

Bahá'u'lláh's “Long Healing Prayer” (“*Lawḥ-i-Anta'l-Káfi*”) in Light of a Metaphysics of Unity

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Abstract

Designated as having “a special potency and significance,” the Long Healing Prayer or “*Lawḥ-i-Anta'l-Káfi*” calls on 119 names of God in second-person invocations, supplicating spiritual forces for healing, protection, and guidance. While acknowledging those elements of Islamic worship with which this prayer engages, the author explores the originality and deep coherence of the prayer as expressed by its rhyme schemes, frequent alliterations, and structures organized around the number nineteen. Overall, this article aims to shed light on how the prayer functions as an invitation to meditate on God’s names—names which not only give shape to the human capacity to recognize an ultimately unknowable God, but also represent for Bahá’is the underlying significance of spiritual and physical reality in a metaphysics of unity and wholeness.

Résumé

Dotée d’une « puissance et d’une signification particulières », la longue prière de guérison ou « *Lawḥ-i-Anta'l-Káfi* » récite 119 noms de Dieu sous la forme d’invocations à la deuxième personne, suppliant les forces spirituelles de guérir, de protéger

et de guider. Tout en reconnaissant les éléments du culte islamique que cette prière évoque de par sa formulation, l’auteur explore le caractère original et la profonde cohérence de cette prière, qui s’expriment par ses schémas de rimes, ses fréquentes allitérations et ses structures organisées autour du nombre dix-neuf. Dans l’ensemble, cet article met en lumière la façon dont la prière invite le croyant à méditer sur les noms de Dieu – noms qui confèrent à l’homme la capacité de reconnaître Dieu, ultimement inconnaissable dans son essence, et qui constitue aussi pour les bahá’ís une représentation du sens profond de la réalité spirituelle et matérielle dans une métaphysique d’unité et d’intégralité.

Resumen

Designada como dotada de “una especial potencia y significado”, la Oración Larga de Curación o “*Lawḥ-i-Anta'l-Káfi*” invoca en segunda persona a 119 nombres de Dios suplicando fuerzas espirituales para curación, protección y guía. Mientras reconoce aquellos elementos de la adoración islámica con los cuales la oración se relaciona, el autor explora la originalidad y la profunda coherencia de la oración expresadas por sus esquemas de rima, aliteraciones frecuentes, y las estructuras organizadas alrededor del número diecinueve. En general, este artículo tiene el objetivo de esclarecer la manera que la oración funciona como una invitación a meditar acerca de los nombres de Dios-nombres que dan forma no solamente a la capacidad humana para reconocer a un Dios incognocible en última instancia, sino también representan para los Bahais el significado subyacente de la realidad espiritual y física en una metafísica de unidad y plenitud.

For Bahá'ís seeking healing for themselves or others, Bahá'u'lláh's 800-word Tablet (in Arabic) known as Lawḥ-i-Anta'l-Káfi or the Long Healing Prayer is often considered a most potent resource. The leitmotif of this prayer is the invocation of 119 of God's beautiful names in second person addresses, beginning with the verse “*Bika yá* (I call on Thee O) ‘*Alí* (Exalted One), *bika yá Vafí* (O Faithful One), *bika yá Bahí* (O Glorious One).”¹ Each new verse presents a set of three new names. After invoking a rich spectrum of names of God in rhyming (in Arabic-only) and rhythmic (in Arabic and in English) cadence, the prayer asks God to “to protect the bearer of this blessed Tablet, and whoso reciteth it, and whoso cometh upon it, and whoso passeth around the house wherein it is” and concludes with a supplication to God: “heal Thou, then, by it every sick, diseased and poor one, from every tribulation and distress, from every loathsome affliction and sorrow, and guide Thou by it whosoever desireth to enter upon the paths of Thy guidance, and the

ways of Thy forgiveness and grace.”²

I propose that the Long Healing Prayer's invocation of names of God is intended to guide the reciter to the fundamentally meditative act of engaging both mind and heart to recognize (*ir-fān*) the Divine ever more deeply and completely; and therein lies its potency. In the Islamic tradition—in whose milieu this prayer was revealed—specific names of God are understood to have particular healing effects, and the Bahá'í Writings, for their part, assure the believer that real effects are created when one recites the sacred verses in the way of “them that have drawn nigh unto [God]” (*Gleanings* 295). An exploration of the content and structure of this prayer, however, suggests that this promise does not imply a mechanical activation of supernatural forces as if through a spell or charm. I suggest in this paper that the names of God found in this prayer, and their particular arrangement in verses, encourage the believer to meditate on the intimate relationship between the One and the many. The many—represented by the divine names themselves and alluding to the infinite diversity of created phenomena—are in their completeness, continually put in conversation, or dialectic, with the One which is their Source, Fashioner, Artist, and Caregiver. In contemplating the significance of these Divine Names and

1 *Vafí* would be pronounced as *Wafí* by a native Arabic speaker. A Bahá'í system of transliteration strives to follow the example of Shoghi Effendi who transliterated the Arabic *w* phoneme as the *v* phoneme, following a common Persian dialectal pronunciation of Arabic words. The reader can note that wherever there is *v* transliteration throughout this paper, the native Arabic speaker would pronounce this with a *w* in this prayer revealed almost completely in Arabic by Bahá'u'lláh.

2 All passages from the Long Healing Prayer quoted in this article are excerpted from *Bahá'í Prayers, A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, The Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá*.

their relation to the One, the heart of the worshipper is invited to grow in intimacy with the Names; this intimacy, in turn, transforms the self, others, and the world. Each separate thing, each part, becomes whole through the recognition of its profound relationship to the Whole itself. In this paper, I call this vision of reality a "metaphysics of unity."

Designated by Shoghi Effendi—the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith—as having "a special potency and significance" (qtd. in *Bahá'í Prayers* 208), this prayer may be regarded as a "healing prayer," and not only in the sense of an aid to recovery from physical and psychological illness. Rather, just as "health" and "whole" have a shared etymology, this prayer may be understood as a *meditative willing* to facilitate wholeness in every sense of the word.³ This prayer incorporates some central Islamic theological concepts and vocabulary, yet it is a unique and original composition, a significant contribution to the corpus of scripture in world religions that invites the worshippers to transform their orientation to health, illness, and wholeness through a vision of reality in which every part of existence is intimately connected to each other and to the One Reality. In this

article, I will first provide some background about the prayer, before exploring its significance and structure, its Islamic precedents and its literary elements, all of which work together to transform the reader's consciousness by orienting it to a metaphysics of unity and wholeness.

THE TITLE

This prayer has been known as the "Long Healing Prayer" among English-speaking Bahá'ís, and other European languages typically translate its English title for their prayer books (Oración Larga de Curación in Spanish or Das Lange Heilungsgebet in German, for instance). Among Arabic and Persian speakers the closest equivalent name has been Lawḥ-i-Shafá' al-Ṭawíl ("The Long Healing Tablet"), while it is perhaps most commonly referred to as Lawḥ-i-Anta'l-Káfi (literally "Tablet of Thou the Sufficing") and Lawḥ-i-Shifá (Tablet of Healing). Thus, in some Bahá'í circles this work may be referred to as a "prayer" and in others a "tablet."

THE PRAYER'S SIGNIFICANCE

Various published compilations of Bahá'í prayers contain this statement written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi:

These daily obligatory prayers, together with a few other specific ones, such as the Healing Prayer, the Tablet of Aḥmad, have been invested by Bahá'u'lláh with a

3 See *Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary* entries "Health" [ME *helthe*, fr. OE *hælth*, fr. *hāl*] (535) and "Whole" [...fr. OE *hāl*...] (1351). The concepts are similarly linked in Arabic: *shifá* means "to heal," but also to "satisfy" or "make complete," "restore," and, by implication, "make whole."

special potency and significance, and should therefore be accepted as such and be recited by the believers with unquestioning faith and confidence, that through them they may enter into a much closer communion with God, and identify themselves more fully with His laws and precepts. (*Bahá'í Prayers* 208)

Shoghi Effendi indicates, by name or category, five prayers as having “special potency and significance.” Four of these prayers have been unambiguously identified, but which of Bahá'u'lláh's many revealed prayers is “the Healing Prayer” is not quite as certain.

Bahá'u'lláh revealed many prayers that have healing as their theme, including a short one that begins with “*Yá ilahí ismuka shifá'í wa dhikruka diwá'í*” (“Thy name is my healing, O my God, and remembrance of Thee is my remedy”), which is part of Bahá'u'lláh's *Lawḥ-i-Ṭibb* (commonly known as the Tablet to the Physician) on living healthfully.⁴ This beautiful,

pithy healing prayer has long been a favorite of Bahá'ís the world over. Shoghi Effendi included this prayer in *Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh* (282). Shoghi Effendi did not translate the Long Healing Prayer during his lifetime, just as he did not translate many other important works of Bahá'u'lláh such as the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*.

Guidance from the Bahá'í World Centre suggests that it is likely the Long Healing Prayer that Shoghi Effendi referred to as being “invested by Bahá'u'lláh with a special potency and significance.” In response to a query in this regard, the Department of the Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice is reported to have replied: “it is probably the one known as the Long Healing Prayer, but nothing specific about this has been located at this time” (“Healing Prayer”). In this letter, the Secretariat also quotes the assurance within the text of the Long Healing Prayer of its potency to heal and protect. Thus, while we cannot definitively say which healing prayer holds “a special potency and significance,” the Long Healing Prayer does have a very strong claim to such a designation.

Bahá'ís may be inspired further in

4 Just as the opening line of the prayer “Create in me a pure heart, O my God, and renew a tranquil conscience within me . . .” bears a resemblance to Psalm 51:10 (“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” in the King James version of the Bible), the beginning of this short healing prayer bears a similarity to a line in a traditional prayer (*du'a*), attributed to Imam 'Alí ibn Tálíb and recommended by thirteenth-century Shia scholar Sayyid ibn Ṭawús to be

written down and worn as an amulet at all times: *Yá mani as'muha diwá'un wa dhikruha shifá'un* (“O He whose name is a remedy, whose remembrance is a healing”). This line occurs in Hussein A. Rahim's translation (ibn Tálíb 29), and can be found recited online at duas.org/mobile/dua-kumayl.html. This same line is recommended in “Miscellaneous Du-a's for every illness, ache, fever” (*Dua'a* 282).

their usage of this prayer by anecdotes from the early annals of the Bahá'í Faith. Mírzá Ja'far-i-Yazdí, a former Shia religious scholar, upon embracing the Bahá'í Faith strove to serve Bahá'u'lláh and his fellow believers for the rest of his life. 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells this story of Mírzá Ja'far about their time together in the prison of 'Akká:

[W]hen we were in the barracks he fell dangerously ill and was confined to his bed. He suffered many complications, until finally the doctor gave him up and would visit him no more. Then the sick man breathed his last. Mírzá Áqá Ján ran to Bahá'u'lláh, with word of the death. Not only had the patient ceased to breathe, but his body was already going limp. His family were gathered about him, mourning him, shedding bitter tears. The Blessed Beauty said, "Go; chant the prayer of Yá Sháfi—O Thou, the Healer—and Mírzá Ja'far will come alive. Very rapidly, he will be as well as ever." I reached his bedside. His body was cold and all the signs of death were present. Slowly, he began to stir; soon he could move his limbs, and before an hour had passed he lifted his head, sat up, and proceeded to laugh and tell jokes. He lived for a long time after that, occupied as ever with serving the friends. (*Memorials* 157–58)⁵

RECENSIONS AND TRANSLATIONS,
PROVISIONAL AND OFFICIAL

Bahá'í historians have not yet identified the year this prayer was revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. In its April 2020 response to an inquiry from an individual believer, the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice writes: "The identity of the recipient and the date of its revelation remain unknown, and we have no information about its use during the time of Bahá'u'lláh" (qtd. in Pschaida note 2). Some speculate that the prayer was revealed during the "'Akka period" (1868-1892).⁶ Based on the account quoted above it seems to have been in use by the Bahá'ís in 'Akka within the first ten years of that period, the time-frame during which most of the exiles were still living in the barracks of the prison-city.

Two versions of the Arabic Long Healing Prayer have been published by Bahá'í publishers. The differences between them are quite negligible for such a long Tablet (96 percent is the

Şádiq-i-Yazdí, who fell gravely ill from ileus while in Baghdad. Bahá'u'lláh told 'Abdu'l-Bahá to repeat "Thou the Healer!" [*Yá Sháfi*] while touching the distended area. 'Abdu'l-Bahá reports doing so and observing that the apple-sized swelling and coiling of the affected part instantly vanished (*Memorials* 43–44). However, 'Abdu'l-Bahá seems to state that only the words "*Yá Sháfi*" were intoned, rather than the entire Long Healing Prayer.

6 "Lawhu Anta'l-Kafi." *Internet Archive*.

5 Another story is that of Shaykh

same in both versions) but the few dissimilarities can still be jarring for someone who is intimately familiar with only one version.⁷ In response to this author's enquiry, the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre writes that "[t]he most authentic version of the Long Healing Prayer in Arabic that has been identified is in the handwriting of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín, and it is this version that served as the basis of the current authorized English translation" (qtd. in Pschaida note 2). Balyuzi (274–76) and Taherzadeh (*Revelation* vol. 1 25–26) note that Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín was a former doctor of Islamic law at the high rank of *mujtahid* who was known for his excellent calligraphy and for reliably transcribing Bahá'u'lláh's writings. This is the recension that I call the "Huva version" as it begins *Huva* (He is), while what I call the "Bismi version" distinctively begins *Bism-i-llah* (In the name of God). The latter is the Arabic version most commonly found online and in Bahá'í prayer phone apps, as well as in published prayer books such as *Tasbiḥ va Tahlil* and *Ad'iyiyih Ḥaḍrat-i-Maḥbúb*. The Huva version was most recently published in 1988 by the Persian Institute for Bahá'í Studies in Canada, in a book titled *Nafahát-i-Faḍl* ("Fragrances of Divine Favors").⁸

7 For further details on the small differences between these two versions, as well as an attempted complete transliteration of the prayer's spoken Arabic, see Pschaida.

8 I wish to acknowledge Dr. Steven

Apparently, the oldest translation of this Tablet into English was produced in September 1945 in New York City. In one available copy, the introduction on the typed page states that the translation was carried out by "Ali Kuli Khan and his daughter, Marzieh Gail"—both accomplished translators of the Bahá'í Writings. The introduction goes on to state:

BAHÁ'U'LLÁH "invokes God through" 119 different Names and 41 refrains Healing, Guidance, Protection and Happiness to those who recite it; who cometh upon it, who walketh around the house in which it is.

This very important prayer—carries great power—is very cleansing and effective. ("Long Healing Prayer")

Although the claim of "119 Names" in the introduction actually corresponds to the Huva version, this rendering lines up more closely with the Bismi version. However, lines 15-17 are inexplicably not part of this translation (or perhaps have been accidentally omitted by the typist). I have not been able to determine if these translators were aware of the Huva version when they translated the Bismi recension. At the time, Shoghi Effendi explained through his secretary that because this prayer is "one which, when rendered into English, loses much of its rich

Phelps' assistance in identifying publications for each version.

imagery, he does not feel it is suitable at present for inclusion in a prayer book," (qtd. in Braun 10–11). Accordingly, as I mentioned earlier, he never translated this prayer, nor did Bahá'í publishing trusts include the translation by Khan and Gail. However, copies of this provisional translation were informally circulated among Bahá'ís before 1980.

In a letter dated 13 August 1980 to "all National Spiritual Assemblies," the Universal House of Justice—Head of the global Bahá'í community, overseeing quality and accuracy of all official translations of Bahá'í scripture—announced that it had "recently commissioned the translation into English of two of the important works of Bahá'u'lláh, namely the Long Healing Prayer and His Tablet . . . known to many in the West as the 'Fire Tablet.'" A copy of this translation was included in this letter, announcing its completion and approval (*Messages* 455). Soon the prayer books of the Publishing Trust of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States began including this translation, which is now also found on database websites of the Bahá'í Writings and in prayer book apps; it has also become the basis of further translations into other European languages. This translation corresponds to the Arabic of the Huva version. The analysis in this article is based on this version.

STRUCTURE

As is typical of prayers and epistles revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Long

Healing Prayer begins with a praise or affirmation of God's reality or attributes: "He is the Healer, the Sufferer, the Helper, the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful." Tablets, prayers and epistles authored by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá typically begin with the Qur'anic "*Bismilláh*" (as can be observed in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* and *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*) or with *Huva* (as in *The Hidden Words*) or *Huvalláh* ("He is God," pronounced *Hovalláh* in Persian). However, while other Tablets and prayers normally invoke only two or three names of God, the Healing Prayer begins with five. This could be seen as foreshadowing the theme of this work, which would seem to be the names of God themselves.

After the opening, the next forty verses invoke God in the second person *bika yá* ("I call on Thee O . . .") by His "most beautiful names," each verse introducing three new names.⁹ Each verse finishes with the repeated refrain "Thou the Sufficing (*Anta'l-Káfi*), Thou the Healing (*va Anta'sh-Sháfi*), Thou the Abiding (*va Anta'l-Báqi*), O Thou Abiding One (*yá Báqi*)!"

This prayer appears to be organized in structures of nineteen. Thirty-eight of these forty verses have nineteen words each. Each name of God is typically composed of two syllables or—if one pronounces the

9 Sometimes a new name has a shared three-letter root with another (previous) name. However, only the name *Šáni'* occurs twice in identical form (verses 14 and 17, translated first as "Fashioner," then as "Creator").

grammatical-markers—three.¹⁰ Each verse, but for a few exceptions, also consists grammatically of thirty-eight syllables—twice nineteen.¹¹ Likewise, the Long Healing Prayer calls on the names of God 119 times in its forty verses of supplicatory invocations.¹² Ninety-one—nineteen reversed—words with Arabic roots are used in this Tablet.¹³ While these characteristics of the Tablet are not apparent in translation, those who notice or are taught these numerological patterns cannot help but increase their admiration for this Tablet and its elegant structure. The

10 The two exceptions are verse 3 in which the third name *Fard* (Single One) technically has only one syllable—or two when the grammatical marker at the end is pronounced—and verse 27 with its first divine name *Ján* (“Thou my Soul”).

11 It should be noted that in various recitations of this prayer available online, whether featuring a native Arabic or Persian-dialectical pronunciation, only one reciter pronounces the grammatical marker at the end of each of the three names of God. Without these markers, most verses contain only thirty-five syllables when recited aloud. See Pschaida for links to many online recordings of this prayer.

12 This is counting the names that immediately follow “I call on Thee,” not the repeated refrains “Thou the Sufficing . . .”

13 For this count, we assume that the word(s) *Ján* (“Soul”) and *Jánán* (Beloved), found in verse 27 have shared roots. *Jánán* may be considered the Persian plural of the Persian and Arabic word *Ján* (with the Persian suffix *-án*), since both words share a range of meanings such as “dearest, sweetheart, life, spirit” (Steingass 352)

number nineteen itself is significant in the Islamic tradition since the word for “one” (*wáhid*) is equal to the number nineteen in the letter-to-number symbolic system called *abjad* (*w-* has a value of 6, ‘-á-’ of 1, *-h-* of 8, and *-d* of 4) (Schimmel, *Mystery* 224; Saiedi 106–7, 282). The use of nineteen does seem deliberate by the Author who—along with His predecessor the Báb—invests the numbers nine and nineteen with mystical significance as numbers that symbolize oneness, harmony, and unity in diversity.¹⁴ Nine, as the highest single digit number, includes each lower number and so symbolizes completeness, harmony, and unity among the many, a concept frequently applied to religion and to humanity in Bahá'í teachings. Meanwhile, one is a number that symbolizes God as He is the one and only God.¹⁵ The number nineteen takes on the symbolism of both nine and one, including unity in diversity.

14 While the Bahá'í Writings also frequently find symmetry and symbolism in many numbers (1, 5, 9, and 19 being the most celebrated), the Bahá'í Faith does not endorse any system of magic, numerological or otherwise, and the number nine seems to have an essentially symbolic significance relating to completeness, harmony, and unity, according to Shoghi Effendi (qtd. in Hornby 415).

15 For Bahá'ís, it may also be said to be a symbol of the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, the single precious, interconnected ecology of our planet, the single animating inspiration of the world's sundry religions, and the unification of the human family through the common recognition of Bahá'u'lláh.

This unity in diversity may be applied to God and His perfections, to the beautiful diversity of the single human species, and also to the myriad phenomena of God's creation in which each phenomenon manifests attributes of its one Fashioner. In this way, the number nineteen itself symbolizes what I refer to as a "metaphysics of unity."

The three divine names introduced at the start of each verse typically rhyme with each other. For example, verse thirty-two reads "*Bika yá Ḥabīb, bika yá Ṭabīb, bika yá Jadhib*"; all three words end in *-īb*, while the first two names rhyme even more completely with each other through the shared ending *-bīb*. Furthermore, the divine names in each line almost always have the same two-syllable (or three with grammatical markers) cadence. The consistent number of syllables, and the repetition and rhyming, of the divine names enhance the overall poetic, sonic, and meditative qualities of the Healing Prayer, giving it a musical effect. The Bahá'í World Centre notes:

In the original Arabic of the Long Healing Prayer, the Prayer for the Dead, and the Prayer for the Fast beginning, "I beseech Thee, O My God," the refrains are composed of rhyming words which give them a lyrical, musical quality which promotes their evocative power. (qtd. in Hatcher 146)

Much of this same lyrical, musical quality has been maintained in translation through the repeated supplication

"I call on Thee, O . . ." at the beginning of each verse, and the refrain "Thou the Sufficing, Thou the Healing, Thou the Abiding, O Thou Abiding One" to close each verse.

Altogether, seventeen of the forty verses have a rhyming pattern that appears in at least one other verse elsewhere in the Tablet. For example, verses two, four, six, and twenty-seven all have the rhyming ending *-án*. Likewise, verses twenty and twenty-one each, back-to-back, feature the ending *-úm*:

20: *Bika yá Qayúm, bika yá Daymúm, bika yá 'Alúm*

21. *Bika yá 'Azúm, bika yá Qadúm, bika yá Karúm*

However, I was not able to identify a pattern governing when a given rhyming syllable reappears in a later verse in the Tablet.

Besides the internal rhyme in each set of three of divine names, and the occasional reoccurrence of rhyming patterns in different verses, the unity between the verses is reinforced by the repeating refrain "Thou the Sufficing, Thou the Healing, Thou the Abiding, O Thou Abiding One!" that ends each verse: "*Anta 'l-Káfi va Anta 'sh-Sháfi va Anta 'l-Báqí ya Báqí.*" The consistent cadence or meter maintained throughout the invocation of divine names also strengthens the coherence and unity of the entire Tablet.

The Long Healing Prayer concludes with a paragraph of 160 words that begins by praising God with *subhánaka*

yá Alláhuma (Sanctified art Thou), and then presents a series of beautiful images describing God's generosity and grace, before finally supplicating Him by His "most beauteous names . . . most noble and sublime attributes" to protect, heal, and guide whoever comes under the prayer's influence. The prayer ends with a meditative affirmation of eight more names, closing as it opens—in acknowledgement of God's names: "Thou art verily the Powerful, the All-Sufficing, the Healing, the Protector, the Giving, the Compassionate, the All-Generous, the All-Merciful."

THE NAMES OF GOD:
AN ISLAMIC TROPE

The Jewish, Christian, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Sikh, and Bahá'í scriptures each conceive of, relate to, and worship God via His various names, perfections, and attributes. In the Islamic tradition this practice of connecting with God through His names gains official scriptural validation: "Say: Call upon *Alláh*, or call upon *Rahmán*: by whatever name ye call upon Him, (it is well): for to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. Neither speak thy Prayer aloud, nor speak it in a low tone, but seek a middle course between" (Qur'án 17:110). The phrase translated as "Most Beautiful Names" (*al-Asmá' al-Ḥusná*) also appears in Qur'án 7:180, 20:8, and 59:24. Due to the rich nuance of the word *ḥusná*, this phrase is variously rendered as Beautiful, Best, Fairest, Most Excellent, or Most Perfect Names, depending on

the translator.¹⁶ This passage presents the Ultimate Being as approachable by His generic name Alláh (the God) or by the particular name and attribute *Rahmán* (Gracious, Beneficent, Merciful) or by another one of His beautiful names of perfection. The passage quoted above does not specify what these other names of perfection might be, but Surah 59:22–24 does list over twenty of them, such as *Álim* (Knower), *Malik* (Sovereign), *Quddús* (Holy One), *Salám* (Source of Peace), and *Kháliq* (Creator). Ernst notes that the Qur'án itself contains over ninety-nine names of God (81).

Over the centuries, scholars of Islam have compiled lists of these names, based on these and other verses in the Qur'án, statements in the *ḥadīth*, and logical inferences about qualities attributable to a Being of perfection. Although God is believed to have innumerable names, and hundreds of such names have been compiled, focusing on God through lists of ninety-nine names became a prominent practice among Muslims due to influential *ḥadīth*:

Alláh has ninety-nine names, i.e. one-hundred minus one, and whoever knows them will go to Paradise. (al-Bukhari 50:894)

16 For example, compare this verse's translations by Yusuf Ali, Muhsin Khan, Ghali, Muhammad Asad, Wahiduddin Khan, Laleh Bakhtiar, John Rodwell, and many others available at www.islam-awakened.com/quran/17/110/default.htm.

There are ninety-nine names of Alláh; he who commits them to memory would get into Paradise. Verily, Alláh is Odd (He is one, and it is an odd number) and He loves an odd number. (Muslim 48:5)

These same two ḥadīth found in the above Sunni compilations have also been transmitted into the Shia tradition through the very influential Islamic scholar and Imam Ja'far al-Ṣádiq, as the tenth century Shia scholar, Shaykh al-Ṣaduq tells us (209).

One of the most common lists of God's ninety-nine names came through a ḥadīth, from the collection of al-Tirmidhí in a chapter on supplication, said to have been narrated by Abu Hurairah (Book 48, ḥadīth 138). A somewhat distinct listing was collected by ibn Májah—one of six major Sunni ḥadīth collectors—also in a chapter on supplication (Chapter 37, ḥadīth 3861). While believing that the statement in the ḥadīth that God has ninety-nine names was authentic, Abu Ḥámid al-Ghazálí acknowledged skepticism about the reliability of the part of this ḥadīth that actually specifies or lists these names, both because of great differences in the *matn* (content) of different versions of the same ḥadīth and because it rests on the authority of just one companion and has only a single *isnád* or chain (175). While up to fifteen names differ between the various available lists, Islamic theologians have consistently clarified that this is not problematic, as God actually has more than ninety-nine names or

perfections. According to al-Ghazálí, the wisdom of asserting ninety-nine names can be understood by imagining a king who has ninety-nine servants or soldiers whom no enemy can overcome. Even if that king actually has a thousand soldiers, the group of only ninety-nine is sufficiently powerful, just as a group of ninety-nine names of God is sufficiently abundant, awesome, and rich. It is a representation and selection of divine names that “bring together varieties of meanings which tell of [the divine] majesty which another set of meanings would not be able to bring together” (171–72). Similar to the symbolic significance of the number nine in the Bahá'í Faith, ninety-nine is a number of completeness or sufficiency in Islam.

That the Long Healing Prayer of Bahá'u'lláh is in dialogue with the Islamic tradition of calling upon God's names is made explicit by the use of the Qur'anic phrase *al-Asmá' al-Husná* (most beautiful names) itself in the final paragraphs of this Tablet. While names of God are called upon 296 times in the entirety of the prayer, altogether 126 distinct names of God are called upon.¹⁷ In Table 1, we can see the thirty-one names of God from the Long Healing Prayer that correspond to, or at least have the same three-letter roots and shared meaning, some of those ninety-nine names found in traditional Islamic lists.

17 This is when adding the opening verse and the closing paragraph to the 119 names in the body of the prayer.

TABLE 1: 99 NAMES OF GOD IN THE ISLAMIC TRADITION
AND THE LONG HEALING PRAYER THAT ARE THE SAME OR SIMILAR

Al-Ghazali / Tirmidhi / ibn Majah lists	Long Healing Prayer	Al-Ghazali / Tirmidhi / ibn Majah lists	Long Healing Prayer
'Adl (The Just)	'Adl (Just One)	Laţíf (Benevolent)	Laţúf (Most Benevolent One)
Aḥad (The One)	Aḥad (Peerless One)	Máni' (The Withholder)	Máni' (Withholding One)
'Alím (The Omniscient)	'Alím (Omniscient)	Mu'min (The Faithful)	'Imán (my Faith)
'Alí (The Most High)	'Alí (Exalted One)	Náfi' (He who benefits)	Náfi' (Beneficent One)
'Azím (Tremendous)	'Azím (Most Great One)	Núr (Light)	Núr (Light)
'Azíz (The Eminent)	'Azíz (Mightiest One, Powerful)	Qádir (All-Powerful)	Qádir (Almighty)
Alláh (The God)	'Iláhumma, yá Iláhí (O my God)	Qayyúm (Self-Existing)	Qayyúm (All-Compelling)
Báqí (The Everlasting)	Báqí (Abiding One)	Quddús (The Holy)	Quddús (Most Holy)
Da'im (Eternal)	Daymún (Ever-Abiding)	Ra'úf (All-Pitying)	Raú'úf (Compassionate)
Fattáḥ (The Opener)	Fattáḥ (Unfastener)	Ráfi' (Exalter)	Ráfi' (Exalting One)
Ghafúr (All-Forgiving)	Ghafúr (All-Forgiving)	Raḥím (Merciful)	Raḥím (All-Merciful)
Háfiz (All-Preserver)	Háfiz (Protector)	Raḥmán (Gracious)	Raḥman (Clement One)
Ḥakím (Wise)	Ḥakím (Most Wise)	Şamad (The Eternal)	Şamad (Eternal One)
Jalíl (The Majestic)	Jalíl (Most Sublime One)	Vahháb (The Bestower)	Vahháb (Bestowing One)
Jámi' (The Uniter)	Jámi' (Gathering One)	Záhir (The Manifest)	Záhir (Manifest One)
Karím (Generous)	Karím (the All-Generous)		

In Table 2 are fifty-one of eighty-nine names of God found in the Long Healing Prayer that are *not* typically found in the lists from Islamic *ḥadīth*.¹⁸

18 For the sake of brevity, in cases where there are multiple Names with the same Arabic three-letter roots, sometimes only one of these Divine Names is listed in this chart. For example, while the Long Healing Prayer contains both *Subḥán* (Most Praised One) and *Subúḥ* (Most-Lauded), the table only lists *Subúḥ*.

TABLE 2: SOME DIVINE PERFECTIONS IN THE LONG HEALING PRAYER THAT ARE NOT TYPICALLY FOUND IN TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC LISTS OF THE 99 NAMES OF GOD

‘Áshiq (The Best Lover)	Ján (my Soul)	Naṣṣáh (Counselor)
‘Aṭúf (Kind to All)	Káfi (Sufficing)	Nuzúh (Sanctified One)
Bádhil (Generous One)	Káshif (Unfolder)	Qáli‘ (Uprooter)
Bahí (Glorious One)	Láfiz (Lord of Utterance)	Qáni‘ (Satisfier)
Bahháj (Bringer of Delight)	Láḥiz (All-Seeing)	Rúḥ (Spirit)
Báligh (Perfecting One)	Ma‘ádh (Shelter to all)	Sábigh (Bountiful One)
Balláj (Brightener)	Maḥzúz (Lord of Joy)	Ṣáni‘ (Fashioner)
Dayyán (Judge)	Majdhúb (Enraptured One)	Sáqí (Quencher of Thirsts)
Dháwit (Source of all Being)	Maládh (Haven for all)	Sháfi (Healing)
Faḍḍál (Bountiful One)	Malhúz (Desired One)	Subúḥ (Most Laudé)
Fáliq (Lord of the Dawn)	Ma‘múr (Frequented by All)	Sulṭán (Sovereign)
Fard (Single One)	Musta‘án (Helping One)	Ṭabíb (Physician)
Fáriḡh (Unfettered One)	Nábit (Life-Giving One)	Ṭáli‘ (Rising One)
Ghá‘ib (Concealed One)	Naffáth (Quickening One)	Thábit (Constant One)
Ghálí (Most Precious One)	Najjáh (Deliverer)	Vafí (Faithful One)
Ghálí (Triumphant One)	Náshif (Ravager)	Vahháj (Enkindler)
Ghayáth (Succorer of all)	Naṣír (Sustaining One)	Váthiq (the Most Trusted)

From this table and the discussion thus far, we can infer that Bahá'u'lláh was neither seeking to affirm a particular list in the Islamic traditions of God's ninety-nine names nor to present an altogether new one in His composition of the *Lawh-i-Anta'l-Káfi*. Rather, as seems to be typical of Revelation, the Author makes use of vocabulary, literary forms, and concepts that are familiar to His recipients, repurposing and combining these building blocks of the cultural-religious-linguistic milieu in new ways to convey those truths He wishes—or is called upon—to communicate.¹⁹

DHIKR AND PRAYER BEADS

Dhikr—recollecting, remembering, bringing to mind, mentioning, or praising God—is a central Islamic concept and ritual practice through which the Muslim strives to focus on the Ultimate and become more and more aware of His omnipresent, absolute Reality at every moment. *Dhikr* is frequently practiced by repeating the Names of God, and related phrases of praise, as a kind of mantra; this is done both individually and in the communal rituals of Sufi groups. Depending on the Sufi order and the school of practice, one

may recite the names or praises of God silently or out loud, including in song, but it is considered most essential to recollect God in the heart (whether the tongue is used or silent) until one's innermost consciousness is engaged (Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions* 167, 171).

The most prominent practice of repetition of divine names in *dhikr* among Muslims is usually facilitated by a string of thirty-three or ninety-nine prayer beads—called *tasbeḥ* or *subḥa*. This practice is not only found among those formally associated with Sufi orders; many other Muslims carry and regularly use prayer beads.²⁰ Depending on the individual believer—and based on their upbringing, their Islamic mentors, or their personal preference—this practice may consist of mentioning one divine name per bead until all ninety-nine names have been invoked, or of repeating a set of divine names multiple times. Within a Sufi order, the *shaykh*

20 For some Sufis prayer beads are more of a distraction than a helpful tool for *dhikr*, and to some degree so are the divine names themselves, since remembrance of God's names should be constant, not as an end in itself, but as a doorway to Divine experience, knowledge, and communion. On the other hand, for some Muslims a set of prayer beads—having been constantly handled in the context of praising God's names (and perhaps passed down over multiple generations and/or from an individual regarded as saintly)—imbibes sacred power or *baraka* and becomes in itself a kind of talisman.

19 We should note that in a Bahá'í point of view, the building blocks are not simply old pieces rearranged; Bahá'u'lláh states that they are themselves “made new,” and that “[i]nto every word that God doth speak a new spirit is breathed, and the breezes of life are wafted therefrom upon all things” (Additional Tablets).

(spiritual teacher) carefully chooses for the novice or veteran student the exact formula needed to spiritually advance, according to that student's psychological condition, as a physician would mix medicinal ingredients (Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions* 103–4). For example, the student trying to master hope may receive a different *dhikr*-formula than one working on renunciation or on complete trust in God (169–70). Another student might simply be prescribed the repetition of the name "Alláh" day and night so that God would always be in their heart and mind, whether awake or sleeping.²¹

Today, Muslims seeking to advance their sense of mystical connection will frequently look to the world-wide web for *dhikr* formulas, consisting of various phrases of praise, such as *Subhāna Allāh* (Glory is to Alláh), *Al-Hamdu Lillāh* (Praise is due to Alláh), and *Allāhu Akbar* (Alláh is the Great). Many different names of God are featured in these formulas. One website of the Shia Islamic tradition lists 128 names of God, discussing for each one the benefits that can derive from repeating that divine name—from being in the company of angels through reciting *al-Aḥad* (The One), to raising one's status by reciting *al-'Alí* (The

Highest), to improving eye ailments by reciting *Al-Baṣīr* (The All-Seeing) (Zaidi). In fact, about a dozen of the names discussed on this site are claimed to have curative effects—from healing broken relationships (*Wadūd* [Loving] or *Waḥīd* [Singular]), to scorpion bites (*al-Wási'* [Ample-giving]) or snake bites (*al-Aḥad*), to cure-alls (*Salām* [Peace] and *Shāfi* [Healing]). Sunni Islam shares this traditional belief in the curative and protective effects of invoking the names of God in ritual ways (Trimingham 28).²² Ibn 'Aṭa' Alláh, an influential Sufi teacher of the thirteenth century, taught that the names of God, when called upon, are potent cures for illness, but they are only effective as a remedy when they have a logical connection with the desired effect; the cure occurs through a kind of transformation of the consciousness of the person performing *dhikr* (*Sufism* 93–94). This background helps us understand the cultural milieu in which Bahá'u'lláh's Long Healing Prayer was initially received, and we may imagine that someone with such an Islamic background reading this prayer may see in a specific name the power to cure a specific kind of ailment or solve a particular difficulty.

21 My former Arabic teacher from Egypt, who would constantly carry his prayer beads, told me that he focuses on thanking God through two divine names: "I usually say *Yá Allah* (O God) *Yá Karím* (O Generous One) because I feel that God is so generous with me even if I don't do what I must do towards Him."

22 Beyond calling upon God's names in *dhikr* for healing or protection, another common practice for Muslims has been to imbibe potions made from the ink, saffron, or another substance which has been used to write God's names (Ernst 90–91).

DHIKR AND PRAYER BEADS
IN THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

The Bahá'í Faith does not have a prescribed ritual of repeating either ninety-nine names of God or a handful of names of God ninety-nine times. However, Bahá'u'lláh decreed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas that each day “every believer in God, the Lord of Judgement” should perform ablutions, “seat himself and, turning unto God, repeat” the Most Great Name “Alláh-u-Abhá” ninety-five times. “Such was the decree of the Maker of the Heavens when, with majesty and power, He established Himself upon the thrones of His Names” (§18). Believers “repeat” (literally, *yudhakir*—from the same trilateral Arabic root as *dhikr*) *Alláh-u-Abhá*, meaning “God the All-Glorious,” individually and alone. There are relatively few prescriptions for how exactly to perform this daily ritual. The method for counting to ninety-five is left to the choice of the individual Bahá'í; some choose to employ prayer beads, while others count to nineteen using the phalanges and tips of the fingers of one hand, repeating this process for five cycles to reach ninety-five.²³ Each individual may find various ways of focusing their mental energy, images, and thoughts; there is no extensive

survey of strategies in this regard in existing Bahá'í literature. Shoghi Effendi explains in a letter written on his behalf in 1925:

mere mechanical repetition of the syllables is not referred to. The utterance of the word must be accompanied by the turning of the heart to God. When we turn to God with our whole heart and invoke His Name, a spiritual connection is established through which we become a channel of divine influence. (qtd. in Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Memorandum dated 15 September 2003)

In this letter, the Research Department also quotes a statement written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice on 4 January 1991 to an individual Bahá'í, elucidating the purpose and effects of this devotional practice: “As a devoted believer in Bahá'u'lláh, you have the privilege of using the Greatest Name and the revealed prayers to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit, which is your shield and your protection through any difficulties and which will bring reassurance and serenity to your heart.”

Although many divine names of God can be found throughout revealed Bahá'í prayers, it is the recital of the Long Healing Prayer that, after the daily repetition of *Alláh-u-Abhá*, is the most prominent devotional act in which a Bahá'í meditates upon and praises God's names. According to their

23 Both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá owned prayer beads. See, for example Taherzadeh (*Revelation* vol. 4; *Covenant* 200) and Gail (200). Shoghi Effendi clarified that the use of prayer beads is neither required nor prohibited for Bahá'ís (qtd. in Hornby 462).

personal preference, some Bahá'ís say the prayer rarely or only on very special occasions, while others might say the prayer daily—for instance, a physician reciting the prayer each morning before work.

ISLAMIC PREDECESSORS TO THE LONG HEALING PRAYER

Although not specified as a healing prayer per se, a beautiful predecessor in the Islamic tradition to Bahá'u'lláh's Long Healing Prayer is likely the prayer of *Bahá'*, credited to the fifth Shia Imam Muḥammad al-Báqir. This prayer, variously referred to as Du'á' al-Bahá' (Prayer of Glory) or Du'á' al-Saḥar (Dawn Prayer), is about twenty-three verses long, and is repeated by Shia Muslims at night or in pre-dawn during the Ramadan month of fasting. Each verse focuses upon a divine name, or two, by which to beseech God: from *Bahá'* (Splendor/Glory) in verse one, to *Jamál* (Beauty) in verse two, *Jalál* (Glory/Splendor) in verse three, and *Jabarút* (Omnipotence) in the last verse. The first verse, in a stirring translation by Stephen Lambden, supplicates: "O my God! I beseech Thee by Thy Splendor (*Bahá'*) at its most Splendid (*Abhá'*) for all Thy Splendor (*Bahá'*) is truly resplendent (*Bahíy*). I, verily, O my God! beseech Thee by the fullness of Thy Splendor (*Bahá'*)" (al-Báqir). In its mode of short, pithy, supplications of the Divine Names, it may be regarded as a preeminent forebear of Bahá'u'lláh's Long Healing Prayer.

Indeed, a vital importance of the

Du'á' al-Bahá' to the Bahá'í Faith may be found in the Báb's choice of the first nineteen divine names found in this prayer for the names of the nineteen months of the Badí' calendar.²⁴ Bahá'u'lláh clarified some details of the Báb's revealed calendar and made it the official Bahá'í calendar.

Although, as mentioned above, the Du'á' al-Bahá' is not explicitly a healing prayer, healing prayers have a prominent place within the Islamic tradition, for both Sunnis and Shias. A popular Sunni healing prayer from the *ḥadith* reads: "O Alláh, the Lord of the people! Remove (*Athhib*) the trouble (*al-bá'sa*) and heal (*ashfi*), for You are the Healer (*al-Sháfi*). No healing (*shifá'*) is of any avail but Your healing (*shifá'úka*); healing (*shifá'an*) that will leave behind no ailment (*saqaman*)."²⁵ (al-Bukhari, 76:57) While it does not invoke many names of God, this prayer is similar to Du'á' al-Bahá' in that it intensely focuses on various forms of a single trilateral root (*sh-f-ú*). Bahá'u'lláh's Long Healing

24 This calendar consists of nineteen months of nineteen days plus four to five "intercalary" days. Nineteen also is a number of some significance in the Qur'án. For example, there is a group of nineteen angels mentioned in 74:30. The Qur'án is organized into 114 chapters—a multiple of nineteen—and the *bismillah* may be counted as having nineteen letters (if one does not count the dagger-alif between the 'm' and 'n' in *al-rahmán*).

25 Note: There are some variations of the morphologies of individual words of this prayer.

Prayer utilizes a similar literary device through the repeating line at the end of each verse: “Thou the Sufficing, Thou the Healing (*Sháfi*), Thou the Abiding (*Báqí*), O Thou Abiding One (*yá Báqí*).” Both prayers use repetition to continually reaffirm in the reader a vision of God as Healer.

The central theme in many of the Islamic healing prayers is God’s perfections. The following fascinating Shia prayer—traditionally attributed to the Imam ‘Alí—focuses the worshipper on the name of God *Azal* (Eternal) and variations on its three-letter root (*z-ú-l*). It closes with derivations on a three-letter root *r-h-m* in speaking of God’s mercy. It also includes affirmations of two other names of God, and—if recited three times a day—is promised to cure any sickness. It reads:

Alláh is eternal (*Qadímun*), ever-living (*Azaliyun*); He removes (*yuzillu*) suffering (*al-‘alala*); He is self-subsisting (*Qá’imun*), ever-existing (*Azaliyun*) by His eternity (*Azaliyati*), neither perishes nor ceases to exist (*lam yazal wa la yazálu*). By Your mercy (*bi-Rahmatika*), O the most beneficent (*yá Arhama-l-ráhimín*). (“Miscellaneous Du-a’as” 286)

The flow of this prayer can be likened to a creative choreography, in which the repetition of *-zal-* and *-zil-* (of the *z-ú-l* root letters) in a play on words juxtaposes their interacting meanings—ever-continuing and ceasing, infinity and finitude. God is presented as the Life

that gives life and health, the Maker of both abundance and the limits that are required for balance, the Remover of disease, suffering, and illness. The interplay of two divine names starting with Q—*Qadímun* and *Qá’imun*—reinforces a conceptualization of God as the eternal Foundation of life and the universe. At the same time, through focused concentration on forms of words for Mercy (from the root *r-h-m*), delicately introduced with the single-letter preposition *b-* (“by,” “through,” or “with”), the prayer reminds us that the beneficial workings of all these other divine names are by the fundamental attribute of Mercy or Grace.

As is discussed below, the dancing interplay between divine names is found throughout Bahá’u’lláh’s Long Healing Prayer. In each verse, the prayer presents a new set of three divine names, inviting the worshipper to meditate not only on the meaning of each name in the set but also on the relationship of each name with the others. Additionally, the repeated “Thou the Abiding, O Thou Abiding One” (*Anta’l-Báqí yá Báqí*) at the end of each verse calls the seeker of healing to meditate upon the realities of this attribute in particular, just as the various words for “Mercy” do in the above-mentioned Islamic prayer.

THE GREATEST NAME AND CHARISMS

Various Muslims have claimed to know the greatest of the names of God—either one of the ninety-nine or the hundredth—and that knowing this

name gave them charisms, or spiritual, supernatural powers (Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions* 177; *Deciphering* 119). In Abrahamic traditions, knowing God's truest, hidden names has been associated with the ability to work miracles, as evidenced by Jewish and Islamic tales of prophets who were able to achieve the impossible because of the secret names of God, such as those written on Moses' staff or on Joseph's cloak (Fodor 107–8, 110). Within Islamic history, various names have been proposed as the greatest, perhaps most popularly Allah itself. Al-Ghazálí said "Alláh" itself is "the greatest of the names (*Á'zim'l-Asmá'*) . . . because it refers to the essence which unites all the attributes of divinity, so that none of them is left out, whereas each of the remaining names only refers to a single attribute" (Al-Ghazálí 51). *Rahmán* or *Rahím*, which are God's most emphasized names in the Qur'án, and *Váhid* (One, Singular) and *Huva* (He/He is) have also been commonly nominated. Al-Ghazálí cited a *hadíth* in which the supreme name of God is promised to be contained in Qur'án verse 2:163, "Your God is One (*Váhid*); there is no God save He (*Huva*), the Gracious (*Rahmán*), the Merciful (*Rahím*)," and in Qur'an 3:1–2, "'Alif Lám Mím. Alláh! There is no God save He (*Huva*), the Living (*Hayu*), the Eternal Sustainer (*Qayyúm*)" (al-Ghazálí 173).²⁶

26 Note: The translated text inaccurately cites chapter and verse, which I have corrected above. For a discussion of "Alláh" as either just one of the names of God, or the all-encompassing name, see

The Báb discussed an Islamic *hadíth* in which *Alláh*, *Tabáraka* (Blessed), and *Ta'álá* or '*Alí* (Exalted)—and their numerical, symbolic corollaries *Huva* and *Káfi* (Sufficing)—are disclosed as the Most Great Names of God (Saiedi 105–7).²⁷ A fourth name has been kept hidden, yet the Báb (the Gate) hints that it is His own name or that of *Bahá'* (Glory). Interestingly, many of the above-mentioned names posited as the greatest name are found in the Healing Prayer in positions of particular prominence. Thus, Bahá'u'lláh begins the Healing Prayer with *Huva* in the introductory invocation, the very first verse contains both '*Alí* and *Bahí*, *Rahmán* is in the sixth verse and *Rahím* is in the opening and closing, and *Káfi* is in the opening, closing, and the repeating refrain.

From 1848, at the Conference of Badashht, Bahá'u'lláh, whose given name was Mírzá Husayn 'Alí Núrí, then a leading Bábí, began to be known as Bahá or Bahá'u'lláh. At this Conference, each day a new Tablet was revealed and chanted for the attendees, and a new name was bestowed upon each of the eighty-one assembled believers.²⁸ In the ensuing decades, Mírzá

Louis Gardet, "al-Asmá' al-Ḥusná," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edition.

27 Saiedi explains in more depth that *Huva* and *Káfi* are symbolic corollaries of '*Alí* through their numerological value in the abjad system of translation in which the letter-values in '*Alí* [110] have an intimate relation with *Huva* [11] and *Káfi* [111].

28 The historical sources (*Dawn-Breakers* 293; *God Passes By* 31)

Husayn ‘Alí Núrí more and more often used a combination of Bahá with Alláh for His own name, a name He would later affirm as “The Most Great Name” in His writings. As Alláh is the Being believed to have all names and perfections, we might venture that Bahá’—meaning glory, splendor, radiance, and light—can be likened to light that contains the full spectrum of colors and energy waves. Bahá’u’lláh may thus be viewed as the name that includes all divine names.²⁹

The Greatest Name is believed by many within the Islamic tradition to have miraculous power, including that of restoring health, and two of Bahá’u’lláh’s well-known prayers include the statement that God’s “name is my healing” (*Prayers and Meditations* 174, 262). Whether the integration of the name Bahá’ itself into the Long Healing Prayer is intended for meditative, talismanic, or transformative

leave the question of whether it was the Báb or Bahá’u’lláh who was conferring the new names somewhat open. Whoever was the immediate source, the Báb in later letters would confirm these new names (*Dawn-Breakers* 293).

29 This statement and analogy is my personal understanding; I know of no authoritative explanation on what makes *Bahá* God’s greatest name, apart from Bahá’u’lláh decreeing it to be so. However, there have been various investigations by Bahá’í authors into the Greatest Name. See, for example, Abu’l Qasim Faizi’s ““Explanation of the Symbol of the Greatest Name” and Stephen Lambden’s ““The Word Bahá: Quintessence of the Greatest Name.”

purposes is a question that will be discussed further below. For now, we might propose that the many names of God in the Long Healing Prayer be considered as parts of the spectrum of the light of the name Bahá’, which includes them all. Thus, for a Bahá’í, through the contemplation of these names, the Long Healing Prayer acts as a portal to the heaven of the Divine Reality.

POETIC COMBINATIONS OF DIVINE NAMES

Bahá’u’lláh’s Long Healing Prayer integrates elements of supplication, praise, and affirmation, and also invites meditation. First, the one who recites the Tablet expresses their ardent desire for healing and protection. Second, the Tablet has the reader express praise, adoration, or magnification of the glorious Divine Reality in familiar second-person language (*-ka* [Thee], *Anta* [Thou]), facilitating a mystical I-Thou encounter between one’s self and one’s Lord.³⁰ Third, through the *bika* (I call on Thee) preceding each divine name, the Tablet encourages the reader to deepen their sense of the Divine Reality by contemplating the significance of each individual divine name in itself. Lastly, the poetic interplay between the names in each verse prompts the reader to meditate upon the interrelationships

30 This concept is borrowed from Jewish philosopher Martin Buber who, in his celebrated work *I and Thou*, meditates upon the sacrality of a personal and genuine relationship, whether between two humans or between a human and God.

between each set of divine names. In a metaphysics of unity, each divine name is in itself inexhaustible in significance as an expression of the One; at the same time, each divine name is allowed to speak to each of the others in an intimate relationship and all three names are meditated upon as to their interweaving application to the human-ethical-social contexts and the natural world.

A few examples of what meditation within a metaphysics of unity could look like may be helpful to the reader. In the Long Healing Prayer, each divine name is not simply treated as one of many that are all called upon together in a list; instead, each name is presented to be called upon individually. In the Arabic original, *bika yá* (I call on Thee O . . .) precedes each of the initial three names in the verse. In the English translation, while the "I call on Thee" only begins the verse itself, the invocation honoring the dignity of each divine name is preserved with the "O" preceding each name. Thus, instead of reading lightly over each name as merely part of a string of words, the person praying may be moved to pause and contemplate the profundity of this single attribute as a personal name of God, a kind of individual precious pearl or gem on the string. For example, in the third verse, "*Bika yá Aḥad bika yá Ṣamad bika yá Fard,*" having paused to reflect on the pearl of *Aḥad* (Peerless One), one is also moved to pause at *Ṣamad* (Eternal One) as a gem-like, infinitely rich in meaning, name of God in itself. One might reflect on the temporal (always

present before, now, after) or spatial (pervading here, there, everywhere) implications of the One called *Ṣamad*; one might further consider that *Ṣamad* created—and therefore transcends—both time and space. Again, next, one may be moved to pause and meditate upon the inexhaustibly valuable jewel of God's name *Fard* (Single One).

While one can pause to consider the precious meanings of each divine perfection, the resonant rhyming of the three divine names within each verse may prompt the reader to also meditate upon the metaphysical relationship between the names—as in poetry, where concepts, aesthetics, and imagery are conveyed in ways that transcend the capacity of each single word. In the first verse we read: *Bika yá 'Alí, bika yá Vafí, bika yá Bahí, Anta'l-Káfi va Anta'sh-Sháfi va Anta'l-Báqí ya Báqí.* In this verse the Arabic words used for Exalted One, Faithful One, and Glorious One rhyme with each other through the shared ending of -í, and also rhyme with the names of God in the repeating refrain, "Thou the Sufficing, Thou the Healing, Thou the Abiding, O Thou Abiding One."³¹ In this case, the literary, rhyming elements encourage the

31 The only other verse in which all six of the invoked names rhyme with each other is verse 28, which calls upon the three divine names *Sáqí*, *'Alí*, and *Ghálí*: Quencher of Thirsts, Transcendent Lord, Most Precious One. Otherwise, there are two distinct sets of rhymes in each verse; the first three names rhyme with each other and then the repeated refrain rhymes within itself.

worshipper to ask the metaphysical question: What is the intimate connection between God being Exalted and being Faithful, between being Glorious and being Sufficing? One might contemplate the nature of exaltation on the human plane, and consider that being a majestic king or an eagle soaring high in the clouds need not mean a cold detachment from the people and ecology of this planet, but can rather imply being a faithful friend and partner in mutual wellbeing. Likewise, with *‘Alí* (Exalted)—also a Bahá'í title for ‘Ali Muḥammad, the Báb—we are reminded of how He demonstrated genuine hospitality, such as when he received Mullá Ḥusayn-i-Buṣhrú'í on their first meeting. With *Bahí* (Glorious)—also alluding to Bahá'u'lláh—we are reminded of how He was known as “the Father of the Poor” in the 1840s, and of how ‘Abdu'l-Bahá later exemplified a generous way of life among His neighbors in ‘Akká and Haifa. In this way, the rhyme that unites these six divine names invites the reciter to consider the truths constituted through the interrelationships between all six, and thereby paints a rich, organic spectrum of the Divine Personality—one with equally organic implications for the socio-ethical, human realm.

In most succeeding verses, the three new attributes introduced in that verse rhyme with each other, encouraging further reflection on the metaphysical interrelationship between each new set of three divine names. For example, in the second verse that begins “I call on Thee O Sovereign, O Upraiser, O

Judge,” we find in Arabic the rhyming “-án”: *Bika yá Sulṭán, bika yá Raf‘án, bika yá Dayyán*. The rhyme elicits the question: how are Sovereign, Upraiser, and Judge interrelated? Personal meditation could yield any number of answers to the question, and any number of implications for our own lives. For example, one may consider that perhaps God is sovereign not only because of infinite power and possession but because that power is deployed to develop and elevate His creatures in ways that He has judged will be truly helpful. How might we use our own powers, possessions, and discernment to do similarly, on a human level? That the repeated refrain (*Káfi*, *Sháfi*, and *Báqi*) also rhymes within itself may also prompt us to consider the relationship between these three attributes and the three new ones introduced: How can we use our powers to suffice, to heal, and to abide (which we might interpret as mindfully being with and accompanying each other)? Thus, in this interpretive metaphysics of unity and wholeness, we continue to apply reflection on the Divine Personality to the human ethical and social level.

Because each the three new names in each verse typically rhyme with each other, it stands out for the reciter when one of the names does not. Verse seven, “I call on Thee O Beloved One, O Cherished One, O Enraptured One,” reads in Arabic *Bika yá Ma ‘shúq, bika yá Maḥbúb, bika ya Majdhúb*.³² The

32 Each of these names can be translated as a variation on romantic ideals of

consistent vowels (*a, ú*) and the alliterative, shared first syllable of each name (*ma-*) partially veil the lack of a perfect rhyme. Nonetheless, the first divine name still stands out to some degree, which may prompt the reciter of the prayer to prioritize meditating upon the name *Ma 'shúq* in itself and its relationship to the other two divine names in which loving includes cherishing and being enraptured.³³

Another interesting case of a near rhyme is verse 10, which invokes a kind of interplay between God's names Spirit, Light, and Manifest One: *Bika yá Rúh, bika yá Núr, bika yá Zuhúr*. *Núr* and *Zuhúr* rhyme with each other, but not with *Rúh*. As in the above example, this lack of rhyme is mitigated by the shared long-vowel *-ú-*. Distinct from the above, however, here the rhyming aspect is also reinforced by the fact that one may quickly discern that *Rúh* backwards is *Húr*, which does rhyme with the other two. If in the meditative recitation of the prayer, the reciter does take the path of thinking of both *Rúh* and *Húr* then they may be reminded that in the Qur'án, the *Húr* are the entities (usually translated as "black eyed damsels" or "virgins" or "fair ones") to whom the blessed believers

lover and beloved—*ma 'shúq* having to do with ardent, impassioned lover/beloved, *mahbúb* having to do with a cherished sweetheart or darling and *majdhúb* with someone who is completely possessed or enraptured with love or attraction.

33 In verses 8 and 36 the first divine name, likewise, stands out by not truly rhyming with the second and third names.

are "married" in Qur'anic descriptions of the garden of heaven. In the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, these same *Húr* or heavenly "maidens" are spiritualized as progressively revealed theophanies or personifications of God's attributes, truths, or the Holy Spirit itself.³⁴ Conceiving of the divine names as sentient theophanies in and of themselves reinforces our intent to meditate upon each of the divine names, both individually and in relationship to each other, in the Healing Prayer, and also reinforces conceiving the divine names as intimately present within or near our own soul.³⁵ A metaphysics of unity may also open us to consider the intimate relationship of the Bahá'í revelation with other holy books. For example, this set of divine names may also remind us of the act of Divine decree at the beginning of the Book of Genesis: "the wind" (*ruah* in Hebrew, related to *rúh* in Arabic) of the Lord moves across

34 See, for example, "How many the *húris* of inner meaning that are as yet concealed within the chambers of divine wisdom!" (Kitáb-i-Íqán 70) and "I have summoned the Maids (*húríyát*) of Heaven to emerge from behind the veil . . . and have clothed them with these words of mine" (*Gleanings* 327). See also Hatcher, Hemmat, and Hemmat, "Bahá'u'lláh's Symbolic Use of the Veiled *Húríyyih*."

35 By "within and near" is meant the Bahá'í understanding of both the ever-abiding divine Omnipresence with each soul as well as the human capacity to develop spiritual virtues. In this two-fold way, divine attributes may be thought of as "married" to the human soul.

the formless stuff of creation, while the command “Let there be light” (*ówr* in Hebrew, related to *núr* in Arabic) revealed the distinctive shape God was giving creation.³⁶ The contemplation of this striking word, *Rúh*, that does not literally rhyme with the others is further facilitated by the fact that the following verse continues the *-úr* pattern of rhyme with *Ma'múr*, *Mashhúr*, and *Mastúr* (Thou Frequented by all, Thou Known to all, Thou Hidden from all). *Rúh* thus becomes the odd name out, directing the attention of the close reader to its relation to these other five names.

Some verses feature names that are differentiated by only a single phoneme, inviting meditation on the interrelationships between these divine names in particular. In verse 12, for example, only the middle phoneme *-l-* differentiates the second divine name from the first: “*Bika yá Ghá'ib*, *bika yá Ghálib*, *bika yá Wáhib* (I call on Thee O Concealed One, O Triumphant One, O Bestowing One).”³⁷ Thus, the reader of this invocation may think of a triumphant one as not necessarily being conspicuous, flamboyant, and imposing but, rather, “concealed” or quiet and humble, working effectively

and generously in the background—a servant leader. Likewise, as the word *Ghá'ib* shares a root with the important Qur'anic concept of the *Ghayb* (Unseen) that in Islamic metaphysics encompasses such realities as the angels, the afterlife, and God Himself, and additionally—in Bahá'í scripture—the “Celestial Concourse,” one gains confidence that such divine agents will subtly and graciously reinforce and inspire one's efforts to humbly strive to serve and sincerely obey God's teachings (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 12).³⁸

A similar case is verse 35: “*Bika yá Wahháj*, *bika yá Balláj*, *bika yá Bahháj*,” in which the third name differs by only one phoneme from each of the other two (*Wahhaj/Bahhaj* and *Ballaj/Bahhaj*), reinforcing a conception of an intimate relationship between God as Enkindler, God as Brightener, and God as Bringer of Delight. Likewise, in verse 14's “*Bika yá Sáni'*, *bika yá Qáni'*, *bika yá Qáli'*” the first two divine names only differ by the first letter of each (*S-* vs. *Q-*), while the second

36 Genesis 1 also reminds us of the popular Islamic *hadith qudsi*, “I was a Hidden Treasure and loved to be made known, so I created creation to be known”—a creation that discloses the attributes of the Creator.

37 The root verb *ghalaba* contains the overlapping meanings of “subduer” and “conqueror” (Wehr 796).

38 To my knowledge, there is no complete, official list in authoritative Bahá'í sources of who or what is included in the “Celestial Concourse.” However, Bahá'ís will often refer to the Concourse as including heavenly angels, Prophets and Messengers of God, pure souls and saint-like beings who have passed on (including holy individuals and martyrs in the Bahá'í Faith and other religions), and mystical—perhaps symbolic—maidens (*húr*). Bahá'í Scripture repeatedly promises their aid, as can be seen in *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* 280, 334.

and third names only differ by the middle phoneme (i.e. *-n-* vs. *-l-*). The translation given for these three is Fashioner, Satisfier, and Uprooter. The reciter may be led to reflect on God as fashioning the creation in a way that satisfies both Himself and His created beings, including by satisfying the physical, intellectual, and spiritual needs of the human being. While it is probably not satisfying for a plant to be uprooted and destroyed by a storm, scavenger, or farmer, it *can* then become food for new plants or other creatures. Conversely, a plant may also be uprooted to be replanted in a new environment more suitable to continued growth and vitality, and sometimes we human beings find new opportunities for personal growth when placed in new settings. Also, religious teachings confirm some human desires and ask us to limit others; Buddhism, for example, reminds us in its Four Noble Truths that there is a close link between ignoble desires and suffering.³⁹ The reciter may draw strength from considering that their very Fashioner can also be the Uprooter of unworthy desires and cravings.

On three occasions, two of the three

divine names share the same three-letter root, highlighting shades of significance in an underlying basic ideal. Thus, the divine names in verse 24, *Ma 'ádḥ* (Shelter to all) and *Musta 'ádḥ* (All-Preserving One), both from the Arabic root '*ú-dḥ*, drive home and emphasize the sheltering and preserving nature of a refuge—maintaining and protecting the individual and family from material, psychological, and spiritual harm. Verse 25, meanwhile, begins with two words from the root *gh-ú-th*, *Ghayáth* (Thou Succorer of all) and *Mustagháth* (Thou invoked by all). Both are etymologically linked to the noun *Ghiyáth* (help, aid, succor) from the same root, but the nuances of meaning drawn out from their juxtaposition enrich the concept of help: together, they suggest a reality in which God succors all His creatures even before being asked, yet it is still beneficial for the creature to invoke Him, confident that the answer will be whatever succor is best. Verse 27 begins with "*Bika yá Ján, bika yá Jánán, bika yá 'Ímán,*" which is translated into English as "O Thou my Soul, O Thou my Beloved, O Thou my Faith!" The Healing Prayer's play on the shared etymology of *Ján* and *Jánán* implies God being at the same time the very center of one's being and the best love of one's being—deepest subject and dearest object in an intimate dance within an I-Thou relationship. The reciter may also be prompted to such reflections on the relationships between *Ján* and *Jánán* by the fact that Bahá'u'lláh borrows *Jánán* from Persian, while

39 Similarly, in *Paris Talks* 'Abdu'l-Bahá was recorded to have said that suffering has various sources. It is often the natural consequence of our own unwise actions (50–51) or stems from our excessive attachment to the material world so as to encourage us to develop detachment (178); it can, additionally, result from the often random calamities of worldly conditions that teach us to rather dwell and rely upon the "spiritual Kingdom" of "perpetual joy" (110).

-*ján* (or -*jún*) is also commonly used in Persian as a popular suffix added affectionally to given names to say “dear one.”⁴⁰ Each of these verses reinforces a metaphysics of unity in which God—the Sufficing, the Healing, the Abiding One—is intimately *with* His creation.

Verse 4 calls on “*Subhán . . . Qudsán . . . Must’án*,” encouraging meditation upon the connections between being Most Praised, Holy, and Helping. In reflecting upon the interrelationship between these qualities, one may come to consider that neither praiseworthiness nor holiness is at all about being vaingloriously superior to others but is instead about being involved and engaged in helping others. Put differently, helping the wellbeing of oneself and others is a holy and praiseworthy act.

These are only a few examples to illustrate how the rhyming elements encourage the reciter to make metaphysical links between the various names of God and meditate on what they communicate about each other. The prayer, with its various sets of

names in intimate dialogue, each name in itself inexhaustible in significance, in this way functions like a chandelier made of priceless, prism-like gems, each refracting its effulgent light to its fellow jewels, each illuminating new, multi-colored sparks in the others in a potentially infinite inter-illumination.

MYSTICAL ENCOUNTER IN THE CONCLUDING PARAGRAPHS

After beseeching, invoking, and meditating upon God by His many individual perfections in over forty verses, in the final paragraphs the worshipper entreats God in language that is deeply personal and majestic. Here, the prayer paints a picture of drawing near to, meeting, and communing with one’s Lord, the visual counterpart of the feelings of mystical encounter which the preceding forty paragraphs may have already engendered.

Sanctified art Thou, O my God! I beseech Thee by Thy generosity, whereby the portals of Thy bounty and grace were opened wide
[The worshipper has been invited to walk through an internal doorway to her Lord and His gracious favors.]

whereby the Temple of Thy Holiness was established upon the throne of eternity
[The supplicant has entered the doorway to find herself in a magnificent, holy Temple near God’s own throne.]

40 *Jánán*, also colloquially meaning “sweetheart,” is frequently found in Bahá’u’lláh’s Persian writings, such as the Persian Hidden Words nos. 1, 4, 12, 17, and 26. In this Tablet, this is the only direct borrowing from Persian I have identified. The first divine name in this verse *Ján* (life, spirit, soul) does sometimes show up in this connotation in Arabic. We should note that it is not uncommon for Bahá’u’lláh to use some Persian words in His Arabic writings—*jánán* itself or *siráj* (lamp), for instance. Likewise, the Qur’án has various old-Persian borrowings.

and by Thy mercy whereby Thou didst invite all created things unto the table of Thy bounties and bestowals

[The worshipper has been graciously invited to, and sits down at, the festal table inside the Temple and before God's throne.]

and by Thy grace whereby Thou didst respond, in thine own Self with Thy word "Yea!" on behalf of all in heaven and earth

[The supplicant and her Lord are engaged in intimate fellowship, and before she can even articulate her heart's deepest aspiration, without delay she receives an answer from her divine King of "Yes!"]

"at the hour when Thy sovereignty and Thy grandeur stood revealed" [From this table before the Lord's throne, His majesty, kingship, and awe-inspiring splendor is clearly made evident.]

"at the dawn-time when the might of Thy dominion was made manifest."

[The light of perception has dawned in the worshipper's inner eye, which perceives all parts of the world, the sky, the universe, the Unseen, the divine theophanies, and all human hearts as the Lord King's own personal possession.]

Then in the center and heart of the paragraph comes the line, "And again

do I beseech Thee, by these most beautiful names, by these most noble and sublime attributes," in which God's names and attributes are reiterated as the pivot and central thresholds of access to mystical encounter and divine knowledge and raised to an aesthetic of beauty, magnificence, nobility, and sublimity. Yet this pivot point of the entire prayer is not the endpoint as the line continues in a rising crescendo that elevates the worshipper (in a kind of ladder of ascent or *mi'ráj*) to the Point that cannot be pointed to, immanent and transcendent at the same time: "and by Thy most Exalted Remembrance, and by Thy pure and spotless Beauty, and by Thy hidden Light in the most hidden pavilion, and by Thy Name, cloaked with the garment of affliction every morn and eve." How high is this "most Exalted Remembrance"? How pure and beautiful is His "pure and spotless Beauty"? At what depths is this "hidden Light"? This language, in my reading, challenges us to continually deepen and broaden our understanding of God's Being, shattering the shibboleths of previous ideas with more accurate ones, and then again shattering these new ideas in a never-ending cycle of growth.

MIRACULOUS POWERS
OF THIS TABLET IN LIGHT
OF A METAPHYSICS OF UNITY

The promise in the final paragraphs of the Long Healing Prayer of seemingly miraculous powers to protect and heal might be understood in light of other

concepts in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation that break down and challenge present-day dichotomies and tensions between the traditional and the modern. Many intellectuals, especially in Europe and North America, consider medicine the exclusive province of science, while religion—if it has any function—is exclusively for the social, “spiritual,” and possibly ethical and existential domains of life (Ernst 90; Arbab 185–86). The Bahá'í Faith, rejecting atomization, isolation, and separation, encourages a worldview that recognizes the deep interweaving, interdependence, interpenetration, and wholeness of the physical, psychological, and spiritual within an individual, in our social relationships, and in our connection with the earth itself. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá explains, “in the same way that the parts, members, and organs of the human body are interconnected, and that they mutually assist, reinforce, and influence each other, so too are the parts and members of this endless universe connected with, and spiritually and materially influenced by, one another” (*Some Answered Questions* 285). Likewise, Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf, states:

We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding

change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions. (qtd. in *Compilation* 84)

Just as each part of our body is deeply connected with every other part, we are inextricably connected with our environment, and all parts of the universe are materially and spiritually influenced by one another. For example, we know that the material, environmental conditions of air quality or potable water purity can have a great impact on human health. Likewise, as an example of the importance of social context to human physical health, a substantial body of research has identified positive outcomes for in-patients when family and friends are able to visit them in the hospital (Trogen). Although further empirical studies are needed, scientific research over the last thirty years has confirmed the strong positive impact of mind-body therapies (including relaxation, meditation, imagery, hypnosis, and biofeedback) on bodily function and symptoms pertaining to diverse conditions (Mahmoudi and Teckie 58; Bialkowska, Juranek, and Wojtkiewicz). Shoghi Effendi encouraged Bahá'ís seeking healing to both pray and work with competent physicians (qtd. in *Compilation* 476).⁴¹ In His “Tablet to the Physician” (*Lawh-i-Ṭibb*), Bahá'u'lláh not only recommends well-proven or “established

41 “The prayers which were revealed to ask for healing apply both to physical and spiritual healing. Recite them, then, to heal both the soul and the body” (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 161).

means" to heal, but also prayer, and states that the very presence of the physician filled with God's "Love"—bringing "mercy and hope"—heals the patient (Ziaei 74). Also, Bahá'u'lláh recommends care in diet, some exercise, and emotional wellness as (preventative) measures to promote wellbeing (Ziaei 76–78; Taherzadeh, vol. 3, 358). More generally, knowing that one's social relationships and physical environment tremendously impact one's state of being, the Bahá'í attempts to have a positive impact on social and ecological relationships in their homelife, neighborhood, community, workplace, and natural environment. In this metaphysics of unity, the greater the wellbeing of each, the more the others can flourish, and each must flourish if any entity is to actualize its potential to the fullest.

I offer that it is in this light of wholeness that we might read those final paragraphs of the Long Healing Prayer in which the supplicant beseeches God by His "generosity, whereby the portals of" His "bounty and grace were opened wide" and "by these most beautiful names to"

protect [*tahfīz*] the bearer [*hāmīl*] of this blessed Tablet, and who-so reciteth it, and whoso cometh upon it, and whoso passeth around the house wherein it is. Heal Thou, then, by it every sick, diseased and poor one, from every tribulation and distress, from every loathsome affliction and sorrow, and guide Thou by it whosoever

desireth to enter upon the paths of Thy guidance, and the ways of Thy forgiveness and grace.

This passage may bring to mind the practice in many cultures influenced by Abrahamic traditions of writing prayers as talismans, physical artifacts that are believed to draw upon spiritual forces to heal and protect. However, a metaphysics of unity in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation modifies, deepens, and widens the significance of the talisman. In Merriam-Webster's definition, a talisman is "an object held to act as a charm to avert evil and bring good fortune." Some examples of talismans include: in Catholic folk traditions, the use of the crucifix, holy water, or the physical book of the Bible itself as agents of protection or healing; the *mezuzah* which adorns many Jewish homes; and shirts or pendants or necklaces (often called *ta'wīth*) adorned with or containing Qur'anic verses or holy names worn by some Muslims.⁴² Such practices are not without controversy; religious leaders within these Abrahamic traditions have sometimes denounced the use of talismans altogether and, at other times, have reminded followers that the object itself does not have protective or healing power but is merely a symbol or reminder of God in whom one trusts as having all power to heal and protect (Collins 257–58, 275).

Bahá'u'lláh's Long Healing Prayer

42 Not all talismans have overtly religious origins; consider the American folk tradition of carrying a rabbit's foot for protection and good luck.

is similar in some ways to talismans of the Abrahamic traditions. Peter Smith noted the talismanic nature of the prayer's finale but does not discuss his reasoning for such a description (333–34). Fodor discusses a prayer containing similar language concerning its potential to cure and protect all, composed by a Muslim for a Christian woman: “O my God, I ask you by your name which you have preferred to all names to heal, cure and cleanse the bearer [*hámilah*] of this book . . . guard [*bi-h'fíz*] this human body from all malice . . . from every evil and from the mischief and injury of all things created by God” (134).⁴³ Like some popular Islamic talismans that use the same approach of a consistent meter (for example: *fatáh, waháb, jabár*) to reinforce their potency and incantation-like character, even if they do not necessarily rhyme (Fodor 136), the Long Healing Prayer typically has a consistent cadence, as discussed above. Those steeped in such a background would notice these similarities to talismans and magical spells in this prayer, and this may be its main significance for those who do not believe it to also be the revealed Word of God.⁴⁴ Furthermore, central

to theories of magical spells in Islamic and other religious milieus has been the necessity to call upon the actual names of the figures or spiritual forces one wishes to summon (Fodor 107–8, 110; Collins 253), and calling God by His actual names is the central motif of the Long Healing Prayer. Indeed, as discussed above, this prayer prominently invokes God by names that the Islamic tradition alludes to as God's “greatest name”—held to have miraculous powers, including that of healing—amongst them those names affirmed in the Bábí and Bahá'í revelations such as *Káfi* (Sufficing), *‘Alí* (Exalted), and *Bahí* (a form of *Bahá*). Additionally, this prayer—like other talismans—ostensibly promises that its power can be accessed merely by possessing it, carrying it, or vocalizing it. It may be perfectly legitimate, within a metaphysics of unity, to understand these final paragraphs of the prayer as promising to transform health in these ways; God is the One who “doeth what He willeth” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations* 164). The Bahá'í openly “trusts” that the “All-Merciful Lord” can “heal a hundred thousand incurable ills” with a mere “glance,” if He so pleases (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 51). However, from the language above, I would conclude that this trust in healing is primarily centered on God rather than on the mere possession of one of

43 Interestingly, this talisman healing prayer, like the Long Healing Prayer, begins by invoking the names of *Sháfi* [Healer] and *Káfi* [Sufficer]. However, Fodor does not disclose the date or location of composition of this prayer.

44 On the other hand, while for Bahá'is the Long Healing Prayer—like each of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings—may share some cultural, religious, literary, or musical

elements of other works of its social milieu, it is not a product of the Author's own cultural learnings but, rather, an act of direct Revelation from God. Its preeminent merits lie in its being the Word of God.

His prayers, even if the revealed prayer itself is very potent.

In various places in His Writings, Bahá'u'lláh makes reference to what have traditionally been regarded as magical objects in order to metaphorically illustrate the tremendous potency of God's revealed Word in developing and transforming the extraordinary potential of human beings. For example, an elixir (from the Arabic *al-iksír*) has been traditionally considered a medicinal mixture for specific diseases, while the elusive "elixir of life" was a cure-all that might also be able to confer eternal life upon its drinker; it was sometimes used interchangeably with the "philosopher's stone" that could convert copper into gold (Coudert and White, "Elixir"). In His Writings, Bahá'u'lláh metaphorically describes God's Revelation as the "Elixir" but states that its greatest "task" is not turning less valuable elements of matter into "purest gold," but reviving "the vitality of men's belief in God" and "converting satanic strength into heavenly power" (*Gleanings* 199)—that is, replacing human vices with virtues.⁴⁵ To consider the Long Healing Prayer as an instance of the "Elixir" of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, one that "converts satanic strength into heavenly power," is consistent with Islamic and Bahá'í teachings that a fundamental purpose

of engaging the Divine Names is to improve and transform one's ethical character. Abú Hámid al-Ghazálí states that the perfection and happiness of the human consists in acquiring these divine attributes and "in this way man becomes 'lordly'—close to the Lord most high . . . and . . . a companion to the heavenly hosts of angels" (30, 32, 51–52). Similarly, Bahá'u'lláh asks rhetorically, "is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind . . . ?" (*Kitáb-i-Íqan* 240). And again:

The purpose of the one true God in manifesting Himself is to summon all mankind to truthfulness and sincerity, to piety and trustworthiness, to resignation and submissiveness to the Will of God, to forbearance and kindness, to uprightness and wisdom. His object is to array every man with the mantle of a saintly character, and to adorn him with the ornament of holy and goodly deeds. (*Gleanings* 298)

The worshipper is invited and attracted to become a mirror, ambassador, or channel—on a human level—of the very divine names meditated upon. In this way, not only is the Long Healing Prayer itself metaphorically an elixir or a talisman, but so too becomes the believer who prays with it and whose consciousness and ethical character are transformed by it. This goal of dynamic, relational transformation is then summarized in the last line of the prayer

45 Bahá'u'lláh also uses the term for His Teachings that provide the "infallible remedy for all the ills that afflict the children of men" (*Gleanings* 183), and this is how 'Abdu'l-Bahá uses it as well (*Selections* 59).

which recalls eight of the divine names emphasized previously in the prayer: the Powerful (*al-'Azíz*), the All-Sufficing (*al-Káfí*), the Healing (*ash-Sháfí*), the Protector (*al-Háfíz*), the Giving (*al-Mu'tí*), the Compassionate (*ar-Raú'úf*), the All-Generous (*al-Karím*), the All-Merciful (*ar-Rahím*).

It is the Elixir of God's Revelation that educates and empowers the "Talisman" of the human being to manifest wondrous, beneficial influences on society. Bahá'u'lláh says in the *Lawh-i-Maqsúd*, "Man is the supreme Talisman . . . Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom" (*Tablets* 161). This enormous power of the Revelation of God to develop the sublime capacities of the human being to contribute to the "betterment of the world" may sometimes be released instantaneously through sheer exposure to Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings. More often, this transformation occurs through the individual's systematic efforts, assisted by God's grace, to meditate upon and discover the "pearls of wisdom" in Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, to "translate that which hath been written into action" in their daily lives, and bring themselves "to account each day," reflecting upon their efforts, learning from them and from those of others, and improving day by day (*Gleanings* 184, 136, 250, 236) that "each morn be better than its eve and each morrow richer than its yesterday" (*Tablets* 138).

Through these uses of terms such as "elixir" and "talisman" elsewhere in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, we might also

understand the Long Healing Prayer's promise to protect not just the "bearer of this blessed Tablet, and whoso reciteth it," but "whoso cometh upon it and whoso passeth around the house wherein it is." Will this Tablet even protect the person who happens to walk by a house in which this prayer is kept? While His followers are confident in Bahá'u'lláh's promise that when someone recites God's verses "as intoned by them that have drawn nigh unto Him," "the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb" (qtd. in *Bahá'í Prayers* 3), they also know that they have the opportunity to take concrete actions: to develop friendships with their neighbors, be "worthy" of their "trust," be "charitable," and "look upon" them "with a bright and friendly face," manifesting "clearly the signs of the one true God" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 295, 278, 285, 316). As friendships, built on trust and kindness, are developed with neighbors—often in the context of coming together for meaningful conversations and prayer—they become partners as conscientious, intentional agents working for the wellbeing of the neighborhood and community, reflecting together on action, and consulting on each other's insights and wisdom in progressively improving systematic lines of action.⁴⁶ Complementary, then,

46 This is an attempt to briefly describe the global efforts of Bahá'ís to learn about frameworks of action for spiritual and social transformation on local levels.

to the essentially mystical dynamics of prayer, in this concrete, pragmatic, and systematic way the Long Healing Prayer becomes an elixir and talisman for the protection, healing, and guidance of not only individuals and families but entire neighborhoods.

I propose, in short, that those deeply engaged—in thought, attitude, word, and practical action—with the concepts and truths of the Long Healing Prayer can catalyze protective, healing, and guiding influences in their natural and social environment. In other words, in this metaphysics of unity, the human being's way of life—in collaborative teamwork with others—becomes integrated into, and integral to, those various spiritual forces at work to bring good to the world. This helps us make sense of the language that follows, listing typologies of ailments ("from every tribulation and distress, from every loathsome affliction and sorrow"), as highlighting the Tablet's aim to heal not only illnesses that are biological in nature but also those that are psychological, emotional, existential, economic, political, social, ecological, or ethical.

CONCLUSION

The metaphysics of unity and wholeness offered by the Long Healing

As an example of guidance for such frameworks of action, see pages 7–8 of the letter of the Universal House of Justice to the Continental Board of Counsellors, dated 29 December 2015. Also, see Jalalizadeh, 90–91.

Prayer invites a transformation in our perception, whereby the diverse phenomena of life will be related to their truest Source and Reality in the Divine Names. For example, washing one's face in the morning, one may be reminded of God's Name "Sanctified One" (*Nuzzúh*). In a blade of grass shooting up from the ground or a basketball player giving a fallen competitor a hand to get back up, one may see an "Upraiser" (*Raf'án*). Listening to an engaging lecture or witnessing a gorgeously choreographed dance, one may recall God's Name "O Captivating One" (*Jadhīb*). Thinking through how to write this paragraph, I may be reminded of God's Names "the Knower," "the Wise," "Thou Who penetratest all things," or "Lord of Utterance." While its list of divine perfections is not exhaustive, the Long Healing Prayer provides a deep and wide spectrum of Divine Names through which the lover of God's beauty may perceive traces of the Best Beloved everywhere.

The wholeness achieved through supplication, worship, and meditation upon these divine Names of the Healing Prayer, culminating in the finale's metaphorically rich journey of ascent towards the Majestic King, is one that includes heavenly realities as expressions of God's own Countenance. Another momentous prayer, the Long Obligatory Prayer, "invested by Bahá'u'lláh with a special potency and significance," begins with the address "O Thou Who art the Lord of all names and the Maker of the heavens."

(*Bahá'í Prayers* 8).⁴⁷ In a kind of play on words, the Arabic as spoken *Yá Illaha'l-Asmá'i wa Fátira's-samá'i* creates a close link between “names” (*Asmá'i*) and “heavens” (*samá'i*) in which the divine names may be experienced as portals of the heaven of the Divine Reality. Thus, contemplating “the Lord of all names” can lead to consciousness, not only of the intimate relationships between the perfections of the One and those conferred upon His many creations on earth, but also of the intimate relationship between heaven and earth. With the human being defined in the Bahá'í Writings as the focal point of the “radiance of all [God's] names and attributes” (*Gleanings* 65), we learn more about such names through the Long Healing Prayer. This healing prayer cultivates our understanding of those spiritual names, and in correspondence to the measure we fulfill our human purpose to actualize these names—individually and in partnership with others—the earth itself becomes in tangible ways “heaven on earth.”

In the *Lawḥ-i-Anta'l-Káfi* Bahá'u'lláh engages in creative ways with Arabic poetical forms, Islamic literature, prayer, and *dhikr* that may be familiar to someone with a Muslim background, while—when read with a metaphysics of unity in mind—the Tablet refashions our conception of talismans, elixirs, and mysticism to

embrace theological, social, ethical, and ecological dimensions. As the prayer enumerates God's names with a completeness reminiscent of the Islamic *ḥadīth* of God's ninety-nine names, each one a distinguishing characteristic of the One, a dynamic, high-definition picture of the spectrum of the Divine Personality is painted in the heart of the person praying. This Divinity is at once transcendent and intimately connected with self, others, unseen spiritual realities, and one's natural and social ecology, and it calls one to dignifying and unifying relationships with each. In this evolving awareness of a metaphysics of unity, health is nurtured as one continually grows—in a journey that knows no bounds—in perceiving and experiencing the wholeness of the self as whole with the whole, single organism of existence, fashioned and cared for by its Creator and Lord—the all-sufficing Whole itself.

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47 This Obligatory Prayer is called “Long” as Bahá'u'lláh also revealed a “Medium” and a “Short” Obligatory Prayer.

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