



# BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

Provisional Translations

7 RAHMAT 178 B.E

ERIC MICHOT

Personal Selection Volume II

# VOLUME II

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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1

LAWH AR-RU'YA  
THE TABLET OF THE VISION

6

LAWH BASÍT AL-HAQÍQA  
TABLET OF THE UNCOMPOUNDED REALITY

28

LAWH-I YÚSUF  
TABLET OF JOSEPH

36

LAWH-I-DUSTAN-I-YAZDANI  
TABLET FOR THE ZOROASTRIANS

40

LAWH-I FU'AD  
TABLET OF FUAD

61

LAWH-I-GHULÁMU'L-KHULD  
THE TABLET OF THE DEATHLESS YOUTH

68

LAWH-I-HÚRÍYYIH  
TABLET OF THE MAIDEN

78

LAWH-I RA'ÍS II  
TABLET TO 'ALI PASHA II

89

LAWH-I TA'VIL  
A TABLET ON THE FIGURATIVE  
INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

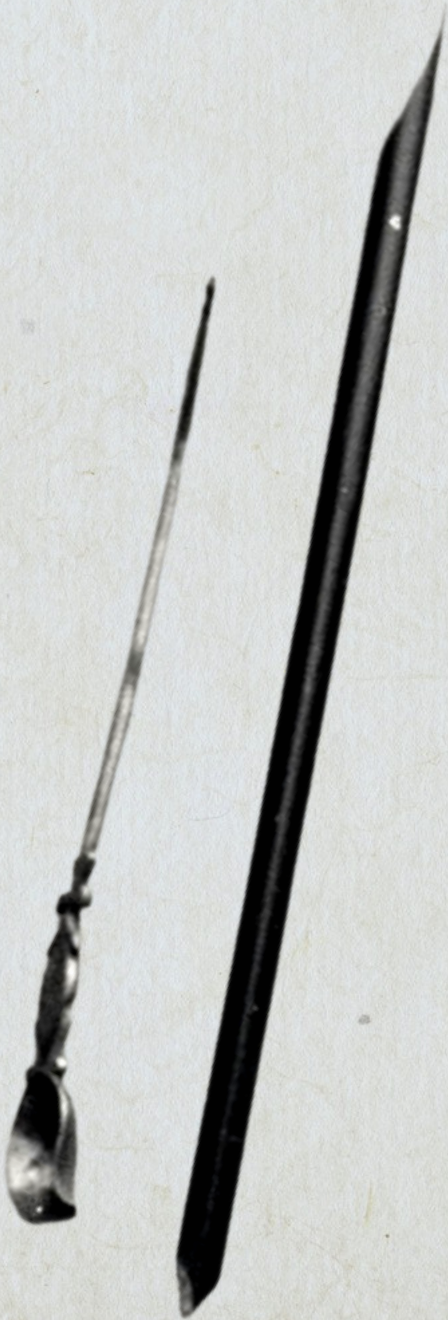
97

LAWH-I-TIBB  
THE TABLET OF MEDICINE

118

LAWH-I ZUHUR  
TABLET OF THE MANIFESTATION

اَللّٰهُمَّ  
بِهْتَابْ





**LAWH AR-RU'YA**  
**The Tablet of the Vision**  
**Bahá'u'lláh**

Translated by Juan Cole

Source: Ishraq-Khavari's \*Ayyam-i Tis`ih\*, pp. 16-20.

In His Name, Who warbleth upon the twigs.

O My Name! Listen to My call from the precincts of My throne, that it might transport thee to a shoreless sea, the depths of which no diver ever plumbed. Verily, thy Lord is knowing and generous. We desired to favor thee with the mention of what We saw, that thou mightest perceive the world of light that lieth within this realm of gloom, mightest be convinced that We have worlds within this world, and mightest thank thy Lord, the All-Perceiving. If He desired to make the rays of the sun burst forth from an atom, or to make the waves of the sea billow from a droplet, He would be able to do so, just as He generated from the Point the knowledge of all that was and yet shall be. Verily, We were seated upon the throne.

A most luminous woman entered, wearing exalted white raiments, shining like the moon when it riseth above the horizon. Exalted be God, Her Creator; no eye hath ever seen Her like. When her veil came undone, the heavens and the earth were illumined, as though the essence of pre-existence had shed the lights of effulgence upon it. Exalted be God, Her Creator; no eye hath ever seen Her like. She smileth and swayeth like the branch of an Egyptian willow before the panorama of the All-Merciful. Praise be to God, Who hath made Her manifest; no eye hath ever seen her like. She roved and wandered aimlessly, bereft of Her own will, as though the needle of love were attracted by the magnet of the Beauty that was refulgent before her countenance. Exalted be Her Creator; no eye hath ever seen Her like. She walketh, and splendor waiteth upon her, as the kingdom of beauty behind her voiceth its acclaim at the wonders of Her loveliness, Her coquetry, and the symmetry of Her limbs. Exalted be Her Creator; no eye hath ever seen her like.

Then We perceived black tresses all along her milky neck, as though night and day had embraced in this most glorious station and this ultimate goal. Exalted be Her Creator; no eye hath ever seen Her like. When We gazed at Her face We discovered the Point that had been concealed beneath the veil of oneness dawning forth from the horizon of Her brow, as though it was by means of Her that the tablets of divine love were revealed in the contingent world and the ledgers of the lovers were recorded in the remotest regions. Exalted be Her Creator; no eye hath ever seen Her like. That Point was spoken of by another Point, above her right breast. Exalted be the Lord of the hidden and the manifest, Who created her; no eye hath ever seen Her like. Then the Temple of God arose and She strode behind Him, listening, in motion, attracted by the verses of Her Lord. Blessed be the One

Who fashioned Her; no eye hath ever seen Her like. Then She grew more glad, joyful and full of yearning, till Her aspect changed and She swooned.

When She regained consciousness, She drew near and said, "May My soul be a sacrifice for Thine imprisonment, O Mystery of the Unseen in the kingdom of creation." Exalted be Her Creator; no eye hath ever seen Her like. She was gazing at the Orient of the Throne like one drunk and bewildered, till she put her hand around the neck of Her Lord and pressed Him to Her. When She drew near, We drew near. We found in Her that which was revealed in the hidden crimson scroll by My most high Pen. Exalted be Her Creator; no eye hath ever seen Her like. Then She inclined Her head and rested Her face upon two fingers, as though the crescent moon were joined to a full moon. Exalted be Her Creator; no one hath ever seen Her like. At that point She cried out, saying, "May all existence be a sacrifice to Thy tribulations, O sovereign of the earth and the heavens. To what end hast Thou entrusted Thyself to those in the city of `Akka? Set out for Thine other dominions, those stations upon which the eyes of the people of names have never fallen.

At that We smiled. "Acquaint yourselves with this most sweet pronouncement, and with that which We intended by the hidden mystery that is both manifest and supremely concealed, O ye endued with understanding among the passengers on My crimson ark. This mention hath coincided with the birth date of my Forerunner, Who made mention of Me and of My sovereignty, giving the people glad tidings of the heaven of My will, the ocean of My volition, and the sun of My manifestation. We have honored Him with another Day, whereon was revealed the concealed Absence, the hidden secret and the well-guarded enigma that struck

confusion into the hearts of those who dwell in the kingdom of names and left all who are on the earth and in the heavens thunderstruck, save for any whom We saved by Our authority and power. I am Powerful over whatsoever I will. No God is there but Me, the Knowing, the Wise.

Blessed is the one who perceiveth the fragrance of God in this Day that was the dawn of epiphany and of My Name, the Forgiving. Thereon, perfume hath been diffused, gales have blown, the ecstasy of disclosure hath overtaken those in their graves, and Mount Sinai hath cried out, "Dominion is God's the Almighty, the Exalted, the Omniscient, the All-Perceiving." On this Day, all who set out toward the goal have attained it, all mystics have reached what they would know, all wayfarers have trodden their straight path. Praise be to thee, O My God. Bless Thy friends, then send down upon them from the heaven of Thy magnanimity what will render them detached from all save Thee and cause them to set their faces toward the horizon from which hath risen the sun of Thy grace. Ordain, O My God, that which will profit them in this world and the next. Verily, thou art the Powerful, the Most High, the Bestower, the Giving, the Self-Sufficient, the Munificent.

Juan Cole writes:

...Baha'u'llah's Tablet of the Vision (Lawh ar-Ru'ya), [is] an ecstatic Akka Arabic Tablet that contains many themes similar to the earlier, Baghdad-era, Tablet of the Hour.

Because of Ishraq-Khavari's researches and internal evidence, we know the precise day of the revelation of this Tablet. Baha'u'llah says it was revealed on the commemoration of the Bab's birth (1 Muharram), and Ishraq-Khavari says in Ganj-i Shayigan that it was revealed in 1290. 1 Muharram 1290 was 1 March 1873. So this Tablet was written in the House of Abbud and is contemporaneous with the final stages of the completion of the Aqdas.



# LAWH BASIT AL-HAQIQA

## Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality

**Bahá'u'lláh**

Translation by M. Momen

He is God, exalted be He in Might and Greatness!

Concerning what the questioner has asked regarding the statement of the philosophers (hukamá) that "the uncompounded reality(16) is all things", say: know that what is intended by "things" in this context (lit. station, maqám) is none other than being (wujúd) and the perfections (kamalát) of being in so far as they are existent [and not privative](17); and by "all" is meant the obtainer (al-wájid).(18) This "all" contains no plurality and no part of it can be compared to the whole. The meaning is that the uncompounded reality, insofar as it is uncompounded in all respects, is the obtainer and gatherer of all the infinite and endless perfections.(19) As it has been said: "His works are limitless."

In the Persian language, it may be said that what the philosopher means by the word "things" in the afore-mentioned expression is the perfections of being in so far as these are existent [and not privative]; and by the word "all", is meant possession (dará'í) that is to say obtaining--the gathering together of all of the limitless perfections, in an uncompounded manner. They have mentioned similar

things throughout their discourse on the Divine unity (tawhíd), power (quwwat), and intensity (shiddat) of existence.

The meaning of the philosopher was not that the Necessarily Existent [God] has become dispersed among (resolved into, lit. dissolved into, munhal) the innumerable existent things. No! Praised be He! Exalted is He above that! Even as the philosophers themselves have stated: "The uncompounded reality is all things, but is not any one thing."

And viewed from another aspect, the lights of the uncompounded reality can be seen in all things. This however is dependent upon the vision of the seer and the discernment of the beholder. A penetrating vision (absar-i hadídih) is able to see the signs of the Primal Divine Unity in all things, since all things have been and are the places wherein the Divine Names are manifested. The Absolute Reality, however, has been and will continue unceasingly to be sanctified from ascent and descent, from limitations, connections and relationships, while "things" exist and appear in the loci of limitations. Thus it has been said: "The existence of the Necessarily [Existent] would not be in the full perfection of its power and intensity, were it possible for It to disperse Itself into the innumerable existent things, but such a dispersion is not possible." There is much to be said about this statement and if one were to elaborate fully on the meaning of the philosophers, the matter would become lengthy.(20)[107] Because the hearts of the noble are perceived to be subtle and refined, the pen chooses to confine itself to brevity.

Two stations can be observed in the Divine Unity: Existential Oneness (tawhíd-i wujúdí), and this is that [station] wherein all things are negated with a "no" and only the Absolute Reality is affirmed. This means the existence of nothing is

acknowledged except the Absolute Reality, in the sense that all things, when compared with Its manifestation and remembrance, have been and will continue to be absolute nothingness (faná-yi mahd). "All things perish save the [Divine] Face(21)", which means that compared with Its existence, nothing else has the capacity for existence and so no mention of the existence of anything else should be made. It has been said "God was and there was nothing else beside Him. And He is now as He always has been." And yet it can be seen that things exist and have existed. The meaning of these words is that, in His court, nothing has, or has ever had, existence. In the Existential Oneness, "all things" perish and are nothing and the [Divine] "Face(22)", which is the Absolute Reality, and is eternal and unceasing.

[The second station in Divine Unity,] Manifestational Oneness (tawhíd-i shuhúdí), is that [station] where the signs of the Primal Divine Unity, the manifestations of Eternity, and the effulgences of the light of Singleness can be observed in all things. Thus in the divine book it is revealed: "We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and in themselves."(23) [108] In this station the effulgences of the signs of the uncompounded reality can be observed and are apparent in all things. The meaning of the philosopher was not that the Absolute Reality is dispersed among the innumerable existent things. Immeasurably exalted is It from being dispersed in any thing or from being constrained by any limits or from being associated with any other thing in creation. It is and continues to be sanctified from and exalted above all else except Itself. We bear witness that It is one in Its Essence and one in Its attributes. And all things are held in the grasp of the power of Him [God] Who is the sovereign Protector of all the worlds.

In one aspect, all that has been said or will be said refers back to the first assertion, that the glorified and exalted Absolute Reality is unknowable, unattainable, and invisible, and this station has been and will continued to be sanctified from all references and names, and freed from whatever the people of creation may understand of It. The path is barred and the quest denied. For whatever wondrous references and powerful descriptions have appeared from the tongue and pen refer to the sublime Word [of God], the most exalted Pen, the primal Summit, the true Homeland, and the Dawning-place of the manifestation of mercy. This is [109] the source of Divine Unity (tawhíd) and the Manifestation of singleness and abstraction. In this station, all of the most beautiful Names [of God] and the most lofty [Divine] Attributes refer to Him (i.e. the manifestation of God), and do not refer to anything beyond Him, for, as has been stated, the Unseen Reality is sanctified from all reference. This locus of the light of Divine Unity, even though outwardly He is given a name and appears to be bound by limitations, is in His inner reality uncompounded (basít), sanctified from limitations. This uncompounded state is relative and attributive (idáfi wa nisbí) and not uncompounded in an absolute sense (min kull al-jihát). In this station, the meaning is as follows: the Primal Word and the Dawning-place of the light of Primal Oneness is the educator of all things and the possessor of innumerable perfections. For this word in this station, there is an exposition, hidden in the treasures of purity (infallibility, `ismat) and recorded in the guarded tablet, which it is not appropriate to mention now. Perchance God will produce it. He is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.

And the objections that have been raised by some to the words of the philosopher are not based on evidence in that the meaning of his words has not been

understood. Truly one cannot regard it as sufficient to look to the literal (external) meaning of a statement and then stir up malice. This is except in the case of the words [110] of those who are notorious for their unbelief and idolatry. The words of such souls are not worthy of commentary.

The philosophers have been and are of various factions. Some have derived what they say from the books of the prophets. And the first who taught divine wisdom (hikma) was Idrís, on account of which he was given his name,(24) and he is also called Hermes. He is called by a different name in each language. He has given thorough and convincing expositions in every arena of divine wisdom. And after him Balínús (Apollonius) derived some of the sciences from the Hermetic tablets. Most of the philosophers have derived their philosophical and scientific discoveries from his words and expositions.

Thus this exposition of the philosopher has been and is still capable of numerous praiseworthy and specific interpretations (ta'wílát). Some of those who have attained [the Divine Presence], wishing to protect the Cause of God, have outwardly refuted (the words of the philosopher). But this imprisoned servant does not mention anything but that which is good. Furthermore this day is not the day for human beings to occupy themselves with understanding such expositions, for such knowledge and its like has never been and will never be conducive to making human beings self-sufficient (able to do without, detached from all save God, ghaní). For example, the philosopher who spoke these words, [111] were he to be alive, and also both they who accepted what he said and those who opposed him over it, all of them would now be in one position: every single one of them who, after the raising of the call of the King of Names from the right hand of the

luminous spot, affirmed his belief, is accepted and praiseworthy,(25) and all others are rejected.

How many the souls who considered themselves as being at the highest pinnacle of reality and mystical knowledge to the extent that they considered that what issued forth from their mouths was the balance by which [the truth of] human utterance should be weighed or the astrolabe with which the calendar of the beginning and the end should be fixed. Despite all this, in the days of the spring-time of the All-Merciful and the blowing of the winds of trials, we did not discover in them either acceptance or constancy. If a soul were today to be omniscient in all the sciences of the world and yet hesitate in affirming his belief (lit. speaking the word "yes"(26)), he would not be mentioned in the Divine Presence and would be accounted among the most ignorant of people. The goal of the religious sciences is to attain knowledge of the Absolute Reality. Any soul who holds back from this most holy and most mighty adornment is recorded in the tablets as being of the dead.

O Husyan! This wronged one declares: words need deeds. Words without deeds are as bees without honey or as trees without fruit.

Consider the philosopher Sabzivárí (27)[112]. Among his verses, there is a poem, which conveys the following meaning: "No Moses is alive to hear it, otherwise the chant of 'I verily am God!' exists in every tree [bush]." Such words as these he has spoken and his meaning is that the true knower of God rises to such a station that his eyes perceive the lights of the effulgences of the luminous Source of manifestation (mujallí) and his ears discern His call from all things. There is no objection to these words of the philosopher(28), but, as we have already stated, this

is the realm of words. In the realm of deeds, however, it can be seen that although the call of the divine lote-tree has been raised upon the highest spot in creation in clear and unambiguous (min ghayr ta'wíl) language and is inviting all beings through the loftiest of summonses, he has paid no heed whatsoever. For had he hearkened, he would have arisen to make mention of it. Either we must say that these were empty words which flowed from his mouth, or that, for fear for his reputation and love of his livelihood (lit. his bread), he remained deprived of this station (of belief) and of testifying to it. Either he understood and concealed [his belief] or he understood and denied [Bahá'u'lláh's claim].

Woe to those who waste [113] their whole lives in trying to establish the truth of their vain imaginings and yet, when the lights of the Divine Presence are shining forth from the horizon of the name of the Self-Subsisting (al-Qayyúm), they remain deprived thereof. The Cause is in God's hands. He grants what He wishes to whomever He wishes, and withholds whatever He desires from whomever He desires. He is to be praised in His doings and obeyed in His judgements. No God is there but He, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.(29)

In these days, the following was revealed in a tablet: How many men, attired with a turban [i.e. learned], have held back and opposed and how many women wearing veils have recognized and accepted and have said "Praise be to Thee, O God of the Worlds!" Thus it is that we have made the most exalted among them to become the most abased, and the most abased to become the most exalted. Verily your Lord is Ruler over whatsoever He wishes.

O Husayn! Say to the questioner: forsake this small pond when the most mighty ocean is before you. Draw near and drink from its waters in the name of your Lord,

the Knowing, the All-Informed. By my life! It will cause you to reach a station wherein you will see in the whole world naught but the effulgences of the presence of the Ancient of Days and you will hearken unto the lote-tree which has been elevated upon the knowledge that there is no god but He, the Powerful, the Mighty, the Omnipotent.

In this day, it is incumbent upon all souls, when they hear the call from the Dawning-Place of Creation, to leave behind [114] the people of the world and their opinions and arise and say: "Yes,(30)O my Desire!" and then to say: "I obey! O Beloved of the Worlds."

Say: O questioner! Were the sweetness of the wine of the exposition of your Lord to seize you and were you to recognize the wisdom and illumination that is in it, you would forsake this contingent world and arise to assist this wronged exile and would proclaim: "Praise be to the one who has manifested the fluid [waters] as the solid [ice],(31) and the uncompounded [reality] as a circumscribed [creation], and the hidden as the manifest; the one who, were one to behold him in his outward form, one would find him in the form of a man standing before the people of tyranny. Were one to contemplate him his inner reality, however, one would recognize him as lord over all who are in the heavens and earths."

Listen to what the fire is proclaiming from the luminous lote-tree raised upon the crimson spot: "O People! Hasten with all of your hearts to the shore of the Beloved. Thus has the matter been decided and the decree has issued forth from He who is all-powerful and trustworthy."

O questioner! Your words have been mentioned in the Divine Presence(32) in this manifest prison. Thus has been revealed this tablet from the horizon of which



shines forth the sun of the benevolence of your Lord the mighty, the all-praised. [115] Know its true worth and value it greatly. This would be best for you, if you are among those who have true knowledge. We ask of God that He confirm you in His Cause and make mention of you and decree for you that which will profit you in this world and the next. He verily answers the prayers of those who call upon Him and He is the most merciful of the merciful.

O servant! Were you to be attracted by the breezes of the utterances of the Lord of Names and were you to seek illumination from the lights of the [Divine] Face(33), which shine forth from the Dawning-place of eternity, you would turn your face towards the all-highest Horizon.

Say: O Creator of the heavens and Lord of Names! I ask You by Your name through which You have opened the door of meeting with You to Your creatures and have caused the sun of Your bounty to shine forth upon those who are in Your kingdom, that You may cause me to be sincere in Your love, detached from all save You, arising for Your service, looking towards Your Face, and speaking in praise of You. O Lord! assist me in the days of the Manifestation of Your Self and the Dawning-place of Your Cause, such that I may burn away the clouds [that obscure You] by Your grace and favour and may consume the veils [that separate me from You] with the fire of Your love. O Lord! You are strong and I am weak; You are rich [116] and I am poor. I ask You, by the ocean of Your bounty, that You do not cause me to be deprived of Your grace and Your Love. All things bear witness to Your greatness, Your glory, Your power and Your might. Guide and assist me through (lit. take my hand in the hand of) Your will and save me by Your sovereignty. Write down then for me what You have written down for Your

confidants, those who have near access to You and are faithful to Your Covenant and Testament, who soar in the atmosphere of Your will and speak Your praise among Your creatures. Verily You are the Powerful, the Protector, the Lofty, the Mighty, the Generous.

## Notes

1. Sirhindi quoted in Burhan Ahmad Faruqi, *The Mujjaddid's Concept of Tawhid*, Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, repr. 1970, p. 81.
2. In this paper the text for this work is taken from Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í's commentary on the work (see note 9), the translation is adapted from James Morris, *The Wisdom of the Throne* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
3. In this paper, use has been made of the Persian translation by Ahmad Ardikání (Tihran: Markaz Nashr Danishgáhi, 1362).
4. The Arabic text used is that found in unnumbered pages at the back of the Persian translation by Ghulam-Husayn Áhangí (Tihran: Intishárát Mawla, 2nd printing 1361).
5. Qumm: Maktabat al-Mustawfi, 1378/1958, vol.1, p. 116-7
6. Morris, *Wisdom*, pp. 98-9. A similar argument can be found in al-Mashá'ir, Mash`ar 6 of Manhaj 1 (Persian translation, p. 63).
7. See for example, al-Mabda, pp. 52-3
8. Muhammad Sharíf Al-Jurjání, for example, in his dictionary of religious terms, *Kitab al-Ta`rífát* (Beirut: Maktaba Lubnan, 1969) states that al-basit can be

considered in three ways. The first of these is al-haqíqí, which is "that which has no parts (or divisions, juz`) to it at all, such as the Creator, exalted be He." (p. 46).

9. Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í Sharh al-`Arshiyya vol. 1 (Kirman: Sa`ádat, 1361), pp. 80-1

10. For details of these works and manuscript and published sources for them, see M. Momen, The Works of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í (Bahá'í Studies Bulletin Monograph, no. 1, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1991, nos. 22, 25, and 39, pp. 52, 55-6, 64-5.

11. Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í, Majmu`a ar-Rasá'il, vol. 30, (Kirman: Matba`a al-Sa`ádat, second printing, n.d.), pp. 131-2

12. Iranian National Bahá'í Manuscript Collection, vol. 86, pp. 95-6. I am grateful to Stephen Lambden for finding this and the next quotation in this paper.

13. This refers to the assertion that if Knowledge is an essential attribute of God, then the Eternal Archetypes of all created things must be within the Essence of God in order for there to be something that is the object of God's knowledge.

14. Iranian National Bahá'í Manuscript Collection, vol. 69, p. 422-3

15. I am grateful to Keven Locke for some suggested corrections to the translation and to Jack McLean for his suggestions for the improvement of the English text. Others who suggested improvements and corrections to my commentary include John Walbridge, Nima Hazini, and Bijan Masumian

16. Basít al-Haqíqa. Basít is here translated as "uncompounded". It has been translated by James Morris as "simple" (The Wisdom of the Throne, pp. ). Although this is technically a correct translation in the philosophical sense of the word as something that is uncompounded, I felt that the word "simple" has too many other meanings in common use and would be confusing. The translator of the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh (p. 61) has translated the term as "elementary". There is also the fact that this word is being used in a genitive construction and not adjectivally (i.e. the Arabic may be rendered literally as "the uncompounded of reality"). The root of the word basít means "to spread out" or "to stretch out", and in this sense of something spread out, I was tempted to translate the phrase as "the field of reality". This would render the passage "the field of reality is all things" which has a striking resonance with modern physics in the sense that all physical reality is in modern physics considered to consist of electro-magnetic fields in which fluxes occur. This would however, apart from being anachronistic also be a departure from the sense in which the original author Mullá Sadrá intended this passage. His meaning was derived from the philosophical notion that all reality is compounded and that the only uncompounded reality is God.

17. i.e. those perfections that are positive and existent, rather than those which are negative and privative.

18. This is a somewhat unusual use of the word wájid, which derives from the root meaning "to get" or "obtain". According to Sayyid Ja`far Sajjádí, (Farhang-i Ma`árif-i Islámí, Tehran, 1373, 3rd vol., p. 2090, citing Sharh-i Kalamát-i Bábá Táhir) wájid is used by Bábá Táhir `Uryán to refer to someone who has emptied himself of all vestige of self and has detached himself from all save God.

19. The basic language of the text changes from Arabic to Persian at this point, although there continue to be numerous Arabic phrases and passages in what follows.

20. These numbers refer to the page numbers in the original text in *Iqtidarát*.

21. Qur'án 28:88

22. Qur'án, see note 19

23. Qur'án 41:53

24. The name Idrís can be considered to derive from the root "d-r-s" which means "to teach".

25. Lit. Attained to the word "Balá" (lit. "Yes"). A reference to Qur'án

7:172, where, in the pre-eternal Covenant, to God's question "Am I not your Lord?" The children of Adam are made to reply "Yes (Balá)." In other words, Bahá'u'lláh is saying that were Mullá Sadrá together with his supporters and opponents all to be alive in Bahá'u'lláh's day, they would all be in the position of having to face the challenge of Bahá'u'lláh's claim.

26. See note 23

27. Mullá Hádí Sabzivári (d. 1878) the most prominent of the Iranian philosophers of the nineteenth century. An English translation of one of his major works is available *The Metaphysics of Sabzavári* (trans. T. Izutsu and M. Mohaghegh, New York, 1977).

28. Indeed Bahá'u'lláh himself says much the same in one of the prayers for the fast: "...this Revelation - a Revelation the potency of which hath caused every tree to cry out what the Burning Bush had aforetime proclaimed unto Moses, Who conversed with Thee" (Prayers and Meditations, no. 85, p. 144).

29. This paragraph is paraphrased and quoted by Bahá'u'lláh in the Words of Paradise (Kalimát Firdawsiiyih), Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 61

30. See 23

31. Cf. Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations, no. 38, p. 49

32. lit. "before the Face"; a Qur'anic allusion, see note 19

33. Qur'anic reference, see note 19

The tablet known as the Lawh Basít al-Haqíqa (Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality) dates from the Akka period. In this tablet, Bahá'u'lláh deals with one of the principle issues that has run through the Islamic world from the Middle Ages onwards. This is the controversy between two positions concerning the nature of the relationship between God and His creation. These two positions existed from the earliest days of Islam and eventually became known as Wahdat al-Wujúd (existential unity, oneness of being) and Wahdat ash-Shuhúd (unity in appearance only). The former was the position taken by the followers of Ibn al-'Arabí (d. 638 A.H./1240) and was more common among those inclined towards Sufism and mystical philosophy. The latter was the position commonly taken by jurists and was given its name by Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindí (971 A.H./1563-1034 A.H. - 1034/1624-5) in the 17th century.

In brief it may be said that those who supported the position of Wahdat al-Wujúd maintained that Being is one--it is that which exists. Since existence is also one of the essential attributes of God, then it may be said that all things are subsumed in the one Absolute Reality that we call God. This one Reality has different aspects according to the way that it is viewed.

Those who held to the opposing position of Wahdat ash-Shuhúd maintained that God is beyond any conceptualizations that can be made of Him; he is wará' al-wará thumma wará' al-wará thumma wará' al-wará (beyond the beyond, then beyond the beyond, and again beyond the beyond)(1). Hence the mystics' experience of unity or union or any apprehension of God through mystical experience is subjective only and has no objective validity. The unity that mystics claim with God is only an appearance and has no substance.

In Iran, the concept of wahdat al-wujúd had a powerful influence especially upon many philosopher-mystics. The most important of these was Sadru'd-Dín Shírází, known as Mullá Sadrá. It is Mullá Sadrá whose dictum "All that which is uncompounded in Its Reality is, by virtue of Its [absolute] Unity, all things" (kullu ma huwa basítu 'l-haqíqa fa-huwa bi-wahdatihi kullu 'l-ashyá') is quoted and commented upon by Bahá'u'lláh in this tablet. This dictum is one of the cornerstones of Mullá Sadrá's philosophy and is explicated in several of his works: al-Hikmat al-Arshiyah (the Wisdom of the Throne)(2), al-Mabda wa'l-Mu`ád (the Origin and the Return)(3), al-Mashá`ir fí Ma`rifat Alláh (the Staging-Posts in the Knowledge of God)(4), and al-Hikmat al-muta`áliyya fi'l-Asfar al-`aqliyya al-arba`a (The Transcendental Wisdom concerning the Four Journeys of the Rational Soul).(5)

In his work, *al-Hikmat al-Arshiyah*, the Wisdom of the Throne, Mullá Sadrá takes as his starting point the traditional philosophical concept that all things are composed of quiddity (*mahiyyah*, that which answers the question "what is it?") and being (*wujúd*, that which gives existence to the quiddity). He then goes on to demonstrate that if an entity A has something B negated of it (i.e. if A is stated to be "not B") and if B is something that itself has being (i.e. is not merely a statement of privation or imperfection, such as "not blue" or "illiterate"), then A cannot be uncompounded in its essential reality since it must be composed of at least two aspects, an aspect by which it is A and an aspect by which it is not B. (These two aspects cannot be identical since that would mean positing that the very essence of A is something privative such that anyone who intellected "A" would also immediately intellect "not B"). Hence the converse of this must also be true, that which is uncompounded in its reality can have nothing that has being negated of it--otherwise it would consist of at least two aspects: an aspect by which it is such (such as A) and an aspect by which it is not some other (such as not B, not C, etc.), and would therefore not be uncompounded in its essential reality. Hence "that which is uncompounded in its reality" must necessarily be "all things".(6) Elsewhere, Mullá Sadrá makes it clear that "that which is uncompounded in its reality" is the "necessarily existent (*wájib al-wujúd*)", i.e. God(7), and this is the definition also given by other writers.(8)

Mullá Sadrá's pre-eminence in the field of Iranian Shi`i mystical philosophy (*hikmat*) meant that this idea was adopted and commented upon by numerous other philosophers. For our purposes, the most significant of those who commented upon this dictum was the Shaykhí leader, Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í.



He severely criticized this dictum of Mullá Sadrá because of its implication of existential monism.

Shaykh Ahmad wrote in several of his works commenting upon this dictum. The most extensive of these critiques was in a commentary that he wrote on Mullá Sadra's work the Mashá'ir (composed in 1234/1818-9 in Kirmánsháh). He also deals with this subject in his last major work, his commentary on Mullá Sadrá's Hikmat al-`Arshiyya (completed in 1236/1820-1 in Kirmánsháh). In the latter, he states that this dictum is erroneous because:

He [Mullá Sadrá] has concluded that if one negates something of it and this negation is comprehended in the mind, then this necessitates composition. And we say to him: the uncompounded reality is a pure matter, not something from which nothing can be negated because your words that "it is something from which nothing can be negated" is similar to your words that "it is something from which something can be negated"; for in both cases there is need for composition. There is need for composition from existent matter and non-existent matter in what you have rejected and there is need for composition from existent matter and existent matter in what you have taken recourse in, and it is that from which nothing can be negated.(9)

This subject is also arises in a treatise that Shaykh Ahmad wrote for Mullá Muhammad Damaghání in 1232/1816-7, and in a treatise written for several unnamed Sayyids in (date not known)(10). In the last-named work, Shaykh Ahmad states that:

When he (Mullá Sadrá) says "the uncompounded reality is all things", this expression would suggest that He [God], praised be He, is all accidents (hawadith),

since things are accidents. The error of this statement is clear since accidents are in the realm of of contingency (al-imkán) and the necessarily [existent], praised be He, is pre-existent (azal) and is not in the realm of contingency . . .

Shaykh Ahmad goes on to give several possible meanings of Mullá Sadrá's dictum and demonstrates the falseness of each.(11)

The Báb, in a few places, criticizes the doctrine of wahdat al-wujúd as it was generally understood among Sufis. He disapproved, in particular, of the concept that God could somehow be considered to be dispersed among created things. In the course of this criticism, he mentions the concept of basít al-haqíqa. In his Risála adh-Dhahabiyya(12), the Báb states that:

Most of the Islamic philosophers, the peripatetic philosophers, the followers of Mulla Sadrá (as-Sadrá'iyyin), and the Theosophical philosophers (al-iláhiyyin) have erred in their explanations of this station. The signs of the effulgences (tajalliyát) of creation were mistaken by them for the countenance of the Essence [of God]. Thus they went along with erroneous statements concerning the Eternal Archetypes (a`yan thábita) being in the Essence [of God] in order to establish His knowledge (praised be He)(13); and with mention of the Uncompounded Reality in order to establish causality (`illiyya) in the Essence [of God]; and with mention of the connection between the Essence [of God] and [His] actions and attributes; and with the mention of the oneness of Being (wahdat al-wujúd) between the Creator (mújjid) and the one who has gone astray (al-mafqúd). All of this is absolute heresy (shirk mahd) in the estimation of the family of God, the Imáms of justice, for God has always been the All-Knowing without the existence of anything having form and shape (? -- shay'un bi-mithl ma inna-hu kana shayyár). Just as He does not

need for His being alive the existence of anything other than Him, He also does not need for His knowledge the existence of objects of knowledge. And the Essence [of God] continues to be connected to things. The causation (‘illiyya) of created things is His handiwork (san`ihi) and this is the [Primal] Will, which God has created through itself by itself without any fire from the Essence [of God] touching it. And God has created existent things through it and it continues. The All-High does not speak except through it; and the All-High does not give any indication of its essence (dhátiyyatihá). And God has not given any sign of His Essence in [the whole of] creation (al-imkán), for His Being (kaynúnátihi) sets beings apart from being known, and His Essence (dhatiyyatihi) prevents essences from being explained. Verily the relationship of the [Primal] Will to Him is like the relationship of a verse [of scripture] to God. It is a relationship that is conferred upon Creation not upon the Essence [of God], for It is sanctified from the mention of any indications or relationships or evidences or signs or stations or effulgences or breezes relating to It; and that being the case none can know It except Itself. And such expressions as Oneness of Being and the mention of the Uncompounded Reality is witness, in the estimation of the people of the covenants (ahl al-`uhúd), to its falsity, for He is the one who there is no-one other than He with Him. How then is it possible to say any words concerning His Being. On the contrary, all signs in the world of Láhút, Jabarút, Malakút and Mulk are possibilities of the hearts and souls [of human beings] and what has occurred to their imaginations. All who describe God, except Himself, have lied and deceived for anything other than Him is not of Him and cannot speak on His level and cannot have existence with Him, even the purest expression of the Oneness of God. And I have set forth proofs in two thousand manuscripts (fí'l-nuskha al-alifayn) in explanation of the

secret of the confusion (? - ilhá') of the errors of the words of these men. The beginning of the saying of such words is the passage from Muhyi ad-Dín, may God delay his punishment, such as what he has said in the Fusús [al-Hikám}. And this is sheer idolatry (shirk) in the estimation of those who have inner knowledge (ahl al-butún).

And in a letter addressed to Mírzá Muhammad Sa`id of Zavárih(14), the Báb states:

And with regard to the reply concerning the uncompounded reality, which the philosophers have mentioned in order to assert that there is Being between the Creator and the one who has gone astray, there is no doubt that this is erroneous in the estimation of one who possesses the musk-like fragrance of fair-mindedness.

Bahá'u'lláh takes a much milder and more accommodating attitude towards the monist ideas in Sufism. In the Baghdad period, he spent some time associating with Sufis in Sulaymaniyya. He also wrote several works in the Sufi style and idiom. Among these were the Seven Valleys (Haft Vádí), the Four Valleys (Chahár Vádí), and the poem Qasída `Izz Varqá'iyih (The Ode of the Dove) which was written in the style of the famous poem at-Tá'iyya of the Sufi poet Ibn al-Fárid. Although Bahá'u'lláh wrote less on overtly Sufi themes in later years, the tablet which is the subject of this paper and which was revealed in the Akka period is one of those in which he returns to some of these themes.

Given the fact that both Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í and the Báb had written on the theme of Basít al-Haqíqa, it was perhaps inevitable that someone among his followers would ask Bahá'u'lláh for his comments on the theme of Mullá Sadrá's dictum. It would appear from the text that one of Bahá'u'lláh's followers, named

Husayn, had been asked by someone who was a follower of Mullá Sadrá to ask for Bahá'u'lláh's comments on the question of Basít al-Haqíqa and this tablet was revealed in response to the question.

In this tablet, Bahá'u'lláh again displays his benevolent attitude towards Sufi themes. He refrains from condemning Mullá Sadrá's dictum outright, and instead states that those who have condemned this approach have misunderstood it and have taken it too literally.

Bahá'u'lláh first explains the nature of the division among Muslims over Mullá Sadrá's dictum and the associated concepts. He brings forward verses from the Qur'an in support of both positions. For those who follow Mullá Sadrá's position, which he here calls Tawhíd-i-Wujúdí (existential oneness), Bahá'u'lláh quotes the Qur'anic verse "All things perish save [His] face" (28:8, cf. 55:27) and interprets this to support the position of those those who assert that the only reality is the Divine Reality. For those who opposed Mullá Sadrá's position, which he here calls Tawhíd-i-Shuhúdí (oneness in appearance only), Bahá'u'lláh quotes the Qur'anic verse ""We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and in themselves." (41:53) This he interprets as saying that any evidence of union between the Divinity and creation is only the result of the fact that the signs of God are apparent in all things.

Having defined the two sides of the conflict, Bahá'u'lláh asserts that those who have attacked Mullá Sadrá's position have looked only at the literal meaning of his words rather than the underlying meaning. He then goes on to give an interpretation of Mullá Sadrá's dictum in terms of the concept of the Manifestation of God. This is one of Bahá'u'lláh's most explicit statements of one of the most interesting and controversial aspects of his doctrine: his assertion that all of the

statements that occur in the scriptures relating to God (including references to His names and attributes, and statements about His actions and commands) refer in reality to the Manifestation of God, since no statement can be made about the Essence of God, which is unknowable.

The tablet then continues with Bahá'u'lláh's statement that there is no benefit to be gained from disputing such points. Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh asserts that his appearance renders all such disputation secondary. Whichever side of the argument an individual is on, his status with God depends only on whether he accepts or rejects Bahá'u'lláh.

The text which is translated here<sup>(15)</sup> is that published in the compilation *Alváh Mubarakih Hadrat Bahá'u'lláh: Iqtidárát wa chand lawh digár* (usually known as *Iqtidárát*, no date, no place of publication, pp. 105-116), the facsimile of a manuscript in the hand-writing of Mishkín-Qalam, dated Rajab A.H. 1310/January 1893. The text of this tablet has also been published in *Ma'idih Asmání* (vol. 7, pp. 140-7) and by Alexander (Aleksandr) G. Tumanski (d. 1920) in his translation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, *Kitabe Akdes*, *Zapiski Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk S. Petersburg*, 8th series, vol. 3, no. 6, 1899, pp. 61-4. Manuscripts of this tablet include one in the collection of manuscripts bought from Mr. Dunlop of the British Legation in Tehran by the University of Leiden (Manuscript Or. 4971, section 7, item 1).

# LAWH-I-YUSUF

## Tablet of Joseph

### Bahá'u'lláh

Translated by Anton Haddad in, or before, 1904

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The Tongue of God utters (this) in Persian words:

O Joseph! My Demonstration was brought to Its fullness and completion for all who are in heaven and on earth before I made Myself known, because It appeared with such wonderful condition that no one could find a way to delay or oppose.

Meditate upon the nations of former ages and why they were excluded from approaching the Shore of God and prevented from the Beauty of His Eternal Majesty. If thou lookest with clear insight (iron sight), thou wilt perceive that all are deprived of the of the Bounty of God on account of the veils of words, imaginations, and invented proofs. In the Day of God, though the Beauty of God was like the sun in heaven, shining and radiating, still they were veiled on account

of their superstitions and imaginations. Notwithstanding that they had been commanded in all the Tablets not to cling to anything created between earth and Heaven in the time of the Manifestation, but to adhere only to the Root of the Cause and that which is manifested through Him, yet they deviated from the Right Path and adhered to the idea that the way to know God (Who is exalted and holy above all) depends upon believing or disbelieving the people. Woe upon them, being remote from God because of their willingness to know God through that which is beside Him! This is impossible, because the Ancient Essence is known (only) by Himself, and all things which are known are made possible (only) through that which flows from the Pen of His Command. Exalted is He, that He should be known through that which is beside Him because, verily, all else but Him was created as thou art.

In this day all those on earth and in heaven are viewed (by God) as being in one region. Every soul which is wholly cut from all else save God and is soaring to the Heaven of the knowledge of God, is and will be of those who are faithful to God and of His saints, even though they should not be known by others; and the soul which rejects will be considered as one of the lowest of the creatures in the sight of God, even though he should be of the chiefs among the people, because God (exalted is His mention) hath never been and never will be related or attributed to any one of the creatures. All people were created alike by the Breath of His order, and loftiness, exaltation and debasement appeared among the people after they had been created. Every soul who accepts the Word of God while hearing It, verily, is of the inhabitants of the Supreme Kingdom and of the



confirmed ones in the Paradise of ABHA, and those who do not (accept) are mentioned as the people of Hades.

In this day he who desires to be in relationship with the Tree of the Cause, must withdraw himself from all that is in heaven and upon earth and advance toward the Great Aspect with a pure and shining heart and a sanctified soul. If any soul desires to know God (exalted is His Majesty) through other means, he will never succeed, and will never understand, because all beside Him are limited with (evident) limitations of possibilities and are brought into existence by (His) power of creation. Through that which is created and limited the Essence of the Ancient was not and never will be known.

Hear the Lordly commandments and the tones of the Eternal Holiness, and turn from the left hand of uncertainty and superstition to the Right Hand of Assurance. Ponder carefully with thine insight upon the Godly Manifestations and the conditions of Eternal Holiness. Cleanse the eye from unsatisfying views that thou mayest see the Manifestations of the Majestic Oneness in everything. Purify thine ear from the saying of all the people, that thou mayest hear the Holy and Godly tones from all directions, and sanctify thy heart from the confused, wordy allusions of the past that thou mayest perceive the plain, direct, wonderful words revealed, and victoriously succeed to the Stream of Eternal Holiness and the Pure Wine which has no liness [sic, likeness?]. This is the command of JAMAL EL QUEDAM (The Beauty of the Ancient) to thee.

Concerning what thou hast asked as to the beginning of the Creation, its end, assembling, resurrection, path, paradise and fire, know verily that all are true and there is no doubt about them, and he who is faithful and has clear insight can see

with his inward and outward eyes all these ranks and stations in every time, because such an one will not be, in any time, prevented from the Bounty, neither excluded from what he wishes.

If thou soarest unto the Heaven of Godly Bounty, thou shalt see the Sign of God manifested in all manners of things brought into existence in every time, whether of the past or the future; because, verily, the Bounty of God hath never been nor ever will be specialized in any one thing.

The explanation of what God intended by the (words) Assembling, Resurrection, Paradise, Fire, etc., which are mentioned in the Godly Tablets, is found only and especially at the time of the Manifestation; for example, at the time of the Manifestation the Toungue [sic] of God utters the Word, and through the Word which comes forth from his mouth, the Paradise, Fire, Assembling, Resurrection, Oath and all that thou hast asked, and that which thou hast not, will be disclosed and manifested.

Every soul who sincerely accepts the Word (of God) hath verily passed through the (Right Path) and succeeded in approaching the Paradise of (God's Pleasure), and hath assembled with those who are near to God --- the chosen ones.

He, in the Presence of God, will be considered as one of the inhabitants of the Paradise and of the confirmed ones of the Supreme Kingdom; and every soul that rejects is in fire and considered as one of those who are in relationship with denial and Sejjin (Hades) and assembled in the shadow of the polytheists.

That which has (just) been mentioned, represents all these stations, which in the time of the Manifestation appear through the Word.

But the souls who succeed in attaining the Pleasure of God and believing in His Cause, will gain the reward of their deeds in the world to come, after their spirits leave their bodies. Because all seen things in this world are not ready (nor able) to bear more than that (which has been given to them).

Though the worlds of God are circulating around this world, yet for each soul in any of these worlds (there is) a fixed and preordained command.

Do not think (or imagine) that anything mentioned in the Books of God is false or foolish; (Verily), God is exalted above all that.

I swear by the Sun of the Horizon of the Meanings, that there are for ever and ever many Godly Paradises which have no equal nor comparison.

In (this) the first life the meaning of Paradise is pleasing God and (believing) entering His Cause!

But after departing from this world the faithful ones will enter into paradises which have no likeness and will enjoy winning graces which are beyond comprehension; verily those paradises are the fruits of their deeds which they have accomplished in this world.

Dost thou not see that if any one of God's creatures serves another, or performs work for him, he receives his reward and compensation for it? Then how can it be said that the All-Generous commandeth his creatures (to do according to) His Ordinances and after that excluded them from His Mercy?

Praised is He, and Praised is He about that; Exalted is He and Exalted is He above what the creatures imagine about Him!

In this day, all these ranks (asked about) are witnessed; therefore is the soul blessed who victoriously succeedeth in attaining the Paradise of ABHA, which is was and ever will be the Supreme of all Paradises.

If purified ears and matured souls shall be found, then, continually will be mentioned that which is from the Wonderful Bounty of God, that all may be purified and emptied of all that they perceived, understood or witnessed; and advanced toward the highest Aspect.

But of what benefit is this! Since through all the training of the Point of Bian, (the souls of all beside Him be a sacrifice for Him!) these creatures have not progressed from the seed to the first station of the embryo, therefore, when will they reach the condition of the body? And beside all these there are several stations which have not been mentioned. Woe upon those who changed the Grace of God that was bestowed upon them so that by their being in existence, the Heaven of Meanings was prevented from mentioning them, (the stations) and their conditions!

Thus ponder carefully upon the condition of these creatures and be one of the witnesses.

The Paradise and the Fire in the apparent life, were and will ever be the acceptance and the rejection; and after the ascension of the spirit, there are Paradises which have no equal -- and also Fire which has no likeness, which are the fruits of the deeds of the advancer and the opposer, who will be in such condition; but no soul understood or ever will understand these stations save God.

And for the faithful one (the believer) many stations were created above what was heard; this is from the wonderful gifts of God, which are prepared in the

Paradise of Everlasting Majesty. In the same way stations were created for the denier of eternal and everlasting torment beyond what was heard.

Heareby We bear witness that the Path is lifted up in Truth, the Balance is laid in Justice, the Manifestations assembled, the Hidden issues [sic, issues?] disclosed, the Clarion pealed, the Trumpet sounded, the Fire burst forth, the Paradise approached nearer, the Proclaimer announced, the Heavens roller [sic] together as a scroll, the Ground leveled, the Breeze of God wafted, the Spirit of God sent, the Beauteous damsels adorned, the Youths beautified, the Mansions assured, the securities of the upper apartments (of Paradise) inlaid with precious stones, the Waters overflowed, the Fruits hung low (so as to be easily gathered), the Fruits plucked, the Texts revealed, the Deeds of the deniers effaced, the Deeds of the Advancers confirmed, the Tablet which was kept in Heaven manifested in Truth, the Written Tablet pronounced with Authority, and the Desired One of all existence, The Beloved of all creatures, the worshipped of those on earth and in Heaven, hath been manifested in the Temple of a Youth, while the tongue of everything declares, "Verily, blessed is God, the Creator of the Creators."

O My servant! O Joseph! hear the Tones of God, and do not compare this Day with any other day, neither the Wonderful Sweet Words of God with any other words; look to the apparent matters with thine own eye, and do not follow anyone in knowing the Greatest and Brilliant ORB.

In this Day, the beloved of God must not hesitate or delay an instant in teaching the Cause of the Manifestation; and must summon the people continually, with good admonitions and conciliating words, to the Religion of Majestic Oneness; because verily, in this Day, to the soul who is the cause of guidance to

another soul, the recompense of a Martyr in the way of God will be assuredly recorded by the Pen of the Cause for his deed.

This is from the Bounty of God unto the (servants) teachers. Do according to what thou has been commanded and do not be of those who tarry.

And EL-BAHA is upon thee and upon those who are with thee, if thou art steadfast in this Sublime and Most Exalted Cause.

## **LAWH-I DUSTAN-I YAZDANI**

### **Tablet for the Zoroastrians**

#### **Bahá'u'lláh**

Here is a rough draft of a Tablet of Baha'u'llah to the Zoroastrians, printed in the *Majmu'ih-yi Matbu'ih* edited by Muhyi'd-Din Sabri (Cairo 1920, Wilmette 1978) page number given below).

The beginning of every tale is the name of God

Friends of God, listen with the ear of the soul to the voice of the One, self-subsistent God, that he might liberate you from the shackles of captivity and the gloom of darkness, and might deliver you into perpetual illumination. Ascent and descent, and motion and stillness, all appeared from the will of the lord of all that was and shall be. The cause of ascent is lightness, and lightness derives from heat. God has thus decreed. The cause of stillness is heaviness and weight, which in turn is caused by cold. God has thus decreed. Since he chose heat, which is the

essence of motion and ascent, and the cause of attainment to the goal, he thereby ignited the true fire with the hand of spirituality and dispatched it into the world, so that this divine fire might attract all to the abode of the peerless friend, and might uplift and guide them, by the heat of divine love.

This is the mystery of your book [the Avesta], which was revealed aforetime, and which has until now remained concealed from eyes and hearts. Now, that primal fire has appeared with renewed radiance and unimaginable heat. This fire of God is luminous and manifest independently, without \*\*\*fuel or smoke,\*\*\* [bI mAyih va dUd] that it might attract away the extra moisture and cold that are the foundations of languor and dejection and the bases of heaviness and sorrow, and might draw the entire creation toward the station of nearness to the All-Merciful. All who drew near were set on fire and attained to the goal. All who remained distant, however, were left behind.

O servant of God: Stay away from the hostile, that you might come to know the One. The hostile are those who keep you distant from the One. Today is not the day of royal decrees or the regulations of the Zoroastrian priests. In your book [the Avesta] is a saying to this effect: "The Zoroastrian priests on that day shall keep the people distant and prevent them from drawing near." A true dastur priest is someone who has seen the light and hurries to the court of the friend. Such a one is a beneficent priest, and is the essence of illumination in this era.

O servant of God: Any Zoroastrian dastur who keeps you far from the flame which is the reality of light and the mystery of manifestation is your



enemy. Do not remain distant from the friend at the behest of strangers, nor forsake your confidant because of the words of an enemy.

O servant of God: The day of deeds has arrived. This is not the time for words. The messenger of the lord has appeared, and this is not the era of mere anticipation. Open the eye of your soul, so that you might see the face of the beloved. Stop up the ears of your intellect, that you might hear the murmuring prayer of the divine angel.

O servant of God: The shirt of munificence has been woven and delivered: take it and put it on. Detach your heart from the people and cover your eyes.

O wise one, if you hear the counsel of the lord, then free yourself from the shackles of the servants, and behold yourself exalted above all others.

O servant of God: We have sent down droplets from the oceans of generosity, if only they will drink thereof. We have brought forth the murmuring prayers of the pure, if only they will listen with their souls.

With the wings of joy, soar into the heavens of divine love. Consider as dead all the people of the world who have not perceived the sweet fragrance of the souls in this dawn. The Self-subsisting calls out in thundering tones, saying, "Joy has come to the world; be not sorrowful! The secret has been revealed; be not melancholy!" If you were to attain the triumph of this day, you would forsake the world and all that is therein, and hasten to the divine court.

O servant of God: The unfortunate are unaware of this victory, and the sorrowful receive no warmth from this blazing fire.

O servant of God: The tree that we planted with the hand of munificence has given fruit, and the glad-tidings that we gave in the Book have appeared with a sign.

O servant of God: Once, in your dreams, we bestowed our effulgence on you, but you remained unaware. Now, remember the homeland and hasten with all your heart toward the unconstrained Friend.

O servant of God: Say, `O priests of the Zoroastrian faith, gaze with fresh eyes at how the hand of power has appeared from behind the cloud, and look with pure eyes at how the signs of grandeur and greatness have been unveiled and become manifest."

O servant of God: The sun of the eternal world is shining from the orient of God's will, and the ocean of divine generosity is billowing. Those who have not seen it are bereft, and all who have not attained it are dead. Close your eyes to this world, and open them upon the visage of the peerless friend, and unite with him.

O servant of God: Open your mouth to sing the praises of the lord with an unblemished soul, for he has made mention of you with his gem-scattering pen. Were you to attain this bestowal, you would discover yourself to be immortal.

O servant of God: Say, `The lord says that anyone who surrenders to temptation has never desired and shall never desire soundness, nor shall such a one ever acquire the hallmark of uprightness.

# **LAWH-I FU'AD**

## **Tablet of Fuad**

### **Bahá'u'lláh**

Translation by Juan Cole

He is the most holy, the most glorious

We called out to you from beyond the ocean of grandeur, upon the crimson land, from the horizon of tribulation. In truth, there is no God but he, the mighty, the giving. Be steadfast in my Cause, and do not join those who, when given what they had desired, denied God, the lord of lords. God shall seize them by his overwhelming force. In truth, he is the powerful, the subduer.

Know that of those who passed sentence upon us, God took hold upon the elder by his power and sovereignty. When he experienced severe pain, he fled to Paris and resorted to physicians. He asked, "Is there any protector?"

He was struck upon the mouth and it was said, "It is too late!"

When he turned to the angel of victory, he was nearly obliterated out of fear. He said, "I have an ornamented mansion and a palace upon the Bosphorus, beneath which rivers run."

The angel replied, "Today, no sacrifice shall be accepted from you, even though you bring all that is in the private and public domains. Do you not hear the clamor of the people of God, whom you have made prisoner without any evidence or confirming book? At your deed the inhabitants of paradise have wailed, as have those who circle round the throne in the evening and at dawn. The victory of your lord has come upon you. In truth, he is the severe, the unattainable."

He said, "I was the grand vizier of the people, and this is my edict!"

"Hold your tongue, you denier of the Judgment Day!"

"May I have a respite to summon my family?"

"Never, disbeliever in the verses!"

Then the vault of the fiery abyss called out to him, "I have flung the gates of the inferno open for you, opposer of the sovereign lord. Return to it, for it misses you. Have you forgotten, outcast, when you were the Nimrod of the horizons? Your wrongdoing eclipsed even the despotism of Pharaoh, lord of the stakes. By God, by your iniquity the veil of sanctity was rent and the pillars of paradise were shaken. Where is your refuge, and your protector from the fear of your lord, the Omnipotent? Today, you have no place to flee, you idolater and doubter!"

Then the stupor of death overtook him and closed his eyes. Thus did we seize him by our triumph. In truth, your lord is stern in meting out punishment. An angel

called to him from the right of the throne. This is the angel of harshness. "Is there any escape for you," it was asked, "save to hellfire, in which hearts are boiled?"

The angel of torment then greeted his soul. "Enter this flaming chasm that you were promised in the Book, which you used to deny day and night."

We shall depose the one [Ali Pasha] who was like him, and shall lay hold upon their prince [Sultan Abdulaziz] who rules the land. We are mighty and powerful. Be steadfast in the cause, and sing the praises of your lord in the morning and the evening. Beware lest you be stifled by the slanders of the one [Azal?] who was seduced by the things we had bestowed upon him, until he denied God, the king of names. He inspires his associates just as Satan inspired him. You shall see him beset by loss in this world and the next, for he is among those for whom torment has been prepared. He sent a letter to someone there, a missive of the debauched. In it he ridiculed God and his books, such that all things were dismayed at him. Say: Do you see anyone who will protect you when there comes the victory of God, the mighty, the ordainer?

Thus have we informed you of what lies hidden in breasts. In truth, your lord is powerful, omniscient. Arise for the sake of the cause, then gather my lovers and remind them, in this day whereon feet have slipped. Today it is incumbent upon all who accept the cause to come to the aid of their lord. In truth, he is your guardian, but today the people have no guardian.

Then we seized Mihdi, whom we had promised torment in the psalms and tablets. When God's power came to him, he asked, "Might I return?"

It was said, "Away with you, disbeliever in the resurrection! That is hellfire, wherein the flames have been kindled for you. You have forsaken beneficence for a life of vanity, and today you have no protector from God. Because of you the holy spirit lamented and hearts were annihilated."

He said, "Is there any sanctuary for me?"

"No, by my lord, even if you brought all belongings!"

Therefore, he cried out, shrieking, so that terror struck the people of the tombs, and he was encompassed by the grasp of power. It was said, "Return to the abode of coercion in hell, and a pitifully bad abode it is!"

We have taken him, just as we took many before him. Those are your houses, which we have abandoned to the spider. Consider, you who are endued with insight. He it is who opposed God, and verses of sorrow were revealed to him in the Book. Blessed is he who reads it and thinks upon it: in truth, the destiny of such a one will be good. Thus have we related to you the tales of perpetrators, so as to solace your eyes. In truth, yours is a good return.

## Translator's Notes

The Tablet of Fuad was written to commemorate the death of KeÁicizade Fuad Pasha in Nice of heart trouble, in February, 1869. Therefore it was presumably penned in late winter or early spring of that year, during Baha'u'llah's close confinement in the fortress of Acre (Akka).

Fuad Pasha was the son of a famed poet, and he himself studied medicine. Although Fuad Pasha is presented in this tablet as a despot, he is remembered in Turkish historiography rather as a reformer. Born in Istanbul in 1815, he was among the foremost planners and implementers of the Tanzimat or reorganization of the Ottoman administration in the nineteenth century so as to bring it closer to modern Western standards. Because of his fluent French, he was able to enter and rise high in the foreign ministry. In 1840 he was first secretary of the Ottoman Embassy in England. He had other diplomatic postings, then rose to become minister of foreign affairs in 1852-53 and at the end of the Crimean war in 1855-1856. Fuad Pasha had been instrumental in creating the secular conception of "Ottomanism" as the basis for a political loyalty for all subjects of the sultan.(1) He had a role in the issuing of the Reform Decree of 1856 that:

laid more stress on the full equality of the Sultan's non-Muslim subjects and abolished the civil power of the heads of the various Christian communities. Churches were henceforth to be governed by synods of the clergy in co-operation with national councils of the laity. Full liberty of conscience was guaranteed and all civil offices were declared open to all Ottoman subjects without distinction. Non-Muslims were made technically eligible for military service but were given

the option of buying their exemption. Torture was prohibited and prison reform promised.(2)

These reforms moved the Ottoman state away from an Islamic foundation and toward a secular one. He was active in educational and language reform, again arguing for a more Western approach, and helped write the first modern Ottoman Turkish grammar in that language. He headed the Ottoman investigation of the anti-Christian riots in Damascus of 1860, which had threatened to bring European intervention. He had some prominent Muslims executed for their role in the affair, which was unheard-of in an Ottoman context, and reflected the values of the 1856 Reform Decree that granted Christians and Jews equal status with Muslims in the Empire. Although this evenhandedness pleased the Christian Powers and other secularists, those with a more Islamic orientation were outraged that Muslims were beginning to lose their predominant position in Ottoman politics.

On 25 June, 1861, Abdulaziz succeeded to the Ottoman throne in the wake of the death of his brother Abdulmecid. The new sultan was a great admirer of Western progress, but he did not have a Western education and he remained somewhat religiously conservative and open to the blandishments of soothsayers. Abdulaziz belonged to the Mevlevi order of Sufi mystics, which especially honors Jalalu'd-Din Rumi. Upon Abdulaziz's accession to the throne in 1861, he made Fuad Pasha his grand vizier for one year; Fuad served again in that post 1863-1867. Of Fuad, Davison writes that "he was a convinced westernizer. He worked on many of the reforms of the later Tanzimat period. He may have favoured representative government, though he was in no hurry to achieve it. His main objective was preservation of the Ottoman Empire through diplomacy and reform.



He loved high office, but was not so jealous and grudging as `Ali, and rather bolder in innovation. His honesty has been impugned, especially as regards gifts from Isma`il [Pasha of Egypt] . . ."(3)

Although Davison is here generous to Fuad, a contemporary Ottoman historian, Cevdet Pasha, reports that although Fuad "was not as despotically inclined as Ali Pasha, he also held similar opinions."(4) The opinion he is said to have shared was that God had given the management of the affairs of the empire into the hands of five or six individuals at the top of the Ottoman bureaucracy, and that this was a good thing. One of the hallmarks of his generation of Tanzimat reformers was their creation of a powerful corporate bureaucracy, a sort of enlightened dictatorship, that aimed at forcibly reshaping the rest of society on a more Western model. As for his having been a convinced Westernizer, this aspect of his personality is apparent in his willingness to consider scrapping Islamic canon law (the shari`ah) in favor of the Code NapolÈon. Progressive Muslim critics complained that he understood Westernization only superficially as "the establishment of theaters, frequenting ballrooms, being liberal about the infidelities of one's wife and using European toilets."(5)

Fuad Pasha was intimately involved in decisions affecting Baha'u'llah. He was grand vizier in 1863 when Baha'u'llah was brought from Baghdad to Istanbul, presumably to remove him from close proximity to his followers in Iran and also to investigate whether Babism under his leadership might be politically useful to the Ottomans in the relations with Iran. (In this regard the summoning of Baha'u'llah to Istanbul prefigures Abdulhamid II's attempt to use Iranians such as Sayyid Jamalud-Din al-Afghani and Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani for political purposes

vis-a-vis Iran during his campaign for pan-Islam during the 1880s and 1890s). Fuad Pasha must certainly have taken the decision to rusticate Baha'u'llah to Edirne (Adrianople) in November of 1863. He was also involved, as grand vizier and then foreign minister, in making the decision to send Baha'u'llah to Acre nearly five years later. As a defender of the more secular values of the Tanzimat reforms, Fuad Pasha was probably suspicious (as we know his colleague Mehmet Emin Ali Pasha was) of Babism as an old-style theocratic Mahdist movement that attacked modernity. In 1866 Ali Pasha told the Austrian ambassador in Istanbul that Baha'u'llah, then in exile in Edirne, was "a man of great distinction, exemplary conduct, great moderation, and a most dignified figure" and spoke of Babism as "a doctrine which is worthy of high esteem."<sup>(6)</sup> He went on to say, however, that he still found the religion politically unacceptable because it refused to recognize a separation of religious and temporal authority. From the reformers' point of view a messianic movement such as Babism, whatever its virtues, threatened the achievements of the Tanzimat by seeking to put all authority, religious and secular, back in the hands of a charismatic spiritual leader. I would argue that, ironically, Baha'u'llah was moving away from a theocratic model toward one that acknowledged the autonomy of the civil state, and that there was a convergence between his thought and the Tanzimat that, tragically, the Ottoman state was unable to grasp because of Babism's previous reputation as a vehicle for radical theocracy. Around the fall of 1867, Baha'u'llah in Edirne wrote a letter (The Tablet of the Kings or Surat al-Muluk) apostrophizing the world's rulers, in which he addressed Ottoman cabinet officials and to Sultan Abdulaziz. Baha'u'llah therein disavows any theocratic or mahdist pretensions, denying that he wishes to lay hold on the worldly possessions of these high officials, and insisting that he is not in rebellion

against the Ottoman sultan. He does say that Sultan Abdulaziz should be grateful to God for having made him "sultan of the Muslims," and calls him the "shadow of God on earth."<sup>(7)</sup> He thus underlines that the civil state derives its ultimate authority from God, but that Baha'u'llah's coming does not challenge in any way its authority, since he wishes only to give ethical and spiritual counsel.

We do not know if the Tablet to the Kings actually was sent to the Sublime Porte, though that seems likely. Its attempt at conciliation, in any case, failed. By spring of 1868 Sultan Abdulaziz and his cabinet, in reaction to Azali complaints and the importuning of the Iranian ambassador, had decided to exile Baha'u'llah and his companions from Edirne to Acre. Grand Vizier or First Minister Ali Pasha and Foreign Minister Fuad Pasha were intimately involved in this decision, which had implications for the Ottoman Empire's relations with Iran and also had the potential to raise protests from the European ambassadors concerned about freedom of conscience. But the motives for taking this step among the high Ottoman elite probably differed. Fuad and Ali could have cared less about Islamic orthodoxy, but they wanted to please Iran for reasons of Realpolitik. Ironically, they may also have worried about the Babis as Muslim critics of their autocracy. The Islamic backlash against the secularizing Tanzimat reforms had taken two forms. One was the reactionary critique by the conservative Ottoman Muslim clergy (ulema), which had been implicated in the 1858 Kuleli revolt against the Westernizing government. Many of Baha'u'llah's statements in his letters to the Ottoman state, calling it back to God, and critiquing its secularizing principles, could have been read as belonging in this reactionary tradition.

The other Islamic response was that of the Young Ottomans, a society founded in 1865, who combined an interest in Islamic mysticism and culture with an Ottoman nationalism and a commitment to parliamentary governance and civil rights. (8) Many of these individuals were government translators and had a good knowledge of European languages and of the Enlightenment tradition of thinking about government and rights.

Baha'u'llah's support for "consultative" (mushawarah) government and complaints about the lack of due process accorded him and his followers also bore some resemblance to these progressive Muslim reformers, some of whom were already in exile in 1867. It is clear that Baha'u'llah and `Abdu'l-Baha later conducted an extensive correspondence with the Young Ottomans, and it is not impossible that they already had contacts with sympathizers in Edirne. In any case, Ali and Fuad saw the Babism as a political nuisance, far too Islamic and far too dissatisfied with the authoritarian Tanzimat status quo to be trusted. On the other hand, Sultan Abdulaziz, a superstitious, authoritarian and conservative leader, may have genuinely worried about Babism as a heresy. In his firman to the governor of Akka, the sultan wrote in summer, 1868:

"Mirza Husayn `Ali and a group of his companions have been sentenced to life imprisonment in the fortress of Akka. When they have arrived at that fortress and been delivered into your custody, incarcerate them within the fortress for the rest of their lives. Institute complete surveillance over them, to ensure that they mix socially with no one. Your officials must inspect them with great care, such that they not be allowed to move from place to place. They must remain always under close supervision."(9)

The Ottoman state had clearly decided to silence Baha'u'llah for all time, in the most rigorous fashion possible short of actual execution.

Baha'u'llah later often told the story of how on 12 August, 1868, Ottoman soldiers suddenly surrounded him, his family and his companions, and marched them off into a final exile. In a letter (Surat ar-Ra'is) written at way-stations on the road to Gallipoli, Baha'u'llah addressed the first minister, Ali Pasha, condemning him forcefully and predicting a horrible fate for the Ottoman empire:

"The day is approaching when the Land of Mystery [Edirne and Rumelia], and what is beside it shall be changed, and shall pass out of the hands of the king, and commotion shall appear, and the voice of lamentation shall be raised, and the evidences of mischief shall be revealed on all sides, and confusion shall spread by reason of that which hath befallen these captives at the hands of the hosts of oppression. The course of things shall be altered, and conditions shall wax so grievous, that the very sands on the desolate hills will moan, and the trees on the mountain will weep, and blood will flow out of all things. Then wilt thou behold the people in sore distress."(10)

The imprisonment of Baha'u'llah and some 70 other individuals in the fortress at Acre was harsh. They often lacked sufficient food and the water given them was brackish. Three died of malaria or dysentery. Their jailers had strict instructions to keep them from contact with the outside world. Over time, the Baha'is developed means local friends and began even winning over the Ottoman troops that guarded them, so that Baha'u'llah was able to slip letters out, if only in the hat band of a visiting physician. He expressed understandable outrage and anger at the high Ottoman officials who had banished him without any due process, and the very

arduous conditions of his imprisonment do much to help explain the bitterness toward Fuad Pasha visible in the Tablet of Fuad.

Baha'u'llah was hardly alone in being outraged at Fuad's autocracy, or even in being exiled because he was seen as a threat to it. Mardin notes that among the early Young Ottomans of 1868, "Sariyerli Hoca Sadik Effendi . . . incurred the disfavor of the Porte [Ottoman Sultan] because he mentioned the evils of oppression in his sermons. Because of these sermons Sadik Effendi was accused of favoring the Young Ottomans and was exiled to [Akka,] Syria." Mardin goes on to paint a fascinating miniature portrait of the political and cultural scene in Istanbul in late 1868 and early 1869:

"A contemporary French periodical made the following comment on this banishment: 'It is not only among the Christian populations that reigns at this moment a lively and deep-seated agitation. This is much more prevalent among the Moslem populations . . . The discontent of the Moslems is mostly evidenced by the daring shown in religious publications against the governments of Ali and Fuad Pasa . . . Ulamas who were delivering sermons on the Ramazan . . . in the presence of the Sultan have dared state to his face that he would lose his empire and his people.' After having described the saintliness of Sadik Effendi, the author of the article added: 'Such is the man that the government of Ali Pasa has just arrested and interned at the fortress of St. John of Acre. For he preached in Istanbul [the merits of] democracy, liberty, equality, brotherhood between all men, be they Christian or Moslem, Greek or Ottoman.'" (11)

This episode obviously provides further context to Baha'u'llah's Tablet of Fuad. It suggests, for one thing, that predictions of the Sultan's downfall, such as Baha'u'llah made in that Tablet, were not unusual but rather were commonplaces of the religious discourse of the time. Second, it shows how a mosque preacher at the time might get enough Western education to be considered a member of the effendi (Westernized secretary) class, and how such men were mixing an Islamic critique of what they saw as Fuad and Ali's extreme Westernization with an Enlightenment critique of their top-down, highly authoritarian approach to government. I suppose there is a parallel between the 'republicanism' of these Muslim Young Ottomans and the similar pro-republican stance that the American Baptists took during the 1776 revolution. Third, and most suggestive of all, the French periodical describing Sadik Effendi's exile to the Fortress of Akka is dated Feb. 28, 1869. It seems to me almost certain that he interacted with the Baha'is also imprisoned in the fortress, and while Baha'u'llah had his own reasons to condemn Fuad Pasha, his likely dialogue with Young Ottoman thought of the time is probably part of the picture. Note that at that moment, Young Ottomans like Namik Kemal were in exile in London, calling for British-style parliamentary governance in the Ottoman empire, and that Baha'u'llah's Tablet to Queen Victoria, written in Akka sometime 1868-1869 also did. It is not impossible, in fact, that Sadik Effendi was able surreptitiously to correspond with other Young Ottomans who reported developments to him.

Clearly, when Baha'u'llah heard that Fuad had died in France of heart disease, he felt that this was divine retribution. In the wake of the 1876 First Constitutional

Revolution against Abd laziz, several years later, Baha'u'llah explained further concerning the Tablet of Fuad:

"This tablet was revealed when Fuad Pasha was the foreign minister of the Ottoman Empire. He had (earlier) returned to his home base, and became the cause of the recent [1876] crisis and of our own exile from Rumelia to Acre. Two individuals were, after the sultan, supreme chief (ra'is-i kull): One was Fuad Pasha and the other was Ali Pasha. Sometimes the one was first minister, and the other foreign minister, and sometimes the other way around. In that tablet (God), may his majesty be gloried, says: 'We shall depose the one who was like him and seize their prince, who rules the lands; and I am the glorious, the mighty.'"(12)

Baha'u'llah clearly blamed the autocratic legacy of Fuad and Ali for the revolution of 1876, which deposed the sultan (who committed suicide) and ushered in the first Ottoman parliament, of which Baha'u'llah approved.

The Tablet of Fuad is addressed to Kazim Samandar of Qazvin, and begins with the letters K.Z., for Kazim, who served as a courier for Baha'u'llah. This courier had received an early Acre tablet regarding the end of absolute monarchy, and was someone with whom Baha'u'llah discussed the reform movement in Iranian politics when he came to Acre. The tablet is in very chaste Arabic, and the version we now have may well have been redacted later on to reflect classical rather than Babi standards of Arabic grammar and usage; it is certainly much more idiomatic in its Arabic usage than the Tablet to the Kings of only a year and a half before.(13) The tablet begins with the assertion that it is divinely revealed, that its voice derives from a transcendent realm. He advises Samandar not to be like Fuad Pasha, upon whom the good things of life were bestowed, but who proved ungrateful to God for



them. He promises that the vengeance of the lord shall be visited upon such persons, and instances Fuad Pasha himself. He depicts the foreign minister as fleeing to France for medical treatment, but finding it incapable of commuting God's death sentence upon him. He is shown finally turning to the divine for assistance, but an angel strikes him on his mouth and cries, "It is too late!" This and other imagined scenes in the tablet play upon Fuad Pasha's support for secularization and Westernization. He is depicted as an unbeliever who attempts to repent only when death comes upon him, and whose death-bed conversion is refused by the celestial powers. He attempts to offer up as a sacrifice his vast wealth and his palaces in Istanbul, but these are not accepted by the angel because of the great wrong Fuad did in exiling the Baha'is to the fortress of Acre without any due process--a wrong that has provoked great weeping and lamentation among all the inhabitants of paradise.

Fuad Pasha, used to commanding men and armies by virtue of his sealed edicts, is depicted as now attempting to issue such an Ottoman-style decree to the angels besetting him, but they simply silence him. Humbled, he asks for time to call his family, but this request, too, is rebuffed. Hellfire itself is cast as one of the dramatis personae, and it now addresses Fuad Pasha, summoning him to itself and identifying him with koranic oppressors such as Nimrod and Pharaoh, who persecuted Abraham and Moses, respectively. Indeed, he is castigated as more despotic than Pharaoh. Baha'u'llah shows Fuad Pasha at the moment of his death, at which an angel taunts him that he cannot escape the torments of the inferno. The very hell that the secularist Fuad Pasha had denied now swallows him up.

Note that the "tale of the criminal (or perpetrator)" is told from a third person, omniscient point of view. Interestingly, whenever the angels speak, the passive voice is used "qila lahu"-`it was said to him.' I think this is a "screen" that emphasizes the transcendent quality of the angels of victory; they speak from behind a barrier of sorts (the passive voice) that hides their awful agency. Even the vault of hell itself becomes a character actor with a bit part, in joining in the condemnation of the Ottoman official. His death and his consignment to hell are described in dramatic terms that all along appeal to the irony that he was himself a secular unbeliever who did not accept the existence of hell. (A further irony within this irony is that the Babi-Bahai conception of it is not as a physical place with literal angels, either. Baha'u'llah is appropriating the imagery of the Islamic conservatives in order to juxtapose it to the Westernizing unbelief of Fuad Pasha, but both are caricatures in a way and not ultimately indicative in a surface way of Baha'u'llah's own beliefs, which in many ways were closer to those of Fuad than to those of the Islamic Right).

Now Baha'u'llah turns to a prophecy similar to but more specific than his jeremiads in the Tablet of the Premier (Surat ar-Ra'is) addressed to Ali Pasha. Speaking with the voice of God (using the royal "we"), Baha'u'llah predicts that Ali Pasha, then grand vizier, will be deposed (the verb is `azala, which is used of deposing kings). He says, too, that God will "lay hold" (the verb is akhadha, to take, seize) of Sultan Abdulaziz (he is called amiruhum, literally, "their prince" or "their commander"). Although Baha'u'llah was correct that neither of these powerful men had long at the top in 1869, his prophecy, if taken literally, actually reverses their true fates. Ali Pasha was never deposed, but rather died in office in 1871. It was Sultan Abdulaziz who was deposed, in the Constitutional Revolution of spring, 1876, shortly after

which he committed suicide. Obviously, if Baha'u'llah had merely meant to predict that eventually these two men would die, then the prophecy was not very remarkable. Rather, he seems to have believed that Ali Pasha would fall from the sultan's favor, and that some dramatic event would overtake the sultan. Even contemporaries such as Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani, who became a Baha'i in 1876 on hearing of the sultan's fall, had demanded that the latter meet some extraordinary fate before he would accept that the prophecy in the Tablet of Fuad had been fulfilled. Taken together with Baha'u'llah's prediction in the Tablet of the Premier that turmoil would overtake the Ottoman empire and his advocacy from his early Acre years of parliamentary democracy, he does seem to have been prescient about the imminence of the First Constitutional Revolution. Indeed, the matter of Ali Pasha never being deposed seems minor in comparison.

It is important to note how political Baha'u'llah's statements in this tablet are, and how candidly seditious. Any published or openly circulated criticism of the sultan and his ministers, who still presided over an absolute monarchy despite their moves toward cabinet government, was strictly forbidden and punishable by death. Had the Tablet to Fuad fallen into Ottoman hands, it could well have led to Baha'u'llah's summary execution. As noted above, the only other group that engaged in a similar critique of Fuad Pasha and Ali Pasha, charging them with being overly authoritarian and arguing that the Tanzimat abandonment of spirituality had gone too far, while working for British-style parliamentary governance, was the Young Ottomans. This group of intellectuals, many of whom had a Western education and who were well aware of the U.S. Bill of Rights and the French Rights of Man, had a more mainstream political style than did Baha'u'llah. In 1873 the Sultan exiled a number of Young Ottomans--Ebuzziya

Tevfik to Rhodes, Namik Kemal to Cyprus (where he made friends with Mishkin Qalam and also with some Azalis), and Nuri Bey and Bereketzade Ismail Hakki Bey to Akka. Ebuzziya says in his memoirs that he was worried about Hakki and Nuri, and had lost contact with them, but was reassured when he received a letter from the Babi leader at Akka, Baha'u'llah [he says Baha'u'd-Din] informing him that they were all right.( 14) For him to receive such a letter implied that Baha'u'llah was already in contact with the Young Ottomans, and there is a link to the Young Ottomans via Sadiq Effendi that goes back to winter 1869. My suspicion is that the links go back even further, to Edirne/Adrianople.

Despite Baha'u'llah's Miltonian imagery, his prophetic rhetorical style, and his Babi passion, by 1869 he was advocating a political program in the Ottoman Empire and Iran that differed very little from that of Young Ottomans such as Namik Kemal. (In his Tablet to Queen Victoria of 1868 or 1869, he advocated parliamentary rule, another value that was strictly prohibited in Ottoman political discourse). The stark Baha'i turn to political quietism from the 1930s has resulted in a view of Baha'u'llah that reads back into his period the later skittishness about politics, a view made possible only by ignorance of Ottoman imperial policy of the time with regard to politics and censorship. The Tablet of Fuad is as radical a document in its own time as Tom Paine's revolutionary pamphlets were.

The last part of the Tablet to Fuad contains a condemnation of Mirza Yahya Subh-i Azal (d. 1912), Baha'u'llah's half-brother and a widely recognized leader of the Babis, with whom Baha'u'llah was in competition for the leadership of the Babi community. Despite the disadvantages of his confinement in the fortress of Acre, Baha'u'llah appears to have been already well on the way to winning over most of

the Babis by his assertion that he was the promised one of the Bab. Finally, there is a passage about God having seized or taken Mirza Mihdi, an Azali polemicist. This individual had supported Azal, had been in the circle of Sayyid Muhammad Isfahani, an Azali in Edirne, and had written a fierce attack on Baha'u'llah. To this refutation, Baha'u'llah had replied with his Book of Wonder (Kitab-i Badi`), a long apology for the Baha'i faith to the Babis.(15) Fuad Pasha, Subh-i Azal, and Mirza Mihdi are all grouped together as "perpetrators" or "criminals," deserving hellfire for rejecting Baha'u'llah's message.

## Conclusion

The Tablet of Fuad was called by Baron Rosen a "victory hymn" in celebration of an enemy's death. This is an apt description, but this short piece is much more than that. It condemns the autocratic leadership style of the Tanzimat men, with their vision of modernization dictated from above. It playfully pokes fun at their increasing secularization by depicting one of them at the gates of hell surrounded by vengeful angels, who strike him down for his impudence, taunt him for his unbelief and his despotic deeds, and unceremoniously dump him into the inferno. Fuad Pasha is lambasted as more of a tyrant than Pharaoh, and the entire Ottoman state is thus painted with the same brush. The issues of rights and due process are also key to this tablet. Fuad's crime is to condemn the Baha'is to imprisonment without proof of any wrongdoing on their part. Because of their iniquity and despotism, the top three officers of the Ottoman state are here consigned to unpleasant ends. Fuad Pasha suddenly dies at a relatively young 53 or 54, far from home and from his loved ones. The deposition of Ali Pasha is predicted. And it is

said that God would lay hold upon the sultan. The correspondence between their mistreatment of Baha'u'llah and his companions and their actual or predicted fates posited in this tablet recalls the conviction among Sufi leaders that the fates of kings and dynasties depend upon how well they treat the mystic masters, and, as we have seen, it echoes the many sermons and expatriate newspaper articles of the time that condemned Fuad Pasha for despotism and atheism. But in going on, in later works, to specify actual mechanisms for the redress of such injustices, such as adoption of a rule of law, the safeguarding of individual rights, and parliamentary governance, Baha'u'llah makes his jeremiads against the Ottoman pharaohs something distinctly other than mere superstitious gloating, imbuing them instead with importance for the history of thinking about human rights and democracy in the modern Middle East.

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Notes

1. Roderic Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), esp. chapters 2, 3, 4, and 7; and Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964), chapters 5 and 6.
2. Robert Devereux, *The First Ottoman Constitutional Period: A Study of the Midhat Constitution and Parliament* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), p. 23.
3. Roderic Davison, "Fu'ad Pasha," EI2.
4. Serif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 112.

5. Hurriyet Newspaper in *Ibid.*, p. 115.
6. C.S. de Gobineau, ed., *Correspondence entre le Comte de Gobineau et le Comte de Prokesch-Osten (1854-76)* (Paris, 1933), pp. 288-89; also tr. in Momen, Babi and Baha'i Religions, p. 187.
7. Baha'u'llah, "Surat al-Muluk," *Alvah-i Nazilih khitab bi Muluk va Ru'asa-yi Ard* (Tehran: MMMA, 1968), pp. 17-21, 34-35, 38, 41.
- 8 Mardin, *Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, op. cit.
- 9 Persian translation from the Ottoman given in Muhammad `Ali Faydi, *La'ali- yi Dirakhshan* (Shiraz: n.p, 1967), p. 501.
- 10 Baha'u'llah, "Lawh ar-Ra'is," *Majmu`ih-yi Matbu`ih*, pp. 88-89; trans. Shoghi Effendi Rabbani, *The Promised Day is Come*, preface Firuz Kazemzadeh (Wilmette, Ill., 1967), p. 62.
- 11 Mardin, *Young Ottoman Thought*, p. 224.
- 12 Baha'u'llah/Mulla `Ali Bajistani, 12 Jumada II 1293/ 6 June 1876, in `Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari, ed., *Ma'idih-ëi Asmani*, 9 vols. (Tehran: MMMA, 129/1973), 7:254-255.
- 13 Baha'u'llah, *al-Kitab al-Mubin [Athar-i Qalam-i A`la vol. 1]* (Bombay, n.p., 1890), pp. 210-213.
- 14 Juan R. I. Cole, "Iranian Millenarianism and Democratic Thought in the 19th Century." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24 (1992):1-26.
- (15) I am grateful to Dr. Khazeh Fananapazir for this information.

# THE TABLET OF THE DEATHLESS YOUTH

**Bahá'u'lláh**

Translation by John Walbridge

This is mention of that which was made manifest in the Year Sixty, in the Days of God, the Powerful, the Help in Peril, the Almighty, the Knower.

When the gates of Paradise swung wide and the Holy Youth came forth, lo! in His hand was a serpent plain!

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a gushing spring. Upon His face a veil woven by the fingers of power and might.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a mighty Name. Upon His head a crown of beauty, light for the people of every heaven, every earth.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a mighty Cause. Tresses of spirit hung upon His shoulders, black like musk upon bright and luminous pearls.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a wondrous Cause. Upon the finger of His right hand, a ring with a pearl of immaculate holiness.



Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a mighty spirit. Graven thereon in a hidden and pre-eternal script, "By God, a noble angel is this!" Thereupon, the hearts of the people of eternity cried aloud.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with an ancient light. Upon his right cheek a mole whereby the faiths of the mystics were shaken. Thereupon the people of the veil of divinity cried aloud!

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a mighty secret. This pertaineth to that Point from which branched forth all the knowledge of the past and of the present. Thereupon the people of the angelic realm sang aloud.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a mighty knowledge. This indeed is a knight of the spirit, circling about the Spring of Salsabil. Thereupon a clamor arose from that people nigh the veil of the Kingdom of Might.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with vision mystic and mighty. He came down from the pavilions of beauty and stood like the Sun at the zenith of heaven, peerless and unique in His beauty.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come bearing great joy. Thus He stood in the midst of heaven, shining like the noonday Sun at the axis of beauty, His Name mighty! Thereupon a herald proclaimed: "

Rejoice! This is the Beauty of the Unseen, come with a mighty spirit." A clamor then arose from the hearts of the maids of heaven in their chambers, "Blessed be God, the best of Creators!" Thereupon the dove sang out,

Rejoice! for the eyes of the privy angels have seen none like unto this Deathless Youth." The gates of Paradise were flung wide yet again, opened with the key of a mighty Name.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a mighty Name. The Maid of Beauty came forth, dawning like the sun, plain upon the horizon of the morn.

Rejoice! This is the Maid of Glory, come with a mighty beauty. A brocade she wore, dazzling the minds of the privy angels.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Maid, come with a mighty grace. She descended from the chambers of eternity, then She sang such a song as to enchant the hearts of the sincere.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Beauty, come with a mighty secret. She walked in the midst of space, and lo! she let slip a lock of Her hair from beneath Her luminous veil.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Maid, come with a wondrous spirit. And by this single lock the people of all the worlds were perfumed. It made the faces of the holy ones to pale, and the hearts of the lovers to bleed.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Maid, come with a mighty perfume. By God! Whoso shutteth his eyes to Her beauty hath schemed grievously and is in evident falsehood.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Maid, come with a mighty light. She turned, and with Her turned the inhabitants of both worlds.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Maid, come with a mighty revolution. She advanced until She stood in Her wondrous brocade before that Youth.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Beauty, come wondrous fair. Then from beneath that veil She brought forth a hennaed hand. Like a ray of sun it was, upon a bright mirror!

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Beauty, come in a mighty fashion. With fingertips like peerless gems She took the hem of the Youth's veil.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Beauty, come with a mighty glance. She lifted the veil from off His face--lo! the pillars of the mighty Throne were shaken.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a mighty Cause. Then the spirit died in the temple of each and every creature.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a mighty Cause. The robes of the folk of Paradise were rent at this ancient and shining vision.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a mighty light. Thereupon the Voice of Eternity sounded from behind the veils of cloud, calling in a voice enchanting and fair.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a mighty enchantment. The Tongue of the Unseen proclaimed from the hidden abode of destiny, "By God! This Youth--the eyes of the ancients did not attain to beholding Him!"

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a mighty Cause. The maids of holiness cried aloud from their chambers of impenetrable might.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with manifest lordship. By God! The inhabitants of the all-highest concourse long for the beauty of this Youth!

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a mighty Cause. Then that Youth raised His head to the concourse of Cherubim.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a mighty spirit. He spoke a single word, and lo! all who were in the heavens arose with a new spirit.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a mighty trump. Then with a glance of unparalleled might He looked upon the people of the world.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a mighty glance. And all who were in creation were raised up by this wondrous glance.

Rejoice! This is the Deathless Youth, come with a mighty Cause. Then with His glance He indicated but a few and returned to His place in the deathless Paradise. This indeed pertaineth to a mighty Cause! Thus spoke the herald of eternity from the cloud-wrapped throne: O ye who wait in the valley of patience and fidelity! O lovers of the air of nearness and eternity!

The spiritual Youth, He Who was hid in the treasuries of the Lord's infallibility, hath risen above the horizon of eternity, clad in the robe of divinity and God-like beauty, like unto the sun of reality and the pre-eternal spirit. With the cloak of true being He hath delivered all who are in the heavens and the earth from the worlds of utter nothingness and given them life. From the depths of utter obscurity He hath brought forth into the open court that hidden word upon which depend the spirits of all the prophets and saints.

When He took that secret word from the realm of pure being and absolute unity and manifested it in the worlds of creation, by that act a breeze of mercy arose, wiping the stench of sin from all things and placing a new robe of forgiveness upon the numberless temples of all things and man. Such was the wondrous solicitude with which He surrounded all things that the hidden realities laid up in the storehouses of possibility were made manifest in outward things through the breath of the letters B and E. The seen and the unseen were gathered together within a single cloak, and the mysterious and the manifest united in a single robe. Nothingness itself attained to the kingdom of pre-existence. The essence of mortality attained the realm of eternity.

Therefore, O lovers of His gracious beauty, O ye struck mad by the air night unto His awful throne! This is the season to draw near and find reunion, not a time for talk and argument. If ye be true, the true morn is plain and shining before you. Free yourselves of self and other--nay, of all that is, of being and non-being, of light and darkness, of abasement and might. Lay aside all vain and idle thoughts; and pure and holy, wander with a luminous heart through this spiritual court beneath the shade of the manifestations of eternal holiness.

O Friends, the eternal wine is flowing! O lovers, the beauty of the Beloved is unveiled! O companions, the fire of the Sinai of love burns bright! Shrug off the burden of love of the world and attachment thereto. Like the bright birds about the Throne, soar in the atmosphere of divine Ridvan, singing of that home that shall not perish.

Surely the soul ought not to be at all deprived, Nor any fragment of the heart be without the Beloved.

Consider how at every moment the moths of that Yemen of praise burn away their souls about the lamp of the Friend and will not be separated from their Beloved. Would any bird do likewise? God will guide whomsoever He willeth to a path lofty and great. Thus We rain down upon the people of the cloud-wrapped throne that which will turn them towards the right hand of eternity and enter them into that station raised high in the heaven of holiness.

# **LAWH-I-HURIYYIH**

## **Tablet of the Maiden**

**Bahá'u'lláh**

Translation by Juan Cole

While the following translation is textually accurate, the Universal House of Justice has said in two letters that it "is quite misleading and could easily convey a wrong impression to those who study it." At the same time, though, the House said that Baha'is may "decide whether to use the provisional translation," i.e. that its use is not prohibited. Readers are thus cautioned to use this translation with the appropriate caveat lector. To better understand some of the subtleties of this multifaceted issue, a note from the translator has also been provided.

As this Tablet alludes to and employs a set of symbolism quite unique to certain threads of Sufism—and especially Persian Sufism—it is possible that the foreignness of the symbolic lexicon Baha'u'llah employs in this and other similar Tablets is the source of potential misreadings more than the words He uses and the specific terms used to translate them into English. Those curious can also consult a paper inspired by exactly this style of Baha'u'llah's Tablets, my "Themes of 'The Erotic' in Sufi Mysticism." -J.W

In the name of God, the most holy, the most exalted

Praise be to Thee, O God, My God. I make mention of Thee at this time, when the sun of Thy Godhead hath risen from the horizon of the splendid divinity of Thy oneness, the lights of Thy lordship have flashed forth from the dawning of the ineffable encounter with the eternal kingdom of Thy self-sufficiency, and the darkness of this world hath been illumined by the radiance of the faithful realm of Thy cause--in such wise that the garden of paradise came into being above the essence of Thy glorious selfhood. Therein were planted the trees of Thy quintessence, which put forth the fruits of Thine essence, and therein wafted the breezes of Thy spirit and the breaths of Thy sanctity. Therein were foreordained the gems of Thy bounties and the substance of Thy munificence; and therein were uncovered the treasures of Thy knowledge and mystery. Over its terraces flow the streams of Thy glorious life, the canals of Thy radiant eternity, and the springs of the wine of Thine inaccessibility. When Thou didst desire, O my God, to manifest it, Thou didst raise it up to the throne of grandeur and greatness, embellish it with the rays of might and power, render it effulgent by Thine essence, and didst make to shine upon it the sun of oneness from the pre-eternal lights of Thy features. Thou didst light for it the wick of eternity in the lamp of pre-existence. Now, Thy most exalted decree hath come to the kingdom of command by Thy signature, so that a visage might appear therefrom, that the brilliance of Thy beauty might be manifest to all who dwell on earth, and that the glory of Thy countenance might be seen by all who are in the realm of Thy cause.



There arose the houri, Who had dwelt in pre-eternity in the pavilions of holiness, protection, and glorification and in the canopies of sinlessness, greatness and splendor. Upon Her creamy brow the most high pen hath written in crimson ink, "Praise be to God! This is a houri upon Whom none have gazed save God, the exalted, the most high. God hath purified the hem of Her purity from the knowledge of the concourse of names in the realm of eternity, and Her face from the view of all who are in the kingdom of creation. When She arose with the ornament of God from Her palace, She looked with one glance toward the sky. The people of the heavens swooned at the rays of Her visage and at the wafting of Her perfume. Then She looked with another glance toward the earth, and it was illumined by the lights of Her beauty and the loveliness of Her splendor.

Praise be to Thee, O my God, for all the wonders of Thy handiwork that Thou hast shown Me in Her, for the ensemble of Thy power, manifest in Her creation. She hung there, suspended. Then She journeyed through the sky as though striding across the horizon in mid-air. It is as though I discovered that the chain of being was set in motion by Her footfalls. She descended, drew nigh, and came until She halted before Me. I was bewildered by the subtleties and wonders of Her creation. Behold, I discovered within myself a passion that grew out of my yearning for Her. I raised my hands toward Her, and lifted the hem of Her veil from Her shoulder. I found Her hair to be sandy, wavy and curly, lying on Her back in ringlets, hanging down almost to Her legs. And when the gales blew it to the right of Her shoulder, it perfumed the heavens and the earth. When it was blown to the left, from its fragrance there spread a holy musk-like scent. It is as though the motion of Her

tresses caused the spirit of life to quake in the inner essence of creation, and caused the kingdom of mystical insight to tremble in the realities of being.

Exalted be God, Her creator, for what He caused Me to see in Her. Then blessed be God, Her fashioner, for the manifestation of might that I witnessed in Her beauty, and the modalities of power that I saw in Her splendor. At one time, I perceived Her as the sweet water of life, delicious and flowing through the realities of beings and the dark recesses of contingent things. I grew certain that the entirety of being survived by virtue of Her eternity, and continued to exist because of Her perpetuity. At another time, I perceived Her as a fire that had blazed forth in the divine bush, as though the element of fire had been created from a torch ignited by Her glowing embers. The hearts of both visible and invisible being were consumed by Her heat and flame when they were shaken by a delicate yearning for Her and a wondrous hankering for Her. It is as though the fragrance of the All-Merciful wafted from the apertures in Her garments. Praise be to God, Her creator, originator and fashioner.

Then I drew near, till She stood before my face and gave utterance as a dove warbles in the realm of eternity, as though speaking in the wondrous music that hath no words, letters or sounds. It is as though all books appeared in commentary on the songs of Her innovation. I recognized all meaning in a single point therein. When I listened with my entire being, I heard the mention of God, the exalted, the most glorious, in Her tunes, and the name of God, the exalted, the most high, in Her melodies.

I raised my hand another time, and bared one of Her breasts that had been hidden beneath Her gown. Then the firmament was illumined by the radiance of its light, contingent beings were made resplendent by its appearance and effulgence, and by its rays infinite numbers of suns dawned forth, as though they trekked through heavens that were without beginning or end. I became bewildered at the pen of God's handiwork, and at what it had inscribed upon Her temple. It was as though She had appeared with a body of light in the forms of the spirit, as though She moved upon the earth of essence in the substance of manifestation. I noticed that the houris had poked their heads out of their rooms and were suspended in the air above Her. They grew perplexed at Her appearance and Her beauty, and were entranced by the raptures of Her song. Praise be to Her creator, fashioner, and maker--to the one Who made Her manifest.

Then she nearly swooned within herself, and with all her being she sought to inhale My fragrance. She opened Her lips, and the rays of light dawned forth from Her teeth, as though the pearls of the cause had appeared from Her treasures and Her shells.

She asked, "Who art Thou?"

I said, "A servant of God and the son of his maidservant."

She said, "I discern in Thee the signs of sorrow, which so sadden Thee that I find the lamp of joy in the niche of Thy heart to have been extinguished, and the lights of happiness in the lantern of Thy soul to have been cut off. I adjure Thee by God, other than Whom there is no God, not to conceal from Me what befell Thee.

Inform Me, that I might know Thy circumstances with no departure from the whole truth, though it be less than a bit of overflowing foam."

I said to Her, "Do not ask Me about that, for Thou canst not bear to hear from Me concerning my sorrow--not even a mere letter thereof. I entreat you in the name of God, the All-Powerful, the protector, the eternal, to lift Thy hand from Me and leave Me alone. Return to Thy place in paradise, and do not ask about what I cannot disclose to Thee--even though it be a mere syllable thereof."

When She saw the quaking of my soul, the wailing of my heart, the lamenting of my being, the fire burning in my bones, the shuddering of my skin, the disturbance in my soul, and the uneasiness of my body, She called out to Me, asking, "Hast Thou a mother to bemoan Thy tribulations?"

I said, "I do not know."

She asked, "Hast Thou a sister, to weep at Thy fate, or a helper, to aid Thee in Thy trial and to give Thee company in Thy loneliness?"

I said, "By my sorrow, to which no joy ever came, do not ask Me anything! Look at my heart, so that what Thou seekest may become apparent to Thee."

She bowed Her head in the direction of my heart, scrutinizing all my limbs, members, bones and inner organs, as though She had lost something and sought it everywhere. Her examination lasted for a long time. Then She lifted Her head until

it reached my breast. I saw that Her condition had undergone an alteration. Her head tilted once to the right, and once to the left. At one moment, She lifted Her gaze to the heavens with grief and misery, and at another She looked at the earth in confusion and regret. I saw Her lips move as though She were saying something beneath Her breath. I trained my ear on Her, and heard a faint cry, as though it issued from the depths of Her being in the essence of Her heart. When I brought my head close to Her mouth, I heard words that I cannot mention. Were I to disclose them, by God, nothing would be left of this world in the face of the searing of Her soul and the scorching of Her heart.

Then She addressed Me, saying, "Thy mother will die, O youth. For I have seen no one like Thee. My distress and bewilderment linger over Thee, and my perturbation hath increased at Thy condition. Would that I had never been created in the divine realm of eternity, had never been born from a breath of God in the most exalted chambers, had never imbibed the milk of life from the springs of glory! How sad is what I have come to know, and to see, how sorrowful what I have discovered. For however much I searched, I found within Thee no heart, whereby I might be informed about Thy circumstances."

When I heard Her lift Her head up, I saw that Her eyes were overflowing with blood, as though oceans appeared from Her every teardrop. When Her eyes met mine, Her tears took the reins of patience from Her, and She shrieked Her lament such that I cannot mention or describe it. Then She was overcome with weeping. She lifted Her hands to my shoulder, and I placed my hand on Her shoulder, and

we wept without moderation, such that it cannot be reckoned by time, eternity, eons, or epochs.

When Her weeping subsided, She said, "I adjure Thee by the One Who seized the pens in His powerful grasp and thereby established whatever He willed, to answer my questions about what hath befallen Thee, that I might be Thy companion in Thy calamities and make mention of Thine ordeals among the concourse on high in the sublime realm."

I said to Her, "My beloved, by my life and Thine, I am not able to explain for Thee what befell Me. But look at my breast,[1] that Thou mightest discover therein what will satisfy Thy quest, in the inmost recesses of my most hidden soul."

[1] Lit. "liver." Just as in Islamic philosophy the heart was often seen as the seat of the intellect (‘aql), so is the liver a symbol for the seat of the emotions.

Then She tilted Her head and brought it near once more to my breast, searching for so long a time that it cannot be expressed in the realm of glory, nor can it be uttered by the tongues of the eloquent. But She found no trace.

Behold, I saw the earth quake at the trembling of Her soul, and shake at the quivering of Her heart. She remained, before time, after time, above time. Then She raised Her head with a scream that cleft the sky and broke open the earth.

Lands moved, and mountains were pulverized. Then She returned to Me and said, "Thy mother hath died, O youth. Thy circumstances have bewildered Me and Thy deeds have caused Me to perish. I never found anyone with neither heart nor breast. How hast Thou survived on earth, how canst Thou exist in this world?"

At that point She was gazing at Me as a lover looketh on the beauty of the beloved. Then I saw Her shaking within Herself, as though the breeze of God from this coat had wafted upon Her. She turned to Me outwardly and inwardly and said, "By Thy life, I perceive from Thee the fragrance of the beloved. Thou art the darling of the worlds. If Thou art He, why dost Thou disguise Thy comely features? Is it because of the people of the Qur'an, or because of the people of the Bayan? Woe be unto all created things!"

When I smelled Her perfume and saw Her advancing toward Me, I guided Her to my soul. When She knew, She wailed, shook, lamented, trembled, and fell on Her face in the dust before my feet. When I turned to Her, I found Her stretched out on the ground, and the spirit had departed from Her as though She had never been created therein. Then the houris suspended in the air howled, and the purified houris in the cloud of unknowing lamented, and all of them returned to their palaces and their pavilions, forsaking all that had been ordained for them and created for their essences.

I was standing over Her body, stricken by Her grief, bewildered at Her condition, and Her love. I took Her and washed Her with the tears of my eyes, then wrapped Her in a shroud of my own clothing. Then I brought my lips close to Her right ear and gave Her the glad tidings of what no one can hear from Me in Her regard. When I had spoken to Her, She trembled at the Word of God. Then She gave Me the glad tidings of what I must not mention or even breathe. Thereafter, I consigned Her to the sacred receptacles and returned Her to the place of intimacy, the station that we had foreordained for Her. Thus do we address you, O concourse of paradise, with a vision of eternity. Interpret it for Me, if ye can interpret the vision of the spirit.



## **LAWH-I RA'ÍS II**

### **Tablet to 'Ali Pasha II**

**Bahá'u'lláh**

(The second tablet by this name, but the third to be sent to 'Ali Pasha.  
For details see Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah Vol. 3 p. 33).

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Translated by Ahmad Sohrab

Tablet Revealed by Baha'u'llah  
to the Sultan of Turkey  
Describing the sufferings of himself and his followers, after his arrival in Akka.

## HE IS THE POSSESSOR IN HIS MIGHT AND POWER!

The Supreme Pen proclaims:

O, thou personage, who considerest thyself the greatest of all men, while looking upon the Divine Youth, thinking him to be the lowest of men, yet through him the Eye of the Supreme Concourse is brightened and illumined. This Youth has never made nor will he ever make a request of thee: For from the beginning every one of the Manifestations of Mercifulness and the dawning-Places of the Glory of the Almighty, who have stepped forth from the Realm of Immortality upon the arena of existence and shone forth with great splendor for the quickening of the dead, men like thee have considered those Sanctified Souls and Temples of Oneness upon whom the reformation of the world depends, as the people of strife, and wrong-doers. Verily, their names (the deniers) are forgotten and ere long thy name will also be forgotten and thou shalt find thyself in great loss. According to thy opinion this quickener of the World and its Peace-Maker is culpable and seditious. What crime have the women, children and suffering babes committed, to merit thy wrath, oppression and hate? In every religion and community the children are considered innocent, nor does the Pen of Divine Command hold them responsible, yet the reign of thy tyranny and despotism has surrounded them. If thou art the follower of any religion or sect, read thou the Heavenly Books, the Inspired Epistles and the Divine Writings, so that thou mayest realize the irresponsibility of children. On the other hand, even those people who do believe in God, have never committed such crimes. In everything an effect is hidden, and no

one has denied the effects of things except an ignorant one who is completely denied and deprived of intelligence. Therefore, undoubtedly the lamentation of these children and the cries of these wronged ones will produce a great effect.

You have persecuted a number of souls who have shown no opposition to your country and who have instigated no revolution against the government; nay, rather, days and nights they have been peacefully engaged in the mentioning of God. You have pillaged their properties and through your tyrannical acts, all they had was taken from them. When the order was issued for the banishment of this Youth, these souls began to lament, but the officers who constituted my guard mentioned that these souls had committed no wrong, nor has the government banished them, but if they desire they may follow you for no one will oppose them. Consequently, they paid all their own expenses and leaving their property behind, they were contented with the Countenance of this Youth and trusting upon God they departed again with the True One, until the fortress of Akka became the place of the incarceration of Baha'. The day after the arrival, the officials of the army surrounded the men, women and children and carried them to the gloomy dungeon of the barrack. The first night they were given neither bread nor water, for the sentinels were guarding the door of the prison and permitted no one to leave the place. They did not consider the plight of these wronged ones. Water was asked for, but it was refused. It is now some time since we are all imprisoned in this dungeon; although we were living for five years in Adrianople and all the people, whether ignorant or wise, rich or poor, testified to the sanctity and holiness of these servants.

When departing from Adrianople one of the believers of God sacrificed himself with his own hand, for he could not see this Wronged One in the hands of the tyrants. On our way we were transferred three times, from one ship to another, and it is evident that a number of the children suffered under these severe circumstances. When we left the steamer, they separated four of the friends from us, and prevented them from following, and upon the departure of this Youth, one of the four, named Abdul Gaffar, threw himself into the sea and no one has ever found any trace of him. This is a drop of the ocean of persecution which surrounded and encircled us. Notwithstanding these things, they are not yet satisfied, and every day the officers of the government are increasing their hard-heartedness, nor is it ended; day and night they are forming new intrigues and adding to our sufferings. From the government supplies, these prisoners receive three loaves of bread to last for twenty-four hours, and no one is able to eat it.

From the beginning of the world, no such persecutions have been seen or heard of! I declare by the One who has commanded Baha' to speak, between the heavens and the earth, there is no name or mention for you equal to those who sacrificed their spirits, bodies and property for the love of God, the Mighty, the Powerful, the Omnipotent! Before God, a handful of dust is greater than your kingdom, sovereignty, glory and dominion, and should He desire, He would scatter you as the sand of the desert, and ere long His wrath shall overtake thee, revolutions shall appear in your midst and your countries will be divided! Then you will weep and lament and nowhere will you find help and protection. The mentioning of these facts is not for the sake of your becoming mindful, for already the wrath of God has surrounded you, but you have not nor will you become mindful; neither is it for the sake of reciting the persecutions which have

descended upon these holy souls, for they are intoxicated with the Wine of the Merciful and they are so exhilarated with the clear Salsabil of Divine Providence, that should the persecutions of all the world descend upon them in the Path of God, they are satisfied, nay, rather, grateful; they never had nor will they ever have any complaints to offer. At every moment the blood in their bodies begs and supplicates from the Lord of both worlds, that it be shed upon the ground in His Path; likewise their heads yearn to be raised upon a spear for the sake of the Beloved of the heart and soul. For several times the tests of God have descended upon you, and you were not mindful; one was a conflagration which burned the city with the Fire of Justice, so much so that poets have composed poems about it, declaring that such a conflagration has never appeared before; notwithstanding this your negligence increased. Then the cholera came, and still you remained heedless. Be ye watchful, for the wrath of God is prepared, and ere long ye shall behold that which is descended from the Pen of Command. Have ye thought that your glory is everlasting, or did ye dream that your kingdom would remain forever? No, by the life of God! Your glory is not eternal, and our humiliation will not last. This humiliation is the diadem of all the glories, and only man in his perfection can comprehend it.

When this Youth was a child and had not yet reached the age of maturity, one of my brothers intended to marry in Teheran and according to the custom of that country, for seven days and nights they were engaged in feasting and banqueting. The program for the last day of entertainment for the guests was the play of Sultan Salim. The ministers, the grandees and officials of the city were there in a great throng, and this Youth was sitting in one of the galleries of the building and was observing the scenes. Then they raised a great tent in the middle

of the court; representations of human forms only a few inches in height would come out of the tent and cry: "The king is coming, arrange the seats in order." Then the other figures came out, sweeping the ground while a number were sprinkling the streets with water; then another picture was presented, who was supposed to be the herald, acquainting the people to be ready for review before His Majesty, the Sultan.

Then the ministers came, with hat and shawl, according to the Persian custom; others were present with clubs, while a number of others were garbed chamberlains, aides-de-camp, ferrashes and executioners with instruments of punishment. All these men were lined up according to their station and class. At last the king appeared, with sovereign power and shining diadem upon his head, and with splendor and glory walked slowly and majestically, and with perfect calmness, tranquility and composure, seated himself upon the throne. At that moment the noise of the guns and the music of the national anthem was raised, and the smoke surrounded the tent and the king. When the air was cleared, it was seen that the king was on his throne, and the ministers, the magistrates and secretaries had taken their places according to their rank. Immediately, a thief, captured by the police, was brought before the king, and a royal order was issued to behead him. Then the chief of the executioners took the captive and decapitated him, and a red fluid, which was like blood, was seen by all the spectators. While the Sultan was consulting with some of his ministers, the news was brought in that a certain person had become a rebel. The Sultan issued orders that several regiments of soldiers and artillerymen be sent to the scene and quell the disturbance. After a few minutes the thunderous noise of guns and artillery was heard behind the tent, and

we were told they were engaged in battle. This Youth became astonished and bewildered at these affairs.

Then the review ended and the curtain descended.

After twenty minutes a man came out from behind the tent with a box under his arm. I asked him, "What is this box? Where is the king and all the men?" He answered that all these great things and manifest objects, such kings, princes and ministers, glory, majesty, power and sovereignty that we beheld were enclosed in this box.

I declare by the Lord who has created all things through His Word, that from that day all the conditions of this world and its greatness are like that play before the eyes of this Youth. It has not nor will ever have the weight of a mustard seed. I was wondering greatly that the people glorify themselves in these affairs, notwithstanding this, the people of insight will discern with the eye of certainty the end of the glory of every great one before beholding it. I have seen nothing except I have discerned its transiency, and God testifies to this. It is incumbent upon every soul in these few days of life to spend them in truthfulness and justice and if he be not confirmed with the knowledge of the True One, he can at least walk in the path of equity and intelligence.

Ere long all these apparent things, manifest treasures, worldly wealth, valiant soldiers, beautiful dresses and haughty souls, will be enclosed in the box-like tomb, similar to the box which contained all the players, and all this quarrel, strife and so-called honors are like the play of the children before the people of insight. Be ye admonished, and be not of those who see the Truth and yet deny. These things will not affect this Youth and the friends of the True One, for

they are all prisoners and enchained, and will not nor will ever make any request of people like thee.

The point is this, that thou mayest raise thy head from the bed of negligence and become mindful and not oppose the servants of God without reason. Bear in mind that so far as power and strength remain in the body, thou shouldst remove persecutions from the oppressed ones. Shouldst thou have a little justice and behold with the eye of certainty in the affairs and differences of the ephemeral world, thou shalt acknowledge that all of them are like unto the above-mentioned play. Hearken unto the word of Truth! Be thou not proud on account of the world. Where are those people who were like unto thee, who claimed divinity in this earth without the permission of God, and desired to extinguish the Light of God and to demolish the foundation of Truth? Do thou see any one of them? Be just! Then turn to God, perchance He may forgive the sins thou hast committed in this ephemeral life. Yet we know that thou shalt not become assisted in this, for through thy tyranny the Fire of Sinai flamed forth, the Spirit wept, and the hearts of the angels bled.

O, ye people of the earth! Hearken to the voice of this Oppressed One with the ear of the soul, and ponder ye deeply over the above-mentioned story. Perchance ye may not be burned with the fire of passion and desire, and be not prevented from the meeting of the True One, through the worthless things of the faithless world. Glory and abasement, poverty and wealth, trouble and tranquillity, all shall pass away, and ere long all the inhabitants of the earth shall return to the tomb. Therefore every possessor of insight must behold the immortal outlook, that peradventure, through the Bounties of the Eternal Sovereign, he may enter into the



everlasting Kingdom and rest under the shade of the Tree of Command. Although the world is the place of treachery and duplicity, yet under all circumstances it reminds all the people with the idea of change. The passing of the father is an admonition for the son, and it reminds him that he, too, must pass away. It would have been well if the people of the world who are amassing great fortunes and are deprived of the True One, knew what would become of their great wealth. By the Life of Baha', no one is cognizant of this fact except God, Glorified is His Station!

The philosopher, Avicena -- peace be upon him -- says: "Be admonished, O ye whose hearts are darkened, be ye admonished O ye, whose faces are covered with the lines of age!" However, the majority of the people are asleep. The example of those souls is like unto a person who was so intoxicated with wine that he was showing the signs of affection to a dog, and showering upon him tender words of love and affection. When the morning of intelligence dawned, and the horizons of the heaven were illumined with the brilliant orb, he beheld that his beloved was only a dog; when ashamed, regretful and remorseful on account of his act, he returned to his home.

Do thou not think that thou hast made this Youth powerless, or that thou hast conquered him. Thou art defeated by one of the servants, but knowest it not. The worst and lowest of creatures ruled over thee, and that is thy passion and desire, which has been condemned forever. If it were not on account of the consummate Wisdom of God thou wouldst have seen thy weakness and the weakness of the people of the earth. This humility is the glory of My Cause, wert thou to know! This Youth has never loved nor will ever love to utter any word which is against courtesy. Verily, courtesy is My Garment with which we have adorned the temples

of our favorite servants. Otherwise some of thy actions that thou thinkest are unknown, would be mentioned in this Tablet. O, thou possessor of might! These little children and these friends of God did not need the officers and soldiers as guards. After our arrival, one of the officers presented himself and after much conversation expressed his own innocence and thy crime. This Youth mentioned to him that: "Primarily, it was necessary to bring about a meeting of the Ulamas of the time and Himself so that the crimes of which these servants are accused might become evident. However, time has passed and according to thy statement thou art commanded to imprison us in the 'most desolate city.' But I have one wish to make of thee, and that is to request of His Majesty, the Sultan, to grant Me an audience of ten minutes in order that he may ask proofs and arguments which he thinks would establish the validity of the Word of God. If the proofs which he desires are made manifest on the part of God, he should then liberate these wronged ones and leave them to their own condition."

He promised to take this message and send an answer, but we heard nothing more from him; although it is not the Station of this True One to present Himself before any person, for all the people are created for His worship: Yet for the sake of these little children and the number of women who are away from their country and people, we volunteered this act, but notwithstanding this, no result was produced. Omar is living and ready, ask of him so that the Truth may become manifest to thee. Now all these exiled ones are sick and lying in prison. No one but God the Mighty, the Glorious, knows what will happen to us.

During the first days two of these servants passed into the Supreme Concourse. One day one of the officers commanded that they could not remove those blessed bodies unless they were paid for the shroud and casket, although no one ever asked anything of them. At that time we possessed no means, and when we insisted that they leave the work to us and allow the friends to prepare the dead for burial, they refused. Finally they took a rug to the bazaar and sold it at auction, and delivered the money to the officers. Later on it became evident that they only dug the ground and laid the two blessed bodies in the one grave, although they had been doubly paid for shrouds and caskets. The pen is unable and the tongue is powerless to describe that which has descended upon us; however, all these poisons of tests are sweeter to this Youth than honey. I pray that under all circumstances the trials of the world in the Path of God and the Love of the Merciful may descend upon this Ocean of Significances. We beg of Him patience and endurance.

Thou art weak, and knowest it not. Couldst thou realize and be perfumed with the fragrance wafted from the direction of the Ancient Beauty, thou wouldst leave everything that thou hast in hand and hasten to come and live in one of the ruined rooms of this Most Great Prison. Ask thou of God that thou mayest attain to the age of maturity so that thou mayest recognize the beauty and ugliness of deeds and actions. Peace be upon those who follow guidance!

Translated by Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, especially for the STAR OF THE WEST

## LAWH-I TA'VIL

### Bahá'u'lláh

A Tablet on the Figurative Interpretation of Scripture

Trans. with introduction by Juan R. I. Cole

(from Baha'u'llah, *Iqtidarát* (Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, n.d.), pp. 279-286.)

This is what the tongue of grandeur spoke forth.

The purpose of figurative interpretation (ta'vil) is not that one be deprived of the outward sense of the verse, nor that its intent be veiled. For instance, let us say that from the heaven of the divine will the command is revealed, "Wash your faces." Do not interpret it figuratively, saying that the intent is that one should wash the countenance of one's inner self, cleansing it with the water of mystical insight, and so forth. For in this manner a person might, by reason of such a figurative interpretation, continue to have a malodorous face soiled with dirt, yet be convinced in his own mind that he had carried out the very essence of God's

decree. For in this station it is clear and obvious that the intent is that the face be washed with physical water.

Some of the words of God can be interpreted figuratively, but such non literal interpretations should not give rise to illusions and misconceptions, nor miss the divine intent.

Contemplate the verse revealed by the All-Merciful in the Qur'an, "Whoso has been given wisdom has been given much good."(1) Some hold that the intent of the word "wisdom" is the divine laws revealed in scripture. Some maintain that "wisdom" is the science of medicine, and that all who master it are given much good insofar as it concerns human beings.

They believe that this science and that of physiology are the noblest branches of knowledge, since they have been identified by the temple of wisdom with this exalted verse.

Knowledge consists of two branches, the study of the body and the study of the religions. The study of the body, in this divine verse, takes precedence, and in reality, it has precedence. For the appearance of the absolute Truth and the divine Laws have all been for the sake of educating and advancing human beings, safeguarding the people of the world, and so forth. Therefore, whatever causes human beings to be protected and in good health, and secures their well-being, takes and ever will take precedence. This statement is clear and obvious.

Some assert that "wisdom" here means knowledge of the realities of things, such that all who attain to this level possess exalted stations. Another faction believes that "wisdom" is to do whatever benefits human beings. Whoever succeeds in

arriving at this station possesses much good. A large number of people say that "wisdom" is that which protects human beings from whatever abases them and guides them to what bestows glory upon them. A group holds that "wisdom" is knowing how to associate with people and to conciliate them in a way that does not exceed the bounds of moderation. Some say that wisdom is the science of metaphysics that is founded upon the paradigms established by the ancient philosophers. In the same way, they say that "wisdom" is the science of substances and accidents, or of cosmology, and so forth. Others insist that "wisdom" is knowing how to make one's living in the world. Some identify "wisdom" with a knowledge of basic principles. Some say it is the affairs of justice, which lie in giving to each his due. There are those who argue that "wisdom" is the elixir, such that whoever discovers it attains too much good. Others see "wisdom" as the science of geometry.

Each group has supported its assertions with evidence and proof according to its own degree of perception. Were the details of these stations to be mentioned, it would result in tedium. Praise be to the One who spoke forth this exalted word: "The essence of wisdom is the fear of God." For the fear of God deters human beings from whatever leads to their abasement and degradation, and aids them to attain that which causes their exaltation. Persons endued with reason avoid odious actions, since they can foresee the rewards of doing so. The pavilion of the world's order has been raised upon two poles, reward and punishment. A little while ago this blessed verse shone forth from the divine mouth: "Justice hath a mighty force at its command. It is none other than reward and punishment for the deeds of men. By the power of this force the tabernacle of order is established throughout the

world, causing the wicked to restrain their natures for fear of punishment."(2) Thus spoke the king of names.

He is, verily, the Speaker, the All-Knowing.

In former times, some persons referred to themselves as people of the mystic Path, and their writings are even now available in the land. Various peoples each chose a mystic order, and thereby Islam became divided. They created straits out of the most great ocean, until, at last, the religion of God was overtaken by that which befell it. The tremendous power with which it had been imbued by the deeds and efforts of its adherents was now transformed into weakness, as has been and will be seen. Some of those who call themselves dervishes subject all the ordinances and divine laws to figurative interpretation. When it is pointed out that performing daily obligatory prayers is an incontrovertible command of God, they say that by obligatory prayers are meant ordinary prayers: "We came into the world praying, and have put into practice true obligatory prayers." This poor man is deprived of the outer meaning, how much more the inner meaning. The idle fancies of heedless souls have been and are beyond reckoning. Indeed, because of their laziness and indolence, they have interpreted in a figurative fashion all the divine laws, which are like an impregnable fortress for the safeguarding and security of the world. Immuring themselves in convents, they have chosen to do nothing but eat and sleep, gullibly believing, with regard to the branches of knowledge, whatever proposition anyone might advance. But to this day no trace of the heat of the love of God can be perceived in them, except for a very few, who have tasted the sweetness of the Utterance and who, in sum, became aware of the true intent of the word "manifestation."

Some of the figurative interpretations of "wisdom" that were adverted to above are each, in their own right, correct. For they are not contradictory to the principles underlying the divine commands. Those verses containing commands or prohibitions, such as rituals, the payment of blood money to the victim's relatives for manslaughter, crimes, and so forth, are intended to be implemented according to their literal meaning. Those divine verses concerning the Resurrection and the Hour, whether they were revealed in past scriptures or in the Qur'an, are for the most part to be interpreted figuratively. "And none knows its interpretation, save only God."(3)

These matters have been made clear and demonstrated in the Book of Certitude. Anyone who ponders it will become aware of what was hidden from the eyes of all. Gaze upon what the Bestower has revealed in the Book, that is, the verse "It behooves not the sun to overtake the moon, neither does the night outstrip the day."(4) The clergy, ancient and modern, have commented upon and interpreted figuratively this blessed verse, and each derived its meaning from his own beliefs. But these are the stations of delusion and idle fancy, whereas this is the station of knowledge. The individual whom they call the king of scripture commentators, Qadi Baydawi, asserted that this verse was revealed in refutation of those who worshipped the sun. Note how far he is from the spring of knowledge, despite the assertion of the people that he was profoundly learned. The reins of the branches of knowledge are in the grasp of the divine power. He bestows them upon whomever he desires.

Also in the former scriptures, most of the references to this dispensation made by the most high pen are figurative in nature. For instance, he says that the valleys



will melt under him like wax.(5) He also says, "the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills" (6) just as has occurred. In another place he speaks of "an immovable tent, whose stakes will never be plucked up, nor will any of its cords be broken."(7) These passages are to be interpreted figuratively. Any equitable person will perceive which stations must be adjudged according to the outward sense of the revelation.

Indeed, today that which can cleanse the people of defilement, and can deliver them into true repose, is the faith of God, the religion of God, the Cause of God. Thus has the invisible discourse rained down from the heaven of mystical insight, as a grace upon you. Give thanks and say, "To you be praise, O beloved of the mystics. And to you be glorification, O goal of the worlds. And to you be thanks, you in whose grasp is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth."

#### Translator Notes:

As a result of our discussion of esoteric or figurative interpretation (ta'wil or eisegesis) by individuals earlier this month, I looked at my notes and found extended comments by Baha'u'llah on the subject in a Tablet printed in *Iqtidarat* (pp. 279-286), of which I shared a summary.

It seemed to me that the subject, of the legitimacy of figurative scripture interpretation, is of sufficient importance that I should make a translation of this

tablet. I have referred to it as the Lawh-i Ta'vil (the Persian transliteration), even though it has no title in Iqtidarat, because that is clearly its subject-matter.

This Tablet quotes from a passage in Arabic that is also quoted in the Lawh-i Maqsud, dated late 1881. It seems to me therefore likely that this Tablet can also be dated to around that time in `Akka.

One of the reasons for the controversy over ta'wil was that Baha'u'llah had appeared to forbid it in the Most Holy Book. He writes (para. 105, p. 57): "Whoso interpreteth what hath been sent down from the heaven of Reelation, and altereth its evident meaning, he, verily, is of them that have perverted the Sublime Word of God . . ." The underlying Arabic here is ta'wil. "Interpret" is not really the right translation, and is misleading. What Baha'u'llah means is "interpret away".

It is clear that Baha'u'llah had only meant to forbid a figurative interpretation of legal texts, such as would excuse adherents from complying with the commands therein. (That is why the issue is mentioned in the Most Holy Book). It was never his intention to forbid individuals from interpreting scripture in the sense of exegesis, nor to forbid figurative or eisegetic interpretation if it was applied to other than legal texts. He makes these issues very clear in the Lawh-i Ta'vil.

Here, as in his "Commentary on the Surah of the Sun" (<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jrcole/shams.htm>), Baha'u'llah urges a golden mean. Believers should neither so depart from the outward meaning of the text in idiosyncratic flights of fancy that the original intent is lost sight of, nor should they be so literal as to leave them with only the letter and none of the spirit. He condemns antinomian Sufism for the former, and the great Sunni Qur'an commentator al-Baydawi for the latter. He admits, in his discussion of the

controversy in Islam over the meaning of Qur'an 2:227, that there is more than one valid interpretation of the verse, and therefore acknowledges the legitimacy of individuals seeking these meanings. He does not ever suggest that the meaning of non-legal scripture can be finally fixed by any institutional authority, and appears to encourage individual study and group discussion without hindrance or limitation. The only area in which he finds such activities inappropriate is the figurative interpretation of revealed law, which would have the effect of setting it aside.

This is, obviously, a draft translation. Suggestions for improvement and queries about any passages that seem unclear are welcome.

Juan Cole

Notes

(1) Qur'an 2:272

(2) Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'u'llah revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas, trans. Habib Taherzadeh et. al. (Haifa: Baha'i World Center, 1988), p. 164 (from the Lawh-i Maqsud, 1881).

(3) Qur'an 3:5.

(4) Qur'an 36:40.

(5) Micah 1:4.

(6) Isaiah 2:2.

(7) Isaiah 33:20

**LAWH-I-TIBB**

**The Tablet of Medicine**

**Bahá'u'lláh**

Translated by Khazeh Fananapazir & Stephen Lambden

Source: BSB 6:4-7:2 (October 1992) pp.18-65

Revealed unto a Physician, upon him be the Glory of God!

He is God, the One Who is Most Knowing

The Tongue of the Ancient of Days uttereth that which shall be a sufficient  
Treasure for the wise ones in the absence of physicians.

## II

[1] Say: O People! Eat not except after having hungered and drink not after retiring to sleep (al-huju'). [2] How beneficial is exercise when one [s stomach] is empty for through it the limbs become strengthened; and how dark a calamity is exercise when one[s stomach] is full! [3] Do not avoid medical treatment (al-'ilaj) when thou hast need of it but abandon it when thy constitution hath been restored (istiqamat). [4] Do not commence a meal except after full digestion [of the previous meal] and swallow not save after the completion of chewing. [5] Treat an illness firstly with nutrients (or foods, alimants, haghdhiya) and proceed not [immediately] unto medications (adwiyat). [6] If that which thou desirest resulteth from elemental nutrients (al-mufradat) refrain from the compound treatments (al-murakkabat). [7] Abandon medication (al-dawa') when thou art healthy but take hold of it when thou hast need thereof. [8] If foods of opposing disposition (diddan) are available at table, do not mix them; under such circumstances content thyself with but one of them. [9] Commence first with the light food (al-raqiq) before moving on to the heavier one (al-ghaliz) and with the liquid before the solid. [10] To intake one food which becomes superimposed upon another, (idkhal al-ta'am 'ala ta'am) is dangerous; be warned of this matter.

### III

[1] When thou wouldst commence eating, start by mentioning My Most Glorious Name (al-abha) and finish it with the Name of Thy Lord, the Possessor of the Throne above and of the earth below. [2] And when thou hast finished eating, walk a little to settle thy meal. [3] That [foodstuff] which is hard to chew; the same is forbidden unto those possessed of intelligence. Thus doth the Supreme Pen command thee. [4] Eat a little in the morning for this is as a lamp to the body. [5] Eschew harmful habits [i.e. addictive substances al-i'ada al-mudirra) for they truly, are a calamity for created beings. [6] Counter disease by utilizing established means (bi'l-asbab). This utterance is the decisive command in this discourse.

### IV

[1] Most necessary to thy well-being is contentment (al-qana'at) under all circumstances for through it will the soul be saved from sloth and ill-being. [2] Eschew anxiety (al-hamma) and depression (al-ghamm) for through these twain will transpire a darksome affliction (bala' adham).

### V

[1] Say: Envy (al-hasad) consumeth the body and rage [or anger, wrath, al-ghayz) burneth the liver: avoid these two as ye would a fierce lion (al-asad). [2] Purification of the bowels (tanqiyat al-fudul) constitutes a pillar [of health, al-'umdat) when accomplished in the temperate seasons (al-fusul al-mu'tadila). [3] He whose eating hath been excessive, his malady will be heightened. [4] We,

assuredly, have decreed a cause (sabab an) for all things and vouchsafed everything with an effect (al-athar). All of this is by virtue of the effulgence of My Name, the Efficacious [the 'Producer of Effects' al-mu'aththir) upon existing things. Verily, thy Lord is the One Who exerciseth command over all that He willeth.

## VI

[1] Say: Through all that which We have expounded the [equilibrium of the] four humours (al-akhlat) will not exceed their moderate balance (al-i'tidal), neither will their measures deviate from their mean conditions. [2] The [human constitutional] foundation (al-al) will remain in its purity and the "sixth part" and the "sixth of the sixth part" (wa'l-suds wa suds al-suds) in their stable condition. [3] The twin active forces (fa'ilan) and the twin passive realities (munfa'ilan) will be rendered whole. And upon God is all our trust. There is no God but Him, the true Healer, the Omniscient, the One Whose succour is sought by all. [4] My Supreme Pen hath not moved over such words as the above save out of My love for thee, that thou mayest know that sorrows have not overtaken the Ancient Beauty and He is not saddened by that which hath befallen Him from the nations. [5] Sorrow is for that one who loseth a thing, and from My Grasp is not lost all that is in the heavens and the earth.

## VII

[1] O Physician! Firstly, heal thou the sick ones with the Remembrance of thy Lord (bi-dhikr rabbika), the Lord of the Day of Mutual Invocation (yawm al-tanad) and

afterwards by that which We have ordained for the health of the constitutions of the servants. [2] By My life! Merely attaining the presence of the physician who hath drunk of the Wine of My Love conferreth healing and his mere breath bringeth mercy and hope. [3] Say: Adhere to him for the restoration of the body's well-being. [4] Verily such a physician is assisted by God for the treatment of ills. [5] Say: The science of healing is the most noble of all the sciences. [6] Verily, it is the greatest instrument given by God, the Quickener of mouldering bones, for the preservation of the bodies of peoples. God hath given it precedence over all sciences and branches of wisdom. [7] But this Day is the Day wherein thou shouldst arise to bring about My Victory, detached from all the worlds.

## VIII

Say: "Thy Name is My healing, O my God, and remembrance of Thee is my remedy. Nearness to Thee is my hope and love for Thee my companion. Thy mercy to me is my healing (tabib) and my succour in both this world and the world to come. Thou, verily, art the All-Bountiful, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise."

## IX

[1] Give the salutations of God to all the Friends. [2] Say: In this Day two decrees (du amr) are beloved and to be desired. The first is wisdom and utterance. [3] The second is steadfastness in the Cause of thy Lord, the Most Compassionate. [4] Every one that attaineth unto these twin commands is accounted and mentioned, in the sight of God, as among the dwellers of the City of Immortality (madinah-i baqa'). [5] For it is through the instrumentality of these twin decrees that the Cause



of God hath been and will continue to be established amongst God's servants. [6] This inasmuch as, were it not for wisdom and utterance, all will become sorely tried. Were such to be the case none would remain to guide the people unto the Religion of the One True God. [7] Furthermore, if it were not for steadfastness, the words of the teacher [lit. narrator, reminder, dhakir) shall not be effective.

X

[1] Say: O Friends! Apprehensiveness and agitation pertaineth unto women. [2] And should the beloved of God reflect briefly upon the world and its manifest vicissitudes, the dominance of those who hath been tyrants will not frighten them. [3] Then shall they take their flight on the wings of yearning desire unto the One Who is at the centre of the Luminous Horizons [of the next World?] (nayyir al-afaq) [4] This servant hath wished for Himself that which He hath wished for all the servants of God. [5] The reason that wisdom (hikmat) and the protection of the friends hath been and shall be commanded is that those who remember Me should remain in the world and occupy themselves with the mention of the Lord of all the worlds. [6] Thus it is binding and necessary that all may protect themselves and their brethren for the sake of the Cause of God. [7] If the beloved of God had performed that which they were commanded, the majority of the people of the world at this time would have been adorned with the garment of faith. [8] Great is the blessedness of him who leadeth another soul to the Immortal Faith of God and guideth him to life everlasting. [9] This is an act of supreme importance in the presence of thy Lord, the Mighty, the Most Exalted.

May the Spirit be upon thee! And may the Glory be upon thee also!

## Commentary

The Arabic-Persian text of Baha'u'llah's Tablet of Medicine (Lawh-i-Tibb) [1] is to be dated to the early 'Akka' period of his ministry (early 1870's?). It was addressed to a Baha'i named Mirza Muhammad Rida'-yi Tabib-i-Yazdi, a physician of the traditional school. The text is translated and selectively annotated below. The tentative translation is highly provisional. The notes are designed to clarify what is a sometimes difficult text which could, at certain points, have been translated in quite a number of different ways. Only a few of the verses or terms contained within the \*Lawh-i-Tibb\* are commented upon. It is hoped that the translation and notes will be of interest to Baha'is in general and to those who are practitioners of modern medicine. Doubtless, in the future, scholars expert in both Baha'i doctrine and in the history of science/medicine will write learned and comprehensive commentaries upon this important Tablet.

[1. The \*Lawh-i-Tibb\* was first published in \*Majmu'a-yi alwah-i-mubarakah\* (Cairo, 1920, Rep. Wilmette, Illinois: BPT., 1981, 222-226 (Reproduced and translated below).]

As indicated, not all of the numerous Baha'i texts which might have an expository bearing on the Tablet of Medicine can be cited below. The following letter of Shoghi Effendi makes some centrally important points:

"The Tablet to a Physician was addressed to a man who was a student of the old type of healing prevalent in the East and familiar with the terminology used in those days, and He addresses him in terms used by the medical men of those days.

These terms are quite different from those used by modern medicine, and one would have to have a deep knowledge of this former school of medicine to understand the questions Baha'u'llah was elucidating. Baha'u'llah has recommended that people seek the help and advice of experts and doctors: He does not say which school they should belong to.

"Likewise there is nothing in the teachings about whether people should eat their food cooked or raw: exercise or not exercise: resort to specific therapies or not: nor is it forbidden to eat meat.

"Baha'u'llah says teaching is the greatest of all services, but He does not mean one should give up medicine to teach." [2]

[2. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, December 18, 1945 cited UHJ:1984 -- see also the letter printed in BSB 4:3-4 (April 1990), 58.]

Shoghi Effendi indicated in a letter dated 14th January 1932 that the first few Arabic paragraphs of the Tablet of Medicine contain useful advice for the maintenance of good health (see II:1ff).[3] They echo those medical maxims and pieces of useful advice (fawa'id) found in a variety of Greek and Islamic literatures -- generally speaking, a considerable proportion of Islamic medicine has Greek roots. Ullmann has written in the introduction to his *Islamic Medicine*, "'Islamic medicine' did not grow up on Arab soil. Rather it is the medicine of later Greek antiquity which was formulated in the Arabic language in the south and west of the Mediterranean from the ninth century A.D." (p.xi). While the Qur'an contains little or no explicit medicine -- neither the word doctor/physician nor medicine are

mentioned (cf. Ullmann, p.4; Dols, review of Rahman p.417) -- this is more than made up for in the Sunni and Shi'i \*hadith\* literatures.

[3. Part of this letter of Shoghi Effendi reads, "With the appearance of every Revelation a new insight is created in man and this in turn expresses itself in the growth of science. This has happened in past dispensations and we find its earliest fruits in our present day. What we see however is only the beginning. With the spiritual awakening of man this force will develop and marvelous results will become manifest. Among other phases of human learning the medical science will have a place. There is a Tablet of Medicine that Baha'u'llah has revealed and which is translated into English. That does not contain much of scientific informations [sic.] but has some interesting advice for keeping healthy." (cited LDG 2:21 )]

From the early Islamic centuries compilations of medical wisdom attributed to the Prophet Muhammad were made by Sunni and Shi'i writers (see the various \*Tibb al-nabi/ Tibb al-nabawi\* works). [4] Such major Sunni canonical collections of hadith as that of al-Bukhhari (810-870 CE) contain their own \*Kitab al-tibb\* ("Book of Medicine"). Many medical or quasi-medical traditions were attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. It is nonetheless the case that "The hadith directly related to medicine are relatively few, usually late, and frequently contradictory." [5]

[4. Refer, for example, Cyril Elgood, 'Tibb al-Nabi or Medicine of the Prophet, Being a Translation of Two Works of the same Name: I. The \*Tibb-ul-Nabbi\* [\*Tibb al-Nabi\*] of Al-Suyuti; II. The Tibb-ul-Nabbi of Mahmud bin Mohammad al-Chaghghayni' the scientist-astronomer Mamud ibn 'Umar Chagmini] in \*Osiris\* Vol.14 (1962) 33-192. With respect to the al-Chaghmini's

medical tract Elgood writes, "Next is the version by Mahmud bin 'Umar Jaghmini [=Chaghmini] of which I also present a translation as a contrast to the much longer version of al-Suyuti and as a specimen of the aphoristic form of writing which was once so popular in Persia. This is written in Arabic. Mahmud also wrote in Persian a book called \*Qanunchi fi al-Tibb\*, being an extract from the Canon of Avicenna. The edition that I used for my translation is a small book lithographed in Teheran in 1888/89 and is in my private collection." (p.43). On page 40 of the aforementioned article Elgood writes, "A reference to the Encyclopaedia of Hajji Khalifa [written 1658 CE] shows that he devotes a special section in his work to what he calls \*'Ilm al-Tibb al-Nabbawi\* or \*The Science of Prophetic Medicine\*. Here he mentions seven different works on this subject which were existing in his day and were known to him. The authors whom he names as having made these collections are Nu'aym Ahmad of Ispahan [948-1038 CE], Abu al-'Abbas Ja'far Mustaghfiri, Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti [1445-1505 CE], Abu Hassan 'Ali al-Rida [the 8th Imam, Imam Ria' see below], Habib Nishapuri, Habib al-Thani, and 'Abd al-Malik bin Habib." (transliteration altered). In the books of the 'Prophetic Medicine' (\*Tibb al-nabawi\*) innumerable inauthentic traditions were attributed to the Prophet Muhammad. Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) as noted by Ullmann "alone has said clearly that essentially this is bedouin medicine and can have no claim to be divine revelation and therefore cannot be obligatory under religious law." (p.5).]

[5. M.W. Dols, review of Rahman in \*Hist. Sci.\* xxvi (1988), 417.]

The medical wisdom of the Twelver Shi'i Imams (\*tibb al- a'immah\*) was likewise assiduously compiled (see Agha Buzurg al-Tihrani, \*al-Dhari'a ila tasanif al-shi'a\* 25 Vols Tehran / Najaf 1355/1936, 15:135-144). [6] A great many statements are

attributed to the Twelver Imams that, in one way or another, have to do with medical matters or with bodily health. To the eighth Imam 'Ali al-Rida' (c.768-818 CE) is attributed *\*al-Risala al-dhahabiya/al-mudhahhaba fi'-tibb\** ("The Golden Treatise...") a treatise on medical cures and good health written for and at the request of the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur (text in Majlisi, *\*Bihar al-anwar\** (2nd ed) LXII: 308-328). Commentaries are said to have been written on this Arabic treatise which have been translated into Persian and Urdu (see W. Malelung, Ali al-Reza, *EI*. 2:877-8). [7] There exists furthermore, a treatise in the Jabirean corpus--writings attributed to Jabir ibn Hayyan (c.103/721-c.200/815) -- certain of which Baha'u'llah drew upon -- entitled *\*Kitab al-tibb al-nabawi'ala ahl al-bayt\** ("The Book of Prophetic Medicine) according to the view of the Household of the Prophet").

[6. The recently published Batool Ispahany (trans.) & Andrew J. Newman (Ed.), *\*Islamic Medical Wisdom, The ibb al-A'imma\** ([= Medicine of the Imams] London: The Muhammadi Trust 1991) is a collection of statements of certain Twelver Imams compiled by Abu 'Atab 'Abd Allah and al-Husayn, the sons of Bisam b. Sabur -- Bistam was a companion of the sixth Imam Abu Abd Allah Ja'far b. Muhammad al-Sadiq (d. 148/765) and the seventh Imam Abu al-Hasan Musa b. Ja'far al-Kazim (d. 183/799) (cf. *\* al-Dhari'a \* 15:139-140). In the preface to this work Newman writes, "There is no dearth of Twelver Shi'i medical texts. Agha Buzurg al-Tehrani (d. 1389/1970) in his massive bibliography of Twelver texts [see above] devoted several pages to listing texts on medicine completed from the earliest years following the disappearance of the Twelfth Imam up to the last century." See for further details *ibid* p. xxxiv ff.]*

[7. See also Muhammad 'Ali al-Bar, *\*al-Imam 'Ali al-Rida wa risalat fi al-tibb al-nabawi, al-risala al-dhahabiya, awwal risala fi al-tibb al-nabawi\**, (Beirut: Dar al-manahil, 1412/1991). This volume commences with material highlighting the glories of the "people of the House of the Prophet" (Pt.I pp.11-68) followed by an hagiographical biography of 'Ali al-Rida' (Pt.II 69-110); the text of Imam Rida's "Golden Treatise" (Pt. III pp. 111-126) and two further sections; a prolegomenon to the understanding of ancient medical books and books of the medicine of the Prophet (Pt. IV pp. 127-137) the *\*Risala dhahabiya\** and an exposition and glosses on some of its terms (Pt. V pp. 139-183).]

A multitude of other Shi'i works, which cannot possibly be even listed here, are relevant to the study of the background to the *\*Lawh-i-Tibb\**. The *\*Lawh-i-Tibb\** cannot be fully or adequately commented upon without some reference to its (Shi'i) Islamic background; not forgetting its pre-Islamic antecedents which will only at certain points in the notes below be cursorily indicated.

Sources known to the present writer only allow the *\*sitz im leben\** ("setting in life") of the *\*Lawh-i-Tibb\** to be inadequately sketched. In volume three of his *\*The Revelation of Baha'u'llah\** (Oxford: George Ronald 1983) Adib Taherzadeh gives something of a summary of key points of the Tablet of Medicine (see 3: 358-360). He translates a passage from Haji Muammad Tahir-i Malamiri's memoirs, the *\*Khatirat-i-Malamiri\**, about Aqa Mirza Muhammad-Rida' (the recipient of the *\*Lawh-i-Tibb\**):

"One of the early believers who embraced the Faith when Siyyid Yahyay-i-Darabi, known as Vahid, came to Yazd, was Aqa Mirza Muammad-Riay-i-Abib. He was a skilled and distinguished physician, and an embodiment of grace and steadfastness.

The Pen of the Most High revealed the Lawh-i-Tibb in his honour. In that exalted Tablet, Baha'u'llah states that the mere visit of a physician who has drunk deep of the wine of His love will cure the patient. Mirza Muhammad-Rida was truly the fulfilment of these words of Baha'u'llah. He used to cure the patient by administering very simple remedies. Truly, he possessed wonderful qualities which made him a very special person in the community of the Most Great Name. Owing to his intense piety he became highly disturbed when Mirza Yahya broke the Covenant. As a result he was bewildered and stunned; he even became hesitant in the Cause for a short time. Then it was as though Divine Providence sent Mulla Zaynu'l-'Abidin, a native of Najafabad (he was entitled by Baha'u'llah as Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin) to Yazd in order to calm his agitation and dispel his doubts. Zaynu'l-Muqarrabin at first stayed in the house of this servant in the district of Malamir, but when he learned of the intense anguish and distress that Mirza Muhammad-Rida was subjected to, he changed his residence and stayed in his home instead. Consequently, Mirza Muhammad-Rida became fully aware of the circumstances of the Revelation of Baha'u'llah. He later received many Tablets from the Pen of the Most High, and served the Faith of Baha'u'llah with devotion and love till the end of his life. He was about eighty years old when he passed away." [8]

[8. See *\*Khatirat-i- Malamiri\**. Hoffheim-Langenhain: Baha'i-Verlag, 149/1992, 58-9 cited in translation in A. Taherzadeh, *\*The Revelation of Baha'u'llah\** Vol. 3 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1983), 359.]



## Appendix One: Early Translations of Portions of The 'Tablet To A Physician'

[ = Tablet Of Medicine]

Unapproved or provisional English translations of passages from the Tablet of Medicine have been around since the time of the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Baha. Among the translations which may be noted are the following--:

Star of the West (Vol. 13 No.9 [December 1922] Vol. 8 [of the reprint] George Ronald: Oxford 1978) p.252 -- the translator is not named.

Some rules for health, from a Tablet revealed by Baha'u'llah.

"O God! The Supreme Knower! The Ancient Tongue speaks that which will satisfy the wise in the absence of doctors.

"O People, do not eat except when you are hungry. Do not drink after you have retired to sleep.

"Exercise is good when the stomach is empty; It strengthens the muscles. When the stomach is full it is very harmful. Do not neglect medical treatment when it is necessary, but leave it off when the body is in good condition.

"Do not take nourishment except when (the process of) digestion is completed. Do not swallow until you have thoroughly masticated your food.

The translations from this tablet printed in the first edition of BNE were slightly revised in later editions. It is the slightly revised passages from the 5th Ed. (1980 rep.1990) which are reproduced above.

"Treat disease first of all through diet and, refrain from medicine. If you can find what you need for healing in a single herb do not use a compound medicine. Leave off medicine when the health is good, and use it in case of necessity.

"If two diametrically opposite foods are put on the table, do not mix them. Be content with one of them. Take first the liquid food before partaking of solid food. The taking of food before that which you have already eaten is digested is dangerous....

"When you have eaten walk a little that the food may settle. That which is difficult to masticate is forbidden by the wise. Thus the Supreme Pen commands you.

"A light meal in the morning is as a light to the body. Avoid all harmful habits: they cause unhappiness in the world. Search for the causes of disease. This saying is the conclusion of this utterance."

Another and slightly different English translation -- not available to the present writers -- was published in the Australian Baha'i magazine, Herald of the South 2:4 (October-November 1927). See also letter of the Universal House of Justice, 8 June 1988, which appeared in the Australian Baha'i Bulletin (September 1989) p. 4, and in BSB 4:3-4 (April 1990), p. 58.

In William Collins' Bibliography of English Language Works on the Babi and Baha'i Faiths 1844-1985 (Oxford: George Ronald 1990, p. 1) there is reference to another published partial (? single page) translation, Baha'u'llah's Letter to a Physician. Mokelumne Hill, Calif.: Health Research, n.d. [197-?].

## APPENDIX TWO: REFERRING TO COMPETENT PHYSICIANS 2

The following are a number of passages from Baha'i sources which are directly or indirectly related to that verse of the Kitab-i-Aqdas in which Baha'u'llah advises that the sick refer (or be referred) to competent physicians.

"...In the Kitab-i-Aqdas Baha'u'llah has stated: 'Whenever ye fall ill, refer to competent physicians. Verily, We had not abolished recourse to material means, rather have We affirmed it through this Pen which God hath made the Dawning Place of His luminous and resplendent Cause. 'The secretaries of the Guardian have conveyed his guidance on this point in many letters to individual believers in passages such as these: '..refer to competent physicians, an abide by their considered decisions', '..invariably consult and follow the treatment of competent and conscientious physicians...' and '...consult the best physicians ... doctors who have studied a scientific system of medicine. 'Thus the obligation to consult physicians and to distinguish between doctors who are well trained in medical sciences a those who are not is clear, but the Faith should not be associated with any particular school of medical theory or practice. It is left to each believer to decide for himself which doctors he should consult, bearing in mind the principle enunciated above...' (From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer January 24, 1977)

2 A proportion of these passages are collected in Zohoori, 1985.

"Whatever the competent physicians or surgeons prescribe for a patient should be accepted and complied with." (Baha'u'llah, cited UHJ:1984, 1)

"..Therefore thou shouldst also accept physical remedies inasmuch as these two have come from the mercy and favour of God, Who hath revealed and made manifest medical science so that His servants may profit from this kind of treatment also." (SWAB: 151 -2).

"It is incumbent upon everyone to seek medical treatment and to follow the doctor's instructions, for this is in compliance with the divine ordinance, but, in reality, He Who giveth healing is God." ('Abdu'l-Baha, SWAB: 156)

"... thou hast written about thy poor sight. According to the explicit divine text the sick must refer to the doctor. This decree is decisive and everyone is bound to observe it. While thou art there thou shouldst consult the most skilled and the most famed eye

specialist." (From a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer, cited UHJ:1970)

"One must obey the command of God and submit to medical opinion. Thou hast undertaken this journey to comply with His command and not for the sake of healing, since healing Is in the hand of God, not In the hand of doctors." (From a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha to an individual believer, cited UHJ: 1970)

"According to the explicit decree of Baha'u'llah one must not turn aside from the advice of a competent doctor. It is imperative to consult one even if the patient himself be a well-known and eminent physician. In short, the point is that you should maintain your health by consulting a highly-skilled physician. " ('Abdu'l-Baha SWAB:156)

"... He fully sympathizes with you in this great sorrow that has afflicted you. At such occasions, the true servants of God should be resigned and try to act wisely, using at the same time all available means to help their loved one who is in distress and is suffering from illness.

"Baha'u'llah tells us that in case of disease we should pray but at the same time refer to competent physicians, and abide by their considered decisions. Shoghi Effendi wishes you therefore to find whether your son has really become ill, and if he is, then follow the directions of the doctor. Being versed in the medical sciences they can treat better than even a loving mother can. You can render your assistance by praying for him and at the same time helping the physicians to treat him."(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, April 9,1933 cited UHJ:1970, pp. 5-6).

"In His Most Holy Book (the Aqdas) Baha'u'llah says to consult the best physicians, in other words, doctors who have studied a scientific system of medicine: he never gave us to believe He Himself would heal us through 'healers', but rather through prayer and the assistance of medicine and approved treatments."

"In the Book of Aqdas Baha'u'llah urges us, that when we obtain any physical ailment we should refer to the doctor and abide by his decision. Physical and spiritual forces have both to be used to secure the speedy recovery of the patients; no partial treatment is sufficient. So you should pray for your son and also be faithful in your obedience to the directions of the physicians who are trying to restore him to health." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, June 1, 1933 cited LG:939)

"Now, as long as your healing is in no opposition to these principles, as long as you do not try and take the place of a regular doctor in trying to heal others, but only give them your kind of help through constructive suggestion -- or whatever it may be -- and do not associate this help with being a channel of the direct grace of Baha'u'llah, the Guardian sees no harm in your continuing your assistance to others. But you must conscientiously decide whether in view of the above you are really justified in continuing. He will pray for your guidance and happiness..." (cited LG: 930 From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, June 8, 1948: [Ibid. p. 811 Baha'i News, No. 237, p. 2, November 1950)

"He is pleased to see that you are feeling better, and will certainly pray for your full recovery. Before having any serious operation, you should consult more than one qualified physician." (From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, April 8, 1954 cited LG:989)

"You should always bear in mind Baha'u'llah's counsel that we should take the utmost care of our health, surely not because it is an end in itself, but as a necessary means of serving His Cause. In case of illness, He emphatically tells us, we should refer to the most competent physicians..." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an Individual believer, July 17, 1937, cited LG: 991)

"Whatever the skilled physicians prescribe is pleasing and acceptable." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, June 10, 1928, cited UNJ:1970, 5)

"You should always bear in mind Baha'u'llah's instruction to the effect that in case of any illness, no matter how slight, we should always seek the help and advice of the most competent physicians." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, April 17, 1937, cited *ibid*, 6)

"...follow the advice which Baha'u'llah has so repeatedly given in His Tablets namely, that in case of sickness we should invariably consult the most competent physicians, follow their Instructions and leave the rest in God's hands." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, June 29, 1938, cited *ibid.*, 7)

"According to the explicit decree of Baha'u'llah one must not turn aside from the advice of a competent doctor. It is imperative to consult one even if the patient himself be a well-known and eminent physician. In short, the point is that you should maintain your health by consulting a highly skilled physician." ('Abdu'l-Baha cited UHJ:1970, 4)

"He was very sorry to hear that you have been so afflicted by disease; and he assures you that he will supplicate for your healing in the Holy Tomb.

"He also urges you to consult first-class doctors, and see if perhaps modern medicine has not found a remedy for this malady which is afflicting you so sorely.

"He urges you in spite of your disability to persevere in spreading the Message of Baha'u'llah, for this will attract to you the divine blessings." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, April 1, 1951, cited *ibid.*, 8)

"He was very sorry indeed to hear of your serious affliction, but he feels very strongly that you should not despair of your condition but on the contrary put yourself in the hands of the best specialists you can find and combat this disease both spiritually and physically." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, January 6, 1945, *ibid*)

"As already urged by cable, he should continue the treatment. He should not be in a hurry but must comply with the instructions of a skillful physician and not go against what the doctor may prescribe or advise." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, January 20, 1938 *ibid.*, 7)

"As regards Miss ... Shoghi Effendi feels unspeakably grateful for all the kind assistance you have been continually extending to her father in this assuredly heart-rending, nay indeed calamitous situation facing him. You did certainly well, however critical and hopeless his daughter's case may have been considered by the doctors, to advise him to take her to a hospital, and give her the best treatment medical science could possibly offer. In doing so you have acted in full conformity with the counsel so tenderly and repeatedly given by Baha'u'llah that in case of illness one should invariably consult and follow the treatment of competent and conscientious physicians." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, June 18, 1939: *ibid*)

"He was very sorry to hear of the condition of your sister-in-law... He has already assured her that he will pray for her in the Holy Shrines, and advised her not to passively submit to her disease but to take the very best care of herself under the guidance of the best physicians available." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, January 17, 1945: *ibid*)



# LAWH-I ZUHUR

## Tablet of the Manifestation

### Bahá'u'lláh

In the Name of God! The Most Holy, the All-Knowing! The Mighty!

O thou who art gazing toward the direction of God and submerged in His Nearness and Good-pleasure! Know thou that, verily, the "Manifestation" is not composed of the four elements (earth, water, fire and air), nay, rather, He is the Mystery of Oneness, of the Ancient Identity, the Eternal Essence and the Unknowable Reality, and that, verily, He can never be known by any other save Himself. Therefore, one can never realize that He hath appeared from any of the four elements, or from any of the substances mentioned by the tongues of philosophers, or from any of the four expressions of nature, such as heat, cold, dry and wet, inasmuch as all these are created by His Command and Will, which has never been nor shall ever be separate from all else; even as He is now, in truth, on the throne of excellence and in revealed verses unto thee, which are creative in kindling the fire of Love within their heart.

Is there anything endowed with utterance in the world that may be able to speak with Him? Or any revealer to arise with Him in His Cause? Or any existing thing to claim existence for itself? No, by the Lord, the Clement! All are evanescent and

as nothingness! Were one to be known by any beside Him, it would never be proven to have its essence sanctified from any similitude, its identity purified from likeness and its singleness from any created appearance.

He is the Sea upon which no one can sail, inasmuch as all that thou mayest see in heaven and earth is created by His Word.

By Myself, the True One! Were His servants to know Him as He is to be known, they would all sever themselves from everything, and would make themselves subject to Him, their King, and the sultans would abandon their crowns and hasten toward His direction in the path of His good pleasure; but since He is hidden from them, they have fixed their gaze upon others beside, and are flying with the wings of eagles, in the sky of their superstitions and vain imaginings.

Testify thou with thine own essence, then with thyself, and then with the tongue, that, verily, there is no God but He! No other save Himself can know Him, and no one can ever approach Him! Verily, He is not a Manifestation in Himself, but rather He is a Manifestation in His Identity, and this is what We have mentioned to thee in the Divine Mystery, and in the Eternal Essence.

As to the bodies, verily, they are as thrones for His Manifestation, of which no one is informed save Himself! These bodies although they have appeared in the world of creation, in the Temple in which ye have been informed of (Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, etc.), yet were ye to gaze upon them with the eye of reality and innate consciousness, ye would testify that although they are created from the elements, yet they are sanctified from them to such an extent that there is no similitude between them.

Consider the diamond -- can the stone be compared to it? Thus hath appeared in El-Bayan, from the presence of thy Lord, the Mighty, the Powerful, the Potentate! Were they not to be their Temples, the bodies of His servants would not have been created. Wert thou minutely to consider, thou wouldst find that, verily, all in heaven and earth are created from Their Outward Temples, and that all the worlds of thy Lord seek help from the Manifestation of God, the Protector, the Self-Subsistent!

In every world, He appears according to the capacity of that world. For example, in the world of spirits He manifests Himself to them and appears unto them with the signs of the Spirit. So, likewise, in bodies in the world of names and attributes; and in the worlds which are not known to any save God. All of these worlds have their position from this Manifestation. He appears unto them in His Form, so that He, their Lord, may direct them, and draw them nearer to the seat of His Command, and cause them to attain to that which was ordained for them. As His Reality is not known, so likewise all that is related to Him is not known, except to a certain degree.

Think over thine own identity. Would it not consist in the expansion and order of the five senses? Otherwise the limbs would become inactive; the eye would never see, the ear would never hear, the tongue would never speak, the hand would never grasp and the form would never move, -- although He sways and rules over all, for God has made the use of all dependent upon Him. Yet He sees through the eye, hears through the ear, and speaks by the tongue. Wert thou to reflect upon this, thou wouldst find even this to be His Guidance in such manner that His dignity is not defective through these attachments and instruments.

Consider a goldsmith; verily, he makes a ring, and although he is the maker, yet he adorns his finger with it. Likewise, God the Exalted, appears in the clothing of His creatures. This is through His favor, so that His servants may not flee from Him, but that they may approach Him and rest in His Presence, hear His wonderful melodies and be benefitted by that which proceeds from His mouth, and by that which He reveals unto them from the Heaven of His Will. There is wisdom in this. Wert thou to reflect upon it with the duration of God, thou wouldst discover at every moment that which thou hadst not found before.

Verily, were God the Exalted to appear in His (proper) grade and form, and in a manner befitting His Station, no one could ever approach Him or endure to be near Him.

For example, consider the throne, the seat and the chair. All of these are made by certain of His creatures, through the confirmation which descends upon them from the heavens of His grace and clouds of His Bounty. He establishes Himself upon them. Before He is seated no one knows them, or considers them important, for they find them simply articles made by their own hands; but when He is established upon them every relation is cut from them and they become the Throne of the Merciful God, and the realities of all things that are created in heaven revolve around them. Then only the most discerning, the most perceiving of the perceiving, can realize their value.

Everyone who is endowed with a clear insight will behold that They (the Manifestations) were created before the creation of heaven and earth, and that this has ever been the Throne of the Merciful, and will forever be as it was; that there is no relation, connection, similarity or reference between that Throne and all else

save it, and that all things testify with their inmost tongue; "Verily, these (bodies) are the Thrones of the Merciful One." They have no like in creation, nor any equal in the world of emanation. From their elements all have appeared in such wise that thou wilt find that, verily, from their Fire fire hath appeared in the universe and hath spoken in the Blessed Branch of Unity, in the lofty Sinai of Moses the Interlocutor, and that from their Waters thou findest every soul living and immortal. So, likewise, after this manner, consider its other elements; but with manifest certainty. This was the mention of the place whereon He was established. How much above this, then, will be the station of His Chair, and that upon which He stands? (The Prophets.) All that which We have revealed and mentioned unto thee in this Tablet is according to the language of the people of creation; otherwise, by the One in the grasp of Whose Power are all things, verily, We have utterances concerning this station such as are not befitting to mention in these days, during which the people have differed, and have cast the Lord of Lords behind them, and have made an idol by the hands of lust, and have circled around it and become of those who are attached to it.

Blessed art thou for that which God hath desired for thee, because thou hast walked in the path of His good-pleasure until thou hast presented thyself before His Face, the shining, the radiant!

His Manifestation for His creatures has ever been through His creatures, just as He manifested Himself unto thee in truth, and delivered thee from the depths of the suggestions of those who have denied God and have striven with Himself, and at every moment have taken for themselves other gods than God, and are of the people of oppression and error in the Manifest Book of Might. Wert thou to be

submerged in the sea of power and might thou wouldst surely know, verily, God, who is wonderful to make even one of these things made by Him, to be the maker of all that which He desires. There is no God but He, the Powerful, the Mighty! Every power is in this, wert thou to reflect! Every grace is in it, wert thou of those who perceive! I beg of God to manifest His Cause in all countries, and that the servants may attain such a position that He may explain to them that which He desires, without veiling and concealment; that He may teach them the wonders of His knowledge and provide them with the fruits of the tree of His grace and beneficence, and that all may become affluent through His affluence, and that all may become powerful through His power, the impregnable, the high and inaccessible!

By the One, through whose command all are moved, had I found the people as We created them, I would have opened a door of doors of mercy and inner significances, so that they would behold all mysteries with their eyes, and subdue all lands through the names of their Lord. But thou beholdest the creatures, and hearest that which proceeds from their mouths; therefore, the bounty is restrained, except so many of its drops as thou hast discovered. Verily, thy Lord witnesseth and is well informed thereof. Were We to manifest Ourselves more than that which we have manifested, dogs and deniers would surround Us.

Thus, hath the cock crowed and the dove cooed. Beware, [lest] thou be of the [un]thankful. Praise be unto God, the Lord of the creatures!

# SAHIFIY-I-SHATTIYYIH

## Book of the River

### Bahá'u'lláh

(A provisional translation by Nader Saiedi)

The Journal of Baha'i Studies 9.3.1999

He is God! There is none other God but Him, and we, verily, believe in Him

The people talk constantly about this subject, but most of them comprehend not. Of the miracles mentioned, those which are ascribed to this humble one are fabrications contrived by impostors. As for the miracles ascribed to the Primal point and the Wellspring of the First Outpouring [the Bab], and those related to the Mirrors reflecting His glory, these are truths by which the faithful are blessed. However, whatsoever was revealed in the Bayan from the heaven of loving-kindness and the cloud of mercy, naught hath been ordained as a universal testimony and a conclusive proof other than the revelation of verses. This hath ever been and ever will be God's testimony unto the people of the earth. If anything else

appeared from the mine of bounty and glory [Baha], that was but a token of God's grace. Otherwise, the greatest testimony is that which He Himself hath ordained: "And whose word is more true than God's?"[1]

[1. Qur'an 4:89.]

However, those who entirely deny the appearance of any miracle attributed to the Prophets should not do so, for human reason is not a sufficient standard. When viewed with the eye of insight, no phenomenon on earth could be comprehended by any human, whether high or low, without prior observation and experience. Observe the sun in the heavens. To the extent that it is manifest, it giveth splendor and illumination to the entirety of the inhabitants of the earth in the east, the west, and all other directions. Certainly, human reason would not be inclined to accept the possibility of the existence of such a thing by means of any rational definition or description without actual observations and experience. It is the same with all other things in God's creation. Reflect, so that the secret of this question may become disclosed to thee. All things are miracles of the Prophets: "Repeat the gaze: seest thou a single flaw?"[2] In the Qur'an there are many verses which touch upon this theme. Although We do not have in mind an exact text, the purport of the verses is as follows. For example: "He it is Who created you and then provided for you sustenance. Will ye not see?" "He it is Who produced you from the earth most excellently. Will ye not believe?" "He hath sent down the rain from heaven. Will ye not give thanks?" "He hath created the heavens and the earth and whatever lieth between them, and made the mountains a shelter as a token of His grace, yet few among you understand." Thus it becometh evident that all phenomena, as things endowed with power, are also miracles of God. Is there any Creator besides God?



Say: Praise be unto God. No maker is there but Him, in whose name the faithful believe.

[2. Qur'an 67:3.]

Yea, if it is said that those miracles attributed to the former Prophets are not true unless they are revealed now, this also is not an argument worthy of enlightened minds and understanding hearts. For how often events have occurred in the past which have not occurred in the present, and vice versa. Everything hath its storehouses with thy Lord, and He sendeth them down as He pleaseth according to a measure from Him. He is your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers. Consider, for instance, that every thirty years, according to the calculation and reckoning of men, there is an outbreak of plague in some lands. Could it be argued with disbelief during the delay of an outbreak of plague that no plagues have occurred in the past, since otherwise it must happen now? The same is true of other events that have occurred before but are not happening at present, and vice versa.

If it is said, Why should not a miracle reflecting God's absolute power and unconditioned attributes appear now in order to cause the upliftment of sanctified spirits and the exaltation of holy souls, this is indeed true in the same way as thou dost affirm it with regard to the Bayan. God possesseth the best analogies, wert thou to comprehend. Consider the course of this river, which is visible for all to see. When its waters swell and flood, it rusheth forward and moveth turbulently. Whatever it doeth, it remaineth within its own sovereignty. However much the helpless people cry out from every side--claiming that a great dam hath been rent asunder, or a barrier obliterated, or houses destroyed, or a palace crushed to ruins--the river payeth them no heed. With the utmost force and compulsion, power

and sovereignty, it continueth to rush and flow, touching all places equally. For instance, before the onrush of its power it doth not matter whether a building belongeth to a prince or to a pauper; the effect is the same, unless that building hath unique fortifications. Thus do We create analogies for you that haply ye may be of those who are well assured. Make thy vision sharp and thy sight keen that the fragrances of joy and exultation may waft upon thy heart and thou mayest be established upon the throne of tranquility. This is the greatest of bestowals and the best of states. Would that ye might find a path unto it.

Observe, furthermore, that were a mighty person to block this river and control its course by means of his authority and sovereign power, as a consequence how many homes and dwellings would be ruined and how many people would be drowned, even though, at the same time, certain dry lands which had long been suffering from lack of rain would be irrigated, obtain fresh and wondrous life, and appear in a new and fabulous garment. Verily, God createth what He pleaseth through the power of His command. No God is there save God, the Lord of all the worlds.

Similarly, ponder upon the mysteries of divine decree and destiny. Whatever hath appeared or will appear is like this river. Each thing moveth or reposeth in its proper place. But if something contrary to this natural flow of events is manifested, the order of the world becometh gravely disrupted. Couldst thou but grasp this subtle mystery, which is more hidden than any other mystery, thou wouldst find thyself independent of this and all other questions. It is for this reason that, in every age and century, as He desireth, the Unique Hidden One and the Eternal Essence manifesteth that true River and real Sea and causeth it to flow, adorning it with a new temple and a new vesture. All those structures of vain imaginings and palaces

of the ungodly are then swept away and destroyed in its waters. With utmost desire and thirst they drown and perish, lacking even the faintest awareness that they could quaff a draught thereof. Thus doth God bestow life upon whom He willeth, and taketh it away from whom He willeth, and confirmeth whom He pleaseth, and denieth whom He pleaseth, could ye but perceive it.

This is especially true if the Eastern Winds begin to blow upon the flood of this heavenly river, which is rushing forth from the North of divine unity. How many exalted souls and possessors of true understanding, how many mighty castles and firm lofty edifices, will be destroyed and perish. By Him Who holdeth the heavens by His might and moveth the oceans by His command! Were it not for fear of the malice hidden in the hearts, I would have assuredly unveiled all the inmost divine analogies and all the subtleties of the heavenly principles with regard to the course of this outward river. Yet, alas, I am disinclined to approach any matter. On account of the intensity of My anguish and sorrow, in these days I am sore and tried between the Gog of silence and the Magog of utterance. I beseech God to send down an Alexander who will raise an insurmountable barrier.

Hidden allusions are concealed within these verses and holy letters are treasured up within these words. Blessed is the one who hath seized these pearls, recognized their value, and attained the presence of their Supreme Meaning. It is clear and evident that the root of differences, from the farthest worlds of meaning to the nearest degree of expression, is caused by the diversity of the forms of the mirrors. Each person speaketh and expresseth himself according to that which is reflected within him. For example, with reference to the same analogy of the flooding river, observe that it floweth forward in one manner and its relationship to all buildings

and structures is the same, yet any valley that hath more capacity is able to resist it. These differences, therefore, have arisen from the diversity of recipients. In like manner, consider the rays of the Eternal Sun, which shine with the same illumination in the heaven of human hearts but, when reflected in the forms of mirrors, differ by reason of differences among the mirrors themselves. Thus it is that some abide exalted in their essences and high in their endeavors, while others sink into the depths of lethargy and degradation. All things have their rank before God, and all return unto Him.

Those possessed of insight should make their vision as sharp as blades of steel and their hearts as vast as existence itself that haply, while there is yet a chance, the former may not be prevented from beholding the Divine Beauty, nor the latter remain withheld from the sweet waters of everlasting life. Thus may they take delight in all foods and obtain their portion and no longer cleave unto the sayings of the people or suffer their virtue to be robbed by their deeds. All drink from the same fountain and partake of the same ocean, and all have their ranks before thy Lord, and all move in accordance with their own state. Today, every soul who believeth in the Most Exalted Countenance and recognizeth with certitude His station as manifested after Him on the Throne, this shall suffice him above any other knowledge or deed. But His good pleasure and faith in Him cannot be realized except through obedience unto His command in all things. This is the greatest, most excellent, and consummate fruit of existence. There is no goal besides God and no end save Him.

All that hath been mentioned of the attributes of the river was only one analogy which streamed forth from the Pen. Ponder and reflect, that haply all the hidden mysteries may be freed from the veils of nearness and remoteness, of loftiness and abasement, and unveil their beauty. Recognize this Sea of Seas before whose grandeur all seas are but a drop, and behold how it surgeth within the Wellspring of its own blessed Essence and the mine of its own attributes. Say: Praise be unto God! How astonishing is Thy cause and how mighty Thy power! How great is Thy sovereignty and how compelling Thy grandeur! We know naught of Thee except what Thou hast taught us through the tongue of the Manifestation of Thyself and the Wellspring of Thine Essence, He Who is the Fountainhead of Thy Cause and the Repository of Thy Decree. Verily, Thou knowest all that hath been and will be created. Thou, indeed, art the Truth, the Knower of things unseen.

O Javad! We shall import unto thee a single word which We have taken from the essence of the Sacred Books and Scriptures as a token of Our mercy and loving-kindness, that the water of immortality may rain from the clouds of God's unity upon thy reality and the realities of His servants, and that thou mayest attain unto eternal and everlasting life. That word is this: "Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting." This is a treasure that pertaineth to Heaven. Were it to be quickened and to rise, it would never die or perish. This is a light that shall never be extinguished, a treasure that perisheth not, a raiment that shall never be outworn, a revelation that will never be concealed. Through it many will go astray and others will be guided. Render thanks unto God that thou hast become the recipient of this All-Encompassing Word, this celestial melody and heavenly song. Had I found a word more conclusive, I would have divulged it. There is no greater counsel than

this word. Preserve it if thou desirest to find a path to the Lord of the Mighty Throne.

It is because of the love this servant holdeth for thee that this answer hath been written. Otherwise, I have no inclination to set forth any topic or write a single letter thereon. God is a sufficient witness unto Me, and a protector for thee. Wherefore, rise up with legs of iron and set forth upon this path which We have rolled out upon the snow-white earth of the spirit. With eyes of consuming flame gaze upon its pillars and its stature, and with ruby ears hearken unto what hath appeared therefrom in regard to thy question. With palms of gold and fingers of power seize what is in and upon it, and with a swordlike tongue sing and chant in ringing tones, clap and drum, that there is no God but Him, that 'Ali Muhammad is the Essence of God and His eternal Being, and Muhammad 'Ali is the Mine of the Cause of God and His everlasting Self, that the Living Identity, and the Letters of the Living are the first to have believed in God and His verses. We all, verily, cleave unto them. This is the Word by which truth shall be distinguished from falsehood until the Day when the Hour shall strike, when all shall present themselves before God and abide by His command. Glory be upon those who believe in Him on the day of His meeting and who observe what He hath decreed.

## THE BOOK OF THE TIGRIS

### Bahá'u'lláh

It has become the subject of much talk, but the people do not understand: The miracles that have been mentioned and attributed to this abased one are lies fabricated by prevaricators. But those attributed to the original Point (the Bab)-the wellspring of the primal emanation-and to the Mirrors who speak of him, are true, a truth to which the sincere attain. What he revealed in the Bayan from the heaven of bounty and the clouds of compassion is, moreover, a universal and convincing proof. Aside from revealing verses, he did not affirm anything. This was and is God's proof to the people of the earth. Any sign beyond it that appears from the mine of grace and glory is a bounty from God. Otherwise, the greatest proof is what he himself has established. "And whose believes a word from God . . ."

The appearance of other miracles, which have been attributed to the prophets, should not be categorically denied, because human reason is not the balance. If one gazes with the eye of insight, one will consider that everything that can be seen upon the earth was invisible to all the people, high and low, before they took notice of it. Consider the sun in the sky, which is so apparent-how it sheds delight and illumination upon all who are on the earth, whether in the east, west or other directions. Clearly, before the mind had perceived such a thing, it would not have accepted anyone's description of it. Think about belief in such a thing in all the stations of the creation, so that the mystery of this matter might be unveiled to you.

All things are the miracles of the prophets. "Return thy gaze; seest thou any fissure?" (Qur'an 67:3) . In the Qur'an are many verses that prove this. Even though I do not have the verse itself before me, the meaning of those verses bears this implication. For instance, "God is he that created you, then he provided for you"-do you not then see? (Qur'an 30:39) And God "caused you to grow out of the earth"-so do you not believe? (Q. 71:17) "And sent down out of heaven water" (Q. 2:20)-do you not give thanks? And he "created the heavens and the earth and what is between them," (Q. 32:3) and he calmed the mountains as a grace from him, and little do you understand. Thus it is clear that whatever can be seen is dependent upon God's power. Is there any creator save God? Say: Praise be to God! No creator is there but He, in whom the sincere have believed.

Now, some argue that if the miracles attributed to past prophets are true, then they must appear now, as well. But this argument is unworthy of the consideration of illumined minds and pure hearts. It is quite frequently the case that affairs occurred in the past that no longer occur today, and vice versa. "In every matter your lord possesses treasure holds that he sends down as he wishes, according to his own measure. That is your lord, and the lord of your fathers aforetime." For instance, every thirty years as you count and reckon, in some countries a plague epidemic used to break out. Can this interval be disputed? And can it be denied that no such thing has recently occurred? Otherwise, many other things should also occur nowadays that used to take place but do not, and vice versa.

It might be asked why a miracle demonstrating pure power and the divine attributes should not appear, so as to cause the exaltation of lofty spirits and of holy souls. Indeed, this is a truth, the like of which you speak forth in utterance. But



God has sublime parables, if you but knew. Consider the course of the Tigris, which you see. It grows turbulent at the time when it overflows its banks and goes on its course. What it does is determined by its own sovereignty. It pays no heed to the cries of weak souls that are raised from every side, that a mighty dam has been breached, or a wall in such and such locality has crumbled, or a house has been destroyed, or a mansion has collapsed. Rather, it flows on, with perfect dominion, power, triumph and sovereignty. At every stage, it acts with perfect egalitarianism. For instance, before its onslaught, every building, whether it belongs to an emperor or to a pauper, is equally at risk. The only exception is a building that is so strong that it can stand firm on its own. Thus do we coin for you parables, so that perhaps you might attain certitude in your beliefs. Render your vision and insight subtle, so that a breeze from the wind of delight and splendor might caress your heart and you might be firmly ensconced on the throne of tranquility. This is the greatest, the supreme teaching, if you can but discern it.

In addition, note that if a powerful individual desired to dam up this river, and to curb it by means of main force and sovereign power, how many homes and dwellings would in consequence be destroyed, and how many souls would drown. But at the same time desiccated fields that had for some time been afflicted with burning thirst would attain fresh and wondrous life and would be clothed in fine and magnificent new raiments. Thus does God create what he wills by his command, and there is no god but God. That is the lord of the worlds. In the same way, consider the foreordained and predestined mysteries-what has appeared and shall appear. Like this river, events flow in their own station. But if something appears that is contrary to that destiny, then conflict arises in the world. If you can grasp this abstruse and recondite enigma, which is more hidden than any other

secret, you will be able to dispense with the question you posed, and with all such questions in the future. In any age or epoch when the Point of Unity and the self-sufficient Essence desires, he makes this real river and true sea to appear and sets it flowing, clothing it in a new body and a wondrous robe. All those edifices of being and imaginings of false souls then drown and perish. But they are obliterated by the utmost thirst and parching, neglecting even so much as to take a sip from it. Thus does God revivify whomever he wishes, vindicating whomever he pleases and denying whomever he wishes, if you but knew.

The winds of yearning begin gusting over the flooded river of essence that flows from the north of unity. How many exalted souls, possessors of hearts and sound imaginations, and how many perfect lofty edifices, will be destroyed and effaced! By him who grasped the heavens by his might and caused the rivers to flow by his command! If it were not for fear of the hidden chains in the breasts of the people, I would have continued to mirror forth all divine parables and subtleties of the celestial laws with reference to the very flowing of this physical river. But what shall I say? I make no claim to a Cause. The intensity of the sorrow and grief that have befallen me during these days has left me sorely tried between the Gog of silence and the Magog of speech. I beseech God to send down an Alexander who will erect a protecting wall. Hidden allusions have been concealed in these phrases and sacred letters have been treasured up in these words. Happy are those who have grasped these pearls, have appreciated their value, and have attained their presence.

It is obvious and well known that disagreement, from the most distant worlds of meaning to the nearest stages of words, is caused by differences in the forms reflected by individual mirrors. Every person speaks of and relates what is within him. For instance, in this very parable of the Tigris, note how from one point of view it overflows and affects mansions and buildings equally. But any vale that had greater capacity could take in more water, and any dam that was less sturdy would be less able to resist the flood. These differences, then, derive from situation. In the same way, consider the rays of the pre-existent sun, which shines with a single ray in the heavens of the hearts of contingent beings.

Thereafter, its reflection in the forms, which is visible in the mirrors, differs because of the differences among the mirrors themselves. For some mirrors stand exalted in their nature and sublime in their aspirations, whereas others stoop in the baseness of their rigidity and their descent into obliteration. All have stages before God and all shall return to him. Those endued with insight must have sharp vision and a heart as big as all being, so that an opportunity at hand does not prevent some from gazing upon the beauty, nor deprive others of the water of life.

Thus might they be favored with all foods and receive their portion. Then what necessity would there be to hold fast to the words of the people, or to be torn apart by the deeds of the servants? All drink from one body of water and sip from one lake, and all occupy levels before God, and all proceed according to their stations.

Today, every person who believes in the most exalted countenance (the Bab) and who is certain of his station upon the throne after him, will have a sufficient share of knowledge and deeds. But the only way to attain his good pleasure and faith in him is by obeying his command in every respect. This is the most great, glorious

and incorruptible result. No one besides God has any goal nor any end. All that has been mentioned in description of the Tigris river was a parable that flowed from the Pen. It pondered and thought about the river, until all the mysteries, including the veil of nearness and distance, loftiness and baseness, were lifted so that the beauty was uncovered. Gaze upon this sea of seas, for all oceans will be but droplets before his grandeur, for the wellspring of the Essence and the mine of the blessed attributes is itself billowing. Say: Praise be to God! How amazing is your Cause, how great your power, how extensive your sovereignty, how triumphant your splendor! We know nothing of you save what you have taught us from yourself by the tongue of the manifestation of your Self, the wellspring of your essence, the mine of your Cause, and the sanctuary of your command. Verily, you know all that has been created and shall be created, and verily you are the Absolute Truth, knower of the invisible.

Javad, I shall share with you one letter, which is pure compassion and clemency, which has been taken from the substance of the Books and the essence of the scrolls, so that from the cloud of oneness the water of self-sufficiency might rain down upon your reality and the reality of the servants. Thus might you attain eternal life, which is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that yours may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting. This is my treasure, which is related to you. If it lives and is implemented, it shall never die nor perish. This is a light that is not extinguished, a treasure that is not exhausted, a raiment that does not wear out, and a splendor over which no curtain is drawn. By it many are led astray whereas others are guided.

Praise God that you have been the recipient of this universal Word, this divine melody, and this celestial song. I have found nothing more incontrovertible than this phrase, otherwise I would have shared it with you. I have no greater counsel than the saying mentioned above. Preserve it, if you wish to find a path to the possessor of the Throne. Because of the love I bear for that gentleman, this answer has been written. Otherwise, I have no inclination to write anything, or to compose a single letter. God suffices as a witness and a protector for you. Therefore, arise with legs of iron to tread the highway that we have stretched out upon the white land of the spirit. With blazing eyes, gaze upon its pillars and its foundations. With ears of sapphire listen to what has appeared therefrom, in regard to the question you posed. With a golden palm and fingers of power take what is therein and what is upon it. Confess with the tongue of song and celebration, with clapping and drumming, that there is no god but He; that `Ali Muhammad (the Bab) is the eternal essence and being of God; that Muhammad `Ali (Quddus) is the mine of the Cause of God and his enduring quintessence; that the Living Countenance is the sanctuary of the command of God and his subsisting identity; that the Letters of the Living are the first to have believed in God and his verses. Verily, we all cling to him. In truth, this word distinguishes between truth and falsehood until the day when the Hour shall strike, when all shall be present before God and all abide by his bidding. Glory be upon those who believe in him on the day of the Encounter, on which they attain to his presence.

## Translator Notes:

Here is a translation of a Baghdad-era work by Baha'u'llah entitled *Sahifah-i Shattiyyih*. *Sahifah* means scroll and is used in the Qur'an to refer to the books of the biblical patriarchs (a reference to the Torah scroll no doubt). *Shatt* can mean river but also can refer directly to the Tigris river upon which Baghdad is situated. Since there are other more common words for "river" and we know Baha'u'llah was speaking of the Tigris, I think he is using it in the latter sense, and so have translated it as "The Book of the Tigris." The text is from `Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari, ed., *Ma'idih-i Asmani*, 4:142-149.

It is not a book, of course, but a short letter. It quotes a Hidden Word, No. 1 of the Arabic (but with the grammatical difference that the plural imperative is used, whereas in the text of the Hidden Words we now have the grammar is singular). My guess is therefore that it was written around 1857 shortly before Baha'u'llah put the Hidden Words into final shape.

This work is the clearest indication I know of Baha'u'llah's self-conception before about 1859, when he appears to have begun telling people like Fitnih and Nabil-i Akbar that he was the promised one. Denis MacEoin pointed out in his 1989 BRISMES article that Baha'u'llah in this work disclaims having any "Cause" at that point, and my rereading it now in conjunction with my translation convinces me that Denis is right. He has no "iqbal bar amri," is making no claim to have a divine Cause.

This work gives us a humanist Baha'u'llah, who sternly denies being able to work any miracles, who defers humbly to the Mirrors of the Babi dispensation, who gives us a catechism that includes belief in God, the Bab, Quddus, and the "Living Countenance" (Denis thinks this is Azal; I don't know Babi terminology well enough to have an opinion). Indeed, the argument seems to be made that just as plagues no longer break out in Iraq every 30 years as they had in past centuries (owing to Ottoman quarantines, by the way), that after the Bab's death the age of miracles is over with. This is in turn an announcement of a profound secularization of sorts, isn't it?

This brief letter seems to me proof that Baha'u'llah's "messianic secret" (for which I have argued) probably should not be dated further back than about 1859, from which time we begin getting independent eyewitness accounts of his having privately put forth a claim. In short, it raises the most acute questions about the nature of the "intimation" Baha'u'llah is said to have experienced in the Siyah Chal. If one reads the account in Epistle to the Son of the Wolf carefully, it appears that it consisted more of ilham or inspiration than of wahy or revelation, and that Baha'u'llah began thinking of islah or reform of Babism rather than of making any claim of his own. If in fact the Book of the Tigris post-dates the poetry of the Sulaymaniyyah period, I probably should retract my messianic reading of the Ode of the Dove in favor of seeing it as an example of Sufi effusion or ecstatic enthusiasm (shath).

On the other hand, Baha'u'llah is after all in this letter speaking rather authoritatively and handing out spiritual advice. If the title "Sahifah" goes back to the Baghdad period then he is using a word normally employed for scripture. To put it bluntly, who does he think he is? A sort of Babi Sufi shaykh? A manifestation of the attributes of Imam Husayn alongside other Babi manifestations? What is clear is that his self-conception changed mightily between the early 1850s and the later 1850s.

Juan Cole



## SHIKKAR-SHIKAN-SHAVAND

### Bahá'u'lláh

Translation by Habib Taherzadeh

(An excerpt from Fire and Light, also published in the Bahá'í World vol. XVIII, p. 11)

They that yearn for the abode of the Beloved, they that circle round the sanctuary of the Desired One, are not apprehensive of trials and adversities, nor do they flee away from that which is ordained by God. They receive their portion from the ocean of resignation and drink their fill from the soft-flowing stream of His mercy. They would not surrender the good-pleasure of the Friend in exchange for the kingdom of both worlds, nor would they barter that which the Well-Beloved hath decreed in return for dominion over the realms of the infinite. They would eagerly drink the venom of woe as if it were the water of life and would drain deadly poison to its bitter dregs just as a sweet and life-giving draught. In the arid wastes of desolation they are stirred with enthusiasm through the remembrance of the Friend, and in the dreary wilds of adversity they are eager and impatient to offer themselves as a sacrifice. Unhesitatingly have they renounced their lives and

directed their steps towards the abode of the Best Beloved. They have closed their eyes to the world and fixed their gaze upon the beautiful countenance of the Friend, cherishing no desire but the presence of the loved One and seeking no attainment save reunion with Him. They fly with the feathers of trust in God, and soar with the wings of adherence unto His Will. In their estimation a blood-shedding blade is more desirable than finest silk and a piercing dart more acceptable than mother's milk.

'High-spirited souls by the myriad are  
deemed necessary in this path,  
To lay down a hundred lives with every  
fleeting breath.

It behoveth us to kiss the hand of the would-be assassin and to set out, dancing, on our way to the habitation of the Friend. How indescribably pleasant is that hour, how immeasurably sweet that moment when the inmost spirit is intent upon sacrificing itself, when the tabernacle of fidelity is hastening to attain the heights of self-surrender! With necks laid bare, we yearn for the stroke of the ruthless sword wielded by the hand of the Beloved. With breasts aglow with light, we eagerly await the dart of His decree. Contemptuous of name, we have detached ourselves from all else but Him, we shall not run away, we shall not endeavour to repel the stranger, we pray for calamity, that thereby we may soar unto the sublime heights of the spirit, seek shelter beneath the shade of the tree of reunion, attain the highest stations of love, and drink our fill from the wondrous wine of everlasting communion with Him. Surely we will not forfeit this imperishable dominion, nor

will we forgo this incomparable blessing. If hidden beneath the dust, we shall rear our heads from the bosom of the tender mercy of the Lord of mankind. No trial can suppress these companions, no mortal feet can traverse this journey, nor can any veil obscure this countenance.

Yea, it is clear and evident that in view of the multitudes of internal and external opponents who have raised the standards of opposition, who have girded the loins of endeavour to eliminate these poor creatures, it standeth to reason that one should turn away from them and flee from this land, nay, from the face of the earth. However, through the loving-kindness of God and by the aid of His invisible confirmations, we are as radiant as the sun and as shining as the moon. We are established upon the throne of tranquillity and seated upon the couch of fortitude. Of what importance is the shipwreck to the fish of the spirit? What doth a soul celestial care if the physical frame is destroyed? Indeed this body is for it a prison; and the ship but a place of confinement to the fish. What else but a nightingale can understand a Nightingale's melody and who else but the intimate friend can recognize the familiar voice of the Friend?

# **SURAT AD-DAM**

## **Surah of Blood**

### **Bahá'u'lláh**

Translation by Juan Cole

Source: pp. 1-15 of Athar-i Qalam-i A'la, vol. 4, 2nd edition.

We have caused this Surah of Blood to surge forth from the Ocean of the Unseen, that it might be a sign of My Manifestation among all created things.

He is eternally seated upon the Throne! In My Name, the Glorious, the All-Glorious: Hearken, O Muhammad<sup>1</sup>, to the voice of thy Lord from this station, which is exalted above the reach of all contingent beings. It can never be attained by the hearts of His creatures nor by the inmost realities of those who have, for a single instant, been heedless of this sanctified, mighty and concealed Cause.

Say: O people, hasten unto the sanctuary of God and His essence, unto the House of God and His Selfhood, unto the Manifestation of God and His sovereignty. Be not of them that make mention of God with their lips and yet show forth opposition to His signs. Say: O people, this is a station around which circles the Concourse on High, then the denizens of the canopy of eternity and those who dwell beyond the depths of grandeur, if ye be of them that comprehend.

Say: This is the Shrine, the Presence, the Countenance and the Greatness of God Himself.

Arise and issue forth from your homes, O people of the concourse of Divinity, and ye of the grades of divine Dominion, then the people of might in the stations both of this earthly world and the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus may ye attain unto this station, which none have reached save those who detached themselves from all in heaven and on earth, and from all that is characterized by name, description, direction or allusion, did ye but understand. Say: O people, this is the station of God, this is His Court, Garden and Paradise, and this is His Tabernacle and Pavilion. Beware, O people, lest ye turn your faces toward anyone but Him. Hasten then unto Him, that mayhap ye will be given to eat of the fruits of the Spirit. This is a station wherein the righteous, and they that circle round the Throne on High, have halted, as ye also bear witness.

As for thee, O Muhammad, perform what the tongue of thy Lord doth counsel thee at this time, and accomplish all that which thou art bidden by God, the Protector, the Almighty, the Beloved. First of all, tear the veils of vain imagination from about thy heart by My mighty, powerful and unquestioned Sovereignty. Then enter the fortress of the All-Merciful in My Name, the Mighty, the Glorified, and

pay no heed to all that hath been and shall be. If thou shouldst behold Satan seated at its gate, forbidding thee to enter therein, close thine eyes to him and take refuge in My Beauty, the Blessed, the Help in Peril, the Adored. Beware lest ye sit with those in whom thou perceivest the evidence of malice, as heat is evident in summer or cold in poison. Flee from them and their ilk, and look not upon them nor that which they possess. Turn thy gaze rather to My Cause, and that which surpasseth in excellence all else, did ye but perceive it.

If thou dost wish to travel in various lands, then do thou spread the dawning lights of thy Lord throughout those realms. Think thou upon the handiwork of thy Lord which thou seest, that thou mayest be of those who consider. Adorn thyself with My character, in such wise that should anyone treat thee unjustly thou wouldst take no heed of him, nor oppose him. Leave him to the judgment of thy Lord, the Powerful, Omnipotent and Self-Subsisting. Be at all times a wronged one, for this is one of My attributes, though none but the sincere are aware of it. Verily, the sighs of patience uttered by one wronged are more precious to God than any other deed, did ye but know. Therefore, be patient in the face of whatever befalleth thee, and set thy trust in thy Lord God in all thine affairs. He, verily, doth suffice thee against all the harm which any created thing can wreak toward thee, and preserveth thee in the shelter of His Cause and the mighty fortress of His guardianship. There is no God but Him. His are the worlds of creation and command, and all seek His aid.

Should anyone slander thee, thou must not retaliate against him in kind lest thou become as he is. Turn aside from him, and set thy face toward the holy tabernacle in this exalted and sacred canopy. Be among men as a sweet-scented knoll, that the

fragrance of sanctity may be wafted among them. In such wise, thou mightest succeed in attracting them to the court of the holy and Beloved One. Shouldst thou find a helper among the friends of God, seek his company at eventide and dawn, throughout the months and years. In all matters, emulate God, thy Succorer. Walk among men with His dignity and peace, and teach them the Cause of their Lord to the extent that they are able to hear it.

O hope of Sheba, go thou with My book to the cities of God. Should the other birds ask thee concerning the dove of holiness, say: "When I left her, she was sore-pressed in the talons of denial and the beaks of wickedness. She had no helper save God, Who created her, formed her and made her the lamp of His beauty between the heavens of the earth, if ye be possessed of certainty."

Shouldst thou find one of My lovers, if he asks about Me say: "By God, I went up out of the Prison City (Adrianople) at a time when Husayn was lying upon the ground, while Disgrace knelt upon His breast and desired to behead Him. The spears were standing before His head, and He expected it to be raised aloft upon them. Such was the situation in inmost secrecy, if ye be of them that perceive. I then saw Him move His lips, and gaze toward the heavens with a look such as would rend every heart, and beyond them the heart of God, the Protector, the Mighty, the Self-Subsisting. I moved My head close to His lips, and heard that He was beneath the sword, saying 'O people! By God, I have not spoken to you out of selfish desire! Nay, rather I have given voice to that which the Speaker on Sinai uttered in My most pure and sanctified breast. The verses of God leave no doubt as to what hath been foreordained in the realm of the divine Decree, or as to that which is in this world and the next. O ye who have joined partners with God,

inhale the scent of these verses that have descended from the realm of the divine Essence, from the King of names and attributes. Should ye perceive therein the fragrance of the coat of the beloved Joseph, then show mercy toward Him and put Him not to death with the blades of malice, if ye see with the eyes of justice and are equitable in yourselves.

"O people! I bolted up the gates of paradise for twenty years, lest anything issue from My lips which might cause the fire of hatred to blaze forth in your breasts. To this beareth witness the Tongue of Grandeur, then the Pen of Command upon the holy and guarded Tablets. O people, I verily am 'Al' (the Bab), and this is but another Return after the first. I have demonstrated to ye at this time the greatest of the things I manifested aforesaid. I have come from the fountainhead of grandeur and glory, and the treasure hold of exaltation and majesty, with verses of which not a single letter hath heretofore been revealed in this world. This Tablet is My proof among ye, to ye and against ye, if ye be of them that comprehend.

"O people, God is My witness that I remained silent in My house, and gave voice to no melody. However, the Spirit set my limbs quaking, and caused Me to speak forth with the Truth. Its features then appeared in My face, if ye descry My beauty. I barred the doors of utterance for lo, these many years, but the tongue of God hath loosened My tongue, did ye but know. Will ye slay Him by whose Command the heavens were raised aloft, the seas surged forth, the trees gave fruit, the mysteries were revealed and the beauty of the Chosen One shone forth from behind the veil? Fear God, O people of the Bayan, and be not of those who repudiate the verses of God. I shall never deny these verses, even should ye slay Me and all the swords and spears rain down upon Me at every moment. I shall speak forth in the kingdom



of the heavens and the earth, and shall never fear anyone. This is My religion, if ye be of them that perceive. This is the religion of all the Messengers, and is that which was revealed to 'Al' (the Bab) in every Tablet. I know not, however, to which religion ye adhere!

"When the melodies of that Holy One reached this point, He suddenly fell silent by reason of the weakness which had overtaken Him. He remained in this state for some time, and when He regained consciousness He opened His eyes and turned in the sacred direction with a gaze of deep affection, saying, 'Praise be to Thee, O Lord My God, for the wondrous revelations of Thy inscrutable decree and the manifold woes and trials Thou hast destined for Myself. At one time Thou didst deliver Me into the hands of Nimrod; at another Thou hast allowed Pharaoh's rod to persecute Me. Thou, alone, canst estimate, through Thine all-encompassing knowledge and the operation of Thy Will, the incalculable afflictions I have suffered at their hands.

Again Thou didst cast Me into the prison-cell of the ungodly, for no reason except that I was moved to whisper into the ears of the well-favored denizens of Thy Kingdom an intimation of the vision with which Thou hadst, through Thy knowledge, inspired Me, and revealed to Me its meaning through the potency of Thy might. And again Thou didst decree that I be beheaded by the sword of the infidel. Again I was crucified for having unveiled to men's eyes the hidden gems of Thy glorious unity, for having revealed to them the wondrous signs of Thy sovereign and everlasting power. How bitter the humiliations heaped upon Me, in a subsequent age, on the plain of Karbila!

How lonely did I feel amidst Thy people! To what a state of helplessness was I reduced in that land! Unsatisfied with such indignities, My persecutors decapitated Me, and, carrying aloft My head from land to land paraded it before the gaze of the unbelieving multitude, and deposited it on the seats of the perverse and faithless. In a later age, I was suspended, and My breast was made a target to the darts of the malicious cruelty of My foes. My limbs were riddled with bullets, and My body was torn asunder. Finally, behold how, in this Day, My treacherous enemies have leagued themselves against Me, and are continually plotting to instill the venom of hate and malice into the souls of Thy servants. with all their might they are scheming to accomplish their purpose.

"It is Thou, My God and My adored One, Who hast delivered Me into the hands of the infidels. Behold Me, then, in the dust, beneath the swords of thine enemies.

Yet, grievous as is My plight, O God, My well-Beloved, I render thanks unto Thee, and My Spirit is grateful for whatsoever hath befallen Me in the path of Thy good-pleasure. I am well pleased with that which Thou didst ordain for Me, and welcome, however calamitous, the pains and sorrows I am made to suffer.

"I plead with Thee, O My God, by Thy hidden names and Thy Beauty, Who, both manifest and concealed, lieth in the dust of degradation, to inculcate Thy love in the hearts of Thy servants, and to seat them upon the carpet of Thy mercy. Give them shade, O My God, beneath the tree of Thy sanctity, and deny them not the breezes of Thy holiness, which waft from the paradise of Thy beauty and from the

direction of Thy favors. Thou art, verily, able to accomplish Thy will, and Thou art the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting."

O Muhammad, estimate well the number of gem-like mysteries We have bestowed upon thee, and think upon the wondrous knowledge We have taught thee, knowledge which lay concealed behind veils of light. Thus mayest thou become aware of that which hath befallen Us, and be of those well-acquainted with the mysteries of this Cause. Then say with the tongue of thy spirit in thine inmost soul, "Is there any helper who will come to the aid of the Primal Beauty (the Bab) in His new guise, or any supporter who will arise to serve the Ultimate Point (Quddus) in His Radiance, the Glorious, the Most Glorious?" Mayhap thereby God will be persuaded to dispatch someone to succor this Youth in these days, wherein the denizens of heaven and earth are drunk with heedlessness, save those who have gazed from nigh upon this Beauty.

But O Muhammad, thou wilt encounter the opposition and haughtiness of the perverse, and wilt find them engaged in acts of hatred against this Youth on all sides, except those for whom it hath been decreed otherwise by thy Lord God, the Mighty, the Self-Subsisting. Give ear to that which thou art commanded by the Pen of the Most High in the kingdom of decree, in these heavens that have been sanctified by God from the incarnations of rancor, from the touch of the infidels and from the recognition of the malicious. Rend asunder the veils, then rise up from the dawning-point of this Cause with manifest sovereignty. Call out to the people, telling them of this resplendent, mighty and illumined Beauty. Go to the Name of Ha', and deliver to him that which hath been bestowed upon thee by the Spirit of God, the Powerful, the Mighty, the Generous. Perhaps he will feel

admonished within himself, will detach himself from all save his Lord and enter the ranks of them that are rightly guided.

Say: "O My servant, We have revealed for thee Tablets and Writings which are known only to God, and therein is that which would enable thee to dispense with all creation, and all that is in the heavens and on the earth. However, we did not send them to thee, because we failed to perceive from thee the fragrance of the exalted ones in this Arab Youth. By God, all that thou dost possess will pass away, and nothing will remain save what is with thy Lord, behind the pavilions of the Powerful, the Inaccessible. Leave the world and its people, and detach thyself from all that was created therein. Then turn thy face toward the Countenance of God, the Generous, the Uncreated."

Say: "This is 'Al' (the Bab) in very truth, Who hath appeared once more in this most pure, manifest and glorious Beauty. He doth speak forth with the truth in the realm of eternity, and the exalted kingdom, if ye have ears to hear. O people of the Bayan, the spirit of true understanding will never speak in your hearts until after My love hath entered them. This is a fundamental principle of religion, if ye be of those with certitude."

O people of the Qur'an, the Eternal Truth is come unto ye, and that whereby the religions shall be differentiated and truth distinguished from falsehood. Fear God, and be not of those who oppose Him.

O people of the Churches, cease from ringing the bells, for the Most Great Bell hath appeared. It is, verily, this Trump that hath been sent down in the form of these holy verses between the heavens and the earth. He crieth out in truth in this resplendent, manifest and brilliant Name. Say: He it is by Whose command the

verses were revealed, and by Whose permission all the scriptures were brought into being. To this attesteth the fragrance that issueth from the Camphor Fountain through this most Ancient and pre-existent Pen. He speaketh forth at all times, uttering verses beyond the comprehension of the minds of the wise, the knowledge of the mystic knowers, and the hearts of them that have attained. This is what ye were promised in the Books of God, did ye but know, and this is that whereby the truth was realized from all eternity and shall be realized to all eternity.

O Muhammad, avert thy gaze from all who are in heaven and on earth, so that thou canst enter into the mighty fortress of thy Lord, the Bestower, the Almighty. Set the trees of existence ablaze with this Fire, that all may speak forth as It did, in the form of light, upon the Sinai of Theophany. Thus doth the Ancient Beauty shower His bounty upon thee, and command thee in this Cause, that thou mayest detach thyself from all things and hold fast to the cord of the Omnipotent, the Unattainable Spirit, praises and glory be upon thee, and upon whosoever heareth thy tidings of this Great Announcement.

## Notes

The Tablet is one of the early proclamatory Tablets sent by Baha'u'llah from Edirne when he publicly announced His mission. The first of these to arrive in Tehran was addressed to Aqa Munir (Munib) Kashani. Nabil says that this Tablet arrived in the latter part of 1282 (I'd guess, January or February of 1866) and that it was the first news he had had of Baha'u'llah in Edirne. Nabil must immediately have contacted Baha'u'llah, and my guess is that this Tablet is the reply he received. Baha'u'llah clearly states His station as He whom God shall make manifest, the return of the spirit of the Bab and of Quddus, as well as the fulfillment of the Qur'an and of Christianity. Indeed, in the famous middle passage translated by Shoghi Effendi in *Gleanings*, Baha'u'llah here identifies Himself with all the past Prophets and their sufferings. This passage has a "frame" story based on the Shi'ite narrative of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn at Karbala, in what is now Iraq. Baha'u'llah depicts himself sprawled out upon the field of battle, mortally wounded (as Imam Husayn was). I have done a literary analysis of this passage, published in *Poetics Today*,\* which I could share if there is demand.

1. Muhammad "Nabil-i A'zam" Zarandi.
2. The text gives "sultan," but I read it "shaytan." I cannot find a way to make "sultan" meaningful in this passage, since presumably the "king" of the fortress would be God.
3. Here begins the translation of Shoghi Effendi, *Gleanings* XXXIX.
4. Shoghi Effendi's translation omits the following sentence.
5. Shoghi Effendi's translation resumes.
6. Shoghi Effendi's translation ends

**SURAT ALLAH**  
**The Surah of God**  
**Bahá'u'lláh**

Translation by Juan Cole

This is the Surah of God that hath been revealed in truth from the divine realm of the Hallowed, the Glorious, the Illumined One.

He is the Powerful.

O Muhammad-'Ali, hearken to this proclamation from thy Lord, at a time when He desireth to depart out from among ye by reason of what the hands of the oppressors have wrought. Thereby have sorrows encompassed

mentioning the mysteries, the Tablet from giving its written testimony, the clouds of grace from raining down and the trees of paradise from bearing fruit, if ye be of

them that know. Say: O people, ye are so wrapped in dense veils that ye expel God from His House and yet make mention of His names at morn and eventide.

Say: Blinded be the eyes that open every morning and yet shall never fall upon My glorious and refulgent Beauty, deaf be the ears that hear every sound but neglect to hearken to My wondrous and sweet melodies, and dumb be the tongue that shall never move with My Name, the All-Subduing, the Omnipotent, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. Contemplate within thyself My calamities, and that which hath befallen Me. By God, they have afflicted no one else before Me, and they shall never be borne by the heavens and the earth. Matters have come to such a pass for Me on every side that I have resigned Myself to that which no one in all the worlds will accept for himself. Say: O People of the Bayan, have I forbidden you what God allowed you, or have I enjoined upon you what God proscribed? Have I altered even one of the ordinances that were revealed in the Tablets of God, the Almighty, the Glorious, the Generous?

If My sin be the divine verses that are revealed to Me, this was not from Me, but rather from the All-Powerful, the All-Beautiful. By God, I am not the first to perpetrate this crime, rather, most of the Prophets committed it, including 'Ali-Muhammad (The Bab), and, before Him, Muhammad the Apostle of God, Christ, and Moses. Each spoke forth that with which the Strong Spirit inspired Him from the kingdom of God, the Protector, the Omnipotent.

By God, the creation hath never seen My like and no eye hath beheld My peer, for I am Powerful to do what I will, and I am the Pardoner, the Compassionate. Whoso denieth My Cause hath repudiated all the Messengers, and whoso turneth away from My face hath shunned the Countenance of God. To this bear witness the



essences of all contingent beings, and the tongues of all existing things, then this Tongue, the All-Knowing, the All-Perceiving. Say: O People of the Bayan, We lived among you as one of you, but you were not pleased thereby. For this reason did We draw some of the seventy thousand veils from the face of this Cause, but this also gladdened you not. We lifted some more of the veils, until affairs came to the pass where this lofty and inaccessible station stood revealed. Should ye never be pleased therewith, We shall, in spite of you, continue to lift the veils with a power and sovereignty that derive from Us, O assemblage of the hateful. This hath ever been the practice of the Messengers and the character of the Sincere Ones, if ye but knew.

Since ye have turned away from the Primal Beauty in His subsequent form, repudiated His verses, and disbelieved in His bounty, therefore doth He depart alone out from among you at a time when He is detached from all who are in the heavens and on earth. My deeds bear witness thereto, if ye be of the fair-minded. Say: Verily, We have turned Our face toward Him that created the heavens and the Throne, and I shall never ask for a helper other than God, the Glorious, the All-Praised. O people, know that My succorer is My heart and my fortress is My trust in God. My confidant is My beauty, My troops are My mention and My party is the concourse of the worlds. By God, when We discovered the people adoring the graven images of their delusions of God, We visited upon them thereby a retribution for their deeds, that they might thus be led to perceive that a new people had come into being.

Therefore, be just within thyself. Is it seemly that those who turn their faces toward utter nothingness should make mention of the eternal Beauty? Nay, by My Self, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Therefore hath God cleansed the hem of His robe from the filth of any mention by the wicked, and hath purified it from all names and attributes, in private and in public. The people, however, neglected to take note, and remain heedless. O 'Ali, close thine eyes to the like of these, and turn they gaze away from all who are in the heavens and on earth. Then remind the people of that with which the Spirit inspireth thee at all times. If thou cleanseth thy soul from this world and from those in whom thou perceivest the odor of unbelief, thou wilt find that thou hast attained that station whereunto the hearts of the Near Ones shall never soar. Thou wilt discover that thou art more learned than all those endued with perfect and sagacious knowledge. Therefore, rend the veils in My Name, the Chosen, and pay no heed to the impudent. Quaff the waters of the river of paradise that are reserved for the righteous, from this gleaming and radiant chAlice, and stand in trepidation of no one. Put thy trust in My Name, the Forgiving, the Glorious, the Munificent. Abandon the world to those who seek it, and depart from the prison of earthly hopes. Content thyself with My love, for, verily it is better than the treasures of the heavens and the earth, and more excellent than all that was and is yet to be. This is My command to thee, and My counsel to the people of sanctity. Through the power of the All-Merciful, shun the serpent that hideth within its heart a hatred for the All-Bountiful, and turn away from it, though it recite for thee all that hath been revealed in the Holy Scriptures and though it cling to glorious and articulate Tablets.

O 'Ali, We heard with Our own ears what the ear of no contingent being hath heard. It issued from behind the walls, from those who lived in Our House and dwelt in the precincts of that Sacred Spot around which circle the denizens of paradise, and the people of the holy veils, then the angels that render praise to God. Nevertheless, We concealed this matter in such wise that they privately imagined God to be heedless of them. Say: How wretched is what ye have imagined! Verily, He knoweth what is invisible in the heavens and on earth, and He is, in truth, Omniscient. Thus I was tormented while I was among those persons and dwelt behind them. At My back was the murky gloom of rancor, and at My right hand were the somber depths of malevolence, and God standeth witness to what I say. The matter continued into these very days, when the sacred Beauty desireth to deny Himself the silk brocade of human friendship and to sever Himself from all, male and female, young and old, save from those women toward whom God hath laid upon Me responsibilities. Verily, there is no God but Him, the Possessor of the world of creation and the kingdom of the Cause, and all is with Him upon a Preserved Tablet.

Know, however, that the reason for My withdrawal was not what We have enumerated for thee in this luminous Tablet. Rather, We had found Ourselves to be a chief in the land and a guardian of this people, but then abandoned this position to such as desired and would accept it. There was no such person among the people, and distress, terror and murder were abroad in the land. We therefore manifested Ourselves between the heavens and the earth, and dawned forth from the axis of the horizon with perspicuous sovereignty. Then, when We observed that the land was tranquil, We secluded Ourselves and gave it into the care of other people. For, by My Life, a subject is better than a thousand rulers, a subordinate is

more exalted than a myriad of superiors, and one oppressed is more excellent than a city full of tyrants. Emulate thy Beloved therein and sever thyself from all things. Issue from behind the curtains of silence and speak forth with the truth in wondrous and precious melodies. Then soar into the realm of detachment with the wings of the Sanctified, the Exalted, the Soaring, the Benevolent, the All-High.

# **SURAT AL-QADIR**

## **Surah of the Almighty**

### **Bahá'u'lláh**

Translation by Juan R. I. Cole

This is the Surah of the Almighty, which we have pre-ordained in the realm of eternal life. We have revealed it to our Servants so that it might be as a shining lamp unto them.

He is the Eternal Truth, the Glorious, the Most Glorious. Praise be unto him, who foreordained for each thing its portion in mighty, preserved Tablets. He created all things in such a manner that, were they to purify themselves from the dust of imaginings and selfish passions, they would ascend to the farthest stations and would speak forth the words uttered by the Holy Spirit from the Lote-Tree beyond which there is no passing: There is no God but him and that the possessor of the two Words among these two Names is the everlasting Name of Names in the realm

of immortality. The mercy of these days has thus encompassed all humankind, but the people remain unaware.

God has shed his illumination on all creatures in this Tablet by virtue of His Name, the Almighty, in order that they might beseech him for strength to overcome all that was created between the earth and the heavens, lest anyone be deprived of the sovereignty of His power. This is what has been revealed at this time, by the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Sun of my name, the Almighty: Rise from the East upon all beings with the wonders of the power of your Lord, so that all things may witness in themselves the Might of God, the Omnipotent, the All-Glorious. Whoever is deprived of the effulgence of this Name will never succeed in establishing the power of his Lord, the August, the Ordainer. Even should he confess his inability, this confession would fall short of the reality, for how could he ever truly know what he had lost? Praised may he be, then, above what they know. [1]

[1] Ganj-i Shayigan, p. 52, gives 'what they oppose' (yu`ridun). This does not seem to me to make any sense.

Therefore, O people, make your hearts mirrors for this Sun, that they may reflect its lights and radiance. Thus commands your Lord, if you only knew it. God will render anyone who reflects the effulgence of this Name powerful over all things, to the extent that if he were to instruct all things to turn upside down, they would do so. If he should wish to conquer all beings by the power of his will, he would be enabled to accomplish it by the might of his Lord. This is, verily, a grace for all to see. The gales of power are wafted upon all possessors of might from this Tablet, and they blow where they will by an order from him, were you only able to reason.

The metaphor for this Name in this Tablet is a spring of water that feeds various rivers. In a like manner, from this Name flow the waters of Might into the streams of all being. All take therefrom according to their preordained portion.

O Name, we have brought you into being by our command and have exalted your mention in the kingdom of names. We adorned you with the cloak of immortality, so that you might give thanks to your Lord and be among the grateful. Beware lest anything beguile you, nor should you be veiled from the mention of your Lord's name. Do not be among those who, when they find themselves high and exalted, grow heedless of the mention of their Lord, and then grow prideful toward God, who created them by the operation of his will. Thus did they act.

You, who are named with this Name, and who are its manifestations: Listen to the voice of your Lord, the All-Merciful, in this paradise, and pay no attention to all that was ordained in the worlds of being. Do not be among those who fail to comprehend, and beware lest mere names entice you away from the mention of your Creator. When the Sun of your Lord's mention dawns upon you, fall prostrate upon your faces, bowing before God, the Almighty, the Guardian, the Self-Subsisting. Beware, and let nothing stand in the way of your obedience to God. Do not be like the one whose cause we exalted among the servants, and whose name we made renowned throughout the land, and who, when he beheld his glory and loftiness, grew haughty toward the One who created and fashioned him. He reached the point where he demonstrated opposition to me before my face and separated himself from God. He was among those who, when the sun of beauty shone upon them from the horizon of grandeur, became proud and arrogant.

My Name, we have made you the manifestation of this Name, so that you might cast all contingent beings behind you, and smash the idols of imaginings in all things, leading everyone to the shade of your Lord, the Glorious, the Beloved. Thus may you ensure the victory of your Lord in every affair insofar as you are able, so that the standards of victory might be planted upon lofty and holy summits.

Say: People of the Bayan! If you will not aid this Youth to become triumphant, God Himself will render him victorious, just as he succored him in truth with invisible hosts when he was imprisoned. He sent down what would preserve him from His enemies. In truth, there is no God but him, and to him belong the worlds of creation and command. All is with him upon a Preserved Tablet.

My Name: Be steadfast in the Cause. Then remind the people of that with which the Spirit inspired you. If you find one who accepts it, advance toward him, and should anyone shun it, fearlessly turn away from him. Put your trust in God, your Lord, and he will protect you from those who disbelieved and sought many gods. Such were those who, when the verses of the All-Merciful were recited to them, were dallying within themselves. Sanctify your soul from all those who keep you from the path of God, Possessor of everything that is in the heavens and upon the earth. This is, in truth, better for you than all that was concealed in the kingdom of creation and command. But most of the people do not comprehend.

Await the Day whereon God will come with dominion from the Cause, surrounded by angels of the Spirit. Then you will find that the people are fallen upon the ground and a great commotion has overtaken the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth. All of the names will be inverted and they shall fall



prostrate to the earth of limitation, save for the one who is detached for the sake of God and who enters into the shade of his Lord, the Exalted, the Most High, the All-Glorious, the All-Praised. Thus have we inspired you with the wonders of your Lord's revelation, so that you might attain certitude and be among the assured. Glory be upon you and upon anyone seeks in the shade of his Lord a place that is praiseworthy. Praise be to God, the Mighty, the Powerful, the All-High, the Beloved.

# **SURATU'DH-DHIBH**

## **Surah of the Sacrifice**

### **Bahá'u'lláh**

Translation by Juan Cole

I enclose a provisional translation from the Edirne period, which was probably written in 1866 or 1867. This Tablet was written for Muhammad Isma`il Kashani, known as Dhabih (the Sacrifice) and also as Anis (the intimate), a companion of Baha'u'llah. It was also for Dhabih that the Suriy-i Ra'is was later revealed. Dhabih was the brother of Haji Mirza Jani, who Browne thought authored the Nuqtat al-Kaf chronicle of early Babism, and it has even been speculated that Dhabih would have been a more obvious author, since Nuqtat al-Kaf contains material after 1852, when Haji Mirza Jani was martyred. In any case, Dhabih became an enthusiastic follower of Baha'u'llah. He later suffered arrest in Tehran (in the 1882 mass arrest of Baha'is?), but was released and settled in Tabriz, which was where he eventually passed away.

This is the Surah of the Sacrifice, which hath been sent down from the heaven of Command to him whom We named Dhabih in the kingdom of names, that he might dedicate himself to God, the Lord of the Worlds.

He is the Everlasting, the Wondrous

God hath proclaimed from the throne of grandeur and splendor, "I, verily, am the Lord God, and there is no other god beside Me, the Help in Peril, the Everlasting." He hath, at this time, affirmed from the realm of glory and majesty that there is none other God but Him, the Protector, the Imperishable. The Essence of pre-existence hath avowed to the domain of power and exaltation, "I am, in truth, Almighty God, beside Whom there is no other God, and I am the Powerful, the Omnipotent, the Beloved." God hath borne witness within His own substance, to His substance and by His substance that He is God, saying, "There is no divinity save Me, the Manifest, the Visible. I testify within My essence, to My essence and by My essence that I am God" and there is no God but He, the Effulgent, the Glorious, the Hidden.

O Beauty of the Primeval, sprinkle upon all created things droplets from the ocean of Thine overflowing grace, that perchance they might be captivated by the holy fragrance of the camphor fountain that hath appeared in the form of the Manifestation. >From it floweth the river of paradise, which God hath distilled in the form of My Pen, and He rendered it a sign of His Knowledge to all the world, but few of the people comprehend.

O Sovereign of Eternity, how shall I deliver to contingent beings the verses of thy mighty dominion, after those who joined partners with God have encompassed Me on every side, and have clasped the hands of rancor over these brilliant, glorious and beloved lips? If I should speak among them of the wonders of Thy mention, it would increase the loathing in the breasts of those godless ones. Thou knowest what hath befallen Thine own Self. Thou art, verily, the Eternal Truth, the Omniscient, the Invisible.

O Dhabih, lift up thy head from thy slumber and loosen thy tongue in utterance, in My Name, the Almighty, the Bestower. Fear no one, for thy Lord shall safeguard thee from Satan and his manifestations, and shall protect thee with His mighty and evident sovereignty. If thou dost wish to enter into this station, to whose court have come in supplication the realities of the worlds and the angels that circled about the Throne on high, it is incumbent upon thee to detach thyself from all who are in the heavens and upon the earth, from all that was and shall be. It behooveth thee to make thy companion love of Me, and thy goal knowledge of Me, and thy fortress trust in thy Lord, the All-Knowing, in these days wherein all have turned away from His beauty and taken to themselves lords other than God. Thus did they act aforetime. If thou dost attain the attributes that We commanded thee to acquire, God shall open the eye of thy heart and thou wilt witness what none of His servants hath glimpsed. Thou wilt come to know what was never apprehended by those who claim in themselves that which God hath not sanctioned for them, and say what they do not understand. Therefore, leave the idolaters and what they possess, and ascend with the wings of holiness into the heavens of intimacy, that thou mightest reach the most great Paradise in this hidden and concealed Word.

Say: O people, I do not speak from My own selfish passions, rather, the Spirit speaketh in My breast, and that is My proof, if ye would be fair. O people, if this is my crime, I am not the first to commit it in God's presence; so also have His honored servants who feared Him. Dispute not the truth with your lips, then gaze in the direction of equity concerning that which descended in truth from the kingdom of God, the Omnipotent, the Help-in-Peril, the Self-Subsisting. If ye should dispute these words, then, by God, ye shall not be adjudged to have faith in the verses of His Lord that were revealed to `Ali (the Bab), nor in the verses prior to His, that were given to the messengers of God, if ye did but know. O people, be merciful to yourselves, and weigh not the Cause by what is with you. Be of those who, when the verses of their Lord are recited to them, quake in eagerness to attain His presence, and then fall prostrate upon their faces.

O Dhabih, by God, this Youth hath fallen into the well of hatred. Would that some caravan might stop and throw down the bucket of aid, that this Youth might emerge from it and illumine with His radiance the visages of all the denizens of the heavens and the earth. Thus hath been written the wont of fate upon glorious and preserved Tablets, and thus is it related by this Pen, which quaffed the waters of life from the fountain of the All-Merciful, and grew in the earth of holiness in the center of the heart. From it floweth the springs of God's praise, but the people do not begin to understand.

Know, then, that a commotion appeared whereby the heavens of idle imaginings were cleft, and the sun of creation failed to give its light. Then was manifested the falseness of those who claimed in themselves to believe in the verses of God, the Guardian, the Eternal. Say: O people, these are the verses of `Ali (the Bab) in

truth! Beware lest ye grow haughty toward them, and be rather among the obedient. Say: By God, the clouds of grace have risen high, raining down upon contingent beings the water of life. This is the bounty of thy Lord, the All-Merciful, if ye did but have certitude. Hast thou seen any grace greater than this? Nay, by God Himself, the Help in Peril, the Almighty, the Well-Beloved. Hast thou reckoned in the whole creation any mercy more expansive? Nay, by My Self, the all- Bounteous, ye have not, did ye but know.

One among the people asked concerning the Announcement from those whom he imagined to be are rightly guided. Say: O people, He shall never, in order to vindicate His Cause, stand in need of anything that was created between the heavens and the earth. All else besides Him hath been fashioned by His Word, if ye would but think upon His verses. Say: Verily, His proof is Himself and His very existence is equivalent to His sovereignty. None is cognizant of this save those who turned with sanctified visages toward the countenance of their Lord, and who were among those that descry their Lord. Beware lest thou fail to acquaint thyself with the Cause of thy Lord. Then gaze with the eye of holiness upon the proofs of the Prophets and Messengers, that this matter may be facilitated for thee, and thou mayest crush the idols of vain imaginings by the power of thy Lord, the All-Glorious, the All-Knowing, and become one of those who recline upon the cushions of grandeur.

Know that all that hath issued from the Pen of true counsel hath been but a token of My love for thee. Otherwise, thy Lord is, verily, able to dispense with all who are in the heavens and upon the earth. He ruleth as He willeth and giveth judgment as He wisheth, through His Word, "Be!"--and it is. Listen well within thyself, and

allow not the whispering of Satan to cause thee to stumble upon the paths of the All-Merciful. Be steadfast in the Cause of thy Lord, and be of those who gaze with the eyes of God upon His Cause.

Say: O people, all that ye possess and all that in which ye take pride is established solely by the verses of God, and these verses have descended from the heaven of the divine Will. Take heed lest ye deny them, and in so doing render all your works vain. Be not of them who follow every croaking orator and then reject the verses of their Lord. Know thou that We have made thee Our envoy, that thou mightest share with the people the glad tidings of this Cause, at which every woman with child hath miscarried, and the veils of grief have covered the eyes of all who dwell in the heavens and upon the earth, save only a limited few. The latter grew steadfast behind the canopies of glory, and sought to draw nigh unto the Sinai of nearness. These are they who swim in the watery depths of this Cause.

Strip thyself of everything, that the hand of grace may take thee, exalt thee to the majestic and beloved seat, and clothe thee in raiment that will illumine all beings. This is from thy Lord's bounty upon thee, if thou wilt refrain from consuming it in the fires of mortal intimations, and wilt adhere unwaveringly to the Cause of thy Lord. Follow not every cast-out idolater, and beware lest thou limit thyself with the limitations of allusions or veil thyself with the veils of signs.

Burn away the veils by Our sovereignty, then consume those allusions in the flames that were ignited upon the Sinai of Pre-existence, and which shed their effulgence upon this Pen in such wise as to attract the hearts of those who seek guidance in the verses of God.

Meditate upon the community of the Qur'an, and upon all that they possessed, that thou mightest sanctify thy soul from the hints of the people and be praiseworthy in thy rectitude. Forsake this mortal world, then ascend into these heavens that thou mightest discover what no one else hath perceived, save those who were willed to do so by thy Lord, the Powerful, the Exalted, the All-Protecting, the Everlasting. If thou wilt purify thyself and contemplate My exile in that year that We arrived in Iraq, by God, this would suffice thee above all things and render thee one of those who think upon the signs of their Lord. Thereby hath the proof of God been completed for His servants and pure ones, His blessing hath been fulfilled for His Chosen Ones, and His Countenance hath gleamed forth to His creation. When, however, the veils of imaginings encompassed the people, they neglected to meditate upon all this. Indeed, they were heedless of the Cause of their Lord. Say: O people, act not as did the people of the Qur'an, and never surrender the reins of your insight into the hands of anyone else. Seize upon the grace proffered you in these days, and see with your own eyes. Turn not upon your heels when the verses of your Lord are recited, nor be of those who reject the signs of God and hurl derision from where they sit.

O Dhabih, I have been sacrificed at every moment for the past twenty years, and this is known only to thy Lord, the Almighty, the Beloved. Know that when He who was sacrificed before Me desired the field of annihilation, the sacrifice came to Him from the heavens of the divine Will. But I have been sacrificed even before being offered up, impaled upon the sword of rancor by the wicked, who know not what they do. If thou shouldst hallow thy gaze above mortal allusions, and ascend unto the most great Panorama, thou wilt see that My head is raised aloft upon the spears of the hypocrites against the horizon, and thou wilt weep at this, as lovers



tearfully lament when the dictates of destiny forbid them access to the abode of the glorious beloved. O Dhabih, purify thy vision from all the worlds of being and what they contain, and from the contingent universe and all that is therein, that thou mayest recognize the handiwork of God, which perfected the creation of all things. Thus mightest thou enter the house of mysteries, wherein no one setteth foot save by the will of God, the All-Knowing, the Omniscient, the Omnipotent, the Self-Subsisting. Strive to appreciate the greatness of these days, wherein the countenance of this Youth sheddeth its radiance among you, and to estimate what passed thee by (until) thou didst Him. This is better for thee than the kingdoms of the heavens and the earth, than all that ye do and know. Thou shalt place the fingers of grief between the teeth of bewilderment, but shall not discover this Youth, though thou diligently search the heavens and the earth. Thus doth the Pen of the divine Will reveal to thee the mysteries of fate, that the servants might rise from their graves of heedlessness and detach themselves from all that hindereth them from attaining the throne of His recognition. This is the garden that God hath sanctified above the notice of those who joined gods with God.

When the cloak of this Youth reacheth thee stained with true blood, press it to thy face and inhale from it the fragrance of the All- Merciful. Redden thine own face therewith, and lament with a crimson visage between earth and heaven, that perchance the people of veils might burn away their idle imaginings and divest themselves of the garments of allusions, and wing their way unto the kingdom of names and attributes. This is the exalted, mighty and praised station. When this Sacrifice wished to enter the abode of nearness to God, the realm of His Lord, the Exalted, the Most High, behold, Satan manifested himself in the form of a man and desired to prevent Him from entering the holy and concealed sanctuary. When We

recognized him, We cast stones at him with Our own power and might. Thus did it come to pass, if ye be of them that know. It behooveth thee to emulate Him and do as He did. If thou perceivest that anyone desireth to deter thee from loving this Youth, know that he is Satan who hath taken the form of a human being. Then take refuge with God and exorcise him with a luminous star-shower. Beware lest thou payest heed to anything. Determine in thy heart to set out for this sacred and adored shore.

By God, O Dhabih, all that thou hast heard from the beginning of this Cause was manifested by Us. However, We concealed it out of a wisdom of which only the sincere are cognizant. Thereby have most of the servants dealt with Us unjustly, insofar as they remained unaware. We were patient in our trials, and shall forebear by the power and might of God until such time as the pre-existent Beauty shall come with the authority to save and rescue His Youth in a manner that transcendeth the abilities of all who were and shall be.

Spirit, greetings and glory be upon thee, and upon all who are patient with the good-pleasure of their Lord.

Notes:

On Sun, 21 Apr 1996, Ahang Rabbani wrote:

"...A quick question on the timing of its Revelation. Juan, you suggest it was written around 1866-7; could you elaborate on your reasoning? In the Tablet, Baha'u'llah speaks of "twenty years" of persecution. If we were to take this literally, it would place its revelation closer to 1872...."

The Surah of Sacrifice is similar in style and concerns to other Tablets I have studied that we know to have been revealed around 1866-1867. I have not seen Tablets reliably dated to before about summer, 1865, that are at all explicit about Baha'u'llah's Ridvan declaration. The "20 years" appears to be a figure of speech in these Edirne-era Tablets. It also occurs in the Surah of Blood, which I think we can date to winter-spring 1866. Loosely speaking, the 20 years appears to refer to the period from 1260/1844 to 1280/1863-64 during which Baha'u'llah deferred to the Bab and then hid his station from the public. However, the mention of 20 years in a Tablet does not, as I once had thought it might, date the Tablet to 1864; Baha'u'llah continued to use this round number into the late '60s. The Surah of Sacrifice, I forgot to say, was published by the Iranian Baha'i Publishing Trust in the 1968 edition of *Athar-i Qalam-i A'la* vol. 4 (Tracings of the Supreme Pen), pp. 29-41. Note that it appears to be one of a number of Tablets in which Baha'u'llah appoints for Himself special emissaries to the Babi community in Iran; Isma'il "Dhabih" Kashani was just one of these.

"...Given that Baha'u'llah's other Tablet to Dhabih (Gleanings, CXV, pp 240-46) was revealed immediately after the killing of Azalis in Akka (1872), is it possible

that in fact either these are simply both part of the same Tablet, or that they were revealed closer in time to each other?..."

No, I think the Surah of Sacrifice is late Edirne/Adrianople, while the Tablet in Gleanings (the original of which is in Iqtidarat 323-328), is early Akka. With Suriy-i-Ra'is in the middle, we have here a series of \*three\* Tablets to the same person, probably revealed in 1866-67, 1868, and 1872, respectively.

Juan Cole

# **SURAT AL-ASHAB**

## **Surah of the Companions**

### **Bahá'u'lláh**

Translation by Juan Cole

In the name of God, the Glorious, the Most Glorious, the All-Glorious

H.B. Give ear to the divine summons from the precincts of the throne, as we recite to you the verses of God, the Help in Peril, the Hallowed, the Most Great. Perhaps you will then turn to your Lord with all that is in you and proclaim the sovereignty of this Cause between the heavens and the earth. Thus will you attain such power in yourself that even if all who dwell on earth were to contend with you with keen, finely honed sword blades, you would meet them without trepidation and find yourself altogether independent of them by virtue of my name, the Self-Sufficient, the Mighty, the Powerful, the Omnipotent.

In truth, you are aware of what has befallen us, insofar as you became acquainted in the course of your travels with secrets unknown to others. For at the time when we emigrated to God there was no man of insight with us save you.

Thus did you pay heed, and came to know what none of those pretenders knew. This is the choice wine for which God has singled you out, so quaff it within yourself in secret, lest the heedless become cognizant of it. Render thanks to God, insofar as he has made you aware of what none of his creatures discovered, and has taken your hand in the Hand of Might and delivered you out of the desert of negligence. There is no God but he, and he is, in truth, the Guardian of the Near Ones. By God, the Eternal Truth! The chalice of joy could contain nothing better than what we have ordained for you. Therefore, drink from it and be steadfast in this Cause, and be not of the fearful. Then gaze with a seeing eye on those who claim, 'In truth, we have believed in the verses of God, the Protector, the Mighty, the Powerful.' But when these verses were revealed yet another time in his name, the Exalted, the Omnipotent, the Most Great, behold, they fled from him, showed pride toward him and demonstrated a hypocrisy greater than that of any previous people.

Say: By God, we have endured what has never been borne by the mountains, nor by the heavens and all that is in them, nor by the earth and all that are on it, nor even by those who support the throne of the Almighty. Say: Not the waves, nor the seas, nor the trees, nor all that has been and will be, nor even the hosts of the invisible Lord among the concourse of the worlds can ever bear this burden. Behold, the eyes of grandeur are on the brink of tears, as are the eyes of those who attained everlasting life, and those who dwell in the eternal paradise in their crimson chambers, then those in the Ark of Glory beyond the depths wherein dwell the people of sanctity.

My beloved friend! You shall find that our opponents have clung to the same arguments as did the people of the Qur'an in the past, nay have stooped even lower. God is sufficient to me in this regard as a witness. Indeed, you shall hear from them what never was heard from any of the learned among the Muslims, nor from their ignorant ones, nor even from their street-sweepers in the markets. By God, this is a great iniquity!

Say: This is he who appeared once before. All else besides me has been created by my decree, if you are among the seeing. Say: Do you grow haughty toward him who made your names manifest and your ranks exalted? In truth, this is a wrong that you have committed against God, the Help in Peril, the Glorious, the All-Knowing. Have you not seen the sovereignty and power, the grandeur and majesty, the authority and sublimity of God? Then may your vision grow dim, concourse of the hateful!

Was it for any living thing to ask 'Wherefore?' or 'Whereby?' or to speak forth in our Presence? Nay, by my Self, the Mighty, the Knowing! All heads have bowed before my glorious and beautiful countenance, and all have humbly submitted to my powerful and invincible dominion. Within the throat of this youth lie imprisoned words that, if revealed to mankind to an extent smaller than a needle's eye, would be sufficient to cause every mountain to crumble, the leaves of the trees to be discolored and their fruits to fall; would compel every head to bow down in worship and every face to turn in adoration towards this omnipotent ruler who, at various times and in diverse manners, appears as a devouring flame, as a billowing ocean, as a radiant light, as the tree which, rooted in the soil of holiness, lifts its branches and spreads out its limbs as far as and beyond the throne of deathless

glory.[1] At yet other times, you will find him in the form of the beloved, in this cloak that none in all the creation can recognize. Should any of them desire to recognize him, they would swoon within their own spirits, all save those who approach their Lord with a sincere heart.

[1] Passage beginning with "Within the throat" translated by Shoghi Effendi, World Order of Baha'u'llah, pp. 108-109.

Thus does the crier call out on my right hand, the speaker declare on my left hand, the caller shout aloud from behind me and the Spirit from before me, and the tongue of God proclaim from above my head. By God! This is, in truth, he whom you have sought from the beginning that has no beginning. This is the visage toward which all faces turned, though they might now be without understanding, and whoever rejects this manifest, refulgent, exalted and illumined Grace must inquire of his condition from his mother. Such a one will return to the lowest depths of hell. Do you think within yourselves that, if you deny these verses, your faith in any of the former Messengers of God, even in 'Ali (the Bab), can be credited? No, by the Lord of the Worlds! Behold, you are given the lie by all the atoms, and beyond them by the tongues of power, might, glory and grandeur, and beyond all these by the tongue of God, the Omnipotent, the Almighty, the All-Wise.

My beloved friend, grasp the hem of the veil with the fingers of might and barely lift it, so that none could perceive what you had done. Should you hear the clamor of the hateful, remove your fingertips and leave it as it was. Subsist behind a curtain of beauty with patience and perseverance. Then bring the fingers of power near and raise the veil of contingent beings higher than before. If the



howling of those who join partners with God should begin lay it down and retreat before the beasts of prey, seeking an impregnable shelter. Dwell with the dignity and tranquillity of God, then prepare yourself for the service of God and turn your face to him with manifest authority. Detach yourself from all who are in the heavens and on earth, and from the likes of the idolaters. Then extend the fingers of might and power from the cloak that we bestowed on you before the creation of all things, when Adam was yet between water and clay. Rend asunder the illusions of the people by means of sovereignty whereby all veils were torn from all things. Demonstrate such wondrous integrity that it will efface the idle fancies of those who have turned away and the delusions of those who depend on false intimations without any warrant from us, if you are among those who act.

Friend, shatter the idols and do not sorrow at what befalls you, and fear not the demonic hosts. Say: O concourse of deniers, we do not fear you. You may perish, or swoon, or pass out of existence, but the Cause of God shall not be turned back. It has, in truth, become manifest, in spite of you and despite those who join partners with God. Whenever we have, at one time, concealed this Cause from you, and at another revealed it to you, this has been a mercy from us on you, and on all the worlds. For some of the people are weak and feeble, such that they would be unable to witness the light of the sun by reason of the infirmity in their eyes. Therefore have we treated them with gentle courtesy, lest they expire altogether. Say: It will not profit you to turn to the right or the left, to answer or to ask, if you be of those with certitude.

Say: Consider in yourselves when 'Ali (the Bab) came in truth from the Egypt of Spirit with the verses of God, the Powerful, the unconstrained. Did any of the people of the Qur'an profit from what was with them? Nay, by your Lord, the All-Merciful! In the same way, peruse the Bayan, if you will. By my life, nothing that they possessed availed them, neither anyone's question nor any soul's answer. Every individual of perspicacious understanding knows this. Say: By God, what was never manifested before has now appeared, and he enjoins on you what you were commanded in the Book of God, the Omnipotent, the Mighty, the Omniscient. All that you have was created by my Word, did you but know. Say: In this day, no one can become rich save by making himself poor in the presence of God. This is a sanctified and luminous station. Nor can anything gain mention save by forgetting itself, and becoming oblivious to all that is in the kingdom of the Cause and the world of creation, how much more so to all that was created between the heavens and the earth. Say: Have you not heard it said in the past, that 'his evidence is his verses and his proof is his being.'? Then woe to you, concourse of the heedless.

Were the veil to be drawn from the face of this Cause even to so small an extent that none of the mystic knowers could discern it, the call of the concourse on high would be raised, the people of the domains of immortality would cry out, and the strains of the sacred melody would be heard from the sanctuary of grandeur. These would proclaim that this is nothing but a glad-tiding to the world of creation. Is this anything but the King, the Powerful, the Venerable, the Wondrous? Thus was the proof of God made perfect. But the people are in a drunken stupor induced by their negligence, such that they will never even be able to distinguish left from right.

After God's self-manifestation, can anything else in the heavens or on earth avail anyone? Nay, by the Lord of the Worlds!

O my beloved friend, come and chant, lilt, drum and beat time in the realm of eternity, and then in the kingdom of the Unknowable Essence, paying no heed to anything save my radiant and resplendent Beauty. Thus have we bestowed on you something, a single letter of which could render wealthy all who are in the heavens and on the earth, if they would but persevere in their love for their Lord, the Glorious, the Generous. May the Spirit be on you, and on all those endued with knowledge.

Make mention of me to Javad, even as the pen of the Cause at this very moment busies itself with my mention, whereby the canopy of holiness was raised aloft, and the sun came to rest on the throne of magnificent splendor. Give him to drink of the chalice we bestowed on you, that thereby his heart will be soothed, and he may be among the grateful. Say: We showed you in your sleep that whereby your soul and spirit will find repose, if you would but perform it. Interpret your vision as God interprets it, then traverse the path even as a cloud passes overhead, and pay no heed to those who join partners with God. Should you find one whose heart is devoid of love for me, flee from him and eschew his company, keeping at a great distance from him. Should your soul contend with you in this matter, then detach yourself from it and demonstrate an invincible certitude. Say: By God, the balance is nothing other but love for me. This is a mercy on the near ones, but a vengeance and a scourge on those who join partners with God.

Then remind Rahim of the glad-tidings of God, the Exalted, the Almighty, the All-Wise. Say: You attained the Presence of God, but failed to recognize him, and were among the heedless. Therefore beseech God to aid you in knowing him and to apprise you of the one who manifests his essence, and to remove you from the midst of those deluded ones. O Rahim, avoid them and their like. Do not associate with them, nor with any among the hateful. Turn toward the horizon of spirit with your heart, and sever yourself from all attachment to this world. Thus do we teach you what shall enable you to dispense with all creatures. What you sent reached us, and we accepted it as a mercy from us on you, that you might be among the thankful.

Speak to Zaman of the verses of his Lord now being mentioned by the Spirit, that he might rejoice in his soul and might be among the pious, at a time when most of the people have departed from piety in such a way that they turn away from him in whom they believed. Thus does the spirit admonish them, lest they enter the ranks of his repudiators. Say: Servant, read what we revealed to you in the past, and inhale from its ink the fragrance of musk from the tresses of the divine Beloved, the Help in Peril, the All-Glorious. Then act according to what is written therein. By God, thereby were solaced the eyes of the dwellers in paradise and the inhabitants of the heaven of sanctity, did you but know.

Then remember us to 'Ali-Akbar, and announce to him the good news now being proclaimed by the spirit within this lofty, brilliant and lauded heart. Say: Servant, what we sent to you earlier was such that nothing created between the heavens and the earth equals in value even a letter of it. Commit it to memory, and read it at those times you find yourself free from all who are on the earth, that you might be

attracted to the lustrous and resplendent seat of holiness. We received the letter you had previously dispatched, and God shall give you as recompense the best of what is with him, for in truth he is the Guardian of the beneficent. Know, then, that whatever he accepts from his servants is as a grace to his creatures, and that he is Self-Sufficient above the worlds. Beware lest you associate with those in whose hearts you find hatred for this youth, nay, keep clear of them and their like, and avoid their company. Suffice yourself with God, your Lord, and, in truth, he shall render you able to dispense with all else besides him. There is no God but him. The worlds of creation and of command are his, and all is with him on a Preserved Tablet.

Tell 'Ali in Qaf (Qazvin) that which the essence of pre-existence commands you, at a time when all who subsist in the depths of eternity circle round him, as does all that has been or will be, if you but knew. Say: Servant, be steadfast in the Cause of God, and fear no one. Put your trust in my refulgent, sanctified and luminous Beauty. If your very essence should oppose you in this, then detach yourself therefrom without pause.

Give our regards to Hasan, that he might be gladdened by the droplets sprinkled in his name from this shimmering Ink, which is perfumed, wondrous, indelible, unific, eternal, and everlasting. Say: Servant, perform what you were commanded in the Guarded Tablet that we sent to you, and be not of the listless. Ascend in your spirit to the heights of sanctity, and let no man make you apprehensive; rather, depend on God, the Mighty, the Powerful. Say: By God, the Ascension has recurred in its entirety, if you did but see.

Say to Ibn Nabil from us, if you find in his visage the radiance of grace: Servant, do not hesitate in this Cause, and follow no one in so doing. Then look with fresh eyes at the proofs of the messengers. By God, he who appeared in the year 60 is manifest once more. This is among his proofs that have filled the East and the West. Because your father hesitated in this Cause, he failed to attain what he desired. God severed him from all that was with him and returned him to dust with great sorrow solely in order to awaken you, but you failed to perceive it and remained heedless. God has now, however, forgiven him his offenses and has granted him remission of his misdeeds, for he, in truth, pardons whoever he wills, and chastises whomever he pleases. The decree is his alone: He does whatsoever he wills and ordains whatsoever he desires. Say: O servant, have mercy on yourself; do not dispute the verses of God, and be not among those who join partners with God. Say: By God, were we to draw aside the veil from the face of this Cause, you would slash at your bodies with your own hands. However, we concealed the Cause with what was predestined in the tablets by the pen of God, the Almighty, the All-Knowing. My beloved friend, if you fail to perceive in him the fragrance of love, sever yourself from him and pay him no heed. Turn to the countenance of your Lord, the Glorious, the Wondrous.

Then magnify before the face of Isma'il the one who murmurs from the fire on the heights, to whose flames are attracted the hearts of the believers in divine unity. Say: Servant, strip yourself of all veils, then enter into the fire, for it shall be as light and mercy to you, and to all the sincere. Then smash the idols of self and passion set up by those who disbelieved and joined partners with the Deity after having claimed within themselves faith in God, the Powerful, the Mighty, the Compassionate. Say: By God, your own tongues revile you and your mortal frames

declare themselves innocent of you, concourse of the heedless! Servant, teach the Cause of your Lord and let nothing dismay you. Fare not on the paths of the deluded.

Say: O people of the Bayan, 'Ali (the Bab) has appeared in a new mantle. In truth, he was named Husayn in the realm of names, and Baha' in the kingdom of eternity, and in the domain of the Unknowable Essence he was given this name, which has taken the form of this youth. Blessed be God, the Best of Creators. Concourse of mankind, the manifestation of divine potency has appeared in the most great countenance, with an adornment that has dazzled the hearts of all endowed with intelligence and insight. Say: Concourse of idolaters, by what proof can you escape. By God, there is no refuge for anyone save in severing himself from all that he possesses and clinging to this glittering, most luminous Cord. Indeed, he is the most great sign and the beauty of God among you, and he is the concealed mystery, but he is the wrath of God to those who attribute partners to him. In truth, his wrath is bitterer and more calamitous, for by him God chastises those who have denied the divine verses and decree. Then flee to God, your Lord, and set not other gods up beside him. In truth, with me is sanctuary. Say: If we wished, we would bring into being another creation, for we are over all things Mighty and Powerful. All things are in the grasp of our potency, and this is recognized by the people of knowledge and thought.

People, think on these verses. By virtue of what saying did you hitherto believe in 'Ali (the Bab)? Then consider carefully, O concourse of asses! Say: In this day, nothing shall avail you but to believe in him in whom you believed aforetime, and in the Tablets and Scriptures that he revealed. Munib, report to that servant what

this celebrated pen has related to you, that he may be steadfast within himself in such a way that he will not be deterred by the aversion of those who turned away, nor hindered by anyone who has committed a wrong toward God and disbelieved.

Then mention on our behalf the friend who journeyed to God, attained his Presence, heard his melodies and was of the people of vision. Say: Blessed are your eyes and ears! It is incumbent on you to realize their full value, insofar as they have heard and seen what the eyes of those who advanced toward God never witnessed. Then the latter turned their backs and turned away from him that dawned from the sacred horizon with this radiant, sanctified and most pure Beauty. O servant, be not distressed when the clamor of the idolaters grows raucous, for if you allow yourself to be disturbed thereby you risk joining the people of hell.

Say: The most great trumpet has appeared, and has spoken forth with the truth, sounding, and raising its voice to the utmost between the heavens and the earth, proclaiming, 'With me is sanctuary!' People, do not invent lies against God, your creator, and do not deny him after he has lifted the veil and manifested himself. Beware lest you busy yourselves with this world and allow anything to prevent you from attaining this fathomless and overflowing Ocean. In truth, those who believed in God and his verses ascended to God, and they have inherited gardens and rivers, but those who disbelieved and set up other gods beside God, they are consumed in the fires of the inferno. Beyond this, the wrath of God will take hold of them and make them like enclosed fields of chaff. Thus did God decree for them retribution for their sins. Woe to them, and to any who disbelieve and act with perfidy. And blessed is he who acquiesces to the good-pleasure of his Lord, and who, when the divine verses are recited to him, believes and gives thanks.



Then convey to 'Abdu'r-Rahim the gist of this tablet, so that perhaps he will draw near in his essence to the sacred Shore, and be of the thoughtful, who contemplate the Cause of God and obey the ordinances and admonitions revealed by him. Say: Servant, cast away whatever hinders you from arriving at the haven of grandeur. In truth, that is better for you than all that has been created and foreordained. Lift up your voice between the heavens and the earth, that you may be among those who struggle in the way of God, and gain the victory. Say: In truth, we have created the heavens and the earth for the sake of our Cause. By God, then, this is our Cause, which has appeared with the truth, and which has been recognized only by those endowed with sagacity and the ability to reflect. Thus have we inspired you and informed you, so that you might follow what you have been commanded in this tablet, and be of the discerning.

Finally, tell Ha', as the last of the names, what the dove of holiness says, and perhaps he will be enraptured by her melodies. We have mentioned him last so that he might ascend to the lote-tree of the farthest limit and seek its shade. Say: The lote-tree has spread its branches over all who are in the heavens and on earth, and blessed is the one who resides in its vicinity.

The sun has risen over the sacred horizon, and the concourse on high has been illumined by its radiance. The scent of musk has diffused from the knolls of sanctity, perfuming the temples of pre-existence. Happy is he who adorns himself with these fragrances! The luminary of the Cause has risen in the midst of the sky, and has taken the form of a full moon, brilliant in its whiteness. Concourse of the near ones, seek to be illumined by its splendor! Say: The throne has been established behind the pavilion of majesty, and about it circle chaste maidens of

beauty bearing flagons brimming with the water of life. Blessed is the person who attains to sprinkled droplets thereof. Say: The Maiden of Eternity has uncovered Beauty itself with a gut-wrenching gaze. Blessed is the one who is struck by her glance! Say: The voice of God has been heard from the sanctuary of eternity, and the hearts of the mystic knowers have been enthralled by its melodies.

O my name, hearken to what is revealed to you from the Holy Land by the songs of your Lord, and stand in fear of no one, rather, put your trust in God, who will preserve you from the evil ones and the harm they wreak. Take heed lest you forbid yourself the very thing for which you were created, and be not among those who deny the verses of God after their revelation. In this day, nothing can be of any benefit to anyone until he attains my love, and to this bear witness the people of the sacred canopy and the tongues of those who subsist beyond it. In truth, those who turned away from the brilliancy of this countenance, God will blacken their own faces in hellfire, until they are as the feathers of the raven. He will chastise them with the burning flames of remoteness. Say: In truth, he it is who created the heavens and the earth, and established the throne on the water. Then he suspended the water from the sky, so that you might recognize the handiwork of God, who perfected the creation of all things. Meditate thereon, and on the blessings that have been foreordained in the earth.

Say: People, in truth, I am that 'good' you were promised in the year Nine, concerning whom God covenanted with all the atoms. Blessed is the soul that fulfills his covenant. The canopy of pre-existence has been raised. People of the Bayan, do not keep yourselves therefrom, but rather dwell in its court. By God, the lote-tree of Baha' has borne fruit in this paradise that has manifested itself in four-

and three-sided patterns. People of the Ark of Eternity, draw near to it, and enjoy its harvest. Say: People, do you deny the verses of God and yet continue to recite what was revealed before? Woe to you, insofar as satan has made your works seem beautiful to your base selves. Thus do we share with you the verses of the Cause, that you might rise from the dust of negligence and be nourished by what descended from the clouds of sanctity, and the waters that rain down from them. Thus does the pen of the Cause counsel every soul among the perceptive.

The vessels of immortality have come to rest on the crimson sea, and happy is the one who clings to their sacred cords, that he might attain everlasting life by virtue of their imperishability. By God, this sea has dazzled the eyes of contingent beings and its waters are plied by the ark of holiness that was constructed by the Noah of the spirit for this youth, in whose name the helm of the ark is taken, and in whose name it is spun. Say: The seas of eternity have billowed within this Most Great Ocean, and no one has attained to its shore, how much less to its whirling depths, save those who clung to the sacred ships that ply it. Board them, then, in my name.

The burning bush has been raised up on the Sinai of immortality, and the nightingale that sang before the world was made warbles on its branches with the best of melodies. Give ear, temples of the All-Praised, that you may hear them. The river of paradise has streamed out from this celestial fountain that flowed from the sacred spring of Kawthar, through these lips from which the waters of eternity descend. Blessed is he on whom they overflow. Say: This is the Self of God, which is seated on the throne, and God has sanctified his robe from the touch of the idolaters.

O my beloved friend, nourish every soul with the tender, imperishable bounties of the divine unity that descend from this heaven, which has been raised up with truth. Take heed lest you transgress the bounds of the people, and give to every soul according to its capacity. He whose sense of taste has suffered an alteration will never be able to distinguish between the sweet and bitter, except if he should recover from his illness. Thus, we created souls in various conditions. They who have not cleansed their ears shall never delight in the songs of holiness. Thus do we share with you the purport of every decree. Break the seal on the flask of the All-Merciful in my name, the All-Bountiful, and pass about the wine of life that was pressed by the fingers of the All-Praised. Perhaps the people of the contingent world will be warmed by its heat and be illumined by its gleaming light. In this manner have we revealed the verses, and have changed them from one condition to another. We send them forth as we please, so that in their dispatch you may witness the power of your Lord, and may prostrate yourself humbly before him. Say: By God, the Eternal Truth, glory lies not in revealing verses and the like. Rather, glory lies in my manifestation between the heavens and the earth, among the divers peoples of the world, if you have eyes to see.

If you find those whose names we have mentioned in this Tablet fragrant and encompassed by the spirit, then waft on them the diffusing scent of God, the Exalted, the Mighty, the Guardian. If not, stop up the mouth of the perfume bottle, lest those who join partners with God discover its aroma, and seal it with the mark of holiness or with a crimson gem from this Yemen. Beware lest you spread the divine writings among the idolaters. Rather, abandon them, be patient and sorrow not. By God, this is a Cause at which all who are in the heavens and on earth are thunderstruck, the skin of the haughty has crawled with fright, the lands of the

pharaohs have been split, towering peaks have been leveled, every nursing mother has forsaken her newborn, every pregnant woman has laid down her fetus and a drunken stupor has enveloped the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth, all save those on whom God bestowed a heart able to bear afflictions.

Bear the Book of God with a power and a might deriving from us. Shrink not from bearing it, and feel no apprehension at its weight, for he will, in truth, protect you and will guard you from all trials and calamities. When any tribulation touches those endued with knowledge, it only increases their detachment in God, and their yearning for that station which God has sanctified from the vicissitudes of time. If you find yourself alone between the heavens and the earth, then be pleased therewith, and with the One who created them, and do not be overwhelmed by trials and distress. Turn away from those who have disbelieved, and draw near to God. In truth, that is better for you than possession of the heavens and the earth, and of all that was created, whether hidden or manifest. Purify your hem from the tumult of the created world, and quaff from the crimson chalice proffered by the hand of this most glorious youth, so that your soul may be liberated from this world and the vanities and palaces that are therein. Say: People, do not focus on discrepancies among the verses we have revealed, for these have all descended from one strong in power, from the realm of immortality, and differ according to various stations, if you be among the discerning. Thus do we bestow on you a portion of the mysteries of the Cause, lest your feet stumble on this exalted and manifest path. Conceal not the Cause of your Lord to the extent that the divine fire is extinguished in all else besides it, nor openly proclaim it in such a way that harm befalls you. Follow a clear path between these two.

Know, then, that this Beauty has been sorely tried among those persons in such a way that he desires to withdraw from them, or soar into the heavens of holiness in the primal homeland. By God, I have fallen at every moment beneath the talons of the malicious and the hateful, and I shall never find for myself any helper save God, who created me and all else besides, and sent me forth with the sovereignty of his Cause to land and sea, and to the inhabitants of the cities. Say: We related not even an intimation of our vision to the believers in the Unknowable Essence. Behold, they could not bear it, and they cast us into this pit, in the depths of darkness. Thus do we relate to you the mysteries of the Cause that were shrouded and concealed. Know that among those present were some who turned away from God, their Lord, and disbelieved in his signs, and some who believed in their Lord and attained safety and salvation. The former disguised themselves, when they ventured out from behind their wine jugs, in the gowns of women, after which they turned away from this most manifest, and yet most hidden, Beauty. Say: People, fear God and do not dispute with the manifestation of his Self; rather, turn to him with splendid humility. The invisible God has become manifest and the symbol of the hidden God has appeared from this sanctuary. People, render thanks to God, who created you from gushing water and made known to you the paths of holiness. For he revealed to you divine laws and standards, so that you might follow the way of guidance for the sake of this fountain that has appeared with the truth. Beware lest you differ concerning it, nor should you doubt that you will attain the presence of your Lord. Draw near to him in your hearts, for that is, in truth, better for you than all that has been made manifest and all that has remained concealed.

This is the Surah of the Companions, which we have revealed with the truth, and we have sent it to you that you may recite it to those in whose faces you

discover the radiance of the All-Merciful. When they hear the verses of God, they soar to the lote-tree of the farthest limit in this sanctified and united Court.

If you see Nasr, relate to him, even after the last-mentioned person, what has at this time been revealed from the kingdom of exaltation, that he might remember within himself, and be among those who were secure and guided. Say: Nasr, aid your Lord to the extent you are able for the sake of this victory that has been manifested in the form of this youth. Blessed by God, who created and proportioned all things. Be steadfast in the Cause of your Lord God in such a way that nothing in the heavens or on earth could prevent you from being among those that made a covenant and fulfilled it.

Say: People, do you dispute the Spirit concerning what he witnessed and saw, and the melodies of God that he heard in the most holy, pure and glorious realm? In truth, he is so steadfast that the entire creation will never deter him, nor will all who are in the heavens and on earth ever be more in his eyes than a handful of dust. Were he but speak forth the least intimation, it would be sweeter than all that has been revealed in the kingdom of the Cause and the world of creation. This is known only by those who possess understanding. In truth, he has mounted the throne and seated himself thereon. This is a difficult thing indeed for those who join partners with God, and for him who has disbelieved and transgressed, then turned away and provoked great misery. Say: Concourse of the hateful, die in your rancor! For the sun has dawned forth, spreading the rays of God from the zenith of the mid-morning sky, and all have been illumined thereby, save the despicable, who have gone astray and become blind. Thus do we relate to you some of the stories of God, you possessors of intellect. In truth, a glance at him is better than all

that is in the concourse on high, and than the kingdoms of this world and the next. Blessed is the one who has attained the presence of the throne, has gazed on the countenance of the Most High, and has heard in the songs of holiness the most great verses of his Lord. Nasr, listen to what is revealed to you from the farthest divine realm, and take heed lest you fear any man. Turn to the visage of your Lord, and be of those who profited from the remembrance of God. Have patience when the heavens are cleft asunder, the earth of desire is split and the lamentations among those who turned away and were lost fill the air. He whose heart is not purified from all that can be described by any name will never reflect within himself this brilliant and most limpid Beauty.

Purify the mirrors of your souls, people of the earth, then ascend to the station that God has rendered, from behind himself, only two bow-lengths away, or less. In truth, he declares at all times what the Spirit revealed within his pure and sinless breast. Say: He speaks not out of his own base desire, rather, he proclaims the most great verses of his Lord, with which he is inspired by one powerful in his commands. Say: In truth, he has at this time risen above the most exalted horizon, and he is, verily, the Primal Beauty (the Bab) clothed in another mantle. By him have the standards of the Cause been raised aloft in the kingdom of names, and the pavilion of glory been erected in the realm of the Unknowable Essence. Say: O people, return to him, for he is the end of all things. By God, he is the heaven of refuge at the lote-tree of holiness when the effulgence of the light becomes manifest from this shining and most glorious Beauty. Thus, his sharp gaze swerved not from the most manifest, and yet most hidden, sovereignty of his Lord that he witnessed with his own eyes.



Say: Were he to uncover the veil from the face of only one of his words, the earth would be rent and the heavens of the most high would be cloven. He, however, treated his servants with gentle courtesy, lest their hearts be distinguished from one another, and they return to the seat of wrath in the deepest pit. Be afraid of no one, and remind the people of the verses of your Lord, for this is his triumph in the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. Thus he aids you with this mention, and to him the commemoration returns. Thus have we caused to flow forth from every letter of this tablet nineteen rivers. Happy is he that thirsts and seeks to drink.

When we completed this tablet, the most great verses of God began to descend once again from the realm of immortality, that every reasoning and gracious man might take admonishment therefrom. Let us mention in this tablet some of the beloved of God to whom we have not heretofore referred, that the grace of God might encompass every atom and every possessor of refinement and prudence. Then remind those, over whose names the pen of the cause has not moved, if you find them bearing in mind the remembrance of their Lord. Otherwise, leave them to themselves and avoid every one who turns away in suspicion. Say: O people, delight in these days wherein God has come in the shadows of the spirit, and the countenance has dawned forth from behind the veil.

Share with Muhammad-'Ali, whose name you mentioned in your letter, what the pen of fate reminds him in the realm of the divine decree, in the presence of his Lord, the Mighty, the Bestower. Thus might he ascend within himself to the heights of sanctity through this ascension that has manifested itself in the form of this youth, and be among those who obeyed and repented. Servant, detach yourself from all that your passions desire, then cling to the most great cord within yourself,

which is, in truth, better for you than the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. Only the steadfast believers can comprehend this saying and those endowed with insight. Give praise in the name of your Lord, and let the ecstasy and rapture of love wash over you, insofar as we have poured out for you the wine of life in wondrous and sanctified goblets. We have, in truth, rendered those letters chalices containing the most marvelous attributes, and we give such of our servants as we desire to drink from the cup of our verses. Say: From us this grace appeared and to us shall it return on the Resurrection Day. A drop thereof bestows life on the forms of all beings. Thus has our mercy preceded all things, and encompassed every atom, from the heights of paradise down to the lowliest speck of earth. In truth, those who failed to attain holy droplets from this cup are more contemptible in the sight of God than common flies, for they disbelieved in the bounty of God and disputed his verses after their revelation, and followed every lying infidel.

Say: O people, do you call on those to whom God has given no authority, and yet abandon the lord of lords? How miserable are the guardians you have adopted for yourselves instead of God! You shall be chastised by the divine wrath, for he is, in truth, powerful in fixing blame and severe in inflicting punishment. Among the idolaters is one who was there, and who was displeased that we gave to ourselves one of the names. Thus did he commit a wrong toward God, who created and fashioned him. The injustice committed by those who join partners with God is nothing but perdition. Say: People, all the names refer to their kingdom, which refers to my Cause, which was created by my word. All know this, who have believed in the Day of Reckoning. The sun has dawned from the horizon of the glory of its Lord, the heavens of pride are sundered, the earth of malice is furrowed with chasms, and the mountain of stillness moves like the clouds. Thus have we

informed you of every announcement, that you may remember within yourself and remind the people of that with which we have inspired you. Mayhap they will purify their souls from every malady, and recover their health.

People of the earth, strive for victory in these days, and let not the numbers of the idolaters frighten you. Thus does the pen of grandeur counsel you on behalf of the Glorious, the Enticing One. Know that triumph can never be attained by unsheathing your swords, but rather depends on purifying your souls. Concourse of companions, should anyone sever himself from all who are in the heavens and on earth, and arise to fulfill the divine plan, God will, through him, render victorious the sincere among his loved ones, and will pull down the standards of the idolaters from all parties. By God, the true victory is your detachment from all else besides God and your steadfastness in my love in this day, when the feet of the eloquent have stumbled and a pack of jackals has issued from the thickets of hypocrisy. These persons disbelieved and turned away, doubting that they could attain the presence of their Lord, even after he manifested himself from the sacred horizon with scriptures and the book.

Say: Concourse of holiness, unsheathe the swords of wisdom from the scabbards of utterance, and thereby aid your Lord, the All-Merciful. Beware lest you wreak corruption in the land after its reformation, and fear God, to whom all affairs return in the beginning and the end. Should the idolaters creep up on you, drive them away with our word, not with your blades, and do not contravene what you were commanded in the Book. Be steadfast, people, in following the path, and allow fire and rapture to consume you in this Cause and on this foundation. If you fail to pursue this path with perseverance, God will send another people that will be firm

in his Cause and will commemorate him with distraction, yearning and ecstasy. Nothing in the heavens or on earth will deter them. On these the angels and the Spirit will pronounce blessings, as will the concourse of holiness, and those who were within the pavilion of nearness behind the veil. Is there anything that does not mention their names and thereby draw near to God? Say: By God, their names are tolled by the bell, crowed by the cockerel of paradise, and sung by the rebec. Thus are the words of your Lord completed in veracity and justice. Nothing can alter the words of your Lord, but none can comprehend this truth save the souls endued with excellence and immortality.

Baha'u'llah, Súriy-i-Asháb, The Tablet of the Companions

Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By

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[re. Adrianople days]

A period of prodigious activity ensued which, in its repercussions, outshone the vernal years of Baha'u'llah's ministry. "Day and night," an eye-witness has written, "the Divine verses were raining down in such number that it was impossible to record them.... Baha'u'llah, Himself, referring to the verses revealed

by Him, has written: "Such are the outpourings ... from the clouds of Divine Bounty that within the space of an hour the equivalent of a thousand verses hath been revealed." "So great is the grace vouchsafed in this day that in a single day and night, were an amanuensis capable of accomplishing it to be found, the equivalent of the Persian Bayan would be sent down from the heaven of Divine holiness." "I swear by God!" He, in another connection has affirmed, "In those days the equivalent of all that hath been sent down aforetime unto the Prophets hath been revealed." "That which hath already been revealed in this land (Adrianople)," He, furthermore, referring to the copiousness of His writings, has declared, "secretaries are incapable of transcribing. It has, therefore, remained for the most part untranscribed."

Already in the very midst of that grievous crisis, and even before it came to a head, Tablets unnumbered were streaming from the pen of Baha'u'llah, in which the implications of His newly-asserted claims were fully expounded. The Suriy-i-Amr, the Lawh-i-Nuqtih, the Lawh-i-Ahmad, the Suriy-i-Ashab, the Lawh-i-Sayyah, the Suriy-i-Damm, the Suriy-i-Hajj, the Lawhu'r-Ruh, the Lawhu'r-Ridvan, the Lawhu't-Tuqa were among the Tablets which His pen had already set down when He transferred His residence to the house of Izzat Aqa.

(Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 170 )

One of the early Tablets revealed in Adrianople is the Suriy-i-Ashab (Surih of Companions). This Tablet played a significant role in the unveiling of the station of Baha'u'llah to the Babis of Persia. It is a lengthy Tablet in Arabic and is addressed to Mirza Aqay-i-Munib.[1] Baha'u'llah addresses the recipient of this Tablet as Habib (Friend) and in one instance He mentions Munib by name. This appears to have led some scholars of the Faith to state that this Tablet was revealed for Mirza Habib-i-Maraghi'i and that Munib was also addressed in it. A careful study of the Tablet and other historical facts, however, make it clear beyond doubt that it was revealed for Mirza Aqay-i-Munib whom He addressed as Habib. When Jinab-i-Munib received this important Tablet, He arose with wisdom and courage to disclose the station of Baha'u'llah to those Babis whom he considered faithful.

[1 See vol. I, pp. 283-7 for further information about him.]

(Adib Taherzadeh, The Revelation of Baha'u'llah v 2, p. 65 )

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Jinab-i-Munib was among the companions of Baha'u'llah in Constantinople until His departure for Adrianople, when He summoned him to His presence and instructed him to go to Persia, where he could teach and spread the glad-tidings of the Declaration of Baha'u'llah to the Babis. In fact, it took some time for the news of Baha'u'llah's Declaration to reach the believers in Persia. In the first place, methods of communication were still primitive. Secondly, the dissemination of such important news had to be carried out with wisdom. Only the insight and

devotion of Baha'u'llah's disciples could bring this about, which is one of the reasons that Baha'u'llah sent a number of the ablest among them to Persia to teach His Cause there.

When Jinab-i-Munib arrived in Tihran, he began to intimate the station of Baha'u'llah to some of the Babis, at first very discreetly. After a short while Baha'u'llah sent him a Tablet from Adrianople, known as the Suriy-i-Ashab, which was addressed to a certain Mirza Habib-i-Maraghi'i. When Jinab-i-Munib received this Tablet, he began to unveil the station of Baha'u'llah to the mass of the believers in that land. This is a lengthy Tablet in which Baha'u'llah speaks about the greatness of His Cause and, alluding to Mirza Yahya, warns the people of the Bayan to beware of those who deny it. (More detail of this significant Tablet will be given in the next volume.)

During this period Jinab-i-Munib rendered memorable services to the Faith in Persia, especially in Tihran. After this, he journeyed to Adrianople, attained the presence of Baha'u'llah again, and was in that city when Baha'u'llah was exiled to Akka. About that time, however, he was taken ill and badly needed treatment. In spite of this, he begged Baha'u'llah to permit him to join in His exile as he longed to be with his Lord. Eventually, his request was granted and he managed to reach Gallipoli with the others, but he was so weak that three men had to carry him aboard the steamer which was to take the exiles to Akka. Soon after this his condition deteriorated and the captain forced him to leave the ship at Smyrna.

Many times Jinab-i-Munib had indicated to Baha'u'llah that his greatest desire in life was to sacrifice himself in His path. Now at last the time had come. Before being carried out of the ship he managed, in spite of his weakness, to drag

his frail body before Baha'u'llah. He threw himself at His feet and with tearful eyes begged Him for the last time to accept his sacrifice. This Baha'u'llah did and his hopes and aspirations were finally fulfilled. He was taken to a hospital in Smyrna where, shortly afterwards, his soul took its flight to the immortal realms of the spirit.

(Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah* v 1, p. 286 )

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The Declaration of Baha'u'llah in the Garden of Ridvan was made only to a few of His companions. The news of this historic event was not communicated to most Babis until later. The *Suriy-i-Ashab* and other early Tablets disclosed the station of Baha'u'llah clearly and openly. Mirza Aqay-i-Munib shared this important Tablet with many souls. Among them was Haji Mirza Haydar-'Ali, who describes his feelings when he read this Tablet for the first time in these words:

...I arrived in Tihran at a time that Mirza Aqay-i-Munir[1] ... was also in the city. The *Suriy-i-Ashab* had been revealed by the Pen of the Lord of Lords in his honour and was received by him. Since he was aware of my convictions and knew that my heart is turned towards the Ancient Beauty[2] ... he called me and, in private, handed me the Tablet to read. With the perusal of each verse, I felt as if a world of exultation, of certitude and insight was created within me. After reading a few verses with great joy, I asked Mirza Muni whether Siyyid Muhammad had duped Azal, or Azal duped Siyyid Muhammad;

or whether the two of them had joined together in denying and opposing [Baha'u'llah] and had taken a course of obstinacy and hostility [against Him]. On hearing this Mirza Munir was so delighted that he hugged me and said, 'Their



enmity towards the Ancient Beauty is the cause of their unity. They deceive and mislead each other so that they may arise in enmity [against Him]'.<sup>1</sup>

[1 Jinab-i-Munib. (A.T.)]

[2 Baha'u'llah.]

I was enraptured and set aglow by the Suriy-i-Ashab. It affected me so deeply that even now after the lapse of fifty years at an advanced age when torpidity, stiffness and cold have set in by nature, whenever I read this Tablet or remember my feelings on that day, I find myself filled with such joy that I pass into a state of intoxication and bewilderment.<sup>(4)</sup>

(Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah* v 2, p. 72 )

## COMMENTARY ON THE SURAH OF THE SUN

**Bahá'u'lláh**

Qur'an 91, The Surah of the Sun

By the sun and its noonday brightness!

By the moon when it followeth it!

By the day when it revealeth its glory!

By the night when it enshroudeth it!

By the heaven and that which built it!

By the earth and that which spread it forth!

By a soul and Him who fashioned it!

And informed it of its wickedness and its piety;

Blessed now is he who hath kept it pure,

and undone is he who hath corrupted it!

Thamud in their insolence rejected their prophet,

When the greatest wretch among them rushed up:

Said the Apostle of God to them, "The Camel of God! Let her drink."

But they treated him as an impostor and hamstrung her.

So their Lord destroyed them for their crime, and visited all alike:

Nor feared He the issue thereof.

[Translation based on Rodwell, but modified by Cole, sometimes with reference to Arberry.]

## In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Praise be to God, Who hath set the dove of eloquence, perched among twigs of the tree of explanation, to weaving her divers melodies. Her lyrics tell of how there is no God but God, Who hath brought new beings into existence, and created the contingent world by means of His Primal Will, whereby He hath caused to exist all that was and yet shall be. May God be glorified, Who hath embellished the heavens of reality with the sun of metaphorical meanings and mystical insight, as inscribed by the Pen of the Most High. Sovereignty belongeth to God, the Omnipotent, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

He hath brought forth the Most Great Ocean, which uniteth in itself the waters flowing from the spring of the letter H, which flow into the Most Ancient Name (Baha), from which the Primal Point was separated off, and whereby the unifying Word hath become manifest and both spiritual truth and religious law were revealed.(2) The upholders of the divine unity broke through its surface and soared up into the heavens of ecstasy and divine presence. The sincere ones thus attained the beatific vision of their Lord, the All- Glorious, the Devoted Friend.

Then peace and blessings be upon the Dawning-Place of the Most Beautiful Names and the Most Exalted Attributes, in every letter of Whose appellation the Divine Names are treasured up, and whereby existence itself, whether visible or invisible, hath been adorned. He was called Muhammad in the realm of names, and Ahmad in the Kingdom of eternity. And peace be upon His House and His

Companions, from this day until that upon which the Tongue of Grandeur shall speak forth. Sovereignty belongs to God, the One, the All-Conquering.

Your letter reached Us, and We have perused it, with all its allusions. We beseech God to aid thee in doing that which He loves, that He might bring thee nigh unto the shores of that sea from which rise up the waves of the Name of thy Lord, the Most High. Every drop thereof saith, "There is no God but God, the Creator of all Names and of the Heavens above."

O questioner, if thou seekest the Sacred Fold and the Sinai of divine proximity, then cleanse thy heart of all else but Him. Remove the sandals of thy suppositions and idle fancies, that thou mightest see with the eye of thine heart the effulgences of God, the Lord of the Throne and of the Earth. For this is the day of unveiling and witnessing. Separation hath passed away, and union hath arrived. This is from the bounty of thy Lord, the Cherished, the Beloved. Leave posing questions and seeking answers to the people of this earth, and ascend by the wings of abnegation into those skies wherein thou shalt draw nigh to the clemency of thy Lord, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

Say: O people, the Primal Point hath been revealed, the Universal Word hath been brought to fruition, and the kingdom of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting, hath been made manifest. Say: O people, ye disport yourselves in a puddle, oblivious to the sweet sea that billoweth before your faces. What aileth ye, that ye comprehend not? Do ye speak forth with the knowledge ye possess when He hath appeared, Who knew the Point of Knowledge that generated all things, and to which they all returned? From this Point did issue God's own words of wisdom, and sciences that yet remain concealed in the treasuries of the purity of thy Lord,

the Exalted, the Almighty. Leave allusions to those trapped in them, and set out toward that station wherein ye shall perceive the fragrances of knowledge from His heavens. Thus counseleth ye this Servant, every member, every artery, of whose body testifieth that there is no God save He. He ever subsisted in the zenith of His might and glory, and in the heights of His honor and radiance. The Ones He sent with truth and guidance are the Dawning-places of His revelation to all creation, and the Daysprings of His inspiration among His servants. Through them were the mysteries unveiled, and the divine Laws legislated, and by Them was realized the Cause of God, the All-Powerful, the Mighty, the Unconstrained. No God is there but He, the Omniscient, the All-Knowing.

O questioner, know thou that the people pride themselves upon knowledge, and praise it, whereas this Servant complaineth of it. For without it Baha would not have been imprisoned in Akka with extreme abasement, nor would He have drunk from the cup of woes proffered by His enemies. Eloquence hath banished Me, and the science of rhetoric brought Me low. My mention of conjunction [union with God] hath torn Me limb from limb. My succinctness hath provoked a long-winded affliction, grammar hath deprived Me of all comfort, and syntax hath disordered the pleasures of My heart. My knowledge of God's mysteries hath become a chain about my neck. Given all this, how can I respond to your question concerning the verses revealed from the heavens of majesty and grandeur, especially since the hearts of the discerning have failed to comprehend them, and the minds of the sagacious never soared into the heavens of their meanings?

My pinions have been clipped by the shears of envy and rancor. Should this broken bird find wings, He would fly into the sky of rhetoric and exposition and warble on the twigs of the tree of knowledge a song that would lift up the hearts of the sincere ones into the firmament of longing and attraction. They would then witness the effulgences of their Lord, the Mighty, the Bestower. At this time, however, I am forbidden to uncover what was hidden, release what was repressed or speak openly of what was concealed. We must withhold it rather than revealing it. Were We to speak of what God hath taught Us by His grace, the people would back away from Us and flee, save for those who have imbibed the elixir of life from the chalice of the words of their Lord, the All-Merciful

For, every word sent down from the heavens of revelation upon the prophets and messengers hath been filled with the sacred waters of figurative meaning, explanation, wisdom and exposition. Blessed are they who drink thereof. Since We have perceived in thee the fragrance of love, We shall reply to thee briefly and with concision. Thus mightest thou sever thyself from those who interpret all scripture metaphorically, who have opposed the truth and its mystery and cling instead to their own conjectures and vain imaginings, even though aforetime it was revealed that "Conjecture availeth nothing against the truth"(3) and in another place "Some conjecture is a sin."(4)

Know that the sun mentioned in this blessed surah hath divers meanings. At the level of primacy and unity, and in the city of pre-existent divinity, it is one of God's mysteries, one of his sanctuaries, stored away in His treasure hold, concealed in His knowledge, and sealed by God's own seal. No one is informed thereof save the One, the Unique, the Omniscient. For in this station the sun signifieth the Primal

Will and the illumination of divine oneness that by means of its Self sheddeth its effulgence upon the horizons. Whoever approached it was illumined thereby just as, when the sun riseth, its rays encompass the world, all save those surfaces that remain veiled from it by some obstacle. Consider the land unencumbered by trellis or wall: it is irradiated by the sun, whereas walls cast a shadow that prevents the earth from receiving this effulgence. In the same way, behold the sun of reality. It sheddeth the light of meanings and explanation upon beings. Whoso turneth toward it is rendered luminous by its rays, and such a one's heart gloweth with its light. Whoso turneth away will never have any portion therein, for the veil of self and passion hath intervened, and such a one remaineth far from the emanations of the sun of reality that flashed forth from the horizons of the heaven of heavens.

Then, in another station, it refereth to the prophets and pure ones of God, for they are the suns of His names and attributes amid his creation. Were it not for them, no one would have been illumined by the mystical knowledge of God. As you see, every nation on earth hath been enlightened by one of these brightly shining suns. Whoso denieth them remaineth deprived. For instance, those of God's servants who followed the Christ were irradiated by the sun of his knowledge, until the luminary of the horizons dawned over the Hijaz. Those who denied him [Muhammad] among the Christians and other communities were thereby deprived of that sun and its rays. Their very repudiation of him became a wall that locked out the light emanating from the horizon of the Cause of their Lord, the Omnipotent, the Succorer.

On yet another level of reality, it refereth to the friends and lovers of God, since they are the suns of authority among his creatures. Without them, gloom would have encompassed the entire earth, save those thy Lord willed to escape it. The word hath many other referents. Were ten scribes to come into Our presence and take down Our utterances for a year, or two years, they would in the end confess their inability to keep pace. Were it not for the denials of some ignoramuses, We would have discoursed at greater length, and the revered Pen of God would have gone beyond the mention of limitations.

Know assuredly that just as thou firmly believest that the Word of God, exalted be His glory, endureth for ever, thou must, likewise, believe with undoubting faith that its meaning can never be exhausted.(5) They who are its appointed interpreters, they whose hearts are the repositories of its secrets are, however, the only ones who can comprehend its manifold wisdom. Whoso, while reading the Sacred Scriptures, is tempted to choose therefrom whatever may suit him with which to challenge the authority of the Representative of God among men, is, indeed, as one dead, though to outward seeming he may walk and converse with his neighbors, and share with them their food and drink.

Oh, would that the world could believe Me! Were all the things that lie enshrined within the heart of Baha, and which the Lord, His God, the Lord of all names, hath taught Him, to be unveiled to mankind, every man on earth would be dumbfounded.

How great the multitude of truths which the garment of words can never contain! How vast the number of such verities as no expression can adequately describe, whose significance can never be unfolded, and to which not even the



remotest allusion can be made! How manifold are the truths which must remain unuttered until the appointed time is come! Even as it hath been said: "Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it."

Of these truths some can be disclosed only to the extent of the capacity of the repositories of the light of Our knowledge, and the recipients of Our hidden grace. We beseech God to strengthen thee with His power, and enable thee to recognize Him Who is the Source of all knowledge, that thou mayest detach thyself from all human learning, for "what would it profit any man to strive after learning when he hath already found and recognized Him Who is the object of all knowledge?" Cleave to the Root of knowledge, and to Him Who is the Fountain thereof, that thou mayest find thyself independent of all who claim to be well versed in human learning, and whose claim no clear proof, nor the testimony of any enlightening book, can support.(6)

In another station, it refereth to the most beautiful names of God, insofar as every one of His names constituteth a sun shining above the horizon. Consider the name of God, "the knowing." It is a sun that dawneth above the horizon of the will of thy Lord, the All-Merciful, its rays bathing the bodies of all things in the known universe. Thou wilt find every correct science among those persons of learning who have not given in to their passions and base desires, who have acknowledged the path of the divine decree and held fast to the firm handle of faith. Know that such a one is in the right, and that his knowledge is a ray that emanated from the light of this sun. We have, verily, interpreted the names and elucidated their

mysteries, effulgences, and coruscations, their externality and internality, the secrets of their letters and the wisdom of their composition in an epistle that We penned for one of Our friends who had inquired concerning the names and what they contained.

Know that the Word of God, in the primal reality and the first station, compriseth those meanings that most of the people have failed to perceive. We bear witness that His words are complete, and in every one of these words lie concealed meanings apprehended by no one but Himself, and from Him is knowledge of the Book. No God is there but Him, the Almighty, the Omnipotent, the Bestower.

Those who wrote commentaries on the Qur'an fell into two sorts. The first neglected the literal sense in favor of an esoteric exegesis. The other interpreted literally and ignored its metaphorical dimension. Were We to review all their sayings and statements, thou wouldst be overtaken with fatigue and unable to read what We have written for thee. Therefore, We have declined to mention them here. Blessed are they that cling both to the literal and to the esoteric, for those are His servants that have believed in the universal Word.

Know that whoso clingeth to the outward sense of the words, leaving aside their esoteric significance, is simply ignorant. And whoso concentrateth on the metaphorical sense to the exclusion of the prosaic meaning is heedless. Only the one who intepreteth the verses esoterically while harmonizing this reading with the literal meaning can be said to be a complete scholar. This maxim hath dawned from the horizon of knowledge, so know thou its value and cherish its excellence. Verily, we mention Our object allusively in our words and intimations. Blessed is the one who graspeth Our intent and arriveth at the goal.

Say: O people, the nightingale warbleth upon the twigs, the royal cockerel crieth out with wisdom and utterance, and the peacock spreadeth its feathers in paradise. How long will ye sleep upon the couch of heedlessness and transgression? Rise from the bed of selfish passion and advance toward the dawning-place of the compassion of thy Lord, the Sovereign of Eternity, the Revealer of Names. Beware lest ye oppose Him, who calleth you to God and to His precepts. Fear ye God and be not of the negligent.

Then know that God swore to His prophet by the sun of divinity, sovereignty, will, volition, and names; by the lights of these suns, their effulgences, emanations, and effects, and by the sun shining and apparent above the horizon of this exalted firmament.(7)

"By the moon when it followeth it!"(8) The moon signifieth the station of guardianship, which followeth the sun of prophethood, that is, it appeareth afterward, to vindicate the cause of the prophet among God's servants. Were We to elaborate on the stations of the moon, thou wouldst be presented with a hefty tome indeed.

"By the day when it revealeth its glory!" The intent of the word "day" on the level of primal reality is every Day whereon a prophet or messenger of God appeared, to establish His mention among His servants and to implement His laws among His creatures. Thereon, the Manifestation of His Cause emanateth forth upon phenomenal beings. On that Day, the lights of the sun are manifest, and He is the One who causeth their effulgence in the sense that in Him and by Him the sun of prophethood shineth and sheddeth its light.

"By the night when it enshroudeth it!" By the night is meant the veil of oneness behind which was hidden the Point of Reality. After this Point descended from its highest station, it settled into the realm of oneness, the plane of unity. From it the soft form of the letter alif became manifest, and beneath the veil of oneness there appeared the alif in motion, which is its upright form. It covereth the veil itself, and concealeth the Point of Reality that constituted the actuality of the sun of prophethood.(9)

"By Heaven and that which built it!" Heaven possesseth, for the people of truth, divers referents: the heaven of meanings, the heaven of mystical insight, the heaven of the religions, the heaven of learning, the heaven of wisdom, the heaven of grandeur, the heaven of exaltation, the heaven of glory. The phrase "that which built it" signifieth the One Who created all the heavens just mentioned, and all that thou seest in the phenomenal world.

"By the earth and Him who spread it forth!" By the earth is intended the hearts. They are, indeed, vaster than the earth and heaven, for the heart is the most great throne upon which descendeth the effulgence of thy Lord, Creator of the nations and Reviver of mouldering bones. This is an earth in which God hath sown the seeds of His knowledge and love, that the sprouts of learning and certitude might shoot forth. Say, O people: Today is the day of sowing. Plant in your hearts with the hands of certitude that which hath been bestowed upon you by your Lord, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. "And Him who spread it forth" means the One who unfolded it with the hand of His might and the power of His Cause.

"By a soul and Him who fashioned it!" The soul or self hath numerous stations and subsists upon divers planes. Among them is the self of the kingdom, the self of sovereignty, the self of Godhead, the self of divinity, the self of holiness, the self of serenity, the self of contentment, the self of satisfaction, the self of inspiration, the blameworthy self, and the self that is at the command of evil. The soul intended in this verse is the one that God hath rendered capable of all works, including acceptance and opposition, error and guidance, belief and unbelief. "And Him who fashioned it" means the One who created it and ordered it.

"And informed it of its wickedness and its piety." This verse signifieth that God informed and instructed the soul concerning its wickedness, that is, the deeds that benefit it not and that take it far from its sovereign Creator. "Its piety" referreth to the inspiration that he giveth the soul concerning that which will sanctify it from what hath been forbidden it. That is, He created it and informed it of the path of guidance and error, truth and falsehood, light and darkness. The He commanded it to forsake what was prohibited to it and to perform that which was enjoined upon it.

"Blessed now is he who hath kept it pure." This verse constituteth an answer to His oath upon the soul. That is, whoso cleanseth the soul from shortcomings and passions, from all that hath been interdicted in the Book, hath attained the goal. Consider those who have purified their souls in these days. By My Life! They, verily, are blessed. They are persons undeterred by the world and all that is therein from setting out on the clear and straight path. Verily, they exemplify this blessed verse, clothing themselves in piety and clinging to the hem of the loving-kindness of their Lord in these days, wherein most have stumbled. We bear witness to

whatever God hath attested, and confess the truth of that which He hath revealed. Verily, He is the Truth, and after the truth there is naught but falsehood.

"And undone is he who hath corrupted it!" That is, whoso causeth the soul to become lost hath gone astray, and hath neglected to forbid it that which was prohibited or to enjoin upon it that which it was commanded to perform.

"The Thamud tribe in their impiety rejected their prophet." Thamud, according to what is recorded in the books, was a community to whom God sent the Prophet Salih, but they rejected him after he enjoined them to good and forbade them from evil. They did not follow the commands and precepts of God. Finally, they hamstrung Salih camel.

"So their Lord destroyed them for their crime." That is, God visited His wrath upon them and made of them an object lesson to all the peoples on earth. In reality, all those who oppose the truth belong to the tribe of Thamud, whatever their actual genealogy. They shall be tormented and destroyed, just as were their predecessors. Verily, God is Almighty and Omnipotent. Praise be to God, Lord of all the worlds.

We have forborne to mention what the commentators have said in interpreting this blessed chapter, for such commentaries are freely available among the people and whoso desireth may consult them. They have interpreted the sun as the outward sun, and likewise the moon, and so forth throughout the surah. They trod down the path of fundamentalism and satisfied themselves with what they possessed. We have, on the other hand, interpreted it in a way not mentioned in such books. We beseech God to render every letter of what was mentioned a chalice brimming with meanings and knowledge, and to give thee to drink therefrom what will enable thee to detach thyself from all that runneth contrary to

His good-pleasure. May it bring thee nigh unto the station He hath preordained for His pure ones, for He is, verily, the Forgiving, the Merciful. Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.

Praise be to thee, O Lord, My God! I beseech thee by Thy name, whereby all things glorify Thee, to open the eyes of thy creatures, that they may see the evidences of Thy splendid unity, and the effulgences of the sun of thy loving-kindness. O Lord, leave them not to themselves, for they are thy servants and creatures. Attract them by the exalted Word unto the Dayspring of Thy most beautiful names and the treasury of Thy highest attributes. Thou art, verily, able to do whatsoever Thou desirest. No God is there but thee, the Almighty, the All-Wise.

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## NOTES

1. I am grateful to Franklin Lewis of the University of Chicago for his meticulous comments on the earlier draft of this translation. I am grateful to Stephen Lambden for publishing the earlier draft of this provisional translation, the circulation of which in Baha'i Studies Bulletin made it possible for Mr. Lewis to comment on and improve it.

2. This passage is abstruse, but it appears to refer to the two-stage Neoplatonic and mystical doctrine of the appearance of the world. First there is the level of the

unknowable God, subsisting in and by Himself. This level is variously referred to as that of God's essential "identity" (huwiyyah) or, in the Tablet of All Food, as hahut (probably formed on the Syriac pattern of words such as nasut or humanity from the "h" of huwiyyah). Huwiyyah or identity derives from the third-person masculine pronoun in Arabic, huwa or he. Huwa ("He," a typical Sufi way of referring to God), huwiyyah or (divine) identity, and hahut or the level of unknowable divinity, all begin with the Arabic letter "ha" or the soft H. That the "waters" of this letter H (unknowable divinity) run into the Most Great Ocean would appear to refer to the process whereby the Universal Intellect is emanated from the primal One. The Universal Intellect is coded here as the Most Ancient name, or Baha, an Arabic word meaning "glory" that is made up of the letter H (referring to huwiyyah or the unknowable divinity), the letter B, and the letter alif. Alif, a straight line, is often used by Muslim mystical thinkers to symbolize the Universal Intellect. The Arabic letter B in turn is made up of a horizontal line curved up at each end (and therefore replicating the alif), with a point underneath it. The letter B is therefore a symbol of the further emanation of the world from the Universal Intellect, since it is made up of a basic shape that is lent meaning only by being differentiated. Unlike the divine, which is essentially One, the world, like the Arabic letter B, is essentially dual in character. By analogy, the "Primal Point" is the manifestation of God in this world that gives differentiation to human society. The word Baha therefore encodes the entire Neoplatonic process of emanation, containing the H of the primal huwiyyah or divine identity, the alif of the Universal Intellect, the B of the emanated cosmos, and the Primal Point or manifestation in the world of the Universal Intellect, which gives it meaning or rationality (Arabic `aql, Gr. nous). For hahut in the Tablet of All Food, see "Lawh Kull at-Ta'am" in



Ishraq-Khavari, *Ma'idih-i Asmani*, IV, pp. 260-70 and Stephen Lambden, "A Tablet of Mirza Husayn `Ali Baha'u'llah of the Early Iraq Period: The Tablet of All Food," *Baha'i Studies Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 1 (June 1984):4-67. The transformation of the alif into the B (symbolizing the emanation of the superlunary spheres from the Universal Intellect) is made explicit by the Shi`ite mystic Rajab al- Bursi, *Mashariq Anwar al-Yaqin fi Asrar Amir al-Mu'minin* (Beirut: n.p., 1979), pp. 20-21. On this figure see B.Todd Lawson, "The Dawning of the Lights of Certainty in the Divine Secrets Connected with the Commander of the Faithful by Rajab Bursi (d. 1411)," in Leonard Lewisohn, ed., *The Legacy of Medieval Persian Sufism* (London: Khaniqahi Nimatullahi Publications, 1992), pp. 261-276. The procession from H to alif to B is not necessarily always stated in so straightforward a manner. Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i appears to see the broken alif as an intermediate stage between the upright alif and the supine ba'. The intermediate level of Universal Spirit has, in turn, the shape of the lam, the Arabic "L." Ahmad al-Ahsa'i/Abu'l-Hasan al-Jilani, 1 Safar 1224/18 March 1809, in Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i, *Jawami` al-kalim*, 2 vols. (Tabriz: Muhammad Taqi Nakhjavani, 1273-1276), I, i, 11:143-144.

3. Qur'an 53:28 (53:29, *Flugel*).

4. Qur'an 49:12.

5. This and the following three paragraphs were translated by Shoghi Effendi Rabbani in *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah* (Wilmette, Il.: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 2nd edn 1976), LXXXIX.

6. Here ends the section translated by Shoghi Effendi.

7. In Surah 91 of the Qur'an, entitled "The Sun," verse 1: "By the sun and its morning brightness!"

8. Qur'an, 91:2. Subsequent verses quoted are all from the same surah, and are quoted in order, so further identification of them would seem pedantic.

9. Again, this passage refers to the letter mysticism of Muslim Neoplatonism. The upright alif, equivalent to the English long A when not associated with the hamzah glottal stop, often symbolizes the Universal Intellect. Alif also has a "soft" or "broken" form, with the shape of the Arabic ya' or Y but without any pointing. This "soft" form of the alif was often seen by mystics to symbolize an intermediate stage of emanation, in the transformation from alif to ba' (the Arabic B consists of a horizontal, slightly curved line, with one point beneath it). The sequence upright alif-broken alif-B thus symbolizes the emanation of Universal Spirit and Universal Nature from Universal Intellect. For further details, see note 10 above.

"Commentary on the Surah of the Sun"

Introduction and Provisional Translation

by Juan R.I. Cole

Among those who discouraged a literalist approach to scripture interpretation was Baha'u'llah Himself. I am posting my provisional translation of Baha'u'llah's "Commentary on the Surah of the Sun" along with a brief introduction, in an effort to open up the discussion. The translation is only provisional; an earlier version of

it was kindly published by the preeminent Baha'i scholar Stephen Lambden in his Baha'i Studies Bulletin, under the auspices of the NSA of the UK.

\* Qur'an commentary proved an important literary genre in Shaykhism, Babism, and the early Baha'i Faith, the three religious traditions that formed the matrix for the emergence of the modern Baha'i community. One perspicacious observer has already drawn attention to the paradox implicit in Babi scripture consisting in part of commentary on previous scripture. Although such commentary played a considerably less important role in Baha'u'llah's writings, some Qur'an commentary (Tafsir) does occur in them. Here I would like to bring attention to a central text for this issue, Baha'u'llah's commentary on Surah 91 of the Qur'an, "The Sun" (ash-Shams). Obviously, where Baha'u'llah himself says something about how one should go about interpreting scripture, the Baha'i commentator must take it extremely seriously. Yet this Arabic Tablet, written during the `Akka period, has not to my knowledge been discussed in Baha'i literature. Muhyi'd-Din Sabri, the Kurdish-Egyptian intellectual who undertook an important compilation of Baha'u'llah's Tablets and published them in Cairo in 1920, thought the commentary so important that he placed it first in the book. In this work, Baha'u'llah sets out some general guidelines for commenting on scripture, and I offer a translation of it in Appendix II below, with some brief comments here.

\* Before turning to the hermeneutical and exegetical principles elaborated by Baha'u'llah in his brief commentary on the Surah of the Sun, written at the request of one of the Ottoman ulama, some of this tablet's general features should be mentioned. First, the reader will be struck by the eloquence of Baha'u'llah's Arabic. Unlike his Baghdad and Edirne works, this piece completely conforms to the

conventions of standard nineteenth-century Arabic, showing neither the Persian grammatical influences we find elsewhere nor the Dadaist, Babi disdain for conventional grammar apparent in some earlier works. Some of its passages display a fine literary flair, such as Baha'u'llah's satirical description of how the sciences of rhetoric and grammar cultivated in Muslim polite society had caused him so much grief.

\* My main interest in this tablet, however, derives from the manner in which Baha'u'llah expresses himself on how he thinks scripture commentary should be carried out. He shows himself altogether opposed to literalism and what we might now call fundamentalism. "Know thou," Baha'u'llah writes in this Tablet, "that whoso clingeth to the outward sense of the words, leaving aside their esoteric significance, is simply ignorant." One has only to examine classical Qur'an commentaries such as that of al-Baydawi, to see such an exoteric approach at work. For al-Baydawi, the sun is the sun is the sun. On the other hand, Baha'u'llah has equally little patience with those mystics or sectarians who wholly neglect the plain, common-sense meaning of scripture in favor of wild, unanchored flights of speculation. "Only the one," he concludes, "who interpreteth the verses esoterically while harmonizing this reading with their literal meaning can be said to be a complete scholar." The Muslim civilization had developed an elaborate apparatus for understanding the literal or outward (*az-zahir*) meaning of a verse of scripture. It included the study of Arabic grammar, lexicology, and rhetoric so that the commentator could be sure he understood the structural place of the various elements in the verse. That is, the scholar had to take into account syntax and morphology, as well as seeking the meaning of obscure words in parallel usages in pre-Islamic poetry. The commentator also attempted to put the chapters of the

Qur'an in chronological order and studied their context in the biographies of the Prophet and in a literature known as "occasions of revelation" (asbab an- nuzul). Baha'u'llah clearly requires that commentators attain such linguistic and historical competency, all of which is required for an understanding of the verse's outward meaning.

\* The outward sense of the verse must not be disregarded in Baha'u'llah's view. In his Most Holy Book, he castigated those who performed an esoteric exegesis (ta'wil) on revealed verses, accusing them of corrupting the word of God. An entire disregard for the literal, commonsense meaning of scripture would open the door, after all, for antinomianism. Baha'u'llah, weary of the endless parade of Babi manifestations of God, at one point in the Most Holy Book declares himself the last prophet who will arise for at least 1,000 years. Yet Babis were nothing if not clever in matters of numerology, and he felt it necessary specifically to forbid believers to interpret this verse in anything but a literal manner, excluding esoteric exegesis or ta'wil. He feared that too subjective an approach to hermeneutics could harm his religion, especially if applied to matters of law and authority.

\* On the other hand, an exegesis concerned wholly with details of grammar and items of lexicology could only deaden the soul. In his commentary on the Surah of the Sun, Baha'u'llah goes beyond such dry exercises in pedantry, advising exegesis to set up a tension between the outward and the manifold subjective meanings of scriptural verses, and let them play off one another. Here, it seems to me, the cultural tradition in which Baha'u'llah stood, of Persian mysticism and gnosticism, resonates rather nicely with aspects of contemporary postmodernism. Baha'u'llah completely rejected the primacy of common-sense or positivist approaches to

meaning. A proposition, in his view, had many potential meanings, tens of them, not just a single literal one. Some might prefer to think of this stance as the positing of "polyvalence," or many levels of meaning, in scripture. Others may see it in postmodern terms as semantic ambiguity or instability. In either case, the multiple meanings inscribed in statements and texts derive from both the diversity of human perceptions and from the multiple nature of reality itself. Reality is not exhausted by what can be experienced by sense-perception, as a positivist would maintain. Rather, reality consists of a series of graded "planes" or "stations" (rutbah, maqam), which run the spectrum between pure Being and pure nothingness. At the pole of pure Being is the plane of absolute unity, which is the domain of God's preexistent essence. Below this domain is the plane of God's Word or Command, the domain of the Logos. Then come various lesser stations or planes of the created, contingent world. Some of these planes have to do with human psychology and the attainment of certain mystical states, and they are often metaphorically called by Baha'u'llah "cities" or "valleys," in Persian mystical style. Thus, we have the city or plane of rid, wherein the believer radiantly acquiesces in whatever God wills for him or her. All this is well-known, of course. But the point I want to make here is that Baha'u'llah envisions these various planes or stations of reality, whether they be metaphysical or psychological, as sites of discourse. A person speaks from some plane and understands the discourse of others within the subjective context of that particular plane or station which he or she inhabits at that moment. A verse of scripture, in short, will carry a different meaning to different believers, depending on what plane they inhabit, or even depending upon what plane they are meditating on when considering the verse.

\* Any verse of scripture, then, carries an obvious literal sense, along with a myriad of metaphorical or subjective significations which will differ from believer to believer, and from station to station. A proper exegesis would take account of these several semantic dimensions. Thus, when the Qur'an represents God as taking an oath by the sun and "by the moon when it followeth it!" one may say on the prosaic plane that the Qur'an is appealing to the grandeur of nature in order to exalt its Creator. But according to Baha'u'llah, such terms as sun and moon also carry a great many subjective or metaphorical meanings for the believer who meditates upon them. In the station of absolute divine unity, the sun refers to the emanations of the Self or the Primal Will upon creation, a reference to Neoplatonic conceptions of metaphysics and theology wherein a demiurge emanates from God, from whom in turn emanates the contingent world. In other stations, on other planes, the sun can refer to prophets, or to imams and saints. The potential numbers of referents for the word sun are infinite, depending upon the station in which the word is considered. Unlike the case in postmodernism, these contending significations appear to war with one another only if one neglects to take account their various semantic levels, which exist in a hierarchical arrangement. Disputes among believers about the metaphorical sense of a particular passage might arise if the two believers were speaking from, or in the context of, different metaphysical or psychological planes.

\* This polyvalence or semantic ambiguity is what makes it impossible for any believer to promulgate an authoritative interpretation of scripture. Any individual's interpretation would be bounded by his or her stage of spiritual development, and

readers dwelling on other planes would interpret in a wholly different manner the proof-texts of which the exegete made use.

The ability of `Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi to interpret scripture authoritatively for the community appears primarily to have concerned the legal or doctrinal implications of the verses' outward meanings; neither suggested that he had exhausted the verses' esoteric meanings. Even this central teaching authority is now absent in the Baha'i Faith, leaving even greater scope for a decentralization of theology. With the passing of the guardianship, the new leadership of the Baha'i Faith, the Universal House of Justice (elected in 1963), has the prerogative only of legislating on matters not covered by scripture. The authority to interpret scripture was confined solely to the Guardian, and the Universal House of Justice, Shoghi Effendi wrote, would never "infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain" of interpretation.

\* The multiple meanings inscribed in texts, then, requires that Baha'is tolerate a wide variety of theologies within their faith, recognizing the subjective element in exegesis. I do not myself find this prospect at all problematic. All world-religions have in fact been very diverse, but their ecclesiastical representatives have often attempted to deny that diversity and to play upon the community's anxieties about ambiguity in order to gain more power by persecuting those they branded heretics. Islam, for instance, encompasses persons in West Africa who have essentially the same mindset and basic beliefs as their neighbors who follow indigenous African religions, as well as encompassing Indian Muslim villagers who, in their illiterate ecumenism, often call upon Hindu deities for help. Admittedly, modern literacy, printing, and mass media are making inroads against this kind of localism and



popular syncretism. But for most of history, the world-religions have been little more than umbrellas under which all sorts of folk and local practices were pursued. The Qur'an clearly meant something different to the Gambian Muslims than it did to those in South India. A fundamentalist might argue that these mostly illiterate believers misunderstood their own religion. But that would require the absurd conclusion that the vast majority of Muslims have been daily misunderstanding Islam for 1400 years. The alternative explanation, that a world-religion necessarily involves the subsuming under a few broad symbols of millions of localistic subjectivities, is hateful to fundamentalists because it challenges their conviction that there is only one, literalist way to read scripture

\* In matters of theology, Baha'is have the magnificent opportunity to let a thousand flowers bloom. Many of the otherwise admirable saintly figures in human history, from St. Augustine to Sir Thomas More, have been guilty of having heretics burned to death. This hypocrisy was forced upon them by the vain belief that it was possible and necessary to achieve an absolute creedal consensus within their religious community. Baha'u'llah himself made this sort of ugly Inquisition wholly unnecessary by recognizing the ambiguity and semantic instability of texts, even revealed ones. His theory of exegesis deserves a more rigorous investigation than I can offer here. I think the idea of plane-specific semantic universes offers a fascinating area for the interplay of Baha'i ideas with those of modern philosophers of language such as Wittgenstein, Eco, and Derrida. But the most important and lasting contribution of Baha'u'llah's exegetical principles may be the creation, at last, of a self-consciously diverse world religion, which achieves unity, not by Inquisition, but by tolerance.

# THE GARDEN OF JUSTICE

**Bahá'u'lláh**

Translation by Juan Cole

In the Name of God, the Just, the Wise

This is a Tablet, wherein God hath sent forth His Name, the Just, and hath breathed the spirit of equity into the temples of all created things. Thereby might all preserve pure justice and judge themselves and others, nor transgress against it to the extent of a blemish on a date pit.

O this Name! We have rendered Thee one of the suns of Our most beautiful Names between the heavens and the earth. Shed Thine illumination upon all things created by Thy powerful and wondrous lights, that perhaps the people might gather under Thy penumbra and cast the darkness behind them, and shine with Thy holy and luminous rays. O this Name! We have made Thee the source of Our justice among those of Our servants who have drawn near. By means of Thee, the justice

of every just one is made manifest and our servants who are advancing toward Us have been emblazoned with Thine ornament.

O this Name! Beware lest this station entice Thee away from submission in the presence of God, the Mighty, the Omnipotent. Know that Thy relationship to Us is the same as that of any other, and there is no difference between Thee and aught else created between the heavens and the earth. For when We seated Ourselves upon the throne of justice, We created the contingent creatures by a Word from Us. Thus was Thy Lord wise with regard to all things. And we raise some of the Names up to the realm of eternity as a bestowal of grace from Us, for, verily, We are Powerful, Exalted, Mighty and Wondrous. Say: Verily, no relationship exists between Him and His creation. Praised may He be above all that He hath created and all that of which Our servants make mention. The relationship that binds, which is mentioned in the Tablets, only appeared from His Will, which was sent forth from His Volition, and which in turn was generated by My all-encompassing and irrevocable decree.

We have, however, chosen Thee out especially and exalted Thee in this Tablet, that Thou mightest give thanks to Thy Lord and be among those who have attained detachment. Beware lest the exaltation of Thy name become a barrier between Thee and God, Thy Lord and the Lord of the Worlds. Verily, We exalt whoever We please by Our decree, and verily, We are Powerful to accomplish whatever We purpose and Sovereign in achieving what We wish. See nothing in Thyself save the effulgence of the sun of the commanding Word, which rose from the horizon of the lips of the Will of Thy Lord, the Merciful, the Compassionate. See in Thine essence neither power or might, neither movement nor stillness, save what deriveth

from the decree of God, the King, the All-Powerful, the Omnipotent. Move with the breeze of Thy Lord, the Exalted, the Most Glorious, not with the gales that blow from the direction of self and passion. Thus doth the Most High Pen command thee, that Thou mightest act accordingly. Beware lest Thou be like the one whom We adorned with the ornament of the Names in the realm of creation, for when he gazed upon himself and the exaltation of his name, he turned against the very God Who created and nourished him, and plummeted from the highest of stations to the lowest of the low.

Say: The Names are as garments, with which we array whoever We please among Our devoted servants, and which We strip from whoever We desire by Our command, for verily We are the Omnipotent, the Sovereign, the Omniscient. We give our servants now, at the time of Our withdrawal, the same counsel we offered them at the time of bounty. Thus, know the command of thy Lord and be completely assured that nothing can detract from Our Potency, and that the hand of Power shall never be chained up, if Thou art among those who know. Say: The glory of each Name that knoweth its Lord and hath not transgressed against His law increaseth every moment, and at every instant there shineth upon it the sun of the loving-kindness of its Lord, the Forgiving, the Generous; and it ascendeth by the ladder of detachment unto a station that shall never reveal aught but its Creator nor speak save by His leave, nor move save by His Will. Verily, He is the Mighty, the Just, the Knowing, the Wise.

O this Name! Take pride within Thyself, insofar as We have made Thee the dawning-place of Our justice in all the worlds. We shall dispatch from Thee manifestations in the realm, whereby the pavilions of tyranny shall be folded up

and the carpet of justice rolled out between the heavens and the earth. By means of them, God shall efface the traces of despotism from the world and adorn all corners of the earth with their names among the worlds. Because of them, the mouth of visible and invisible being broke into a smile. They are the mirrors of My justice among My servants and the dawning places of My names among My creation. By them, the hands of oppression are cut off, and the right arm of the Cause is strengthened. Thus have We decreed in this preserving and sanctified Tablet.

O that Name! We have rendered Thee an ornament for rulers. Blessed are they if they adorn their temples with Thee, do justice among the people with pure truth and right, and make their decrees in accordance with what God hath ordained in His mighty and pre-existent Book. No ornament was ordained for them better than Thee, and by Thee their sovereignty is made manifest, their mention is exalted, and their names are commemorated in the kingdom of God, the Mighty, the Great. Whoso hath deprived himself of Thee is naked between the heavens and the earth even if attired in all the silk in the world. O concourse of monarchs, array your heads with the crowns of justice, that all regions of the land might be illumined by their light. Thus do We command you, out of Our grace upon you. O concourse of kings, God shall make manifest in the land rulers who shall repose upon cushions of justice and decree for the people that which they decree for themselves. These are the flowers of My entire creation.

O people, clothe your bodies in the robes of justice, for it becometh all souls, if ye be among those who know. So, to, is it with good manners and fairness, and We require both in most of the Tablets, that ye may act accordingly. Verily, He hath only commanded Our soul to perform what is best for it and will benefit it in this

world and the next. He is able, in Himself, to dispense with the actions of all others and with the insight of the learned and the perspicacious. Verily, God hath by this Name in this Tablet shed His effulgence on all things. Blessed are they who are illumined by its rays; and those who have attained it--they are Our servants who have drawn near. Verily, We have, with the hands of might, planted in this garden the trees of justice and watered them with the springs of grace. Each one of them shall bring forth its fruits. Thus hath the matter been irrevocably decreed. We are by Ourselves the Ordainer of decrees.

O manifestations of justice, when the gales of might blow, summon the people of the Bayan and remind them of this Great, this Most Great Announcement. Then ask them, "O people, by what proof have ye believed in 'Al' (the Bab) and yet have rejected the One of Whom He gave glad tidings in all the Tablets. Examine matters critically, O ignorant ones. Fear God, O concourse of the heedless! Do ye assert your faith in My Herald while disbelieving in My own Self, the Mighty, the Wise? Your likeness is as those who believed in John, the Prophet, who proclaimed to the people the kingdom of God. But when the Word (Jesus) became manifest, they rejected and slandered Him. The malediction of God be upon the wrong-doers! John had called the servants each and every day in His loudest voice, and concluded with them the Covenant of the Word of God, prophesying to them that they would attain His presence. In the end, John sacrificed His own life out of love for that glorious and wondrous Soul. But when the veil was rent and the Most Great Word appeared, they opposed Him, and said, "He has transgressed against the commandments of John." Thus have their base selves deceived them, insofar as they were deprived of meeting their Lord, the Mighty, the Powerful.

Among the idolaters was he who said, "The message of the son of Zachariah hath not yet been vindicated in the land, nor hath His sovereignty been established among the servants throughout the countries. Before it is established, no other should arise." Thereby did he display haughtiness toward the Spirit (Jesus) and he joined the opposition to Him.

Another said, "John baptized the people with water, but the one who hath appeared baptizeth only with the spirit and associateth with sinners," just as ye hear similar sayings from the people of the Bayan in these days. They repeat the charges of the former, nay, they say what none hath ever said before. Woe unto those who follow the idolaters.

Say: O people of the Bayan, stand ashamed before the Beauty of your Lord, the All-Merciful, Who hath appeared in the center of the cosmos with evident and perspicuous proof. The One who came to you aforetime named 'Al' (the Bab) gave you the glad tidings that ye would attain My presence, and informed you of My Self. He did not move save out of love for Me, nor exhaled save that He breathed My mention, the Mighty, the Wondrous. He informed you that all illumined ones would be cast into the shade by His glory, and every woman with a suckling Babe would forsake her newborn, and every woman with a burden in her womb shall cast her burden. Thus hath the matter been revealed from the kingdom of the Will of thy Lord, the Exalted, the Omniscient.

And when the Hour came, at a time when ye were heedless thereof, and the beauty of the Beloved dawned forth from the horizon of the Will of your Lord, the Powerful, the Almighty, ye turned away from Him and opposed Him, rejecting His signs and joining partners with His Self. Then ye desired to shed His holy, pure,

potent and unattainable blood. O people, fear God, and do not circumscribe the Cause of God with the limitations of your own selves. Verily, He decreeth, as He pleaseth, His command. He is, verily, the Help in Peril, the Mighty, the Omnipotent. Say: By God, He speaketh in My breast, calleth out in My spirit, and uttereth by My tongue. Verily, He it is Who wakened Me by the breezes of His Cause and inspired Me to speak forth between the heavens and the earth. Say: By God, the Mighty, the Exalted: Thus might I be among you and hear from you what no ear hath ever heard aforetime. But God made Me manifest in truth and I was enjoined to worship none but Him and to remind you of what is best for you in the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. Had this matter been in My hands, I would not have manifested Myself among those idolaters, but He, verily, chooseth and doeth as He pleaseth, and decreeth what He willeth.

O people, look not upon Me through your eyes or the eyes of your leaders, for by God, the Eternal Truth, that shall never profit you in any way, even should ye appeal for help to the first creatures to be created. Rather, look upon My beauty with My eyes, for if ye gaze with the eyes of anyone else, ye will never know Me. Thus hath the matter been revealed in the Tablets of God, the Almighty, the Glorious, the Wise. Say: O people, I do not call out among you by Myself or for Myself. Rather, He calleth out as He willeth to His Self and to His servants. To this beareth witness My wailing and My complaints, and the lament of My heart, if ye be equitable. Can the dove caught up in the gales of the Will of God regain her balance? Nay, by Him Who caused Me to speak forth with the truth! Rather, they move her as they will. He, verily, decreeth that which He desireth. Her motion, and her agitation in herself, bear witness to her truth, if ye but knew. Look, O people, at the change undergone by the reed pipe that falleth into the fingers of the Will of its



Lord, into which the breath of the All-Praised bloweth. Can it be silent in itself? Nay, by your Lord, the Mighty, the Beneficent. Rather, He will cause to appear from it divers melodies, according to His wish, for He is, verily, the Glorious, the Sovereign, the Powerful. Or, can the sun rise above the horizon of the Cause without giving light, or can it deny things its illumination? Nay, by the Self of Baha, every fair-minded and perceptive person will bear witness thereto.

Say: O people, the Most High Pen is moved by the fingers of the power of your Lord, the Exalted, the Most Glorious. This was not from Me, rather from God, your Lord and the Lord of your ancient forebears. And you, O concourse of idolaters! Do ye oppose this Pen, or the One Who wieldeth it by His sovereignty? Say, woe unto you! What ye have done hath bewildered the concourse of the worlds. Then, the eye of justice weepeth for My Self, and the Reality of Justice lamenteth the harm and tribulations that have befallen Me, and crieth out at what hath been perpetrated against Me by those who were created by My Will, who pride themselves in having stood in My presence, and who sought blessings in the very earth trodden by My powerful and unattainable feet.

O manifestation of Justice! Verily, I make My plaint unto Thee concerning those who disbelieved and joined partners with God after they had been promised to My Self in all the Tablets, and in a Tablet that God preserved in the treasure hold of His impregnability, and guarded it from the eyes of all His creatures. Say: O people! Behold, ye have arrived in the Garden and have discerned a rose. Smell it, if ye perceive therefrom the fragrance of perfume. Fear God, reject Him not, nor be of those who knew and then denied, and fell into disbelief. If any person could be

found with a sense of smell, they would perceive in everything that hath appeared from Me the fragrance of God, the Sanctified, the Almighty, the Generous.

O manifestations of this Name, ye were created by My decree and were sent forth by My volition. Beware lest this station deprive you of humility in the presence of your Lord, the Glorious, the Omniscient, on a Day when God cometh in the shadows of the clouds with great dominion; when the spirit of life is breathed into the people of the universe; when the Garden is adorned by My name, the Mighty, the Munificent; when human beings are renewed by the adornment of the All-Merciful; and when all things are arrayed with the robe of the Names by the Creator, the Wondrous. Verily, ye were created for that Day. Fear God, and deprive not yourselves of that sublime grace. O ye who are named after that Name: Let not the names beguile you on that Day. Hasten unto the precincts of grace, even if the clouds of the Cause rain down upon you all the darts of wrath. Beware lest ye restrain yourselves therefrom for less than an instant. On that Day, no one shall possess anything; and on that Day, the decree shall belong to God, the Omnipotent, the All-Wise.

Say: O people, be faithful to the covenant of God, and break not the pact to which ye swore in the world of pre-existence, in the Presence of God, the Mighty, the Glorious, the All-Knowing. Say: Then open your eyes! By God, the Eternal Truth, He hath resurrected all on that Day, at that time. And God hath come in the shadows of the clouds. Blessed be God, the Dispatcher, the Mighty, the Exalted, the Great. Then shall all who are in the heavens be stricken with fear, and all the people of the concourse on High shall lament, save for the one who hath been taken by the hand of the Most Glorious by virtue of His mighty, exalted and most

high Sovereignty, the one who hath had the veils obscuring his sight torn by the fingers of the divine decree, and the one whom God hath delivered from those who were in doubt about attaining the presence of God, the King, the Mighty, the Beauteous.

Say: By God, all the Names have undergone an alteration, the wailing of all things hath gone up, and every soul is agitated, save those resurrected by the breaths of the All-Merciful that have wafted from the precincts of Your Lord, the Compassionate. For it hath wakened them from their slumber and cleansed them of the defilement of the idolaters. O Tongue of Pre-existence, cause the verses to flow, since the ears of the people shall never be able to hear what was revealed from the heaven of Thy creation and the fundament of Thy Will. Therefore, bestow upon them, according to their capacity, the mention of Thy doings. Verily, that is manifest justice.

O people of the earth, know that justice hath planes, stations and meanings beyond reckoning, but we shall sprinkle upon you spray from this ocean so as to purify you from the filth of tyranny and render you among the sincere. Know verily that the essence of justice and the source thereof are both embodied in the ordinances prescribed by Him who is the Manifestation of the Self of God amongst men, if ye be of them that recognize this truth. He doth verily incarnate the highest, the infallible standard of justice unto all creation. Were His law to be such as to strike terror into the hearts of all that are in heaven and on earth, that law is naught but manifest justice. The fears and agitation which the revelation of this law provokes in men's hearts should indeed be likened to the cries of the suckling babe weaned from his mother's milk, if ye be of them that perceive. Were men to

discover the motivating purpose of God's Revelation, they would assuredly cast away their fears, and, with hearts filled with gratitude, rejoice with exceeding gladness.[1] Say: Even though autumn gales denude the trees of their spring ornamentation, they do so only so that other adornments might appear. Thus hath the matter been decreed by the Mighty, the Omnipotent.

[1] This passage beginning "Know verily", was translated by Shoghi Effendi, Gleanings LXXXVIII.

By justice every deserving person is given his due. This occureth as ye witness it in the manifestations of being, not as most of the people have alleged. Then ponder, that ye might know the intent of that which hath been revealed from the wondrous Pen. Say: The justice of the One at whom the pillars of tyranny have been shaken and the stanchions of idolatry have crumbled consists in the affirmation of this Manifestation in this Dawn, wherein the sun of Baha' hath risen above the horizon of eternity with evident dominion. Whoso disbelieveth in Him hath departed out of the citadel of justice, and his name is recorded among the wrongdoers in mighty and guarded Tablets. Whoso accomplisheth all the deeds in the heavens and the earth and doeth justice among the people until the end that hath no end, yet hesitates in this Cause, hath wronged himself and is among the unjust. Await, O people, the days of justice. Verily, they have come in truth! Beware lest ye veil yourselves therefrom, or join the ranks of the heedless.

Say: O people, array your temples with the adornment of justice. Then judge by what God hath decreed in the Tablets and be not among the transgressors. Say: Should anyone take a drink of water at My command, that is better than the worship of all who are on the earth. For God will never accept the deed of anyone

save if it is embellished with the ornament of My permission among the worlds. Observe, O people, what We have ordained in the Tablets, for it hath been revealed from the kingdom of God, the Help in Peril, the Mighty, the Powerful. Whoso averteth his gaze upon perceiving the fragrance of the garment of My name, the All-Merciful, will, verily, see in all things the signs of his Lord, the Just, the Wise. O Pen of the Most High, send forth the servant named Rida after Nabil as one of the manifestations of justice in the realm of creation. Verily, his justice lieth in his belief in God, which is not equaled by the justice of the heavens and the earth. O servant, listen to the shrill sound of the Pen of the Most High. Then gather the people on the shore of the Most Great Ocean, which hath appeared by virtue of this ancient and pre-existent Name. Safeguard the servants of the All-Merciful, lest the countenances of insight be bruised by the blows of the allusions of Satan's manifestations. Thus hath thy Lord, the Glorious, the Beneficent, commanded thee. Observe what thou hast been commanded by the Mighty, the Beauteous. Be as a high wall between the Magog of idolatry and the hosts of the All-Merciful, lest the hordes transgress their bounds. Thus was the matter revealed from the kingdom of the decree of thy Lord, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. Verily, We have made thee a reminder from Us among our servants, and rendered thee a fortress for Our creatures among the worlds, that thou might preserve them from the darts of allusions and remind them of this Announcement, whereat the temples of the Names have quavered, faces are covered with dust, the earth of grandeur hath been cleft, and the fruits have fallen from every towering, unshakable tree.

Blessed art thou, insofar as thou hast shattered the graven image of idle fancy with the power of thy Lord, and thou has cast off from thy temple the cloak of blind obedience, adorning it instead with the robe of divine unity by means of this holy, blessed, exalted and all-encompassing Name. Then know that the concourse of the Bayan rose in opposition to their Lord, the Compassionate, and rejected the One in Whom they believed--after We had counseled them in all the Tablets not to veil themselves by means of anything created between the heavens and the earth. Among them is he who disbelieved in Me, yet reciteth My words, and among them is he who taketh pride in books revealed on My behalf aforetime. Say: Today, were all who are in the heavens and on earth to be loaded down with priceless Books, from which the breaths of my Cause and the fragrance of My love did not waft, they shall never be mentioned in the Presence of God, thy Lord and the Lord of the worlds. Say: Woe unto you, O people! All that which descended from the heaven of the Bayan was revealed for the sake of My mention and in praise of Me, if ye be of them that know. Say: Woe is you, insofar as ye have broken the covenant of God and tossed it behind you, and returned to your abode in the deepest abyss.

O My Name, I am left alone among the concourse of the Bayan, after the Bayan was only revealed for the sake of the mention of My wronged and peerless Self. O people, fear God! By God, the Primal Point never drew a breath save that He mentioned Me, never spoke save to praise Me, nor was the beloved of His heart any other than My radiant and illumined Beauty. Know that the idolaters have attributed wrongdoing to the One from Whom the temples of justice were sent forth, and by Whom the lights of grace dawned. This is what the malefactors have wrought towards Me. This land will undergo an alteration because of their iniquity, and affairs shall be thrown into disarray. Thus doth the All-Knowing tongue of

truth inform you. The tablets of hellfire have been distributed in all the lands, and the manifestation of Satan passeth by you with a book. Therefore, say: O servants of the All Merciful, leave them behind and turn your faces toward the Word of God, the Invincible, the Wondrous. For all that was revealed from all pre-eternity, and all that descendeth from the glorious and exalted Firmament doth not equal a single letter thereof.

O My Name, purify My servants from the breaths of anyone but Me and attract them by the wonder of My melodies and words. Then cause them to soar into the heavens of My nearness and good pleasure. Perhaps they will set out toward the sanctuary of My glory and the house of My grandeur. Thus hath it been revealed in truth, for, verily, this is a revelation from thy Lord, the Exalted, the Knowing. Then forbid them from shedding blood. We have proscribed it in all the Tablets, but they have made the laws of God a laughingstock and left behind the fortress of the Cause, and were among the heedless. But the harm wrought by their deeds redounds upon the root of the tree. The matter was thus, if thou art among those who hear. Those who contend and fight with the people have departed out of the Garden of Justice and are accounted among the wrongdoers in the Tablets of the Mighty, the Preserver. And those who have been martyred in the path of God in these days are among the most exalted of beings. For they mentioned God out loud, insofar as the multitude of enemies did not deter them from making mention of God, their Creator, until they met martyrdom and were among those who attained. When their spirits ascended, they were greeted by the entire Concourse on High, bearing the standards of the Cause. Thus was the matter decreed in truth by the Powerful, the Wise.

Say: O My God and My Lord, Thou art the One Who planted the trees of justice in the garden of Thy Cause and Thy Wisdom. Then safeguard them, O My God, from the tempests of fate and the thunderbolts of calamity, that their branches and twigs might be uplifted in the shadow of Thy grace and the precincts of Thy mercy. Then cause to dwell in their leafy shade, O My God, the sincere one among Thy creatures and the near ones among Thy servants. Thou art, verily, the Forgiving, the Compassionate. We have created the garden of justice by Our power and might and dispatched it unto thee with the fruits of the Glorious, the Wondrous. Then taste of its fruits and rest in the shade of its foliage, shielded from the fire of the idolaters. Thereby hath the bounty bestowed upon thee been completed, that thou mightest be among the thankful.

Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds.

Notes:

This Tablet was written for one Muhammad Rida, but it begins as an address to God's Name, Justice. This Name of God--Justice--is personified, almost recalling for me the Zoroastrian/Iranian-Muslim Angel, Surush, or the ancient conception of Mithra as guardian of the sanctity of contract. Ironically, Baha'u'llah bids Justice itself be just, and humble. He refers to Justice as an ornament for Rulers, necessary to their sovereignty. This is in line with classical Perso-Islamic thinking about justice and kingship. Baha'u'llah also looks onward to the rise of just monarchs and rulers. This Tablet was probably written in winter-spring of 1867, at a time before



Baha'u'llah decisively promulgated the ideal of constitutional monarchy and parliamentary governance, which he does only once he arrives in 'Akka.

He chastises the Babis for not accepting Him, and includes an important passage comparing the Bab to John the Baptist and himself to Jesus. He refers to the Covenant, and grounds it in the Pre-Existent Scene, when God asks His creatures-to-be, "Am I not your Lord," and they reply "Bala"--Yes! This is in Baha'u'llah's view the Primal Covenant. He refers repeatedly to the image of a Garden in which the trees of Justice are planted. The word used for Garden, "ridwan," has connotations also of paradise.

A few laws and principles of the Aqdas are anticipated in this tablet, including the command to be just and fair, to be polite, and the command not to engage in fighting with the people and not to shed blood. In the rough and tumble world of the Iranian bazaar at this time, and given the militancy of many Babis, these commands represented a new ethic.

This Tablet toward the end refers to some Baha'is who were recently martyred. The first Baha'is to be martyred were Mirza Mustafa, Shaykh Ahmad, and Mirza 'Ali Naqi, all of Khurasan, at Tabriz on 8 January 1867. These three believers had been en route to Edirne to see Baha'u'llah, but were arrested by the Iranian authorities in Tabriz. I think it most likely that these are the martyrs referred to by Baha'u'llah in this Tablet, which would then date it to winter-spring, 1867.

**COMMENTARY ON "HE WHO KNOWETH HIS SELF  
KNOWETH HIS LORD"**

**Bahá'u'lláh**

Translation by Shoghi Effendi completed [between brackets] by Juan R.I. Cole

Source: *Majmu'ih-yi Matbu'ih-yi Alvah-i Mubarakih*, ed. Muhyi'd-Din Sabri (Wilmette, Ill.: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1978), pp. 346-361.

He is God, the August, the Beauteous

How wondrous is the unity of the Living, the Ever-Abiding God--a unity which is exalted above all limitations, that transcendeth the comprehension of all created things!(1) He hath, from everlasting, dwelt in His inaccessible habitation of holiness and glory, and will unto everlasting continue to be enthroned upon the heights of His independent sovereignty and grandeur. How lofty hath been His incorruptible Essence, how completely independent of the knowledge of all created

things, and how immensely exalted will it remain above the praise of all the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth!

From the exalted source, and out of the essence of His favor and bounty He hath entrusted every created thing with a sign of His knowledge, so that none of His creatures may be deprived of its share in expressing, each according to its capacity and rank, this knowledge. This sign is the mirror of His beauty in the world of creation. The greater the effort exerted for the refinement of this sublime and noble mirror, the more faithfully will it be made to reflect the glory of the names and attributes of God, and reveal the wonders of His signs and knowledge. Every created thing will be enabled (so great is this reflecting power) to reveal the potentialities of its pre-ordained station, will recognize its capacity and limitations, and will testify to the truth that "He, verily, is God; there is none other God besides Him [and that 'Ali Muhammad (the Bab) is the Manifestation of all the Names, and is the Dawning-Point of all the Attributes, and that all were created by His will and all act according to His command.

There can be no doubt whatever that, in consequence of the efforts which every man may consciously exert and as a result of the exertion of his own spiritual faculties, this mirror can be so cleansed from the dross of earthly defilement and purged from satanic fancies as to be able to draw nigh unto the meads of eternal holiness and attain the courts of everlasting fellowship. In pursuance, however, of the principle that for everything a time hath been fixed, and for every fruit a season hath been ordained, the latent energies of such a bounty can best be released, and the vernal glory of such a gift can only be manifested, in the Days of God. Invested though each day may be with its pre-ordained share of God's wondrous grace, the

Days immediately associated with the Manifestation of God possess a unique distinction and occupy a station which no mind can ever comprehend. Such is the virtue infused into them that if the hearts of all that dwell in the heavens and the earth were, in those days of everlasting delight, to be brought face to face with that Day Star of unfading glory and attuned to His Will, each would find itself exalted above all earthly things, radiant with His light, and sanctified through His grace. All hail to this grace which no blessing, however great, can excel, and all honor to such a loving-kindness the like of which the eye of creation hath not seen! Exalted is He above that which they attribute unto Him or recount about Him!

It is for this reason that, in those days, no man shall ever stand in need of his neighbor.(2) It hath already been abundantly demonstrated that in that divinely-appointed Day the majority of them that have sought and attained His holy court have revealed such knowledge and wisdom, a drop of which none else besides these holy and sanctified souls, however long he may have taught or studied, hath grasped or will ever comprehend. It is by virtue of this power that the beloved of God have, in the days of the Manifestation of the Day Star of Truth, been exalted above, and made independent of, all human learning. Nay, from their hearts and the springs of their innate powers hath gushed out unceasingly the inmost essence of human learning and wisdom.

[O Hadi! God willing, thou hast been guided to the lights of the dawn of eternity and the manifestation of the everlasting morn. For in such wise doth the heart become sanctified from the ephemeral, wicked selves, and thus wilt thou witness that all branches of knowledge and their secrets are inscribed upon it. For He possesseth the comprehensive Book and the complete Word, and the mirrors that

reflect the verse, "Everything we have numbered in a clear register,"(3) did you but know.

Thou hast inquired about detachment. It is well known to thee that by detachment is intended the detachment of the soul from all else but God. That is, it consisteth in soaring up to an eternal station, wherein nothing that can be seen between heaven and earth deterreth the seeker from the Absolute Truth. In other words, he is not veiled from divine love or from busying himself with the mention of God by the love of any other thing or by his immersion therein. For it can clearly be seen that today most of the people have seized upon fleeting baubles and clung to defective goods, and have remained deprived of perpetual bounty and of the fruits of the blessed Tree.

Although a wayfarer upon the path of the Absolute Truth might reach a particular station, without detachment he would not be able to perceive that station or any other plane. This topic, however, shall never be mentioned by any translator, nor shall any pen set it down or any author discourse upon it. This is from the grace of God; He bestoweth it upon whoso He willeth. By detachment is not meant giving away and depleting all one's wealth. Rather, it denotes turning unto God and supplicating Him. This plane can be attained in every precinct and is manifest and visible from every thing. He is detachment, and is the alpha and the omega thereof. Therefore, we beseech God to make us detached from anyone save Him and to grace us with the attainment of His presence. Verily, there is no God but He. Command and creation belong to Him. He maketh beloved whatever he wisheth to whomever He desireth, and verily He is Powerful over all things.

Another question regarded the Return. This matter hath been treated in detail and at length in all the Tablets, in diverse statements and innumerable aphorisms. God willing, thou shalt refer to them, that thou mightest attain an understanding thereof. The genesis of all things is from God and all things shall return unto Him. There is no escape for anyone. All return to the Absolute Truth, but some to His mercy and good pleasure, and others to His wrath and fire. In Persian and Arabic Tablets this matter hath been commented upon in its entirety. Refer to them if ye desire to know. Likewise, the Primal Point, may his grandeur be glorified, wrote in detail concerning this subject in the Persian Bayan. Consult it, for a single letter thereof sufficeth all the people of the earth. Verily, God hath made mention of all things in a perspicuous Book. Consider thine own origin, which was from God, and which shall return unto Him. As ye began, so shall ye return, and shall return to Him.

Thou has asked about the saying, "Whoso knoweth his own self hath known his Lord." It is well known to thee that this statement hath, in every one of the infinite worlds, wondrous meanings according to the exigencies of that world, of which no one else hath or ever will have any knowledge. Were all of this to be discussed as it deserveth, all the pens of the universe and oceans of ink would not suffice. However, a droplet from this most great, endless ocean shall be mentioned, that perhaps seekers might be enabled to reach their destination and wayfarers might attain the original goal. God guideth whoso He desireth to the path of the Mighty, the Powerful, the Omnipotent.]

Consider the rational faculty with which God hath endowed the essence of man. Examine thine own self, and behold how thy motion and stillness, thy will and purpose, thy sight and hearing, thy sense of smell and power of speech, and

whatever else is related to, or transcendeth, thy physical senses or spiritual perceptions, all proceed from, and owe their existence to, this same faculty.(4) So closely are they related unto it, that if in less than the twinkling of an eye its relationship to the human body be severed, each and everyone of these senses will cease immediately to exercise its function, and will be deprived of the power to manifest the evidences of its activity. It is indubitably clear and evident that each of these aforementioned instruments has depended, and will ever continue to depend, for its proper functioning on this rational faculty, which should be regarded as a sign of the revelation of Him Who is the sovereign Lord of all. Through its manifestation, all these names and attributes have been revealed, and by the suspension of its action they are all destroyed and perish.

It would be wholly untrue to maintain that this faculty is the same as the power of vision, inasmuch as the power of vision is derived from it and acteth in dependence upon it. It would, likewise, be idle to contend that this faculty can be identified with the sense of hearing, as the sense of hearing receiveth from the rational faculty the requisite energy for performing its functions.

This same relationship bindeth this faculty with whatsoever hath been the recipient of these names and attributes within the human temple. These diverse names and revealed attributes have been generated through the agency of this sign of God. Immeasurably exalted is this sign, in its essence and reality, above all such names and attributes. Nay, all else besides it will, when compared with its glory, fade into utter nothingness and become a thing forgotten.

Wert thou to ponder in thy heart, from now until the end that hath no end, and with all the concentrated intelligence and understanding which the greatest minds have attained in the past or will attain in the future, this divinely ordained and subtle Reality, this sign of the revelation of the All-Abiding, All-Glorious God, thou wilt fail to comprehend its mystery or to appraise its virtue. Having recognized thy powerlessness to attain to an adequate understanding of that Reality which abideth within thee, thou wilt readily admit the futility of such efforts as may be attempted by thee, or by any of the created things, to fathom the mystery of the Living God, the Day Star of unfading glory, the Ancient of everlasting days. This confession of helplessness which mature contemplation must eventually impel every mind to make is in itself the acme of human understanding [irfan] and marketh the culmination of man's development.

If thou wert to ascend the stages of reliance upon God and detachment by means of the ladders of glory and inaccessibility, and if thou wert to open thy spiritual eye, thou wouldst see this utterance as an abstract truth, free of the limitations of self. And thou wouldst hear the words, "Whoso hath known any thing hath known his Lord" in the ear of thy consciousness through the angelic call of the divine dove of holiness. For in all things is present and visible the sign of the effulgence of the self-subsistent Glory and the rays of the manifestation of the unique Sun. This sign is not and never shall be confined to any one soul. This is the truth, and no doubt lies therein, if you be among those who know. But the primary intent of knowing the self in this station is the knowledge of the Self of God in every era and age. For the pre-existent essence and the ocean of reality is exalted above the knowledge of all else but Him. Therefore, the insight attained by all the mystics actually hath reference to their insight into the Manifestations of His Cause. They are the Self of



God among His servants, His Manifestation in His Creation, His Sign among His creatures. Whoso knoweth them hath known God, whoso hath affirmed them hath affirmed God, whoso hath acknowledged Their truth hath acknowledged the signs of God, the Help in Peril, the Everlasting. Thus do We reveal for you the signs, that you might be guided by the Signs of God.

O Hadi, follow the guidance of God, thy Lord and the Lord of all things. Then gird up thy loins to aid the Cause of God. Do not follow those who took pharaoh's magician, Samiri, as their friend instead of God, who ridicule the verses of God and are of the transgressors. And when the verses of thy Lord are recited to them, they say, "These are veils."

Say: By virtue of what word have you believed in God, your Lord? Produce it, if you speak the truth. Now, matters have reached such a pass that, by Him Who holds my soul in His hands, all who are in the heavens and on earth weep and wail with the eye of mystery at how this Servant is oppressed. We have relied upon God, Our Lord and the Lord of all things. I shall ever view all who are in the world as nothing but a handful of dust, save for those who have entered into the depths of the love and knowledge of God. Thus do we remind thee, that thou mightest be among they who know.

As for thy question concerning the Saying, "The believer is alive in both worlds:" Yes, that is a truth, like the existence of the sun, which shone forth in this atmosphere, which hath appeared in this sky, which subsisteth in this Cloud of the Unseen, if thou art among those who know. Indeed, wert thou to be steadfast in thy love for thy Lord and to attain that station wherein thou shalt never stumble, there would appear from thee that whereby both worlds would be revived.

This is revelation from the Mighty, the All-Knowing. Then thank God for having given thee to drink from this spring, which giveth new life to the spirits of the Near Ones; for having lifted thee up in truth; and for having revealed to thee those Words whereby the proof of God to all the worlds was perfected. By God, if a drop thereof were bestowed on the people of the heavens and the earth, thou wouldst find them all subsisting in the eternity of thy Lord, the Mighty, the Powerful.

It is clear and evident that when the veils that conceal the realities of the manifestations of the Names and Attributes of God, nay of all created things visible or invisible, have been rent asunder, nothing except the Sign of God will remain--a sign which He, Himself hath placed within these realities.(5) This sign will endure as long as is the wish of the Lord thy God, the Lord of the heavens and of the earth. If such be the blessings conferred on all created things, how superior must be the destiny of the true believer, whose existence and life are to be regarded as the originating purpose of all creation. Just as the conception of faith hath existed from the beginning that hath no beginning, and will endure till the end that hath no end, in like manner will the true believer eternally live and endure. His spirit will everlastingly circle round the Will of God. He will last as long as God, Himself, will last. He is revealed through the Revelation of God, and is hidden at His bidding. It is evident that the loftiest mansions in the Realm of Immortality have been ordained as the habitation of them that have truly believed in God and in His signs. Death can never invade that holy seat. Thus have We entrusted thee with the signs of Thy Lord, that thou mayest persevere in thy love for Him, and be of them that comprehend this truth.

Since all these matters have been mentioned extensively and in detail in most of the Tablets, We have adverted to them here only with the utmost brevity. We hope that, God willing, thou shalt attain the farthest horizon of holiness, shalt arrive at the reality of those journeys that are the station of subsistence in God, and shalt have influence, shine and glow like a sun in the world of dominion and sovereignty. Despair not of the clemency of God, for none despaireth of His generosity save those in loss . . .

#### Notes

- 1 . Thus begins Shoghi Effendi's translation, Gleanings CXXIV
2. This verse has possible Uvaysi implications, abolishing the need for a Sufi pir.
3. Qur'an 36:11, 78:29.
4. Shoghi Effendi's translation, again, Gleanings LXXXIII
5. Shoghi Effendi's translation, in Gleanings, LXXIII