

## **An Introduction to the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*<sup>1</sup>** **Nasser Sabet** **(1935—1991)**

### **Abstract**

This article discusses the importance, style, and contents of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (the Book of Certitude) by Bahá'u'lláh. The five major themes of the book—the True Seeker and the Conditions and Constraints of an Independent Investigation of Truth; Rebirth of Spirituality; Subjects Related to Christianity and Islam; the Bábí Dispensation; and the Process of Revelation—are then succinctly yet perceptively summarized.

### **Résumé**

Cet article traite de l'importance, du style, et du contenu du *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Le Livre de la certitude) de Bahá'u'lláh. Ce livre peut se diviser en cinq thèmes principaux: le vrai chercheur et les conditions et les contraintes de la recherche indépendante de la vérité; la renaissance de la spiritualité; les sujets reliés au Christianisme et à l'Islam; la dispensation bábíe; et le processus de la révélation qui sont résumés de façon succincte mais perspicace.

### **Resumen**

Este estudio ventila la importancia, el estilo, y el contenido del *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Libro de la Certidumbre) escrito por Bahá'u'lláh. Los cinco temas principales del libro, El Verdadero Buscador y las Condiciones y Restricciones de la Búsqueda Independiente de la Verdad; el Renacimiento de la Espiritualidad; Materias Relacionadas a la Cristiandad y el Islam; la Dispensación Bábí; y el Proceso de Revelación—se recapitulan con brevedad y acierto

**T**he Works of Bahá'u'lláh, although comprising many tablets addressed to individuals, contain universal messages: universal in the sense that they have been and will be applicable to all times, conditions, and individuals. An extraordinary work of this type is his well-known *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Book of Certitude) which, from the time of its revelation, has been a great source of inspiration for the most distinguished scholars of the Bahá'í Faith.

### **The Importance of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán***

After the *Kitáb-i-Áqdas*, the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* is Bahá'u'lláh's most important work and has a two-fold position in the Bahá'í Faith. First, the Báb had not completed the Persian *Bayán* and had prophesied that "He Whom God will make Manifest" would reveal the remaining chapters and would complete the text of the Persian *Bayán*. Second, an authentic explanation and interpretation of the symbolic and abstruse verses and terms of the Bible and the Qur'án were to be considered as a proof of the Manifestation of God in this age.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was first presented at the Fifth Annual Conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies, University of Ottawa, and is printed posthumously in tribute to Nasser Sabet.

## **Style of the Book**

As indicated by Shoghi Effendi, the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* is a “model of Persian prose, of a style at once original, chaste and vigorous, and remarkably lucid, both cogent in argument and matchless in its irresistible eloquence ...” (*God Passes By* 138–39). Shoghi Effendi himself did the miraculous and accurate translation of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*—a translation giving those familiar with Persian and English an unsurpassed reference source of mystical and literary terms used in the vast literature of the Bahá’í Faith and past religious traditions. For its English readers, Shoghi Effendi’s translation is a priceless gift, for no other person would have been able to accomplish this difficult task so admirably.

## **Contents of the Book**

The *Kitáb-i-Íqán* consists of a flow of themes with a unique approach to many subjects. These themes, although independent in their nature, are interrelated. Thus, the book does not lend itself to a conventional table of contents. However, Bahá’u’lláh has divided the whole book into two chapters.

For the purposes of this presentation, most of the themes elaborated in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* have been classified into five headings:

- The True Seeker and the Conditions and Constraints of an Independent Investigation of Truth;
- Rebirth of Spirituality;
- Subjects Related to Christianity and Islam;
- The Bábí Dispensation;
- The Process of Revelation.

## **The True Seeker and the Conditions and Constraints of an Independent Investigation of Truth**

As with every other scientific endeavor in which analysis is carried out in an unbiased way under well-defined conditions, here too, to attain the “shores of the ocean of true understanding” (*Kitáb-i-Íqán*) true spiritual seekers must obtain certain prerequisites. These prerequisites are both exogenous and endogenous to the seeker’s nature. Body and soul must be completely detached from all internal and external influences in order to purify “their ears from idle talk, their minds from vain imaginings, their hearts from worldly affections, their eyes from that which perisheth” (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 3). Furthermore, “they should put their trust in God, and, holding fast unto Him, follow in His way” (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 3).

If the seeker should consider the words of “mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets” (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 4), the seeker will be misled. Who might these mortals be? An analysis of history shows that these have always been the divines of the age. In this dispensation, humanity is reaching the stage of maturity, having passed the stage of childhood. Humankind should realize its nobility and its capacity to pass even beyond the realm of angels and progress to a station beyond imagination (an allusion to a poem by Molavi). This noble creature is, without doubt, capable of rejecting the role of the clergy in a new world order. Bahá’u’lláh states in irrefutable terms that humanity possesses every necessary qualification to act as mature and independent beings. Religious leaders have no role to play in this age of the maturity of humankind.

## Rebirth of Spirituality

The period of the 1860s in which the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* was revealed was also a period of the rapid expansion of atheism. In this period, religious beliefs were strongly rejected. Religious leaders were incapable of finding answers to many questions that arose due to new discoveries in science and technology. In this chaotic period of human history, Bahá'u'lláh's reiteration of religious beliefs and his scientific and logical approach in explaining religious beliefs represents the "rebirth of spirituality."

In the words of Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'u'lláh "proclaims unequivocally the existence and oneness of a personal God, unknowable, inaccessible, the source of all Revelation, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent and almighty" (*God Passes By* 139). He further emphasizes that the only way for humankind to know God is through his Manifestations. Namely, that humankind has always been and will always be barred from comprehending God except through the life and teachings of a prophet of God. This clear approach to God has no resemblance in the different philosophical lines of thought contained in the ontology of St. Anselm, the cosmology of St. Thomas Aquinas, the teleology of William Paley, nor the arguments formulated by Immanuel Kant. Nor is the concept of "Most holy outpouring" expressed by some Sufis acceptable to Bahá'u'lláh as a means of attaining "the divine presence." Only the Manifestations of God, these divinely appointed beings, can reflect all the attributes of God. This resounding theme of the oneness and inaccessibility of God is further elaborated in other themes unique to the Bahá'í Dispensation: the "relativity of religious truth and the continuity of Divine Revelation," the "unity of the Prophets, the universality of their Message, the identity of their fundamental teachings," and "the sanctity of their scriptures" (*God Passes By* 139).

## Subjects Related to Christianity and Islam

In the Bible and the Qur'án, there are allegorical and symbolic verses that, despite numerous previous attempts to explain their meaning, have never been adequately interpreted. In the Bible, we read: "But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time ... go your way Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end of time" (Daniel 12:4).

The Qur'án itself distinguishes two types of verses within it: the didactic and the allegorical. In the Súrih of *Al-i-Imrán* it says: " 'the Book' [Qur'án] ... some of its verses are of themselves perspicuous others are symbolic ... none knoweth the meaning thereof except God and those who are well grounded in knowledge" (Qur'án 3:5).<sup>2</sup>

Both the Bible and the Qur'án are full of allegorical and symbolic terms. As mentioned in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*:

the purpose underlying all these symbolic terms and abstruse allusions, which emanate from the Revealers of God's holy Cause, hath been to test and prove the peoples of the world; that thereby the earth of the pure and illuminated hearts may be known from the perishable and barren soil. From time immemorial such hath been the way of God. (49)

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<sup>2</sup> Most translators have rendered this passage as Rodwell did in 1909: "Yet none knoweth its interpretation but God. And the stable in knowledge say, 'We believe in it: it is all from our Lord'" (386). However, the majority of the Shi'ah scholars concur with Bahá'u'lláh's quotation: "None knoweth the meaning thereof except God and them that are well-grounded in knowledge" (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* 17).

Some of the symbolic terms are as follows: return; resurrection; day of judgment; sun, moon, and stars; angels; clouds; earth; heaven; *Mi'raj*; death and life; trumpet; veils of glory; and city of God. Each of these terms will be elaborated upon later in this article.

### **The Bábí Dispensation**

The *Kitáb-i-Iqán* was revealed immediately prior to Bahá'u'lláh's public declaration, in honor of Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad, the Báb's maternal uncle.<sup>3</sup> As yet unconvinced, Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad had questioned Bahá'u'lláh as to how the prophecies in the Shí'ah traditions could have been realized in his nephew. In response to this question, Bahá'u'lláh clarified the meanings behind the signs of the promised Qá'im. Many of these, signs, such as "sovereignty," "judgment," "resurrection," and so on are symbolic terms. Thus, a vast portion of the book deals with the explanation of these terms and an analysis of related traditions. In the course of these explanations, Bahá'u'lláh irrefutably demonstrates "the validity, the sublimity and significance of the Báb's Revelation ..." (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 139). In fact, Bahá'u'lláh divides the *Kitáb-i-Iqán* into two parts, the first focusing on the explanation of symbolic terms and the second, on the sovereignty of the Báb.

### **The Process of Revelation**

Sometimes during the course of revelation, Bahá'u'lláh would suddenly diverge from the topic at hand and express his most intimate feelings about the process of revelation itself. Never before in the history of religion has anyone heard or read about the personal feelings of a Manifestation of God at the moment of inspiration:

Great God! When the stream of utterance reached this stage, We beheld, and lo! the sweet savours of God were being wafted from the day-spring of Revelation, and the morning breeze was blowing out of the Sheba of the Eternal. Its tidings rejoiced anew the heart, and imparted immeasurable gladness to the soul. It made all things new, and brought unnumbered and inestimable gifts from the unknowable Friend ... At this hour, so liberal is the outpouring of Its grace that the holy Spirit itself is envious!...

The universe is pregnant with these manifold bounties, awaiting the hour when the effects of Its unseen gifts will be made manifest us this world. ... In the soil of whose heart will these holy seeds germinate? ... Verily, I say, so fierce is the blaze of the Bush of love, burning in the Sinai of the heart, that the streaming waters of holy utterance can never quench its flame. (*Kitáb-i-Iqán* 59–61)

### **Conclusion**

To conclude this summary, I would like to quote Shoghi Effendi on the significance of the *Kitáb-i-Iqán* in Bahá'í literature:

Well may it be claimed that of all the books revealed by the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation, this Book alone, by sweeping away the age-long barriers that have so insurmountably

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<sup>3</sup> The *Kitáb-i-Iqán* was revealed in the two days and two nights prior to April 21, 1862.

separated the great religions of the world, has laid down a broad and unassailable foundation for the complete and permanent reconciliation of their followers. (*God Passes By* 139)

### **Works Cited**

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