

# The Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha‘sha‘ (The Tablet of the Effulgent Praise): A Little-Known but Significant Early Writing of Bahá’u’lláh

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## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to acquaint the reader with a Tablet of Bahá’u’lláh which until now has remained relatively unknown but is worthy of great attention, given that it features revelatory language and likely dates to the early 1850s. If true, the Tablet would constitute significant evidence that Bahá’u’lláh expressed Himself as a theophany, in authenticated writing, long before He publicly declared Himself to be a Manifestation of God. For ease of reference, the present author proposes that this Tablet be called the Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha‘sha‘ (The Tablet of the Effulgent Praise), after the first few words of its opening sentence.

The article will feature an exploration of two possible hypotheses as to when the Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha‘sha‘ might have been revealed, along with the historical context that attends these periods, followed by an analysis of selected passages from the Tablet (made available in provisional English translation elsewhere).

## Dating the Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha‘sha‘

The time and place in which this authentic Tablet of Bahá’u’lláh was revealed, as well as the identity of its addressee, have all yet to be definitively established.<sup>1</sup> No primary sources have been found that speak to any of these questions, and there do not appear to be any references to the Tablet in Bahá’u’lláh’s other Writings, nor those of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. This means that, until any such sources come to light, one is limited to the text of the Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha‘sha‘ itself to judge when it might have been revealed.

Even with this limitation, however, it seems reasonable to assume from the overall style of the Tablet that it belongs to sometime in the early 1850s. The challenge lies in arriving at a conclusion any more precise than that.

## The 1851 Hypothesis

In the fourth volume of his *Tárikh-i-Zuhúru’l-Haqq*, a series of books on Bábí and Bahá’í history, Fáḍil Mázandarání includes this Tablet (which he calls a *tawqí‘*, a decree or other writing from an exalted personage) in his chapter on the events of 1851,<sup>2</sup> stating that it was written in the Shimírán district of northern Ṭíhrán and addressed to an eminent Bábí by the name of Shaykh ‘Alí Turshízí, known as ‘Azím.<sup>3</sup>

Mázandarání's volume is one of the only places where the original text of this Tablet has been made available to any extent. Having been completed in 1953, it was the first work to discuss the Tablet at any length, and virtually no other publication in the entire corpus of Bahá'í literature has even mentioned it in the seventy years since.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Mázandarání should certainly be credited with being the first person to call attention to the Tablet and gift it to the world for future study.

The problem with all his assertions, however, is that they are not substantiated by any tangible proof. They are simply presented as self-evident truths, when there is nothing in the Tablet itself that explicitly identifies Shimírán as the place of revelation or 'Azím as the addressee. Furthermore, the content of the Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha'sha' seems inconsistent with the events of 1851. If the scope of Mázandarání's chapter were to be expanded to also include the events of 1852—as has been done in the 2011 edition of *Tárikh-i-Zuhúru'l-Ḥaqq*, volume 4 by Bahá'í-Verlag<sup>5</sup>—then it could be argued that some of the content has the potential to line up with historical events.

For instance, there is no evidence that Bahá'u'lláh was ever in Shimírán in 1851, but it is well documented that He was there in the summer of 1852, when He returned from a sojourn in 'Iráq at the invitation of Mírzá Áqá Khán Núrí, the new prime minister, first staying for about a month at the home of Ja'far-Qulí Khán—the brother of Áqá Khán Núrí—and then at the residence of the prime minister himself in the village of Afchih. Bahá'í histories indicate that it was during His stay in this village that Bahá'u'lláh learned of 'Azím's plot to assassinate Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, and that, in an interview with him there, Bahá'u'lláh advised him “in the most emphatic terms, to abandon the plan he had conceived.”<sup>6</sup>

Set against this historical backdrop, Mázandarání's argument seems logical: Bahá'u'lláh revealed the Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha'sha' for 'Azím as the immediate addressee, and for the Bábí plotters as a more general audience, to dissuade them all from carrying out their scheme. Viewed in this light, Bahá'u'lláh's condemnations of the Bábís (¶¶ 2-3, possibly ¶¶ 7-8) and His ominous warnings about the grave consequences their actions will entail (¶¶ 4, 12) could be seen as references to the assassination plot.

To reiterate, however, this hypothesis is viable only in 1852, not 1851 as Mázandarání himself originally asserted. Yet there is too much in the Tablet that does not fit even in the context of 1852—details that cannot be simply ignored or dismissed as unimportant. For example, in ¶ 8, Bahá'u'lláh laments that God's loved ones (likely the Bábís) are doing as they please unto “him who is [God's] Countenance” (apparently Bahá'u'lláh Himself). Apart from the ill-conceived attempt on the life of Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, there is virtually nothing in the historical record to suggest that Bahá'u'lláh had witnessed such reprehensible behavior from the Bábís prior to His exile from Persia (12 January 1853) as to warrant this kind of language.

Thus, the notion that this Tablet was revealed at some point in Ṭíhrán, whether in 1851 or 1852, is plausible only through an unproven portrayal of events that seems not to stand up to historical scrutiny. This raises the question of why Mázandarání asserted it to be true. We know from his autobiographical account in *Tárikh-i-Zuhúru'l-Ḥaqq*<sup>7</sup> that he obtained Tablets while

meeting with Bahá'ís in the course of his extensive travels. It may well be the case that he procured this one, the *Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha'sha'*, as part of those travels from someone who provided him with the information that he went on to repeat in his volume—namely, that it was revealed for 'Azím in *Shimírán* in 1851. But since Mázandarání did not cite any sources, this, too—as with nearly everything about this hypothesis—falls into the realm of speculation.

### **The Early Baghdád Hypothesis**

The manner in which Bahá'u'lláh deplores the state of the Bábí community in this Tablet aligns much more neatly with the events of early 1853 to early 1854 as described in *God Passes By*, a history of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths written by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>8</sup> This was, in his words, a period in which “the cup of Bahá'u'lláh's sorrows was . . . running over.”<sup>9</sup> With the initial years of Bahá'u'lláh's time in Baghdád came “the first attacks aiming at the disruption of His Faith from within,”<sup>10</sup> the most threatening of them a crisis “purely internal in character . . . occasioned solely by the acts, the ambitions and follies of those who were numbered among His recognized fellow-disciples.”<sup>11</sup> This seems to refer primarily to the activities of Siyyid Muḥammad Iṣfahání, whom Bahá'u'lláh would later stigmatize as “the source of envy and the quintessence of mischief,”<sup>12</sup> and His own half-brother, Mírzá Yaḥyá. Remarking on the relationship between these co-conspirators at this juncture, Shoghi Effendi writes that “Siyyid Muḥammad had . . . settled in Karbilá, and was busily engaged, with Mírzá Yaḥyá as his lever, in kindling dissensions and in deranging the life of the exiles and of the community that had gathered about them,”<sup>13</sup> and characterizes their machinations as a clearly discernible “clandestine opposition, whose aim was to nullify every effort exerted, and frustrate every design conceived, by Bahá'u'lláh for the rehabilitation of a distracted community.”<sup>14</sup> He continues:

Insinuations, whose purpose was to sow the seeds of doubt and suspicion and to represent [Bahá'u'lláh] as a usurper, as the subverter of the laws instituted by the Báb, and the wrecker of His Cause, were being incessantly circulated. His Epistles, interpretations, invocations and commentaries were being covertly and indirectly criticized, challenged and misrepresented. An attempt to injure His person was even set afoot but failed to materialize.<sup>15</sup>

To compound this ongoing sedition, the dwindling numbers of those who still identified as Bábís, as well as the evident deterioration of a unified Bábí community into various sects, would have only added to Bahá'u'lláh's distress. By Nabíl Zarandí's account, what little was left of the Bábís in Qazvín at this time “had split into four factions, bitterly opposed to one another, and a prey to the most absurd doctrines and fancies.”<sup>16</sup> Bahá'u'lláh Himself found, upon His arrival in Baghdád, “no more than a single Bábí,”<sup>17</sup> and in the city of Kázimayn “a mere handful of His compatriots remained who still professed, in fear and obscurity, their faith in the Báb.”<sup>18</sup>

It was around this time that Bahá'u'lláh began to write about these troubling circumstances. The following are passages from one such Tablet:

The days of tests are now come. Oceans of dissension and tribulation are surging, and the Banners of Doubt are, in every nook and corner, occupied in stirring up mischief and in

leading men to perdition. . . . Suffer not the voice of some of the soldiers of negation to cast doubt into your midst, neither allow yourselves to become heedless of Him Who is the Truth, inasmuch as in every Dispensation such contentions have been raised. God, however, will establish His Faith, and manifest His light albeit the stirrers of sedition abhor it. . . . Watch ye every day for the Cause of God . . . . All are held captive in His grasp. No place is there for any one to flee to. Think not the Cause of God to be a thing lightly taken, in which any one can gratify his whims. In various quarters a number of souls have, at the present time, advanced this same claim. The time is approaching when . . . every one of them will have perished and been lost, nay will have come to naught and become a thing unremembered, even as the dust itself.<sup>19</sup>

These admonitions clearly resemble those in the *Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Muṣḥa'sha'*—and the similarities do not end there. At one point in this period of history, Bahá'u'lláh instructed His amanuensis, Mírzá Áqá Ján, not to heed “the idle talk of the people of the Bayán, who pervert the meaning of every word.”<sup>20</sup> Here, too, we have a notable echo in the *Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Muṣḥa'sha'*, where Bahá'u'lláh rebukes the Bábís for having “flagrantly . . . subverted the all-encompassing, the blessed, the pre-eternal Word of God” (¶ 4). Additional thematic similarities will be explored in the textual analysis of the Tablet below.

Shoghi Effendi has quoted amply from other Writings of Bahá'u'lláh that belong to this period and vividly demonstrate how distraught He had become by this time. Here is a small sample from that selection:

So grievous hath been My weeping that I have been prevented from making mention of Thee and singing Thy praises.<sup>21</sup>

So loud hath been the voice of My lamentation that every mother mourning for her child would be amazed, and would still her weeping and her grief.<sup>22</sup>

It was these “woes at their blackest,”<sup>23</sup> this “sadness that filled His soul”<sup>24</sup>—brought on by “the perfidy of [His] friends”<sup>25</sup>—that would soon prompt Bahá'u'lláh to withdraw to the Kurdish mountains of Sulaymáníyyih from 1854 to 1856.

Moreover, the style of the languages in which the Tablet was originally revealed, a mixture of Persian and Arabic, is strikingly similar to that of others from the early *Baghdád* period.<sup>26</sup> The text includes several neologisms and deviations from standard grammar that are typical of what might be called “the Bábí style,”<sup>27</sup> which remained alive and well in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh up until the mid-1850s. Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh Himself would later attest to this distinctive feature of His early *Baghdád* Writings in one of His Tablets to an eminent follower, Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín, in which He stated that “in the early days, when the Divine verses were revealed, absolutely no regard was given to the grammatical conventions of the people.”<sup>28</sup>

Alternatively, it could be argued that Writings that use this style might belong to the late *Ṭihrán* period, given its chronological proximity to the early *Baghdád* period, but such an argument would be impossible to prove. At present, there is only one extant Writing of Bahá'u'lláh, the *Rashḥ-i-'Amá*, which has been decisively proven to have been revealed in *Ṭihrán* (more on this

below). A sample size of just one Writing is insufficient for drawing conclusions as to what a conventional “late Ṭīhrán style” might look like. In the absence of other contemporaneous Writings to compare it with, it is equally likely for a single Writing to be typical or atypical of any other Writings from the same period. Thus, it cannot be proven strictly on stylistic grounds that the *Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha’sha’* was a late Ṭīhrán Tablet. With the early Baghdád period, however, there is a larger sample to work with, as has been demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs.

## The Grand Claims of the Bábís

Eschatologically speaking, the early 1850s were a heady time for the Bábís, marked by at least twenty claims to some sort of theophanic or messianic status.<sup>29</sup> It should not be impossible, then, to imagine that Bahá’u’lláh Himself might have advanced such a claim, however obliquely, before He publicly declared Himself a Manifestation of God in 1863—but until now, there was little evidence that one could point to in support of that argument.

For instance, in his narrative of Bábí history, Nabíl Zarandí mentions that, at the Conference of *Badasht*, Bahá’u’lláh “revealed a Tablet”<sup>30</sup> every day that would be “chanted in the presence of the assembled believers,”<sup>31</sup> and also that “He bestowed a new name”<sup>32</sup> upon each of the attendees. From this account, one can reasonably deduce that Bahá’u’lláh openly believed Himself, as early as 1848, to have been invested with the authority to issue Tablets and confer titles on His fellow Bábís. Yet any attempt to conclude that He necessarily regarded Himself as a Manifestation of God in so doing would be inevitably constrained by the absence of those Tablets, which could shed light on the nature of His self-perception at the time but are presumed to be lost, and also by the fact that Nabíl himself was not actually a witness to these events at the Conference of *Badasht*.

To give another example: in that same narrative, Nabíl relates an anecdote conveyed to him by a Bábí named *Shaykh Ḥasan Zunúzí*, in which Bahá’u’lláh told Zunúzí while in Karbalá in 1851 that He was the return of the Imám Ḥusayn—a secret He urged him not to disclose.<sup>33</sup> This evidence is stronger in that it tells us precisely what Bahá’u’lláh was claiming to be, and shows us that He did it at least once well before 1863, but it is still hindered by the same constraint: it comes to us secondhand, not directly from the witness himself.

Beyond these accounts, one might also cite the *Rashḥ-i-‘Amá*, a poem of Bahá’u’lláh revealed somewhere in Ṭīhrán (possibly the *Síyáh-Chál*, but not necessarily),<sup>34</sup> as proof that He saw Himself as a Manifestation of God in the very early 1850s. To be sure, the poem includes several compelling verses on this theme:

From out the fountain of Our heart hath God’s celestial river flowed;  
This cup of honeyed nectar from Our ruby lips is raining down.<sup>35</sup>

Behold Bahá’s outpouring grace, the bounty of the clouds above,  
Which, merged into a single song, in God’s own voice is raining down.<sup>36</sup>

Behold the Countenance Divine! Behold the Maid of Paradise!  
Behold the grace upon the world from Our own presence raining down.<sup>37</sup>

Behold the fire of Moses, see His hand that shineth white;  
Behold the heart of Sinai—from Our hand all raining down.<sup>38</sup>

Evidence of this sort is clearly the strongest considered thus far, as it comes from the pen of Bahá'u'lláh Himself. But while the poem is highly suggestive, its theophanic tenor is still neither as explicit nor as salient as that of the *Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Muṣḥa'sha'*.

It would be appropriate at this juncture to briefly compare Bahá'u'lláh's claims in that Tablet to those of His fellow Bábís. One such claimant, Mullá Muḥammad Ja'far Naráqí, identified three categories into which these claims can be divided:<sup>39</sup>

1. The claim to be the return of the Imám Ḥusayn (*Ḥusayníyyat*)
2. The claim to be “Him Whom God shall make manifest” (*man yuzhiruhu'lláh*)
3. The claim to be both of these simultaneously

According to the important research that Denis MacEoin has done along these lines,<sup>40</sup> there were two people who made the third claim:<sup>41</sup> Siyyid Baṣír Hindí, a blind Indian Bábí, and Bahá'u'lláh Himself. Interestingly, however, Siyyid Baṣír considered himself subordinate to Bahá'u'lláh, Who “exercised considerable influence over him.”<sup>42</sup> To quote the *Nuḡtatu'l-Káf*, an early Bábí history:

... the effulgences of the lordship of that splendour of paradise [Bahá'u'lláh] shone forth in the temple of his [Baṣír's] servitude.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, MacEoin states that Siyyid Baṣír “certainly appears to have regarded himself as a receptacle for spiritual manifestations,”<sup>44</sup> and that he believed these spiritual manifestations to have been transmitted to him by other individuals, including Bahá'u'lláh.<sup>45</sup>

Yet MacEoin ultimately admits that “it is difficult to determine what the claims of Sayyid Baṣír entailed,”<sup>46</sup> probably because we have nothing from him firsthand, and the claims attributed to him in secondary accounts are not clearly defined. Indeed, virtually all of the claims advanced by these Bábís suffer from this lack of definition. Immediately after listing the names of twenty Bábí claimants he was able to identify through his research, MacEoin writes:

Many of the above-mentioned are extremely obscure and are likely to remain so; for others we possess only the most rudimentary information. It is difficult to establish with any clarity or in any detail what sort of claims were made by them or what kind of doctrines they taught.

In his extensive survey of the Báb's life and Writings, *Ahd-i-A'lá*, the late Abu'l-Qásim Afnán sheds additional light on the nature of these claims that would be worthwhile to explore below.

Afnán writes that a certain **Shaykh Ismá'íl**, a seminarian from Iṣfahán, was converted to the Bábí religion by Muḥammad-Qásim 'Abá-Dúz, a survivor of the Battle of Fort Ṭabarsí, and that **Shaykh Ismá'íl** gradually went on to regard himself as the return of the Prophet Muḥammad and Muḥammad-Qásim 'Abá-Dúz as that of the Imám 'Alí. Apparently, **Shaykh Ismá'íl** also maintained that he was “Him Whom God shall make manifest.” Both he and Muḥammad-Qásim 'Abá-Dúz were put to death after they went to the bazaar in Iṣfahán one day and **Shaykh Ismá'íl** declared, “Lo, Muḥammad, the Apostle of God, has appeared!”

**Mírzá Asadu'lláh Khu'í**, surnamed **Dayyán** by the Báb, was another Bábí who claimed to be “Him Whom God shall make manifest” and amassed a relatively large group of followers who came to be known as “Dayyánís.” Hoping that he might meet **Mírzá Yaḥyá**, who had presented himself as the nominee of the Báb and the promoter of the Bayán, **Dayyán** traveled to Baghdád, but **Mírzá Yaḥyá** refused to meet with him. So offended was **Dayyán** by the behavior of **Mírzá Yaḥyá** that he lost all affection for him and deemed him unworthy of the station to which he had laid claim. Sometime thereafter, he went to meet Bahá'u'lláh and developed an attitude of reverent deference to Him. It was this devotion to Bahá'u'lláh that so irritated **Mírzá Yaḥyá** and added to his jealousy that he ordered a certain **Mírzá Muḥammad Mázandarání** to kill him—a fact to which Bahá'u'lláh attests in the *Kitáb-i-Badí'*, writing that even **Mírzá Yaḥyá** himself speaks to the plot in his *Mustaqiz*.<sup>48</sup>

**Shaykh 'Alí Turshízí**, the same **'Azím** discussed above, was one of the first Bábís of **Khurásán** and had been converted to the Bábí religion by Mullá Ḥusayn. He styled himself *Sultán-i-Manṣúr* (“the [Divinely] Aided King”), claimed to be “Him Whom God shall make manifest,” and gained a number of followers in Ṭihrán. He had made that place his primary residence and would make brief trips to cities nearby when the occasion warranted it. One of these was a trip to **Káshán**, where he met with Siyyid Baṣír Hindí. Owing to the similarity of their claims, they became embroiled in heated conflict, which was eventually quelled, to a degree, through the intermediation of Ḥájí **Mírzá Jání**. We are quite fortunate to have a letter from **Jání** himself to his brother, Ḥájí Muḥammad-Ismá'íl **Dhabíḥ**, in which he describes this confrontation and the events leading up to it. Here is a translation of some passages from the letter that will be of interest:

... in the month of **Sha'bán** [1267 AH / June 1851],<sup>49</sup> **Jináb-i-Baṣír** came to the Land of **Káshán**, as did **Jináb-i-'Azím**. Prior to the arrival of **Jináb-i-Baṣír**, I heard that he had made pretensions to revelations [or manifestations; *ṣáhib-i-zuhúrát*], laid claim to the station of the Ḥusayní secret [*maqám-i-sirr-i-ḥusayn*]; i.e., that he was the return of the Imám Ḥusayn], and unloosed his tongue to recite verses. Some of his verses had been brought to me, but I did not understand [them] all that well until he himself came. At the first gathering, we spoke a bit about the unity of God [*'ilm-i-tawḥíd*], and I believed myself to be more knowledgeable than he. Upon reflecting awhile, I realized that he enjoyed a greater [understanding of] the subtleties of God's unity than I—that he had made more progress on the mystical path, and that he was possessed of [mystical] attraction [*jadhb*] and effulgence [*iṣhráq*]. In view of my desire to be fair and sincere, I could not deny the superiority and exaltedness of his station, nor did I wish to veil myself [therefrom] with

my own name and rank. Hence, I acknowledged his lordship [*rubúbíyyat*] and professed my servitude [*‘ubúdíyyat*]. . . . After the meeting of those two suns, meaning Ḥaḍrat-i-Baṣír and Jináb-i-‘Azím, Ḥaḍrat-i-Baṣír shed the effulgent attractions of love and Jináb-i-‘Azím the fire of fury. Since conspicuous antagonism had arisen in their midst, the secret of the matter remained hidden, and severe tests and grievous trials ensued. Eventually, I served as a chasm of prudence that prevented these two seas from impinging on one another, and a resolution was reached somehow.<sup>50</sup>

Jání goes on to say that, following the departure of ‘Azím from Káshán, some seditious tumult was incited by “a few of the satanic people of the Bayán, who, prompted by their selfish passions, lent fuel to this fire, burning their own wicked souls and the pure souls of some others [in the process],” but he essentially concludes the letter by stating that he returned to Káshán on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Sha‘bán, whereupon he somewhat reanimated the believers and dispelled the dissension that had reached their ears, and remarking that, “At present, praised be God, there is no discord.” The present author has not found anything in the historical record to indicate that ‘Azím retracted his claim before he was killed as a consequence of the attempt to assassinate Náṣiri’d-Dín Sháh.

**Siyyid ‘Uluvv**<sup>51</sup> was another person who, in Baghdád, claimed to be “Him Whom God shall make manifest” and garnered a following consisting of such eminent Bábís as Ḥájí Siyyid Javád Karbalá’í and Shaykh Sulṭán. Nabíl Zarandí writes:

Bahá’u’lláh met [‘Uluvv] on several occasions and succeeded, by His words of counsel and loving-kindness, in purging his mind from his idle fancies and in releasing him from the state of abject servitude into which he had sunk. He won him over completely to the Cause of the Báb and kindled in his heart a desire to propagate the Faith. His fellow-disciples, witnessing the effects of his immediate and marvellous conversion, were led, one after another, to forsake their former allegiance and to embrace the Cause which their colleague had risen to champion. Abandoned and despised by his former adherents, the Siyyid-i-‘Uluvv was at length reduced to recognising the authority of Bahá’u’lláh and acknowledging the superiority of His position. He even went so far as to express repentance for his acts, and to pledge his word that he would never again advocate the theories and principles with which he had identified himself.<sup>52</sup>

Among the more well-known claimants is **Mírzá ‘Abdu’lláh Ghawghá**, a respected poet and boon companion of the Qájár princes. While in the retinue of Ḥamzih Mírzá, the Ḥiṣḥmatu’d-Dawlih, in the village of Rádkán, roughly a hundred kilometers northwest of Mashhad, Ghawghá learned of the Bábí religion and was converted to it by Mullá Ḥusayn, whom the Ḥiṣḥmatu’d-Dawlih had invited to his camp. Ghawghá eventually claimed to be “Him Whom God shall make manifest.” When he was in Kirmánsháh serving the government of the ‘Imádu’d-Dawlih, Nabíl Zarandí learned of his presence in that city and went there to meet him. Zarandí had apparently expressed a desire to travel to Baghdád, but Ghawghá forbade him to do this and is reported to have said, “A statement has been disseminated on behalf of Mírzá Yaḥyá, and a copy of it has come into my possession. Azal wishes to kill me, you, and a few of the other believers.” An alternative version of this warning, apparently from the unpublished portions of Nabíl Zarandí’s



narrative and quoted by Mázandarání, is as follows: “Azal has ordered the killing of all those who have made a claim. You and I are among those people.”<sup>53</sup> In the Kitáb-i-Badí‘, we read:

. . . I know not what Mírzá Ghawghá hath perpetrated, that hatred of him should so fill the hearts of his peers that they write in rejection of him in their letters. Many are the men who speak in the throes of zeal and ecstasy. He, too, hath uttered certain words, but those people ought not to strive to dishonor others with such intensity.<sup>54</sup>

Afnán states that he was never able to procure any of Ghawghá’s writings,<sup>55</sup> and as with ‘Azím, it is unclear to the present author whether or not he ever withdrew his claim.

One person who, according to Afnán, laid claim to *mazharíyyat* (theophany), which was probably tantamount to being “Him Whom God shall make manifest,” was Mírzá Ḥusayn Quṭb Nayrízí, the leader of the Bábís in Nayríz who believed himself to be supported by the confirmations and inspirations of the Báb Himself. “In all likelihood,” Afnán writes, “the second upheaval in Nayríz, which followed the martyrdom of Vaḥíd, occurred as a consequence of his claims.” Nayrízí was himself killed in that upheaval.

Another person who, after the martyrdom of the Báb and before the public declaration of Bahá’u’lláh, claimed to be “Him Whom God shall make manifest” was Ḥájí Mírzá Músá Qumí, who “cultivated ideas in people’s heads” and behaved extravagantly, regarding himself as the possessor of lofty epiphanic stations and calling himself the Promised One of the Bayán. When Bahá’u’lláh was in Baghdád, Qumí met with Him and amply received His loving-kindness. Qumí, in turn, realized the error of his ways, repented, and became so ecstatic that “he no longer knew which way was up and which was down.”

Among those who claimed to be “Him Whom God shall make manifest” and are explicitly named in the Kitáb-i-Badí‘ is a certain Ḥájí Mullá Háshim,<sup>56</sup> with regard to whom Bahá’u’lláh states:

Moreover, Dayyán, Mírzá Ghawghá, Shaykh Ismá’íl, and Ḥájí Mullá Háshim have also made this claim, and their pretensions have been rendered null and void. It is not enough, then, simply to make a claim; otherwise, [all] these esteemed ones [*ḥaḍarát*] must needs be that very Promised One.<sup>57</sup>

Háshim had become a Bábí after meeting the Báb in Káshán. He went on to accept the Bahá’í Faith, as implied by Bahá’u’lláh Himself in the Kitáb-i-Badí‘:

O ignorant one!<sup>58</sup> Know thou that those people have never been rejected in the sight of God, nor shall they ever be . . . and one from among those [whom thou hast] written about is Jináb-i-Mullá Háshim. The petitions from him that have reached the seat of the throne are currently at hand, and he hath shown naught but the greatest humility.<sup>59</sup>

A more commonly-known claimant to the station of “Him Whom God shall make manifest” was Ḥusayn Mílání, whose followers addressed him as “Ḥusayn Ján” and bowed themselves at the very mention of his name. He was reportedly an eloquent man, utterly enamored of the Báb, and considered himself to be the return of the Imám Ḥusayn, Who was to appear after the Qá’im from the house of the Prophet Muḥammad. Mílání was among those killed in the aftermath of

the failed attempt on the life of Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, and Afnán has discussed his activities to that end in his work.<sup>60</sup> The killing of Mílání in particular was reported in one of Iran's earliest newspapers, *Vaqáyi'-i-Ittifáqíyyih*.<sup>61</sup>

The last person mentioned by Afnán who claimed to be “Him Whom God shall make manifest” is the well-known **Nabíl Zarandí**. “Earnest to the utmost,” Afnán writes, “he rose up and called on the Bábí heroes and other great men to follow him.” He goes on to say that, in an unspecified history written by Ustád ‘Alí-Akbar Yazdí, the architect and builder of the Mashriq’l-Adhkár that once stood in ‘Ishqábád, some opening verses of a *mathnaví* by Nabíl are quoted in which he speaks to how he conveyed his claim to Mullá Muḥammad Qá’íní (Nabíl-i-Akbar), Shaykh Abú-Turáb Ishihárdí, and Bahá’u’lláh Himself:<sup>62</sup>

Muḥammad, rise to us with fabled steed!  
Abandon every other path and creed!

O You Whose glory points to that of God,  
Lay down Your life upon our path so broad!

O Bú-Turáb, O captive of the clay,  
That building you once knew has gone away!

According to Afnán, “It is certain that this *mathnaví* was very lengthy and that Nabíl destroyed it long afterwards.” He soon recognized his transgression, attained the presence of Bahá’u’lláh in Baghdád, and repented. The remainder of his life as a highly devoted Bábí and then a Bahá’í is well documented.<sup>63</sup>

It is important to also discuss **Mírzá Yaḥyá** in the context of these claimants.<sup>64</sup> Mírzá Yaḥyá obviously considered himself to have been invested with a certain degree of authority, which probably stemmed from a Writing addressed to Him by the Báb that has been called His “will and testament” or “testamentary disposition.”<sup>65</sup> While this Writing does empower Mírzá Yaḥyá to make certain admonitions and injunctions to the Bábís, and even to complete the unfinished text of the Persian Bayán, it certainly does not identify him as “Him Whom God shall make manifest,” who continues to be held in abeyance and referred to in the third person throughout the text. To delve into the specific details of the authority to which Mírzá Yaḥyá did lay claim—which appears to have revolved primarily around the role of Bábí leadership and the powers entailed by it, as laid out in the Writing of the Báb mentioned above—would lie beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say here that Mírzá Yaḥyá himself seems never to have claimed to be any sort of messianic or otherwise scripturally promised figure, including “Him Whom God shall make manifest,” although the *Nuḩṩatu’l-Káf* states that some Bábís ascribed that rank to him.<sup>66</sup>

The above list of claimants is not exhaustive, but it should give an adequate sense of the situation of the time. At this point, we might consider the motives behind these claims. For some, such as Ḥusayn Mílání, the prospect of a deeply deferent following and the charismatic power he would have exercised over his subordinates might have appealed to him more than anything else. For others, their claims may have been born of a genuine spiritual fervor or even sincere conviction,

an example being the case of Mírzá Ghawghá to which Bahá'u'lláh Himself attested. But the main factor that probably gave rise to all these claims was the ineffective leadership of Mírzá Yahyá, who was only about eighteen at the time of the Báb's martyrdom. His self-concealment to the point of absence—which Bahá'í sources attribute to his cowardice, but which MacEoin characterizes as dissimulative obedience to the Báb's directive in the aforementioned testamentary Writing to “preserve thyself, then preserve thyself”<sup>67</sup>—essentially left a vacuum of leadership, which these claimants may have deemed necessary to fill for the sake of Bábí unity. In most cases, it was probably some combination of these factors, each to varying degrees, that motivated these people to make their claims. It is difficult to know for sure since we have virtually nothing from the claimants themselves that sheds light on the nature of their claims or their rationale for making them.

The Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Muṣḥa'sha', then, stands in refreshingly stark contrast to the dense obscurity of these years, serving as lucid evidence and firsthand testimony that, in the early 1850s, Bahá'u'lláh believed Himself to be a Manifestation of God essentially one and the same with the Manifestations of the past.

### **A Textual Analysis of the Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Muṣḥa'sha'**

To save space, the present author has not included his provisional rendering of the Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Muṣḥa'sha' in this paper, but instead posted it to his website along with the original text.<sup>68</sup> Selections from the translation are quoted in the analysis below,<sup>69</sup> though it should be noted that, as a provisional translation, the diction may be subject to change and thus differ, in the future, from the wording used here. To produce his rendering, the present author consulted a typescript of the original text which is based on “a transcript of the Tablet in the handwriting of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín”<sup>70</sup> and available on the Bahá'í Reference Library.<sup>71</sup>

#### **Paragraph 2**

After some initial praise to God, Bahá'u'lláh disapprovingly attests that “all waxed proud and became even as nothing,” adding that “they deem themselves to be guided aright and doers of good; but nay, by the Lord of the heavens, they are naught but liars and stirrers of sedition.” This is probably a reference to certain Bábís for possible reasons discussed in the section on historical context above, reinforced by Bahá'u'lláh's use of *'amá'iyán*, or “followers of the Theophanic Cloud”—*'amá'* (“the Theophanic Cloud”) being a self-styled title of Mírzá Yahyá's, hidden away as he was in deliberate obscurity.

There are notable references in this paragraph to “the heavenly Dove,” “the everlasting Cockerel,” and “the Bird of inaccessible divinity,” all of which symbolize the Manifestation of God and will be discussed below as a recurring motif in this Tablet, along with the allusions to beauty, glory, and splendor.

#### **Paragraph 3**

Bahá'u'lláh expands on the condemnatory tone of the preceding paragraph, making reference to “the blackening deeds [*kudúrat*] of those who are dear to us [*aḥbáb*, or “the believers”]; in this

case, the Bábís],” which “have so smirched the pages on which they are written that the very mention of them hath estranged all that is visible and invisible.” Examples of what this might refer to, depending on when the Tablet was revealed, include the plot to assassinate Náṣiri’d-Dín Sháh, the machinations of Siyyid Muḥammad Iṣfahání and Mírzá Yaḥyá, and the various claims of the Bábís to lofty stations discussed above.

In the penultimate sentence, Bahá’u’lláh states that these events are so saddening that “the ornaments of sorrow are now manifest upon the divine Countenance.” The phrase “divine Countenance” might be open to some interpretation; it could be read as a reference to God Himself, or possibly the first instance in this Tablet where Bahá’u’lláh is alluding to Himself, if indirectly, as a Manifestation of God.

In juxtaposing “the brilliance of the morn of faithfulness” with “the darksome night of waywardness” that has “overtaken the whole earth,” Bahá’u’lláh might be symbolizing Himself with the former metaphor and Mírzá Yaḥyá with the latter one. As was mentioned in the analysis of ¶ 2, ‘*amá*’ was a title of Mírzá Yaḥyá’s but can also have the connotation of “waywardness,” which is how it has been translated in this instance. If accurate, Bahá’u’lláh may be using ‘*amá*’ not only to allude to Mírzá Yaḥyá, but also to highlight the damaging and far-reaching effects of his deviance.

#### **Paragraph 4**

Bahá’u’lláh’s condemnation of the Bábís intensifies, charging them with having “flagrantly . . . subverted the all-encompassing, the blessed, the pre-eternal Word of God.” Swearing by God, He ominously warns that what the Bábís have said and done, all “clear and apparent” before the Almighty, will have consequences that will return to haunt them. Possible explanations will be discussed toward the end of this analysis.

With regard to the Tablet’s theophanic significance, this is a critical paragraph in that it begins with the word “say” [*bigú*]. An extension of the Qur’anic phenomenon by which God bids Muḥammad to speak by the command *qul* [“say”], we see that same word and its Persian equivalent [*bigú*] used repeatedly in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh to indicate that God is instructing Him to say the words which follow that command. This is such a ubiquitous feature of Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings that we might initially find its usage here unremarkable, but it is in fact a clear sign that, in this very early Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh is intimating that He is expressing divine revelation as only the Manifestation of God can do.

#### **Paragraph 5**

This marks the start of some praise and supplication to God that lasts for several paragraphs. In this one, Bahá’u’lláh speaks to the annihilation of His own will in the Will of God, giving us our first look at the prominent theme of unity between God and the Manifestation that will follow in this Tablet. This is strengthened by the mention of His “fidelity” [*wafá*], which is perhaps underscored in contrast to the aberrant behavior of Mírzá Yaḥyá and his followers, and which will be reiterated later in the Tablet. It is also in this paragraph that Bahá’u’lláh shifts from a

primarily Persian mode of expression to Arabic, and He will not switch back until the final paragraph of the Tablet.

### Paragraph 6

A few of the phrases in this paragraph are particularly significant. Here, Bahá'u'lláh declares that He is testifying to God and crying aloud to Him “upon the thrones of holiness [*saráyiri'l-quds*].” He also declares that, “from eternity,” God has been “firmly fixed within the hidden secret of Bahá,” and that, “to everlasting,” He will “continue to repose upon the Throne of the Theophanic Cloud.” With the former imagery, Bahá'u'lláh is most likely referring to His “messianic secret,” that He is the next Manifestation of God long awaited by adherents of many religions. With the latter, He may be illustrating the inextricable connection between God and Himself, and also claiming the title of “Theophanic Cloud” for Himself, as if to say that it truly applies to Him, not Mírzá Yaḥyá.

### Paragraph 7

As with ¶ 3, Bahá'u'lláh alludes to the intensity of His sadness, and perhaps also the regrettable conduct of the Bábís, by voicing the hope to God that “[His] heart may find peace despite the blowing of the breezes of sorrow from Thy loved ones,” and that “[His] soul may repose notwithstanding the appearance of the banners of affliction raised high by Thy chosen ones.”

### Paragraph 8

In this paragraph, Bahá'u'lláh alludes to His despondent state in “this most lonely house” [*tilka'l-bayti'l-wuḥdá*]. If we take the *Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Muṣḥa'sha'* to have been revealed in the late Ṭíhrán period, this might be a reference to the house of Ja'far-Qulí *Khán* in *Afchih*, but if we place it in the early *Baghdád* period, it could refer to “the house of Hájí 'Alí Madad, in an old quarter of the city [of *Baghdád*], into which He moved with His family”<sup>72</sup> towards the end of Rajab, equivalent to early May 1853. Another intriguing possibility is that the “house” may be a symbol for this world, an image one often finds in Persian poetry, where the world is likened to a ruined tavern.<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, Bahá'u'lláh seems to continue the previous theme of blasphemy and wrongdoing on the part of the Bábís by mentioning to God that “the pious [*al-atqíyá*] have imagined about Thee whatsoever they like” and that “Thy loved ones [*al-aḥibbá*’, the Bábís] do as they please unto him who is Thy Countenance [*ṭal'atik*],” apparently a reference to Himself.

Most intriguingly from a messianic standpoint, Bahá'u'lláh mentions “the secret” [*sirrí*; literally, “my secret”] He has kept “before the Letters of the Theophanic Cloud” [*inda aḥrufi'l-'amá*]. The reference to these “Letters” is somewhat opaque, but might signify those who were specially favored by Mírzá Yaḥyá, if there is any connection to be made between that epithet and “the Letters of the Living.” As in ¶ 6, Bahá'u'lláh alludes once again to His messianic secret, which He does not divulge explicitly and unequivocally until 1863.

Yet another point of interest is where Bahá'u'lláh, addressing God, laudingly acknowledges “the things that Thou hast done through me” [*fí'lika bí*], indicative of His absolute instrumentality as a Manifestation of God Whose Own will is dissolved wholly in God's.

### Paragraph 9

This paragraph begins with a reference to God as the One “Who made Bahá to warble the mystery of fidelity” [*qad aghanna'l-bahá' bi's-sirri'l-wafá'*]. An extension of the imagery first seen in ¶ 2, this obvious allusion to divine revelation is expressed in the form of “warbling,” invoking the symbolism of the Manifestation as a bird that recurs in the rest of this Tablet and many of Bahá'u'lláh's subsequent Writings. The “mystery of fidelity,” paralleling a theme in ¶ 5, may denote revelation intended to maintain the faithfulness and cohesion of the Bábí community, or the inscrutable nature of His own consummate faithfulness to God as His Manifestation contrasted with the disunifying behavior of Mírzá Yahyá.

The image of the throne, first mentioned in ¶ 6, appears again in this paragraph, but a distinct difference is that here we have “the Crimson Throne” [*saríri'l-ḥamrá'*]. In the Bahá'í framework, crimson (or red) represents the decree of God.<sup>74</sup> This suggests that Bahá'u'lláh is not claiming to be an ordinary king who issues temporal edicts; rather, He is the vicegerent of God, fully deputized to issue decrees of divine authority on His behalf.

Moreover, Bahá'u'lláh states, in no uncertain terms, that He has been moved to intone verses that have the power to enchant or attract. The clear implication here is that the “verses” [*áyát*], itself a religiously charged term, are invested with divine power—the sort of potency that is restricted to the Word of God. The fact that Bahá'u'lláh also calls them verses of “attraction” (or “enchantment”; *jadhb*) aligns with the usage of that same term and its derivatives by certain Bábí claimants discussed above. His choice of that term, then, seems to have been a conscious decision to draw on the vocabulary that would have been very familiar to His fellow Bábís, consistent with the approach He would describe only a few years later in the Arabic Hidden Words as revealing “in accordance with [humanity's] capacity and understanding, not with My state and the melody of My voice.”<sup>75</sup>

The last part of the translation of this paragraph inevitably dilutes the magnitude of what Bahá'u'lláh is saying in the original Arabic. For example, the original word for “inaccessible realm” is *háhút*, a term which in one Islamic conception of existence refers to the realm where God alone exists. Viewed in that context, the metaphor of Bahá'u'lláh's being “called upon” by God “from the inaccessible realm of divine decree” and “presented . . . before the countenances of the Theophanic Cloud” [*falaqad ashhadahu min háhúti'l-amr bayna ṭala'áti'l-'amá'*] could signify that He was summoned by God and sent to the Azalís.

### Paragraph 10

In this paragraph, we have an allusion to “the Buráq of light,” *Buráq* being the name of the mythical steed on which Muḥammad rode up to heaven during His *mi'ráj* or night journey. Bahá'u'lláh's audience, probably all of Muslim background, would have certainly noticed this reference and interpreted it as His way of putting Himself on an ontological par with

Muḥammad. For Bahá'u'lláh to then say that this Buráq lifted Him up to “the golden heights of the realm that lieth in the hidden retreats of the most glorious Essences” [*rafrafi şufri'l-jabarút fi mustasarráti huwíyyati'l-abhá*] would strengthen this point by suggesting that He belongs to an immensely exalted order of being, “golden” [*şufr*] being connected with yellow, which in the Bahá'í framework symbolizes the ordainment of God and is thus an extension of the divine color motif in ¶ 9.<sup>76</sup>

Next, Bahá'u'lláh praises God for having caused Him “to ascend unto the sublime court of Há.” In Bahá'í parlance, the Arabic letter *há* is an abbreviation for *huwíyyah*, which essentially denotes divinity. His usage of *Bá* here, insofar as God “called [Him] into being before the radiant brilliance of the Countenance of *Bá*,” is more open to interpretation. Taken by itself, *bá* can be read as the first letter of the title “*Báb*” and also “Bahá'u'lláh,” so perhaps it is a reference to the single Ancient Beauty common to all of the Manifestations of God. Alternatively, we might need to regard *bá* here as being irreducibly and inextricably tied to the *há* that precedes it; viewed together, these are two constituent letters of the word “Bahá,” and Bahá'u'lláh may be referring to some sort of divine interplay happening between them which is integral to His reality but beyond the finite capacity of the human mind to fully apprehend.

He then thanks God for making Him to “enter the house of divinity shrouded in the densest of veils.” Here we have yet another figurative indication that Bahá'u'lláh regards Himself as divine. As to “the densest of veils,” these can easily be made the subject of ample conjecture. They might symbolize the divinely-ordained concealment of Bahá'u'lláh's true station, or perhaps the myriad and sundry barriers that prevented others in His midst from recognizing that station.

### Paragraph 11

The overarching feature of this important paragraph is a series of rhetorical questions which God instructs Bahá'u'lláh to pose to “the people of the Book” [*ahla'l-kitáb*] to prompt their reflection. All these questions are asked with the same interrogative, *alasná*, meaning “Are we not?” There is a striking parallel between this interrogative and *alastu*, “Am I not?”, which introduces the primordial question “Am I not your Lord?” [*alastu bi rabbikum*], posed by God in Qur'án 7:172 to the descendants of Adam, suggesting the continuity of God's perpetual message now being transmitted here through Bahá'u'lláh.

Much of the theophanic significance of this paragraph hinges on how “we” is interpreted. The most likely possibility is that it denotes God speaking through the Manifestation, insofar as the paragraph includes such questions as “Are we not the Beloved mysteriously concealed in the core of Há?” and “Are we not the Friend in the very soul of Bahá intoning melodies of the Day of Resurrection?” Another possibility is that it refers to the Bábís more generally, or that both possibilities are true at the same time. The potential multivalence of this paragraph will be explored below.

Beyond this one crucial word, it can be demonstrated quite clearly that nearly every other word in this paragraph is laden with meaning and allusion. For instance, God addresses Bahá'u'lláh as the “eternal Dove.” The Holy Spirit appeared to Jesus Christ in the form of a dove, betokening an imperceptibly intimate relationship between it and the Manifestation, and the use of

“eternal” suggests the simultaneously preexistent and everlasting nature of Bahá’u’lláh’s true reality.

Bahá’u’lláh is also addressed here as “the peerless Cockerel.” This is significant because the cockerel, or rooster [*dík*], is used in Bahá’í iconography (most notably in the artwork of Miṣḥkín-Qalam, the preeminent Bahá’í calligrapher and Apostle of Bahá’u’lláh) and other contexts to symbolize the Manifestation as a divine summoner who, with His cry, rouses the slumbering masses to heedfulness. The fact that He is described as a “peerless” Cockerel reinforces the idea that He, the Manifestation of God, belongs to a special class of being, at once human and divine.

It would be appropriate at this juncture to further explore the bird imagery used in this paragraph. Beyond the foregoing references to the “eternal Dove” and “peerless Cockerel,” there is also the “most glorious Bird” [*táyira’l-abhá’í*] and “the Chanter Who abideth in the divinity of the inmost heart and singeth in the ringing tones of birds” [*al-murannim fi’l-láhuṭi’l-fu’ád bi rannáti’ṭ-ṭuyúr*]. In these phrases, we have an extension of the bird motif first seen in ¶ 2 and repeated in ¶ 9, and which will appear yet again in ¶ 13.

Akin to the “most glorious Bird,” God also addresses Bahá’u’lláh as the “beauteous splendor” [*tashá’shá’a’l-jamáli*] and pointedly asks through Him, “Are we not the Beauty of the All-Glorious [*jamála’l-‘izz*] enwrapped in gloomy darkneses?” The darkneses in which Bahá’u’lláh is wrapped here may symbolize such dire circumstances as humanity’s hopeless confusion, profound despair, and benighted perversity, or perhaps the concealed nature of His messianic secret. It is, moreover, the beauty of Bahá’u’lláh that is highlighted here, likely harking back to a salient theme employed by the Báb in His Qayyúmu’l-Asmá where “Him Whom God shall make manifest” is portrayed as the divine Joseph, the epitome of beauty in the Qur’án.

As if to leave no room for any doubt whatsoever, God even calls Bahá’u’lláh “the divine Manifestation” [*tazahhura’l-iláhi*]. This seems to be the most explicit reference in this Tablet to Bahá’u’lláh’s station, though it is done somewhat obliquely through an address by God to Him, and not as a proclamation of His own to His audience. Yet regardless of how the point was expressed, the meaning is obvious, and Bahá’u’lláh lends only more support to it with such additional questions as “Are we not the Countenance of Him Who is the Ever-Living, the Ever-Forgiving?” and “Are we not clearly reflective of Divine Unity through our manifestation?”

It is also worth examining some of the other rhetorical questions in this paragraph. For example, Bahá’u’lláh asks, “Are we not the chanting of the Lord upon Mount Sinai?” This clearly indicates that He is speaking to His audience with the voice of God, drawing on a Biblical scene that holds special significance for “the People of the Book,” an Islamic term referring primarily to Jews and Christians.

Similarly, Bahá’u’lláh asks, “Are we not the Friend in the very soul of Bahá intoning melodies of the Day of Resurrection?” The Arabic word translated here as “the Friend” is *al-ḥabīb*, a title of Muḥammad, giving further support to the idea that this paragraph is a kind of testament to the “station of unity” that exists among all the Manifestations of God. No less significant is the reference to “melodies of the Day of Resurrection,” likely to signal that the Promised Day has come, and perhaps also allude to the regenerative potency of God’s Word. For Bahá’u’lláh to say



that these melodies are being intoned “in the very soul of Bahá” is yet another metaphor that illustrates His channeling of divine revelation. Indeed, the reference to Himself as “the hidden retreat of Revelation enshrined in Scripture” [*mustasarra’n-nuzúl fi’z-zabúr*] is deeply telling, and in fact uses the proper name *zabúr*, referring primarily to the Psalms and more literally to writings in general, consistent as an address to “the people of the Book” with the aforementioned “chanting of the Lord upon Mount Sinai.”

Bahá’u’lláh also asks, “Wherefore have ye persecuted us, and for what reason have ye put us to grief?” This could be a reference to the tests and trials to which all the Manifestations of God have been subjected. Alternatively, if the *Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha’sha’* is an early Baghdad Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh may be using the first-person plural to refer to the beginning of His own exile. Yet another possibility is that He is alluding to the collective suffering of the Bábís at the hands of countless oppressors. In much the same vein, we have “banished us from our land,” which could refer to Bahá’u’lláh’s initial exile to Baghdad, or a foretelling of His future exiles, or the banishments of the other Bábís; “repudiated us,” which could be read as an expression of Bahá’u’lláh’s essential unity with all the other Manifestations of God, or a prediction about the disbelievers who will reject Him in the years to come, or the status of the Bábí community more widely as outcasts; and “slain us,” which could be construed as Bahá’u’lláh’s identification with Jesus and the Báb, or an allusion to killings of the Bábís.

There is an intriguing reference in this paragraph to Bahá’u’lláh as “the Theophanic Cloud of camphor.” Taken at the most basic and secular level, “camphor” can denote either a certain kind of tree, or the white (or colorless) fragrant compound derived from that tree. But in a context that is more sublime and religious, camphor is associated with virtue. In Qur’án 76:5, we read, “Truly the pious drink of a cup mixed with camphor.” The term used both in that verse and in this passage of the *Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha’sha’* is *káfúr*, which is also the name of a river in the Islamic depiction of paradise. Hence, Bahá’u’lláh might be stating that He represents the source of this heavenly substance, raining down from Him like a cloud. *Káfúr* also has connotations of hiddenness, signifying an unseen aspect of reality that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá discusses in a Tablet partially translated in *The Call of the Divine Beloved*.<sup>77</sup>

## Paragraph 12

A continuation of the sterner and more foreboding tenor of the first few paragraphs of this Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh, invoking verses of the Qur’án, warns His audience that “the crushing grip of One Who is mighty and powerful” will descend on them before long, and “the violent force of One Who is severe and subduing” will soon appear to them. These admonishments seem to echo the language used in ¶ 4, such as the “fruit” of “that which [His audience’s] hands have wrought, and that which [their] tongues have uttered,” which they will “erelong behold,” and the consequences of the acts they “have perpetrated” which will “return to haunt [them].”

There is then mention of a “humiliating punishment” that God will imminently mete out to an unspecified “him.” If the *Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha’sha’* was revealed sometime in 1851 or the summer of 1852, Bahá’u’lláh may be alluding to Ḥusayn Mílání and prophesying his unceremonious death, which resulted from his heavy involvement with the plot to assassinate

Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh. If, however, the Tablet was revealed in the early Baghdád period, then it may refer to Siyyid Muḥammad Iṣfahání or Mírzá Yaḥyá and foreshadow their own ignominious downfalls. In any case, the paragraph's concluding address to the Tablet's audience that there will be "no place . . . for you to flee from our seizure" suggests that this divine punishment will not be confined only to the unnamed offender, but also unavoidably extend to any Bábís in league with him.

### **Paragraph 13**

Most of this paragraph reads like an apology from Bahá'u'lláh to God for certain transgressions He has committed before Him. These could be general, in which case Bahá'u'lláh's ardent contrition here might chiefly serve to humble Himself before God—not unlike the apologetic expressions found in many of Bahá'u'lláh's supplications, such as the Long Obligatory Prayer—but one also wonders if He is referring to instances in which He feels, perhaps on a human level, that He has somehow overstepped His bounds by disclosing too much of His divine reality roughly a decade before the appointed time. This possibility stems from the fact that Bahá'u'lláh attributes all these ecstatic utterances to "the Dove of [God's] eternity warbling within [his] soul, the outpourings of [God's] loving-kindness surging within [his] breast, and the Countenance of [God's] Essence emerging within [his] inmost heart," all of which fall under the same category of clear reference to divine revelation that abounds in this Tablet.

### **Paragraph 14**

Here we have a continuation of the prayer that began in the previous paragraph and a declaration of Bahá'u'lláh's consecration to God as a clear channel for the operation of His will, echoing the theme of His absolute instrumentality present in ¶ 8. It is with this devotional paragraph, brimming with such self-effacing language as "I have no existence until I expend it in perseverance before Thee, and I am nothing at all until I mention my Self before the habitation of Thy glory," that we might say Bahá'u'lláh concludes the "essence" of the *Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Muṣḥa'ṣha'* by underscoring that the very reason for His existence is to serve as a mouthpiece of God and a vehicle for the promotion of His Cause.

### **Paragraph 15**

This final paragraph can be reasonably considered a postscript to the Tablet, since it shifts away from central themes to subjects that are relevant only to Bahá'u'lláh's immediate audience. It is also in this paragraph that the language shifts back from Arabic to Persian.

The references to four Bábís of Ṭihrán, all mentioned by name, tether the revelation of this Tablet to the early 1850s, since Bahá'í histories make no mention of them after that period, and in fact Bahá'u'lláh observes here that one of these Bábís (Jináb-i-Jináb) had already distanced himself from the community by that time. The passing reference to rock candy reflects a common cultural practice by which people would send sweets to one another as tokens of affection. In the final sentence of this Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh makes an important distinction: that some of its contents are intended specifically for his addressee, while other parts do not apply to that particular person and are in fact germane to the generality of Bábís.

## Conclusion

It should be clear at this point that we have, in the Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha'sha', a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh that deserves our careful attention. A small attempt at its study has been made in this article, but no one treatment can exhaust a Writing as multidimensional as this one.

And of course, there is still much about this Tablet that is *not* clear. To reiterate, the questions of when and where it was revealed, as well as the person to whom it was addressed, have yet to be answered with any conclusive evidence. It is hoped that future research will unearth the answers to these and other questions, perhaps by comparing this Tablet with the other early Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and its idiosyncratic diction with that of Bábí texts (perhaps focusing on such mysterious words as *al-bayt*, “the house,” or *al-layl*, “the night”) to arrive at more informed conclusions. A deeper dive into the historical context, to the extent that the historiographic obscurity of the period will allow it, would surely prove useful. To that end, Ḥájí Mírzá Jání's *Nuqṭatu'l-Káf*,<sup>78</sup> Mu'ínu's-Salṭanih's *Tárikh-i-Amr*,<sup>79</sup> and other chronicles of the period should be consulted as sources for study.

At any rate, it should be noted that the Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha'sha' has significant implications regardless of whether it belongs to the late Ṭihrán or early Baghdád period. The former would certainly be more important, in that it would predate Bahá'u'lláh's epiphanic experience in the Sýáh-Chál and thus demonstrate that He was a channel for divine revelation even before that culminating event. But even if it was revealed in the earliest years of His exile in Baghdád, it would constitute one of the strongest pieces of evidence heretofore discovered that Bahá'u'lláh, while never explicitly proclaiming His true station before 1863,<sup>80</sup> certainly intimated it in highly suggestive terms.

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<sup>1</sup> “The Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh referred to by Mr. Masumian is authentic and a copy of it is held by the Archives at the Bahá'í World Centre. To date, we have not found any record of its publication other than in *Zuhúru'l-Ḥaqq*, volume 4. . . . Also, to date, we have found no further information regarding the exact date of this Tablet, the addressee or the circumstances of how Fádíl-i-Mázandarání obtained it, other than what is provided in *Zuhúru'l-Ḥaqq*” (Memorandum from the Research Department to the Universal House of Justice, 23 July 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Refer to the original version of *Tárikh-i-Zuhúru'l-Ḥaqq*, vol. 4, transcribed by Muḥammad 'Abbásiyán Mílání in 1953, pp. 4ff; available online at: <https://www.h-net.org/~bahai/arabic/vol2/tzh4/tzh4.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Fádíl Mázandarání, *Tárikh-i-Zuhúru'l-Ḥaqq*, vol. 4 (Hofheim: Bahá'í-Verlag, 2011), p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> To the best of the present author's knowledge, one of the only exceptions to this rule is a passing reference to this Tablet that Vahid Rafati makes in a Persian article on Bahá'u'lláh's *Rashḥ-i-'Amá'*, where he quotes the opening lines of the Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha'sha' but does not delve into the Tablet any more deeply than this. See Vahid Rafati, “Áthár-i-Munzalih az Qalam-i-A'lá dar Írán: Qaṣídiy-i-Rashḥ-i-'Amá'” (*Safíniy-i-'Irfán*, Book 2, 1999), p. 77. This Tablet also has an entry in “A Partial Inventory of the Works of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith,” where it appears under the catalog ID number BH00775, to which this note has been appended: “One of the earliest known Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh?” (Version 3.01, June 2023; available online at: <https://blog.loomofreality.org/>).

<sup>5</sup> Mázandarání, *Zuhúru'l-Ḥaqq*, vol. 4 (Bahá'í-Verlag, 2011), pp. 17ff.

<sup>6</sup> Nabíl Zarandí, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation* (Wilmette, Illinois: U.S. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1932), p. 599.

<sup>7</sup> Fádíl Mázandarání, *Tárikh-i-Zuhúru'l-Ḥaqq*, vol. 8 (Ṭihrán: Mu'assisiy-i-Millíy-i-Maṭbú'át-i-Amr, 1975–76), pp. 825–881. For other accounts of Mázandarání's life, refer to *Dánish va Bínish 3: Dawriy-i-Fádíl-i-Mázandarání, Landan, Disámbri-1999* (London: Bahá'í Society for Persian Arts and Letters, 2002), pp. 1–62, and ‘Azízu'lláh Sulaymání, *Maṣábíḥ-i-Hidáyat*, vol. 7 (Ṭihrán: Mu'assisiy-i-Millíy-i-Maṭbú'át-i-Amr, 1972), pp. 69–141.

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<sup>8</sup> The present author is grateful to Shahrokh Monjazebe for calling his attention to the host of passages from *God Passes By* quoted here in support of the Early Baghdád Hypothesis.

<sup>9</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (U.S. Bahá'í Publishing Trust: Wilmette, Illinois, 1979), p. 117.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, 117.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 111.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 112.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, 115.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, 117.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, 113.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, 113–14.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 115.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, 116.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 118.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 117.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Examples can be found in Mázandarání, *Tárikh-i-Zuhúru'l-Haqq*, vol. 4 (Hofheim: Bahá'í-Verlag, 2011), pp. 106–08.

<sup>27</sup> The prose of Ṭáhirih epitomizes this style, and is abundantly available in Nosratullah Mohammad Hosseini, *Ḥaḍrat-i-Ṭáhirih* (Dundas, Ontario, Canada: Association for Bahá'í Studies in Persian, 2000), pp. 394–486.

<sup>28</sup> Authorized translation ([www.bahai.org/r/959315823](http://www.bahai.org/r/959315823)) of a passage from a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh published in Fádíl Mázandarání, *Amr va Kḥalq*, vol. 2 (Hofheim: Mu'assisiy-i-Millíy-i-Maṭbú'át-i-Bahá'íy-i-Almán, 1985), p. 105.

<sup>29</sup> The number of those who made such claims was twenty-five, according to the testimony of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, alluded to by Shoghi Effendi in *God Passes By*, p. 125. The source for this testimony may be an entry in the diary of Mirza Ahmad Sohrab dated 29 January 1914, where Sohrab attributes these words to 'Abdu'l-Bahá: “After the martyrdom of His Holiness the BAB there appeared twenty-five persons who claimed to be the fulfilment of ‘Him Whom God would Manifest.’” Shortly thereafter in that same entry, 'Abdu'l-Bahá proceeds to name eleven of them. (The present author is grateful to Ismael Velasco for sharing this reference in Sohrab's diary.) Many of these people have been identified, and some of their claims discussed, in Denis MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 376–89; Abu'l-Qásim Afnán, *Ahd-i-A'lá* (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 2000), pp. 479–89; and other sources. Mázandarání writes that some have said the number of claimants was as high as 83, the Abjad equivalent of the word **ف** (*Zuhúru'l-Haqq*, vol. 4, p. 24).

<sup>30</sup> Zarandí, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 293.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, 593–94.

<sup>34</sup> Although Shoghi Effendi has explicitly confirmed that Bahá'u'lláh revealed the *Rashḥ-i-'Amá* in Ṭihrán (*God Passes By*, p. 121), as did 'Abdu'l-Bahá before him in an authenticated table talk (*Twelve Table Talks given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 'Akká*, no. 11 (“The Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh”), ¶ 5; available online here: <http://www.bahai.org/r/711233361>), there does not seem to be any conclusive evidence that it was specifically revealed in the *Síyáh-Chál* (Black Pit). That it was revealed in that prison is asserted axiomatically in the preface to *The Call of the Divine Beloved* (Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 2018, p. vii); before this, it was stated as a self-evident fact by Adib Taherzadeh in *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 1 (George Ronald: Oxford, England, 1988), p. 45, and before him in Persian by 'Abdu'l-Ḥamid Ishráq-Kḥávarí in *Ganj-i-Sháygán* (Mu'assisiy-i-Millíy-i-Maṭbú'át-i-Amrí: Tehran, Iran, 1967), p. 7. Perhaps Taherzadeh and Ishráq-Kḥávarí drew their conclusions from a passage in Shoghi Effendi's Naw-Rúz 110 BE letter in Persian, where he introduces the *Rashḥ-i-'Amá* in a way ambiguous enough to where it can be read either as a *Síyáh-Chál* Writing or an early work more generally (*Tawqí'át-i-Mubárákih Kḥitáb bih Aḥibbáy-i-Sharq* (Langenhain, Germany, 1992), p. 441). Indeed, in a response to Bijan Masumian on this question, dated 19 April 2021, the Department of the Secretariat wrote, with reference to where exactly the *Rashḥ-i-'Amá* was revealed, that, “Nothing clarifies this issue definitively,” and that “the friends are free to come to their own conclusion about this matter,” leaving it an open question. As an important alternative to what we might call “the *Síyáh-Chál* Hypothesis,” there is a pilgrim's note recorded in Persian (Suheil Bushrui and Ashkan Monfared, *Dar Zill-i-Shajariy-i-Mitháq* (Spain: Fundación Nehal, 2016), p. 104) in which 'Abdu'l-Bahá is

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reported to have identified 1267 AH (6 November 1850 – 26 October 1851) as the year in which this poem was revealed. It is worth noting that Fáḍīl Mázandarání also assigns that year to the poem in *Asraru'l-Áthár*, vol. 4 (Mu'assisy-i-Maṭbú'át-i-Amrí: Tehran, Iran, 1972), p. 394, perhaps on the basis of this very pilgrim's note, though he does not cite a source.

<sup>35</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Call of the Divine Beloved*, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, 6.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> MacEoin, *Messiah*, p. 378.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, 376–89.

<sup>41</sup> According to MacEoin (*Messiah*, pp. 382 and 382n68), it is possible that another Bábí, Ḥusayn Ján Mílání, who definitely claimed to be the return of Imám Ḥusayn, may have also claimed to be “Him Whom God shall make manifest,” which would place him in the third category alongside Bahá'u'lláh and Siyyid Baṣír Hindí, but historical sources disagree on whether or not he actually did this.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, 380.

<sup>43</sup> Ḥájí Mírzá Jání Káshání (ed. Edward Granville Browne), *Kitab-i Nuqtat al-Kaf: Being the Earliest History of the Babis* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1910), p. 258, translated by MacEoin in *Messiah*, 380–81.

<sup>44</sup> MacEoin, *Messiah*, p. 382.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> All of the following notes on the claims made by these Bábís are summarized from Afnán, ‘*Ahd-i-A'lá*’, pp. 479–89.

<sup>48</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Badí'* (Hofheim, Germany: Bahá'í-Verlag, 2008), pp. 50–51.

<sup>49</sup> Per Mázandarání, *Zuhúru'l-Ḥaqq*, vol. 4 (Bahá'í-Verlag, 2011), pp. 19ff.

<sup>50</sup> A facsimile of Jání's letter is published in Afnán, ‘*Ahd-i-A'lá*’, p. 543, and a typescript can be found on pp. 483–84. These passages were translated by the present author.

<sup>51</sup> The alternative spellings of ‘Alláv (Afnán, ‘*Ahd-i-A'lá*’, p. 484) and ‘Uláv (Mázandarání, *Zuhúru'l-Ḥaqq*, vol. 4, p. 24) also appear in Bahá'í sources.

<sup>52</sup> Zarandí, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 593.

<sup>53</sup> Mázandarání, *Zuhúru'l-Ḥaqq*, vol. 4, p. 193, note 2.

<sup>54</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Badí'*, p. 127. Provisional translation by the present author.

<sup>55</sup> Afnán, ‘*Ahd-i-A'lá*’, p. 564, note 25.

<sup>56</sup> Different sources give varying surnames for Ḥájí Mullá Háshim: it may have been Naráqí, Káshání, or Káshí.

<sup>57</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Badí'*, p. 97. Provisional translation by the present author.

<sup>58</sup> Addressing Mírzá Mihdí Raṣhtí, for whom the *Kitáb-i-Badí'* was revealed.

<sup>59</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Badí'*, p. 126. Provisional translation by the present author.

<sup>60</sup> Afnán, ‘*Ahd-i-A'lá*’, pp. 493–95.

<sup>61</sup> *Vaqáyi'-i-Ittifáqíyyih*, no. 82 (Thursday, 10 Dhu'l-Qa'dih 1268 AH [26 August 1852]), per Afnán, ‘*Ahd-i-A'lá*’, p. 564, note 30. The relevant excerpt from the report is published in ‘*Ahd-i-A'lá*’, p. 488.

<sup>62</sup> The following verses are quoted in Afnán, ‘*Ahd-i-A'lá*’, p. 488 and have been translated by the present author.

<sup>63</sup> For instance, refer to a biography of Nabíl Zarandí in ‘Azízu'lláh Sulaymání, *Maṣábiḥ-i-Hidayat*, vol. 10 (n.p., n.d.), beginning on p. 264. An incomplete typescript is available online here: [https://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/sulayman/masabih10/Masabih\\_Hidayat\\_v10.pdf](https://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/sulayman/masabih10/Masabih_Hidayat_v10.pdf)

<sup>64</sup> The present author is grateful to Moojan Momen for sharing several useful details that informed this section on Mírzá Yaḥyá.

<sup>65</sup> A fully vocalized reproduction of the original Arabic text of this Writing appears in INBA 64:95–102. The Research Department has commented on this Writing in the following memorandum addressed to the Universal House of Justice: [https://bahai-library.com/uhj\\_vasaya\\_mirza\\_yahya](https://bahai-library.com/uhj_vasaya_mirza_yahya).

<sup>66</sup> Káshání (ed. Browne), *Kitab-i Nuqtat al-Kaf*, p. 244.

<sup>67</sup> MacEoin, *Messiah*, p. 386.

<sup>68</sup> <https://adibmasumian.com/translations/bh00775/>

<sup>69</sup> The present author is deeply grateful to Stephen Lambden for meticulously checking the provisional translation of this Tablet against the original text for accuracy, and also for offering both helpful suggestions to improve the English rendering and insightful comments on the Tablet's themes and other contents that have been incorporated into this textual analysis.

<sup>70</sup> Letter from the Department of the Secretariat to the present author, 8 December 2020.

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<sup>71</sup> [www.bahai.org/r/900469049](http://www.bahai.org/r/900469049)

<sup>72</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 109.

<sup>73</sup> The present translator is grateful to Todd Lawson for sharing this observation with him.

<sup>74</sup> For more on the significance of certain colors in the Bahá'í framework, refer to Vahid Rafati, *Alván dar Áthár-i-Bahá'í* (Dundas, Ontario, Canada: Mu'assisiy-i-Ma'árif-i-Bahá'í bih Lisán-i-Fársí, 1988). Roughly the first half of this Persian monograph—dealing with colors in Islamic mysticism, Shaykhism and Babism—was translated into English by Omid Ghaemmaghami and has been published under the title of “Colours in the Writings of the Báb” in *A Most Noble Pattern* (Oxford, England: George Ronald, 2012), pp. 33–51. The second half of the monograph, dealing with colors specifically in the Bahá'í Faith, is not yet available in English translation.

<sup>75</sup> “O SON OF BEAUTY! By My spirit and by My favor! By My mercy and by My beauty! All that I have revealed unto thee with the tongue of power, and have written for thee with the pen of might, **hath been in accordance with thy capacity and understanding, not with My state and the melody of My voice**” [Emphasis by the present translator] (*The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, from the Arabic, no. 67).

<sup>76</sup> Rafati, “Alván,” p. 35.

<sup>77</sup> “‘Amá is defined as an extremely thin and subtle cloud, seen and then not seen. For shouldst thou gaze with the utmost care, thou wouldst discern something, but as soon as thou dost look again, it ceaseth to be seen. For this reason, in the usage of mystics who seek after truth, ‘Amá signifieth the Universal Reality without individuations as such, for these individuations exist in the mode of uncompounded simplicity and oneness and are not differentiated from the Divine Essence. Thus they are individuated and not individuated. This is the station alluded to by the terms *Aḥadíyyih* [Absolute Oneness] and ‘Amá. This is the station of the “Hidden Treasure” mentioned in the *Ḥadíth*. The divine attributes, therefore, are individuations that exist in the Essence but are not differentiated therefrom. They are seen and then not seen. This, in brief, is what is meant by ‘Amá” (Authorized translation of a passage from a Tablet of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, published in *The Call of the Divine Beloved*, pp. 105–06).

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/nk/nuqta.htm>

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.h-net.org/~bahai/arabic/vol4/muin/muin.htm>

<sup>80</sup> In His *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, which was revealed in Baghdád and may date to circa 1858–60, there are multiple instances where Bahá'u'lláh states that He has been prohibited from divulging the secrets of what has been bestowed on Him. One example: “. . . forbidden as I may be from divulging that which God hath bestowed upon Me of the wonders of His knowledge, the gems of His wisdom, and the tokens of His power . . .”

[www.bahai.org/r/281175379](http://www.bahai.org/r/281175379)