

## *THE SEALED WORDS*

### **A Brief Account of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i-Íqán (The Book of Certitude)**

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During the thirty-nine years of His ministry, while He endured the trials and afflictions of four successive exiles, Bahá'u'lláh vouchsafed unto humanity a vast ocean of revelations unraveling many divine mysteries previously hidden to the eyes of man. Preeminent among these all-encompassing revelations is the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, which according to Shoghi Effendi “occupies a position unequalled by any work in the entire range of Bahá'í literature, except the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy Book.”<sup>1</sup> Composed in Baghdad shortly before Bahá'u'lláh's open declaration of His Mission, the *Íqán* has, in the words of its Author, proffered to mankind “the mysteries of the Cause of God, and...the gems of divine wisdom.”<sup>2</sup> Its revelation has also marked the fulfillment of certain prophecies associated with the coming of that Promised One awaited by the world's great religions. In the Old Testament prophet Daniel alludes to it as “the words...closed up and sealed till the time of the end.”<sup>3</sup> The Báb had also stated that “Him Whom God shall make manifest” would complete the unfinished text of the *Persian Bayán*, the most sacred book of the Bábí Dispensation. The revelation of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* is believed to have fulfilled this prophecy.

Bahá'u'lláh revealed *The Book of Certitude* in 1861, within an astonishing forty-eight hour period, in reply to the questions posed to Him by Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad, the eldest maternal uncle of the Báb. For this reason, in the early days of its circulation, the *Íqán* was known among the Bahá'ís as the *Risáliy-i-Khál* (*The Epistle of the Uncle*). Later, however, Bahá'u'lláh named it the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*.

The Báb had three maternal uncles, who in order of their age were: Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad, Hájí Mírzá Siyyid 'Alí and Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Hasan-'Alí. Hájí Mírzá Siyyid 'Alí, entitled by Bahá'u'lláh, as the *Khál-i-A'zam* (the Most Great Uncle), was the one who, after the passing of the Báb's father took on the responsibility of raising Him. In the years as the Báb's guardian, Hájí Mírzá Siyyid 'Alí became aware of his Nephew's extraordinary qualities and remarkable spiritual abilities. Within weeks of the Báb's declaration of His divine Mission he extended his allegiance to Him and rose to dedicate his life to the promotion and protection of the Cause of his noble Kinsman. During the Báb's stay in Shíráz, Hájí Mírzá Siyyid 'Alí served Him with unwavering devotion, and never failed to show his solicitude to his beloved Nephew. It was this same uncle who, when the Báb was detained by the officials of that city, managed to secure His release by pledging his

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<sup>1</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 97.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel 12:9.

words in writing to take the Báb under his own care. He also, during this period, acted as an intermediary between the Báb and the multitude of believers who came to Shíráz to see their Beloved. Four month's before the Báb's martyrdom, Hájí Mírzá Siyyid 'Alí was arrested in Tehran and along with six other courageous Bábís, who also refused to denounce their Faith, was publicly executed.<sup>4</sup>

Although having been aware of their Nephew's prominence, neither Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad, entitled Khál-i-Akbar (the Great Uncle), nor Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Ḥasan-'Alí, entitled Khál-i-Aṣghar (the Junior Uncle), had embraced the religion of the Báb.

Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad had closely associated with the Báb in the years the Latter spent with him and his brother Hájí Mírzá Siyyid 'Alí as a merchant in the port city of Búshihir. He had witnessed the noble character and remarkable qualities of his Nephew, yet with all his admiration and respect for the Báb, had failed to recognize Him as the Promised One whom his religion had sought for over a thousand years!

In the early years of the Báb's ministry, several of His relatives including His noble wife Khadíjih Bagúm, accepted the Cause of their Kinsman and tried to convert the Khál-i-Akbar to the new Faith, but he would not be convinced that Siyyid 'Alí-Muḥammad, his Nephew, was the promised Qá'im. Among the relatives who tried to dispel the doubts of this uncle was Áqá Mírzá Áqá, a nephew of the Báb's wife. After Khadíjih Bagúm and Hájí Mírzá Siyyid 'Alí, he is the third member of the family of the Báb who embraced His Cause. Áqá Mírzá Áqá recognized the station of the Báb through the teachings of Khadíjih Bagúm, his maternal aunt. He later became a devoted apostle of Bahá'u'lláh and was designated by Him a Hand of His Cause and entitled as "Núri'd-Dín" (Light of Faith).

Áqá Mírzá Áqá Núri'd-Dín had had a series of discussions with Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad and it was during one of these discussions that the latter accepted to pursue the matter further. Hájí Mírzá Ḥabíb'u'lláh Afnán, a son of Áqá Mírzá Áqá and later a custodian of the House of the Báb in Shíráz, has recorded his father's recollections of that meeting between himself, a youth of seventeen, and the Khál-i-Akbar:

At the beginning when I broached the subject the uncle expressed total refusal. I went on presenting proofs supporting my argument. We went through several meetings until one day, when I was strenuously following my line, he said with great amazement: 'Mírzá Áqá! Do you mean to say that the son of my sister is the Qá'im of the House of Muḥammad?' I replied: 'Why not?' Then he showed still more amazement and said: 'It is strange, very strange.' I replied: 'There is nothing strange about it!' Then he became very pensive. That made me smile. He asked me: 'Why do you smile?' I answered: 'It will not be polite if I say why.' He said: 'Do not be shy, tell me.' I replied: 'Now that you allow me I will say it. What you said just now is exactly what Abú-Lahab<sup>5</sup> exclaimed: "Is it possible for my nephew to be a Prophet!" Indeed it was possible, and the Nephew of Abú-Lahab was the Messenger of God. Now, would you investigate and find out for yourself? This Sun has arisen from your house, this Light has shone from your abode; you must feel proud. Don't be amazed, don't seek avoidance. God the

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed account of his execution see *The Dawn Breakers*, chapter 21.

<sup>5</sup> An uncle of Muḥammad who rejected and opposed His Mission.

Almighty has the power to have made the Son of your sister the Qá'im of the House of Muḥammad. The hand of God is not tied. As the Qur'án declares: His hand is free! Then he [the uncle of the Báb] said: 'Núr-i-Chashm (light of my eye), you gave me an answer, which is unanswerable! What can I say and what should I do now?' I replied: 'Firstly, it is necessary that you go on pilgrimage to 'Iráq and meet your sister who is there [mother of the Báb]. Second, Íshán [the Blessed Beauty] is in Baghdád. Stop there for a few days. Present your difficulties to Him. Try, endeavour, and put your trust in God. Let us hope you shall attain and reach faith. Man has to strive [a reference to a Qur'anic verse]. Having listened to me, he commented: 'It is good what you say. It touched my heart.'<sup>6</sup>

Accepting Áqá Mírzá Áqá Núri'd-Dín's suggestions, Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad wrote a letter to his younger brother Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Ḥasan-'Alí, who lived in Yazd. In this letter the Khál-i-Akbar informed his brother of his intention to visit the Shí'a shrines of Iraq and their sister, and invited him to accompany him on this journey. Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Ḥasan-'Alí accepted his brother's offer and together they set out for Iraq.

In Baghdad, Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad, having withheld from his brother the real purpose of their journey, informed him of his intention to seek an audience with Bahá'u'lláh. Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Ḥasan-'Alí was apparently infuriated by this and decided to cut his trip short and return to Iran.

Shortly after this episode, Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad attained the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. During this meeting, which took place in early January of 1861<sup>7</sup> at Bahá'u'lláh's residence, Khál-i-Akbar expressed to Bahá'u'lláh his perplexity with the new Revelation in the context of Shí'a tradition. In a Tablet<sup>8</sup> addressed to Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Majíd-i-Shirází, Bahá'u'lláh, in the words of His amanuensis<sup>9</sup>, Mírzá Áqá Ján, describes the circumstance which led to His meeting with the Báb's uncle and the revelation of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*:

One day the late Hájí Siyyid Jávád<sup>10</sup> known as Karbilá'í—glory of God be upon him—attained the presence [of Bahá'u'lláh] and said that the uncle of the Báb Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad and the other uncle [Mírzá Siyyid Ḥasan-'Alí]—glory of God be upon them—had been on pilgrimage to Najaf and Karbilá and having completed their visit are about to return home. The Ancient Beauty inquired from the Hájí whether he had mentioned anything [about the Faith] to them? Hájí replied that he had not. Bahá'u'lláh then told him: "You must at all times be engaged in teaching the Cause of God. Now go and extend our greetings [to the uncles] and invite them to

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<sup>6</sup> H.M.Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the time of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 220-21.

<sup>7</sup> Recent archival research has narrowed the date of Bahá'u'lláh's meeting with the uncle of the Báb to the month of January 1861. See Ahang Rabbani, *The Conversion of the Great-Uncle of the Báb*, World Order magazine, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 19-38.

<sup>8</sup> This Tablet was revealed in 1306 A.H. (7 September 1888-27 August 1889).

<sup>9</sup> "Out of respect, the Bahá'ís, rather than addressing Bahá'u'lláh would write to His amanuensis, Mírzá Áqá Ján, surnamed 'Servant of God' and 'Servant in-Attendance'. The reply would be in the form of a letter from Mírzá Áqá Ján quoting words of Bahá'u'lláh, but would, in fact, be dictated in its entirety by Bahá'u'lláh. Thus all parts of the Tablet, even those which ostensibly are the words of Mírzá Áqá Ján himself, are Sacred Scripture revealed by Bahá'u'lláh." (From a note in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 159)

<sup>10</sup> A learned divine of high standing who became a devoted follower of the Báb soon after His declaration. He later embraced the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh and together with his wife was responsible in helping the mother of the Báb recognize the station of her Son.

Our presence. Be thou their guide to the seat of Glory and Might.” Hájí left and returned the next day with one of the uncles. The Great Uncle had come without his brother. During the meeting with the Desire of the world the ocean of His utterance surged and overflowed with such profusion that no one is able to recount. Finally Bahá’u’lláh said [to the uncle]: “We do not wish to see you deprived of the Blessed Tree—adorned with the fruits of wisdom and utterance—which has stemmed from the midst of your family.” The uncle replied: “My lord for twelve hundred years we have heard that the Qá’im lives in the well-known cities, His children are also there with Him living in utmost glory and power. Anyone who dares to utter a single word concerning the date of His birth is vilified and immediately put to death. Besides, what does one do with the story of the holy regions and where does the reference to the sea and the rug go? We have further heard from the Shí’a ulamá that when the Qá’im appears He will redeem the Shí’a Muslims from their debts and will conquer the whole world. There are also other sayings which I am unable to relate as it would take a long time to express them.” He finally added: “With all the Qá’im’s glory and majesty and the extraordinary accounts [relating to His appearance], some are now saying: ‘your nephew is the Qá’im!’ How can I possibly accept this when in fact everything contrary to what has been said in the past is clearly manifest as the sun? I don’t know what I must do!” Then the Tongue of Grandeur replied with these exalted words: “O Khál! Return thou to thine abode and ponder on the accounts and uncertainties mentioned in the past, specify then whatever that hath become an obstacle for you. Come back with your brother and if God willeth He shall turn your doubts into firm proofs. Verily, He is powerful over all things.” The next day the uncle returned without his brother and one by one stated his doubts. The Answer was revealed. Among the believers it was known as the *Risáliy-i-Khál (Epistle to the Uncle)* but later through the inscrutable wisdom of the All-Wise the name of the uncle was removed from the title and became designated as the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*.<sup>11</sup>

The text of the questions presented to Bahá’u’lláh by Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad has survived in the family papers of the uncle of the Báb and they are in summary form as follows:

1. The Day of Resurrection. Is there to be a corporeal resurrection? The world is replete with injustice. How are the just to be requited and the unjust punished?
2. The twelfth Imám was born at a certain time and lives on. There are traditions, all supporting the belief. How can this be explained?
3. Interpretation of holy texts. This Cause does not seem to conform to beliefs held throughout the years. One cannot ignore the literal meaning of holy texts and scripture. How can this be explained?
4. Certain events, according to the traditions that have come down from the Imáms, must occur at the advent of the Qá’im. Some of these are mentioned. But none of these has happened. How can this be explained?<sup>12</sup>

These questions, as stated in the above Tablet, evoked from the Pen of Bahá’u’lláh a lengthy epistle, which was composed within a two-day period. The original transcribed copy of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, which the *Khál-i-Akbar* received, is in

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in A. H. Ishráq Khávarí, *Qámús-i-Kitáb-i-Íqán*. Vol. 1, pp. 4-6. The English rendering of this excerpt has been made by the writer of this article and hence is provisional and not an authorized Bahá’í translation.

<sup>12</sup> H.M.Balyuzi, *Bahá’u’lláh, The King of Glory*, pp.164-65.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s handwriting, who back then among other things, served his beloved Father as a secretary and who at the time was just sixteen years of age. This copy also bears some marginal notes made by Bahá’u’lláh Himself.

Describing the effect of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* on the uncle of the Báb, Hájí Mírzá Habíbu’lláh Afnán further writes in his memoirs:

Having received and read the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, which contained answers to his questions, and having attained faith and assurance, he [Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad]...returned to Shíráz. Believers came to visit him and received spiritual sustenance from him. He [Áqá Mírzá Áqá] used to say: ‘After attaining his presence he thanked me most profoundly and told me: “Although considering age you are as my own son, but in the realm of the Spirit you are as my father, because if it were not for your insistence I would never have attained the measure of faith which is the utmost desideratum of those who seek nearness to God.” He then prayed for me with his whole heart.’<sup>13</sup>

Indeed the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* made Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad recognize the station of his Nephew and imbued within him an unshakable certitude for the remainder of his life. As to the rest of the family of the Báb, they all gradually embraced the Faith as foretold by the Báb Himself. Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Ḥasan-‘Alí, who had returned to Yazd without meeting Bahá’u’lláh, came to accept the Faith about a year later, through the combined efforts of his brother-in-law, Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad Ibráhím-i-Muballigh, and the erudite Nabíl-i-Akbar.

For many years the original copy of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* remained within the family of Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad, until it was sent to Shoghi Effendi to be preserved in the International Bahá’í Archives in the Holy Land. The account of the recovery and submission of this original manuscript makes up another fascinating chapter in the history of this magnificent book.

In 1948, when Hand of the Cause of God Ṭarázu’lláh Samandarí was in Shíráz, Fátimih Khánum-i-Afnán, a great-granddaughter of Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad, approached Mr. Samandarí and told him that she had a valuable antique book for Shoghi Effendi which she wished to entrust to him. After opening up the book and noticing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s handwriting, Mr. Samandarí realized that he was holding in his hands the original manuscript of the *Íqán*. Overjoyed by having set eyes on such a sacred document and equally grateful that Mrs. Afnán had decide to part with such a precious object so that it would be preserved for posterity, he accepted the *Íqán* and left Shíráz for Tehran. In Tehran, Mr. Samandarí contacted the secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran, Mr. ‘Alí-Akbar Furútan and informed him of the *Íqán* master-copy which had come to light. Mr. Furútan immediately cabled Shoghi Effendi to find out what they should do with the priceless manuscript. The Guardian’s response was that the manuscript should be entrusted to Mr. Valíyu’lláh Varqá, the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu’lláh (and a later Hand of the Cause of God), until an appropriate time when it could be sent to the Bahá’í World Center.

Three years later, Shoghi Effendi asked Mr. Dhikru’lláh Khádím (later a Hand of the Cause of God) to bring the *Íqán* manuscript to the Holy Land. Dr. Ugo

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<sup>13</sup> H.M.Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá’ís in the time of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 221.

Giachery, whom the Guardian later appointed as a Hand of the Cause of God, was serving at the Bahá'í World Center when Mr. Khádím arrived in Haifa. He recalls being present when Shoghi Effendi received the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* codex:

One evening, as I entered the dinning-room, the Guardian was already seated at his place at the table, his face shining with an inner jubilation, which he could neither control nor conceal. At his side, upon the table, stood a small bundle, an object wrapped in a coloured silk handkerchief, typical of the East and of Iran in particular. As soon as we were all seated and attentive, even before dinner was served, he said that a pilgrim had that day arrived from Tíhrán, bringing with him one of the most precious documents to be placed in the archives. He untied the handkerchief and with great reverence lifted out a manuscript in book form, and placing it in a position that every one could see, added that it contained two original Tablets in the handwriting of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. One was the *Íqán* and the other was a Tablet the name of which I do not now remember.... Shoghi Effendi had never before seen the original of the *Íqán* and was deeply astonished to discover that the phrase he had chosen from this book and placed on the title of his translation of Nabil's Narrative, *The Dawn-Breakers*, was an after-reflection of Bahá'u'lláh's written by Himself, on the margin of one page.<sup>14</sup>

Thus after ninety years from its revelation the original copy of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* found its way back to the Center of the Faith and was placed in the International Bahá'í Archives for posterity.

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<sup>14</sup> Ugo Giachery, *Shoghi Effendi-Recollections*, p. 149.