Áqá Siyyid Áqáy-i-Ḥakím, upon him be the glory of the All-Glorious*

*O you who are firm in the Covenant! Your letter was received. You requested a prayer supplicating forgiveness for your great father. Indeed, you have coveted a new Tablet from me! Strange as this is, I will obey your command nonetheless. What choice do I have? In former times, men spoke of “the Qájár tax-collectors, and the lack of all recourse but to hand over one’s possessions,” and we now speak of the compelling ruler and the subduing commander! I have, therefore, begun to write this Tablet, that it may bring joy and gladness to that pure heart of yours.*

*Day and night, tearfully and restlessly, this servant supplicates the All-Merciful every morn and eve to cheer the friends of *Khurásán*, to crown their endeavors with success, and to enable them to drink their fill from the chalice of limitless grace, bounty, and gladness. This is my highest aspiration and my greatest hope, and in its fulfillment lie my joy, my delight, and my triumph.*

*Convey on my behalf, with abounding ardor, the most wondrous and most glorious greetings unto Jináb-i-Karbilá í Hasan.<sup>57, 58</sup>*

In yet another one of His Tablets, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written the following:

*Delivered by way of Jináb-i-Amín, upon him be the glory of the All-Glorious*

*Hamadán*

*To Ḥakím Hárún, upon him be the glory of the All-Glorious*

*He is God*

*O refined and illustrious personage! I had written a Tablet to you just two days ago, but I have now received a letter from Jináb-i-Amín in which He has requested a new Writing. What can be done? It resembles the well-known adage: "the Qájár tax-collectors, and the lack of all recourse but to hand over one's possessions." I say this in jest, of course, inasmuch as every request from Jináb-i-Amín is born of his sincere devotion to the Cause of resplendent light. Thus, I must consent to his request, though that which I write be brief in length. Upon you be the glory of the All-Glorious.*

'Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbás

Haifa

8 December 1919<sup>59, 60</sup>

In another one of His Writings, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated the following:

*Káshán*

*To the father of Áqá Mihdí, Áqá Ghulám-'Alí, upon him be the glory of the All-Glorious*

*O you who are firm in the covenant! It has been some time since I last wrote to you. God forbid that this has saddened you, for I have not forgotten you. You are ever enveloped in my embrace, but the storm has raged with such unremitting turbulence that it has prevented me from writing or conversing with you. At present, that noble son of yours, Áqá Mihdí, is with me, and he bears truthful testimony to my words. Indeed, at this very moment, a sweet smile adorns his face as he surely thinks to himself:*

*Advanced in age though my father may be, yet still does he brim with ability; potent is he to mount and descend, whether on land or in the sea. At one time, he goes to Káshán; at another, he visits Jawshaqán.<sup>61</sup> At one*

moment, he goes to Qamṣar,<sup>62</sup> where armed with the mace of cogent argument and the sword of conclusive proof, he rushes valiantly into the battlefields of debate. At still another time, he travels to Ṭihrán, and at yet another, he journeys to Qum. He is like unto the stars that revolve in the heavens.

*Thus, one would need more ink to add to the exploits already recounted here! Yet all this is neither here nor there.*

*The mother of Áqá Mihdí is simple-hearted; she is a noble woman, ever ready to serve in any way. She, therefore, deserves greetings and salutations, and is worthy of favors and kindness.*

*O Ghulám-‘Alí! What am I to do with this tax-collector, who resembles Naw-Rúz ‘Alí?<sup>63</sup> I have no debt, and yet am I indebted. I am under no obligation to pay, and yet must I pay tribute. One is reminded of the well-known saying: “the Qájár tax-collectors, and the lack of all recourse but to hand over one’s possessions.” At any rate, somehow or another, I have set aside all my other affairs for the moment, and am now giving you my attention – but it was no trouble for me to do this. Áqá Mihdí has related the following to me with the utmost sweetness:*

*There are others who have recently been guided aright, and my father is interceding on their behalf. They wish for a special Tablet to be sent to them, and my father has remarked that if I fail to communicate this to you, he will scold me and make quick work of me. Reply, then, to his request, and deliver me from this rebuke and censure!*

*Left with no other choice, I have taken to writing this letter, and seek the favors of God. I hope that you are well; indeed, my hope is that you are happy and content, and that your mind is keen. May you be the cause of joy and gladness unto all the friends in the vicinity, and the means through which they are kept alert and vigilant. Show tenderness unto the*

*mother of Áqá Mihdí, and strive constantly to cheer her heart, that she may not feel despondent in her separation from her son, and instead give thanks unto the One True God that the apple of her eye renders constant service to the threshold of the Star of the East and the West. Convey unto all the friends the abundant greetings of this kind servant of all humanity.<sup>64</sup>*

In another Writing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the following is recorded:

*He is God*

*O you who raise the cry of the Covenant! Even as a Turkish colonel or an Azerbaijani soldier, waiting to be repaid the debt he is owed, Jináb-i-Hájí is here. I, like a poor borrower in arrears, am at a loss, and wonder to myself how I might possibly satisfy this debt – of which every túmán accrues a monthly thousandfold interest – for with every passing month, the Hájí adds extra “interest” to the Tablets he seeks from me. Owing to my demanding preoccupations, he had granted me a respite from this debt for a time, and this was most sensible of him. Now, however, even as a creditor unsettled by the indigence of the debtor, he has arrived without warning, wishing all of a sudden to collect five documents, and refusing to leave until he obtains them. The difference between the Hájí and an Azerbaijani soldier is that the latter lies in wait behind the door, whereas the former comes into the room and demands that his debt be paid. At any rate, among the documents to which he referred in writing is one that bears your name.<sup>65</sup> We had no choice but to pay this enormous debt – a debt to which compound interest, exorbitant to the point of usury, is attached.*

*Jináb-i-Hájí has inquired about your duty, and that duty is this: that under all conditions, you sacrifice yourself for the Cause of God – that in your vicinity, you spread the divine fragrances, and make firm the hearts in the Covenant of God. This is the fruit of existence, as well as the station of Áqá Mírzá Maḥmúd – and it would be difficult for me to write*

*his name without also writing “Mírzá,” as he would accuse me of blasphemy for so doing.*

*Leave them to their vain imaginings, and let them wander in their heedlessness. Say: “In the name of God is its course and its anchorage.”<sup>66</sup> Unfurl the sail, and set the ship on its course upon the sea of servitude to Bahá. This, in truth, is “a praise-worthy station”;<sup>67</sup> it is “an all-encompassing shadow,”<sup>68</sup> “a gift which is given,”<sup>69</sup> and “a place to which to be led.”<sup>70, 71, 72</sup>*

In yet another Writing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the following is written:

*He is God*

*To Áqá Muḥammad-Háshim, upon him be the glory of the All-Glorious*

*He is God*

*Áqá Muḥammad-Háshim! Even as a creditor who incessantly solicits the money he is owed, Áqá Mihdí is ever present and well apprised, and he implores me to write him this letter. Although my preoccupations are endless, I seek refuge from this tax-collector who hails from Káshán, and not Azerbaijan – for the Azerbaijanis will say a harsh word or two in Turkish and then grant me a respite, whereas this tax-collector makes his requests more mildly. And yet, his entreaties are constant, and leave me with no opportunity to respond. At times he voices his desire openly, while at others he conveys it with a glance. At one moment he will state it explicitly, and at the next he will communicate it with subtlety.*

*At any rate, by some means or other, he has induced me to write this letter. Consider, then, how dear you are to Áqá Mihdí, and how delectable your remembrance is to the palate of this servant, that in spite of my many other responsibilities, I have taken to writing this letter that is sweet as sugar. You must strive, then, and bend every effort to serve the friends day and night. In your service to the*

*bondslaves of the Blessed Beauty – may my life be a sacrifice for them – you must be the lowliest of servants, that in so doing you may become the pride of all the kings and rulers of the earth.*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá ‘Abbás<sup>73</sup>

In another Writing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the following is recorded:

*Nayríz*

*To the sister-in-law of Áqá Siyyid Mihdí, Amatu’lláh Bagum, and her daughter, ‘Aṭa’iyyih – upon them both be the glory of the All-Glorious*

*God is the All-Glorious*

*O handmaid of God! Night has fallen, and it is now dark. With a thin pen, this servant has taken to writing this letter for your sake. What recourse have I? Áqá Siyyid Mihdí makes repeated entreaties, and his power surpasses that of the Turkish tax-collectors. What can I do?<sup>74</sup>*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá ‘Abbás<sup>75</sup>

Third, in a letter to Mírzá Buzurg Núrí, the Qá'im-Maqám has written the following:

What good fortune is this! – that after the passage of some time, your letter, which included your amicable complaints and encouraging counsels, has arrived, and added to my belief in the endurance of our covenant of friendship.

At every moment when your musk-laden pen remembers us

It rivals the reward bestowed by freeing two-hundred slaves<sup>76</sup>

You had complained of my not having replied to your encouraging correspondence with sincere letters of my own. Have you still yet to realize that every one of your remarks is

the very truth, and a question that needs no answer? Should you choose not to write a letter to your ardent servant, and withhold from your hopeful devotees the sprinklings of your pearl-streaming pen, it would offend and provoke them to great complaint. The same cannot be said of me; the less trouble I go to, the better. It behooves the fair-faced to flaunt their beauty, while the hideous deserve only to be hid away ...<sup>77</sup>

With reference to the above text, in which the Qá'im-Maqám states that, "every one of your remarks is the very truth, and a question that needs no answer," Bahá'u'lláh has written the following in one of His Tablets:

*He is God, exalted be He*

*Though, in the words of a speaker from former times, the letters this servant hath sent to thee are ostensibly questions that need no answer and are replete with wrongful words – inasmuch as numerous Tablets have heretofore been sent to thee, and thou hast evidently yet to peruse even one of them – yet methinks some expedient reason doth exist for which thou hast withheld thy response. This notwithstanding, we are content with what God hath ordained for us, and in Him do we place our trust. He, in truth, is the best of helpers and the most excellent of guardians. At any rate, this prisoner hath taken up thy time, and will thus conclude His utterance by reminding thee that We have ever been contented with even a single piece of news from thee, but that the messenger who relateth this news hath now been kept out, and the bounty of hearing it unable to reach Us.*

*God grant that thou art, at all times, persisting in perpetual joy and gladness, and art protected – within the shelter of the safekeeping of the All-Merciful – from such harm as the world and its peoples can inflict. We remember constantly thy mother, as well as the other members of thy household.<sup>78,</sup>*

Likewise, in a Tablet to Jináb-i-Muṣṭafá Effendí, Bahá'u'lláh has written the following:

*Praise be to God, Who hath caused the fruits of utterance to be sent down from the firmament of inner meaning. ... For some time now, the liars and slanderers of this area have taken to broaching certain subjects, inasmuch as the people here are unaware of this most lofty Path. Whatever remark is made by an ignorant one, that remark have these people straightway accepted, and in this behavior they continue to persist. The enemies of this Cause are many; whatsoever these Persians say with regard thereto is accounted as the truth, and considered questions that need no answer. This notwithstanding that all are aware that, apart from a mere few, most Persians are given to the utmost cruelty, oppression, trickery, and deceit ...<sup>80, 81</sup>*

In another Tablet dated June 1880 and revealed for Jináb-i-Ṭabíb, Bahá'u'lláh has written as follows:

*A praise which is exalted above the tongues of all creation beseemeth the most holy court of the Desired One, Who hath made the Primal Word<sup>82</sup> to be the Fountainhead of the waters of life unto the peoples of the earth. ... The Most Great Branch<sup>83</sup> – may My life, Mine essence, and My very being be a sacrifice for the dust which his noble footsteps have trodden – left for Beirut some time ago. I will defer My response to the letter thou didst send until such time as He hath returned. Furthermore, that which thou hadst said in thy reply was the very truth, and a question that needeth no answer ...<sup>84, 85</sup>*

In a Tablet dated October 1885 and addressed to Mírzá Maqṣúd, Bahá'u'lláh has written the following:

*Praise and thanksgiving befit the King of Names, Who hath bestowed mystic pearls from the ocean of truth. ... It hath been said that this world was created through the letters B and E. Unto them that cherish the truth, this “B” representeth the remembrance of the friends, and the “E” signifieth the*

*gift of limitless love.<sup>86</sup> That which thou hadst written was the very truth, and a question that needeth no answer ...<sup>87, 88</sup>*

In a Tablet addressed to Ibn-i-Aşdaq, Bahá'u'lláh has written as follows:

*Concerning that which thou hadst written with regard to the work of teaching the Faith, as well as the consideration given to certain surrounding areas by some of the friends for that purpose – this is the very truth, and a question that needeth no answer, for not long ago this very matter was mentioned repeatedly by the Tongue of Grandeur.<sup>89</sup> Likewise, this servant wrote, as bidden, to some of the friends, admonishing the firm and steadfast souls to concentrate their teaching efforts on certain surrounding areas ...<sup>90, 91</sup>*

Fourth, in a letter to an unknown addressee, the Qá'im-Maqám writes:

You had inquired as to how I am faring. What is it you ask of a soul stricken with separation, whose body is here but whose beloved is in 'Iráq?<sup>92</sup> Think not that I can be patient without you. I swear by God that without you, my dearly beloved, Tabríz afflicts me with fever; indeed, the land of Azerbaijan consumes me with flames of fire, for bereft of you, my beloved, I am weary of life and living.

“O youth!” said a beloved to their lover

“Many a city have you seen in your travels

Then which of those cities is the best?”

“That city,” said the lover, “where the ravisher of hearts resides.”<sup>93</sup>

Truly, remoteness from friends, and the distance between the body and the one who gives it life, are not things to trifle with. “What we stand for is hardly a plaything.”<sup>94</sup> These are the days of separation; they are nights not followed by dawns. The pangs of remoteness are palpable, and the

strength to endure them is sapped. The pain of privation is present, and the way to its balm is barred.

Deliver me, O Lord, through Your consummate grace  
From the abysmal depths of this fearsome place!

So much the better for me to seek from all-glorious God a cure for this affliction – that through His grace, the ways of separation may be annulled, and I might have the good fortune of seeing you again.

That is all; farewell!<sup>95</sup>

The phrase “Tabríz afflicts me with fever; indeed, the land of Azerbaijan consumes me with fire” mentioned in the above text also appears, in poetic form, in one of the Qá'im-Maqám's *ghazals*.<sup>96</sup> The following has been written on this subject in *Ma'ákhidh-i-Ash'ár*, vol. 5, pp. 80–81:

In his handwritten notes, Muḥammad-‘Alí Faydí has observed that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would typically recite this couplet from the Qá'im-Maqám to commemorate the day of the Martyrdom of the Báb:

Tabríz afflicts me with fever; with the blood of sorrow  
do my lips overflow  
How intense are the flames of fire from Azerbaijan  
which consume my soul!

The above couplet is part of a poem, reproduced below, that the Qá'im-Maqám wrote to complain of the government officials of Tabríz:

A frenzied heart I've got and hidden therein such pain and  
strife  
That were I to conceal or reveal it I'd surely fear for my life  
Tabríz afflicts me with fever; my lips spill complaints that could fill  
a scroll

How intense are the flames of fire from Azerbaijan which  
consume my soul!

Why from the heads of Arvanaq a hundred taunts and taints  
should I withstand

When as my food and drink I've only a bit of its water and  
land?

The unkind ones of Mihrán-Rúd have effaced my soul and  
bloodied my heart

For of the hilly terrain of Líqván a tract of farmland's my  
paltry part

So oft must I importune my men who govern Sahlán and  
Isfahlán

That you'd think I ask them to tend to the lands of Káshán and  
Işfahán!

From the king's bountiful means the hamlet of Ni'mat-Ábád  
I've asked

For the hundred tokens of Sháníján's deadly wrath have  
rendered me aghast

The foe-felling fighters of Tabríz who discharge their arms and  
fire their guns

Have made every street to flood from all sides with my  
countless petitioning ones

Every host's in my hands — every fiery spark which upward  
exalts

All steel's as fragile and fine as silk in the face of their assaults

Should the regal edict be given me to spring from earth to  
heaven

God knows I'm set ill at ease by its reaches that number seven

As for that churlish colonel who war with me he fain would  
proclaim

Shame and disgrace would be mine for so much as uttering his  
name!<sup>97</sup>

The following footnote, which is included in an anthology of the Qá'im-Maqám's poems, discusses the names of the villages and towns mentioned in the above *ghazal*:

Arvanaq and Mihrán-Rúd refer to two districts of Tabríz. Líqván, Sahlán, Isfahlán, Ni'mat-Ábád, and Shániján are villages that once belonged to the Qá'im-Maqám, but were seized by the government after he was executed.<sup>98</sup>

---

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> **Translator's note:** This appears to be a typographical error; if the Qá'im-Maqám was born in or around 1779 and executed in 1835, he would have been about 55 or 56 at the time of his death.
- <sup>2</sup> **Translator's note:** Now incorporated into the greater Tīhrán metropolitan area.
- <sup>3</sup> **Author's note:** *Munsha'át-i-Qá'im-Maqám* is among the works that was published in Tīhrán, through the efforts of Jahángír Qá'im-Maqámí, by Intishárát-i-Ibn-i-Síná in 1958. Likewise, *Díván-i-Ash'ár-i-Qá'im-Maqám* ["The Collected Poems of the Qá'im-Maqám"] was published in Tīhrán as a supplement to the tenth year of the *Armaghán* ["Gift"] magazine, and in 2001, it was published in Tīhrán, in full, by Intishárát-i-Avistá Faráhání. This book features an extensive introduction that discusses the writings, views, and details of the Qá'im-Maqám's life.
- <sup>4</sup> **Author's note:** *Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih* has been published in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 57–80, and the excerpt quoted here can be found on p. 65 of that collection. In *Námih-háy-i-Parákandiy-i-Qá'im-Maqám Faráhání* ["The Scattered Letters of Qá'im-Maqám Faráhání"], p. 376, Jahángír Qá'im-Maqámí has written the following concerning "Buzurg Núrí (Mírzá)":

### Buzurg Núrí (Mírzá)

His birth name was 'Abbás, and he hailed from the village of Tákur. He was the father of Áqá Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí, better known as Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í religion. Concerning Buzurg Núrí, the author

of *Ashrafu't-Tavárikh* ["The Noblest of Histories"] has written, "He was the possessor of all pens."

Mírzá Buzurg served for a time as minister to Imám-Virdí Mírzá, chief sentry to Fath-'Alí Sháh, and governor of Qazvín, and likely also served as minister to some of Fath-'Alí Sháh's other sons. At any rate, he had a friendly relationship with the Qá'im-Maqám, and this can be inferred from several letters which the Qá'im-Maqám wrote to Mírzá Buzurg. It is apparently for this reason that Áqá Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí, or Bahá'u'lláh, refers to the Qá'im-Maqám in His *Tajalliyát* [*recte: Kalimát-i-Firdawsiyyih*] as "The Prince of the City of Statesmanship and Literary Accomplishment."

- <sup>5</sup> **Translator's note:** The great-grandson of the Qá'im-Maqám and an eminent Bahá'í. The present translator has recently finished translating a biographical account of Mírzá Áqá *Khán* Qá'im-Maqámí, which he hopes to make available in due course.
- <sup>6</sup> **Author's note:** Abu'l-Qásim, the Qá'im-Maqám, had a son by the name of Mírzá Muḥammad, who was the father of Mírzá Buhlúl Qá'im-Maqámí, who in turn was the father of Mírzá Áqá *Khán* Qá'im-Maqámí, the addressee of this Tablet. Mírzá Áqá *Khán* was the father of Manúhír *Khán* Qá'im-Maqámí, a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iran who, along with the other members of that body, was abducted on 21 August 1980. The fate of these individuals remains unknown to this day.

A biographical account of Mírzá Áqáy-i-Qá'im-Maqámí (Mírzá Áqá *Khán*), which includes the many services he rendered throughout his lifetime, has been written by Ḥasan Núshábádí and published in *Áhang-i-Badí* ["The New Melody"], year 28, nos. 9 & 10, November 1973-January 1974, pp. 18-39. A facsimile of the original, handwritten Tablet that begins, "O you who are the scion of the Prince of the City of Statesmanship and Literary Accomplishment...", and has been reproduced in this article, appears on p. 23 of the aforementioned article by Núshábádí in *Áhang-i-Badí*. Other Tablets that 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to Mírzá Áqáy-i-Qá'im-Maqámí have been published in *Ma'ákhidh-i-Ash'ár dar Áthár-i-Bahá'í* ["The Sources of Poetry Quoted in the Bahá'í Writings"], vol. 2, p. 43, and *ibid.*, vol. 3, pp. 197-8; the corresponding facsimiles of the original, handwritten versions of these Tablets appear on p. 27 and p. 31, respectively, of the aforementioned article by Núshábádí. See also another Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed to Qá'im-Maqámí published in *Makátib-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá* ["The Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá"], vol. 8, p. 64.

[**Translator's note:** Provisional English translations of all four Tablets enumerated here by Rafati appear in an appendix to a complete rendering of Núshábádí's article, which the present translator has recently completed and hopes to make readily available in due course.]

In one of His Tablets to Áqá Siyyid Muḥammad-Riḍá, the son of Jinab-i-Síná, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states the following concerning Mírzá Áqá Khán Qá'im-Maqámí:

*O candle of that honored Síná! Your letter has arrived ... Praise God, Áqá Mírzá Áqá Khán, that kind friend, stands ever ready to serve. All his endeavors are crowned with success and are watched over by the Almighty. The Ancient Beauty, may my life be a sacrifice for His loved ones, felt a special tenderness for the late Qá'im-Maqám. Now, God be praised, the tokens of that fondness and favor are clearly manifest, in that the lineage of that great personage has produced so exalted a soul...*

The text of the above Tablet has been published in the Iranian National Bahá'í Archives series (INBA), vol. 84, pp. 399-401.

<sup>7</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.

<sup>8</sup> **Translator's note:** Both of these titles refer to Bahá'u'lláh.

<sup>9</sup> **Translator's note:** "The gathering of the Prophets and holy souls in the next world or spiritual realm" (BBD, p. 216).

<sup>10</sup> **Translator's note:** A reference by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Himself, insofar as He is known to Bahá'ís as "the Center of the Covenant."

<sup>11</sup> **Author's note:** "Dabír-i-Mu'ayyad" is a reference to Mírzá Muḥsin Khán Na'ímí. The Tablet for him reproduced here has been published in INBA, vol. 88, p. 320.

<sup>12</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.

<sup>13</sup> **Translator's note:** Qur'án 19:57.

<sup>14</sup> **Translator's note:** A reference to Bahá'u'lláh.

<sup>15</sup> **Author's note:** Idrís is mentioned in the Qur'án as one who was renowned for his eternal life, novel literary prowess, and knowledge of sciences and divine wisdoms. The following description of him has been revealed in Qur'án 19:56-57: "And mention in the Book, Idrís; indeed, he was a man of truth and a prophet, and We raised him to a high station." For more information on Idrís, refer to *Dánish-Námiy-i-Qur'án* ["Encyclopedia of the Qur'án"], vol. 1, p. 182.

[**Translator's note:** Idrís is likely the same person as the Biblical figure Enoch. In His *Lawḥ-i-Basítu'l-Ḥaqqíqih* ("Tablet of the Uncompounded

Reality”), Bahá’u’lláh states the following concerning Idrís: “The first person who devoted himself to philosophy was Idrís. Thus was he named. Some called him also Hermes. In every tongue he hath a special name. He it is who hath set forth in every branch of philosophy thorough and convincing statements. After him Bálinus derived his knowledge and sciences from the Hermetic Tablets and most of the philosophers who followed him made their philosophical and scientific discoveries from his words and statements...” (TBAKA, p. 148, note 3).]

The matter of sending the portrait of the Qá’im-Maqám appears to refer to a request made by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, which He mentions in a Tablet addressed to Áqá Mírzá Áqáy-i-Qá’im-Maqámí and dated 16 June 1921:

*O you who are firm in the covenant! Your letter dated 29 March 1921 was received ... If you can, send a pen-and-ink portrait of that luminous personage – your illustrious forefather, the Qá’im-Maqám. Should this not be possible, then send whatever excellent image of him you are able to procure, that I may hang it at the sacred threshold. Although a portrait of him already exists here, its color has faded with the passage of time. Should the image you intend to send be colored – and if, moreover, the vividness of that color be enduring, and the image itself been drawn with pen and ink – this would certainly be preferable ...*

The text of the above Tablet has been published in *Sharḥ-i-Shahádat-i-Jináb-i-Mírzá Ya‘qúb-i-Muttaḥidih* [“An Account of the Martyrdom of Mírzá Ya‘qúb Muttaḥidih”], pp. 61–63. It is evident from the Tablet quoted above that the addressee of this Tablet, which alludes to the “musk-laden message,” is Mírzá Áqáy-i-Qá’im-Maqámí.

<sup>16</sup> **Translator’s note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.

<sup>17</sup> **Author’s note:** The identity of “Mírzá Ḥabíbu’lláh” and the way in which he is related to the Qá’im-Maqám are not entirely clear to me. It is likely, however, that this name refers to Ḥabíbu’lláh *Khán Iḥtishám Nizám*, the nephew of Mírzá Áqá *Khán Qá’im-Maqámí*.

<sup>18</sup> **Translator’s note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.

<sup>19</sup> **Author’s note:** This Tablet – which was revealed for Áqá Siyyid Asadu’lláh, who was residing in Port Sa’id at the time – has been published in *Makátib-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 224–225. “The late Mírzá” is a reference to Mírzá Buzurg Núrí, the father of Bahá’u’lláh.

<sup>20</sup> **Translator’s note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.

<sup>21</sup> **Translator’s note:** “Trusted one” literally being “Amín.”

- 
- <sup>22</sup> **Translator's note:** A reference to Bahá'u'lláh.
- <sup>23</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.
- <sup>24</sup> **Translator's note:** A reference to Mírzá Áqá Khán Qá'im-Maqámí.
- <sup>25</sup> **Translator's note:** A period corresponding to 1785–1883 of the Gregorian calendar.
- <sup>26</sup> **Author's note:** A passage from this Tablet has been published in *Khúshih-há'í az Kharman-i-Adab va Hunar* ["Clusters from the Harvest of Literature and Art"] (Landegg: Anjuman-i-Adab va Hunar, 1990), vol. 1, p. 77.
- <sup>27</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.
- <sup>28</sup> **Author's note:** *Badáyí'u'l-Áthár*, vol. 2, p. 299.
- <sup>29</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.
- <sup>30</sup> **Author's note:** *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- <sup>31</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.
- <sup>32</sup> **Author's note:** *Rahíq-i-Makhtúm*, vol. 2, p. 636.

[**Translator's note:** This passage can also be found on p. 392 of the more readily available 2007 edition of this volume published by Bahá'í-Verlag.]

- <sup>33</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.
- <sup>34</sup> **Translator's note:** Not to be confused with Mírzá Buzurg Núrí, the father of Bahá'u'lláh. The father of the Qá'im-Maqám, whose name was Mírzá 'Ísá Faráhání, also happened to be known as Mírzá Buzurg, and held the title of Qá'im-Maqám before it was passed on to his son.
- <sup>35</sup> **Translator's note:** This would have been 'Abbás Mírzá. For more information on him, refer to H. Busse, "'ABBÁS MĪRZĀ QAJAR," *Encyclopedia Iranica*; available online here: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abbas-mirza-qajar>
- <sup>36</sup> **Translator's note:** The present translator is grateful to Vahid Rafati and Siyamak Zabihi-Moghaddam for helping him to clearly understand the meaning of this sentence.
- <sup>37</sup> **Translator's note:** Rafati goes on to note that, in *Munsha'át-i-Qá'im-Maqám* (Tīhrán: Arashtú), pp. 110–111, this reads "If you seek..."
- <sup>38</sup> **Translator's note:** Rafati goes on to note that, in a footnote included in *Munsha'át-i-Qá'im-Maqám* (Tīhrán: Arashtú), p. 110, the following

explanation is given: “‘Hájí’ here is a reference to Hájí Mullá Riḍáy-i-Hamadání.”

- <sup>39</sup> **Translator’s note:** Rafati goes on to note that, in *Munsha’át-i-Qá’im-Maqám* (Ṭíhrán: Araṣṭú), pp. 110-111, this reads “‘Abdu’r-Razzáq Bayk-i-Adíb-i-Kámilí.”
- <sup>40</sup> **Translator’s note:** The original phrase in the typescript provided by Rafati reads *al-‘ibádu bi’lláh* (“the servants unto God”), but he goes on to note that this is likely a typographical error that should actually read *al-‘iyáḏhu bi’lláh* (“Refuge is with God”).
- <sup>41</sup> **Translator’s note:** Rafati goes on to note that, in *Munsha’át-i-Qá’im-Maqám* (Ṭíhrán: Araṣṭú), pp. 110-111, this reads “The saddlebow of the *mullá*...”
- <sup>42</sup> **Translator’s note:** Both quotes are indirect references to Qur’án 50:30.
- <sup>43</sup> **Author’s note:** *Munsha’át-i-Qá’im-Maqám*, pp. 74-75.
- <sup>44</sup> **Translator’s note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.
- <sup>45</sup> **Translator’s note:** Qur’án 50:30.
- <sup>46</sup> **Author’s note:** The complete text of this Tablet has been published in *Muntakhabátí az Makátib-i-Háḏrat-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá* [“Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá”], vol. 6, p. 366.
- <sup>47</sup> **Translator’s note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.
- <sup>48</sup> **Author’s note:** This Tablet, which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote to Mírzá Muḥammad-Báqir Khán Shírází, has been published in INBA, vol. 84, pp. 371-376.
- <sup>49</sup> **Translator’s note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.
- <sup>50</sup> **Translator’s note:** Another name for Mírzá ‘Abbás Núrí, the father of Bahá’u’lláh.
- <sup>51</sup> **Translator’s note:** The twelfth son of Faṭḥ-‘Alí Sháh.
- <sup>52</sup> **Translator’s note:** A Turkic people who ruled Persia immediately before the Qájárs.
- <sup>53</sup> **Translator’s note:** The word *dam* used here in the original text could also be read as the Arabic word for blood.
- <sup>54</sup> **Author’s note:** *Munsha’át-i-Qá’im-Maqám*, pp. 117-118. Bahá’u’lláh’s father is the addressee of this letter.
- <sup>55</sup> **Author’s note:** An extensive biographical account of Ibn-i-Abhar is given in *Mu’assisíy-i-Ayádíy-i-Amru’lláh* [“The Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God”], pp. 402-449.

<sup>56</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.

<sup>57</sup> **Author's note:** The turns of phrase used in this Tablet are reminiscent of a couplet (no. 577) from the sixth book of Rúmí's *Mathnaví*:

When one's in the clutches of a bloodthirsty lion

What recourse has he but to resign and submit?

<sup>58</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.

<sup>59</sup> **Author's note:** "Jináb-i-Amín" refers to Ḥájí Mírzá Abu'l-Ḥasan Amín Ardikání.

<sup>60</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.

<sup>61</sup> **Translator's note:** A village in Káshán County.

<sup>62</sup> **Translator's note:** A town in Káshán County.

<sup>63</sup> **Translator's note:** In an email to the present translator dated 9 January 2019, Vahid Rafati suggested that Naw-Rúz 'Alí was probably a Bahá'í who had made pilgrimage to the Holy Land from Azerbaijan.

<sup>64</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.

<sup>65</sup> **Translator's note:** Alternatively, "one that is in your name."

<sup>66</sup> **Translator's note:** Qur'án 11:41.

<sup>67</sup> **Translator's note:** Qur'án 17:79.

<sup>68</sup> **Translator's note:** Qur'án 56:30.

<sup>69</sup> **Translator's note:** Qur'án 11:99.

<sup>70</sup> **Translator's note:** Qur'án 11:98.

<sup>71</sup> **Author's note:** INBA, vol. 88, pp. 241–2.

<sup>72</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.

<sup>73</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.

<sup>74</sup> **Author's note:** Muḥtasham Káshání states:

What relationship does the indigent have to the creditor?

What business do the poet and the Turkish tax-collector have with one another?

Avoid that Turk, Yúq Bílmez; for despite one's indigence,

And no matter the excuses one makes before him, he'll demand his money all the same

[**Translator's note:** The full text of the poem is available online here: <https://ganjoor.net/mohtasham/divan-moh/ghete-moh/sh49/>]

- <sup>75</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.
- <sup>76</sup> **Translator's note:** Ḥáfiz, *ghazal* no. 190: <https://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh190/>
- <sup>77</sup> **Author's note:** *Munsha'át-i-Qá'im-Maqám*, pp. 126–127. For a discussion of the phrase “your musk-laden pen,” refer to *Ma'ákhidh-i-Ash'ár*, vol. 4, pp. 258–260.
- <sup>78</sup> **Author's note:** “A speaker from former times” is a reference to the Qá'im-Maqám.
- <sup>79</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.
- <sup>80</sup> **Author's note:** *A'ájim* is a reference to Persians. The contents of this Tablet seem to allude to falsehoods and calumnies leveled against the Bahá'í Faith that had been printed in the Arabic publications of Levantine countries. Without hesitation, and dispensing with careful reflection, the authors of these statements accepted and regarded as correct the suspicion and slander that Persian writers had previously directed at the Bahá'í Faith.
- <sup>81</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.
- <sup>82</sup> **Translator's note:** A reference to the Manifestation of God.
- <sup>83</sup> **Translator's note:** One of the titles of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.
- <sup>84</sup> **Author's note:** For a discussion of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's journey to Beirut, refer to *Yádnámiy-i-Miṣbáḥ-i-Munír* [“A Festschrift for Miṣbáḥ-i-Munír”], p. 151.
- <sup>85</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.
- <sup>86</sup> **Translator's note:** A more technical translation would read, “...this *káf* representeth *káf-i-dhikr-i-dústán* [“the K of the remembrance of the friends”], and the *nún* signifieth *nún-i-nímat-i-maḥabbat-i-bí-páyán* [“the N of the gift of limitless love”]. The Arabic equivalent of “be” is *kun*, which consists of the letters *káf* and *nún*. The fact that the words “be” and *kun* both consist of two letters means they are perfect counterparts — a fact which Shoghi Effendi used to his advantage when translating phrases where this cosmological metaphor occurs (from the Long Obligatory Prayer, for instance: “I testify...that He Who hath been

manifested is the Hidden Mystery, the Treasured Symbol, through Whom the letters B [*al-káf*] and E [*al-nún*]...have been joined and knit together.”) In reading the transliterations of the phrases represented by *káf* (*dhikr-i-dústán*) and *nún* (*ní'mat-i-mahabbat-i-bí-páyán*), we see that the first word of each includes their respective letters. While Bahá'u'lláh's intent, then, is abundantly clear in the original Persian text of this passage, it is inevitably lost in translation.

<sup>87</sup> **Author's note:** Bahá'u'lláh's reference to the creation of the world through the letters *káf* and *nún* is an allusion to the phrase *kun fa yakún* ["Be, and it is"], which occurs repeatedly in the Qur'án, and through which God brought all creation into existence. For instance, see Qur'án 36:82 and 3:47. Refer also to relevant explanations of *káf* and *nún* in several places throughout *Badá'yí-i-Ma'ání va Tafsír* ["The Wonders of Meanings and Commentary"] (Darmstadt: 'Aṣr-i-Jadíd, 2012), including pp. 146–147.

<sup>88</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.

<sup>89</sup> **Translator's note:** A self-referential epithet used by Bahá'u'lláh to denote His station as the mouthpiece of God.

<sup>90</sup> **Author's note:** *Payk-i-Rástán* ["Messenger of the True Ones"], p. 122.

<sup>91</sup> **Translator's note:** Provisional translation of this Tablet by Adib Masumian.

<sup>92</sup> **Translator's note:** In the historical parlance of Middle Eastern geography, there are actually two 'Iráqs: "the Arab 'Iráq" (*iráq-i-'arab*) and "the Persian 'Iráq" (*iráq-i-'ajam*). The former refers to present-day 'Iráq, while the latter was "the name given in medieval times to the largely mountainous, western portion of modern Persia" (C.E. Bosworth, 'ERĀQ-E 'AJAM(Ī), *Encyclopedia Iranica*; available online here: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/eraq-e-ajami>). With the passage of time, "the Persian 'Iráq" came to be synonymous with a much more specific district of present-day Iran that includes the city of Sulṭán-Ábád, now called Arák. Given that the Qá'im-Maqám was born in Arák, it is quite possible that this was the meaning he intended – as he may have been writing to someone there to whom he still had ties – but it would be impossible to say this definitively without knowing the identity of the addressee.

<sup>93</sup> **Translator's note:** From the *Mathnaví* of Rúmí: <https://ganjoor.net/moulavi/masnavi/daftar3/sh182/>

<sup>94</sup> **Translator's note:** This sentence, written in Arabic, is likely a paraphrase of a hemistich from a poem by Abú Nuwás – a poet from the Abbasid era – which uses *bihi* ("for him") rather than *biná* ("for us"), as

---

the Qá'im-Maqám does here. I am grateful to Ruwa Pokorny for offering her valuable insight on how best to render this sentence into English.

<sup>95</sup> **Author's note:** Munsha'át-i-Qá'im-Maqám, pp. 8-9.

<sup>96</sup> **Translator's note:** A style of lyric poem that invariably deals with some kind of love.

<sup>97</sup> **Author's note:** Díván-i-Qá'im-Maqám, p. 148.

<sup>98</sup> **Author's note:** *Ma'ákhidh-i-Ash'ár*, pp. 80-81.

# Dei Verbum

## A Bahá'í Perspective on the Roman Catholic Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation

Marco Oliveira

This text was written as a project for the “Bahá'í Theology 2017” course from Wilmette Institute. Its purpose is to analyze some basic Christian Catholic beliefs on divine revelation and to explain its differences and similarities to the Bahá'í Faith.

**Acknowledgements:** Special thanks to Mikhail Sergeev for all the guidance, encouragement, suggestions and comments; Ian Kluge for inspirational observations during the course; and Robert Stockman for the constant support.

### How the Bahá'í Faith sees Christianity

*Verily, He (Jesus) said: 'Come ye after Me, and I will make you to become fishers of men.' In this day, however, We say: 'Come ye after Me, that We may make you to become quickeners of mankind.'* [PB 91]

I was born in Portugal, a country with a predominantly Catholic population. Most of my relatives and friends are Catholics; some are more conservative, others are more liberal; the strength of their Catholic identity depends on each person. Needless to say, ever since

I became Bahá'í in 1984, I have been asked many of questions about the Bahá'í Faith.

After so many explanations and interesting conversations on religious issues, I believe it is time to explain the Bahá'í Faith by comparing it to the core beliefs of the Catholic Church. I expect such an explanation would make the Bahá'í Faith more understandable for a Catholic, and simultaneously, would also allow Bahá'ís from non-Catholic background to better understand the central beliefs of the Catholic Church.

The basis for this comparison will be *Dei Verbum* (meaning “Word of God” in Latin), a document published by the Catholic Church. *Dei Verbum* is one of the most important documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965); it is described as the “Roman Catholic Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation.” Its intention was to explain the “authentic doctrine on divine revelation” and how it was transmitted throughout the history.

But before we begin our analysis of *Dei Verbum*, let me remind our readers how the Bahá'í Faith sees Christianity.

The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the divinity of Jesus Christ, the importance of His sacrifice and His influence in the history of humanity. Most Bahá'ís, when writing or talking about this issue, will most likely quote the following words of Baha'u'llah:

*Know thou that when the Son of Man yielded up His breath to God, the whole creation wept with a great weeping. By sacrificing Himself, however, a fresh capacity was infused into all created things. Its evidences, as witnessed in all the peoples of the earth, are now manifest before thee. The deepest wisdom which the sages have uttered, the profoundest learning which any mind hath unfolded, the arts which the ablest hands have produced, the influence exerted by the most potent of rulers, are but manifestations of the quickening power released by His transcendent, His all-pervasive and resplendent Spirit. We testify that when He came into the world, He shed the splendor of His glory upon all created things. [GWB #36]*

Concerning the origins of Christianity, the Bahá'í beliefs have a striking similarity with the ones of the Catholic Church:

As to the position of Christianity, let it be stated without any hesitation or equivocation that its divine origin is unconditionally acknowledged, that the Sonship and Divinity of Jesus Christ are fearlessly asserted, that the divine inspiration of the Gospel is fully recognized, that the reality of the mystery of the Immaculacy of the Virgin Mary is confessed, and the primacy of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, is upheld and defended. [PDC 109-110]

And how do Bahá'ís feel about the followers of Jesus Christ? An answer to this question can be found in an event that occurred during the life of Baha'u'llah. In 1868, He was living in exile in Edirne (Ottoman Empire) when the Sultan decided to exile Him together with His family and companions. Such decision disturbed the small group of exiles and also many people in the city. The following quote refers to that moment:

*The people surrounded the house, and Muslims and Christians wept over Us, and the voice of lamentation was upraised between earth and heaven by reason of what the hands of the oppressors had wrought. We perceived that the weeping of the people of the Son exceeded the weeping of others – a sign for such as ponder.* [SLH 146]

## Divine Revelation

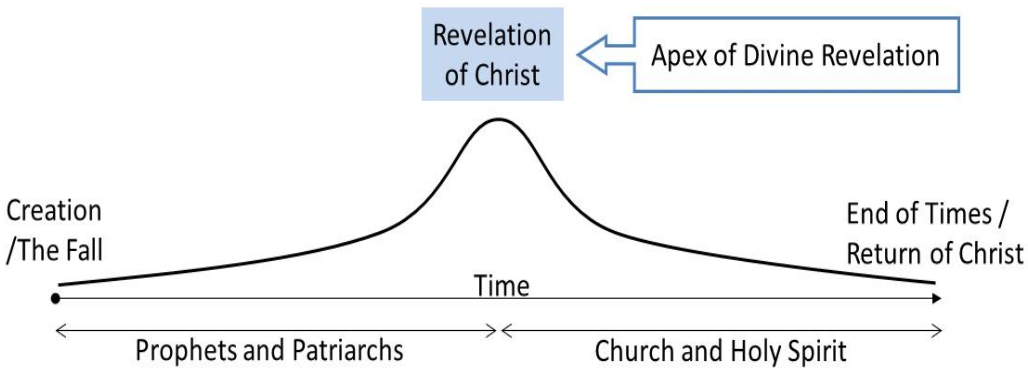
*That City is none other than the Word of God revealed in every age and dispensation. In the days of Moses it was the Pentateuch; in the days of Jesus, the Gospel; in the days of Muhammad, the Messenger of God, the Qur'an; in this day, the Bayan; and in the Dispensation of Him Whom God will make manifest, His own Book.* [KI ¶219]

How does God make Himself known? To whom does He reveal himself? And through whom? How can we know Him? These are the very first questions we have to answer when we try to explain any theistic system of thought. The first chapter of *Die Verbum* (named

“Revelation Itself”) presents a Catholic answer to these questions. In short, it states the following:

- God revealed Himself and made His will known. This revelation occurred through actions and words in history, and reached its fullness with Jesus Christ. (#2)
- After the fall of Adam and Eve, God offered salvation to humanity, sending Abraham, the Patriarchs, Moses and then Jesus Christ (“the word made flesh”). (#3)
- The dispensation of Christ is considered a “new and definitive covenant” and the Church expects “no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ”. (#4)
- God can be known through reason and revelation. (#6)

This is a Christocentric view of divine revelation. Jesus is seen as the apex of divine presence in history of Humankind; before Him, God revealed Himself through the prophets and patriarchs; after Him, there was the Church guided by the Holy Spirit. This chapter also reaffirms the myth of the fall as a justification for the concept of salvation, and claims that the revelation of Jesus was final. This view could be explained with the following image:



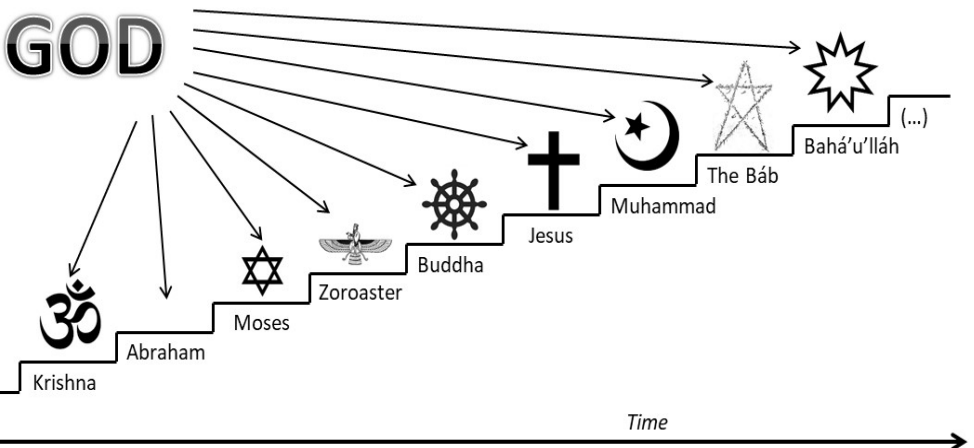
Basically, the Catholic Church claims finality (no more divine revelations after Jesus) and exclusivity (another document published by the Vatican II, named *Nostra Aetate*, referred to non-Christians religions and had a more inclusive perspective). Such a claim may have made some sense in homogeneous societies, where people

practiced only one religion and had no contact with other realities. Thanks to migrations and communications, we live today in pluralistic societies; it is very easy for us to get in contact with persons of other cultures and religions.

Therefore this Catholic claim raises several difficulties and contradictions:

- Why would God have a final or exclusive revelation?
- How is it possible to claim that an All-Loving Father loves all humanity, but saves only a minority?
- How is it possible that the Creator of all humanity reveals Himself only during a certain period of time, and only to a few people?
- How can we claim that God is a God of universal love and pretend that only one of His revelations is true?
- Could the leading figure in the history of humankind be only one people or only one religion?

In clear contrast with this view, the Bahá'í Faith states that religious truth is revealed by God progressively and cyclically over time through a series of divine Messengers, and their teachings are tailored to suit the needs of the time and place of their appearance. The notion of progressive revelation could be explained with the following schema:



Concerning the diversity of religion in the world, Bahá'u'lláh says:

*There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God. The difference between the ordinances under which they abide should be attributed to the varying requirements and exigencies of the age in which they were revealed. All of them... were ordained of God, and are a reflection of His Will and Purpose. [GWB #111]*

An unbiased study of the lives of the Messengers of God – the Manifestations of God – will show that They have a lot in common:

- They appear in times of moral and spiritual decadence.
- Their appearance is not noticed.
- Their teachings call for a moral and spiritual reformation.
- They face opposition from the clergy and political power.
- They announced that another Manifestation would appear (or that they would return).
- They are persecuted and sometimes killed.
- Eventually their message prevails and is accepted.

## **Apostles and Tradition**

*One's conduct must be like the conduct of Paul, and one's faith similar to that of Peter. [SWAB #189]*

Every religion has its heroes and saints from the early days; they are privileged witnesses of the dawn of a new revelation. Their lives and sayings often become the core of the new religion.

The second chapter of *Dei Verbum* (named “Handing On Divine Revelation”) focuses on the importance of the Apostles and their succession. In short, it states the following:

- The Apostles preached the Gospel. Their words and deeds conveyed the message of Christ. (#7)

- The Apostles left bishops as their successors, “handing over” to them “the authority to teach in their own place.” (#7)
- This is the beginning of the “apostolic tradition,” believed to be guided by the Holy Spirit. Several events in Catholic history are believed to be a proof of the validity of this tradition (#8).
- There is a strong link between sacred scripture and tradition. Both are accepted with the same “loyalty and reverence.” (#9)
- Both scripture and Tradition are expressions of the divine Will. The task of the Church is to preserve, interpret and preach the teachings that exist in the sacred scriptures and tradition (#10).

In the Bahá’í Faith the Apostles of Christ are highly respected and admired. The Bahá’í authoritative texts stresses their spiritual importance, their influence and their unique role in the growth of the early Christian Church. For example, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said:

*The Apostles were even as Letters, and Christ was the essence of the Word Itself; and the meaning of the Word, which is grace everlasting, cast a splendour on those Letters. [SWAB #29]*

It is also relevant to notice that the Bahá’í sacred texts also describe the role of the Apostles after the crucifixion of Christ as the main actors in the true resurrection of Christ:

*After the martyrdom of Christ, the Apostles were perplexed and dismayed... The Cause of Christ was thus as a lifeless body. After three days the Apostles became firm and steadfast, arose to aid the Cause of Christ, resolved to promote the divine teachings and practise their Lord’s admonitions, and endeavoured to serve Him... In other words, the Cause of Christ, which was like unto a lifeless body, was quickened to life and surrounded by the grace of the Holy Spirit. [SAQ ch. 23:6]*

According to the Bahá’í sacred texts, the Apostles also received the Holy Spirit:

*... the descent of the Holy Spirit means that the Apostles were attracted by the messianic Spirit, attained constancy and steadfastness, found a new life through the spirit of God's love, and saw Christ to be their ever-living helper and protector. They were mere drops and became the ocean; they were feeble gnats and became soaring eagles; they were all weakness and became endowed with strength. [SAQ ch. 24:4]*

This second chapter of *Dei Verbum* claims that the apostolic tradition – known as a process of handing over doctrinal and spiritual authority – is an expression of divine Will and source of guidance. This is a topic where the Catholics and followers of every other religion diverge. For the Bahá'ís, the divine guidance comes from the person and the words of a divine Messenger. An additional source of guidance to the Bahá'ís comes from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi and the messages from the Universal House of Justice.

We should have in mind that in the Catholic Church there is no such thing as a written covenant (as in the Bahá'í Faith). There is just a series of interpretations of the Bible and of history to claim the authority to the tradition. On the contrary, the succession of authority (to rule over the community of believers and to interpret the sacred writings) is clearly defined in the Bahá'í Faith (covenants of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Bahá).

First concerning the statement of Jesus Christ “Thou art Peter and upon this rock...”: this saying of Jesus establishes beyond any doubt the primacy of Peter and also the principle of succession, but is not explicit enough regarding the nature and functioning of the Church itself. The Catholics have read too much into that statement, and derived from it certain conclusions which are quite unjustifiable. (From a letter dated 7 September 1938 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, quoted in LG #1650)

And concerning traditions in general, 'Abdu'l-Bahá warned us:

*The Jews have traditional superstitions, the Buddhists and the Zoroastrians are not free from them, neither are the*

*Christians! All religions have gradually become bound by tradition and dogma... We should, therefore, detach ourselves from the external forms and practices of religion. We must realize that these forms and practices, however beautiful, are but garments clothing the warm heart and the living limbs of Divine truth. We must abandon the prejudices of tradition if we would succeed in finding the truth at the core of all religions. [PT 135-136]*

## The Origins of Sacred Scripture

*You must know the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God. [PUP 201]*

All religions have their sacred writings. These may be words of their Prophet founder, testimonies of faiths, oral traditions or descriptions of the deeds of the first believers. The content of these Texts goes from proclamations of the divine message, counselling on moral issues, definition of social laws, to divinely inspired poetry and prophecies. Naturally, the followers of every religion believe their sacred writings have a special power, in that they can affect positively their personal and collective lives.

*Dei Verbum* focuses its 3rd chapter (named “Sacred Scripture, Its Inspiration and Divine Interpretation”) on this topic. In short it says:

- Sacred scripture (Old and New Testaments) were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Their books teach divine truth faithfully and without error (#11).
- To understand the scriptures we should be aware of their diverse “literary forms.” The circumstances and cultural environments where the books appeared should be taken in consideration (#12).
- Interpreting scripture should also take tradition into account and is subject to the judgment of the Church (#12).
- The Word of God is similar to human words, just like the Word of God once assumed the flesh of human weakness (#13).

Most people think of sacred scripture as a synonym for the “Word of God.” But for the Bahá’í Faith the notion of the Word of God is not limited to the sacred scripture. The Gospel of John begins with the mysterious words “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” The Qur’an states that God created the universe with the word “Be” (2:117). Baha’u’llah makes similar statements and says that the Word of God is “the Cause of the entire creation,” and has powers and features beyond our understanding:

*...the Word of God – exalted be His glory – is higher and far superior to that which the senses can perceive, for it is sanctified from any property or substance. It transcendeth the limitations of known elements and is exalted above all the essential and recognized substances. It became manifest without any syllable or sound and is none but the Command of God which pervadeth all created things. It hath never been withheld from the world of being. [Baha’u’llah, Tablet of Wisdom, in TB 141]*

According to the Bahá’í sacred writings, the Word of God is the first emanation from God. It always existed and will continue to exist. Everything was created through the Word. To understand the relation between God and His Word, the Bahá’í sacred texts often use the following analogy: God is like the sun and the Word is like the sun’s rays. These rays are reflected by the Manifestations of God, who, acting like mirrors, convey the Word to humankind. Therefore, Their words can be said to be the Word of God. Their written words are what we call “sacred writings”.

For the Bahá’í Faith, the books of the Old and New Testaments are sacred writings, although they are not word-for-word the utterances and historical facts of the revelations they describe. In the Book of Certitude [¶93, ¶98], Bahá’u’lláh confirmed the spiritual authenticity of the Gospel texts.

In 1911, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was in London, He visited and spoke at the City Temple. Before leaving the Church, He wrote in the old Bible used by generations of preachers, the following words:

*This book is the Holy Book of God, of celestial Inspiration. It is the Bible of Salvation, the Noble Gospel. It is the mystery of the Kingdom and its light. It is the Divine Bounty, the sign of the guidance of God. [ABL 18]*

We wrote in a previous chapter that the Bahá'í Faith maintains that no religion has the exclusivity (or the finality) of the divine truth. Therefore, it should be clear that for Bahá'ís, the Bible is not the only existing sacred Book. There are other authentic scripture available to humankind, namely, the Qur'án and the Bahá'í sacred texts.

Concerning interpretations, it is normal that a religious authority claims to have the power to explain the meaning of their sacred writings. However, such power is questioned when another divine revelation appears and the new Manifestations of God explain the true meaning of the scriptures of past religions. One of such cases is described in the Bible when a twelve year old Jesus is found by His parents in the Temple explaining the meaning of the sacred writings to the scholars of His time (Luke 2:41-52).

Considering that for Bahá'ís there were other Divine revelations after Jesus Christ – namely, through Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh – it should not be a surprise to find in the Qur'án and in the Bahá'í authoritative texts explanations and interpretations of the Bible. Several Bahá'í books and tablets quote and explain various texts of the Bible, including Genesis, the Old Testament prophets, each of the gospels, several of the New Testament epistles and the Revelation of St. John.

## The Old Testament

*At one time, Thou didst raise Him up, O my God, and didst attire Him with the ornament of the name of Him Who conversed with Thee (Moses), and didst through Him uncover all that Thy will had decreed and Thine irrevocable purpose ordained. [PM 38]*

Being born in a Jewish environment, and having its first believers coming from Jewish backgrounds, Christianity assumed the Jewish

scriptures as part of their spiritual patrimony. These ancient texts were understood as a path leading to the revelation of Christ.

*Dei Verbum* focuses its 4th chapter (named “The Old Testament”) on this topic. In short it says:

- God established a covenant with Abraham, renewed it with Moses and spoke through the prophets of Israel (#14).
- Thus, the Old Testament presents a plan of salvation that prepares humanity for the advent of Christ (#15).
- The books of the Old Testament “contain some things which are incomplete and temporary” but also display a “true divine pedagogy,” including “sublime teachings about God, sound wisdom about human life, and a wonderful treasury of prayers” (#15).
- The Old Testament is a preparation for the new covenant established by Christ, and its full meaning is exposed in the New Testament (#16).

For the Bahá’í Faith, every divine revelation has a preparatory message for the following revelation. The Old Testament is part of the process of continuous divine revelation. The prophets of Israel announced Christ and other Manifestations of God. In the Kitáb-i-Íqán, Bahá’u’lláh refers to the following prophets/persons of the Old Testament: Abel, Abraham, David, Joseph, Moses, Noah, and Pharaoh.

Concerning Abraham, Baha’u’llah revealed the following words:

*Later, the beauty of the countenance of the Friend of God appeared from behind the veil, and another standard of divine guidance was hoisted. He invited the people of the earth to the light of righteousness... It is well known what a host of enemies besieged Him, until at last the fires of envy and rebellion were kindled against Him. And after the episode of the fire came to pass, He, the lamp of God amongst men, was, as recorded in all books and chronicles, expelled from His city. [K1 ¶11]*

Concerning Job, ‘Abdu’l-Baha wrote:

*Reflect upon his holiness Job: What trials, calamities and perplexities did he not endure! But these tests were like unto the fire and his holiness Job was like unto pure gold. Assuredly gold is purified by being submitted to the fire and if it contain any alloy or imperfection, it will disappear. That is the reason why violent tests become the cause of the everlasting glory of the righteous and are conducive to the destruction and disappearance of the unrighteous. [TAB3 655]*

And concerning Moses, Baha'u'llah wrote:

*Armed with the rod of celestial dominion, adorned with the white hand of divine knowledge, and proceeding from the Párán of the love of God, and wielding the serpent of power and everlasting majesty, He [Moses] shone forth from the Sinai of light upon the world. He summoned all the peoples and kindreds of the earth to the kingdom of eternity.... Surely you are aware of the fierce opposition of Pharaoh and his people, and of the stones of idle fancy which the hands of infidels cast upon that blessed Tree. So much so that Pharaoh and his people finally arose and exerted their utmost endeavor to extinguish with the waters of falsehood and denial the fire of that sacred Tree... [KI ¶12]*

In the Bahá'í authoritative texts we can find hundreds of quotes and allusions to Old Testament verses. However, we should keep in mind that the references to Old Testament stories, peoples and Prophets do not mean that the Bahá'í Faith believes these are necessarily historical facts or characters. But the spiritual meanings that these stories convey are truly important and are reaffirmed in the Bahá'í writings.

## Jesus and the New Testament

'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have said:

*His Holiness Christ said: "The Father is in me." This we must understand through logical and scientific evidences, for if religious principles do not accord with science and reason, they do not inspire the heart with confidence and assurance....*

*Let us, free from past tradition, investigate the reality of this matter. What is the meaning of the father and the son? [ADP 151-152]*

Jesus Christ is the central character of the New Testament; the Gospels, the Acts, the Epistles and the Book of Revelation are centered in His life, His teachings, the deeds of the early apostles, and their understanding of His teachings. *Dei Verbum* focuses its 5th chapter (named “The New Testament”) on this topic. In short it says:

- Christ was the “Word made Flesh.” He “established the kingdom of God on earth,” died, resurrected, and ascended to Heaven. (#17)
- The New Testament presents the Word of God in its “most excellent way” (#17). The Gospels have apostolic origin and preeminence in the New Testament (#18).
- The Church asserts unhesitatingly the “historical character” of the Gospels. The purpose of the authors of the Gospels was to tell us “honest truth about Jesus.” They selected some things, summarized other things and explained others. (#19)
- The epistles and other New Testament writings were “composed under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,” describing “the beginnings of the Church” and its growth (#20).

According to the Bahá’í teachings, the New Testament is the Word of God; but that doesn’t mean it is historically reliable. The books of the New Testament are testimonies of faith written by different people many years after the death of Christ; they refer to historical events, but cannot be said to be historical documents because they do not describe literally and exactly what happened. This topic was mentioned in a previous chapter.

Also in a previous chapter, we described the difference between God, His Word, and creation; we explained how His Messengers (including Christ) are like mirrors reflecting His word. That does not mean that the Word – or God – enters or incarnates in a Messenger. God is transcendent by definition; therefore, He cannot assume the form of a human being. If that would happen, He would no longer be

God. God cannot incarnate; how could the Infinite become finite? Regarding this issue, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is reported to have said:

*This fatherhood and sonship are allegorical and symbolical. The Messianic reality is like unto a mirror through which the sun of divinity has become resplendent. If this mirror expresses “The light is in me” – it is sincere in its claim; therefore Jesus was truthful when he said, “The Father is in me.” The sun in the sky and the sun in the mirror are one, are they not? – and yet we see there are apparently two suns.*  
[ADP 151-152]

Because Jesus is the central character in the New Testament, it is suitable now to describe the Bahá’í view on several main Christological topics.

The Bahá’í sacred texts acknowledge the virginal birth of Christ. This belief, however, does not raise Jesus’ divine condition above any other Messenger of God. Neither does it imply that Bahá’ís follow any Mariology cult. Shoghi Effendi clarified this topic:

...regarding the birth of Jesus-Christ. In the light of what Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá have stated concerning this subject it is evident that Jesus came into this world through the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit, and that consequently His birth was quite miraculous. This is an established fact, and the friends need not feel at all surprised, as the belief in the possibility of miracles has never been rejected in the Teachings. Their importance, however, has been minimized. [Shoghi Effendi, letter dated 31 December 1937, quoted in LG 489]

The Bahá’í Faith does not deny the power of Manifestations of God to perform miracles, but tends to reinterpret accounts of miracles as metaphors, for spiritual miracles are more important than physical ones. Speaking of Jesus’s miracles, Bahá’u’lláh states:

*...through Him [Jesus] the leper recovered from the leprosy of perversity and ignorance. Through Him, the unchaste and wayward were healed. Through His power, born of Almighty God, the eyes of the blind were opened, and the soul of the*

*sinner sanctified. Leprosy may be interpreted as any veil that interveneth between man and the recognition of the Lord, his God. Whoso alloweth himself to be shut out from Him is indeed a leper. [GWB #36]*

The resurrection of Christ is a point of divergence between Bahá'ís and Christians. Christians believe in a physical resurrection—this is a core belief for them!—and Bahá'ís understand resurrection as symbolizing the resurrection of the early Church. This is explained in several passages in the Bahá'í authoritative texts. Shoghi Effendi wrote:

We do not believe that there was a bodily resurrection after the crucifixion of Christ, but that there was a time after His ascension when His disciples perceived spiritually his true greatness and realized He was eternal in being. This is what has been reported symbolically in the New Testament and been misunderstood. [HE 69-70]

## Understanding Sacred Scripture

*...in the sayings of Him Who is the Spirit (Jesus) unnumbered significances lie concealed. Unto many things did He refer, but as He found none possessed of a hearing ear or a seeing eye He chose to conceal most of these things. Even as He saith: "But ye cannot bear them now." [ESW 148]*

*The divine Words are not to be taken according to their outer sense. They are symbolical and contain realities of spiritual meaning. For instance, in the book of Solomon's songs you will read about the bride and bridegroom. It is evident that the physical bride and bridegroom are not intended. Obviously, these are symbols conveying a hidden and inner significance. In the same way the Revelations of St. John are not to be taken literally, but spiritually. [PUP 458]*

Sacred scriptures have a pivotal importance for all world religions. They have the principles and the core teachings of each religion. For Christians, sacred scripture means only the Bible. *Dei Verbum*

focuses its 6th chapter (named “Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church”) on this topic. In short it says:

- The Church considers the scriptures and the tradition as a “supreme rule of Faith.” All preaching should be “nourished and regulated” by scripture. (#21)
- Christians should have access to the scriptures; therefore, “suitable and correct” translations are encouraged. (#22) Translations should have the necessary explanations for Christians and non-Christians. (#25)
- A deeper understanding of the scriptures is required. Exegetes and theologians, under the vigilance of the Church, should explain the meaning of the scriptures. (#23, #24)
- The clergy and lay people are urged to read the scriptures diligently and study them carefully, accompanied by prayer. (#25)
- Reading and studying of scripture will foster a stimulus in believer’s spiritual life. (#26)

The Manifestations of God always explained the meaning of the sacred writings of previous religions to their followers. The meanings they presented were always different from current understanding amongst clergy and people. This is a natural part of the process of progressive revelation.

The New Testament presents us a story of the boy Jesus explaining the meaning of Hebrew scriptures to the doctors in the Temple (Luke 2:41-52). Later, the Christians began to understand the Old Testament in a different mode, found new meanings in those books, and shared them with the Jews and Gentiles. This was a motive for acceptance and rejection of the Message of Christ.

Today we have a similar situation with the Bahá’í Faith. Bahá’u’lláh and His son, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, revealed the meaning of various passages of the Qur’an and the Bible. In January 1861, Baha’u’llah was asked by an uncle of the Báb – the forerunner of Baha’u’llah – on the meaning of several passages of the sacred writings. In reply, Baha’u’llah revealed the Book of Certitude (also

known as The Kitáb-i-Íqán). This book is the second most important book of the Bahá'í sacred texts.

The Book of Certitude is a work of exegesis where Bahá'u'lláh rationally demonstrates the existence of figurative language in the Scriptures, based on absurdities that result from literal readings. He then presents several interpretations for symbolic descriptions and terms found in the New Testament and in the Qur'an. Parables, figurative speech, and apocalyptic visions are interpreted and given a new meaning.

To demonstrate the concept of progressive revelation, Bahá'u'lláh explains in the Book of Certitude the meaning of concepts like "resurrection," "return of a Prophet," "sovereignty," and "Seal of the Prophets." His exegesis exposes the consistency, coherence, and evolution of religion as a single process. The book rationalized the eschatology and established the doctrinal framework for the Bahá'í Faith. It also provided an eschatological bridge into a new religious worldview.

Referring to the Book of Certitude, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, wrote:

Well may it be claimed that of all the books revealed by the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation, this Book alone, by sweeping away the age-long barriers that have so insurmountably separated the great religions of the world, has laid down a broad and unassailable foundation for the complete and permanent reconciliation of their followers.  
[GPB 139]

*Some Answered Questions* is a book that contains questions related to religion, philosophy and science, asked to 'Abdu'l-Bahá by Laura Clifford Barney, during several of her visits to Haifa between 1904 and 1906, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's answers to these questions.

A considerable part of the book focuses on Christian subjects, namely, the story of Adam and Eve, the birth of Christ, the greatness of Christ, baptism, miracles, the Eucharist, Peter and the Papacy, the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the second coming of Christ, the Day of Judgement, sin, and the Trinity.

More than good explanations of deep questions, the *Kitab-i-Íqán* and *Some Answered Questions* lead the reader to reflect about religious issues, explaining the seeming contradictions of the religious pluralism so visible in the world today, and avoiding dogmatic explanations, exclusivist views or syncretic attempts. No wonder these books are so popular amongst Bahá'ís and people wanting to study the Bahá'ís Faith.

## A final remark on Christianity

*If a Christian sets aside traditional forms and blind imitation of ceremonials and investigates the reality of the gospels, he will discover that the foundation principles of the teachings of His Holiness Christ were mercy, love, fellowship, benevolence, altruism, the resplendence or radiance of divine bestowals, acquisition of the breaths of the Holy Spirit and oneness with God. [FWU 105]*

I was born in a Catholic family and accepted the Bahá'í Faith when I was 20 years old. Since I first encountered the Bahá'í Faith I always kept searching for links between the message of Baha'u'llah and the teachings of Christianity, particularly the Catholic Church. After all, most of my relatives are Catholics. After formally accepting the Bahá'í Faith I naturally kept following news and events from Christian churches.

The many references to Christian themes found in the Bahá'í Scriptures are an evidence of the strong links between the Christian and Bahá'í Faiths. Describing the spiritual station of Jesus, Mary, and Peter, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi, wrote:

The Founder of the Christian Faith is designated by Bahá'u'lláh as the "Spirit of God," is proclaimed as the One Who "appeared out of the breath of the Holy Ghost," and is even extolled as the "Essence of the Spirit." His mother is described as "that veiled and immortal, that most beautiful, countenance," and the station of her Son eulogized as a "station which hath been exalted above the imaginings of all that dwell on earth," whilst Peter is recognized as one whom

God has caused “the mysteries of wisdom and of utterance to flow out of his mouth. [PDC 109-110]

But an honest dialogue between Bahá’ís and Christians can’t be based only on similarities between these religions. We should also mention our differences; and as we have shown in this text, we have significant differences. It is my hope that these similarities and differences can be the subject for an inspiring and serene Bahá’í-Christian dialogue.

Besides the Book of Certitude and *Some Answered Questions* (mentioned in the previous chapter), other Bahá’í books contain noteworthy references to the situation of the Church and its future. In several letters addressed to the Bahá’ís between 1929 and 1936, Shoghi Effendi described the growth of the Bahá’í community and the successive world crisis as a process of collective maturation. It is worth noting the reference he makes to the internal crisis in the Church:

...in later generations, voices were raised in protest against the self-appointed Authority which arrogated to itself privileges and powers which did not emanate from the clear text of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and which constituted a grave departure from the spirit which that Gospel did inculcate. They argued with force and justification that the canons promulgated by the Councils of the Church were not divinely-appointed laws, but were merely human devices which did not even rest upon the actual utterances of Jesus. Their contention centered around the fact that the vague and inconclusive words, addressed by Christ to Peter, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church,” could never justify the extreme measures, the elaborate ceremonials, the fettering creeds and dogmas, with which His successors have gradually burdened and obscured His Faith. [WOB 20]

It is also worth noting the reference to the external crisis in the Church:

Such a conscious, avowed, organized attack against religion in general and Christianity in particular is something new in history. Equally deliberate in some lands in its determined hostility to Christianity is another form of social and political faith – nationalism. But the nationalist attack on Christianity, unlike Communism, is often bound up with some form of national religion – with Islám in Persia and Egypt, with Buddhism in Ceylon, while the struggle for communal rights in India is allied with a revival both of Hinduism and Islám. [WOB 182]

The successive of divine revelations played their role in the history of humanity and in the transformation of the world. Inspired by these revelations, the early believers of every religion became active agents in the spiritual rebirth of the world. Cyclically, the world is born again. It is interesting to notice that Shoghi Effendi compared the current development of the Bahá'í Faith – which is today the source of spiritual rebirth of the world – to the early years of Christianity:

The indwelling Spirit of God which, in the Apostolic Age of the Church, animated its members, the pristine purity of its teachings, the primitive brilliancy of its light, will, no doubt, be reborn and revived as the inevitable consequence of this redefinition of its fundamental verities, and the clarification of its original purpose. [WOB 185]

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Borovicka, JoAnn: *Light of the Kingdom, Biblical Topics in the Bahá'í Writings*. (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2016).

Dibdin, Colin: *A Bahá'í View of the Bible* at [https://bahai-library.com/dibdin\\_bahai\\_view\\_bible](https://bahai-library.com/dibdin_bahai_view_bible)

*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum solemnly promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on November 18, 1965* at [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html)

Heggie, James, *Bahá'í References to Judaism, Christianity and Islám*. (Oxford, George Ronald, 1986)

Hornby, Helen. *Lights of Guidance: a Bahá'í reference file*. (New Delhi, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983).

Stockman, Robert: *Christianity from a Bahá'í Perspective*, at [http://bahai-library.com/stockman\\_christianity\\_bahai\\_perspective](http://bahai-library.com/stockman_christianity_bahai_perspective)

# An Analysis of the Salient Features of *Risáliy-i-Ja‘faríyyih*

Foad Seddigh

## Abstract

The *Risáliy-i-Ja‘faríyyih* (see a partial provisional translation following this paper) is one of the major writings of the Báb, about a quarter in length of Commentary on the Surih of Joseph (Qayyúmu’l-Asmá). Although not exclusively, it concerns the commentary on a particular Islamic prayer for the advent of the promised Qá’im, (Ḥujjat), written entirely in Arabic. It has fourteen chapters and was revealed on or about 10 January, 1846 CE. We can be sure that this tablet was revealed towards the end of the Shíráz period of His Ministry. Despite the fact that the Báb was not incarcerated at the time of revealing this epistle, none-the-less, He was prohibited from meeting with His followers. In this tablet, He expressed the hope that the restrictions on Him will be lifted and that He will be able to teach His followers in person. The Islamic prayer for which this commentary is written is only three short phrases long. His commentary appears specifically in chapters 11, 12 and 13 of the epistle, and it quotes certain words or phrases and expounds their real meaning. It should be noted that the Báb had not formally disclosed His complete station of prophethood to the general public at the time of the revelation of this epistle. Therefore, in other chapters of the commentary, He alludes to His full station discreetly, and only those who had the necessary spiritual perception could grasp His subtle allusions.

Some of the significant themes in this work are as follows: He refers to various episodes in His ministry, including the successive tribulations that have befallen Him in Shíráz, and He comments on the meaning of the letter “Há”. On a number of occasions, He asserts that He has not attended any schools and whatever He has revealed is from God. He laments that the Shaykhís who attained His presence failed to recognize Him; He forbids any questions about the Essence of God, criticizes those philosophers who have contended that the Divine Essence is the First Cause. He further expounds that the cause of creation is the Primal Will. He asserts that His call is the same call that arose from the Burning Bush on Mount Sinai. He elucidates the meaning of the “light” in the famous verse of the Qur’án. He relates and interprets a dream He experienced on the night of 12 Muḥarram. He lauds the station of the Remnant of God (Baḡyyat’ulláh) and stresses that He has thus far disclosed only some of the truths which He possesses. He declares further that even if all the rulers of the earth were to arise against Him, they would be powerless to resist His Cause or frustrate His purpose. He declares that He yearns to lay down His life in the same manner that Imám Ḥusayn did in the path of God. He interprets in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth chapters, the three parts of the aforementioned prayer, explicating the conditions of true prayer. In this paper some of the above points have been explicated further. A provisional translation of Chapter One follows the article.

## **Introductory Remarks**

### **Contents of the Epistle**

This epistle, a commentary on an Islamic prayer concerning the advent of the Promised Qá’im (He who arises), answers the questions of a seeker. It should be noted that several writings of the Báb particularly in the early period of His ministry are revealed in the form of Qur’án commentaries. Many Muslim scholars have written commentaries on the entire Qur’án or even isolated words and phrases of the Prophet or the Imáms, as they explicate the various meaning of those same phrases. It should be noted that the commentaries of the Báb are different in nature from the past. In His writings, we are not dealing with the interpretive paraphrase of

successive generations of believers, but with the corpus of His own written works, revealed in an entirely new light. Ascertaining the authenticity of the Sacred Text is no longer an insoluble issue as it was in previous Dispensations, when it was virtually impossible to know which parts of the Scripture accurately represented the Prophet's words and which passages took the form of paraphrase, interpretation, or even error due to the vagaries or the oral tradition.<sup>1</sup> The general features of this epistle are given below:

## Its Name

*Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih*. Apart from this name, it is known as “Sharḥ-i Du‘á’-i-Gḥaybat” or “Commentary on the Occultation Prayer”, “Saḥífih-i Ja'fariyyih”, and “Tafsír-i-Há”, i.e. Interpretation of the Letter “Há”. The tablet derives its name from Imám Ja‘far, the truthful. In the first few years of His Ministry, the Báb named His writings after the fourteen Immaculates, i.e. the Prophet Muḥammad; Fáṭimih, the Prophet’s daughter; ‘Alí, the Prophet’s son-in-law, cousin, and the first Imám; Ḥasan son of ‘Alí, the second Imám; Ḥusayn son of ‘Alí, the third Imám; this is followed by Imám Ḥusayn's son and after him by his descendants who form the rest of the Immaculates. This epistle is named after the sixth Imám whose name is Ja‘far.

- **Length:** About one hundred pages
- **Language:** Arabic
- **Time and Place of Revelation:** In the month of Muḥarram, 1262 AH or January, 1846, in Shíráz.
- **Name of the Addressee:** Unknown
- **Chapters:** Fourteen
- **Manuscript:** The author of this paper has not come across an authentic text of the epistle in the original language either in hand-written or in printed form<sup>2</sup>
- **Significance:** It clarifies the meaning of “occultation”. The compelling tone of the epistle will allow us to appreciate its spiritual value.

## Significance of the Risáliy-i-Ja‘faríyyih

The following list is a compilation of several indicators pointing to the importance of the epistle:

1. First and foremost, Bahá’u’lláh has quoted in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Book of Certitude) from this epistle (KI 231).
2. The Guardian has listed in the *Dawn-Breakers* under the title of “the Most Important Writings of the Báb,” 23 items from among the best-known works of the Báb. In that list, Risáliy-i-Ja‘faríyyih is item number ten.<sup>3</sup>
3. The length of the epistle and the significant nature of the material presented makes it worthy of our attention.
4. Selections from this epistle are among the few writings of the Báb that A.L.M. Nicolas has translated, discussed and published in the introduction to his French translation of the Persian Bayán.<sup>4</sup>
5. The early claims of the Báb which form the basis for His later claims are expounded in this epistle.
6. He calls Himself “Ḥujjat” meaning the “Testimony” or “Proof” in this epistle. If we pay close attention, we discover that His future claims to be the Qá’im and an independent Manifestation of God are subtly set out in this epistle.

## Background Information

Background information which is briefly stated below allows us to gain a better understanding of the contents of this epistle.

### The Qá’im and Mihdí in Islám

The Qá’im and Mihdí are central to the religion of Islam and its belief-system. Muslims believe that Muḥammad is the last prophet. However, they believe in the return of a few holy figures. Sunnis believe in the advent of the Mihdí; the Shí‘ahs believe in the appearance of Qá’im. Many signs and portents are associated with the appearance of these promised figures. Among them are: to restore true religion; to herald the end of one age and the beginning of

another; to witness the coming of a living guide to bring humanity back to the straight path; to hear two trumpet blasts; to witness the days of judgement and resurrection.

## Imams in Shí'ah Islam

Shí'ah means "the follower". The appointment of the successor to the Prophet Muḥammad is very much in dispute. Since the Prophet Muḥammad did not have a surviving son, the Shí'ah accepted 'Alí as the first Imám and the grand-children of the Prophet Muḥammad, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, as the second and third Imáms, respectively. The rest of the Imáms are: the son of Ḥusayn and successively down the line from the descendants of Imám Ḥusayn up to the eleventh Imám, Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí. Uncertainties surround the appearance of the twelfth Imám, i.e. the son of Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí. From a historical perspective, we are confronted with several hard facts which are difficult to reject. First, Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí died at the young age of 28 years. Second, he had no wife, only a maid-servant. Third, when he died in the year 260 A.H, he had no grown son to appoint as his successor Imám. Fourth, he did not appoint a successor. Fifth, most chronicles state that when he died, he had no apparent heir. His possessions were consequently divided between his brother and his mother. Sixth, his relatively few followers, at least compared to other sects of Islám, were divided into fourteen different factions as a result of the prevailing circumstances. One faction believed in the existence and disappearance of the child-Imám, a point that will be discussed further below.

## Imáms as Qá'im

Many Shí'ahs believed that each of the aforementioned Imáms was the Promised Qá'im who was supposed to usher in a glorious era for Islám. Based on this belief, these followers asked the Imáms if they were the promised Qá'im. The answer of the Imáms was naturally negative. They explained the several reasons why they could not qualify to be the promised Qá'im. These reasons are reported in the collections of Ḥadíth of the Shí'ahs. The prayer which is the subject of the commentary by the Báb is given by the sixth Imám (Imám Ja'far, the truthful). This prayer in essence asks God to facilitate in

granting to the faithful the knowledge of the promised Qá'im. We will discuss this prayer further below.

## Twelfth Imám

Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí, the eleventh Imám, was imprisoned or was placed under house arrest by the Abbasid Caliph; it is reported that he died in 260 A.H. in the prison, a fact which is universally upheld and undisputed. The point of contact between Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí and the body of the believers was his deputy ('Uthmán-ibn-Sa'íd). When Imám Ḥasan died at the age of 28, there was overwhelming uncertainty among his followers because he had no apparent wife (he had a handmaid), and no son old enough to be appointed as his successor. To be more precise, there has been no solid evidence to believe that he had a son who was alive at the time of his death. There are some ḥadiths (verbal utterance of the Prophets and the Imáms recorded years later) which state that his maid bore him a son in the year 255 A.H., but there is no evidence that he was alive in the year 260 A.H.; on the contrary, the mounting evidence points to the opposite. This is why after the death of Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí his followers were divided into nearly fourteen branches, one of which accepted the child-Imám to be the successor to Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí as the twelfth Imám. The brother of Imám Ḥasan, whose name was Ja'far, challenged the system with which he was intimately associated and claimed that his brother did not have any child at all and claimed that Imám's possessions should be divided between him and the mother of the deceased Imám; he further claimed that he was the lawful successor to the Imám. Some people accepted his claim and followed him, forming one of the fourteen branches of the Shí'ah after the death of Imám Ḥasan. Later on, he was denounced and called Ja'far the liar, in spite of the fact that he was the most truthful person in the world.

## The Minor and Major Occultations

After the death of Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí, it is said that the child-Imám who was hidden in an underground passage, and who was not more than five years old, appointed the deputy of Imám Ḥasan ('Uthmán-ibn-i Sa'íd) as his own deputy, through whom the believers

should communicate with him. Ná'ib means deputy. Another name for the deputy was the "Báb" (Gate) to the Imám. If we approach this matter logically, in reality, there was no legitimate, living Imám to communicate with the body of believers. It is more likely that all communications were composed and issued by the deputy himself in the name of an imaginary Imám, who did not physically exist. Uthmán-ibn-Sa'íd, just before his death, issued a letter relayed from the hidden Imám stating that he was appointing Muḥammad-ibn-i 'Uthmán (the deputy's son) as the Imám's deputy, in a similar manner by which the third and fourth deputies were appointed.<sup>5</sup> Thus a span of sixty nine years lapsed. During this period no one except the deputies could communicate with the hidden Imám. This sixty-nine-year period from 260-329 A.H. is called the Minor Occultation. Near the time of the death of the fourth deputy, a letter purportedly written by the hidden Imám (twelfth Imám) was issued stating that no further deputies would be appointed; from then on the Imám would disappear completely from sight; no one could have any contact with him. From this point on the "Major Occultation" started and no specific date for the end of the situation was anticipated.

### **Shí'ah Íthná 'Asharí**

Those who believed in the minor and major occultations of the hidden Imám were called Shí'ah Íthná 'Asharíyyih (one of the most obscure groups from amongst the fourteen branches formed immediately after the death of Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí (the eleventh Imám) referred to earlier. The Imám's absence left a gap which was gradually filled by the traditional authority of the 'ulamá, (the learned), the scholars of religious law, who increasingly extended and consolidated their influence over the masses of believers. To legitimize their authority, these clerics presented themselves as the general representatives of the Hidden Imám on earth. The main beneficiaries of this arrangement, who became later the core of Shí'ah Íthná 'Asharíyyih (Shí'ah twelvers), were the learned who became the de facto leaders or heirs to the Imám, both for spiritual guidance and also to receive their share of wealth which was due to the Imám. These monetary benefits were so lucrative that they dazzled the eyes of the insincere in heart. The clerics promoted this questionable arrangement, an arrangement that, strangely enough, was accepted by

some. The learned promoted the idea of “the coming of the 12th Imám” who was also the promised Qá’im at an undisclosed time in the future.

It should be noted that before the Safavid reign, the Shí’ah Íthná ‘Asharí was a minority branch in Iran. For political reasons, the Safavid kings found it prudent and convenient to promote the Shí’ah Íthná ‘Asharí sect as the state religion due to rivalry with the Ottoman empire rule.<sup>6</sup> Qajar kings, because of the inherent weakness of their unjust rule, followed the same pattern. They needed the support of the learned to rule the masses.<sup>7</sup> As the years passed, the questionable idea of occultation became not only part of the belief-system of every believer in Shí’ah Íthná ‘Asharí, but rather the unquestionable corner-stone of their belief. All Shí’ah came to expect the appearance of the hidden Imám who was purportedly living at the time of the end in a city called Jabulqa.<sup>8</sup> This belief became so entrenched in the thoughts and minds of the people that the slightest deviation from it was considered blasphemous, punishable by either imprisonment or death.

## The Shaykhí School and the doctrine of Fourth Pillar

The period of occultation persisted for ten centuries. With the approach of the Islamic millennium (1260 A.H.), a messianic fervor was felt in every corner of Iran. The Shaykhí School which was established by Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsá’í started examining the fundamentals of Islam. There are five fundamentals of Shí’ah belief:

1. The unity of God (“*towhid*”)
2. Acceptance of Muḥammad as the Prophet of God
3. The return to God and the resurrection (*Ma’ád*)
4. The justice of God
5. Belief in the Imáms as successors of Muḥammad

The Shaykhí School scrapped the two principles of the justice of God and the resurrection (*Ma’ád*), arguing that the first two tenets include these points. However, they added one more principle to the remaining three, an addition that reduced the principles of the religion to four only:

1. The unity of God
2. Belief in the Prophet
3. Belief in the Imáms
4. The “Fourth Pillar”

This fourth pillar referred to the “Perfect Shí'ah” who was communicating with the Hidden Imám. Both Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsá'í and Siyyid Kázim were considered to be the “fourth pillar” of the faith or the “Báb” to the Hidden Imám, although they never claimed such a station. Furthermore, they did not teach that the Hidden Imám was alive in a physical form. They coined the terminology of “huriqalya” which was a pseudo-physical-form; somewhere between physical and spiritual; sometimes it is called the Imaginal Realm. They said that the Imám existed the form of “huriqalya.”

## **The Báb – the Nature of His Claim**

In the year 1260 A.H. the Báb appeared among the Shí'ah, who had solidified this core, unshakable belief, unsupported by any divine revelation, and lacking any rational or spiritual proof. The Twelvers firmly believed that the promised Qá'im was living in an invisible city. Some of the learned had even composed treatises describing their descriptions of this city with its bizarre, if not surreal, scenarios. The Báb's claim to prophethood had to break and expose this great wall of vain-imaginings that had solidified the Shí'ah belief over the years. His approach was no different from the prophets gone before Him. All past prophets revealed the essentials of their religion gradually. The Prophet Muḥammad in the Qur'án revealed: “They will not believe on him though the example of those of old hath gone before” (Hedjar 15:13).<sup>9</sup> Also: “Such is God's method carried into effect of old; no change canst thou find in God's mode of dealing” (Fath-The Victory 48: 23). Following this method of conveying His message to a people steeped in vain-imaginings, the Báb at the inception of His revelation, conveyed two parallel messages: One for those sincere believers who were not shackled with superstitious notions and who followed the inspired promptings of their heart. For these believers, the former message was stated subtly from the beginning. The other message was intended for those

fundamentalists who relied on the distorted expectations derived from past traditions. For example, the Báb in His “first and mightiest” book, the Qayyúmu’l-Asmá (Commentary on the Surih of Joseph) says for the benefit of the first group:

*O YE kinsmen of the Most Great Remembrance! This Tree of Holiness, dyed crimson with the oil of servitude, hath verily sprung forth out of your own soil in the midst of the Burning Bush, yet ye comprehend nothing whatever thereof, neither of His true, heavenly attributes, nor of the actual circumstances of His earthly life, nor of the evidences of His powerful and unblemished behaviour. Actuated by your own fancies, you consider Him to be alien to the sovereign Truth, while in the estimation of God He is none other than the Promised One Himself, invested with the power of the sovereign Truth, and verily He is, as decreed in the Mother Book, held answerable in the midst of the Burning Bush...*  
[SWB 52]

To the second group, He calls Himself “the Gate”:

*GLORIFIED is He besides Whom there is none other God. In His grasp He holdeth the source of authority, and verily God is powerful over all things. We have decreed that every long life shall in truth suffer decline and that every hardship shall be followed by ease, that perchance men may recognize the Gate of God as He Who is the eternal Truth, and verily God shall stand as witness unto those that have believed.* [SWB 47]

And

*Verily I am the ‘Gate of God’ and I give you to drink, by the leave of God, the sovereign Truth, of the crystal-pure waters of His Revelation which are gushing out from the incorruptible Fountain situate upon the Holy Mount. And those who earnestly strive after the One True God, let them then strive to attain this Gate.* [SWB 50]

The first quote is directed towards the sincere in heart and the second and the third quotes are directed towards the fundamentalists.

It is obvious from the second and third quotes that He calls himself the “Báb” or the “gate.” Outwardly whenever He spoke about His station, He intended the “gate”. Most Shí'ah assumed that He meant by the “gate” the gate to the Hidden Imám, whereas what He intended in reality was the gate to a “Personage” who was yet unknown, as has been described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in *A Traveller's Narrative* [TN 4]. In the entire *Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih*, in several passages He has disavowed having knowledge of the realm of the Unseen, but in reality, whatever He has written has been revealed by God. This is similar to following statement in Qayyúmu'l-Asmá:

*VERILY We made the revelation of verses to be a testimony for Our message unto you. Can ye produce a single letter to match these verses? Bring forth, then, your proofs, if ye be of those who can discern the one true God. I solemnly affirm before God, should all men and spirits combine to compose the like of one chapter of this Book, they would surely fail, even though they were to assist one another ....* [SWB 43]

## Opposition of the ‘Ulamá (The Learned)

The ‘Ulamá enjoyed unchallenged leadership for one thousand years. They fulfilled collectively the role of the deputy of Imám without directly claiming it. Now in light of the Báb’s claim that He was the lawful representative of the Hidden Imám, the learned had to surrender the position that they had arrogated to themselves. In so doing, for the first time in their history, the Báb questioned their legitimacy and placed their leadership under threat. This is the main reason why the learned were among the first to oppose the Báb. Bahá’u’lláh in *the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* says:

*Reflect, O Shaykh, upon the Shí'ih sect. How many the edifices which they reared with the hands of idle fancies and vain imaginings, and how numerous the cities which they built! At length those vain imaginings were converted into bullets and aimed at Him Who is the Prince of the world.* [ESW 119]

Also:

*O Hádí! The blind fanaticism of former times hath withheld the hapless creatures from the Straight Path. Meditate on the Shi'ih sect. For twelve hundred years they have cried "O Qá'im!", until in the end all pronounced the sentence of His death, and caused Him to suffer martyrdom. [ESW 163]*

In one of His tablets Bahá'u'lláh has revealed:

*Since the people are perceived as being weak and veiled by idle fancies, therefore the Sun of Reality hath appeared as an atom and the everlasting ocean hath appeared as a drop. Thus hath the Primal Point appeared assuming the name of "gatehood." Even so, the people were discontent with this lower station, how much more were they discontent by the claim of velayat (Vice-regency, Guardianship), whereas all these stations were created by Him.<sup>10</sup> (Provisional Translation by Foad Seddigh)*

Bahá'u'lláh in one of His Tablets says:

*It is known to thee that the commentary on the Surih of Joseph hath been revealed according to the prevailing understanding of the people of that time. This hath been for reason of pure bounty, that haply the wayward and the ignorant would become transported to the realm of knowledge, because much of that which hath been stated therein is the truth of the matter for the people of the Qur'án. Had it been revealed according to that which God hath desired, no one would have accepted and remained faithful.<sup>11</sup> (Provisional Translation by Foad Seddigh)*

'Abdu'l-Bahá in one of His Tablets says:

*Thou asked about the twelfth Imam. This supposition hath never existed in the material world; it was only a notion confined to the unseen world, lacking corporal existence. Some Shi'ah leaders devised a scheme for the protection of the weak amongst their followers to give Him a physical identity ...<sup>12</sup> (Provisional Translation by Foad Seddigh)*

The Báb in His book *The Seven Proofs* says:

*Consider the manifold favours vouchsafed by the Promised One, and the effusions of His bounty which have pervaded the concourse of the followers of Islam to enable them to attain unto salvation. Indeed observe how He Who representeth the origin of creation, He Who is the Exponent of the verse, 'I, in very truth, am God', identified Himself as the Gate [Bab] for the advent of the promised Qá'im, a descendant of Muḥammad, and in His first Book enjoined the observance of the laws of the Qur'án, so that the people might not be seized with perturbation by reason of a new Book and a new Revelation and might regard His Faith as similar to their own, perchance they would not turn away from the Truth and ignore the thing for which they had been called into being... [SWB 119]*

'Abdu'l-Bahá in *A Traveller's Narrative* has written:

*He began to speak and to declare the rank of Bábhood. Now what He intended by the term Báb [Gate] was this, that He was the channel of grace from some great Person still behind the veil of glory, Who was the possessor of countless and boundless perfections, by Whose will He moved, and to the bond of Whose love He clung. And in the first book which He wrote in explanation of the súrih of Joseph, He addressed Himself in all passages to that Person unseen from Whom He received help and grace, sought for aid in the arrangement of His preliminaries, and craved the sacrifice of life in the way of His love. [TN 4]*

As one may gather from the above quotes, the main reasons that the Báb started His ministry with a lesser claim was due to the lack of spiritual capacity and understanding among the people. He needed, consequently, time to prepare them for the acceptance of His ultimate station and revelation. From the observation of such a lesser claim, a claim that was rejected by the learned, and through their instigation by the majority of the people, we can safely extrapolate the dangerous outcome if He had disclosed His complete message and station at the beginning. It is for the same reason that we notice in

the Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih, which was revealed in the early period of the Báb's ministry, these two types of statements, intended for the sincere, on the one hand, and the superstitious on the other hand.

## The Occultation Prayer

An inquirer asked the Báb to clarify the meaning of the prayer from the 6th Imám regarding the Testimony of God, which is also known as the prayer of occultation. In response to his request, the Báb revealed the "Commentary on the Prayer of Occultation." The Prayer is very short and has three lines only:

*O my God! Make known to me Thyself! Shouldst Thou enable me not to recognize Thyself, I would not be able to recognize Thy Prophet.*

*O my God! Make known to me Thine Apostle! Shouldst Thou enable me not to recognize Thine Apostle, I would not be able to recognize Thy Proof.*

*O my God! Make known to me thy Proof! Shouldst Thou enable me not to recognize Thy Proof, I would stray from my religion.*

It should be noted that "testimony" or "proof" is generally a reference to the revelation; but "Testimony" or "Proof" refers to the Manifestation of God, or the promised Qá'im.

## The Báb's approach in Answering the Question of "Occultation"

The question of "occultation", the story of whether the Hidden Imám was alive or dead, was a complex question, that required clarification because of its perplexing nature. However, the Báb does not make any attempt to explain it in historical terms; rather, as we will see later in the Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih, He explains that the "occultation" occurs when man departs from his everlasting condition at the time of his creation by God. He says that God created mankind in His own image. The Báb identifies occultation with the existential station of forgetting the divine revelation within

the human soul, which requires prayer in order to regain true self-consciousness and to return to his original spiritual condition and thereby gain purity of heart, thereby discovering the truth.

## Major themes in the *Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih*

Without pretence to being exhaustive, the following is a list of the major themes presented in the epistle:

1. The meaning of the recognition of God
2. True belief in the unity of God (*towhid*)
3. Explanation of the Primal Will
4. The interpretation of “iláh”
5. The claims of the Báb
6. The testimony and proof of His mission
7. The inward meaning of the martyrdom of Imám Ḥusayn
8. That all things are in the hands of God: His decree, revelation and the source of His knowledge
9. Why He changed his mind and did not go to Karbilá (*badá*)
10. Opposition of some of the believers
11. The interdiction for man of asking God about creation
12. The true nature of man
13. The meaning of occultation
14. The interpretation of the letter “Há”
15. The testimony of some of the learned about Him

## A Brief Summary of Each Chapter

Since the *Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih* is a commentary on the occultation prayer, we might expect the Báb to devote the entire fourteen chapters to the commentary. But even with a cursory glance at the tablet, we observe that the commentary appears only in chapters 11, 12 and 13. Each of these chapters is devoted to the commentary of one third or one line of the original prayer and a fourth line is added

by the Báb Himself to this prayer in chapter 14. However, the material presented in other chapters is necessary for the understanding of these four chapters. In other words, these four chapters without the other ten chapters would be incomplete. We will present in the following section the important themes treated in each chapter. The Báb Himself has specified the beginning and end of each chapter and also has given a title for each chapter.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 1

### *Title: The Discourse of Illumination and the Glorification of God*

- He states that even Himself cannot adequately praise God.
- He reveals several prayers and meditations.
- He states that everything is/was an act of God, whether seekers travelling to find Him, their acceptance of His claim, the humiliation He endured, opposition to Him, etc.
- He alludes to a verse of the Qur'án: "They plotted but God plotted: and of plotters is God the best." (Anfals, The Spoils 8:30)
- He admonishes the inquirer by stating: "Beware, beware! lest thou look upon any other thing except thy essence of being .... Certainly, it is your duty to examine the promptings of your inner heart and its command." (Provisional Translation by Foad Seddigh)
- He reminds the inquirer that the condition of occultation is the station of falling into the abyss of particularistic essence and forgetting one's real existence which is the true reality or spiritual reality of human beings.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 2

### *Title: Divine Admonition*

- This chapter is an admonition to the inquirer who the Báb encourages to heed His words and to rely upon God such that

he becomes liberated from doubts and temptation. The Báb argues that the matter is confined to two alternatives: either it is true or false. If he follows the Báb, he follows God; should he reject His claims, he follows Satan. The inquirer is reminded when the truth is disclosed to a fair-minded person, he should not reject it, but when falsehood is mixed with truth, no one would accept it.

- The Cause of God is like a light that illumines everything. Now He possesses the Word of God and it sheds light like the sun.
- He is the possessor of God's testimony and revelation; it is incumbent on everyone to accept Him without further questioning.
- The Báb says that He possesses the Testimony of God which is the Truth. Should the seeker reject it, then he has no sure handle/firm cord to grasp the truth. Consequently, if any other "truth" is presented to him, he has no alternative but to reject it.
- He refers to some Shaykhís who accepted Him and then changed their mind. Now they worship Satan.
- He speaks kindly about Siyyid Ja'far Kashfí (the father of Siyyid Yaḥyá Dárábí, Vahíd). For Siyyid Ja'far and for Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsá'í, He beseeches God's mercy.
- He admonishes the seeker that he should have the right attitude. He says: "Behold the One Who calleth thee unto God. Should He possess an incontrovertible testimony from His Lord in such manner that none is able to produce the like thereof, His cause would then be proven to be true and there would be no doubt about it. Obey then His words and ask not why or wherefore . . . Shouldst thou acknowledge His testimony thou wouldst have no place to flee to, save to obey Him, even if He calleth night day, poison sugar, false true, and knowledge ignorance"<sup>13</sup>

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 3

### *Title: An Introduction to the Transcendent Glory of God*

- He forbids questions about creation because all doors to the realm of Divinity are closed. Whoever asks such questions has committed an unforgivable sin.
- Since all roads are barred to the direct recognition of God, the seeker should strive to ascertain His good-pleasure.
- He refers to Himself as “the Point” (Nuḡṡih). To the seeker He says if you know the references to the Point and follow it, you will attain unto all knowledge. (Actually He refers to the Primal Will). He refers to the philosophers who called God the First Cause/Uncaused Cause. He says it was the Primal Will that created the world of existence; the Primal Will created itself. He refers to this realm as that of the Manifestations of God. He refers in a subtle way to His ultimate station.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 4

### *Title: Mentioning the prayer of Occultation.*

- He identifies the reference for the occultation prayer and attributes it to Imám Ja‘far Šádiq.
- He affirms that the knowledge of religion is for man to know himself and to know that which God has endowed the being of man.
- In the beginning, the creation of man was perfect. In the beginning man was self-sufficient. He possessed all required knowledge for this existence. Then he deviated from the original condition of his creation.
- He reminds the seeker that all sins will be forgiven except questions about the origin of creation.
- A true believer has such a high station that it would be impossible to fully describe.

- Once the believer accepts the interdiction not to inquire of God concerning creation, then certain conditions are incumbent upon anyone who supplicates God: to recognize the oneness of God; to acknowledge His names and attributes; to recognize for oneself and others His commands and interdictions. Once the seeker possesses this knowledge, his prayer will be answered.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 5

### *Theme: The Dawning of the Morn of Eternity*

- It starts with the Qur'anic verse: (Qasas, The Story 28:30) “And when he came up to it, a Voice cried to him out of the bush from the right side of the valley in the sacred hollow, “O Moses, I truly am God, the Lord of the Worlds”, followed by Ikhlas-The Unity 112:1-4: “SAY: He is God alone: God the eternal! He begetteth not, and He is not begotten; And there is none like unto Him.”
- What follows is a lengthy chapter concerning the true meaning of the *Towhid*.
- Unacceptability of asking God a question concerning creation.
- The real meaning of the recognition of God.
- At the end of the chapter, he reiterates a discourse by Imám Riḍá on the unity of God in one of his debates.
- True recognition of the essence of God is impossible except by God Himself.
- If anyone says that he manifests God, he has lied.
- The names and attributes of God apply to the realm of creation.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 6

### *Theme: Of the Mystery of Eternity*

- This is also one of the longer chapters of the epistle. This chapter starts by quoting the famous verse from the Qur'án (Nur, Light 24: 35): “God is the LIGHT of the Heavens and of the Earth. His Light is like a niche in which is a lamp – the lamp encased in glass the glass, as it were, a glistening star. From a blessed tree is it lighted, the olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would well-nigh shine out, even though fire touched it not! It is light upon light. God guideth whom He will to His light, and God setteth forth parables to men, for God knoweth all things.” He explains the real meaning of this verse and then continues with a dream of His own.
- He interprets the light referred to in the above verse to be the Primal Will.
- Whoever claims that he has “known” the reality of the Prophet Muḥammad runs the risk of claiming His station. In other words, we cannot know or understand the true stations of the Manifestations of God.
- Whoever calls upon God has a duty to know the Prophet Muḥammad.
- He explains that on 12 Muḥarram 1262. A.H. (February, 1845) He had a dream. He dreamt there were many books around Him. When He opened one of them, He saw dust from the tomb of the Imám Ḥusayn inside a paper wrapping. On opening it, He saw sacred writing in red ink at the end of which was a star bearing the inscription: “I leave all my affairs in Thy hand”. He tried to memorize the sacred verses, but when He awoke He had forgotten everything except four words, one of which was “Ma‘śúd”. He interprets this word by explicating the letters that compose the word.
- He mentions that at the time of writing of this chapter, it was 14 Muḥarram, four days after the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imám Ḥusayn, and He was grief stricken. He

then relates what Imám Ḥusayn uttered while standing by the tomb of his grandfather, the Prophet Muḥammad, at the time of His leaving Medina for Kúfih where martyrdom was awaiting him.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 7

### *Theme: The Beautiful Names of God*

- The subject is the recognition and interpretation of the beautiful names of God.
- He mentions the verse from the Qur'án (Al Araf 7:180): "Most excellent titles hath God: by these call ye on Him, and stand aloof from those who pervert his titles. For what they have done shall they be repaid!"
- Whatever thing has a name is a manifestation of one of God's names.
- God desired to be known by creating the divine names and attributes.
- This ḥadīth is quoted from the Imáms: "We are the beautiful names of God; nothing will be accepted by God except through our recognition."
- One of the names of God is "huvá" (= He is God). It is the great name of God. "Huvá" consists of two letters of "Há = ه" and "vav = و". The number associated with the letter "há" is 11. With a point in front of it, it becomes 110, the number of the Báb's name 'Alí. He claims that this beautiful name of God refers to Him. He encourages the seeker to cling to this beautiful name, that is, to cling unto Him.
- The Qur'án mentions: "He is the great announcement" whom you have turned against. This refers to the Báb.
- He quotes a tradition stated by Ráhib from Imám Ja'far Ṣádiq who said there were eight letters, four in the heaven and four on the earth that the Qá'im will interpret. Ráhib asked for two of the four. Ṣádiq's response was that he would let him know

all four. The first one is the divine unity (there is no God save God); the second is the Prophet Muḥammad; the third refers to the Imáms; the fourth refers to the Shí'ah. The Báb says that the Shí'ah means the perfect man. (One of the titles of the Báb was the “fourth support” or “forth rukn”). He says that one of His titles is the intermediary between the hidden Imám and the believers.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 8

### *Theme: The Great Signs of God*

- He quotes the verse from the Qur'án (Sád 38: 67-70): “SAY: this is a weighty message, From which ye turn aside! Yet had I no knowledge of what passed among the celestial chiefs (Concourse on High) when they disputed; Verily, it hath been revealed to me only because I am a public preacher.”
- He calls Himself the “weighty message,” i.e. Great Announcement, mentioned in the above verse. He affirms that He places all His trust on “the Remnant of God”. The expression of “Remnant of God” appears in the Shí'ah traditions (ḥadīth) not in the Qur'án. The Báb refers to it in the Qayyumu'l-Asmá.
- He addresses the seeker as “O he who has insight!” He draws his attention to the Shí'ah tradition that the Qá'im speaks the words: “The Remnant of God is beneficial to you”. He says the Remnant of God is guiding Him.
- He quotes a tradition from Imám 'Alí who says: “The enlightened recognition of me is the same as the recognition of God”. In the visitation prayer of Imám 'Alí this verse appears: “Whatever is decided by the “Testimony of God” is the unalterable decree.” He reminds the seeker that the allusions made here are finer than a chalice filled with clear wine.
- He says there is a commonly accepted tradition that says should a man die without recognizing the Imám of his time, he has died the death of jáhiliyyih, i.e. a reference to the days of ignorance of the idol worshippers in pre-Islamic Arabia.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 9

### *Theme: The Great Bounties of God*

- He quotes a verse from the Qur'án (Rahman 55: 13): “ Which then of the bounties of your Lord will ye twain deny?”
- He interprets the verse that the greatest favours of God are the kindred of Muḥammad and the Shí'ah Imáms. He calls Himself the last light from the kindred of the Imám. Then He describes five stations for them. He expresses His wish to be living near the tomb of Imám Ḥusayn.
- He enters into detailed and complex numerical tafsir (deriving explanations from numerical assignments to words according to Abjad letters) related to these stations.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 10

### *Theme: The Explanation of the Beginning and the End. i.e. of this World and the Next*

- This is the longest chapter in the epistle. It expounds the beginning of man's life and its end. i.e. the status of man at his creation and his return to God at the end of his earthly life. He also explains the real inner meaning of the martyrdom of the Imám Ḥusayn, as distinguished from his obvious physical martyrdom. The writing of this chapter coincided with the tenth day of Muḥarram, the date of the martyrdom of the Imám Ḥusayn. He discusses the divinity of the Imám Ḥusayn. He quotes one reputable ḥadīth from ibn-i-'Abbás, who stated that when Imám Ḥusayn was leaving Mecca for Iraq, he saw the archangel Gabriel holding Imám Ḥusayn's hand. Gabriel said that whosoever has supported the Imám, it is as though he has supported God. The Báb explains the inner/hidden meaning of the martyrdom of Imám Ḥusayn, i.e. the people would shed tears for Me in My afflictions (the Báb) at the hands of My enemies. The martyrdom of the Imám Ḥusayn was the fulfilment of the first blast on the trumpet. A Qur'ánic verse says there will be two blasts of the trumpet.

- He explains the mystery of the number of 72, i.e. the number of companions of the Imám Ḥusayn at the time of his martyrdom. The Báb relates these verses to His life.
- He explains the mystery of the tenth of Muḥarram when the Imám Ḥusayn was martyred in the year 61 A.H. He says that it was on a Friday. He relates the events surrounding the martyrdom to Himself. He refers to His condition at the hands of His enemies which is more grievous than that of Imám Ḥusayn. If the Imám Ḥusayn received 950 wounds from bows, arrows and spears, the Báb maintains that His suffering is greater.
- He refers to the words of Javád Valiání the Khuvár as the lowing of a calf. He says that he and people like him among the learned who opposed the Báb could not reveal even a single verse. He affirms that He could conquer the east and the west. Then He states His desire for martyrdom. These verses Bahá'u'lláh has quoted in the Kitáb-i-Íqán:

*Likewise, in His interpretation of the letter "Há," He craved martyrdom, saying: "Methinks I heard a Voice calling in my inmost being: 'Do thou sacrifice the thing which Thou lovest most in the path of God, even as Ḥusayn, peace be upon him, hath offered up his life for My sake.' And were I not regardful of this inevitable mystery, by Him, Who hath my being between His hands even if all the kings of the earth were to be leagued together they would be powerless to take from me a single letter, how much less can these servants who are worthy of no attention, and who verily are of the outcast... That all may know the degree of My patience, My resignation, and self-sacrifice in the path of God." (KI 231-232)*

- He makes no claim except servitude. He says He has revealed 10 books and 4 epistles. In order to stress the potency of His writings and lack of capacity of the majority of people to appreciate His spiritual authority, He states that any ordinary man who could have one of His 14 books and epistle in his hands would have conquered the world.

- He mentions that if a member of the learned (*'ulamá*) writes a simple epistle on some minor aspect of Islam, thousands of people will follow him. The faithful believe that the repudiation of such an epistle would be tantamount to repudiation of God. Although His Cause is like the sun at its zenith, the people do not pay any attention to Him and arise to oppose Him vehemently. The Báb laments the spiritual blindness of such people.
- He ends this chapter with 61 lines of a poem modelled on the battle cry of the Imám Ḥusayn.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 11

### *Theme: Commentary on the First One-Third of the Prayer (First Line of the Prayer)*

- God's knowledge encompasses all things. Its outward, plain sense meaning is the same as its inner meaning and vice versa. Only God Himself knows the true meanings of the divine verses.
- He begins with the interpretation of the first word of the first line of the prayer and expounds the letters of the alphabet that form the word. It starts with “alláhuma = اللهم”, “O my God!” He interprets the letters of the alphabet “alif”, “lám”, “há”, “mim”, etc. which form the first word. For an example, in the interpretation of “alif,” He gives different elucidations to the letter alif, the standing alif that refers to the Manifestation of God (This letter of alphabet looks like a vertical line – thus “standing alif”).
- He addresses the seeker stating that to recognize God two processes are involved: one through your own manifest being. This cannot be accomplished by posing questions. The second process is to recognize God through your essence of being (*máhíyyat*). This can be done only through lowliness and by accepting one's weakness and God's decree. He further explains that the recognition of God through the first process involves man's eternal station; the second process involves the

station of servitude. From this explanation one may gather that He says that to know God, one has to show meekness and then follow the Manifestation of God who reflects the Primal Will without questioning His words or deeds.

- He states that true recognition of God will not be complete without the recognition of the Manifestation of God; the recognition of the Manifestation of God is not complete without the recognition of His vice-regent; the recognition of His vice-regent is not complete except by recognizing “the peerless Shí’ah”. By “the peerless Shí’ah,” He means the Báb.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 12

*Theme: Interpretation of the Second Third (Second Line of the Prayer)*

- This chapter starts with a prayer referring to the unity of God.
- This chapter interprets mainly the recognition and station of Muḥammad, the Manifestation of God.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 13

*Theme: Interpretation of the Third One-Third (Third line of the Prayer)*

- The main theme of this chapter is the “testimony/proof” which He establishes as the revelation of the divine verses.
- He mentions a letter which He received from someone named Muḥammad Ja’far, which originally He did not intend to answer because this individual was attempting to debate Him and to test His authority and knowledge. He answers that it would not be possible for Him to make such a claim if He did not have the required testimony. The only other person who would make such a claim would be a person who is devoid of intelligence. He says He has revealed voluminous works without resorting to cognition because it came immediately through divine revelation. He says that He has not attended

schools, but that He possesses the key to the door of all knowledge.

- He makes the interesting statement that He is one of the students of Siyyid Kázim. In this epistle and elsewhere, He has mentioned that He has not acquired the knowledge that is current amongst the learned. This statement should not be taken as an affirmation that he acquired knowledge from Siyyid Kázim, but rather it confirms his former teacher's great station by paying him homage. We know that He stayed for seven months only in Karbilá; he did not attend the Siyyid's classes on any regular basis in that city.
- He exhorts the seeker to give His greetings to His followers. He states that He knows no word issuing from the realm of the Unseen, but whatever He needs to know is given to Him by God.
- To anyone who would debate the Báb, He advises that He would not answer any question unless it met certain criteria. The seeker should fall among three classes of people (For the sake of brevity, no further explanation about three classes could be given here). He then provides twelve admonishments from Imám 'Alí who has taken them from Torah. He explains each one in turn.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 14

***Theme: Avoiding Unbelievers and Those who show Enmity to the New Cause***

- He adds a fourth line to the occultation prayer which reads: "O my God! Make known to me the Gate to Thy Testimony! Shouldst Thou not enable me to recognize Thy Gate, I would go astray." The Báb has argued that the greatest testimony is the revelation of divine verses. According to the Shí'ah, the Testimony is the Twelfth Imám.
- Whoever doubts the command "Avoid the enemies of the Cause," will bring misery on himself and become the enemy of God.

- Almost half of the chapter is devoted to quoting the testimonials from four people who have supported the truth of His Cause. These four people are Shaykh Aḥmad-i Aḥsá'í, Siyyid Kázim Rashti, 'Abdu'l-Kháliq, and Muḥammad 'Alí Qazvíní.

## Conclusion

In this paper *Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih* was introduced and its essential characteristics was given. Furthermore, for its better understanding, relevant background information was introduced and analyzed. A brief content of each of its fourteen chapters was presented.

## Acknowledgement

The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Dr. Omid Ghaemmaghami and Mr. Jack McLean in preparation of this paper.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, (n.p., Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), pp. 37-41.

<sup>2</sup> This study is based on a particular manuscript of the *Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih* created from three different hand written unpublished manuscripts which the author of this paper could find; they are as follows:

1. Manuscript in the Iranian National Baha'i Archives (INBA #60) pp. 57-154
2. Manuscript in the Iranian National Baha'i Archives (INBA #98) pp. 48-111
3. Manuscript in the Babi collection of Princeton University Manuscript #228; pp. 1-60

It seems it is adequate for the sake of this study. There are nearly three hundred textual variations and differences in these three manuscripts; these errors which cause the variations in the three manuscripts have arisen from the carelessness of those who transcribed them and were not intentional. This study is a first step towards further studies and research

to be done in the future in order to prepare an authentic manuscript for the epistle.

- <sup>3</sup> Nabil-i A'zam, Mullá Muḥammad Zarandí, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, translated and edited by Shoghi Effendi. (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1932), p. 669.
- <sup>4</sup> A.L.M. Nicolas, *Síyyid 'Alí Muḥammad dit le Bááb*. (Paris: Librairie Critique, 1908), pp. 17-25.
- <sup>5</sup> These individuals were known as 'Gates' (Abwáb). The first was ('Uthmán-ibn-Sa'id Umarí (260-265 A.H.); the second Muhammad-ibn-i-'Uthmán, son of the above (265-305 A.H.); the third was Ḥusayn -ibn-i-Rúḥ Nábakhtí (305-326 A.H.); the fourth was 'Alí-ibn-i- Muḥammad Simarí (326-329 A.H.). Of these 'gates', the first was appointed by the Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí. The others were appointed by the then acting 'gate' with the sanction and approval of the Hidden Imám. This period extended over 69 years during which the Imám was still accessible by means of the 'gates.' This period is known as the 'Lesser' or 'Minor Occultation' (*Ghaybat-i-Sughra*). This was succeeded by the 'Greater' or 'Major Occultation' (*Ghaybat-i-Kubra*).
- <sup>6</sup> Abbas Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), pp. 62-69.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid* pp. 199-210
- <sup>8</sup> *Jabulqa* and *Jabulsa* are two mythological cities mentioned in the *Shí'ah* ḥadīth. These cities were inhabited by archetypal believers who are waiting for the appearance of the promised Qá'im for the *Shí'ah*. According to some ḥadīth the Qá'im will inhabit these cities. Each city has 12,000 gates, each of which is guarded by 12,000 men until the Day of Resurrection when the Qa'im will appear.
- <sup>9</sup> All the quotes from Qur'an in this paper are according to its translation by J.M. Rev. Rodwell.
- <sup>10</sup> *La'álí Hikmat*, vol. II. (Bahá'í Publishing of Brazil, 1990), p. 60.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ayát-i Iláhí*, vol. II, *A Compilation of Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. (Langenheim: Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Germany, 1990), p. 68.
- <sup>12</sup> Assadulláh-Fadil Mázandarání, *Amr Va Khalq*, vol. II, *Mu'assisih Matbuát Amri*. (Langenheim and Tehran, Reprint by Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Germany, 141 B.E.), p. 221.
- <sup>13</sup> Todd Lawson and Omid Ghaemmaghami, eds; *A Most Noble Pattern: Collected Essays on the Writings of the Bááb*. (Oxford: Bahá'í Studies Series, George Ronald, 2012), paper by Nader Saiedi, p 212.

# A Commentary on the Occultation Prayer, or *Risáliy-i-Ja‘faríyyih*

The Báb

Provisional translation by Foad Seddigh

## Chapter One: The Discourse of Illumination

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful! Praise be unto God Who hath testified to His Essence with His Essence that there is no God except Him Who hath been exalted through His Supreme Self over all things, Who is hidden by His transcendent revelation from all things, Who hath been without remembrance of anything from time immemorial, and Who is now the same as He hath been in the past, that there hath not been with Him the remembrance of anything. He Who is Worshipped, as the Incomparable, the Self-Subsisting, He Who made knowledge an attribute for His servants and power and might a station for His chosen Ones. He is the First without the recognition of anything and the Last without the remembrance of anything. He is manifest without the creation of anything and the innermost reality of things without the injunction of anything. Should I say that verily He is Who He is, the Excogitation and that which pertaineth to it would discredit Me; because He is not recognized by anyone except Himself and cannot be described by His creation. Should I say that Thou art Who Thou art, the Contrivance, and that which is facing it is disputing Me; because, He is not described through acclamation, nor may be*

pointed to because of not being seen. He is sanctified! Verily His Essence leads to His Essence, His pre-existence is established by His momentary existence. He hath been barred from His creation and His Being hath been concealed in veils before His servants. Should any man say: "He is Who He is", the letter "há" leadeth to the creation and the letter "váv" to the decree; this is the proof for His being substantially cut off from others and greatly being debarred. Should he say: "He is Who He is" and I know not His Station, he hath joined partner with his Lord after knowing that he is severed from Him. Which unbelief is greater than the Word "He is"? Which trespass may outweigh that of the non-existent approaching the Absolute Existence? He is sanctified far beyond how I may describe Him without thanking Him, and beyond knowing Him without praising Him; though after denial, My words prove to be the condition of description. I swear by His Might! It is not the case; there is no path drawn between Him and anything else. I mean by denial nothing else but denial, and in remembering Him nothing else except helplessness. Sanctified is He! How great is My boldness before His Beauty and how great is My transgression in face of His majesty. In My contemplation, definitely, I hold Him sanctified from the description of all else except Him. This is My description of His majesty. With the knowledge of being debarred from Him, I hold Him Holy beyond the commendation of all else except Him and this is my praise for His Beauty. He is sanctified from this path. Should I say: "well is it with Me", I have joined partner with Him and should I say: "woe betide Me", I have become unfaithful. I know not how to express My hopelessness and which words to use to admit My transgression. Sanctified is God, the Incomparable, the Single! Should I immerse Myself in the ocean of His praise, notwithstanding being accounted amongst the infidels in His sight, it would fill My heart with such love that I would be silent and drowned in the ocean of remoteness. No by His exalted Being! Should My heart be consumed in My extreme disloyalty, by His Might! Certainly, it would not take away My pleasure for praising His greatness. However, I would be content with the burning of My heart as a result of my boldness. No by His greatness! Verily, I know that there is no path for Me to tread towards Him, not by helplessness, not by praise, not by prohibition, not by glory, not by severance, not by extreme light, not by the letter "há" and not by fleeing away from letter "váv". Sanctified is God!

*That which He hath created in Me is wonderful and that which He hath inspired within Me is exalted. Once He enraptureth Me towards the horizon of the Hidden Realm and another time He annihilateth Me with the fire of non-consciousness. I know not that which Thou seekest from Me; is it My blood that Thou wishest to be spilled or is it Me Who desireth to draw Himself nigh unto Thee, then Thou drivest Me away and then by running away from Thy Might Thou punishest Me? I know not on which path Thou standest so that I can call Thee, and I know not which words to use to ask Thy favor and complain to Thee. No by Thy Might! I flee not from nearness to Thee, shouldst Thou drive Me away. No by Thy Being! I fear not Thy overpowering Might even if Thou wouldst burn Me up. No by Thy power! I have no request from anyone else except Thee even shouldst Thou make me needy towards it. Sanctified is God in His command. Whatever I experience, I will endure it within Me and there is nothing more exalted in My heart than His sovereignty. Should I flee away like a child of tender age, likewise, He would place sugar in My mouth to calm My tears, then He would place the breast of His mercy in my mouth to make me go to sleep. No by Thy might! I am not unaware of that which Thou wouldst do, and I do not busy Myself with such conditions away from Thee. I know not which object Thou dost want for Me; would it be that Thou wantest to take away My life or would it be to make My inner being happy?*

*I was residing in My house alone and no one had any knowledge of Me. Thou induced some people to leave their abode and Thou hast brought them to arrive at My place; then Thou revealed unto Me the decree of Thy call and bestowed upon Me Thy Proof. No sooner had Thy knowledge reached Me than Thou didst take Thy Covenant from the hearts of all those who had become aware of Thy command and made them submit to Thee to such an extent that none of them who had travelled denied My claim. Thou didst then take them back to their places of residence and Thou dispensed to Me after that the honor of travelling towards Thy Respectful House and Thou extended Thy command to the hands of Thy kings on earth in every direction until My Cause reached the east and the west and in between them. As soon as the faith of Thy servants grew stronger and everyone knew the decree of the heart, Thou made Me return from Thy Respectful House; consonant with this condition, Thou desired that mischief arise in the cities and by the inhabitants of such cities*

*until the opposition of them who turned against the Cause descended upon Me and the chosen ones. Then, Thou brought Me in the utmost humiliation in the presence of tyrants, then Thou inspired Me with the word of negation after affirmation in order to make Me secure from life-threatening positions. Are these not all of Thy making, O Thou the Possessor of Majesty and Favor? Verily, O my God! Thou transported Me to the supernal realm from the beginning of the Cause and Thou placed Me in different situations; then Thou placed the word of denial in the hearts of Satanic people until the enemies grabbed whatever they had written. Verily, I did not intend in what I wrote except the specific station of appointed gate-hood yet gate-hood is in reality an absolute word that falleth into limitation by such specification. By Thy Might! They did not scheme against My decree but I was swift in scheming in their affairs. If I had affirmed them like the earlier believers, they would not have treated Me with enmity. However, any affliction I suffer, I see it but as coming from Thee; because Thou hast power over its transmutation or turning it around in the best possible way. The reason that I have endured humiliation is because Thou hast been patient with Me despite having knowledge and being in the position of power. However, Thou knowest O My God that I do not like to act contrary to Thy Will and am aware of Thy patience with respect to those who art nigh unto Thee but I have no power over Thy ways for dealing with them and verily, I am not ashamed before Thee as Thou art potent to decree for Me to pursue an action and then change it without being in a position of contradiction. In such case, I will bring My action to an end even if My words might be similar to those of wrongdoers. And knowing My inner being which is intoxicated by Thy bestowals and by the wine of being thankful to Thee, I call Thee with these verses which do not trespass the limit of praise; however, they are not beyond the decree of a change of plan. Sanctified art Thou! I praise Thee in misery and distress; a praise which is shedding light, is bright, and is sanctified with the sanctity of Thy realm of eternity and Thy divine unity. I seek assistance from Thee with what Thou purposed in this book with Thy strength and power. Thou art the Generous, the All-Praised.*

*I bear witness to Thee with that which Thou lovest and art made happy before manifesting what is in the world of existence. Thou art the All-Informed, the Witness and Thou art sufficient unto Me as a*

witness. I bear witness that there is no other God except Him alone, there is no partner with Him, and verily Muhammad, the salutation of God be upon Him and His kindred, is Thy servant; no one is like Him and He is Thy Messenger Who is exalted above being similar to anyone. He conveyed to the people that which Thou manifested within Him from Thy knowledge, and provided admonishment to the people from that which Thou inspired Him in the path of Thy love. O My God! Reward Him and His kindred as They deserve. I bear witness to the Regents of Muhammad, Thy Beloved, as Thou hast purposed for them and provided help for them in every condition through Thy bounty from Thy Own self and Thou art numbering them as letters of Thy divine unity. Verily, Thou art the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. I bear witness for their followers that which Thy knowledge surrounded them in the arc of descent and Thy mystery in the arc of ascent, for every truth with rightfulness and for every untruth with denial, and Thou art sufficient unto Me and art witness and aware unto Me. O thou who examinest this book! Beware, beware! lest thou look upon any other thing except thy essence of being when the birds invoked with melodious tunes, the peoples with the visible objects, the minds with the world of existence, and the hearts with the clear testimonies; certainly it is your duty to examine the promptings of your inner heart and its command. We are from God and towards Our Lord We shall turn and those who act should conduct themselves like this.

# An Analysis of the Salient Features of *Risáliy-i-Ja‘faríyyih*

Foad Seddigh

## Abstract

The *Risáliy-i-Ja‘faríyyih* (see a partial provisional translation following this paper) is one of the major writings of the Báb, about a quarter in length of Commentary on the Surih of Joseph (Qayyúmu’l-Asmá). Although not exclusively, it concerns the commentary on a particular Islamic prayer for the advent of the promised Qá’im, (Ḥujjat), written entirely in Arabic. It has fourteen chapters and was revealed on or about 10 January, 1846 CE. We can be sure that this tablet was revealed towards the end of the Shíráz period of His Ministry. Despite the fact that the Báb was not incarcerated at the time of revealing this epistle, none-the-less, He was prohibited from meeting with His followers. In this tablet, He expressed the hope that the restrictions on Him will be lifted and that He will be able to teach His followers in person. The Islamic prayer for which this commentary is written is only three short phrases long. His commentary appears specifically in chapters 11, 12 and 13 of the epistle, and it quotes certain words or phrases and expounds their real meaning. It should be noted that the Báb had not formally disclosed His complete station of prophethood to the general public at the time of the revelation of this epistle. Therefore, in other chapters of the commentary, He alludes to His full station discreetly, and only those who had the necessary spiritual perception could grasp His subtle allusions.

Some of the significant themes in this work are as follows: He refers to various episodes in His ministry, including the successive tribulations that have befallen Him in Shíráz, and He comments on the meaning of the letter “Há”. On a number of occasions, He asserts that He has not attended any schools and whatever He has revealed is from God. He laments that the Shaykhís who attained His presence failed to recognize Him; He forbids any questions about the Essence of God, criticizes those philosophers who have contended that the Divine Essence is the First Cause. He further expounds that the cause of creation is the Primal Will. He asserts that His call is the same call that arose from the Burning Bush on Mount Sinai. He elucidates the meaning of the “light” in the famous verse of the Qur’án. He relates and interprets a dream He experienced on the night of 12 Muḥarram. He lauds the station of the Remnant of God (Baḡyyat’ulláh) and stresses that He has thus far disclosed only some of the truths which He possesses. He declares further that even if all the rulers of the earth were to arise against Him, they would be powerless to resist His Cause or frustrate His purpose. He declares that He yearns to lay down His life in the same manner that Imám Ḥusayn did in the path of God. He interprets in the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth chapters, the three parts of the aforementioned prayer, explicating the conditions of true prayer. In this paper some of the above points have been explicated further. A provisional translation of Chapter One follows the article.

## **Introductory Remarks**

### **Contents of the Epistle**

This epistle, a commentary on an Islamic prayer concerning the advent of the Promised Qá’im (He who arises), answers the questions of a seeker. It should be noted that several writings of the Báb particularly in the early period of His ministry are revealed in the form of Qur’án commentaries. Many Muslim scholars have written commentaries on the entire Qur’án or even isolated words and phrases of the Prophet or the Imáms, as they explicate the various meaning of those same phrases. It should be noted that the commentaries of the Báb are different in nature from the past. In His writings, we are not dealing with the interpretive paraphrase of

successive generations of believers, but with the corpus of His own written works, revealed in an entirely new light. Ascertaining the authenticity of the Sacred Text is no longer an insoluble issue as it was in previous Dispensations, when it was virtually impossible to know which parts of the Scripture accurately represented the Prophet's words and which passages took the form of paraphrase, interpretation, or even error due to the vagaries or the oral tradition.<sup>1</sup> The general features of this epistle are given below:

## Its Name

*Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih*. Apart from this name, it is known as “Sharḥ-i-Du'á'-i-Gḥaybat” or “Commentary on the Occultation Prayer”, “Saḥífih-i Ja'fariyyih”, and “Tafsír-i-Há”, i.e. Interpretation of the Letter “Há”. The tablet derives its name from Imám Ja'far, the truthful. In the first few years of His Ministry, the Báb named His writings after the fourteen Immaculates, i.e. the Prophet Muḥammad; Fáṭimih, the Prophet's daughter; 'Alí, the Prophet's son-in-law, cousin, and the first Imám; Ḥasan son of 'Alí, the second Imám; Ḥusayn son of 'Alí, the third Imám; this is followed by Imám Ḥusayn's son and after him by his descendants who form the rest of the Immaculates. This epistle is named after the sixth Imám whose name is Ja'far.

- **Length:** About one hundred pages
- **Language:** Arabic
- **Time and Place of Revelation:** In the month of Muḥarram, 1262 AH or January, 1846, in Shíráz.
- **Name of the Addressee:** Unknown
- **Chapters:** Fourteen
- **Manuscript:** The author of this paper has not come across an authentic text of the epistle in the original language either in hand-written or in printed form<sup>2</sup>
- **Significance:** It clarifies the meaning of “occultation”. The compelling tone of the epistle will allow us to appreciate its spiritual value.

## Significance of the Risáliy-i-Ja‘faríyyih

The following list is a compilation of several indicators pointing to the importance of the epistle:

1. First and foremost, Bahá’u’lláh has quoted in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Book of Certitude) from this epistle (KI 231).
2. The Guardian has listed in the *Dawn-Breakers* under the title of “the Most Important Writings of the Báb,” 23 items from among the best-known works of the Báb. In that list, Risáliy-i-Ja‘faríyyih is item number ten.<sup>3</sup>
3. The length of the epistle and the significant nature of the material presented makes it worthy of our attention.
4. Selections from this epistle are among the few writings of the Báb that A.L.M. Nicolas has translated, discussed and published in the introduction to his French translation of the Persian Bayán.<sup>4</sup>
5. The early claims of the Báb which form the basis for His later claims are expounded in this epistle.
6. He calls Himself “Ḥujjat” meaning the “Testimony” or “Proof” in this epistle. If we pay close attention, we discover that His future claims to be the Qá’im and an independent Manifestation of God are subtly set out in this epistle.

## Background Information

Background information which is briefly stated below allows us to gain a better understanding of the contents of this epistle.

### The Qá’im and Mihdí in Islám

The Qá’im and Mihdí are central to the religion of Islam and its belief-system. Muslims believe that Muḥammad is the last prophet. However, they believe in the return of a few holy figures. Sunnis believe in the advent of the Mihdí; the Shí‘ahs believe in the appearance of Qá’im. Many signs and portents are associated with the appearance of these promised figures. Among them are: to restore true religion; to herald the end of one age and the beginning of

another; to witness the coming of a living guide to bring humanity back to the straight path; to hear two trumpet blasts; to witness the days of judgement and resurrection.

## Imams in Shí'ah Islam

Shí'ah means "the follower". The appointment of the successor to the Prophet Muḥammad is very much in dispute. Since the Prophet Muḥammad did not have a surviving son, the Shí'ah accepted 'Alí as the first Imám and the grand-children of the Prophet Muḥammad, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, as the second and third Imáms, respectively. The rest of the Imáms are: the son of Ḥusayn and successively down the line from the descendants of Imám Ḥusayn up to the eleventh Imám, Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí. Uncertainties surround the appearance of the twelfth Imám, i.e. the son of Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí. From a historical perspective, we are confronted with several hard facts which are difficult to reject. First, Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí died at the young age of 28 years. Second, he had no wife, only a maid-servant. Third, when he died in the year 260 A.H, he had no grown son to appoint as his successor Imám. Fourth, he did not appoint a successor. Fifth, most chronicles state that when he died, he had no apparent heir. His possessions were consequently divided between his brother and his mother. Sixth, his relatively few followers, at least compared to other sects of Islám, were divided into fourteen different factions as a result of the prevailing circumstances. One faction believed in the existence and disappearance of the child-Imám, a point that will be discussed further below.

## Imáms as Qá'im

Many Shí'ahs believed that each of the aforementioned Imáms was the Promised Qá'im who was supposed to usher in a glorious era for Islám. Based on this belief, these followers asked the Imáms if they were the promised Qá'im. The answer of the Imáms was naturally negative. They explained the several reasons why they could not qualify to be the promised Qá'im. These reasons are reported in the collections of Ḥadíth of the Shí'ahs. The prayer which is the subject of the commentary by the Báb is given by the sixth Imám (Imám Ja'far, the truthful). This prayer in essence asks God to facilitate in

granting to the faithful the knowledge of the promised Qá'im. We will discuss this prayer further below.

## Twelfth Imám

Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí, the eleventh Imám, was imprisoned or was placed under house arrest by the Abbasid Caliph; it is reported that he died in 260 A.H. in the prison, a fact which is universally upheld and undisputed. The point of contact between Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí and the body of the believers was his deputy ('Uthmán-ibn-Sa'id). When Imám Ḥasan died at the age of 28, there was overwhelming uncertainty among his followers because he had no apparent wife (he had a handmaid), and no son old enough to be appointed as his successor. To be more precise, there has been no solid evidence to believe that he had a son who was alive at the time of his death. There are some ḥadiths (verbal utterance of the Prophets and the Imáms recorded years later) which state that his maid bore him a son in the year 255 A.H., but there is no evidence that he was alive in the year 260 A.H.; on the contrary, the mounting evidence points to the opposite. This is why after the death of Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí his followers were divided into nearly fourteen branches, one of which accepted the child-Imám to be the successor to Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí as the twelfth Imám. The brother of Imám Ḥasan, whose name was Ja'far, challenged the system with which he was intimately associated and claimed that his brother did not have any child at all and claimed that Imám's possessions should be divided between him and the mother of the deceased Imám; he further claimed that he was the lawful successor to the Imám. Some people accepted his claim and followed him, forming one of the fourteen branches of the Shi'ah after the death of Imám Ḥasan. Later on, he was denounced and called Ja'far the liar, in spite of the fact that he was the most truthful person in the world.

## The Minor and Major Occultations

After the death of Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí, it is said that the child-Imám who was hidden in an underground passage, and who was not more than five years old, appointed the deputy of Imám Ḥasan ('Uthmán-ibn-i Sa'id) as his own deputy, through whom the believers

should communicate with him. Ná'ib means deputy. Another name for the deputy was the "Báb" (Gate) to the Imám. If we approach this matter logically, in reality, there was no legitimate, living Imám to communicate with the body of believers. It is more likely that all communications were composed and issued by the deputy himself in the name of an imaginary Imám, who did not physically exist. Uthmán-ibn-Sa'íd, just before his death, issued a letter relayed from the hidden Imám stating that he was appointing Muḥammad-ibn-i 'Uthmán (the deputy's son) as the Imám's deputy, in a similar manner by which the third and fourth deputies were appointed.<sup>5</sup> Thus a span of sixty nine years lapsed. During this period no one except the deputies could communicate with the hidden Imám. This sixty-nine-year period from 260-329 A.H. is called the Minor Occultation. Near the time of the death of the fourth deputy, a letter purportedly written by the hidden Imám (twelfth Imám) was issued stating that no further deputies would be appointed; from then on the Imám would disappear completely from sight; no one could have any contact with him. From this point on the "Major Occultation" started and no specific date for the end of the situation was anticipated.

### **Shí'ah Íthná 'Asharí**

Those who believed in the minor and major occultations of the hidden Imám were called Shí'ah Íthná 'Asharíyyih (one of the most obscure groups from amongst the fourteen branches formed immediately after the death of Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí (the eleventh Imám) referred to earlier. The Imám's absence left a gap which was gradually filled by the traditional authority of the 'ulamá, (the learned), the scholars of religious law, who increasingly extended and consolidated their influence over the masses of believers. To legitimize their authority, these clerics presented themselves as the general representatives of the Hidden Imám on earth. The main beneficiaries of this arrangement, who became later the core of Shí'ah Íthná 'Asharíyyih (Shí'ah twelvers), were the learned who became the de facto leaders or heirs to the Imám, both for spiritual guidance and also to receive their share of wealth which was due to the Imám. These monetary benefits were so lucrative that they dazzled the eyes of the insincere in heart. The clerics promoted this questionable arrangement, an arrangement that, strangely enough, was accepted by

some. The learned promoted the idea of “the coming of the 12th Imám” who was also the promised Qá’im at an undisclosed time in the future.

It should be noted that before the Safavid reign, the Shí’ah Íthná ‘Asharí was a minority branch in Iran. For political reasons, the Safavid kings found it prudent and convenient to promote the Shí’ah Íthná ‘Asharí sect as the state religion due to rivalry with the Ottoman empire rule.<sup>6</sup> Qajar kings, because of the inherent weakness of their unjust rule, followed the same pattern. They needed the support of the learned to rule the masses.<sup>7</sup> As the years passed, the questionable idea of occultation became not only part of the belief-system of every believer in Shí’ah Íthná ‘Asharí, but rather the unquestionable corner-stone of their belief. All Shí’ah came to expect the appearance of the hidden Imám who was purportedly living at the time of the end in a city called Jabulqa.<sup>8</sup> This belief became so entrenched in the thoughts and minds of the people that the slightest deviation from it was considered blasphemous, punishable by either imprisonment or death.

## The Shaykhí School and the doctrine of Fourth Pillar

The period of occultation persisted for ten centuries. With the approach of the Islamic millennium (1260 A.H.), a messianic fervor was felt in every corner of Iran. The Shaykhí School which was established by Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsá’í started examining the fundamentals of Islam. There are five fundamentals of Shí’ah belief:

1. The unity of God (“*towhid*”)
2. Acceptance of Muḥammad as the Prophet of God
3. The return to God and the resurrection (*Ma’ád*)
4. The justice of God
5. Belief in the Imáms as successors of Muḥammad

The Shaykhí School scrapped the two principles of the justice of God and the resurrection (*Ma’ád*), arguing that the first two tenets include these points. However, they added one more principle to the remaining three, an addition that reduced the principles of the religion to four only:

1. The unity of God
2. Belief in the Prophet
3. Belief in the Imáms
4. The “Fourth Pillar”

This fourth pillar referred to the “Perfect Shí'ah” who was communicating with the Hidden Imám. Both Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsá'í and Siyyid Kázim were considered to be the “fourth pillar” of the faith or the “Báb” to the Hidden Imám, although they never claimed such a station. Furthermore, they did not teach that the Hidden Imám was alive in a physical form. They coined the terminology of “huriqalya” which was a pseudo-physical-form; somewhere between physical and spiritual; sometimes it is called the Imaginal Realm. They said that the Imám existed the form of “huriqalya.”

## **The Báb – the Nature of His Claim**

In the year 1260 A.H. the Báb appeared among the Shí'ah, who had solidified this core, unshakable belief, unsupported by any divine revelation, and lacking any rational or spiritual proof. The Twelvers firmly believed that the promised Qá'im was living in an invisible city. Some of the learned had even composed treatises describing their descriptions of this city with its bizarre, if not surreal, scenarios. The Báb's claim to prophethood had to break and expose this great wall of vain-imaginings that had solidified the Shí'ah belief over the years. His approach was no different from the prophets gone before Him. All past prophets revealed the essentials of their religion gradually. The Prophet Muḥammad in the Qur'án revealed: “They will not believe on him though the example of those of old hath gone before” (Hedjar 15:13).<sup>9</sup> Also: “Such is God's method carried into effect of old; no change canst thou find in God's mode of dealing” (Fath-The Victory 48: 23). Following this method of conveying His message to a people steeped in vain-imaginings, the Báb at the inception of His revelation, conveyed two parallel messages: One for those sincere believers who were not shackled with superstitious notions and who followed the inspired promptings of their heart. For these believers, the former message was stated subtly from the beginning. The other message was intended for those

fundamentalists who relied on the distorted expectations derived from past traditions. For example, the Báb in His “first and mightiest” book, the Qayyúmu’l-Asmá (Commentary on the Surih of Joseph) says for the benefit of the first group:

*O YE kinsmen of the Most Great Remembrance! This Tree of Holiness, dyed crimson with the oil of servitude, hath verily sprung forth out of your own soil in the midst of the Burning Bush, yet ye comprehend nothing whatever thereof, neither of His true, heavenly attributes, nor of the actual circumstances of His earthly life, nor of the evidences of His powerful and unblemished behaviour. Actuated by your own fancies, you consider Him to be alien to the sovereign Truth, while in the estimation of God He is none other than the Promised One Himself, invested with the power of the sovereign Truth, and verily He is, as decreed in the Mother Book, held answerable in the midst of the Burning Bush...*  
[SWB 52]

To the second group, He calls Himself “the Gate”:

*GLORIFIED is He besides Whom there is none other God. In His grasp He holdeth the source of authority, and verily God is powerful over all things. We have decreed that every long life shall in truth suffer decline and that every hardship shall be followed by ease, that perchance men may recognize the Gate of God as He Who is the eternal Truth, and verily God shall stand as witness unto those that have believed.* [SWB 47]

And

*Verily I am the ‘Gate of God’ and I give you to drink, by the leave of God, the sovereign Truth, of the crystal-pure waters of His Revelation which are gushing out from the incorruptible Fountain situate upon the Holy Mount. And those who earnestly strive after the One True God, let them then strive to attain this Gate.* [SWB 50]

The first quote is directed towards the sincere in heart and the second and the third quotes are directed towards the fundamentalists.

It is obvious from the second and third quotes that He calls himself the “Báb” or the “gate.” Outwardly whenever He spoke about His station, He intended the “gate”. Most Shí'ah assumed that He meant by the “gate” the gate to the Hidden Imám, whereas what He intended in reality was the gate to a “Personage” who was yet unknown, as has been described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in *A Traveller's Narrative* [TN 4]. In the entire *Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih*, in several passages He has disavowed having knowledge of the realm of the Unseen, but in reality, whatever He has written has been revealed by God. This is similar to following statement in Qayyúmu’l-Asmá:

*VERILY We made the revelation of verses to be a testimony for Our message unto you. Can ye produce a single letter to match these verses? Bring forth, then, your proofs, if ye be of those who can discern the one true God. I solemnly affirm before God, should all men and spirits combine to compose the like of one chapter of this Book, they would surely fail, even though they were to assist one another ....* [SWB 43]

## Opposition of the ‘Ulamá (The Learned)

The ‘Ulamá enjoyed unchallenged leadership for one thousand years. They fulfilled collectively the role of the deputy of Imám without directly claiming it. Now in light of the Báb’s claim that He was the lawful representative of the Hidden Imám, the learned had to surrender the position that they had arrogated to themselves. In so doing, for the first time in their history, the Báb questioned their legitimacy and placed their leadership under threat. This is the main reason why the learned were among the first to oppose the Báb. Bahá’u’lláh in *the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* says:

*Reflect, O Shaykh, upon the Shí'ih sect. How many the edifices which they reared with the hands of idle fancies and vain imaginings, and how numerous the cities which they built! At length those vain imaginings were converted into bullets and aimed at Him Who is the Prince of the world.*  
[ESW 119]

Also:

*O Hádí! The blind fanaticism of former times hath withheld the hapless creatures from the Straight Path. Meditate on the Shi'ih sect. For twelve hundred years they have cried "O Qá'im!", until in the end all pronounced the sentence of His death, and caused Him to suffer martyrdom. [ESW 163]*

In one of His tablets Bahá'u'lláh has revealed:

*Since the people are perceived as being weak and veiled by idle fancies, therefore the Sun of Reality hath appeared as an atom and the everlasting ocean hath appeared as a drop. Thus hath the Primal Point appeared assuming the name of "gatehood." Even so, the people were discontent with this lower station, how much more were they discontent by the claim of velayyat (Vice-regency, Guardianship), whereas all these stations were created by Him.<sup>10</sup> (Provisional Translation by Foad Seddigh)*

Bahá'u'lláh in one of His Tablets says:

*It is known to thee that the commentary on the Surih of Joseph hath been revealed according to the prevailing understanding of the people of that time. This hath been for reason of pure bounty, that haply the wayward and the ignorant would become transported to the realm of knowledge, because much of that which hath been stated therein is the truth of the matter for the people of the Qur'án. Had it been revealed according to that which God hath desired, no one would have accepted and remained faithful.<sup>11</sup> (Provisional Translation by Foad Seddigh)*

'Abdu'l-Bahá in one of His Tablets says:

*Thou asked about the twelfth Imam. This supposition hath never existed in the material world; it was only a notion confined to the unseen world, lacking corporal existence. Some Shi'ah leaders devised a scheme for the protection of the weak amongst their followers to give Him a physical identity ...<sup>12</sup> (Provisional Translation by Foad Seddigh)*

The Báb in His book *The Seven Proofs* says:

*Consider the manifold favours vouchsafed by the Promised One, and the effusions of His bounty which have pervaded the concourse of the followers of Islam to enable them to attain unto salvation. Indeed observe how He Who representeth the origin of creation, He Who is the Exponent of the verse, 'I, in very truth, am God', identified Himself as the Gate [Bab] for the advent of the promised Qá'im, a descendant of Muḥammad, and in His first Book enjoined the observance of the laws of the Qur'án, so that the people might not be seized with perturbation by reason of a new Book and a new Revelation and might regard His Faith as similar to their own, perchance they would not turn away from the Truth and ignore the thing for which they had been called into being... [SWB 119]*

'Abdu'l-Bahá in *A Traveller's Narrative* has written:

*He began to speak and to declare the rank of Bábhood. Now what He intended by the term Báb [Gate] was this, that He was the channel of grace from some great Person still behind the veil of glory, Who was the possessor of countless and boundless perfections, by Whose will He moved, and to the bond of Whose love He clung. And in the first book which He wrote in explanation of the súrih of Joseph, He addressed Himself in all passages to that Person unseen from Whom He received help and grace, sought for aid in the arrangement of His preliminaries, and craved the sacrifice of life in the way of His love. [TN 4]*

As one may gather from the above quotes, the main reasons that the Báb started His ministry with a lesser claim was due to the lack of spiritual capacity and understanding among the people. He needed, consequently, time to prepare them for the acceptance of His ultimate station and revelation. From the observation of such a lesser claim, a claim that was rejected by the learned, and through their instigation by the majority of the people, we can safely extrapolate the dangerous outcome if He had disclosed His complete message and station at the beginning. It is for the same reason that we notice in

the Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih, which was revealed in the early period of the Báb's ministry, these two types of statements, intended for the sincere, on the one hand, and the superstitious on the other hand.

## The Occultation Prayer

An inquirer asked the Báb to clarify the meaning of the prayer from the 6th Imám regarding the Testimony of God, which is also known as the prayer of occultation. In response to his request, the Báb revealed the "Commentary on the Prayer of Occultation." The Prayer is very short and has three lines only:

*O my God! Make known to me Thyself! Shouldst Thou enable me not to recognize Thyself, I would not be able to recognize Thy Prophet.*

*O my God! Make known to me Thine Apostle! Shouldst Thou enable me not to recognize Thine Apostle, I would not be able to recognize Thy Proof.*

*O my God! Make known to me thy Proof! Shouldst Thou enable me not to recognize Thy Proof, I would stray from my religion.*

It should be noted that "testimony" or "proof" is generally a reference to the revelation; but "Testimony" or "Proof" refers to the Manifestation of God, or the promised Qá'im.

## The Báb's approach in Answering the Question of "Occultation"

The question of "occultation", the story of whether the Hidden Imám was alive or dead, was a complex question, that required clarification because of its perplexing nature. However, the Báb does not make any attempt to explain it in historical terms; rather, as we will see later in the Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih, He explains that the "occultation" occurs when man departs from his everlasting condition at the time of his creation by God. He says that God created mankind in His own image. The Báb identifies occultation with the existential station of forgetting the divine revelation within

the human soul, which requires prayer in order to regain true self-consciousness and to return to his original spiritual condition and thereby gain purity of heart, thereby discovering the truth.

## Major themes in the *Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih*

Without pretence to being exhaustive, the following is a list of the major themes presented in the epistle:

1. The meaning of the recognition of God
2. True belief in the unity of God (*towhid*)
3. Explanation of the Primal Will
4. The interpretation of “iláh”
5. The claims of the Báb
6. The testimony and proof of His mission
7. The inward meaning of the martyrdom of Imám Ḥusayn
8. That all things are in the hands of God: His decree, revelation and the source of His knowledge
9. Why He changed his mind and did not go to Karbilá (*badá*)
10. Opposition of some of the believers
11. The interdiction for man of asking God about creation
12. The true nature of man
13. The meaning of occultation
14. The interpretation of the letter “Há”
15. The testimony of some of the learned about Him

## A Brief Summary of Each Chapter

Since the *Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih* is a commentary on the occultation prayer, we might expect the Báb to devote the entire fourteen chapters to the commentary. But even with a cursory glance at the tablet, we observe that the commentary appears only in chapters 11, 12 and 13. Each of these chapters is devoted to the commentary of one third or one line of the original prayer and a fourth line is added

by the Báb Himself to this prayer in chapter 14. However, the material presented in other chapters is necessary for the understanding of these four chapters. In other words, these four chapters without the other ten chapters would be incomplete. We will present in the following section the important themes treated in each chapter. The Báb Himself has specified the beginning and end of each chapter and also has given a title for each chapter.

## **A Brief Summary of Chapter 1**

### ***Title: The Discourse of Illumination and the Glorification of God***

- He states that even Himself cannot adequately praise God.
- He reveals several prayers and meditations.
- He states that everything is/was an act of God, whether seekers travelling to find Him, their acceptance of His claim, the humiliation He endured, opposition to Him, etc.
- He alludes to a verse of the Qur'án: "They plotted but God plotted: and of plotters is God the best." (Anfals, The Spoils 8:30)
- He admonishes the inquirer by stating: "Beware, beware! lest thou look upon any other thing except thy essence of being .... Certainly, it is your duty to examine the promptings of your inner heart and its command." (Provisional Translation by Foad Seddigh)
- He reminds the inquirer that the condition of occultation is the station of falling into the abyss of particularistic essence and forgetting one's real existence which is the true reality or spiritual reality of human beings.

## **A Brief Summary of Chapter 2**

### ***Title: Divine Admonition***

- This chapter is an admonition to the inquirer who the Báb encourages to heed His words and to rely upon God such that

he becomes liberated from doubts and temptation. The Báb argues that the matter is confined to two alternatives: either it is true or false. If he follows the Báb, he follows God; should he reject His claims, he follows Satan. The inquirer is reminded when the truth is disclosed to a fair-minded person, he should not reject it, but when falsehood is mixed with truth, no one would accept it.

- The Cause of God is like a light that illumines everything. Now He possesses the Word of God and it sheds light like the sun.
- He is the possessor of God's testimony and revelation; it is incumbent on everyone to accept Him without further questioning.
- The Báb says that He possesses the Testimony of God which is the Truth. Should the seeker reject it, then he has no sure handle/firm cord to grasp the truth. Consequently, if any other "truth" is presented to him, he has no alternative but to reject it.
- He refers to some Shaykhís who accepted Him and then changed their mind. Now they worship Satan.
- He speaks kindly about Siyyid Ja'far Kashfí (the father of Siyyid Yaḥyá Dárábí, Vahíd). For Siyyid Ja'far and for Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsá'í, He beseeches God's mercy.
- He admonishes the seeker that he should have the right attitude. He says: "Behold the One Who calleth thee unto God. Should He possess an incontrovertible testimony from His Lord in such manner that none is able to produce the like thereof, His cause would then be proven to be true and there would be no doubt about it. Obey then His words and ask not why or wherefore . . . Shouldst thou acknowledge His testimony thou wouldst have no place to flee to, save to obey Him, even if He calleth night day, poison sugar, false true, and knowledge ignorance"<sup>13</sup>

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 3

### *Title: An Introduction to the Transcendent Glory of God*

- He forbids questions about creation because all doors to the realm of Divinity are closed. Whoever asks such questions has committed an unforgivable sin.
- Since all roads are barred to the direct recognition of God, the seeker should strive to ascertain His good-pleasure.
- He refers to Himself as “the Point” (Nuḡṡih). To the seeker He says if you know the references to the Point and follow it, you will attain unto all knowledge. (Actually He refers to the Primal Will). He refers to the philosophers who called God the First Cause/Uncaused Cause. He says it was the Primal Will that created the world of existence; the Primal Will created itself. He refers to this realm as that of the Manifestations of God. He refers in a subtle way to His ultimate station.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 4

### *Title: Mentioning the prayer of Occultation.*

- He identifies the reference for the occultation prayer and attributes it to Imám Ja‘far Šádiq.
- He affirms that the knowledge of religion is for man to know himself and to know that which God has endowed the being of man.
- In the beginning, the creation of man was perfect. In the beginning man was self-sufficient. He possessed all required knowledge for this existence. Then he deviated from the original condition of his creation.
- He reminds the seeker that all sins will be forgiven except questions about the origin of creation.
- A true believer has such a high station that it would be impossible to fully describe.

- Once the believer accepts the interdiction not to inquire of God concerning creation, then certain conditions are incumbent upon anyone who supplicates God: to recognize the oneness of God; to acknowledge His names and attributes; to recognize for oneself and others His commands and interdictions. Once the seeker possesses this knowledge, his prayer will be answered.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 5

### *Theme: The Dawning of the Morn of Eternity*

- It starts with the Qur'anic verse: (Qasas, The Story 28:30) “And when he came up to it, a Voice cried to him out of the bush from the right side of the valley in the sacred hollow, “O Moses, I truly am God, the Lord of the Worlds”, followed by Ikhlas-The Unity 112:1-4: “SAY: He is God alone: God the eternal! He begetteth not, and He is not begotten; And there is none like unto Him.”
- What follows is a lengthy chapter concerning the true meaning of the *Towhid*.
- Unacceptability of asking God a question concerning creation.
- The real meaning of the recognition of God.
- At the end of the chapter, he reiterates a discourse by Imám Riḍá on the unity of God in one of his debates.
- True recognition of the essence of God is impossible except by God Himself.
- If anyone says that he manifests God, he has lied.
- The names and attributes of God apply to the realm of creation.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 6

### *Theme: Of the Mystery of Eternity*

- This is also one of the longer chapters of the epistle. This chapter starts by quoting the famous verse from the Qur'án (Nur, Light 24: 35): “God is the LIGHT of the Heavens and of the Earth. His Light is like a niche in which is a lamp – the lamp encased in glass the glass, as it were, a glistening star. From a blessed tree is it lighted, the olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would well-nigh shine out, even though fire touched it not! It is light upon light. God guideth whom He will to His light, and God setteth forth parables to men, for God knoweth all things.” He explains the real meaning of this verse and then continues with a dream of His own.
- He interprets the light referred to in the above verse to be the Primal Will.
- Whoever claims that he has “known” the reality of the Prophet Muḥammad runs the risk of claiming His station. In other words, we cannot know or understand the true stations of the Manifestations of God.
- Whoever calls upon God has a duty to know the Prophet Muḥammad.
- He explains that on 12 Muḥarram 1262. A.H. (February, 1845) He had a dream. He dreamt there were many books around Him. When He opened one of them, He saw dust from the tomb of the Imám Ḥusayn inside a paper wrapping. On opening it, He saw sacred writing in red ink at the end of which was a star bearing the inscription: “I leave all my affairs in Thy hand”. He tried to memorize the sacred verses, but when He awoke He had forgotten everything except four words, one of which was “Ma‘śúd”. He interprets this word by explicating the letters that compose the word.
- He mentions that at the time of writing of this chapter, it was 14 Muḥarram, four days after the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imám Ḥusayn, and He was grief stricken. He

then relates what Imám Ḥusayn uttered while standing by the tomb of his grandfather, the Prophet Muḥammad, at the time of His leaving Medina for Kúfih where martyrdom was awaiting him.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 7

### *Theme: The Beautiful Names of God*

- The subject is the recognition and interpretation of the beautiful names of God.
- He mentions the verse from the Qur'án (Al Araf 7:180): "Most excellent titles hath God: by these call ye on Him, and stand aloof from those who pervert his titles. For what they have done shall they be repaid!"
- Whatever thing has a name is a manifestation of one of God's names.
- God desired to be known by creating the divine names and attributes.
- This ḥadīth is quoted from the Imáms: "We are the beautiful names of God; nothing will be accepted by God except through our recognition."
- One of the names of God is "huvá" (= He is God). It is the great name of God. "Huvá" consists of two letters of "Há = ه" and "vav = و". The number associated with the letter "há" is 11. With a point in front of it, it becomes 110, the number of the Báb's name 'Alí. He claims that this beautiful name of God refers to Him. He encourages the seeker to cling to this beautiful name, that is, to cling unto Him.
- The Qur'án mentions: "He is the great announcement" whom you have turned against. This refers to the Báb.
- He quotes a tradition stated by Ráhib from Imám Ja'far Ṣádiq who said there were eight letters, four in the heaven and four on the earth that the Qá'im will interpret. Ráhib asked for two of the four. Ṣádiq's response was that he would let him know

all four. The first one is the divine unity (there is no God save God); the second is the Prophet Muḥammad; the third refers to the Imáms; the fourth refers to the Shí'ah. The Báb says that the Shí'ah means the perfect man. (One of the titles of the Báb was the “fourth support” or “forth rukn”). He says that one of His titles is the intermediary between the hidden Imám and the believers.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 8

### *Theme: The Great Signs of God*

- He quotes the verse from the Qur'án (Sád 38: 67-70): “SAY: this is a weighty message, From which ye turn aside! Yet had I no knowledge of what passed among the celestial chiefs (Concourse on High) when they disputed; Verily, it hath been revealed to me only because I am a public preacher.”
- He calls Himself the “weighty message,” i.e. Great Announcement, mentioned in the above verse. He affirms that He places all His trust on “the Remnant of God”. The expression of “Remnant of God” appears in the Shí'ah traditions (ḥadīth) not in the Qur'án. The Báb refers to it in the Qayyumu'l-Asmá.
- He addresses the seeker as “O he who has insight!” He draws his attention to the Shí'ah tradition that the Qá'im speaks the words: “The Remnant of God is beneficial to you”. He says the Remnant of God is guiding Him.
- He quotes a tradition from Imám 'Alí who says: “The enlightened recognition of me is the same as the recognition of God”. In the visitation prayer of Imám 'Alí this verse appears: “Whatever is decided by the “Testimony of God” is the unalterable decree.” He reminds the seeker that the allusions made here are finer than a chalice filled with clear wine.
- He says there is a commonly accepted tradition that says should a man die without recognizing the Imám of his time, he has died the death of jáhiliyyih, i.e. a reference to the days of ignorance of the idol worshippers in pre-Islamic Arabia.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 9

### *Theme: The Great Bounties of God*

- He quotes a verse from the Qur'án (Rahman 55: 13): “ Which then of the bounties of your Lord will ye twain deny?”
- He interprets the verse that the greatest favours of God are the kindred of Muḥammad and the Shí'ah Imáms. He calls Himself the last light from the kindred of the Imám. Then He describes five stations for them. He expresses His wish to be living near the tomb of Imám Ḥusayn.
- He enters into detailed and complex numerical tafsir (deriving explanations from numerical assignments to words according to Abjad letters) related to these stations.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 10

### *Theme: The Explanation of the Beginning and the End. i.e. of this World and the Next*

- This is the longest chapter in the epistle. It expounds the beginning of man's life and its end. i.e. the status of man at his creation and his return to God at the end of his earthly life. He also explains the real inner meaning of the martyrdom of the Imám Ḥusayn, as distinguished from his obvious physical martyrdom. The writing of this chapter coincided with the tenth day of Muḥarram, the date of the martyrdom of the Imám Ḥusayn. He discusses the divinity of the Imám Ḥusayn. He quotes one reputable ḥadīth from ibn-i-'Abbás, who stated that when Imám Ḥusayn was leaving Mecca for Iraq, he saw the archangel Gabriel holding Imám Ḥusayn's hand. Gabriel said that whosoever has supported the Imám, it is as though he has supported God. The Báb explains the inner/hidden meaning of the martyrdom of Imám Ḥusayn, i.e. the people would shed tears for Me in My afflictions (the Báb) at the hands of My enemies. The martyrdom of the Imám Ḥusayn was the fulfilment of the first blast on the trumpet. A Qur'ánic verse says there will be two blasts of the trumpet.

- He explains the mystery of the number of 72, i.e. the number of companions of the Imám Ḥusayn at the time of his martyrdom. The Báb relates these verses to His life.
- He explains the mystery of the tenth of Muḥarram when the Imám Ḥusayn was martyred in the year 61 A.H. He says that it was on a Friday. He relates the events surrounding the martyrdom to Himself. He refers to His condition at the hands of His enemies which is more grievous than that of Imám Ḥusayn. If the Imám Ḥusayn received 950 wounds from bows, arrows and spears, the Báb maintains that His suffering is greater.
- He refers to the words of Javád Valiání the Khuvár as the lowing of a calf. He says that he and people like him among the learned who opposed the Báb could not reveal even a single verse. He affirms that He could conquer the east and the west. Then He states His desire for martyrdom. These verses Bahá'u'lláh has quoted in the Kitáb-i-Íqán:

*Likewise, in His interpretation of the letter "Há," He craved martyrdom, saying: "Methinks I heard a Voice calling in my inmost being: 'Do thou sacrifice the thing which Thou lovest most in the path of God, even as Ḥusayn, peace be upon him, hath offered up his life for My sake.' And were I not regardful of this inevitable mystery, by Him, Who hath my being between His hands even if all the kings of the earth were to be leagued together they would be powerless to take from me a single letter, how much less can these servants who are worthy of no attention, and who verily are of the outcast... That all may know the degree of My patience, My resignation, and self-sacrifice in the path of God." (KI 231-232)*

- He makes no claim except servitude. He says He has revealed 10 books and 4 epistles. In order to stress the potency of His writings and lack of capacity of the majority of people to appreciate His spiritual authority, He states that any ordinary man who could have one of His 14 books and epistle in his hands would have conquered the world.

- He mentions that if a member of the learned (*'ulamá*) writes a simple epistle on some minor aspect of Islam, thousands of people will follow him. The faithful believe that the repudiation of such an epistle would be tantamount to repudiation of God. Although His Cause is like the sun at its zenith, the people do not pay any attention to Him and arise to oppose Him vehemently. The Báb laments the spiritual blindness of such people.
- He ends this chapter with 61 lines of a poem modelled on the battle cry of the Imám Ḥusayn.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 11

### *Theme: Commentary on the First One-Third of the Prayer (First Line of the Prayer)*

- God's knowledge encompasses all things. Its outward, plain sense meaning is the same as its inner meaning and vice versa. Only God Himself knows the true meanings of the divine verses.
- He begins with the interpretation of the first word of the first line of the prayer and expounds the letters of the alphabet that form the word. It starts with “alláhuma = اللهم”, “O my God!” He interprets the letters of the alphabet “alif”, “lám”, “há”, “mim”, etc. which form the first word. For an example, in the interpretation of “alif,” He gives different elucidations to the letter alif, the standing alif that refers to the Manifestation of God (This letter of alphabet looks like a vertical line – thus “standing alif”).
- He addresses the seeker stating that to recognize God two processes are involved: one through your own manifest being. This cannot be accomplished by posing questions. The second process is to recognize God through your essence of being (*máhíyyat*). This can be done only through lowliness and by accepting one's weakness and God's decree. He further explains that the recognition of God through the first process involves man's eternal station; the second process involves the

station of servitude. From this explanation one may gather that He says that to know God, one has to show meekness and then follow the Manifestation of God who reflects the Primal Will without questioning His words or deeds.

- He states that true recognition of God will not be complete without the recognition of the Manifestation of God; the recognition of the Manifestation of God is not complete without the recognition of His vice-regent; the recognition of His vice-regent is not complete except by recognizing “the peerless Shí’ah”. By “the peerless Shí’ah,” He means the Báb.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 12

*Theme: Interpretation of the Second Third (Second Line of the Prayer)*

- This chapter starts with a prayer referring to the unity of God.
- This chapter interprets mainly the recognition and station of Muḥammad, the Manifestation of God.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 13

*Theme: Interpretation of the Third One-Third (Third line of the Prayer)*

- The main theme of this chapter is the “testimony/proof” which He establishes as the revelation of the divine verses.
- He mentions a letter which He received from someone named Muḥammad Ja’far, which originally He did not intend to answer because this individual was attempting to debate Him and to test His authority and knowledge. He answers that it would not be possible for Him to make such a claim if He did not have the required testimony. The only other person who would make such a claim would be a person who is devoid of intelligence. He says He has revealed voluminous works without resorting to cognition because it came immediately through divine revelation. He says that He has not attended

schools, but that He possesses the key to the door of all knowledge.

- He makes the interesting statement that He is one of the students of Siyyid Kázim. In this epistle and elsewhere, He has mentioned that He has not acquired the knowledge that is current amongst the learned. This statement should not be taken as an affirmation that he acquired knowledge from Siyyid Kázim, but rather it confirms his former teacher's great station by paying him homage. We know that He stayed for seven months only in Karbilá; he did not attend the Siyyid's classes on any regular basis in that city.
- He exhorts the seeker to give His greetings to His followers. He states that He knows no word issuing from the realm of the Unseen, but whatever He needs to know is given to Him by God.
- To anyone who would debate the Báb, He advises that He would not answer any question unless it met certain criteria. The seeker should fall among three classes of people (For the sake of brevity, no further explanation about three classes could be given here). He then provides twelve admonishments from Imám 'Alí who has taken them from Torah. He explains each one in turn.

## A Brief Summary of Chapter 14

***Theme: Avoiding Unbelievers and Those who show Enmity to the New Cause***

- He adds a fourth line to the occultation prayer which reads: "O my God! Make known to me the Gate to Thy Testimony! Shouldst Thou not enable me to recognize Thy Gate, I would go astray." The Báb has argued that the greatest testimony is the revelation of divine verses. According to the Shí'ah, the Testimony is the Twelfth Imám.
- Whoever doubts the command "Avoid the enemies of the Cause," will bring misery on himself and become the enemy of God.

- Almost half of the chapter is devoted to quoting the testimonials from four people who have supported the truth of His Cause. These four people are Shaykh Aḥmad-i Aḥsá'í, Siyyid Kázim Rashti, 'Abdu'l-Kháliq, and Muḥammad 'Alí Qazvíní.

## Conclusion

In this paper *Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih* was introduced and its essential characteristics was given. Furthermore, for its better understanding, relevant background information was introduced and analyzed. A brief content of each of its fourteen chapters was presented.

## Acknowledgement

The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Dr. Omid Ghaemmaghami and Mr. Jack McLean in preparation of this paper.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, (n.p., Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008), pp. 37-41.

<sup>2</sup> This study is based on a particular manuscript of the *Risáliy-i-Ja'faríyyih* created from three different hand written unpublished manuscripts which the author of this paper could find; they are as follows:

1. Manuscript in the Iranian National Baha'i Archives (INBA #60) pp. 57-154
2. Manuscript in the Iranian National Baha'i Archives (INBA #98) pp. 48-111
3. Manuscript in the Babi collection of Princeton University Manuscript #228; pp. 1-60

It seems it is adequate for the sake of this study. There are nearly three hundred textual variations and differences in these three manuscripts; these errors which cause the variations in the three manuscripts have arisen from the carelessness of those who transcribed them and were not intentional. This study is a first step towards further studies and research

to be done in the future in order to prepare an authentic manuscript for the epistle.

- <sup>3</sup> Nabil-i A'zam, Mullá Muḥammad Zarandí, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, translated and edited by Shoghi Effendi. (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1932), p. 669.
- <sup>4</sup> A.L.M. Nicolas, *Síyyid 'Alí Muḥammad dit le Báb*. (Paris: Librairie Critique, 1908), pp. 17-25.
- <sup>5</sup> These individuals were known as 'Gates' (Abwáb). The first was ('Uṭhmán-ibn-Sa'id Umarí (260-265 A.H.); the second Muhammad-ibn-i-'Uṭhmán, son of the above (265-305 A.H.); the third was Ḥusayn -ibn-i-Rúḥ Nábakhtí (305-326 A.H.); the fourth was 'Alí-ibn-i- Muḥammad Simarí (326-329 A.H.). Of these 'gates', the first was appointed by the Imám Ḥasan-i 'Askarí. The others were appointed by the then acting 'gate' with the sanction and approval of the Hidden Imám. This period extended over 69 years during which the Imám was still accessible by means of the 'gates.' This period is known as the 'Lesser' or 'Minor Occultation' (*Ghaybat-i-Sughra*). This was succeeded by the 'Greater' or 'Major Occultation' (*Ghaybat-i-Kubra*).
- <sup>6</sup> Abbas Amanat, *Iran: A Modern History*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), pp. 62-69.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid* pp. 199-210
- <sup>8</sup> *Jabulqa* and *Jabulsa* are two mythological cities mentioned in the *Shí'ah* ḥadīth. These cities were inhabited by archetypal believers who are waiting for the appearance of the promised Qá'im for the *Shí'ah*. According to some ḥadīth the Qá'im will inhabit these cities. Each city has 12,000 gates, each of which is guarded by 12,000 men until the Day of Resurrection when the Qa'im will appear.
- <sup>9</sup> All the quotes from Qur'an in this paper are according to its translation by J.M. Rev. Rodwell.
- <sup>10</sup> *La'álí Hikmat*, vol. II. (Bahá'í Publishing of Brazil, 1990), p. 60.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ayát-i Iláhí*, vol. II, *A Compilation of Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. (Langenheim: Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Germany, 1990), p. 68.
- <sup>12</sup> Assadulláh-Fadil Mázandarání, *Amr Va Khalq*, vol. II, *Mu'assisih Matbuát Amri*. (Langenheim and Tehran, Reprint by Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Germany, 141 B.E.), p. 221.
- <sup>13</sup> Todd Lawson and Omid Ghaemmaghami, eds; *A Most Noble Pattern: Collected Essays on the Writings of the Báb*. (Oxford: Bahá'í Studies Series, George Ronald, 2012), paper by Nader Saiedi, p 212.

# A Commentary on the Occultation Prayer, or *Risáliy-i-Ja‘faríyyih*

The Báb

Provisional translation by Foad Seddigh

## Chapter One: The Discourse of Illumination

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful! Praise be unto God Who hath testified to His Essence with His Essence that there is no God except Him Who hath been exalted through His Supreme Self over all things, Who is hidden by His transcendent revelation from all things, Who hath been without remembrance of anything from time immemorial, and Who is now the same as He hath been in the past, that there hath not been with Him the remembrance of anything. He Who is Worshipped, as the Incomparable, the Self-Subsisting, He Who made knowledge an attribute for His servants and power and might a station for His chosen Ones. He is the First without the recognition of anything and the Last without the remembrance of anything. He is manifest without the creation of anything and the innermost reality of things without the injunction of anything. Should I say that verily He is Who He is, the Excogitation and that which pertaineth to it would discredit Me; because He is not recognized by anyone except Himself and cannot be described by His creation. Should I say that Thou art Who Thou art, the Contrivance, and that which is facing it is disputing Me; because, He is not described through acclamation, nor may be*

pointed to because of not being seen. He is sanctified! Verily His Essence leads to His Essence, His pre-existence is established by His momentary existence. He hath been barred from His creation and His Being hath been concealed in veils before His servants. Should any man say: "He is Who He is", the letter "há" leadeth to the creation and the letter "váv" to the decree; this is the proof for His being substantially cut off from others and greatly being debarred. Should he say: "He is Who He is" and I know not His Station, he hath joined partner with his Lord after knowing that he is severed from Him. Which unbelief is greater than the Word "He is"? Which trespass may outweigh that of the non-existent approaching the Absolute Existence? He is sanctified far beyond how I may describe Him without thanking Him, and beyond knowing Him without praising Him; though after denial, My words prove to be the condition of description. I swear by His Might! It is not the case; there is no path drawn between Him and anything else. I mean by denial nothing else but denial, and in remembering Him nothing else except helplessness. Sanctified is He! How great is My boldness before His Beauty and how great is My transgression in face of His majesty. In My contemplation, definitely, I hold Him sanctified from the description of all else except Him. This is My description of His majesty. With the knowledge of being debarred from Him, I hold Him Holy beyond the commendation of all else except Him and this is my praise for His Beauty. He is sanctified from this path. Should I say: "well is it with Me", I have joined partner with Him and should I say: "woe betide Me", I have become unfaithful. I know not how to express My hopelessness and which words to use to admit My transgression. Sanctified is God, the Incomparable, the Single! Should I immerse Myself in the ocean of His praise, notwithstanding being accounted amongst the infidels in His sight, it would fill My heart with such love that I would be silent and drowned in the ocean of remoteness. No by His exalted Being! Should My heart be consumed in My extreme disloyalty, by His Might! Certainly, it would not take away My pleasure for praising His greatness. However, I would be content with the burning of My heart as a result of my boldness. No by His greatness! Verily, I know that there is no path for Me to tread towards Him, not by helplessness, not by praise, not by prohibition, not by glory, not by severance, not by extreme light, not by the letter "há" and not by fleeing away from letter "váv". Sanctified is God!

*That which He hath created in Me is wonderful and that which He hath inspired within Me is exalted. Once He enraptureth Me towards the horizon of the Hidden Realm and another time He annihilateth Me with the fire of non-consciousness. I know not that which Thou seekest from Me; is it My blood that Thou wishest to be spilled or is it Me Who desireth to draw Himself nigh unto Thee, then Thou drivest Me away and then by running away from Thy Might Thou punishest Me? I know not on which path Thou standest so that I can call Thee, and I know not which words to use to ask Thy favor and complain to Thee. No by Thy Might! I flee not from nearness to Thee, shouldst Thou drive Me away. No by Thy Being! I fear not Thy overpowering Might even if Thou wouldst burn Me up. No by Thy power! I have no request from anyone else except Thee even shouldst Thou make me needy towards it. Sanctified is God in His command. Whatever I experience, I will endure it within Me and there is nothing more exalted in My heart than His sovereignty. Should I flee away like a child of tender age, likewise, He would place sugar in My mouth to calm My tears, then He would place the breast of His mercy in my mouth to make me go to sleep. No by Thy might! I am not unaware of that which Thou wouldst do, and I do not busy Myself with such conditions away from Thee. I know not which object Thou dost want for Me; would it be that Thou wantest to take away My life or would it be to make My inner being happy?*

*I was residing in My house alone and no one had any knowledge of Me. Thou induced some people to leave their abode and Thou hast brought them to arrive at My place; then Thou revealed unto Me the decree of Thy call and bestowed upon Me Thy Proof. No sooner had Thy knowledge reached Me than Thou didst take Thy Covenant from the hearts of all those who had become aware of Thy command and made them submit to Thee to such an extent that none of them who had travelled denied My claim. Thou didst then take them back to their places of residence and Thou dispensed to Me after that the honor of travelling towards Thy Respectful House and Thou extended Thy command to the hands of Thy kings on earth in every direction until My Cause reached the east and the west and in between them. As soon as the faith of Thy servants grew stronger and everyone knew the decree of the heart, Thou made Me return from Thy Respectful House; consonant with this condition, Thou desired that mischief arise in the cities and by the inhabitants of such cities*

*until the opposition of them who turned against the Cause descended upon Me and the chosen ones. Then, Thou brought Me in the utmost humiliation in the presence of tyrants, then Thou inspired Me with the word of negation after affirmation in order to make Me secure from life-threatening positions. Are these not all of Thy making, O Thou the Possessor of Majesty and Favor? Verily, O my God! Thou transported Me to the supernal realm from the beginning of the Cause and Thou placed Me in different situations; then Thou placed the word of denial in the hearts of Satanic people until the enemies grabbed whatever they had written. Verily, I did not intend in what I wrote except the specific station of appointed gate-hood yet gate-hood is in reality an absolute word that falleth into limitation by such specification. By Thy Might! They did not scheme against My decree but I was swift in scheming in their affairs. If I had affirmed them like the earlier believers, they would not have treated Me with enmity. However, any affliction I suffer, I see it but as coming from Thee; because Thou hast power over its transmutation or turning it around in the best possible way. The reason that I have endured humiliation is because Thou hast been patient with Me despite having knowledge and being in the position of power. However, Thou knowest O My God that I do not like to act contrary to Thy Will and am aware of Thy patience with respect to those who art nigh unto Thee but I have no power over Thy ways for dealing with them and verily, I am not ashamed before Thee as Thou art potent to decree for Me to pursue an action and then change it without being in a position of contradiction. In such case, I will bring My action to an end even if My words might be similar to those of wrongdoers. And knowing My inner being which is intoxicated by Thy bestowals and by the wine of being thankful to Thee, I call Thee with these verses which do not trespass the limit of praise; however, they are not beyond the decree of a change of plan. Sanctified art Thou! I praise Thee in misery and distress; a praise which is shedding light, is bright, and is sanctified with the sanctity of Thy realm of eternity and Thy divine unity. I seek assistance from Thee with what Thou purposed in this book with Thy strength and power. Thou art the Generous, the All-Praised.*

*I bear witness to Thee with that which Thou lovest and art made happy before manifesting what is in the world of existence. Thou art the All-Informed, the Witness and Thou art sufficient unto Me as a*

witness. I bear witness that there is no other God except Him alone, there is no partner with Him, and verily Muhammad, the salutation of God be upon Him and His kindred, is Thy servant; no one is like Him and He is Thy Messenger Who is exalted above being similar to anyone. He conveyed to the people that which Thou manifested within Him from Thy knowledge, and provided admonishment to the people from that which Thou inspired Him in the path of Thy love. O My God! Reward Him and His kindred as They deserve. I bear witness to the Regents of Muhammad, Thy Beloved, as Thou hast purposed for them and provided help for them in every condition through Thy bounty from Thy Own self and Thou art numbering them as letters of Thy divine unity. Verily, Thou art the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. I bear witness for their followers that which Thy knowledge surrounded them in the arc of descent and Thy mystery in the arc of ascent, for every truth with rightfulness and for every untruth with denial, and Thou art sufficient unto Me and art witness and aware unto Me. O thou who examinest this book! Beware, beware! lest thou look upon any other thing except thy essence of being when the birds invoked with melodious tunes, the peoples with the visible objects, the minds with the world of existence, and the hearts with the clear testimonies; certainly it is your duty to examine the promptings of your inner heart and its command. We are from God and towards Our Lord We shall turn and those who act should conduct themselves like this.

## THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

27 April 2017

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of 31 January 2017 in which you seek guidance on the latitude Bahá'ís have to engage in social action and public discourse, particularly in relation to the principle of non-involvement in political affairs. We have been asked to convey the following.

Your heartfelt desire to apply the principles of the Faith to address the ills of society is warmly acknowledged. The House of Justice agrees with many of your thoughtful points and wishes to provide some additional ideas for your consideration.

As you are no doubt well aware, in discussing the principle of non-involvement in politics, Shoghi Effendi wrote that Bahá'ís are to “refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with the policies of their governments and the schemes and programs of parties and factions.” In political controversies, they “should assign no blame, take no side, further no design, and identify themselves with no system prejudicial to the best interests” of their “world-wide Fellowship”. They are called to “avoid the entanglements and bickerings inseparable from the pursuits of the politician”. And they are to “rise above all particularism and partisanship, above the vain disputes, the petty calculations, the transient passions that agitate the face, and engage the attention, of a changing world.” Bahá'ís and Bahá'í institutions should not take positions on the political decisions of governments, including disputes among governments of different nations; should refrain from becoming involved in debates surrounding any political controversy; and should not react, orally or otherwise, in a manner that could be taken as evidence of support for a partisan political stance. It is not for a Bahá'í, in offering social commentary, to vilify specific individuals, organizations, or governments or to make attacks on them. Indeed, the Guardian specifically cautioned the friends against referring to political figures in their public remarks, whether in criticism or support.

Furthermore, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá enjoined Bahá'ís to be obedient to the government of their land. Unity, order, and cooperation are the basis for sound and lasting change. Even civil disobedience, in the form of a conscious decision to violate the law to effect social change, is not acceptable for Bahá'ís—whatever merit it appears to have had in particular political settings. Ultimately, obedience to government has a bearing on the unity of the Bahá'í community itself. In a letter written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi stated that individual Bahá'ís should not become immersed in the “faulty systems of the world” or judge their government as “just or unjust—for each believer would be sure to hold a different viewpoint, and within our own Bahá'í fold a hotbed of dissension would spring up and destroy our unity.” These considerations, however, do not imply an endorsement of the actions or policies of one's government. As Shoghi Effendi explained in another letter written on his behalf: “The principle of obedience to government does not place any Bahá'í under the obligation of identifying the teachings of his Faith with the political program enforced by the government. For such an identification, besides being erroneous and contrary to both the spirit as well as the form of the Bahá'í message, would necessarily create a conflict within the conscience of every loyal believer.”

The principles of non-involvement in politics and obedience to government, far from being obstacles to social change, are aspects of an approach set forth in the Bahá'í writings to implement effective remedies for and address the root causes of the ills afflicting society. This approach includes active involvement in the life of society as well as the possibility of influencing

and contributing to the social policies of government by all lawful means. Indeed, service to others and to society is a hallmark of the Bahá'í life. And Shoghi Effendi has explained that “the machinery of the Cause has been so fashioned, that whatever is deemed necessary to incorporate into it in order to keep it in the forefront of all progressive movements, can, according to the provisions made by Bahá'u'lláh, be safely embodied therein.” The way in which Bahá'ís seek to effect social change is described in the 2 March 2013 message of the House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran. A copy of that message is enclosed for your study.

There can be no question then that Bahá'ís are committed to efforts toward social transformation. “Much as the friends must guard against in any way ever seeming to identify themselves or the Cause with any political party,” Shoghi Effendi, through his secretary, cautioned, “they must also guard against the other extreme of never taking part, with other progressive groups, in conferences or committees designed to promote some activity in entire accord with our teachings—such as, for instance, better race relations.” This involvement in activities for social reform and well-being can in certain circumstances even extend to taking part in demonstrations. A letter written on the Guardian's behalf indicated that he did not see any objection to Bahá'í students taking part as Bahá'ís in a protest concerning racial prejudice on campus, since “there was nothing political about it” and “he does not see how they could remain indifferent when fellow-students were voicing our own Bahá'í attitude on such a vital issue and one we feel so strongly about.” Thus, individual Bahá'ís are free to participate in those efforts and activities, such as peaceful rallies, that uphold constructive aims in consonance with the Bahá'í teachings, for example, the advancement of women, the promotion of social justice, the protection of the environment, the elimination of all forms of discrimination, and the safeguarding of human rights.

In deciding whether it would be appropriate for Bahá'ís to participate in particular public activities, a crucial distinction should be drawn between those events that have a partisan political character and those that do not. A further distinction can be drawn between those activities that are fully in keeping with the teachings and that can be supported explicitly by Bahá'í institutions and those where the situation is less clear, in which Bahá'í institutions should not participate but in which individuals can be given some latitude to make a personal decision to take part, without in any way implying that they are representing the Faith directly by their choice. If a believer harbors any doubt as to the appropriateness of involvement with a particular event or approach, guidance should be sought from the National Spiritual Assembly, which is in the best position to evaluate the specific circumstances and is responsible for making the final determination on such questions.

Beyond this clarification of basic principles, there are other important considerations. Too often political goals, even when pursued in the name of justice, are a chimera, for the fundamental partisanship in contemporary political life means policies are often implemented without building consensus and consequently seeds of discontent and continuing political struggle are sown. Conflict and contention ultimately yield more conflict and contention. Eliminating social problems, rather than merely ameliorating them to an extent, requires unity of thought as well as action, an open heart as well as an open hand—conditions which Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is intended to bring about.

For many decades following the second great war of the twentieth century, humanity moved, with fits and starts, toward the promise of a united world. The failure to complete the project of the unification of nations, however, left gaps in relations in which supranational problems could fester and threaten the security and well-being of peoples and states, leading to a recrudescence of prejudice, of diverse expressions of factionalism, and of virulent nationalism that are the very negation of Bahá'u'lláh's message of peace and oneness.

One of the current features of the process of the disintegration of the old world order manifest in the United States is the increasing polarization and fragmentation that has come to characterize so much of political and social life. There has been a hardening of viewpoints, increased incivility, an unwillingness to compromise or even entertain differing perspectives, and a tendency to

automatically take sides and fight. Science and religion, two great lights that should guide human progress, are often compromised or swept aside. Matters of moral principle and questions of justice are reduced to intractable liberal or conservative viewpoints, and the country is increasingly divided along divergent lines. In this context, the friends have to hold steadfastly to the Bahá'í teachings and consultative methods and not allow their pursuit of noble aims and high aspirations to draw them into one side or the other of fruitless debates and contentious processes.

In their reflections on how to contribute to the betterment of the world, Bahá'ís will undoubtedly recognize that demonstrations are not the only, or even the most effective, means available to them. Rather, they can learn and grow in capacity over time to help their fellow citizens to frame concerns in a way that rises above fissures, to share views in a manner that transcends divisive approaches, and to create and participate in spaces to work together in the quest to enact solutions to the problems that bedevil their nation. As Bahá'u'lláh stated: "Say: no man can attain his true station except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation." In this light, justice is indeed essential to resist the vain imaginings and idle fancies of social and political machinations, to see reality with one's own eyes, and to identify the requirements for an equitable social order. But then unity is essential—forged through consultative processes, including action and reflection—to achieve the power required for positive social change.

Unfortunately, sometimes when approaching such important and deeply felt matters, the friends can create dichotomies where none exist. Thus, for example, it is contended that one must choose between either non-involvement in politics or social action; either teaching the Faith or involvement with society; either the institute process and the community-building activities it fosters or a program for race unity; and so on. Such apparent conflicts can be greatly dissipated by keeping in mind Shoghi Effendi's advice, conveyed in a letter written on his behalf, to conceive of the teachings as one great whole with many facets. "Truth may, in covering different subjects, appear to be contradictory," the same letter indicated, "and yet it is all one if you carry the thought through to the end." A careful reading of the Bahá'í writings and the guidance of the House of Justice can clarify how two matters that appear to be in tension with one another are coherent once the concepts and principles that connect them are understood. Particular circumstances in a locality, timeliness, and the periodic need for focus also have a bearing on such issues.

In a recent letter written on its behalf, the House of Justice explained to your National Assembly that the scope of the Five Year Plan offers ample opportunities for believers to address the social concerns of their communities and society as a whole. The Plan's activities for sustained growth and community building lie at the heart of a broad scheme for social transformation. The friends are called to three simultaneous, overlapping, and coherent areas of action: community-building efforts in clusters; projects and activities for social action; and involvement in the discourses of society, whether in neighborhoods or in personal or professional associations. An assessment of the efforts of Bahá'ís across the United States will reveal that there is already an army of believers working in all strata of society to promote the Bahá'í teachings and combat the spiritual and social ills afflicting their country. As the learning process that has proven to be so effective in the expansion and consolidation work worldwide is increasingly employed in all endeavors, the capacity of individuals, communities, and institutions to apply Bahá'u'lláh's healing remedy to achieve profound and lasting change will become ever more pronounced, assisting the nation along the path of its destiny.

Rest assured of the supplications of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh may bless your efforts to be a promoter of unity and justice.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

---

This document has been downloaded from the [Bahá'í Reference Library](#). You are free to use its content subject to the terms of use found at [www.bahai.org/legal](http://www.bahai.org/legal)

# In Memoriam

Dr. Mehrangiz Afnan

(1937-2018)



Dr. Mehrangiz (Mehri) Afnan was an active and much-appreciated presenter at the annual programs of the Irfan Colloquium taking place at Louhelen Bahá'í School in Michigan, United States. She also served as a reviewer of the articles published in *Safiniy-i-Irfan*, the annual publication of the Irfan Colloquium in Persian. A number of

articles written and presented by Dr. Mehri Afnan are published in different volumes of *Safiniy-i-Irfan*.

She was born in Tehran, Iran, on 30 October 1937. Her parents had both grown up in Russia – her father, Abolghasem Kiani, in Ishqabad and her mother, Monavar Namdar, in Moscow – before being forced to move to Iran in the early 1930s.

Dr. Mehri Afnan received her medical doctorate from the University of Tehran and was among a handful of young women who studied medicine at that time. She then went on to specialize in pediatrics. She had a tender heart and a great sense of personal responsibility and was a skilled and conscientious doctor, trusted and loved by her patients. She met Dr. Muhammad Afnan through Bahá'í youth activities, and they married in 1961. They had two children, Elham and Omid.

In 1978, the family moved to Norway to settle there as Bahá'í pioneers. Shortly after the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution in January 1979, they were denied a residence permit in Norway, but also were advised not to return to Iran because of their earlier prominence in Bahá'í administration. They moved to Canada, settling in the town of Dundas, where they helped form the Local Spiritual Assembly and became active and much loved members of the community.

Dr. Mehri Afnan studied the Bahá'í Writings deeply and extensively. In addition to her native Persian, she also had a good knowledge of Arabic and English and was an excellent writer and speaker, writing articles on a variety of Bahá'í topics. She and her husband complemented each other and collaborated in many areas. In 1987, this couple started the Institute for Bahá'í Studies in Persian in Dundas, Canada, to continue the services rendered by the Institute of Advanced Baha'i Studies in Iran. It aimed at promoting and supporting the study of Bahá'í literature in Persian and Arabic and became a major publisher of Bahá'í literature in Persian, replacing the services originally rendered by the Bahá'í Publishing Trust in Iran.

In 1989, this couple were invited to move to the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, where they both served in the Research Department for the next thirteen years, until 2002. They had the opportunity to visit the World Center again several times in recent years and worked on various projects each time, including during the last visit that Dr.

Mehri Afnan made alone, in November 2017, a few months after her husband's passing.

This couple upon returning to Canada, settled in Mississauga and once again became enthusiastically involved in Bahá'í activities. They held regular devotionals and study classes in their home, took part in outreach activities, and used every opportunity to teach the Faith. Dr. Afnan also served as members of the Persian Reviewing Panel for many years.

Dr. Mehri Afnan was a loving and devoted wife, mother, and grandmother. She was an excellent speaker, writer, and teacher, as well as a gracious host. Above all, at the center of her life was service to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. She passed away on 13 August 2018 in Mississauga, Ontario. The Universal House of Justice expressed its appreciation of her life and services in a letter written to her family on its behalf. Irfan Colloquium and its Persian publications are now deprived of the precious collaboration of a learned and dear colleague.

# Sohrab Arjmand

(1935-2019)



Mr. Sohrab Arjmand was a member of the Board of Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund at National Baha'i Center and a faithful supporter of Irfan Colloquium. He was a grandson of Haj Mehdi Arjmand and was born in the city of Tehran, Iran on November 1, 1935. At the age of 18, he left Iran to pursue higher education in the United States and was graduated from Hayward University in

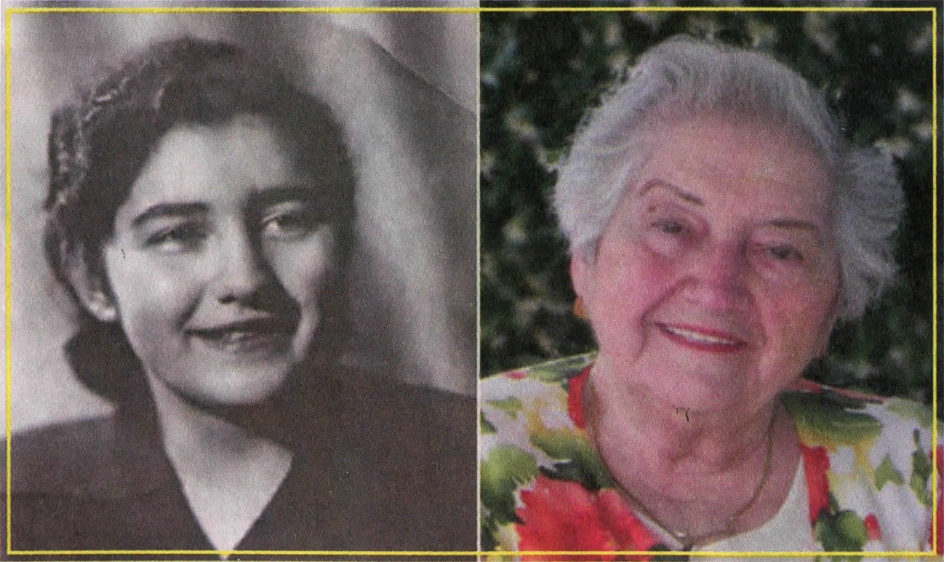
Business Administration. In 1966, he went back to Iran because his mother was very sick. Although he lost his mother shortly thereafter, he met his soon to be his wife, Mehrshid Yadegari. The two were married in 1969.

In 1975, before the Iranian Revolution, they left Iran and came to San Diego. Perhaps having lived in California before, helped him to quickly make new friends and settle down in San Diego. He had quite a sense of humor. He was a very dedicated Baha'i and was elected to the Local Spiritual Assembly in San Diego and served on that position for 20 years. Sohrab Arjmand was very generous and joined his brother and sisters in supporting Irfan Colloquium projects by regularly making contributions to Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund.

He was a very responsible and goal-oriented person and finished every project to its very end. He was a very independent, healthy and active person. Unfortunately, he tripped and fell which resulted in a fatal head injury and passed away in San Diego on January 22, 2019. He is survived by his wife, Parichehr, 2 daughters, Tandis and Anisa and a granddaughter, Leily. He will be greatly missed by the participants in the annual gatherings of Irfan Colloquium taking place at Bosch Baha'i School in Northern California.

## Lily Ayman (Áhy)

(1929-2018)



Lily Ayman was a co-founder and staunch supporter of the Irfan Colloquium project, participating at all its sessions and warmly associating with participants. She was a distinguished educator, author, translator, and world citizen whose life and activities took her to many corners of the world. Lily was born on May 17, 1929 in Tehran. She was the fourth-generation great granddaughter of Mírzá Majíd Áhy, a brother-in-law of Bahá'u'lláh, memorialized by Nabil Zarandi in "The Dawn Breakers" for securing sanctuary for Bahá'u'lláh during the upheavals of 1852. Her father, Majíd Áhy, the scion of a prominent family was a high-ranking government official who was graduated in law and political science from Moscow State University. Her Russian mother, Raeisa Duvinskaya grew up in Moscow and was trained in piano and opera singing at the famous conservatory of Moscow prior to moving to Tehran to marry.

Though born in Tehran, friends from her early childhood still remember her from pre-school classes in Shiraz where she lived while her father was governor of the province of Fars. She then completed her elementary and middle school education in Tehran, where her father was Minister of Justice. Upon her father's appointment as Iranian ambassador to the Soviet Union, she accompanied her parents to Moscow where she completed high school and enrolled at Moscow State University to study French and Russian languages and literature. When her father, fell ill, she and the rest of the family members accompanied him back home to Tehran, where he soon passed away. Lily completed university degrees in philosophy and education at the University of Tehran and the National Teachers College. During this period, she also served as assistant to Professor M.B. Hushyar in developing a new and simplified method for teaching reading and writing Persian. While still an undergraduate student, Lily translated "*Enfants Difficiles*" (Difficult Children) from French to Persian and it was published in 1949. After graduation, she started to serve as a teacher at the Anoushiravan Dadgar secondary school for girls.

Lily married Iraj Ayman in London in 1951 and pursued post graduate studies at London University and the University of Edinburg in Scotland when she gave birth to her first child Roya. Upon their return from Scotland to Iran in 1954, she was appointed as Co-Director of Educational and Vocational Guidance Center at the Department of Research and Curriculum Development, and instructor of the In-Service Teacher Training Program at the Ministry of Education. In the same year, she organized, for the first time in Iran, a summer school for children. The following year, the young family moved to Los Angeles, California, where Iraj completed his Ph.D. at the University of Southern California. Lily worked at the Salvation Army Nursery as teacher and school psychologist and gave birth to their second child, Saba.

In 1957, she and her family returned to Tehran where she embarked on a distinguished academic, literary and professional career. While serving as a member of International Committee for the Evaluation of Reading Comprehension of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (I. E. A.), Lily was teaching child education and children's literature at the

University of Tehran where she continued her interest in developing a modern research-based approach to teaching children and new literates. Three years later, this passion earned her a fellowship for further post graduate study at the Teachers College of Columbia University in New York City.

The desire to instill a love of reading into future generations was a dominating passion underlying her work. To this end, she found time to write numerous stories and books for children and co-founded *Shorá-ye Ketáb-e Kudak* (Children's Book Council), a non-governmental institution, which she served as Board member and Executive Secretary General for two decades. She was also an enthusiastic supporter of the International Board of Books for Young People (IBBY) – a Switzerland based NGO that brought her in contact with colleagues around the world, serving many years on its Executive Board and an additional two years as IBBY Vice-President.

Lily's leadership in education was officially recognized when she was the first and only woman appointed to the High Council of Education of Iran, the country's highest authority in educational administration. She put all of her skills to practical use as the lead author of textbooks officially adopted throughout Iran for teaching reading and writing in primary schools. During this period, she gave birth to their third child, Rama.

The wide horizon of her interest in pedagogy also extended to adults in a country where adult literacy was hovering around 30 percent. Lily was appointed as Head of the Department of Life-long Education and Training, National Center for Adult Education and Training as well as Educational Consultant to the Secretary-General of the National Committee for World Literacy Program and she was in charge of the preparation of textbooks, reading materials and training programs. She also served as Director of a research project on Basic Vocabulary of the Persian Language. This project gathered a sample of ten million words from oral and written language in actual use by adults and children in both urban and rural communities in different geographical regions of the country, having elementary education or less. One fruit of this research was the identification of a basic vocabulary of one thousand most used Persian words which served as a reference in preparing reading materials for new literates.

She was the recipient of numerous medals and awards including:

- Educational Medal (First Class), Ministry of Education
- Best Book of the Year Prize (Award of Distinction)
- Scientific Medal (First Class) of Ministry of Education
- UNESCO National Commission (Iran) International Book of the Year
- Award for development of reading materials for new-literates
- Gold Medal (Highest award for services rendered) by the National
- Committee for World Literacy Program in Iran

Lily was a lover of poetry and literary classics. Her elegant command of language extended that love beyond Persian to Russian, French and English literature. Ever desirous of enriching the literary environment of her country, she was a supporter of *Bongáh-e Tarjomeh va Nashr-e Ketáb* (Institute of Book Translation and Publication) managed by Dr. Ehsan Yarshater where she established and managed a section for the translation and publication of children's literature. Throughout her career, she was a regular contributor to multiple educational journals and Bahá'í periodicals. In addition, she was the author or translator of more than 40 published books and stories.

Although, for many years, Lily had a close association with many friends in the Bahá'í communities in Iran, the UK and the USA, and participated in various Bahá'í activities and services, according to her own testimony, she only began to realize the significance and universality of the Faith while travelling in the Andean countries of South American in connection with her work to raise literacy rates. It was there that she was deeply impressed by the spiritual and social effects of the Faith in those regions. On a visit to the Bahá'í World Center in 1974, she formally embraced the Baha'i Faith, declaring her allegiance to the Bahá'í Cause in the presence of Hands of the Cause of God and members of the Universal House of Justice at the celebration of the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb in Shiraz in May 1844. Upon her return to Iran, she was appointed to the

National Committees for the Advancement of Women and Teacher Training for Bahá'í Education.

Just as it was for so many others, life for Lily and her family was completely upended by the Islamic revolution. In January 1979, with schools closed and the nation in turmoil, Lily and Iraj sent their young son Rama to live with his sister in Chicago so he could temporarily continue his high school education. A few months later, her husband Iraj facing arrest and possible execution, made what he hoped would be a short-term visit to the United States to attend an international conference in an executive capacity and to visit their daughter and son in Chicago. Amidst the turmoil and suspicion of that time, Lily was denied permission to leave the country for several months. In late summer, she too embarked on what she hoped would be a short visit to the United States while waiting for conditions in Iran to settle down. However, after her arrival she was warned by friends and colleagues of multiple calls for her execution due to her progressive outlook, and her embrace of the Bahá'í Faith earlier in the decade. It was not long before news arrived that all their property and assets in Iran were being confiscated and the hopes of an early return began to fade. Months became years, then decades and she was never again to return to her beloved homeland.

Soon after taking up residence in Chicago, she observed a dire need for materials to teach reading and writing in Persian to children of the rapidly growing Iranian diaspora. To meet this need, she authored two books: "*Farsi Beyamuzim*" (Teaching Persian) and "*Iran ra Beshenasim*" (To Know Iran) together with teacher guides which are still widely used globally. She followed up with "*Shadmaneh Kudakaneh*" (A Collection of Parables for Children) and "*Yek Hezar Vajeh PáyeH Zaban-e Farsi*" (One Thousand Basic Persian Words). Despite her family's straightened circumstances, she allowed them to be published with no royalties to facilitate their dissemination at a lower cost to expatriate Iranian families around the world.

After leaving Iran, Lily's services to the Bahá'í community grew exponentially. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States appointed her to its National Education Committee and the Bahá'ís of Chicago elected her to serve on the Spiritual Assembly of that city. In March 1983 Iraj received an appointment from the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Office in Bangkok. Thus, began a

six-year sojourn in Bangkok and Paris. She was elected to serve on the Bahá'í Spiritual Assemblies of both cities, supported a school and library in the northern mountains of Thailand and picked up a respectable grasp of the Thai language along the way, adding to her already enviable list of linguistic accomplishments in Persian, Russian, French and English. While living in Bangkok, Lily Ayman served as President of the United Nations Women Association of Thailand and was a member of the Literacy Education Panel at UNESCO Regional Headquarters for the Asia and Pacific Region.

1988 was another landmark year. Iraj retired from UNESCO in Paris and together they moved to St. Gallen, Switzerland where Iraj, with her able assistance assumed leadership of founding and managing the Landegg Academy at Wienacht near Lake Constance, developing it into a vibrant Bahá'í Learning Center and an International Institute for Educational Development and Administration. Over the next six years, Lily was coordinator of programs on Education and Family Life and organized and managed the Academy's Program of Education for Peace. She also served on the Spiritual Assembly of St. Gallen.

Soon upon her arrival in Switzerland, Lily Ayman was appointed by the Universal House of Justice to serve on a special Task Force on Education with a mandate to stimulate educational initiatives in Baha'i communities worldwide. As part of her contribution to this effort, she authored "*LITERACY: Some Practical Suggestions*" which was published under the imprimatur of the Task Force in 1992.

Lily was deeply in love with her home country, its language, and culture. Following her return to Chicago in 1994, she was invited to teach Persian as a visiting assistant professor at the University of Chicago. Together with her husband Iraj Ayman, she helped to strengthen and further develop the annual conferences of the Association of the Friends of Persian Culture, an activity which they had originally initiated and developed at Landegg Academy. For the remainder of her life, she devoted her energies to the Bahá'í Community of Chicago, serving as Secretary of its Spiritual Assembly, Managing Editor of its newsletter and as a member of various other administrative committees. Meanwhile, she continued assisting those who were engaged in teaching Persian and were contacting her from various parts of the world. An active participant

in myriad community activities, she will especially be remembered for her dedication to teaching the Faith, hosting monthly “fireside” discussion gatherings for over two decades. She was a stalwart supporter of the Irfan Colloquium, assisting with the organization of colloquia in California, Michigan, the United Kingdom and Italy, helping to recruit participants and insisting on the importance of maintaining the regularity of its activities. In addition to all the above, Lily Ayman will be remembered for her commitment to creating a vibrant and close-knit multi-racial Bahá’í community across the segregated neighborhoods that mark the south side of Chicago. She visited the homes of Bahá’ís, rich and poor, intellectuals and the unlettered, black, brown, no matter where they lived and they, likewise, were drawn to hers, creating lasting close relationships that embraced the diversity of the community.

Lily Ayman passed away in Chicago on September 6, 2018. In accordance with her wish, she is buried in the Oakwood Cemetery, a few blocks from the home of her dear friend and illustrious Bahá’í teacher, Gwili Posey. Lily’s resting place is nestled near the graves of the family of Hand of the Cause of God Corinne True, a site marked with an obelisk commemorating the spot visited by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in May 1912. Lily is survived by her husband, Iraj Ayman, her three children Roya, Saba and Rama and her five grandchildren, Omíd, Majíd, Jahán, Yasmine and Kian.

# Appendices

## Bibliography of the Bahá'í Writings and Their Abbreviations used in this book

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| <b>ABL</b> | 'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>'Abdu'l-Bahá in London</i>                    |
| <b>ADJ</b> | Shoghi Effendi, <i>Advent of Divine Justice</i>                |
| <b>ADP</b> | 'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>'Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy</i>         |
| <b>BWF</b> | Compilation, <i>Bahá'í World Faith</i>                         |
| <b>ESW</b> | Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Epistle to the Son of the Wolf</i>             |
| <b>FWU</b> | 'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Foundations of World Unity</i>                |
| <b>GDM</b> | Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Gems of Divine Mysteries</i>                   |
| <b>GPB</b> | Shoghi Effendi, <i>God Passes By</i>                           |
| <b>GWB</b> | Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh</i> |
| <b>HE</b>  | Shoghi Effendi, <i>High Endeavors: Messages to Alaska</i>      |
| <b>HW</b>  | Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Hidden Words</i>                               |
| <b>KA</b>  | Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i>                              |
| <b>KI</b>  | Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Kitáb-i-Íqán</i>                               |
| <b>LG</b>  | Compilation, <i>Lights of Guidance</i>                         |
| <b>MBW</b> | Shoghi Effendi, <i>Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-1957</i>  |
| <b>PB</b>  | Bahá'u'lláh, <i>The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh</i>            |
| <b>PDC</b> | Shoghi Effendi, <i>Promised Day is Come</i>                    |
| <b>PM</b>  | Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Prayers and Meditations</i>                    |
| <b>PT</b>  | 'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Paris Talks</i>                               |
| <b>PUP</b> | 'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Promulgation of Universal Peace</i>           |
| <b>SAQ</b> | 'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Some Answered Questions</i>                   |
| <b>SDC</b> | 'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Secret of Divine Civilization</i>             |

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>SCHC</b>   | Compilation, <i>Scholarship</i>   |
| <b>SLH</b>    | Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Summons of the Lord of Hosts</i>                            |
| <b>SVFV</b>   | Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys</i>                      |
| <b>SWAB</b>   | 'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá</i>           |
| <b>SWB</b>    | The Báb, <i>Selections from the Writings of The Báb</i>                     |
| <b>TAB1-3</b> | 'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas</i> , volumes 1-3            |
| <b>TAF</b>    | 'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Tablet to Auguste Forel</i>                                |
| <b>TB</b>     | Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas</i> |
| <b>TDP</b>    | 'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Tablets of the Divine Plan</i>                             |
| <b>TN</b>     | 'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>A Traveller's Narrative</i>                                |
| <b>TU</b>     | Bahá'u'lláh, <i>Tabernacle of Unity</i>                                     |
| <b>UD</b>     | Shoghi Effendi, <i>Unfolding Destiny</i>                                    |
| <b>WOB</b>    | Shoghi Effendi, <i>World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters</i>         |
| <b>WT</b>     | 'Abdu'l-Bahá, <i>Will and Testament</i>                                     |

## Contents of *Lights of ‘Irfán* Books 1-19

### *Lights of ‘Irfán* Book One, © 2000

Kitáb-i-Aqdas as Described and Glorified by Shoghi Effendi  
Cyrus Alai

The Seven Valleys of Bahá’u’lláh and Faríd ud-Dín Aṭṭár  
Sheila Banani

Common Teachings in Chinese Culture and the Bahá’í Faith  
Albert K. Cheung

The Bedrock of Bahá’í Belief: The Doctrine of Progressive Revelation  
Zaid Lundberg

The New Age Phenomenon and the Bahá’í Faith  
Zaid Lundberg

A Study of the Meaning of the Word “Al-Amr” in the Qur’án and in the  
Writings of Bahá’u’lláh  
Moojan Momen

The Book of Revelation Revealed in Glory: Summary of Glorious Revelation  
William Ridgers

The Development of Humankind  
Julio Savi

The Concept of Sacred Justice in Hebrew Eschatology  
Gary Selchert

Some Chronological Issues in the Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat of Bahá’u’lláh  
Peter Terry

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Explanation of the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh: Tablets and  
Talks Translated into English (1911-1920)  
Peter Terry

### *Lights of ‘Irfán* Book Two, © 2001

“Point” and “Letter” in the Writings of the Báb  
Muḥammad Afnán

Perception into Faith: A Radical Discontinuity within Unity  
William Barnes

An Introduction to the Súratu’l-Haykal (Discourse of The Temple)  
Mohamad Ghasem Bayat

The Firm Cord of Servitude  
Theo Cope

The Human Intellect: A Bahá'í-inspired Perspective  
Adrian John Davis

The Perfect Man and the Manifestation of God  
Y.A. Ioannesyan

The Mystic Cup: The Essential Mystical Nature of the Bahá'í Faith  
LeRoy Jones

A Short Poem by “Darvish” Muḥammad, Bahá'u'lláh: “Sáqí az ghayb-i-baqá'  
burqa' bar afkan az 'idhár”: Introduction and Translation  
Franklin D. Lewis

The Tablet of Unity (Lawḥ-i-Ittiḥád): A Provisional Translation  
Moojan Momen

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary on Quránic Verses Concerning the Overthrow  
of the Byzantines: The Stages of the Soul  
Moojan Momen

“What I Want to Say is Wordless”: Mystical Language, Revelation, Scholarship  
Ismael Velasco

Keys to the Proper Understanding of Islam in the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh  
Brian A. Wittman

### ***Lights of 'Irfán* Book Three, © 2002**

A Journey through the Seven Valleys  
Ghasem Bayat

The beginning that has no beginning: Bahá'í Cosmology  
Vahid Brown

Knowledge, Certitude, the Mystical Heart: Hidden Essence of God's Word  
LeRoy Jones

The Báb's Epistle on the Spiritual Journey towards God  
Todd Lawson

From Adam to Bahá'u'lláh: The Idea of a Chain of Prophecy  
Zaid Lundberg

The Wronged One: Shí'í Narrative Structure in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of  
Visitation for Mullá Ḥusayn  
William McCants

The Mystical Dimensions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order  
Kavian Milani

Mysticism and the Bahá'í Community  
Moojan Momen

The Lawḥ-i-Mánikjī Ááhib: intro and provisional translation  
Ramin Neshati

The Seven Valleys and the Scientific Method  
Robert Sarracino

Theological Responses to Modernity in 19th-century Middle East  
Oliver Scharbrodt

Mysticism in African Traditional Religion and in the Bahá'í Faith  
Enoch Tanyi

An Exposition on the Fire Tablet by Bahá'u'lláh  
James Thomas

Influence of Bábí Teachings on Ming Tang and 19<sup>th</sup>-century China  
Jianping Wang

### ***Lights of 'Irfán Book Four, © 2003***

An Epistle of Sayyid 'Alí Muḥammad 'the Báb' to Sultan 'Abdulmecid  
Necati Alkan

“Thee” and “thee” in the translation of the Súrih of the Temple  
Khazeh Fananapazir

The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings  
Ian Kluge

The Call into Being: Introduction to a Bahá'í Existentialism  
Ian Kluge

The Tablet to Hardegg: A Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to the Templer Leader  
Stephen Lambden

The Tablet of the Bell (Lawḥ-i-Náqúsí) of Bahá'u'lláh  
Stephen Lambden

The 'Akká Traditions in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf  
Moojan Momen

The Tablet of Maqṣúd: Guidance on Human Nature and Leadership  
Ramin Neshati

Inmates of the Celestial Pavilion  
Research department of the Bahá'í World Centre

Letters of the Quranic Dispensation  
Research Department of the Bahá'í World Centre

Genealogy and Genealogical Information in Persianate and Bábí Sources  
Sholeh A. Quinn

An Exposition of the Tablet of the World (Lawḥ-i-Dunya)  
James B. Thomas

Bahá'u'lláh's First Tablet to Napoleon III  
Ismael Velasco

### ***Lights of 'Irfán* Book Five, © 2004**

Number of the Letters of the Living  
Muhammad Afnán

Images of Christ in the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá  
Maryam Afshar

Letters to Bahá'í princesses: Tablets revealed in honour of the women of  
Ibn-i Asdaq's household  
Dominic Parviz Brookshaw

Textual Resurrection: Book, Imám, and Cosmos in the Qur'án Commentaries  
of the Báb  
Vahid Brown

Chronicles of a Birth: Early References to the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions in  
Spain (1850-1853)  
Amín E. Egea

Unity and Progressive Revelation: Comparing Bahá'í Principles with the  
Basic Concepts of Teilhard de Chardin  
Wolfgang A Klebel

Process Philosophy and the Bahá'í Writings: An Initial Exploration  
Ian Kluge

Kaleidoscope: Some Aspects of Angelology, Light, the Divine Throne and  
Color Mysticism in Bábí and Bahá'í Scripture  
Stephen Lambden

Karím Khán Kirmání and the Kitáb-i-Íqán  
Sholeh A. Quinn

Service, Joy and Sacrifice: An Essay on Commentaries by 'Abdu'l-Bahá  
James B. Thomas

The Manifestations of God and Their Function in Human History  
Iscander Micael Tinto

### ***Lights of 'Irfán* Book Six, © 2005**

The Life and Times of August Forel  
Sheila Banani

Bahá'í Understanding of Reincarnation in Relation to the World's Faiths  
Sateh Bayat and Vafá Bayat

Autobibliography in the Writings of the Báb  
Vahid Brown

Models and Idols: Towards a Philosophy of the Community of Mind  
Sháhbaz Fatheazam

True of Thyself: Mystical Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and Ken Wilber  
Wolfgang A. Klebel

Bahá'í Ontology: An Initial Reconnaissance  
Ian Kluge

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablet of the Two Calls: Civilizing Barbarity  
Manuchehr Mofidi

SunWALK: A Bahá'í-inspired Model of Education  
Roger Prentice

Interpretation and the Guardianship  
Ian Semple

The Signs of Prophet-Hood: An Exposition on a Tablet by 'Abdu'l-Bahá  
James B. Thomas

Infallibility of the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith  
Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

A Commentary on the Conclusion on True Mysticism  
Enoch Tanyi

### ***Lights of 'Irfán Book Seven, © 2006***

Andalusí Theosophy: A Recontextualization  
J. Vahid Brown

Out of Jewish Roots: Studies of Prayer Patterns in Jewish, Christian,  
Muslim and Bahá'í Worship  
Ted Brownstein

Chronicles of a Birth: Early References to the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions in  
Spain (1854-1876)  
Amín E. Egea

The St. Petersburg 19th Century Orientalist Collection of Materials on the  
Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths: Primary and Other Sources  
Y.A. Ioannesyan

Origins of the Bahá'í Concept of Unity and Causality: A Brief Survey of  
Greek, Neoplatonic, and Islamic Underpinnings  
B.R. Khadem

Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat, Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom: Towards a Progressive  
Bahá'í Theology  
Wolfgang A. Klebel

Further Explorations in Bahá'í Ontology  
Ian Kluge

“The newly born Bábe of that Day”: Mysticism in the Age of the Maturity  
of Humankind

Julio Savi

Religion and Exclusivism: a Bahá’í Perspective

Julio Savi

Seeds of Revelation and the Mystic Bond between The Báb and Bahá’u’lláh:  
Excerpts from the Persian Bayán

James B. Thomas

The Bahá’í Faith in the Arabic Speaking Middle East: Part 1 (1753-1863)

Ramsey Zeine

### ***Lights of ‘Irfán* Book Eight, © 2007**

Chronicles of a Birth: Early References to the Bábí and Bahá’í Religions in  
Spain (1873-1895)

Amín E. Egea, translated by Francisco J. Díaz

Baron Rosen’s Archive Collection of Bábí and Bahá’í Materials

Youli Ioannesyan

Mysticism East and West

Farhang Jahanpour

The Word is the Master Key for the Whole World: The “Teaching and Spirit  
of the Cause” in Dialogical and Personal Thinking

Wolfgang A. Klebel

Buddhism and the Bahá’í Writings: An Ontological Rapprochement

Ian Kluge

Why the Bahá’í Faith Is Not Pluralist

Grant S. Martin

The Art of Rhetoric in the Writings of Shoghi Effendi

Jack McLean

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Tablet on the Functioning of the Universal House of Justice

Moojan Momen

The Bahá’í Covenant

Alí Nakhjavani

Minimalism from a Bahá’í Perspective

Mahyad Zaerpoor Rahnamaie

Lawḥ-i-Maryam (Tablet to Maryam) Revealed by Bahá’u’lláh: A Provisional  
Translation and Commentary

Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani Mazzoli

The Emergence of World Civilization: An Exposition on Excerpts from the  
Writings of Shoghi Effendi

James B. Thomas

Designation of Mírzá Yahyá Azal in the Writings of the Báb: Will and Testament of the Báb; Making the Crooked Straight  
 Letters Written on Behalf of the Guardian  
 Daniel's Prophecies

***Lights of 'Irfán Book Nine, © 2008***

Emergence, Enchantment, Entanglement and Excellence of the Cosmos  
 Wolfgang Klebel

Bahá'u'lláh's "Most Sublime Vision"  
 Wolfgang Klebel

Postmodernism and the Bahá'í Writings Part One  
 Ian Kluge

Postmodernism and the Bahá'í Writings Part Two  
 Ian Kluge

Relativism and the Bahá'í Writings  
 Ian Kluge

Shoghi Effendi's The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh: A Theology of the Word  
 Jack McLean

Insider and Outsider Scholarship in Bahá'í Studies  
 Moojan Momen

The Lesser Peace and the Most Great Peace  
 'Alí Nakhjavani

The Súrat al-mulk and the Súrat al-mulúk: A Preliminary Comparison  
 Sholeh A. Quinn

Prophets and Mountains  
 Moshe Sharon

Prayers and rituals in the Bahá'í Faith: A Tablet to Jináb-i-Mullá 'Alí-Akbar  
 Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani

Tablet to Jináb-i-Mullá 'Alí-Akbar fí ardi'l-álif  
 trans. Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani

The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice  
 Ian Semple

The Rise of Justice in the Spiritual and Secular Life of Man: An Exposition  
 on excerpts from The Advent of Divine Justice  
 James B. Thomas

The Resurrection and Return of Jesus

Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith

***Lights of 'Irfán Book Ten, © 2009***

Further Comments on a Passage of the Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat  
Amín Egea

The Bahá'í Worldview on Unity of Religions: Progressive Revelation:  
Principles and Insights from the History of Science  
Jena Khadem Khodadad

A Glimpse into the Life of Laura Dreyfus-Barney  
Mona Khademi

In the Heart of All That Is: "Heart" in Bahá'í Writings and Science  
Wolfgang A. Klebel

In the Pure Soil of Thy Heart: "Heart" in Bahá'í Writings and  
Neurocardiology  
Wolfgang A. Klebel

Some Answered Questions: A Philosophical Perspective  
Ian Kluge

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit: Chapter 31 of *Some Answered Questions*  
Moojan Momen

Man Is Man: 'Abdu'l-Bahá on Human Evolution  
Ramin Neshati

Methods and qualities of the seekers of Reality in *Some Answered*  
*Questions* in the light of Bahá'í Scriptures  
Julio Savi

Comments on the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice

Some Thoughts on the Ministry of the Universal House of Justice  
'Alí Nakhjávání

Classification of the Bahá'í Sacred Texts

Development of Bahá'í Scholarly Activities

***Lights of 'Irfán Book Eleven, © 2010***

Chronicles of a Birth Part III: Early References to the Bábí and Bahá'í  
Religions in Spain (1873-1895)  
Amín E. Egea

Reflections on Some Messianic Prophecies in Shaykhi Works  
Y. A. Ioannesyan

Textual Context and Literary Criticism: A Case Study  
Gerald Keil

The Path of God  
Wolfgang A. Klebel

Neoplatonism and the Bahá'í Writings

Ian Kluge

Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality (Lawḥ Basít al-Ḥaqíqa)

Moojan Momen

Dashavatara and Progressive Revelation

Anupam Premanand

Towards a Contextualization of Bahá'u'lláh's Lawḥ-i Qíná'

Sholeh A. Quinn

The Indispensability of Consultation for Ordering Human Affairs

Ian Semple

Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice

Infallibility of the Universal House of Justice

Authority and Centrality of the Universal House of Justice

***Lights of 'Irfán Book Twelve, © 2011***

The Travels of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and their Impact on the Press

Amín Egea

The Essence of Man

Wolfgang A. Klebel

Neo-Platonism and the Bahá'í Faith, Part II

Ian Kluge

Preparing Bahá'í Communities to Embrace Gender Equality

Bahá'ieh Rouhani Ma'ani

Perfection and Refinement: Towards an Aesthetics of the Báb

Moojan Momen

The Duty of Kindness and Sympathy Towards Strangers

Julio Savi

Mayflowers in the Ville Lumière

Julio Savi

The Indispensability of Consultation

Ian Semple

The Mystery of Divinity

James B. Thomas

Speaking on Socio-Political Order

Teaching the Cause of God: A Two-Edged Sword

Alí Nakhjavani

Relativism, A Theological and Cognitive Basis for Bahá'í Ideas about God

Moojan Momen

***Lights of 'Irfán Book Thirteen, © 2012***

The Fragility of Goodness

Sháhbaz Fatheazam

I Know Not How to Sing Thy Praise

Wolfgang A. Klebel

The Bahá'í Writings and Kant's 'Perpetual Peace'

Ian Kluge

The New Atheism – A Bahá'í Perspective

Ian Kluge

The Choice of the West for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Epoch-making trip

Baharieh Rouhani Ma'ani

Apocalyptic Thinking and Process Thinking

Moojan Momen

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Encounter with Modernity

Wendi Momen

Interpretation and Elucidation

Alí Nakhjavani

Bahá'u'lláh's Persian Poems Written before 1863

Julio Savi

Clouds and the Hiding God

Moshe Sharon

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Visit to North America, 1912

Robert H. Stockman

Authority and Centrality of the Universal House of Justice

Whether the Apostle Paul was a "False Teacher"

The Religion of the Sabaeans and African-based Religions in the Americas

Supreme Tribunal (Mahkamiy-i-Kubra)

Alí Nakhjavani

In Memoriam: Ian Semple (1928–2011)

***Lights of 'Irfán Book Fourteen, © 2013***

Yinyáng Cosmology and the Bahá'í Faith

Phyllis Ghim-Lian Chew

Collective Security: An Indispensable Requisite for a Lasting Peace

Sovaida Ma'ani Ewing

Bahá'u'lláh as the Messianic Theophany of the Divine Fire in Zoroastrianism  
Farshid Kazemi

“These Four States Conferred Upon Thee”: Tetrarchic Thinking in  
Philosophy – Theology – Psychology  
Wolfgang Klebel

Reason and the Bahá'í Writings  
Ian Kluge

Eyewitness Account of the Massacre of Bahá'ís in Nayriz on the Naw-Ruz  
'Abdu'l-Bahá Interred the Remains of The Báb on Mt. Carmel  
Baharieh Rouhani Maani

Role of Principles in the Bahá'í Faith: Principles and Fashion  
Farjam Majd

Commentary on a Passage in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf  
Moojan Momen

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Elucidation of the Concept of the Oneness of Humanity  
During His Western Travels  
Wendi Momen

'Abdu'l-Bahá in Egypt: September 1910 – 5 December 1913  
Julio Savi

Individual Rights and Freedoms  
Universal House of Justice

***Lights of 'Irfán Book Fifteen, © 2014***

The Emergence and Organization of Chinese Religions  
Phyllis Ghim Lian Chew

Finding the Trace of the Traceless Friend: Reflection on Bahá'í Scholarship  
as a Journey in the Valley of Search  
Wolfgang A. Klebel

The Bahá'í Writings: A Meta-ethical Excursion  
Part I: Background and a First Dive into the Writings  
Part II: Deeper into the Writings  
Ian Kluge

The Greatest Holy Leaf's Unparalleled Role in Religious History and the  
Significance of the Arc, the Site of Her Resting Place  
Bahá'ieh Rouhani Ma'ani

Origins of Creation  
Farjam Majd

Bahá'í Consultation and the Transformation of Society  
Moojan Momen

The Inebriation of His Enrapturing Call: (*mast-and bulbulán*)  
Julio Savi

Tablet of Patience: Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh and Selected Topics  
Foad Seddigh

Non-Involvement in Politics  
Universal House of Justice

In Memoriam:  
Hushmand Fatheazam (1924-2013)  
Amín Banani (1926-2013)  
Mahboubeh Arjmand (d. 2013)

### ***Lights of 'Irfán* Book Sixteen, © 2015**

The Ten Plagues of the Exodus in Light of the Bahá'í Writings  
JoAnn M. Borovicka

Freud's Transference and the Four States of Bahá'u'lláh  
Wolfgang A. Klebel

Procrustes' Bed: The Insufficiency of Secular Humanism  
Ian Kluge

Women and Wisdom in Scripture  
Baharieh Rouhani Ma'ani

On Existence and Qualities of the Human Soul  
Farjam Majd

Shoghi Effendi's Translation of Terms Related to Law in Bahá'í Scripture  
Moojan Momen

Shared Prosperity: How Does That Work?

Wendi Momen

A Hymn to Love (*Sáqí, bi-dih ábí*)  
Julio Savi

“At Dawn the Friend came to my bed”: An early fruit of the Supreme Pen  
Julio Savi

Intellectual Life and the Future of Bahá’í Studies  
Universal House of Justice

In Memoriam: Kamran Ekbal (1946-2014)

### ***Lights of ‘Irfán Book Seventeen, © 2016***

Addressing the Rising Tide of Globalization and Amorality in the Present World  
Order and Its Implications on Extremes of Wealth and Poverty  
Rama Ayman

Parallels in the Ministries of Táhirih and Paul  
JoAnn M. Borovicka

The Language of the Heart: From Dream Language towards Understanding the  
Language of the Heart  
Wolfgang Klebel

Nietzsche and the Bahá’í Writings: A First Look  
Ian Kluge

Memorials of the Faithful: Virtues of Inner and Outer Transformation  
Marlene Koswan

Memorials of the Faithful: The Democratization of Sainthood  
Moojan Momen

The Concept of ‘Faithfulness’ in the Bahá’í Texts in English Translation  
Wendi Momen

An Homage to Memorials of the Faithful  
Julio Savi

Significance of Some Sites Mentioned in Memorials of the Faithful  
Foad Seddigh

Hagiography: The Art Inspirational Examples for a Religious Community

Iscander Micael Tinto

Translation of Key Bahá'í Terms  
Universal House of Justice

Suggestions about Changes in the Administrative Order  
Universal House of Justice

In Memoriam: Houshang Arjmand (1930-2015)

### ***Lights of 'Irfán* Book Eighteen, © 2017**

An Inquiry on the Role of Religion in Wealth and Poverty  
Hooshmand Badee

Biblical References in Tablets of the Divine Plan  
JoAnn Borovicka

Bahá'u'lláh and the Luminous Mind: Bahá'í Gloss on a Buddhist Puzzle  
Roland Faber

Themes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets of The Divine Plan Illustrated by Scriptural  
References to the Bible and the Qur'án  
Lameh Fananapazir

Grand Narratives and the Bahá'í Writings  
Ian Kluge

Nietzsche and the Bahá'í Writings: A First Look  
Ian Kluge

"Some Answered Questions" and Its Compiler  
Baharieh Rouhani Ma'ani

A Comparison between the Commentary and Interpretation of an Islamic  
Tradition by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Ayatu'llah Khomeini  
Moojan Momen

In the Presence of the Beloved: Bahá'u'lláh's Law'-i-Liqá': A Revised Provisional  
Translation and Notes  
Nima Rafiei

Poetry in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Writings and Utterances  
Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani

## ***Lights of ‘Irfán Book Nineteen, © 2018***

Some Reflections on the Principle of Unity/Oneness  
Hooshmand Badee

Bahá'u'lláh's Life and Mission: "This is the One Who Hath Glorified the Son"  
JoAnn Borovicka

Laozi: A Lost Prophet?  
Roland Faber

Freedom and the Baha'i Writings  
Ian Kluge

The Kitáb-i-Iqán (The Book of Certitude): Revolutionizing the Concepts of Religion,  
Eschatology and Theology  
Sohrab Kourosh

Power and the Bahá'í community  
Moojan Momen

A Tablet by Bahá'u'lláh  
provisional translation by Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani

Ancient Poems as Means of Revelation, in an Early Tablet by Bahá'u'lláh  
Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani

The Mathnaví of Rúhu'lláh, the Martyr  
translated by Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani

The Mathnaví by Rúhu'lláh Varqá, the Martyr: A Few Notes on Its Historical Context  
and Poetical Content  
Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani

The Countenance of the Blessed Beauty in the Mirror of Mawlúd Tablets  
Foad Seddigh

End of Days  
Moshe Sharon

Bahá'í Fast: a compilation

Persian translation of Arabic verses  
Universal House of Justice

In Memoriam: Dr. Muhammad Afnan (1930 – 2017)

In Memoriam: Dr. Heshmat Shariary (1934 – 2018)

## Publications of the ‘Irfán Colloquium

- Moojan Momen (ed.), *Scripture & Revelation* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997)
- Moojan Momen (ed.), *The Bahá’í Faith and the World Religions* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2005)
- Iraj Ayman (ed.), *The Lights of ‘Irfán: Compilations of Papers Presented at ‘Irfán Colloquia* (in English), Books One to Twenty (2000–2019)
- Iraj Ayman (ed.), *Safini-yi ‘Irfán: Compilations of Papers Presented at ‘Irfán Colloquia* (in Persian), Books One to Twenty-one (1998–2018)
- Farah Dustdar (ed.), *Beiträge des ‘Irfán-Kolloquiums: Compilations of Papers Presented at ‘Irfán Colloquia* (in German), Books One to Six (Hofheim, Germany: Bahá’í Verlag, 2004–2017)
- Maryam Afshar, *Images of Christ in the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (2004)
- Wolfgang Klebel, *Revelation of Unity, Unity of Revelation* (Darmsdat, Germany: Reyhani Verlag, 2009)
- Vahid Rafati, *Áftab Ámad Dalíl-i Áftáb* (The proof of the Sun is the Sun) (Darmsdat, Germany: Reyhani Verlag, 2010)
- Vahid Rafati, *Badáy-i-‘i-Ma‘ání va Tafsír* (The Wonders of Inner Meanings and Interpretation): *Selected Commentaries of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on Qur’anic Verses and Islamic Traditions* (Darmsdat: Reyhani Verlag, 2013)
- Sháhbaz Fatheazam, *The Last Refuge: Fifty Years of the Universal House of Justice* (Darmsdat, Germany: Reyhani Verlag, 2015)

## Distributors of ‘Irfán Publications

### **Bahá’í Distribution Service (BDS)**

415 Linden Ave., Wilmette, IL 60091-2886, USA

Tel.: (847)425-7950 Fax: (847)425-7951

E-mail: BDS@usbnc.org

### **Bahá’í Verlag** (for German publications)

Eppsteiner Str. 89, D-65719, Hofheim, Germany

Tel: (49) 6192-22921 Fax: (49)6192-22936

E-mail: office@bahai-verlag.de

### **Reyhani Verlag**

Benzweg 4, 64293, Darmsstadt, Germany

Tel: 49-6151-95170 Fax: 49-6151-9517299

E-Mail: druck@reyhani.de

## Vision and Aims of the ‘Irfán Colloquium

The ‘Irfán Colloquium aims at promoting and supporting systematic studies of fundamental principles of the Bahá’í beliefs, the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá’í Faith, the interface of the Bahá’í Faith with intellectual schools of thought and religious traditions, and looking at current challenges in human society from the Bahá’í perspective. *‘Irfán* is a Persian word referring to mystical, theological and spiritual knowledge. The ‘Irfán Colloquium and its publications are sponsored by Haj Mehdi Memorial Fund.

The Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund was established by Houshang Arjmand (1930–2015) in 1992 to honor his grand-father, Haj Mehdi Arjmand, and is dedicated to promoting the scholarly study of the Bahá’í Faith. Haj Mehdi Arjmand (1861–1941) was a Persian scholar and teacher of the Bahá’í Faith who became well known in Iran for his profound knowledge of the Bible, Qur’an, and Bahá’í scriptures. The primary activity of the Fund is sponsoring annual sessions of ‘Irfán Colloquium and ‘Irfán publications.

In 2012, benefiting from the guidance received from the Universal House of Justice, a management board was appointed for this fund to function as a Bahá’í agency under the direction of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States. Organizing and holding ‘Irfán Colloquia started in 1993 and are presently held seven times every year in North America and Western Europe in English, Persian and German languages under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly of the host country.

As of June 2019 one hundred and sixty sessions of colloquia have been held. Papers in English presented or received at the ‘Irfán Colloquia are annually published in a series of volumes of the *Lights of ‘Irfán*.