

The Tablet of All Food And the Nature of Reality

by Karl Weaver

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Abstract: Baha'u'llah's "Tablet of All Food" is reviewed from several perspectives: its historical background; the suggested referents for specific phrases; English literature commentaries; its color system as related to the writings of the Bab and Islamic traditions; the meanings of "food"; and most importantly a different way of looking at the five levels of reality described in this Tablet.

Author: Karl Weaver M.D. is a retired American psychiatrist and a longstanding student of the Baha'i writings. He has participated in and conducted many study groups but has not previously submitted a paper for academic publication. He is also currently working on an analysis of life after death from both the religious and scientific perspectives. He describes his approach as "grounded in faith and then guided by reason". This article was written principally with a Baha'i audience in mind.

This article discusses Baha'u'llah's "Tablet of All Food" from multiple perspectives. Primarily I am interested in the light it sheds on our attempt to understand aspects of "spiritual", or generally non-physical reality. This has been discussed before, but my analysis suggests a different perspective for understanding the five levels of reality presented within this Tablet. Because the Tablet is not well known in the English speaking world, I reproduce its provisional translation by Stephen Lambden. I then quickly review prior literature in English about the Tablet. Following that I review the historical background for its revelation, and then my reflections on some of the "referents" found in the words. I then review the meanings of "food" in the Tablet, and following this I tackle its most metaphysical aspect: five levels or realms of reality, which are discussed in [Lambden's] section III of the Tablet. Additional reflections follow on the nature of the physical creation and the harmony of science and religion. I review some Islamic traditions regarding heaven, preliminary to discussing how this Tablet relates to the Bab's color scheme, which added a fifth color to the Islamic traditions. I further note how this

Tablet fits with the Bab's symbolism, which connected colors with names of God, steps in the act of creation, and the styles of revelatory verses. I conclude with a summary chart related to the five levels of spiritual reality presented within the Tablet, and a short list of references.

I am handicapped by inability to read Persian and Arabic. In my effort to understand the tablet I relied on the current provisional English translation and English language commentaries written by scholars who can read the original. However, in some ways my handicap may have been a benefit, since in my relative naivete I was led to certain reflections which differ from the analyses by other authors. Some of my ideas may be easily dismissable on good grounds, for example based on other authenticated Writings to which I also do not have access or better understanding of the original language. However it may be that my reflections provide some new and useful ideas, which apparently have not appeared in print before.

The five levels of reality discussed within this Tablet seemed to make more sense if viewed as states of interaction between differing realms, rather than simply as static realms themselves. The meaning of this statement will become more apparent below. Viewed in that way, the metaphysical concepts seem compatible with modern quantum mechanics, which often describes reality in terms of interactions rather than static entities. Generally speaking I loathe facile assertions of this kind. They usually seem appropriate only as a general metaphor, and often a weak one at that. Nevertheless as I studied the Tablet and prior commentaries, this is the way it began to make the most sense. Whether this was due to a preconscious bias based on my readings in physics, or whether this has a fundamental usefulness in understanding it, I leave to the reader to decide.

This Tablet may be divided up into several important themes, which are not clearly separated as they often intertwine. These include: Baha'u'llah's praise of His questioner and an explanation of why He is responding to his question; Baha'u'llah's allusions to His Own station; His expatiating on the grief He experiences, primarily as a result of intense envy and opposition from Mirza Yahya; His discussion of the seeker's question, and his interpretation of five levels of reality, using terms from Sufi writings.

For ease of reference, before proceeding further I here reproduce the provisional English translation of the tablet in its entirety by Stephen Lambden [reference 9]. My reproduction is almost, but not quite identical with the online version of his translation. For the most part differences are minor. Here and there I corrected what appeared to be simple typographical errors in the online version. Occasionally I adjusted the capitalization of specific words to what

appeared more consistent with authorized translations of other texts. In a few instances, I questioned the capitalization status but left it as it was, commenting on the issue later. Lambden's own clarifying comments are in brackets and bold. Occasional comments which I added are in parentheses and in non-bold text. Lambden divides this tablet into 12 parts using Roman numerals, and I have retained his divisions. He also numbers the verses. For convenience I have only included the number of each verse which begins a new paragraph, using Lambden's paragraph divisions. The numbers of the other verses can usually be counted from those verses.



The ancients generally believed the earth to be the center of the universe. Objects in the heavens revolved around it in seven “crystalline” [transparent] spheres containing the moon, sun, visible planets, and the “fixed” stars. Lucretius’s “De Natura Rerum” [On the Nature of Things], circa 60 B.C., attempted to explain the natural world. Tension between a metaphysical and a purely physical explanation of the world is already apparent. Lucretius and certain other philosophers did not believe that “the Gods” created the world, but rather that it was composed of simple components which had

eternally existed, and which combined according to simple natural laws. The English Roman Catholic monk Bede, circa 700 A.D., wrote his own "De Natura Rerum". He was familiar with the works of Lucretius, Virgil and other classical writers. The above illustration from his work shows the seven spheres around the earth. He seems to have realized that the earth was in the form of a sphere and not flat. He calculated the formation of the world at 3952 B.C. based on his own analysis of scriptures. Because this did not agree with the widely accepted figure of roughly 5,000 B.C., he was initially accused of heresy.

Tablet of All Food

Provisional English Translation by Stephen Lambden

from http://bahai-library.com/bahaullah_lawh_kull_taam

He is supremely powerful in accomplishing that which He willeth through a command on His part. And He is God, powerful over all things.

I

1. Praise be to God Who hath caused oceans of light to surge in the divine fiery water, excited the Letters of the Dispensation in the Incomparable, beclouded Point and made the Hidden Mount to revolve around the Firmament of the Theophany, the Concealed Self, the Focal Centre of Eternality. He caused the Lordly Point to circle round the Most Splendid, All-Enduring Ornament, to the end that all might testify that He is the True God; no God is there save Him. He verily is the Incomparable, the One, the Eternal, Who neither begetteth nor is begotten. He can never be likened to any single thing, and He, God, is the Majestic, the All-Compelling.

4. Praise be to God Who hath caused the fiery depths to overflow from the Purified, Sanctified Temple and made the beauteous deep to sprinkle forth refined, glorious dewdrops. He hath attracted the countenances characterized by the letter "H" through the unique, eternal melodies and enabled the Light-Filled Dove to sing forth with warblings timeless and everlasting. This to the end that all might become aware that He is the True One; there is none other God besides Him, the Beneficent, the Almighty, Who cannot be described by aught save His Essence or characterized by aught save His Eminence. He verily is the All-Powerful, the Wrathful.

7. Praise be to God Who hath caused the Light to circle round the Twin Mounts of His Light and made the Light to revolve around the Twin Spheres of His Light. He hath caused the Light to beam forth in the Loci of His Light, and made the Light to be retained in the Repositories of His Light. He hath also caused the Light to scintillate through the impulses of His Light and made the Light to shine resplendent in the

Countenances of His Light. Praise God! Praised be God! Worthy of praise is He Who establisheth His Own worth, for besides Him there is none other.

II

So praised be Thou, O My God, O My God! Bereft of splendor am I until I invoke Thee through Thy sanctified verses. No glory have I until I confide in Thee through Thine intimate Letters. Without radiance am I until I experience Thee through the secrets of Thy Might. And no lustre have I until I observe Thee in the hidden retreats of Thy Light.

4. So praised be Thou, O My God, O My God! We failed to invoke Thee at the moment when Thou madest Me one saddened before the surging of the Deep Sea of Thy blissfulness, and made Me one grieved in the land nigh unto the billowing of the Fathomless Deep of Thy Joyousness. Likewise at the moment when, in Thy House, Thou madest Me one afflicted before the high courses of the Oceans of Thy Radiance.

6. So praised be Thou, O My God, O My God! We failed to adequately bear witness unto Thee in that Thou hast testified before all things unto Thine Own Self, through Thine Own Self, for Thou verily art God; no God is there except Thee. Eternally Thou hast rested upon the Throne of Glory and hath everlastingly been concealed by the essence of Bounty and Justice. Eternally and everlastingly Thou wast hidden in the image Thou hadst aforesaid in the magnificence of Glory and Beauty. Not a single person is capable of fathoming the fullness of Thine Interiority, and no soul is capable of describing the substance of Thine Identity. Whenever the holy ones attempt to become acquainted with Thee, they subscribe to falsity in the holy court of the King of Thy Munificence. And as often as those who confess Thy Unity attempt to characterize Thee, they join partners with Thee at the intimate threshold of the Sovereign of Thy Might.

12. So praised be Thou, O My God, O My God! Thou art the One Who created Me free of affliction in Thy dominions and provided for Me in such wise that not an atom of misfortune befell Me in Thy regions. Such was the case until Thou enabled Me to recognize Thy Remembrance and inspired Me as One acknowledging the truth for Thy sake; One obedient to His commands as befits Thy truth. Thou art the One Who deposited in Mine inmost essence a Lamp from Thy Being, by means of which Thy Self might become known. It beamed forth in Thy Kingdom and I found a haven in the court of Thy Might until oceans of sadness surged over Me—a mere drop of which no soul could bear to drink. I wept to such an extent that the spirit well nigh departed from My body. I was so filled with anxiety that the Spiritual Beings were sorely troubled. I was overcome with sorrow so as to grievously distress the Luminous Ones. And praise be to Thee, O My Beloved, on account of all that Thou madest to appear through Thy Power, ordained through Thy Will, decreed through Thy Judgment and determined through Thy Power of Accomplishment, for all these things are a proof of Thy Cause and a path unto the Sovereign of Thy Graciousness.

19. So praise be to Thee, O My God, O My God! How can I call on Thee through the wonders of Thy Remembrance, when the Path to the gnosis of the boundary of Thine Essence is cut off? And how can I not call upon Thee, in that Thou didst not create Me except for the remembrance of Thy benefits and the commemoration of Thy favours. So praise be unto Thee! I verily stand before Thee, unto Whom all bow down in adoration.

22. So praise be to Thee, O My God, O My God! We failed to entreat Thee on those darkest of nights on which the Dove of Command sang out on Mount Sinai, from the right side of the Crimson Tree with the melodies of Thine Eternity, or during those lengthy periods of gloom when the Light-Filled Bird warbled beyond the veils of the realm of concealed Divinity with the warblings of Thy Perpetuity. This inasmuch as Thou raised Me up unto the heaven of the Unseen through the supremacy of the Sovereign of Thine endless Permanency, made Me to ascend unto the horizon of Evident Attestation through the power of the King of Thy Divinity, caused Me to be elevated unto the hidden retreats of Thy Oneness and ennobled Me through the meeting with Thy Countenance such that I came to abide in Thy sanctuary and found a haven in Thine Expanse. I reclined upon cushions of Light through Thy bounty and rose up above the Heaven of Manifestation through Thy munificence. Thereby did My heart find peace, My soul comfort, My being delight and My essence equanimity, for thereby was I numbered among those who are assured through the meeting with their Lord.

III

1. O thou glorious enquirer, who art set aglow through the Fire of the Friend! Be thou assured that from the very first day that God aided Me through faith in Him and confirmation in His Cause, it was not my desire to respond to the enquiries of any among the servants. But since I found in thy heart a fire from the Proof of God and a brand from the Light of the Manifestation of His Self, the ocean of My affection hath surged and it is My wish to reply to thee through the power and might of God. My munificence overfloweth with the sprinklings of servitude in the Land of the Theophany, in order that the breezes of Light might attract thee unto the summit of exhilaration and cause thee to attain that station which God hath decreed for Thee in these days, in which the winds of sorrow have encompassed Me on all sides. This on account of that which the hands of the people have committed, for they have calumniated Me without proof or written testimony. O Lord! Cast patience upon Me and make Me to be victorious over the seditious people.

7. Then know that for this paradisiacal verse, this choice fruit, divine song and heavenly pearl are subtle meanings, endless in their infinitude. I, by the grace and bounty of God, shall sprinkle upon thee something of the superabundance of its meanings, that may serve as a memorial for the believers, a guiding light for the estranged and a stronghold for the agitated. Then, bear thou witness that for "food" are diverse levels of meaning. It must suffice thee however that We expound four of them.

10. It signifieth the realm of the Throne of He-ness [Hahut], the Paradise of the Divine Oneness. None is capable of expounding even a letter of that verse, relative to that Paradise. This, inasmuch as that realm is that of the Mystery of Endless Duration, the Unique Sonship, the Incomparable Israelicity and the Resplendent Selfhood. Its exoteric aspect is the essence of its esoteric aspect, and its esoteric aspect the essence of its exoteric aspect. It is inappropriate that anyone should attempt to elucidate a single letter of it. God however will disclose its mysteries when He willeth, unto whomsoever He willeth. And I, verily, in view of My injury and My misery, am not informed of even a letter thereof. This, inasmuch as the matter cannot be related except on the part of God, its Fashioner and its Originator.

18. So praise be unto God, its Creator and its Lifegiver, above that which those who confess the Unity of God assert! By Him in Whose Hand is My soul! If oceans of light should surge forth in that realm, all who are in the heavens and on earth would assuredly be drowned; save, that is, a number of the Letters of this Dispensation [Theophany]. In this respect God beareth sufficient witness, as regards both Me and thee.

21. It signifieth the realm of the Paradise of Endless Duration, the Throne of the Divine Realm [Lahut], the Snow-White Light. It is the realm of “He is He Himself” and there is none other save Him. This Paradise is allotted unto those servants who are established upon the Seat of Glory, who quaff liquid camphor nigh unto the All-Beauteous One, and who recite the verses of Light in the Heaven of Manifest Justice. Thereby are they enraptured, and from that “food” derive comfort.

25. It signifieth the Paradise of the Divine Unicity, the Golden [yellow] Land, the Depths of the realm of the Divine Omnipotence [Jabarut]. It is the realm of “Thou art He and He is Thou”, allotted unto those servants who do not cry out except with the permission of God, who act according to His command and ever restrain themselves in accordance with His wisdom—just as God has described them [in the Qur’an], for they are the “honored servants” of whom it is written, “They speak not til He hath spoken, and they do His bidding.” [21:27]

28. It signifieth the Paradise of Justice, the Verdant [Green] Land, the Fathomless Deep of the Kingdom of God [Malakut], allotted to those servants whom “neither traffic nor merchandise beguile from the remembrance of God” [Qur’an 24:27] since they are the companions of the Light. They enter therein with the permission of God and find rest upon the carpet of the Almighty.

30. It signifieth the realm of the Paradise of the Divine Bounty, the Crimson Land, the Golden Secret, the Snow-White Mystery and the Point of the human realm [Nasut]. In it are the proofs of the Remembrance greatest, if you are of those who are informed.

IV

1. Ah! Alas! Then Ah! Alas! If the Primal Point were alive in these days and witnessed My grief He would assuredly and at all times comfort Me, treat Me tenderly and fill Me with ardent joy. At every moment would He strengthen Me. So alas, alas! Would that I had died after Him, before these days, or were one quite forgotten, consigned to oblivion.

3. Say: O thou concourse! Comfort Me! Do not calumniate Me or hasten My affair, for I am a servant who hath believed in God and in His signs [or verses], and there doth not remain of My days except a few. God, My Lord is sufficient protector against you, since He sufficeth Me, and sufficeth he whom He desired aforetime. Sufficient is the careful account of His Own Self. Lord! Pour out patience upon Me and make Me victorious over the disbelieving people, who do not cry out except in accordance with their own delusions, or move except as their idle fancies prompt them. Say: It is not for you to ask why it is this way, for you neither comprehend nor understand.

V

1. O Thou Faithful One! When the breezes of love spilled over from the right side of the Sinaic Tree you were turned to the right and to the left; in that place, in the Cave of Light you were protected with the permission of God, the Exalted, for He is God, powerful over all things. And you acknowledged and understood all that We expounded for you. Then bear witness that We desire to expound further.

4. Then know that the significance of “food” is the essence of knowledge; that is, all branches of learning. “Israel” signifieth the Primal Point and the “children of Israel” He Whom God, on His part, made a proof unto the people in these days. “Except what Israel made unlawful unto itself” ; that is that which the Primal Point made unlawful for His elevated ones and His servants.

7. Then bear witness that all that God decreed in the Book through His command and His power of interdiction is the truth, about which there is no doubt. It is incumbent upon all to act in conformity therewith and to assent thereto. Let not the actions of those who have been spreading wickedness in the land veil you. They suppose that they are rightly guided. Nay! By the Lord of the Realm of the Divine Cloud! They are liars and calumniators. The nature of that party is such that they should never be allowed to eat even barley in these days. How then can they possibly be allowed to eat what God hath forbidden in the Book? So praised be He, praised be He above that which the associators assert.

VI

1. O thou friend! Since you were irradiated through the orient light of the radiance of the splendours of the Morn of Eternity [Subh al Azal] the lights of which have filled the horizons, and been captivated by the winning ways of the Light of Endless Duration –the traces of which have appeared on the Temples of the Orient Light—then know that the intention of “food” in these days, in which the Sun shineth in the centre of heaven and the Lamp of Eternality hath shed splendor upon the Luminary of the Realm of Divine

Cloud, is none other than the Bearer of the Cause. "Israel" in this connection signifieth the Primal Will, by means of which God created all who are in the heavens and on the earth and what is between them. The "children of Israel" are those servants who were captivated by the light of that Primal Will in the year 60 [1260 A.H. = 1844 A.D.] and thereafter until the "Day" on which He shall assemble the people before the Lord of the worlds. God desireth not that anyone be oppressed, but the people wrong their own selves. So know that the Light of God hath ever been established upon the Throne of Favor and will ever remain the like of what it was, though the people neither comprehend nor bear witness.

9. Since We have lifted you up to the summit of the Mount of Light, elevated you to the peak of the Mount of Certitude in the Land of Exhilaration, enabled you to drink deep of the Water of the Divine Oneness from the camphor fount at the hand of the All-Beauteous Joseph and given you rest in the Cradle of Tranquility, about which the gladsome ant sang forth – therein your spirit enlivened, your soul delighted and your essence gladdened –then thank God Who created you aforesaid by a command on His part and made you to be numbered among those servants who are rightly guided through the verses of God.

VII

1. Now, at this moment, I cease not to complain of My sorrow and anguish unto God, for He alone acknowledgeth My anxiety, is aware of My plight and heareth my lamentation. By He Who made the Bird[s] of Light to soar in the Land of the Theophany! None is to be found as dejected as I, for now do I dwell at the point of dust in obscure ignominy. There is no possessor of Spirit in the Dominion of God except he weepeth over Me, to the degree that the heavens are will-nigh cleft asunder, the earth split open and the mountains leveled. This, inasmuch as the Eye of Time has not seen anyone as oppressed as I. And I, verily, have been patient and forbearing; have sat between the hands of God, trusted in Him and committed the affair unto Him; perchance He might comfort Me and protect Me from all that the people have committed.

7. Then know, O Kamal! If I should expound that verse [Qur'an 3:87] from this day until the days find their consummation in "al-mustaghath" [the One invoked for help], which is the Day when the people will rise up before the Countenance of the Living One, the Wondrous, the extent to which God would favor Me through His grace and bounty [with numerous explanations] could not be estimated. This inasmuch as the Mystery of the Divine Oneness hath been set in motion, the Ocean of Endless Duration hath surged, and the Countenance of Light in the Heavens of the Realm of Unknowing hath beamed forth from the right side of the Tree of the Command. This, in these days in which the Sun of Manifestation hath risen in unique manner, though the people are neither cognizant of its magnitude nor mindful of its subtlety.

10. So ah! Alas! If they could but perceive, the Proof would never be hidden from them, nor the Favor be beyond their grasp. Say: it is not for you to ask why it is so, lest you join partners with God Who created you and aided you through a Light from before Him if, that is, you are of those who truly believe.

13. Give ear O Kamal! to the voice of this lowly, this forsaken ant, that hath hid itself in its hole, and Whose desire is to depart from your midst and vanish from your sight by reason of that which the hands of men have wrought. God, verily, hath been witness between Me and His servants. God it is Who beareth witness unto Me in all respects.

15. So ah! Alas! if the Last Point, the Countenance of My Love, Quddus were alive, he would assuredly weep over My plight and would lament that which hath befallen Me. And I for My part would at this moment beseech his eminence and supplicate his holiness that he would enable Me to ascend unto the court of His might and recline on the cushion of His sanctity as I was wont to do in those days [now past] when I was free of the aforementioned misfortunes. O Lord! Cast patience upon Me and make Me to be victorious over the transgressors.

VIII

1. O thou faithful one! If you be of those who dwell in the Snow-White Forest, the Isle of the Criterion [al-Furqan] then know that “food” signified the Guardianship which God signified for His people. The intention of “Israel” in this connection is the Point of the Criterion (Mohammad) and of the “children of Israel” His trustees [the Imams] who succeeded Him [Mohammad] and by means of whom God recompenseth His righteous servants.

3. And if you be of those who dwell in the Crimson Isle, the Orchard of the Exposition [al-Bayan] then know that we abandon the “food” [of the Islamic imamate?] and desire the Primal Point [the Bab], the Pure Wine of the Divine Oneness in an elevated station. The intention of “Israel” in this connection is the Last Countenance [=Quddus?] the Mystery of Endless Duration in an elevated station and the Countenance of Light, the Disengaged Manifestation, the Temple of the Divine Oneness [= Mirza Yahya?] in an elevated station whom the aggressors caused to be imprisoned in the land and concealed in the cities. So praised be God above that which the hands of the people commit. And God is not unaware of the actions of the people.

IX

1. Since at this moment the fire of love surgeth in the heart of al-Baha, the Dove of Servitude singeth in the Heaven of the Divine Cloud and the Bird [hoopoe] of Light warbleth in the midst of the firmaments, the Sinaitic Tree burneth, of itself through the Fire of its Own Self, above the Ark of the Testimony beyond Mount Qaf, in the Land of Realization, and the Ant of Servitude hideth in the Vale of the Divine Oneness in this Night, with mystic fidelity, wherefore do I desire to further expound that verse. This inasmuch as God hath at this moment informed Me about it through His grace and bounty. And He verily is the Mighty, the Generous.

5. Then bear witness that “food” signifieth the Ocean of the Unseen, which is hidden in the Scrolls of Light and treasured up in the Inscribed Tablets. “Israel” signifieth the Manifestation of the Command in these days and the “children of Israel” the people of the Bayan. And that “food” was allowed for them [the Babis] that is, for all who desire to ascend unto the Heaven of Bounty and to drink of the Water of Manifestation [or Pure Water] from that Cup, the Goblet of Servitude, which resembleth naught but a shadow in the land. I however ask God’s forgiveness on account of that limitation. So praised be God, One worthy of praise and mighty beyond the attempts of the negligent to describe Him.

X

1. So ah! Alas! If there should surge upon Me a sprinkling from the Ocean of Divine Authorization from the Sovereign of the Realm of the Divine Cloud and King of Glory, I would expound that verse [Qur’an 3:87] with the accents of the spiritual ones, the sanctified myriads and the melodies of the enraptured ones. Since I have not inhaled, however, the fragrance of realization or accomplishment, then that which I have already set forth for you must suffice you for it is sufficient proof unto those who were in the days of their Lord given to remembrance.

4. In view of the fact that you have sought and derived warmth from the Fire of Love, and have found pleasure in the charm of the trace of ink in these apposite Tablets, then bear witness and be assured that I [Baha’u’llah] have claimed naught but servitude to God, the True One. And God is My arbitrator against that which the people falsely allege.

6. Say: Woe unto you, on account of that which your hands have committed; hereafter shall ye be brought before the Knower of that which is hidden and that which is manifest and assuredly in this respect be questioned.

7. Say: O People of the Concourse! Be not astonished at the handiwork of God, the mercy of God and His blessings upon you, if you are of those who are informed. Fear God! And know that the handiwork of God radiates forth in the image of the Lamp of Eternality among the artistry of the people. How is it that you neither consider this nor bear witness unto it?

XI

1. Then ah! Alas! By He Who hath restrained (confined?) the dove of sorrow in the breast of al-Baha! All that I have witnessed, from the day on which I first drank the pure milk from the breast of My mother until this moment, hath been effaced from My memory, in consequence of that which the hands of the people have committed. And God is aware of all that pertains to the people, though they are not informed.

4. Say: O People of the Realm of the Divine Cloud! Issue forth from your habitations and present yourselves in the sanctum of Light, the manifest Divine Cloud, the most great House of God, as hath been decreed with the permission of God the Exalted, Who beareth witness, in the Tablet of the Heart.

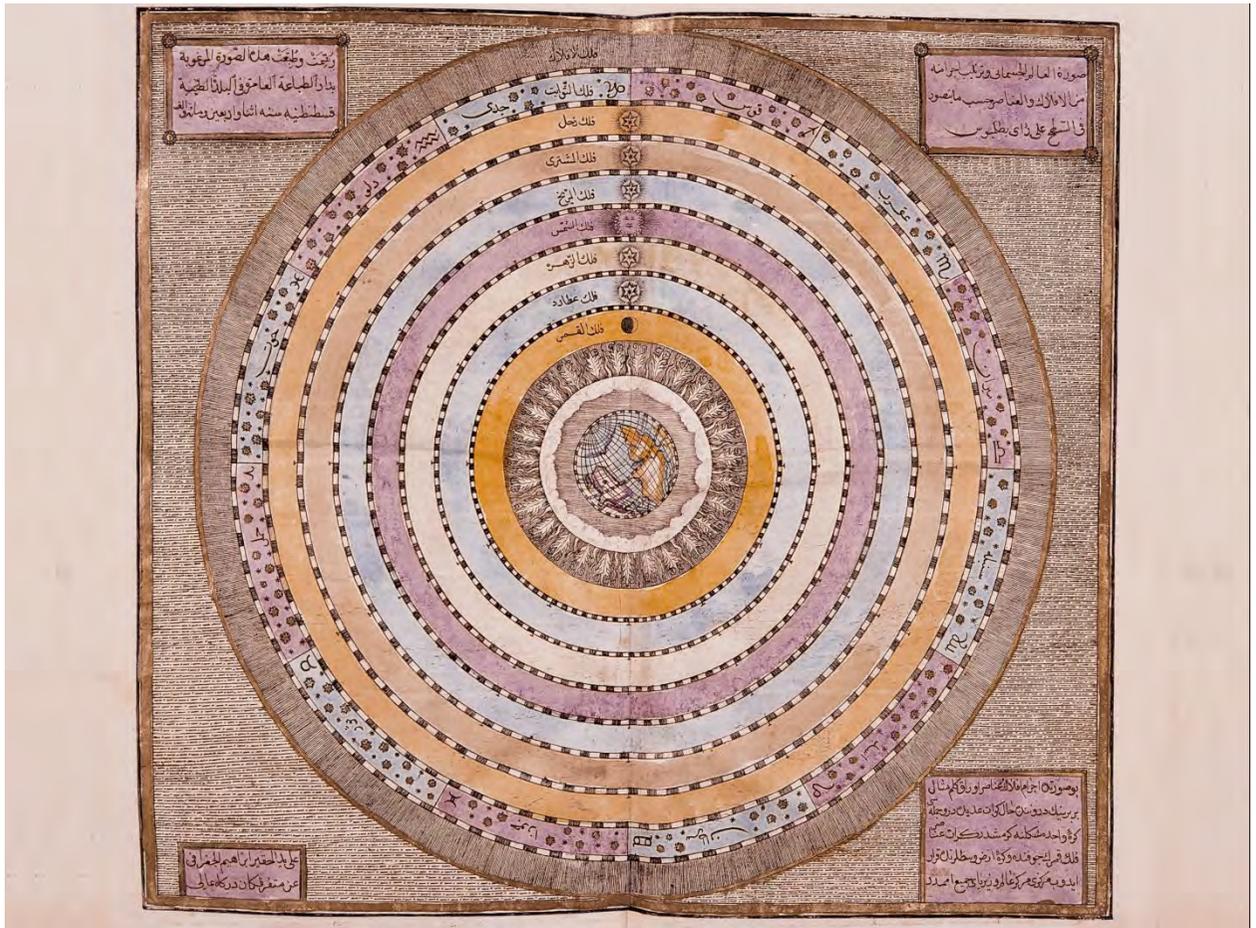
1. I verily conclude this discourse in that (which) the Dove of Light sang forth aforetime, at the moment of His arrival in the Land of Exhilaration and warbled with the accents of the heart. And You know, O My Beloved, that for the sake of God I desired authorization, since patience, on account of My love for the unveiled beauty of God, had departed from Me. And You know that a son of adultery willfully desired to shed My blood.

4. Nay, by the presence of Thy Might! I do not pledge allegiance unto him, either in secret or publicly. It is God alone Who causeth the day of the spilling of My blood to draw nigh, and when My tears shall be sprinkled upon the dust. So oh, would that this, My day were the day of the shedding of My blood, for my ardent desire is for the soil. So praised be God, One worthy of praise and Mighty, above that which the associators assert with respect to His description. And praise be to God, Wondrous Lord of all the worlds.

Article



Every culture and every religion has a creation story. This image represents lines from Hebrew, English “Old Testament” and Arabic scripture regarding creation. Creation stories can describe: how the world was created, when it was created, the unseen aspects of creation, and why it was created. Image licensed from Adobe Stock Images.



This image is of an old Arabic astronomical chart. It appears to depict the same seven heavenly spheres as the Greco-Roman and “Ptolemaic” world views. I cannot tell what are the three circles between earth proper and the orange sphere for the moon. I assume one is the sphere of air. Then there are two additional circles beyond the seven, the inner containing Arabic letters and the final one being a plain brown border. Seven thus become nine or 12 concentric circles. The classical seven spheres contained: the Moon, the Sun, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and the fixed stars. Uranus Neptune and Pluto were not visible to the naked eye and Mercury was clearly associated with the sun’s sphere. This image was licensed from Adobe Stock Images.

An extensive commentary on this Tablet has been written by Bijan Ma’sumian, PhD [reference #11]. There are several other references to it in English. It is mentioned in “God Passes By” and in “Baha’u’llah: The King of Glory” [#7, #4] but these do not require discussion here. Jonah Winters [#18] provides a nice outline and adds further references. Adib Taherzadeh [#16] has a good but brief discussion in Revelation of Baha’u’llah volume I. Stephen Lambden [#9] has provided the provisional English translation of the Tablet which I attached, and which is available online. Faculty notes from a Wilmette Institute course [#2] contain three more commentaries. Kevin Beint [#5] provides a student commentary from another class. Jack

McLean [#12] has an article available online discussing Baha'i theology, which includes a nice diagram of the 5 realms on his page 13. I found his diagram after I had completed my own, rather similar table, and it is interesting to compare the two.

The Bab's color system is referenced several times in a summary of the Persian Bayan found in "Selections From the Writings of E. G. Browne" [#13], Chapter 3. "Gate of the Heart", by Nader Saiedi [#15] details the Bab's categorization of His revelatory Verses and the initial steps of creation. Lastly, Jean-Marc Lepain [#10] wrote a lengthy analysis of the hierarchy of spiritual worlds in the Tablet of All Food. An online copy was translated by Peter Terry.

Historical Background:

When Baha'u'llah was in Baghdad, many Babis looked for guidance to Mirza Yahya, titled by the Bab "Subh-i-Azal" [Morn of Eternity]. Within the first year after Baha'u'llah and His half-brother arrived in Baghdad as exiles [in 1853], one Haji Mirza Kamal al-Din Naraqi traveled to Iraq to ask Mirza Yahya for a commentary on the Qur'anic verse 3:87 "All food was lawful to the children of Israel, save what Israel made unlawful to itself before the Torah was sent down. Say: Bring the Torah now and recite it, if you are truthful." This verse announced the abolition of most of the Jewish rules regarding food, which Mohammad said were not divine in origin. Yahya apparently prepared a commentary on the verse for the Haji, which has since been lost. Haji Naraqi was not impressed, and he then asked Baha'u'llah for a commentary on this same verse. In response Baha'u'llah revealed the Tablet of All Food. The exact date of their meeting and the revelation of this Tablet has not been discovered. Upon receiving it, Naraqi became an admirer and follower of Baha'u'llah. In later years he was the recipient of many other Tablets, and he passed away in 1881.

Naraqi's interest in this verse stemmed from an interpretation which had become popular among some of the remaining Babis at that time. The Bab and most of the leaders of His Faith had been martyred, and the remaining disciples were a dispirited lot. Morals among some of them had deteriorated to an alarming degree. This was exemplified by the shocking attempt on the life of the Shah which had resulted in Baha'u'llah's incarceration and exile, and in the martyrdom of so many Babis in the capital, Tihiran. As noted in *God Passes By* [pg 113], Nabil says of that time, "I could detect no trace of warmth anywhere", and Baha'u'llah found upon His arrival among the Persians in Baghdad only one identifiable follower of the Bab. The condition of the remaining Babis was one of two overriding causes for Baha'u'llah's profound sadness during this period, the other being the clandestine but increasing opposition of His half-brother

Mirza Yahya, "Subh-i-Azal". Baha'u'llah's stated intention [*God Passes By*, pg. 114] became "to arise...and undertake, with the utmost vigor, the task of regenerating this people."

Some Babis promoted an interpretation of the above Qur'anic verse, that since the laws of the Faith of Islam had been abrogated by the Bab, in His absence the believers were free to allow themselves all conduct [all "food"] to which their personal conscience consented. Too often of course, in the absence of external standards conscience finds a way to consent to desire. This was the situation in which Naraqi came seeking guidance.

Baha'u'llah reportedly recited this Tablet to Naraqi but did not give him a physical copy [Ma'sumian]. This apparently was intended to avoid any hint of competition with Mirza Yahya. If so, it didn't work. Naraqi was so impressed that he immediately and vocally pledged allegiance to Baha'u'llah, which further inflamed the jealousy of Mirza Yahya. Lepain however has Naraqi subsequently being sent to Iran with a copy of this Tablet to share with believers, but not to explicitly discuss Baha'u'llah's station. Soon after this Baha'u'llah departed for two years to the wilderness in the region of Sulaymaniyih, on April 10, 1854, an event which He clearly foreshadows in the Tablet. Trying to reconstruct the sequence, it seems that Baha'u'llah recited the tablet in Naraqi's presence as it was being revealed. He subsequently gave Naraqi a transcribed copy to share with the other Babis, and then to let them decide for themselves, on the basis of this Tablet and what they had seen from Mirza Yahya, which one was the true Leader of their community. Naraqi, it seems, liberally supplemented the proof of the Tablet itself with his own account of his experience in meeting Baha'u'llah.

In the Tablet of All Food Baha'u'llah emphasizes the necessity of obeying the laws of God, which then were still the laws set forth by the Bab. He states that the meanings of the verses of God can never be exhausted. Importantly, in each realm, level or station of existence Baha'u'llah states that this verse [3:87] has unique meanings. Some of them apply to specific historical figures, events and circumstances. Others apply to spiritual truths. Baha'u'llah briefly outlines five levels of reality, focuses on several key phrases in the verse such as: "food", "Israel" and "children of Israel", and discusses some of their meanings on these five levels. He uses terms which appear in Sufi writings, which is probably only obvious to one with a sound grasp of Arabic, although typically Baha'u'llah takes such previous concepts and endows them with new or expanded meanings. Commentators see Him as revealing anywhere from four to nine meanings for "food" in this Tablet.

Referents I: The tablet begins with an exordium of two lines invoking God. Whenever I find pairs in the Writings, I ask myself whether one interpretation is as a reference to the Twin Manifestations. Here God is invoked as: “Supremely Powerful” [unbounded] followed by “Powerful over all things” [suggesting, perhaps, more specifically within the realms of creation?]. This could be read as “Powerful in both the realms of Revelation and of creation” [“and whatever lieth between them”, the Bab often wrote]. If this is viewed as a reference to Twin Manifestations, Baha’u’llah must be the “Supremely Powerful”, or “Universal” Manifestation, and the Bab is the second referent. Or it may be seen as a reference to the relationship between the Primal Will and the Manifestation.

This is followed by three passages beginning “Praise be to God” [Lambden’s I-- v1, 4 and 7] followed by six which begin with “So praised be Thou, O My God, O My God!” [II- 1, 4, 6, 12, 19, 22]. This is a total of nine passages, preceding verses which address the Haji: “O thou glorious enquirer”, beginning in section III [Lambden]. This alliteration, “O My God, O My God” six times in a row is interesting, and strengthens my suspicion that it is an allusion to Twin Manifestations. This total of nine verses of praise suggests the significance of the number nine, associated with the name, “Baha”. Since the central purpose of the Revelation of the Bab was to prepare His followers for the advent of “Him Whom God shall make manifest”, it is not unreasonable to speculate that the Haji came to understand this symbolism.

There are deeply symbolic phrases such as “Divine Fiery Water”. Afnani [[8] suggests that “fire” here refers to the figure of Baha’u’llah Himself and “water” refers to the “water of life”, the vivifying Spirit of God, brought anew to humanity in each Revelation. I observe that elsewhere “fire” is associated with the love of God and “water” with spiritual knowledge, these together expressing the twin purposes of our existence as reflected in the short obligatory prayer: “Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee”. “Fire” also sometimes symbolizes the tribulations and persecutions which accompany every new Revelation [“it would almost shine forth, though no fire touched it”: see Qur’an 24:35] and lastly this pairing of opposites is seen elsewhere, such as in the “angels of fire and snow” [Prayers & Meditations of Baha’u’llah, reference 3, #94] or the “fire and water” [ibid, #89].

“Letters of the Dispensation” may refer to the Bab’s Letters of the Living, but more generally may refer to all the believers in Him, including the Haji himself, whom Baha’u’llah is addressing. Baha’u’llah affirms both the Haji’s faith and the Bab’s status as the Revealer of God. The

“Incomparable Point” is now “Beclouded” [I-1] perhaps because of the Bab’s martyrdom and the martyrdom of the greatest of His Letters.

Muin Afnani states this may be the first Tablet revealed in Baghdad and that it appears to be the earliest of His expositions on the nature of the Manifestation of God. It seems clear to me that He is repeatedly alluding to His Own station, as “Him Whom God shall make manifest” in this Tablet, more frequently and in a shorter space than in the incomparable Kitab-i-Iqan. For example the “Purified, Sanctified Temple” [I-4] is most likely a reference to the Bab, but then the “Countenances characterized by the letter H” [I-5] may reference Baha’u’llah Himself [Husayn Ali], whose name is shared by the most revered martyr in Shi’i Islam [Imam Husayn]. Baha’u’llah also seems to be the “Light-filled Dove” [or Dove of Light], who is now edifying the Haji. The names at the end of this passage, “the All-Powerful, the Wrathful”, may reference unprecedented calamities to afflict mankind for having rejected His [Baha’u’llah’s] message and putting the Bab to death.

In I-7 are more references to Twin Manifestations: the “Light with Twin Mounts”, “Twin Spheres”, “Locs”, “Repositories”, “Impulses”, and “Countenances”. This section ends [I – 10] with “Praise God” [present tense imperative] [Baha’u’llah, still in the flesh] and “Praised be God” [the Bab, Who has already been martyred].

Baha’u’llah then speaks repeatedly in His human station, as an evanescent and abased servant. Here it is useful to remember an explanation elsewhere in the Writings, that when scripture expresses some deficiency in the Prophet, it really refers to His followers, or to the people among whom He appeared. In this vein we see, “Bereft of splendor am I”, “No glory have I”, “Without radiance am I”, “No lustre have I”, “We failed to invoke Thee”, “We failed to adequately bear witness”, and “We failed to entreat Thee”. These probably refer in the first instance to the state of the Babi community. I have to wonder what is meant by “at the moment which, in Thy House...”. Is this abstruse, or is it a reference to clear opposition already manifested by Mirza Yahya, in the earliest period of Baha’u’llah’s dwelling in the House later designated by Him as the site for pilgrimage? Some may also argue that these expressions of humility and evanescence [“bereft of splendor”, etc] are a means of concealing His true claim, just as the Bab only gradually unfolded the significance of His claims over several years. However, the dramatic assertions of His position of spiritual authority and Successorship, found later in this Tablet, would perhaps not be present, if Baha’u’llah wished to completely hide His claims. On the whole, this Tablet might be read in either way: as asserting that Baha’u’llah is in

fact that Successor promised by the Bab, or that He is merely a grieving and blessed servant, sharing some of His insights. In this regard it is interesting how many times Baha'u'llah stresses that the Truth would not be hidden but would be evident, if the people only had the capacity to see it. He asserts that God never withholds His favors from humanity and does not wish to see anyone abased, but mankind abases itself, is wrapped up in delusions and fantasies, clings to the images of the past [Islamic tradition], and is blind to the noonday Sun which is present. The Tablet thus can be seen as a test, especially for the Babis who were expecting the imminent appearance of their Promised One. It is a test that the Haji fully passed, thereby becoming one of Baha'u'llah's faithful disciples for long years to come.

“Thou wast hidden in the Image Thou hadst aforetime [II-8]. Is this solely ahistoric, or does this refer to the inability of Moslems to recognize either the Bab or Baha'u'llah, due to their being veiled by the conventional Islamic teachings and their understanding of Mohammad [image aforetime]?”

In II-12 Baha'u'llah references the life of privilege into which He was born, and how He cast it aside when He dedicated Himself to the mission of the Bab, “Thy Remembrance”. Immediately after this we again find a reference to Baha'u'llah's Own station: “Thou art the One Who deposited in Mine inmost Essence a Lamp from Thy Being, by means of which Thy Self might become known”, et seq.

II-23: “during those lengthy periods of gloom, when the Light-filled Bird warbled beyond the veils”: May this be in part a reference to the lengthy periods the Bab spent concealed in the fortresses of Chiriq and Mah-Ku? In any case this is again immediately followed by allusion to Baha'u'llah's Own station: “Thou raised Me up unto the heaven of the Unseen”...”made Me to ascend unto the Heaven of Evident Attestation”...”I reclined upon cushions of Light”... “rose up above the Heaven of Manifestation” etc.

Section III: The connection of “fire” with the love of God is strengthened by the way in which Baha'u'llah addresses the Haji: “enquirer who art set aglow through the Fire of the Friend” and “I found in thy heart a fire”.

He asserts that “it was not My desire to respond to the enquiries of any among the servants” but it does not at all appear to me that Baha'u'llah exhorts the Haji to respect Mirza Yayha as the head of the surviving Babis. He certainly does emphasize the necessity of obedience to the

laws of God. Again He emphasizes that He also does in fact have spiritual authority, whether He desired it or not, telling the Haji that He is answering him “through the power and might of God”.

In Section IV, Baha’u’llah addresses “O Thou Concourse”. Lambden capitalizes this, but it strikes me that Baha’u’llah may now be addressing the remainder of the Babis, and especially Mirza Yahya, Siyyid Muhammad, and all those who were interested in worldly leadership. If that is the case, then “thou concourse” should perhaps not be capitalized. This reading is strengthened by the severe language immediately following it: “Do not calumniate Me”...”My Lord is sufficient protector against you”...”Sufficient is the careful [or “exacting”?] account of His Own Self”. This last may be an assertion that a careful reading of the Bab’s Own Writings would prove the falsity of Yahya’s claims and the fulfillment of “Him Whom God shall make manifest” in the person of Baha’u’llah. This is followed by “Make Me victorious over the disbelieving peoples” and then by the first of several passages in which we hear God speaking to Baha’u’llah: “Say: It is not for you to ask why it is this way...”. In summary, “O thou concourse” appears to be addressed to those desiring leadership and those already opposing Baha’u’llah, from among the remaining Babis. “It is not for you to ask why it is this way”, which appears several times, at first glance seems addressed by God to Baha’u’llah, but might best be applied to any of the readers of the Tablet. At that time there was terrible confusion, dismay and bewilderment as to why God had seemingly deserted the few remaining believers in the Bab’s Message, when many of them had expected it to triumph in their lifetime.

In Section V Baha’u’llah again addresses the Haji and testifies to his illumination by the Bab, “the Exalted”. He states that the Haji has both acknowledged and understood everything which Baha’u’llah has revealed so far, and in light of that, He will expound even more about the Qur’anic verse in question.

In V-7 is the clear command not to set aside the laws of God, then extant in the Writings of the Bab: “all that God decreed...through His command...is the truth...it is incumbent upon all to act in conformity therewith...”. Although the laws of Islam had been abrogated, the laws of the Bayan had not been. The Haji and other Babis should ignore “those who have been spreading wickedness”, “liars and calumniators”, and the “associators” [those who associate themselves as a partner with God, by arrogating to themselves an authority which they did not possess].

Section VI, some have interpreted as Baha’u’llah advising at least nominal subordination to Mirza Yahya, because the phrase “Subh-i-Azal”[Morn of Eternity] is used here. The specific historical context of this phrase was the title “Subh-i-Azal”, given by the Bab at Baha’u’llah’s

suggestion, to Mirza Yahya. However it has meanings in the spiritual realms, one of which is probably referent to the Bab Himself, as the “Dawn Breaker” of a vast new cycle of fulfillment in mankind’s spiritual destiny. That this spiritual meaning, and not any reference to Yahya is meant, seems strengthened by being immediately followed with “the lights of which have filled the horizons”, and the “winning ways of the Light of Endless Duration”. The light of the Bab’s Revelation had indeed “filled the horizons”, while Mirza Yahya/Subh-i-Azal the person hid from everyone in fear. And when he was located, his words and writings were devoid of any light—which was the very reason the Haji was seeking and now receiving enlightenment from Baha’u’llah. If by “Subh-i-Azal”, any reference to Mirza Yahya was meant here, it would have seemed an ironic one to the Haji, but my view is that Baha’u’llah here is explaining the true meaning of “Subh-i-Azal”. In support of this see reference 15, pg. 393 note #17, regarding a Tablet addressed by the Bab to Mirza Yahya, emphasizing that He, the Bab was the true “Morn of Eternity”, and that all followers, without exception, receive any light which they have from Him.

The “Light of Endless Duration”[VI – 1] evokes Lahut, the “Paradise of Endless Duration”, a very high realm indeed, to which humans have no direct access. The Light from this realm however pervades all of the Manifestations of God: “appeared upon the Temples of the Orient Light”. Here Baha’u’llah equates Israel with the “Primal Will”, which elsewhere is said to be the first and only direct emanation from Deity. He also equates Primal Will with that which shines forth through the Twin Manifestations: “captivated by the Light of that Primal Will in the year 60” The “Light of that Primal Will” hath ever been established upon the “Throne of Favour” [the Manifestations of God, here in such absolute unity that the Person and the Throne are singular, although “the people neither comprehend nor bear witness”.] As will be seen in my table below, all this makes perfect sense if the realm of “Lahut” is a realm in which the Manifestations of God interact with the Primal Will.

VI-10 references the “All-Beauteous Joseph”, which I believe is Baha’u’llah Himself. We recall that Mulla Husayn’s request for a commentary on the Surah of Joseph was demurred by Siyyid Kazim, who asserted that this subject was too weighty for him but that spontaneously the Qa’im would reveal His commentary unbidden. This was the Qayyumu’l-Asma, the “first, greatest and mightiest” of the Bab’s works [#7, pg 23]. The sufferings of Joseph: beloved above all others by his Father, the subject of murderous envy by his half-brothers, cast into a pit to die, put in chains, exiled to a foreign land, never to return home, falsely accused, raised to a position of honor as the vicegerent of the King, gifted with divine knowledge, forefather of the “chosen

people”, the fragrance of whose garment brought joy, are all symbolic of Baha’u’llah. The Haji surely was aware of the significance of this reference to Joseph. In the Qayyumu’l-Asma, the Bab also links Joseph with Himself, but I believe the passage here makes most sense if one sees it as a reference to Baha’u’llah.

VI-12: “thank God Who created you aforetime”: i.e., Who brought the Haji to spiritual life in the Revelation of the Bab.

VII-7: Baha’u’llah again asserts His Own station: “if I should expound that verse from this day until the days find their consummation...the extent to which God would favor Me...could not be estimated...the Mystery of the Divine Oneness hath been set in motion, the Ocean of Endless Duration [Lahut] hath surged...and the Countenance of Light...beamed forth from...the Tree of the Command... in these days, in which the Sun of Manifestation hath risen in unique [unprecedented] manner...” This verse seems to reference in descending succession the realms of Hahut, Lahut and Jabarut, the last being the level at which the Manifestation of God reveals Himself to mankind.

Here appears a second “Say: It is not for you to ask why” and the context suggests it is warning to the Babis not to reject the Promised One of the Bayan based on their faulty understanding.

Next appears Baha’u’llah’s desire to withdraw from the envious: “this forsaken ant...whose desire is to depart from your midst and vanish from your sight...”

In VIII-1 the “Isle of the Criterion” [al-Furqan] is referenced, and here “food” is equated with the “trustees” [Imams] who succeeded Him [Muhammad], who therefore continued to provide the food of heavenly teachings. Muin Afnani equated “Point of the Furqan” with the “Word of God”; however the Bab wrote of Muhammad as the “Point of the Furqan” just as He Himself was the “Point of the Bayan”. The twenty fifth Surah of the Qur’an is called “al Furqan”, meaning “The Criterion”, and the Qur’an itself is there called the Criterion of truth and falsehood for mankind. Therefore, “Furqan” is a reference to the Qur’an, and Mohammad, its revealer, is according to the Bab the “Point of the Furqan”. The Manifestation of God can be seen as both the Revealer of the “Word of God”, and also as being in Himself the living Word of God [cf. the Gospel of John, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...”]

In VIII-3 Baha’u’llah appears to equate the “Crimson Isle” with the “Orchard of the Exposition” [Bayan] and with the Primal Point [Bab]. Here it is somewhat unclear what “Israel” references. It appears that every time the words “elevated station” appear, a different “Israel”, a different

source of guidance, is intended, and they are in historical sequence. Food, its source, and its recipients become difficult to distinguish. If we assume that the “food” and drink both refer to the holy spirit as the source of spiritual guidance, then at a very high level the Primal Will is the source, and “Israel”, the recipient is the Manifestation of God. Then the Manifestation becomes the source, and the recipient becomes His successor(s). Eventually, “Israel” becomes the succeeding Manifestation. Here of course the interval was very short, and for the next thousand years or more, Baha’is expect to speak of the “Twin Manifestations” of the Bab and Baha’u’llah. In relation to humanity at large, “Israel” then becomes the source of food and we are the recipients. When the Dispensation of Muhammad ended, “We abandon[ed] the food” [“of the Islamic Wilaya?” --Lambden VIII-3]and “desire the Primal Point, the Pure Wine...in an elevated station”...“the Last Countenance [“Quddus?”—Lambden] in an elevated station”...“the Countenance of Light, the Disengaged Manifestation, the Temple of the Divine Oneness” [Mirza Yahya?—Lambden] “in an elevated station, whom the aggressors caused to be imprisoned in the land and concealed in the cities.” I believe the succession of guidance here is: Muhammad—the Imams--The Bab—Quddus—Baha’u’llah, and that Mirza Yahya is not intended here. Although one could argue that Yahya was “disengaged”, and that he was “concealed in the cities”, he was not imprisoned, while Baha’u’llah had been imprisoned in the Black Pit in in the city of Teheran, where His Revelation began. That true guidance is intended and not error, is illustrated by the closing words of this passage: “above that which the hands of the people commit” and “God is not unaware of the actions of the people”. The “Temple of the Divine Oneness” brings to mind the later mystical “Surah-i-Haykal [Surah of the Temple]. “Disengaged Manifestation” here may be referencing Baha’u’llah’s status as the next Manifestation, while He has not yet clearly announced Himself as such. That is, He is not yet fully and publicly engaged in His Mission. It appears that the Haji understood all of this.

In X-4 “Fire” as the love of God is again illustrated by “you have sought and derived warmth from the fire of Love”. This is followed by another address from God, clearly directed to those who have violated the Covenant of the Bab: “Say: Woe unto you, on account of that which your hands have committed...” This is followed by what might be considered an appeal to any among the Babis who hesitate, confused as to Baha’u’llah’s station: “Say O People of the Concurrence! Be not astonished at the handiwork of God...Fear God! And know that the handiwork of God radiates forth in the Image[s] of the Lamp of Eternity...”

XI-4 also appears to be a call to the Babis to accept Baha’u’llah: “Say: O People of the Realm of the Divine Cloud! Issue forth from your habitations and present yourselves in the Sanctum of

Light, the manifest Divine Cloud, the most great House of God, as hath been decreed with the permission of God the Exalted [the Bab], Who beareth witness..." Baha'u'llah encouraged the Haji to share this Tablet and let those with insight recognize Him through it for themselves. This was the beginning of a process leading to His proclamation in the Garden of Ridvan, and culminating in the "most great Separation", during Baha'u'llah's time in Adrianople.

XII-1 "the Dove of Light sang forth aforetime, at the moment of its arrival in the Land of Exhilaration and warbled in the accents of the heart..." This suggests that, whether verbally or in writing, Baha'u'llah was already revealing verses prior to this Tablet. It is known that He revealed a short poem while still in the Siyah-Chal, and prayers while en-route to Baghdad [Taherzadeh: Revelation volume I]. But if by "arrival" is meant not a spiritual arrival, i.e. the onset of His Revelation, but His actual physical arrival in Baghdad, then it is not clear what verses are referred to here. It would not be too surprising if He had been revealing verses even earlier than this Tablet, very early in His stay in Baghdad.

In the final Section, a vigorous condemnation is made: "And you know that a son of adultery willfully desired to shed My blood" and "I do not pledge allegiance unto him, either in secret or publicly." It is not clear to me to whom this refers [the most obvious candidates being Mirza Yahya, or Siyyid Muhammad of Isfahan], nor whether "son of adultery" is meant literally, or symbolically [cf. Matthew 23:33 regarding the "generation of vipers", in #8].

I now turn briefly to the meanings of "food", and then to the description of the realms or levels in the Tablet. The four most obvious meanings ascribed to "food" are listed in *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah*: "all knowledge", the Manifestation of God, the Imams, and the ocean of knowledge within the largely yet unrevealed Words of Baha'u'llah. I can count more than four, though not necessarily nine. In the realm of "Lahut" food is described as "liquid camphor" [III-23]. In the Dispensation of the Bab, it is the "essence of knowledge" and "all branches of learning" [V-4]. "Essence of knowledge" and "all branches of learning" are not necessarily the same. "All branches of learning" suggests knowledge pertaining to this world, while "essence of knowledge" suggests to me the knowledge of all spiritual realities. These words evoke the tradition referring to the Qa'im that "knowledge consists of twenty and seven letters", of which twenty five would be revealed by the Qa'im.

In VI-3 food is equated with the "Bearer of the Cause" and in VIII-1 it is equated, in Islam, with the Imamate. In VIII-3 "food" is discarded for "Pure Wine" equated with the Primal Point. In IX-5,

“food” is equated in the Revelation of Baha’u’llah, the “Manifestation of the Command in these days”, to the “Ocean of the Unseen” hidden in “Scrolls of Light” and in “Inscribed Tablets”.



Many houses of worship of various faiths depict images of “heaven”, “hell”, the creation of mankind and of the world, and other metaphysical concepts such as angels and demons. This fresco is titled, “The Glory of Heaven” and is found in the main apse of the Basilica di Santi Quattro in Rome, Italy. Note the existence of several strata. Licensed from Adobe Stock Images

Meanings become difficult to count: should we count each specified “Bearer of the Cause” separately? Should we count “Ocean of the Unseen”, “Scrolls of Light” and “Inscribed Tablets” as one meaning or three? At the least, it seems we have 1) “essence of knowledge” 2) “all branches of learning” [I am counting them separately], 3) liquid camphor 4) the Manifestation of God, 5) Successors [such as the Imams and Quddus, and jointly with 4) they are all “Bearers of the Cause”], 6) “the Ocean of the Unseen” [“immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words....”]. In all cases this food symbolizes spiritual sustenance—a sustenance which gives not just knowledge but also life. It operates at all levels of Revelation and creation, and within each separate Revelation, in history. If we make a very expansive list of “food”, we may count

Muhammad, twelve Imams, the Bab, Quddus and other Letters of the Living, “liquid camphor”, “Pure Wine” [this is connected with the Bab], and Baha’u’llah with His “Ocean”, “scrolls” and “inscribed tablets”, giving quite a few meanings. Baha’u’llah however specifically states that He will explain four, and Taherzadeh lists four. There will be more about nourishment, connected with the Bab’s color scheme and the rivers of Paradise in Islamic tradition.

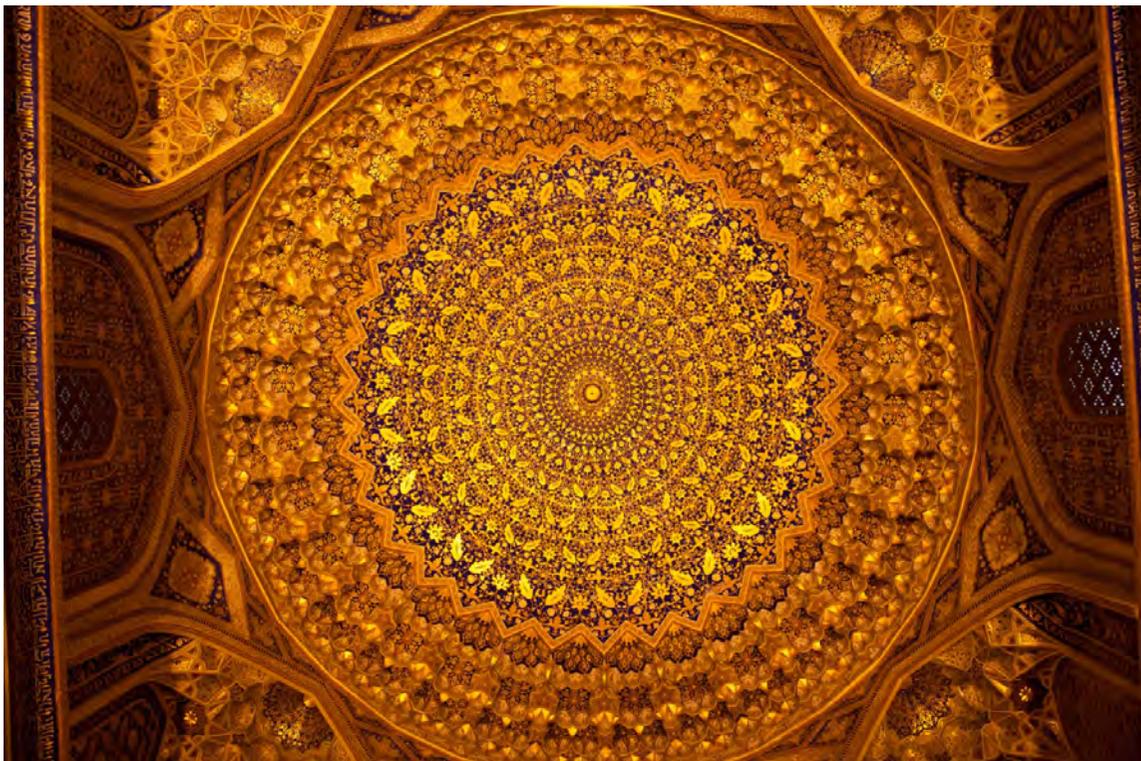
Levels of Reality in the Tablet of All Food:

The highest level of reality in the Tablet of All Food is “**Hahut**”. This begins in III-10 of the Tablet [Lambden] Ma’sumian speculates that the beginning of this word, structurally similar to other words referring to God and starting with the letter H, is connected to “Huwiyyah”, which is God’s self-identity, beyond any other knowledge. He notes this Self Identity, or “Essence of Divinity”, as it is termed elsewhere, is the Absolute Unknown, hidden from everlasting to everlasting, the Mystery of Mysteries and the only true absolute existence, compared to which all else is unreal. Some phrases earlier in the Tablet also appear to reference the Essence of Divinity: “Concealed Self”; “neither begetteth nor is begotten” and “cannot be described by aught save His Essence.” Juan Cole [#6], in the sparsely available *Studies in Babi and Baha’i History vol. 2* addresses Baha’u’llah’s unique use of terms here and many books on Sufism discuss the five Sufi terms used in this Tablet [10]. Ma’sumian also appears to derive some of his analysis here from McLean.

Ma’sumian notes that ‘Abdu’l-Baha compares this level to a black spot of ink on paper. It potentially contains all letters and words [all of creation] yet none can be seen and no differentiation is present. This is reminiscent of the beginning of the most famous quote in the Qur’an: “God’s light may be compared to a **niche** [a dark, empty void] within which is a lamp, encased by a crystal of starlike brilliance...”[Qur’an 24:35]. The first image, the niche, is this darkness and undifferentiated potentiality, out of which the light emerges.

Hahut, Ma’sumian speculates, is God “without attributes”, “unrevealed” and not even the Manifestations of God can attain any knowledge of this realm—but They can perceive that this mystery exists at the heart of everything. Any statement or thought about God pertains only to His revealed attributes, which we know from His Manifestations, and no statement, no thought, no conception is adequate to describe or to approach this realm. Baha’u’llah’s writings repeatedly affirm this.

Based on the provisional translation I obtain a somewhat different understanding of Hahut. It seems that **“Hahut”** is already one step away from the inner Essence of Deity. Consider the words in the translation: **“Paradise of the Divine Oneness”**; **“Mystery of Endless Duration”**; **“no one is capable of expounding even a letter”**. And yet apparently it is knowable, at least to Baha’u’llah, as He states, **“God however will disclose its mysteries when He willeth unto whomsoever He willeth”**. He also terms this the realm of **“the Unique Sonship”** and the **“Incomparable Israelicity”**. The term **Unique Sonship** is simply incompatible as a reference to the Essence of Divinity, because “son” implies a “father”. “Unique Sonship” suggests that this refers to the first Emanation from the Essence of Divinity, which the Writings describe as the “Primal Will”. The benefit of thinking of these realms in relational terms should become apparent now. In relational terms, I suggest this is the relationship between the Unknowable Essence and the Primal Will, from which all else subsequently derives. This brings the lower end of that relationship, the Primal Will, into a domain relating in turn to the Manifestations of God, making the statement that “God however will disclose its mysteries” somewhat more understandable. Additional evidence is in the words: **“praise be unto God, its Creator and its Lifegiver”**, which make sense if the referent here is the Primal Will, but certainly not for the Essence of Divinity. In the table below, I place Hahut and the subsequent realms as an interaction between two levels, to illustrate the usefulness of this relational point of view. The level or realm of **Hahut** is colorless, and is also apparently not linked to a particular name of God, as discussed below.



This image of the ceiling of a mosque in Uzbekistan shows what might be imagined as multiple levels of creation radiating outward from a central point. Notice the intensity of light lessens as you move outward from the center, especially in a drop-off about halfway out. The central point can be thought of as a representation of the “Primal Will”. Islam decried the use of icons and as a result, Islamic art became adept in illuminating sacred verses, and at beautiful geometric shapes, which often contained rich symbolism. Image licensed from Adobe Stock Images

Second comes the realm of **Lahut**, termed in English the “**Paradise of Endless Duration**” the “**Throne of the Divine Realm**”, the “**Snow-White Light**” and realm of “**He is He Himself**”. Ma’sumian describes this as God revealing or manifesting Himself to Himself. Attributes, which were absent in the realm of Hahut, are in the earliest stage of manifesting. A result, says Ma’sumian, is the emanation of the “archetypal forms and essences of all created beings”. This he says is still a stage before actual creation, but might be thought of as God “revealing” to Himself the potentials of everything. “This event is entirely mystical, and takes place within the Godhead”. According to Saeidi however [reference 15 chapter 7] the creation of all other things begins within the Primal Will, and not within the Essence of God, which is completely beyond all else. In fact even the “attributes of God” in reality refer to the attributes of the Primal Will, since nothing at all can be said about the Essence of God. In this realm, says Ma’sumian, the Manifestations of God can claim an identity with God which admits no separation, but an identity in which they consider themselves as non-existent and only God as real. Taherzadeh in

“Revelation of Baha’u’llah” volume 1 says that another term for this realm is the “Heavenly Court” and suggests that “perhaps this is the world of God in relation to His Manifestations”. I very much like this statement, as it illustrates the relational quality that I see in Baha’u’llah’s words. In the provisional translation it is also called the “**Heaven of Manifest Justice**”. Plurality becomes present, as this realm is allotted to those “**servants established upon the Seat of Glory**”. In terms of names and colors, as discussed below, the name of God, **Creator**, matches the role of the Primal Will which, as noted above, the Bab stated is the source or the Creator for everything else. The phrase, “**Paradise of Endless Duration**” has the suggestion not only of eternity, but perhaps of unchanging perfection as well. The color **snow-white** light is associated with Lahut. Of course white is the purest form of visible light and it contains the entire visible spectrum of light within itself.

Lahut is the highest “knowable” realm. Ma’sumian does equate this with the Primal Will, the first emanation from God and the only direct emanation from the Essence of Divinity. He says this has been given various terms in different mystic writings including: Logos, Word of God, Only-Begotten, God the Son, Command of God, Speech [or Utterance] of God, Yahweh or Jehovah, First Mind, First Will, Universal Intellect or Mind, Most Mighty Spirit, Sophia, Throne of God, Prime Matter, Origin of the Universe, Absolute Reality, Simple Reality, Holy Emanation, Manifestation of the Self of God, Lord of Lords, Holy Spirit, Tongue of Grandeur, Speaker on Sinai, Pen of the Most High, Ancient or Pre-Existing Beauty, and Maid of Heaven.

He also claims that Baha’u’llah’s phrase, “Most Exalted Pen” is a reference to the realm of Lahut and he notes how a number of Baha’u’llah’s Writings contain a dialog between Himself and something higher, such as the Maid of Heaven or the Tongue of Grandeur. Ma’sumian refers to Baha’u’llah “borrowing” the term “Most Exalted Pen” from the Moslem mystic Ibn u’l-Arabi. First of all, it seems to me that we should probably not speak of Baha’u’llah “borrowing” concepts from anyone else. Sometimes He makes use of terms that were familiar to His audience, such as Sufi terms used here. In other cases, Baha’is believe that prior mystics and inspired writers caught a glimpse of the truths which the Bab and Baha’u’llah would later manifest more fully. It does appear that “Most Exalted Pen”, “Pen of the Most High” and “Tongue of Grandeur” represent the mysterious “Primal Will”. When there is a dialog between Himself and something higher, this can be thought of as a dialog between His human aspect and His true nature as the Manifestation of God, or as dialog between Himself as the Manifestation of God, and the Primal Will shining through Him. But when Baha’u’llah speaks to mankind in the style of “ayat”, with the Voice of God, He speaks as the “Most Exalted Pen”, the “Pen of the Most High” or the “Tongue

of Grandeur” itself, and His station of individuality is completely invisible. Just as Ma’sumian writes, when addressing mankind the Manifestations can claim identity with God [and with each other], but an “identity” in which They are non-existent, and only the Light of God is seen.

Shoghi Effendi has specifically commented that “Maid of Heaven” has several different meanings, depending on its context: in some cases it represents “the Spirit of Baha’u’llah” or “the divine reality of Baha’u’llah” and sometimes “we don’t know” [letter of Oct 11, 1972 on behalf of the UHJ to Mr. & Mrs. H. L. Barr, quoted by Hooper Dunbar in his compilation “Immortality & the Human Soul”, pg 120-121 , and in *God Passes By*, reference 7 pg. 101]. From our position as ordinary humans, perhaps it is meaningless to even attempt to distinguish an utterance as representing the Manifestation of God in His true station, or as representing the Primal Will working through Him. The Bab states, “It is this Primal Will which appeareth resplendent in every Prophet and speaketh forth in every revealed book” [#17, pg 136].

Ma’sumian notes that ‘Abdu’l-Baha listed the realms of creation as 3: God; the realm of the Kingdom which is the realm of Manifestations and of Revelation; and the realm of creation. On this basis Ma’sumian argues that the Primal Will cannot be thought of as “above”, or independent of the Manifestation of God. Here, I think he simplifies excessively. The Primal Will, it seems to me, is above everything else save God’s Essence. The Manifestations of God are all vehicles through which the Primal Will expresses itself. Because They all express the Primal Will, this is why They are considered as fundamentally one. But no single Manifestation, it would seem, expresses the totality of the Primal Will which creates and manages everything, everywhere, and always, including all of the Manifestations of God. It seems reasonable to see this three-fold categorization by the Master as collapsing some related, but different stages, and Baha’u’llah in this tablet clearly distinguishes at least five of them.

Ma’sumian and Taherzadeh seem to agree that this is the first realm in which the Manifestations of God can approach Him, and that within it They see Themselves as non-existent by comparison.

Perhaps disparate statements about this level can be reconciled with a thought-image. Imagine a two-sided mirror placed between the Essence of Divinity and the realms of Revelation. Viewed from the left side, God manifests Himself to Himself. Viewed from the right side, everything else would perceive the ideal pattern of its own reality, were they able to look. The Manifestations of God perceive Their complete unity here, within the perfect attributes of Divinity. In my view of these realms as interactive, then the “mirror” in this analogy is the “Primal Will”, to the left side is

the realm of Hahut lying between the Primal Will and the Essence of Divinity, and on the right side is the realm of Lahut, in which the Primal Will interacts with the Manifestations of God. Note how in this view, Mr. Taherzadeh's statement that "perhaps this is the world of God in relation to His Manifestations" corresponds with my "relationship between the Primal Will and the Manifestations". Furthermore, plurality is introduced at the lower end of this relationship, with the "servants established on the seat of Glory" ie., the Manifestations of God, while at the upper end, the Primal Will is supremely alone in the station of "He is He Himself" [the first revelation from the Unseen and Unknowable Essence of Deity].



The above image is from the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. The "midnight journey" of Muhammad from the Grand Mosque in Mecca [Masjid al-Haram] to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and from there to the realms of heaven, is briefly recounted in the 17th

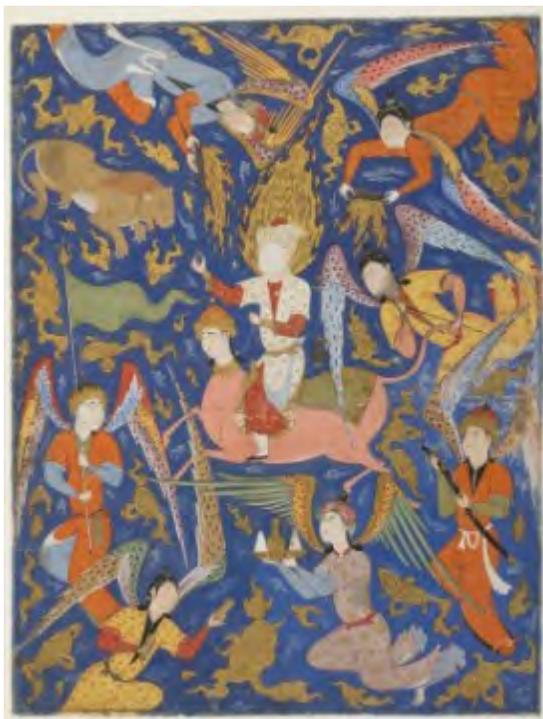
Surah, the “Surah al-Isra” and possibly also in the “Surah an-Najm”, the 53rd Surah. The story was greatly elaborated in subsequent “hadith”, some of which may be legitimate and much of which strikes me as less authentic. The Al-Aqsa mosque was constructed on what was believed to be the location from which Muhammad ascended to view the heavens; thus it is a transition from physical to non-material realms. Licensed from Adobe Stock Images

The third realm moving down is the realm of **Jabarut**. This is called “**the Realm of Divine Omnipotence**”, of “**Thou art He and He is Thou**”, the “**Golden Land**”, and the “**Divine Unicity**” in the provisional English. This seems to be the inherent realm of the Manifestations of God, from which They address mankind using God’s voice, thus “Thou art He and He is Thou”. Islamic tradition also reflects this in the hadith “I am He Himself, and He is I Myself, except that He is what He is, and I am what I am.” Taherzadeh in “Revelation of Baha’u’llah” terms this the plane of “All-Highest Dominion” and Ma’sumian calls it the realm of “Divine Power”. In relational terms this is a realm in which the Manifestations address mankind, speaking to us as the Voice of God, in the voice of command. In the Bab’s system, this is associated with the name “Ever-Living”, and with the style of divine verses in which the Manifestation addresses humanity. Momen in [8] notes that ‘Abdu’l-Baha states the level of Jabarut is the highest level that the human soul can attain. Momen then observes that some might argue only the Perfect Man, in other words that only a Manifestation of God can attain to Jabarut, but he does not see the words of ‘Abdu’l-Baha as reading that way. In the words of this Tablet, while Lahut held those “**servants established on the Seat of Glory**” [note the singular “Seat” there], Jabarut holds those “**servants who speak not til He hath spoken**” and “**who act according to His command and ever restrain themselves in accordance with His wisdom**”. This does indeed appear to include more than the Manifestations of God; in my table the “lesser prophets” and “successors” also belong here. Elsewhere in this Tablet, Baha’u’llah appears to include them all under the term “Bearer of the Cause”. ‘Abdu’l-Baha Himself belongs on this level. It makes sense then, that this would be “the highest level that the human soul can attain.” Shoghi Effendi stated that, “The Prophets regarded as ‘one and the same person’ include the Lesser Prophets as well, and not merely those who ‘bring a Book’. Their station is different, but they are Prophets and Their nature thus different from ours.” [“Lights of Guidance” pg. 498; also quoted by Hooper Dunbar in “A Companion to the Study of the Kitab-i-Iqan” pg. 155] One of those differences seems to be that their proper realm is that of Jabarut. The phrase, “who speak not til He hath spoken” suggests the condition of either innate or conferred infallibility (although in some instances, it might be applied less stringently) while the phrase “who act according to His command, and ever restrain themselves in accordance with His wisdom” suggests a life that is

free from sin, although again this might also be applied at times less stringently. In transactional terms this is the interaction of the Manifestations and Their delegates, all of them being “Bearers of the Cause”, with the rest of humanity in the realm of spirit. Therefore everyone might at least to some degree approach this realm, as we receive Their grace. The color associated with Jabarut is a yellow or golden light.

The fourth realm in this Tablet is the realm of **Malakut**. According to Ma’sumian the realm of Malakut includes the distinctions between the Manifestations of God, the aspects of Their individuality, and the role of the Manifestation of God within the realm of creation with its aspects of time, history, progressive revelation, and circumstance. In the spiritual realms, Ma’sumian states that the realm of Malakut includes the “**Abha Paradise**”: a realm in which blessed human souls can dwell. He states it is also called the “**paradise of justice**” [Taherzadeh: the Heaven of Justice], because in all but special cases, such as infants who die, only those who made the choice to follow the latest Manifestation of God and lived lives which reflected His teachings can attain to the realm of Malakut. It would seem perhaps that the term “Concourse on High” is significantly broader than “Abha Paradise”, and includes many more souls than the latter. In all these discussions of course, we must bear in mind that a) We don’t really know what we are talking about, b) the worlds of God are infinite, and c) We cannot actually comprehend them, unless and until we have been in them. In any case, I am presuming that all the realms to which most human souls can fully attain, fall within the domain of Malakut or below it, and that terms like “**Kingdom**”, “**All-Highest Paradise**”, “**Supreme Concourse**”, “Abha Kingdom”, and “**Crimson Ark**” are all probably more or less exalted domains within this realm of Malakut. The provisional translation terms it the “**Kingdom of God**”, the **Paradise of Justice**, to which are admitted the “**companions of the Light**”, “**whom neither traffic nor merchandise beguile from the remembrance of God**”, and associates with it the color green [the **Verdant Land**]. Perhaps green here symbolizes the gaining of eternal life, and the name of God associated with it, “Quickener” also suggests the gaining of eternal life. In interactional terms, we can think of this as a realm in which angelic souls interact with the Manifestations of God above them and with other human souls below them, whether they are still in the physical body or have passed out of the material world. The reference to **Paradise of Justice** seems important, indicating that the stations in Malakut are attained through God’s justice, and not merely through his mercy or bounty. Although no one truly deserves the infinite bounties of God, the dwellers here have basically achieved what God asked of them in this life: to know Him, to love Him, to remain steadfast in His path, to obey His laws, and to reflect spiritual qualities in

their lives. These are beautifully described in the Qur'an as those "well-pleased with God, and pleasing unto Him". Note Baha'u'llah uses the additional descriptions "companions of the Light" and those whom "neither traffic nor merchandise beguile from the remembrance of God"-not quite as lofty as those who "speak not save by His command" and "act according to His command and ever restrain themselves..."



This is a depiction of the "miraj" of Muhammad; part of the "midnight journey" in which He traveled from Mecca to Jerusalem and from there through the seven heavens, communed with God, and returned back to His starting-place. It is divided between the "Isra", the journey between Mecca and Jerusalem, and the "Mi'raj", between earth and heaven. In this journey He rode the sacred steed "Buraq", at least during Isra, and was accompanied by the archangel Gabriel [Jibril]. This allegedly occurred circa 621 A.D. Many devout Moslems consider visual depiction of Muhammad to be blasphemous, but this did not deter Christian and also some Moslem artists from depicting Him. The artist of this image is not stated but it came from a website titled "Liberty GB", based in Great Britain, which actually argues against many Islamic beliefs. Note that in this depiction Buraq has a human face, and the figure for Muhammad is surrounded by multiple angels from every direction; even a lion-like figure in the upper left. The angels are winged, and some of them carry flags or banners. Angels and archangels are examples of beings thought to exist on non-material planes which never lived on a material plane. Although the Baha'i Writings view many scriptural verses about "angels" as representing human souls with heavenly virtues, this does not necessarily seem to preclude the existence of such beings as well.

The lowest realm in this Tablet is the realm of **Nasut**. This definitely includes the whole realm of the physical creation. Therefore, what we know as mineral, plant and animal levels, including our animal body, are in the realm of Nasut. This is called the realm of bounty [Taherzadeh: Heaven of Bounty], as opposed to the realm of justice. God gives all creatures their existence and life through His bounty, and not through their own merits. The physical life of course is an inferior life, as physical life is temporary and spiritual life is eternal. But Nasut may also include many spiritual realms, after this earthly life, to which many souls are admitted through God's bounty and mercy rather than through His justice. The text is somewhat confusing, but includes "**Paradise of Divine Bounty**" and "**crimson land**". This seems to fit with the fourth name of God in the Bab's system, "**Slayer**", which has several significances. All creatures in the physical realm must die. "Every soul must taste death". To win the pleasure of God however, we don't have to literally be martyrs but we do have to make an effort to slay our worldly nature, and replace it with desiring what God has willed for us. The fourth category of verses, according to the Bab, were philosophical, rational and educational verses, which explain the phenomenal world for us, and thus they are associated with Nasut. In interactional terms, Nasut may be thought of as realms in which we humans interact with other created beings on our own level and below, and receive inspiration coming to us from the higher realms. Nasut is a station of imperfection, and of striving for progress. After death, the realms of "Nasut" might include anything from "nether hell fire" to "heaven", the "garden of happiness" and much of the "concourse on high"—apparently a vast range of conditions, which are below "Malakut" or the "Abha Paradise".

Man is said by Ma'sumian to exist between the realms of Nasut and Malakut. Our soul would find its true home in the realm of "Malakut", but we can hold it back from that destination if we do not properly allow the spirit to nurture our soul while we are in this world. I suggest that for souls who did not win admittance into the station of Malakut based on their earthly life, their initial heavenly destination, from which they await further progress is still a [non-physical] part of Nasut: within the realms of God's bounty.



“Hell” was often conceived as the inverse of heaven, in a geographic as well as a metaphysical sense. Thus if heaven had “pearly gates”, hell must have fiery or dark gates. This image is of a demon on an impressively dark door, from a church in Rouen, France. One of the greatest Western works describing “metaphysical” realities is Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, consisting of *Inferno* [Hell], *Purgatorio* and *Paradisio* [Paradise or heaven]. Interestingly while the numbers three [symbolizing the trinity] and seven [related to the ancient seven spheres of the heavens] often appear, the structure of the realms also follows a 9 + 1 pattern. Thus the circles of hell total nine, with the addition of Satan presiding over them [9 + 1]. The seven “deadly sins” were divided into three categories: self-indulgent, violent and malicious. Similarly there are seven purges in Purgatory and nine realms, plus the Garden of Eden at the top [9 + 1] Again there are nine spheres in heaven, with four cardinal and three “theological” virtues. All of the seven physical spheres of antiquity are symbolically represented, with two more added, plus a final “Empyrean”, representing the Essence of God [again 9 + 1 realms]. Dante depicted an inscription over the gates of hell with the famous phrase, “Abandon hope, all ye who enter here”. A fuller translation runs in part: “Through me you pass into the city of woe; Through me you pass into eternal pain; Through me among the people lost for aye;...Before me things create were none, save things eternal—and eternal I endure. All hope abandon, ye who enter here.” The Baha’i writings depict heaven and hell as essentially states of the soul, and not locations. There is not a doctrine of strict and eternal damnation, although choices made in this life have a necessary impact on the condition of the soul as it passes into the non-physical realms. Hope is held out for the progress of any soul, and the importance of God’s mercy exceeding His justice is emphasized. [Image licensed from Adobe Stock Images]

There is a deficiency in the English language, which becomes apparent when attempting to discuss spiritual realms. We are familiar with the word “**finite**”, which means strictly limited. Translations of some of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s talks use the word “phenomenal”, indicating the same thing: objects which have both a beginning and an end. Still another term for this is “temporal”, and a fourth is “contingent”, which introduces the additional concept of causality. In any case, the Baha’i Writings definitively state that the soul of man has a beginning [near the time of conception of the physical body] but it does not have an ending and we retain an individual existence thereafter. This gives it [the soul], on the one side [its creation] a relation to finite phenomena. On the other hand, by existing eternally after its creation it bears a resemblance to other eternal things going forward. This is an illustration of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s statement that “man is in the highest degree of materiality and at the beginning of spirituality--that is to say he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection.” [Some Answered Questions Ch. 64] We usually conceive of spiritual realities as being **eternal**, but “eternal” normally means “eternal in the past **and** eternal in the future”. We do not have a good term in English for something like the human soul, which has a beginning but no end. I use the inelegant term “**unending**” in the table below. As for “eternal”; that is eternal in the past and eternal in the future, I suggest the proposition:” All eternal things lie in the realm of Revelation. And all things in the realm of Revelation are eternal.” It is also true that creation as a whole is eternal in the past and future, but still everything in the realms of creation is constantly changing, and not any particular thing within it is eternal.

In summary, it seems that the realm of “Nasut” does not equate solely to the physical world. Everything in physical creation is limited: it has both a beginning and an end. The realm of “Nasut”, being the realm of God’s bounty, also includes many souls who have not reached to the level of Malakut, and souls have the unique quality of being “unending”, as noted above. They are included within a vast “Concourse on High”, as souls who remain basically dependent on God’s mercy for their further progress. The color associated with Nasut is crimson or red, which associates with the fourth river of paradise, sparkling wine; also with the color of blood, of the setting sun, and the red of many clays and rocks (ie, with earth).

A quote may illustrate this theme. “This phenomenal world will not remain in an unchanging condition even for a short while. Second after second it undergoes change and transformation. Every foundation will finally become collapsed; every glory and splendor will at last disappear, but the Kingdom of God [Malakut] is eternal...” [Tablets of the Divine Plan pg. 79 in #1]. Our physical bodies are born, and they die. According to the latest calculations, this earth had a birth

date some 4 billion years ago, and it will have a day of death some billions of years in the future. Our sun too had a birth, roughly 4.5 billion years ago, and by current calculations is about halfway through its expected lifespan. This entire physical universe has a calculated birth date, about 13.8 billion years ago. Its death may still be a very long way off, and the exact manner of its death is still a topic of speculation among scientists. It is calculated that the smallest stars can burn so slowly that they may last for a trillion years! Nevertheless, eventually all new star formation will have stopped and all stars will have exhausted their fuel. After an unimaginably longer period, all black holes would have evaporated away. At that point our physical universe would be a cold, dead, dark, expanding infinite space with greatly dispersed radiation and all physical objects close to absolute zero in temperature. What happens then? Scientists are still struggling to understand the ultimate fate of this universe. Baha'is believe unequivocally that creation has always existed. Yet everything in this physical universe that we see is finite: it has a beginning and an end. This even holds true for our physical universe as a whole—at least in terms of anything interesting happening. In the physical world, “creation” is essentially a process of transformation. Death or destruction is another transformation. Energy is preserved, but its manifestations are temporal and always changing. Creation as a totality has always existed, but any particular part of it in the physical realms, is impermanent.

I was surprised to learn that some Baha'is find it impossible to reconcile a scientific view of our physical universe as having a “beginning” and some kind of an “end”, with the clear statements in Baha'i Writings that creation has no beginning and no end. It appears to me that this non-acceptance of a strong scientific conclusion is based on too narrow a view of what “creation” really means.

The understanding of the world of creation in most of antiquity would seem extremely cramped today. There was the earth, at the center of it all. Below the earth: uncertain. Did it just keep on going down? Did it rest on giant turtles, or elephants? They had no information about that, so what exactly was “below the earth” was consigned to mythology. The lateral extent seemed confined by oceans, though what happened at the extreme of the oceans was also mysterious. Above, there seemed to be seven “crystalline” [transparent] spheres, in which moved the moon, the sun, four or five visible planets, and the stars. The stars were thought to occupy the most distant sphere but how far up that was could not be measured. The probably imagined it to be many miles, maybe thousands of miles above the earth. Also the world in some theories was believed to have eternally existed, more or less in its present form, and it would of course continue eternally existing in the future.

After telescopes were invented we began studying the heavens with better tools, and soon it was realized that the band of the Milky Way was really comprised of thousands, millions, billions, about 100 billions of stars like our sun. To appear as only points of light, they had to be vastly much further than we had imagined. Gradually we learned to measure the speed of light, and we measured the distance to various stars in “light-years”—distances far too vast for our minds to grasp. But the Milky Way stretched roughly a hundred thousand or so light-years across.

Yet what were those faint blobs of light, also seen in the sky? Were they clouds of dimly glowing gas inside the Milky Way? Or were they something actually outside the Milky Way? When telescopes got more powerful, we got a good look at Andromeda [the large spiral galaxy closest to our own]. Whoa! Soon we realized that almost all those faint splotches of light previously seen were entire other galaxies, much like our Milky Way but at incredible distances from it. Once again, our conception of size immediately expanded by many orders of magnitude, from hundreds of thousands now to billions of light-years. And it became evident to scientists that the very furthest objects we could possibly see, in a vast heavenly sphere about 10 billion light-years in all directions, were still only a very small part of a stupendously huge physical universe. Possibly, it was infinitely huge. In fact, most physicists and astronomers today believe our physical universe to be literally infinite in size.

Time scales also expanded, from an estimate for the creation of the earth some five thousand years before the time of Christ, based on the “Old Testament” chronologies, to a universe almost 14 billion years old [roughly a million times older]. There, however, our measurement of time stops.

The scientific evidence for a beginning to the physical universe which we see, is essentially overwhelming. It comes from so many different directions, and they all fit together so consistently that scientists no longer contemplate this observable universe as having always been here, any more than they contemplate the idea that the earth is really flat and that the whole sphere theory was wrong. Although the so-called “big bang” theory, or what is termed the “hot inflationary expansion” theory of the beginning of this universe is recognized as incomplete in parts, it is based on such a large amount of good evidence that it is thought to describe something real, if incompletely. It might be thought of as analogous to the “theory of gravity”. Nobody doubts, from first-hand evidence, that there’s something quite real about gravity. Modern theories of gravity, also recognized as still incomplete, work so well that we’ve used

them to navigate probes to land on Mars, photograph Pluto and even travel out of our solar system into interstellar space.

That, however, is far from the end for scientists. Though many will argue the lack of a logical necessity for anything to have existed “before the beginning”, or for an outside creative factor to give rise to the universe, nevertheless concepts of reality in which SOMETHING has been present eternally in the past, and will be eternally in the future, are aesthetically much more pleasing to most theorists than the idea that, “it just happened, and that’s all”. Furthermore, some of the best ideas for how to further extend our understanding of physical reality quickly give rise to the idea that there may be an infinite number of other, physical universes, like or unlike our own, which are at least for now, entirely undetectable to us. Similarly they give rise to the concept of the creation and the recreation of entire universes, much the same as individuals, planets, suns all are born, die and are replaced. In short, many scientists are quite comfortable with the notion that **a physical creation** of some sort has always existed, and will always continue to exist. And the notion of its infinite size is already well-embraced. This conception isn’t as fully fleshed out nor as supported by evidence as to be called a “theory”. It’s probably termed something more like a promising concept. For Baha’is then, a belief in the ultimate unity of science and religion is on good grounds with current scientific views on the nature and origin of the universe—provided we accept that the universe we see is only one little slice of “creation”.

Furthermore the above does not touch on what **other** aspects of the “realms of creation” may exist—completely non-physical realms for example, which would still form a part of creation in its totality—perhaps a far larger part than the physical realm we are familiar with. For Baha’is, man is a part of the realms of creation, and we continue to exist eternally, after the death of this physical body, in other, non-physical realms of creation, growing in knowledge and in closeness to our Creator eternally. If there is one thing which seems to best distinguish the “realms of creation” from “realms of revelation” in a metaphysical sense in the Baha’i writings, perhaps it is the notion of mutability, of change. The realms of creation are never in a static or condition. They are ever-present, but ever-changing. This must even be true of non-physical realms. After all, the statement that “the soul will continue to progress...” is meaningless without change. Progression implies some change. At least some aspects of the realms of revelation on the other hand, appear to be unchanging. Whether one wishes to call them “eternal” or “timeless”, they are fundamentally different from the realms of creation. Because we do not experience them, it is impossible for us to fathom them. For example: in one sense they might be thought of

as far more real and “alive” than we are. In another sense, they might not seem “alive” at all, if **change** in some fashion is made a **requirement** for the definition of “life”. Our understanding of “life” unfortunately is completely constrained by all our experience having been confined to this physical creation, in “Nasut”. Note here that several concepts which are often associated with the “realms of Revelation” and as distinguishing them from the realms of creation, might potentially be separable: there is the condition of **eternality**, being always present in the past and always present in the future; the condition of **immutability**, or changelessness; and the condition of **perfection**.

All this above discussion is aimed at understanding something of what Baha’u’llah appears to mean by the realm of “Nasut”—which includes that part of creation we can observe in this physical life, as well as what makes it different from the realms which are above it. It also seems perhaps a useful discussion for those Baha’is who have had difficulty reconciling their beliefs with some concepts in modern physics, such as that so-called “big bang”.

Our soul is “indivisible” and it is “indestructible”. Once created, we are never annihilated. But in the infinite spiritual worlds to which we can attain, Baha’u’llah distinguishes between the realms of “Justice” [Malakut] and realms of Bounty [Nasut]. Both of these are part of the realms of creation, which again are different from, and inferior to the “realms of revelation”. Lastly we have the ultimate Source of everything, the totally Unknowable realm of the Essence of Divinity.

“Thou hast asked concerning the spirits of men. They are immortal. But the spirits of *heavenly* souls will find *eternal life*; that is, they will attain to *the highest and most great stations of perfections...*” [Star of the West VIV pg 38].

Next, it is useful to review some concepts in Islam and in the Writings of the Bab.

Paradise in Islam:

This sets the background for the Bab’s color system. Some readers may be unfamiliar with Islamic concepts about the afterlife, so I will review some common Islamic thoughts about life after death and the realms which humans can attain. These are fairly common ideas, but for any one idea you will find some Moslems who disagree since beliefs vary among Moslems, just as they do among different Christian denominations.

After death, Moslems historically believed that the person’s consciousness is hidden while his body lies in the earth until the Day of Judgment. In this, their belief is similar to “fundamentalist”

Christian concepts of the Day of Resurrection and Judgment. On the Day of Judgment, the dead would return to life, be judged and sent to heaven or hell, there to abide forever.

Heaven is denoted as “Jannah” and hell is termed “Jahannam”. Paradise has various levels, but there is disagreement on how many. Some say 7, some 8, and other traditions say 100 levels. The highest level is “Firdaws”, which means a “garden” with all kinds of plants, especially grape vines. It is said that believers in the highest paradise are separated from Allah by only a “curtain of glory”. Other named levels include “Adn” which roughly means “eternal residence”. This has residences and gardens, under which rivers flow. “Adn” is identical to the English term “Eden”. A third level is “an-Naeen” which has a connotation of “Gardens of Delight” or of prosperity. A fourth is “al-Mawa”, the Gardens of Refuge, which are dedicated to martyrs. A fifth is “Dar-ul-Khuld” a “Garden of Immortality”. A sixth is “dar-ul-Maqaam” which may be translated as something like “Mansions of Eternity”. A seventh is “Dar-us-Salaam”, the “Abode of Peace” [also a term for Baghdad]. And an eighth level is “Illiyun”, an “Abode of Perfection”, guarded by angels. Each of the main levels may contain many sub-degrees, hence 100 degrees of paradise or more may obtain. Above paradise is the Throne of Allah. Paradise is said to have eight “doors” [Babs], which are best understood not as physical entrances but as the ways to attain it: through charity, through regular prayer, through fasting, through participating in Jihad, through pilgrimage, through forgiving others and restraining anger, through firmness of faith, and through “Dhikr”, or the fervent remembrance of God.

Paradise contains many types of plant life and creatures, wonderful gardens and city-like locations with gold, silver and gemstones used in construction. The foods are of an infinite variety of tastes and do not spoil. Delightful fragrances perfume the nostril. In short, every sense perceives the most delightful stimuli. Paradise is said to grant every longing, but greater than any of the pleasures of Paradise is the vision of God, even if it is only through a veil of glory. One nice tradition states that of the 100 levels, only the lowest three levels can be conceived by our minds, and they are like realms of gold, silver and light. The other 97 levels cannot be imagined at all while in this life.

In the center of Paradise is the Sadrat-u’l-Muntaha, the Tree Beyond Which is No Passing. Also described is the Fountain of Kawthar, from which flow 4 rivers in the four cardinal directions. Traditions vary, some describing two of them as becoming great rivers on earth: the Nile and the Euphrates, and the other 2 as rivers in paradise. Some traditions have all four rivers flowing first through paradise then on earth. Each river in Paradise is of a different substance. The first

is pure and colorless water. The second is incorruptible white milk. The third is golden honey and the fourth is red wine. This wine of paradise confers joy without the mental clouding.

Various names are given for the rivers and springs of Paradise. "Salsabil" is the central fountain of camphor, which splits into rivers of Rahma [mercy] and Kawthar [abundance]. Other river names are Saihan, Jaihan, Furat [Euphrates] and Nil [Nile]. Specific river names apparently are not clearly associated to the four liquids mentioned above. This concept of the rivers links paradise with earth, since the rivers flow from a central location to all of paradise and also to earth below. Symbolically, these rivers represent the outflowing of the holy spirit, the river of life. The four liquids are of higher to lower orders of spiritual sustenance, the highest having no color and being most pure water. Milk, the first food of man, comes second in order, honey is the third and red wine is in the fourth degree. Camphor was used in antiquity as a means of preserving things from decay and removing unpleasant odors, so symbolically this means something "incorruptible" and "preserved".

The Bab [according to Saiedi in his masterful "Gate of the Heart"] equated these 4 rivers of Paradise with the first four modes of Divine verses, the first four letters of His given name [Ali Mohammad], the four pillars upholding the Throne of God, the first four in a total of seven steps of creation or Divine action, and four of the names of God. The first 4 types of revelation are in accord with Islamic theology: Ayat or "verses", which are the Voice of God addressing creation; munayat, or prayers and supplications, which are in the voice of the Manifestation addressing God; commentaries and sermons, which are in the style of the voice of the Manifestation speaking to mankind about God, and rational/ educational/ philosophical verses, which are the Manifestation discussing and analyzing the phenomenal world for mankind. In these four modes of revelation, there is also some linkage to the different levels of existence. Attempting to link these four modes of revelation with fixed realms of existence is problematic. However, once we think about relationships between different levels of existence, the styles of revelation make more sense, since any speech has both a speaker and an audience. The colors associated with these four styles of verses do not correlate precisely with the colors connected with the realms in the Tablet of All Food. Recall that there were four rivers in Paradise, but the Bab added a fifth color, green, in his system, and Baha'u'llah retains that system in this Tablet. If we link the modes of verse to the realms in the Tablet, Munayat seems connected to the realm of Lahut, relating as I suggested, the Manifestation with the Primal Will and thus to God. In using the prayers revealed by the Prophet, mankind has the bounty of associating in a sense with Them, in supplication. Munayat is also associated with the river of milk. Ayat, the Voice of God

addressing humanity, seems most easily associated with the realm termed Jabarut. In “Jabarut” the Manifestation addresses mankind with the voice of Command, the voice of God, or of the “Primal Will”. However in relation to the four rivers, it is associated with the highest one: pure, crystal clear water. Commentaries and sermons, described as the Manifestation of God speaking to mankind about God, as from a separate and intermediate level, may be associated with Malakut, which as we saw above includes aspects of the individuality of the Prophet, His particular mission, and His role in history. Among the four rivers, they can be associated with the river of honey. Finally the rational / educational / philosophical verses in which the Prophet explains aspects of our world, are connected with the realm of Nasut which includes physical creation, and are associated with the crimson river of wine. There remain a fifth style of verse and a fifth color in the Bab’s system, which are the Persian verses, and the color green. The Persian verses however can take the style of any of the other four, in terms of the voice used. We saw above that green was associated with the realm of Malakut in this Tablet. Green is not a color associated with any river, but green is of course the color of living plants, and the gardens in Paradise are described as always fresh and green. Is it accidental that in His time, green was also a color worn by Siyyids, and that the Bab was a Siyyid? In the five realms discussed by Baha’u’llah in the Tablet of All Food, Hahut is associated with colorless or no color, Lahut is snow-white, Jabarut is golden, Malakut is green [Baha’u’llah uses the term “Verdant” in describing it], and Nasut is crimson. This explanation of Sufi terms by Baha’u’llah perfectly matches the five color scheme used by the Bab in His Writings. In terms of verse styles, “munayat” [supplications] and the rational / philosophical / educational verses have the best congruence, since the Bab associates munayat with the river of milk [white], it is the second style of verses, milk was the second river, and the second realm, Lahut, is given the color white. Similarly the “lowest” style of verses, discourses about the world of creation, associates with the lowest realm which is Nasut, given the color crimson, and to the fourth river, which was of red wine.

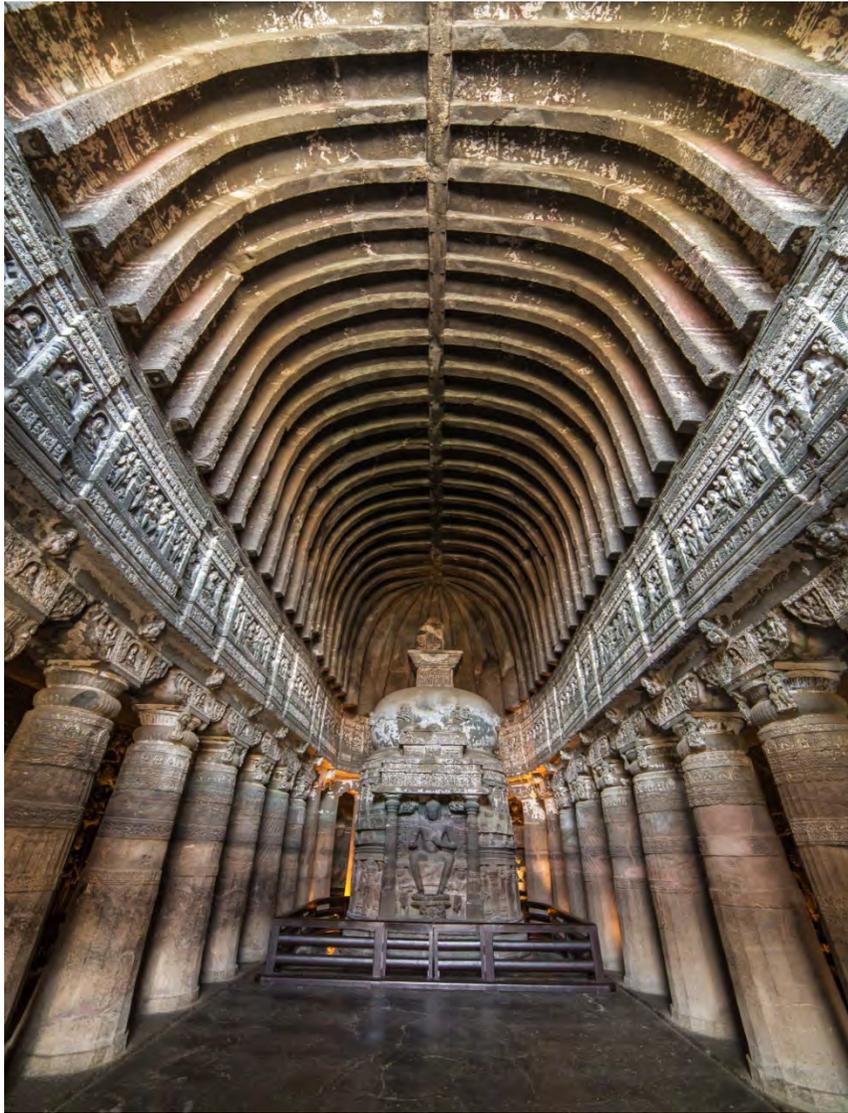
The four names of God equated with these, in provisional English are Creator, Ever-Living [does this equate to “Abiding” or “Ever-Abiding”, and in Hinduism, to “Preserver”?], Quickener, and Slayer. In Islam of course, the color red was associated with martyrdom. I assume that if we try to associate these names with realms, “Creator” associates with Lahut and the Primal Will; “Ever-Living” with Jabarut, an eternal realm from which the Manifestations appear to us; “Quickener” with Malakut, in which mankind gains eternal life by drawing near to the

Manifestation of God; and “Slayer” associates with Nasut. These again are connected to the colors white, golden, green and red, and the realm Hahut is both colorless and nameless.

The four stages of Divine action in English are: Will, Determination, Destiny and Decree. According to Saiedi, white is associated with the Primal Will, yellow with Determination, green with Destiny and crimson with Decree [15, pg. 137]. In the five realms discussed in this tablet white associates with Lahut which in fact is connected to the Primal Will; yellow with Jabarut, green with Malakut and crimson with Nasut. It should be kept in mind however that in the Bab’s Writings the use of colors is somewhat flexible, which renders an attempt to construct a rigid, unchanging linkage of each color with various other concepts difficult, if not impossible. The specific use of a color term in each individual phrase or passage, from either the Bab or Baha’u’llah, is likely determined by multiple mystic and symbolic meanings related to that particular passage, most of which are not explicitly revealed. Furthermore, keeping a consistent linkage of color with Name, verse style, realm and stage of creation is made difficult because: in Islam there were four colors and four rivers of paradise. The Bab added the fifth color green, and a fifth revelatory style, “Persian”, but the Persian verses took any of the classic four modes of voice, and green associates not to a river, but to land.

The Bab refers at least three times in the Persian Bayan to this color system: in Vahid 3 Chapter 10 He equates white with the realm of hearts, gold with spirits, green with souls and red with bodies. He refers to them again in 4:18, and yet a third time in Vahid 8, where he links them with the four words in “In the Name of God, the Most Inaccessible, the Most Holy”, and with the four Names of God which were discussed above.

This all seems quite complex, and in an attempt to understand it I prepared a chart which lists 10 [or should I say 1+9?] grades of existence, and links them as best I understand, with the five realms listed in this Tablet, the three levels mentioned by ‘Abdu’l-Baha, and with their relationship to time. To attempt a more detailed consideration of the concept of “time” is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this article.



Buddhism and Hinduism both have complex cosmologies with many non-physical and physical realms. A Buddhist cosmology conceives 31 levels of existence, divided into three broad categories. Carl Sagan observed that of all religious cosmologies, the Hindu descriptions correspond best to modern astronomy. Both religions conceive a creation existing eternally in past and future, and infinite in scope. Hindu writings conceive a universe starting from a seed point, expanding, then eventually either diluting away or re-collapsing. An infinite number of such universes exist. This statue of Buddha from a cave in Ajanta near Maharashtra, with its multiple pillars and ceiling arches, conveys an idea of endlessly multiple creations. This idea of a multiplicity of existences is common in Buddhist images. [Image licensed from Adobe Stock Images.]

Essence of God or Essence <-> Primal Will	Hahut	God	Transcendent
Primal Will or: P.W. <-> Manifestation	Lahut	Revelation	Eternal
Manifestations of God or Prophet <-> humanity	Jabarut	Revelation	Eternal
Lesser Prophets	Jabarut	Revelation	Eternal
Abha Paradise/	Malakut	Creation	Unending
Supreme Concourse or S.C. <-> everything below			
Concourse on High	Malakut & Nasut	Creation	Unending
Humans on earth or humans <-> below	Nasut	Creation	Temporal
Animals	Nasut	Creation	Temporal
Plants/lower life forms	Nasut	Creation	Temporal
Mineral realm	Nasut	Creation	Temporal
10	5	3	4

Left column: various categories of “actors” mentioned in Baha’i writings.

Second column: The 5 levels named in the Tablet of All Food.

Third column: The 3 levels mentioned by ‘Abdu’l-Baha

Fourth level: Relationship to time. “Temporal” things have a beginning and an end.

“Unending”, have a beginning but no end. “Eternal” has neither beginning nor end. Some other word must designate the Essence of Divinity; I have used “Transcendent” with respect to time.

Bottom row: sum of the categories.

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