

The Inner Dimensions of Revelation

Ross Woodman

Love Me that I may love thee.
If thou lovest Me not,
My love can in no wise reach thee.
Know this, O servant.

When Hájí Mírzá Siyyid Muhammad, the eldest maternal uncle of the Báb, suggested to Bahá'u'lláh that his familiarity with the human person of his nephew stood in the way of his recognition of Him as the long-awaited return of the Hidden Imám, Bahá'u'lláh reminded him of far greater human obstacles placed in the way of the recognition of earlier Prophets. 'Consider', Bahá'u'lláh declares,

how He hath suddenly chosen from among His servants, and entrusted with the exalted mission of divine guidance, Him Who was known as guilty of homicide, Who, Himself, had acknowledged His cruelty, and Who for well-nigh thirty years had, in the eyes of the world, been reared in the home of Pharaoh and been nourished at his table. Was not God, the omnipotent King, able to withhold the hand of Moses from murder, so that manslaughter should not be attributed unto Him, causing bewilderment and aversion among the people?¹

'Likewise,' Bahá'u'lláh continues, 'reflect upon the state and condition of Mary', who, lamenting her plight, wishing she had never been born, carried in her womb what those around her thought to be an illegitimate child. 'How,' Bahá'u'lláh asks the uncle, 'could she claim a Babe Whose

father was unknown had been conceived of the Holy Ghost?' 'O sister of Aaron!' the villagers cruelly chastised her. 'Thy father was not a man of wickedness, nor unchaste thy mother' [Qur'án 19:28].²

Insisting that the Báb's uncle reflect upon these 'grievous' tests (the obstacles in relation to the station of the Báb that he was still unable to resolve after 18 years), Bahá'u'lláh in the most emphatic manner pointed out 'how contrary are the ways of the Manifestations of God, as ordained by the King of creation, to the ways and desires of men!' 'As thou comest to comprehend the essence of these divine mysteries,' Bahá'u'lláh assures the uncle,

thou wilt grasp the purpose of God, the divine Charmer, the Best-Beloved. Thou wilt regard the words and deeds of that almighty Sovereign as one and the same; in such wise that whatsoever thou dost behold in His deeds, the same wilt thou find in His sayings, and whatsoever thou dost read in His sayings, that wilt thou recognize in His deeds. Thus it is that outwardly such deeds and words are the fire of vengeance unto the wicked, and inwardly the waters of mercy unto the righteous. Were the eye of the heart to open, it would surely perceive that the words revealed from the heaven of the will of God are at one with, and the same as, the deeds that have emanated from the Kingdom of divine power.³

Bahá'u'lláh is inviting the Báb's maternal uncle, who had thus far seen his nephew only with his physical eye, to open the eye of his heart and to look again. Implicit in this invitation is the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, a Revelation that for the maternal uncle still lay hidden within an apparent contradiction between word and deed, the purpose of which was to separate the righteous from the wicked. 'How often hath the human heart, which is the recipient of the light of God and the seat of the revelation of the All-Merciful,' Bahá'u'lláh elsewhere declares,

erred from Him Who is the Source of that light and the Well Spring of that revelation. It is the waywardness of the heart that removeth it far from God, and condemneth it to remoteness from Him. Those hearts, however, that are aware of His Presence, are close to Him, and are to be regarded as having drawn nigh unto His throne.⁴

Bahá'u'lláh invited the Báb's uncle into His presence in Baghdad because He recognized in him a closeness to God that had so agitated his soul that he now had to resolve his perplexity concerning his nephew. In extending this invitation, Bahá'u'lláh was, though still unknown to the Báb's uncle, drawing him 'nigh unto His throne'. In opening the eye of his heart to the station of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh was at the same time opening his inner eye to His own as yet undeclared Revelation.

'Consider, moreover,' Bahá'u'lláh writes (always inviting us to 'consider', to 'ponder', to 'meditate'),

how frequently doth man become forgetful of his own self, whilst God remaineth, through His all-encompassing knowledge, aware of His creature, and continueth to shed upon him the manifest radiance of His glory. It is evident, therefore, that, in such circumstances, He is closer to him than his own self. He will, indeed, so remain for ever, for whereas the one true God knoweth all things, perceiveth all things, and comprehendeth all things, mortal man is prone to err, and is ignorant of the mysteries that lie enfolded within him ...⁵

The 'providence' hidden within the 'calamity' of choosing a murderer as the Divine Guide lies in God's desire to restore man⁶ to the reality of 'his own self', a reality of which he is all too 'forgetful' because the remembrance of it depends finally upon his forgetting all else save God. The knowledge of the reality 'enfolded within him', Bahá'u'lláh explains, is 'the same as the comprehension of Mine own Being'.⁷ In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Bahá'u'lláh is liberating the

Báb's uncle from his literalist, sense-bound doubts both about his own spiritual nature and the spiritual nature of his nephew. In the recognition of the latter resides the ground of the former. The 'mystery' immediately confronting the uncle is not only the spiritual fact that his own identity resides in his recognition of his nephew as the Báb but, beyond that, it resides in his recognition of the one but for whom neither the Báb nor any other Prophet would have appeared in the world. The one who now directly addresses him is closer to him than his 'own life-vein',⁸ closer even than his blood ties to his nephew, ties which had ironically stood in the way of his recognition of Him as the Báb.

Having revealed this astonishing proximity, which nevertheless is infinitely distant from God Himself, Bahá'u'lláh is quick to explain that this closeness does not imply that 'the Divine Being ... is, under any circumstances, comparable unto men, or can, in any way, be associated with His creatures'.⁹ 'Everything besides Him', Bahá'u'lláh asserts, 'is as nothing when brought face to face with the resplendent revelation of but one of His names, with no more than the faintest intimation of His glory—how much less when confronted with His own Self.'¹⁰

Clearly, then, one purpose of God's choice of a murderer and One 'known amongst the people as fatherless' is to reduce to nothingness 'the ways and desires of men',¹¹ which blinded the Báb's uncle to the reality conferred upon his nephew. Only when those ways and desires are obliterated can he (along with other members of his family, including the Báb's own mother) awaken to a knowledge of his true self, a knowledge which was identical with his recognition of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

Were God to submit to the literal Shí'í conditions which the Báb's uncle, in the form of four written questions,¹² brought to his audience with Bahá'u'lláh, God, by joining partners with him, would have denied His own transcendent Being, His own 'I am that I am'. Horrified by such a

blasphemous joining, His Pen ‘trembl[ing] with a great trembling ... sore shaken at the revelation of these words’,¹³ Bahá’u’lláh writes:

Such an error hath been committed by certain foolish ones who, after having ascended into the heavens of their idle fancies, have interpreted Divine Unity to mean that all created things are the signs of God, and that, consequently, there is no distinction whatsoever between them. Some have even outstripped them by maintaining that these signs are peers and partners of God Himself. Gracious God! He, verily, is one and indivisible; one in His essence, one in His attributes.¹⁴

The epiphanic encounter between Bahá’u’lláh and Mírzá Siyyid Muhammad intimately and dramatically enacts the relationship between the Manifestation of God and the creatures to whom He reveals Himself. The subtlety of thought by which the Báb’s maternal uncle is brought to a recognition of the station of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh—a subtlety that at once bewilders and dazzles the English reader unfamiliar with the refined complexities of the Persian language which Shoghi Effendi has captured in his translation—exposes the reader to a knowledge of his or her own self that only the Manifestation of God can unveil. ‘Whatever duty Thou has prescribed unto Thy servants of extolling to the utmost Thy majesty and glory’, declares Bahá’u’lláh

is but a token of Thy grace unto them, that they may be enabled to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of the knowledge of their own selves.¹⁵

In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Bahá’u’lláh personifies this unveiling within the human heart of the spiritual station of the human being as identical with his or her knowledge of the Manifestation as the unveiled ‘mystic bride of inner mean-

ing enshrined within the chambers of utterance in the utmost grace and fullest adornment'.¹⁶

This hermeneutic approach to the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* in which the language of revelation contains within it a hidden reality that is unveiled when the reader approaches it as the lover of the Word (in the same way that the lover approaches the beloved) is called the *ta'wíl*, a spiritual exegesis practised, as Henry Corbin points out, 'by all the Spirituals of Islam'.¹⁷ *Ta'wíl*, Corbin explains, is 'that perception which grasps the object not in its objectivity, but as a sign, an intimation, an announcement that is finally the soul's annunciation of itself'.¹⁸ With reference to the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, 'the soul's annunciation of itself' is the annunciation of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation of the Word hidden within all the world's sacred scriptures, an annunciation whose ultimate home is the sanctified human heart ('Thy heart is My home; sanctify it for My descent'¹⁹). The recognition of Bahá'u'lláh, that is, is identical in this Day with the soul's affirmation of itself. 'O My servants!' Bahá'u'lláh declares. 'Could ye apprehend with what wonder of My munificence and bounty I have willed to entrust your souls, ye would, of a truth, rid yourselves of attachment to all created things, and would gain a true knowledge of your own selves—a knowledge which is the same as the comprehension of Mine own Being.'²⁰ The conscious affirmation both of Bahá'u'lláh and the human soul in its coming of age is a recognition of what Bahá'u'lláh calls the unique greatness of this Day. 'Great indeed is this Day!' Bahá'u'lláh writes:

The allusions made to it in all the sacred Scriptures as the Day of God attest its greatness. The soul of every Prophet of God, of every Divine Messenger, hath thirsted for this wondrous Day. All the divers kindreds of the earth have, likewise, yearned to attain it.²¹

The soul's conscious recognition of itself in its recognition

of Bahá'u'lláh repeats in the infinite human mind what Coleridge calls 'the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM'²² as that eternal act is progressively renewed by the Prophets and, in the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, is brought now to its earthly completion.

'I have summoned the Maids of Heaven', Bahá'u'lláh writes, 'to emerge from behind the veil of concealment, and have clothed them with these words of Mine—words of consummate power and wisdom.'²³ 'Let the future disclose the hour', He writes again in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, referring to His own Revelation, 'when the Brides of inner meaning, will, as decreed by the Will of God, hasten forth, unveiled, out of their mystic mansions, and manifest themselves in the ancient realm of being.'²⁴ 'How many the huris of inner meaning that are as yet concealed within the chambers of divine wisdom!' He further declares. 'None hath yet approached them;—huris "whom no man nor spirit hath touched before"' [Qur'án 55:56].²⁵ The ravishing beauty residing in the nuptial metaphoricity of the Word quickens the believer's sanctified heart to facilitate, as the huris of inner meaning, the lover's union with the Beloved, which is to say the true believer's union with the Manifestation.

Presiding over these 'Brides', 'huris', 'Maids of Heaven' (who are metaphorically the feminine component of the Word of God in their spiritual union with the masculine Logos) is Bahá'u'lláh's chosen 'Maid of Heaven', His mystical consort who first appeared to Him in what He called 'those infrequent moments of slumber' while in the 'stench-filled' Sýáh-Chál in Tehran, burdened by the 'galling weight' of chains. In these 'infrequent moments of slumber', Bahá'u'lláh declares,

I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear.²⁶

The time of unveiling, that is, had not yet come. ‘Erelong,’ the Maid of Heaven declared to Him in a dream, ‘will God raise up the treasures of the earth—men who will aid Thee through Thyself and through Thy Name, wherewith God hath revived the hearts of such as have recognized Him.’²⁷ ‘Turning My face,’ He writes on another occasion, describing again His own inner awakening to the station conferred upon Him by God and initially announced to Him by the Maid of Heaven,

I beheld a Maiden ... suspended in the air before Me. So rejoiced was she in her very soul that her countenance shone with the ornament of the good-pleasure of God ... Betwixt earth and heaven she was raising a call which captivated the hearts and minds of men. She was imparting to both My inward and outer being tidings which rejoiced My soul, and the souls of God’s honoured servants.²⁸

The full planetary scope of this mystical intercourse with the Maid of Heaven is embraced in the Maid’s later auditory and imagistic association with Carmel. As Carmel, the inner meaning of the feminine component of the Word becomes in its unveiling the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. Carmel, now united with Bahá’u’lláh after her long separation, has been ‘made the footstool of thy God, and been chosen as the seat of His mighty throne’.²⁹

The union with the Maid of Heaven occurs in what Bahá’u’lláh calls ‘both My inward and outer being’. It is not, therefore, merely the projection or personification of a subjective or inner state; it belongs equally to the outer world which participates in the same reality, the inner and the outer becoming one. Revelation, as Bahá’u’lláh initially describes it in its inward visionary dimension, contains as its ‘outer being’ a new ensouling of the world, which is to say, the calling ‘into being a new creation’.³⁰

The feminine soul of the Manifestation as Bahá’u’lláh

personifies it in the Maid of Heaven is at the same time the personification of the world soul (*anima mundi*) that encompasses the entire creation. Indeed, as Bahá'u'lláh explains, in the 'moments' prior to His Revelation of Himself to humankind as distinct from the Maid's Revelation of Himself to Himself in the Síyáh-Chál, the entire creation passed away, leaving God alone, a Creator without a creation. 'Consider the hour at which the supreme Manifestation of God revealeth Himself unto men,' Bahá'u'lláh writes.

Ere that hour cometh, the Ancient Being, Who is still unknown of men and hath not as yet given utterance to the Word of God, is Himself the All-Knower in a world devoid of any man that hath known Him. He is indeed the Creator without a creation. For the very moment preceding His Revelation, each and every created thing shall be made to yield up its soul to God.³¹

Bahá'u'lláh's amanuensis, Mírzá Áqá Ján, coming out of Bahá'u'lláh's tent on the outskirts of Baghdad on the fifth day of Naw-Rúz (1863), chanted the Tablet of the Holy Mariner. Though largely unknown to those to whom the Tablet was chanted, Bahá'u'lláh was Himself announcing in that Tablet 'the very moment' preceding His public Revelation as a sign of which 'each and every created thing 'had 'been made to yield up its soul to God'. In the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, the Maid of Heaven summons one of her handmaidens and commands her to 'descend into space from the mansions of eternity', to unveil what the Bábís had 'concealed in the inmost of their hearts'. Upon her return, not finding among the 'idle claimants' to the successorship of the Báb 'the breeze of Faithfulness', she fell 'upon the dust and gave up the spirit'.³²

The spiritual evolution from 'the infrequent moments of slumber' in the Síyáh-Chál, when the Maid of Heaven first appeared to Bahá'u'lláh in the final months of 1852,

to His public declaration in the Garden of Ridván in 1863 unveils a hidden dimension of Revelation that expands our human consciousness to embrace previously untapped regions of the human mind. These regions encompass not only our consciousness of our human oneness but also our consciousness of the oneness of the planet itself. Bahá'u'lláh names this new consciousness of oneness 'Carmel', planting and erecting there the Arc of His Covenant.

In the Book of Revelation, the final book of the Bible, the coming to earth of the Kingdom of God is prophetically personified as 'new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' (Rev. 21:2). Viewed in its inner dimension, apparelled in the garment of metaphor, the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the consummation of their marriage. This marriage—the marriage of Heaven and Earth—is a 'new creation'. The old one, which Bahá'u'lláh describes as 'the Prophetic [or Adamic] Cycle', has ended; in Bahá'u'lláh's union with the Maid of Heaven, the 'Eternal Truth' has now come.³³ Jerusalem, sacred to Jew, Christian and Muslim, becomes Haifa, which, as the site of Carmel, is now the 'new Jerusalem'.

It is towards a metaphorical³⁴ understanding of this 'new creation'—what John of Patmos, the visionary author of the Book of Revelation, calls 'the wedding supper of the Lamb' (Rev. 19:9) to which all the Sons of God are invited—we shall now turn as Bahá'u'lláh unveils what in all previous Dispensations had remained hidden. Essential, however, to some understanding of this metaphorical unveiling is an understanding of the nature of metaphorical language, an understanding of which Bahá'u'lláh, interpreting a single biblical verse describing Christ's return, devotes in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* some 25 pages.³⁵

Because, Bahá'u'lláh explains, the Christian divines 'clung to the literal interpretation of the words of Jesus', they deprived the Christian community not only 'of the streaming grace of the Muhammadan Revelation and its

showering bounties',³⁶ but also, as was immediately evident in the burial of the Báb's maternal uncle in the literalism of the *Shí'ís*, from the Revelation of the Báb. 'Once more hath the eternal Spirit breathed into the mystic trumpet, and caused the dead to speed out of their sepulchres of heedlessness and error unto the realm of guidance and grace,' Bahá'u'lláh declares, Himself the second 'mystic trumpet' now raising the dead uncle to life. 'And yet,' Bahá'u'lláh continues, severing by His very words the uncle from the community to which he, like his nephew, had belonged,

that expectant community still crieth out: When shall these things be? When shall the promised One, the object of our expectation, be made manifest, that we may arise for the triumph of His Cause, that we may sacrifice our substance for His sake, that we may offer up our lives in His Path?³⁷

The language of Revelation issues directly from spirit rather than matter. Apparelled as it is in the images of sense which renders visible what otherwise remains invisible, the apparel itself is, as veils, transparent to the invisible. It is as metaphor characterized by what Coleridge, describing sacred Scripture, calls 'the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal'. 'It always', he further explains, 'partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part of that Unity, of which it is the representative.' Mirroring in the reflecting images of sense the eternally uncreated Logos known only to God as God's knowing of God ('I am that I am'), the Manifestation's metaphorical language becomes what Coleridge³⁸ calls 'consubstantial with the truths, of which it is the conductor'.

Buried in the literal understanding of the divines, however, the language of the Manifestation is drained of its living metaphoricity and reduced to inert matter. Far from remaining translucent to spirit, language bound to the

senses become increasingly opaque, a sepulchre burying Revelation, as, for example, the Christian divines buried the Revelation of Muhammad in what Bahá'u'lláh calls 'their sepulchres of heedlessness and error'. The language of sense becomes, in the words of Shelley, 'clouds to hide, not colours to portray'.³⁹

Bahá'u'lláh Himself daily witnessed this burial of Revelation among some of the disciples of the Báb. As a result, they failed to recognize in Him the one whom the Báb had invoked. The inner meaning of the Báb's Revelation was denied so that the Maid of Heaven's chosen handmaid, a 'Bride' of its 'inner meaning', was, as already noted, rejected by the Bábí community. 'And as they beheld her state and comprehended a word of the tale told by the Youth,' Bahá'u'lláh metaphorically continues in His 'Tablet of the Holy Mariner', referring to the betrayal of the Báb's revelation,

they bared their heads, rent their garments asunder, beat upon their faces, forgot their joy, shed tears and smote with their hands upon their cheeks, and this is verily one of the mysterious grievous afflictions ...⁴⁰

The 'mysterious grievous afflictions' were those which, at the hands of the Bábís, had befallen Bahá'u'lláh. The animating spirit of Revelation, which is the Holy Spirit personified as the Maid of Heaven as she was now operating within Him, was largely hidden to the demoralized remnant of the Bábí community in Baghdad. Since His return from His chosen withdrawal into 'a life of complete solitude',⁴¹ Bahá'u'lláh told the uncle of the Báb:

Two years have elapsed during which Our enemies have ceaselessly and assiduously contrived to exterminate Us, whereunto all witness. Nevertheless, none amongst the faithful hath risen to render Us any assistance, nor did an one feel inclined to help in Our deliverance. Nay, instead

of assisting Us, what showers of continuous sorrows, their words and deeds have caused to rain upon Our soul!⁴²

Metaphor, as that which seems to contradict the literal by transforming it into another order of meaning that is different from, though analogous to, the literal, directly invokes the operation of the soul upon the body. The failure to recognize its operations exposes the entombment to which the soul is subject when it remains bound to the literal. To awaken the Báb's uncle to the redeeming power of metaphor by confronting him with the apparent moral contradiction inherent in the literal is, Badí'u'lláh suggests one reason why God chose in Moses a murderer to be the liberating Prophet of His people. More immediately, however, Bahá'u'lláh confronted the maternal uncle with what must have seemed to him an even greater contradiction: Bahá'u'lláh's condemnation of the very Bahá'í community that in his recognition of the Báb the uncle was about to join. The resolution of this apparent contradiction lay, of course, in the spiritual fact that the divinely-appointed 19-year Dispensation of the Báb was now drawing to a close as Bahá'u'lláh as the Mustagháth ('He who is invoked' by all the Prophets) gradually unveiled what still lay partially hidden within Him.

Bahá'u'lláh metaphorically describes the Manifestation's unveiling of the Logos in images of sense as the gradual nuptial removal of the veiling garments adorning the Maids of Heaven who, at the bidding of the Word, rush forth from the Courts of Concealment that yet forever remain 'unsearchable and high above the praise of men'.⁴³ The Maids of Heaven, 'Brides of inner meaning', cannot, therefore, in their unveiling of the multiple meanings of the Word ('seventy and one'), be reduced to the fixed and endlessly repeated metaphors of ritualized worship; they are, rather, the animating feminine power that opens the human heart to the reception of the polymorphous Word even as the beloved opens herself to the multidimensional

lover. They are the inner, naked, animating power of the Word which perpetually transforms Revelation into the speech of the Beloved 'guiding the lovers to the seat of sanctity and to [the Manifestation's] resplendent Beauty'.⁴⁴ The Maids of Heaven are, then, in the nuptial metaphors of the apocalypse of Bahá'u'lláh, not only the consorts of the Word but also the consorts of the true believers who have completely surrendered their will to the revealed Word. The true believers are those to whom the 'Brides of inner meaning' have, in the chambers of their sanctified hearts, unveiled themselves.

In His parable of the wise and foolish virgins, Christ describes His return as their final unveiling in the marriage chamber of the soul. Comparing His return to the Bridegroom Who comes at midnight (Behold, the bridegroom cometh'), Christ as Bridegroom takes with Him into the marriage chamber the wise virgins whose lamps (bodies as the temple of the spirit) are filled with spiritual oil (and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut' [Matt. 25:6–10]). Darkly concluding the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* in a manner that recalls Christ's rejection of the foolish virgins (and the door was shut'), Bahá'u'lláh writes:

We perceive none, however, amongst the people of the earth who, sincerely yearning for the Truth, seeketh the guidance of the divine Manifestations concerning the abstruse matters of his Faith. All are dwellers in the land of oblivion, and all are followers of the people of wickedness and rebellion. God will verily do unto them that which they themselves are doing, and will forget them even as they have ignored His Presence in His day.⁴⁵

Clearly identified as the wise virgin taken into the marriage chamber, Quddús, at the moment of his martyrdom in a public square before a frenzied multitude, declared: 'Would that my mother were with me, and could see with her own eyes the splendour of my nuptials.'⁴⁶ To his mother, who

had long desired to witness her son's wedding, Quddús had observed:

The day of my wedding is not yet come. That day will be unspeakably glorious. Not within the confines of this house, but out in the open air, under the vault of heaven ... before the gaze of the multitude, there shall I celebrate my nuptials and witness the consummation of my hopes.⁴⁷

The unknowable source of Revelation, writes Bahá'u'lláh, resides in 'the Ancient Being' Who at the 'moment preceding His Revelation' remains 'the Creator without a creation',⁴⁸ veiled as He is in His 'immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of [His] essence'⁴⁹ knowing His love for His creation though not acting upon it, not, that is, having yet 'summoned the Maids of Heaven to emerge from behind the veil of concealment' and 'clothed them with ... words of consummate power and wisdom'.⁵⁰ 'There can be no doubt whatever', Bahá'u'lláh writes again, 'that if for one moment the tide of His mercy and grace were to be withheld from the world, it would completely perish.'⁵¹

The act of creation, metaphorically (i.e. spiritually) understood is the emergence of the Maids of Heaven 'from behind the veil of concealment'. To view the creation as the nuptial realm of its unveiled inner meaning is to enter the creation as 'the seat of His mighty throne'.⁵² It is to experience it as the revelation of divine love as that love informs and inhabits the soul.

Metaphorically describing the generating power of the Word as 'Brides' or 'Maids of Heaven', Bahá'u'lláh declares that 'Every single letter proceeding from the mouth of God is indeed a mother letter, and every word uttered by Him Who is the Well Spring of Divine Revelation is a mother word, and His Tablet a Mother Tablet'.⁵³ Illustrating their mothering power, which is metaphorically the feminine aspect of Revelation as it remains wedded to the masculine, Bahá'u'lláh focuses upon such words as 'Fashioner':

‘Through the mere revelation of the word “Fashioner”, issuing forth from His lips and proclaiming His attribute to mankind,’ Bahá’u’lláh writes,

such power is released as can generate, through successive ages, all the manifold arts which the hands of man can produce. This, verily, is a certain truth. No sooner is this resplendent word uttered, than its animating energies, stirring within all created things, give birth to the means and instruments whereby such arts can be produced and perfected. All the wondrous achievements ye now witness are the direct consequences of the Revelation of this Name.⁵⁴

Contained within the masculine word ‘Fashioner’, one of the Names of God, resides its feminine ‘animating energies, stirring within all created things’, energies that ‘give birth to manifold creations. This union of the masculine and feminine as one of the inner dimensions of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh means that all that is now actualized on earth through the discovery and invention of new means and instruments mirrors its divine source in the Word itself. The inner marriage between the Word and its ‘animating energies’ is now, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declares, giving birth, for those whose eye of the heart is open, to the Kingdom of God on earth, God’s Will now being done on earth as it is done in the heaven of God’s Will. The one that hath eyes to see the inner reality of His Revelation, as Bahá’u’lláh Himself unveils it, will see in the creation itself the Kingdom come. Revelation is the Word become act, or, as Bahá’u’lláh explained to the Báb’s uncle:

Were the eye of the heart to open, it would surely perceive that the words revealed from the heaven of the will of God are at one with, and the same as, the deeds that have emanated from the Kingdom of divine power.⁵⁵

For the Manifestation, supremely in the case of Bahá’u’lláh,

to be brought 'in moments'⁵⁶ 'face to face with the resplendent revelation of but one of [God's] Names', He must first, as a human being, be reduced to that state of 'utter nothingness' out of which, Bahá'u'lláh declares, God 'hath created the reality of all things'.⁵⁷ Thus Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Were the eye of discernment to be opened it would recognize that in this very state, they have considered themselves utterly effaced and non-existent in the face of Him Who is the All-Pervading, the Incorruptible. Methinks, they have regarded themselves as utter nothingness, and deemed their mention in that Court an act of blasphemy. For the slightest whisperings of self within such a Court is an evidence of self-assertion and independent existence.⁵⁸

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in His own written comment on the Tablet of the Branch, echoes Bahá'u'lláh in describing His own station of servitude:

I affirm that the true meaning, the real significance, the innermost secret of these verses, of these very words, is my own servitude to the sacred Threshold of the Alpha Beauty, my complete self-effacement, my utter nothingness before Him. This is my resplendent crown, my most precious adorning."

Further explaining the 'blasphemy' of any 'slightest whisperings of self' in the Court of Revelation, Bahá'u'lláh identifies it with the delusion that 'sheer nothingness' has 'the worthiness and capacity to emerge from its state of non-existence into the realm of being'.⁶⁰ The 'sheer nothingness' to which Bahá'u'lláh is reduced is, therefore, paradoxically, at once a direct and immediate awareness of a Creator who, independent of everything save Himself, creates *ex nihilo*, and, at the same time, as the very condition of this awareness, a complete annihilation of any independent sense of self which, particularly in the West, constitutes

what we think of as our human identity. One of the defining characteristics of the Manifestation is, therefore, the momentary extinction of any independent existence—an extinction beyond any human ability to fathom—in which He becomes, relative to self, nothing at all. Bahá'u'lláh in His 'nothingness' is momentarily alone with God in a manner entirely beyond the reach of our human understanding. In His aloneness with God resides the God who veiled in 'immemorial Being' and the 'ancient eternity' of 'Essence', knows in Bahá'u'lláh 'My love for thee'.⁶¹

Momentary extinction confronts in what appears to be the human station of the Prophet what also appears to be the Prophet's human resistance to revelation that, like the apparent imperfections of Moses and Jesus, serves to reveal the absolute self-sufficiency of the God who admits of no partners. The Prophet, that is, does not choose to become a Prophet. The divine station cannot be sought as a reward for initiative or exertion. The Prophet does not prepare Himself for this exalted station as, say, an athlete prepare herself or himself for the Olympics. Nothing in His human nature can of itself prepare Him for the overpowering confrontation with what has been described as the Wholly Other.

Moses pleaded with 'the angel of the Lord' who 'appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush'. Ordered to approach, 'Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God'. When the Voice commanded Him to deliver His people 'out of the hands of the Egyptians', Moses replied, 'Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh ... I am not eloquent ... but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.' 'And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses,' Exodus continues. Finally, however, Moses submitted. 'And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt' where, as Bahá'u'lláh explained to the uncle of the Báb, He was wanted for 'manslaughter' (Ex. 3:2–22; 4:1–20).

Embraced by the angel Gabriel, whose presence encom-

passed the entire horizon, Muhammad, Who could neither read nor write, was commanded to recite. 'I am not a reciter,' Muhammad replied. Gabriel now embraced Him even tighter so that He felt as if all the breath was being squeezed out of his body. 'Recite,' the angel repeated. Muhammad this time sensed that the breath was no longer His own, that His breath, His human breath, had been taken from Him. Yet again, however, Muhammad managed to refuse. Again Gabriel embraced Him, this time so fiercely that Muhammad felt that His life had been extinguished. And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground,' Genesis records, 'and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul' (Gen. 2:7). This 'breath of life', which is the breath of the Holy Spirit, Gabriel's embrace breathed into Muhammad. At that moment, issuing from a divine breath no longer His own, Muhammad found the first words of a new scripture pouring from His mouth:

Recite in the name of thy Sustainer, who has created—created man out of a germ-cell! Recite—for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful, One who has taught [man] the use of the pen—taught him what he did not know.⁶²

Explaining what initially appears as a kind of incoherence from the human point of view, Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes of the Qur'án:

The text of the Quran reveals human language crushed by the power of the Divine Word. It is as if human language were scattered into a thousand fragments like a wave scattered into drops against the rocks at sea. One feels through the shattering effect left upon the language of the Quran, the power of the Divine whence it originated. The Quran displays human language with all the weakness inherent in it becoming suddenly the recipient of the Divine Word and displaying its frailty before a power which is infinitely greater than man can imagine.⁶³

‘What else can my pen recount?’ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asked one of His most trusted and eminent followers during the early days His ministry, as the entire creation exploded in his ear with the deafening roar of its new vibrations

So loud is the call that reverberates from the Abhá Kingdom that mortal ears are well-nigh deafened with its vibrations. The whole creation, methinks, is being disrupted and is bursting asunder through the shattering influence of the Divine summons issued from the throne of glory. More than this I cannot write.⁶⁴

‘Abdu’l-Baba, that is, is not a Prophet. His divinely assigned task was to infallibly interpret rather than reveal the Word. Commanded by the Ancient of Days to ‘Speak, and hold not thy peace’, Bahá’u’lláh initially remained silent. His Pen could not move.

Methinks that thou hast halted and movest not upon My Tablet. Could the brightness of the Divine Countenance have bewildered thee, or the idle talk of the froward filled thee with grief and paralysed thy movement? ... Preferrest thou to tarry when the breeze announcing the Day of God hath already breathed over thee, or art thou of them that are shut out as by a veil from Him?⁶⁵

Assuring the Ancient of Days that He had allowed ‘No veil whatever ... to shut [Him] out from the recognition of the glories of [His] Day—the Day which is the lamp of guidance unto the whole world, and the sign of the Ancient of Days unto all them that dwell therein,’ Bahá’u’lláh explained that His ‘silence is by reason of the veils that have blinded Thy creatures’ eyes to Thee, and my muteness is because of the impediments that have hindered Thy people from recognizing Thy truth’.⁶⁶ Though God had spoken, the blindness of the world momentarily silenced Him. (‘Who hath made man’s mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord’ [Ex 4:11], de-

clares Yahweh to Moses when Moses complained He was ‘slow of speech, and of a slow tongue’.) God’s behest, that is, had not yet completely overwhelmed and overruled Bahá’u’lláh. If Thy overruling and all-compelling behest should ever reach me,’ Bahá’u’lláh thus explains, ‘it would empower me to revive the souls of all men, through Thy most exalted Word, which I have heard uttered by Thy Tongue of power in Thy Kingdom of glory.’⁶⁷

Although Bahá’u’lláh heard God’s ‘most exalted Word’ in His ‘Kingdom of glory’, He appeared not yet to be utterly extinguished as a human being before it. ‘Canst thou discover any one but Me, O Pen, in this Day’, the Ancient of Days now asks as, relative to our human understanding, the apocalyptic moment of extinction approaches, an extinction that announces the release of vibrations operating at a previously untapped level of frequency.

What hath become of the creation and the manifestations thereof? What of the names and their kingdom? Whither are gone all created things, whether seen or unseen? What of the hidden secrets of the universe and its revelations Lo, the entire creation hath passed away! Nothing remaineth except My Face, the Ever-Abiding, the Resplendent, the All-Glorious.⁶⁸

Aware of the depths of Bahá’u’lláh’s apparent bewilderment that may remind some of the bewilderment of Moses and Muhammad, the Ancient of Days addresses Bahá’u’lláh as a loving father addressing his son: ‘We have heard the voice of thy pleading, O Pen, and excuse thy silence. What is it that hath so sorely bewildered thee?’ To which Bahá’u’lláh now replies: ‘The inebriation of Thy presence, O Well-Beloved of all worlds, hath seized and possessed me.’ The Ancient of Days now calls upon Him to ‘Arise’ and proclaim the Day of God. ‘We have chosen thee’, He declares, ‘to be our most mighty Trumpet, whose blast is to signalize the resurrection of all mankind.’⁶⁹

In this state of divine inebriation which brought Bahá'u'lláh to the point where His Pen could again no longer move, a point where He boldly concludes His Tablet with the words 'No God is there but Me, the Most Exalted, the Most Powerful, the Most Excellent, the All-Knowing',⁷⁰ the masculine Word of the Ancient of Days is fully apparelled in the garments of the Maids of Heaven who, 'from the heights' of the 'loftiest chambers' of Paradise, cry out and shout,

Rejoice, ye dwellers of the realms above, for the fingers of Him Who is the Ancient of Days are ringing, in the name of the All-Glorious, the Most Great Bell, in the midmost heart of the heavens. The hands of bounty have borne round the cups of everlasting life. Approach, and drink your fill. Drink with healthy relish, O ye that are the very incarnations of longing, ye who art the embodiments of vehement desire!⁷¹

The Maids of Heaven invite the longing hearts that are 'the embodiments of vehement desire' to the wedding supper celebrating the descent of New Jerusalem as a bride adorned to meet the bridegroom. The consummation of their union is, in the metaphorical language of the soul, the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

In addressing Carmel in this language, much as the Maid of Heaven had in the Síyáh-Chál earlier addressed Bahá'u'lláh, one can perhaps discern the emergence of the full majesty of the masculine Word to which the Ancient of Days had awakened Bahá'u'lláh, an awakening from which issued the unparalleled outpouring of Tablets to the leaders of the world which began in Adrianople. In this outpouring, the lineaments of a new creation are at last delineated as the spiritual gratification of human desire.

With the exchange between Bahá'u'lláh and Carmel, which unveils the inner dimension of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation, this essay ends. In the exchange, one may finally note

the way the Tablet of Carmel brings to its consummation the essentially masculine exchange between Bahá'u'lláh and the Ancient of Days,⁷² in contrast to Bahá'u'lláh's initial encounter with the Maid of Heaven in the Síyáh-Chál. There, in the Síyáh-Chál, Bahá'u'lláh 'turning [His] face', 'beheld [her] ... suspended in the air before [Him]'.⁷³ In the encounter with Carmel, Bahá'u'lláh addresses Carmel as her Lord who now appears before her face, cheering her eyes as earlier the Maid of Heaven in the Síyáh-Chál had cheered His, her 'countenance [shining] with the ornament of the good-pleasure of God'.⁷⁴ Carmel, coming before Bahá'u'lláh, is led by the light issuing from Bahá'u'lláh which fills her 'with transports of joy'.⁷⁵ She has harkened to His call, even as earlier Bahá'u'lláh had harkened to the call of the Maid of Heaven. She has been quickened by the voice of Bahá'u'lláh's Pen, even as earlier the Maid of Heaven was herself the quickener.

'May my life be a sacrifice to Thee,' Carmel exclaims,

inasmuch as Thou hast fixed Thy gaze on me, hast bestowed upon me Thy bounty, and hast directed towards me Thy steps. Separation from Thee, O Thou Source of everlasting life, hath well nigh consumed me, and my remoteness from Thy presence hath burned away my soul. All praise be to Thee for having enabled me to hearken to Thy call, for having honoured me with Thy footsteps, and for having quickened my soul through the vitalizing fragrance of Thy Day and the shrilling voice of Thy Pen, a voice Thou didst ordain as Thy trumpet-call amidst Thy people.⁷⁶

'No sooner had her voice reached that most exalted Spot,' writes Bahá'u'lláh, 'than We made reply':

Render thanks unto Thy Lord, O Carmel. The fire of thy separation from Me was fast consuming thee, when the ocean of My presence surged before thy face, cheering thine eyes and those of all creation, and filling with delight

all things visible and invisible. Rejoice, for God hath in this Day established upon thee His throne, hath made thee the dawning-place of His signs, and the day spring of the evidences of His Revelation.⁷⁷

Bahá'u'lláh then commands Carmel, as earlier the Ancient of Days had commanded Him, to

call out to Zion ... and announce the joyful tidings: He that was hidden from mortal eyes is come! His all-conquering sovereignty is manifest; His all-encompassing splendour is revealed. Beware lest thou hesitate or halt.⁷⁸

No previous Revelation, it is suggested, has unveiled so completely what may perhaps be called the spiritual dynamics of the inner metaphorical masculine and feminine components of the Prophet's divinely seized and possessed soul. While these dynamics as Bahá'u'lláh metaphorically unveils them should not and cannot explain the miraculous act of divine creation which is known only to God, they can perhaps, as Bahá'u'lláh Himself metaphorically suggests, open the heart of the believer to the Beloved who there finds His home. The mystery of His closeness to us—closer than our 'life-vein'—is contained within the paradox that He remains at the same time infinitely beyond the prescribed limits of our comprehension, even, indeed, as does the station of the Manifestation.

What, as divine revelation and in mystic communion with the Maid of Heaven, Bahá'u'lláh has enacted in the human heart sanctified for His descent is the long-concealed and long-promised Face and Voice of the Promised One. 'Verily, I say,' Bahá'u'lláh declares,

this is the Day in which mankind can behold the Face, and hear the Voice, of the Promised One. The Call of God hath been raised, and the light of His countenance hath been lifted up upon men.⁷⁹

The unprecedented greatness of this unveiling, the inner dimensions of which this paper has, however inadequately, attempted to explore, can finally only be described, as indeed it can only be enacted, by Bahá'u'lláh Himself. 'Great indeed is this Day!' Bahá'u'lláh declares.

The allusions made to it in all the sacred Scriptures as the Day of God attest its greatness. The soul of every Prophet of God, of every Divine Messenger, hath thirsted for this wondrous Day. All the divers kindreds of the earth have, likewise, yearned to attain it.⁸⁰

In the sanctification of that yearning a sanctification that protects the soul from attachment to idle fancies and vain imaginations—resides now the soul's long-awaited, heartfelt spiritual consummation, a consummation the inner dimensions of which Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets—particularly what might be called His marriage Tablets—metaphorically enact.

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Notes

1. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 55–6.
2. *ibid.* pp. 56–7.
3. *ibid.* pp. 57–8.
4. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 93, p. 186.
5. *ibid.*
6. Following Shoghi Effendi's translation of Bahá'u'lláh's texts, I use the term 'man' in its non-gendered generic sense in order to incorporate the actual words and phrases of Bahá'u'lláh into my own sentences. Needless to say, the term 'man' embraces both sexes.
7. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 153, p. 327.
8. *ibid.* no. 93, p. 185.
9. *ibid.* no. 93, pp. 186–7.
10. *ibid.* no. 93, p. 187.
11. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 57.

12. 'It is not permissible to ask questions from Him Whom God will make manifest, except that which well beseemeth Him,' the Báb declares in the Persian *Bayán*. 'Should anyone desire to ask questions', the Báb continues, 'he is

allowed to do so only in writing, that he may derive ample understanding from His written reply and that it may serve as a sign from his Beloved. However, let no one ask aught that may prove unworthy of His lofty station ... Unacceptable would be the questions of the highest-ranking people of the world in His presence, except such words as He Himself would utter about Himself in the Day of His manifestation' (The Báb, *Selections*, p. 101).

This is a résumé of the four written questions which the maternal uncle of the Báb presented to Bahá'u'lláh:

1. The Day of Resurrection. Is there to be a corporeal resurrection? The world is replete with injustice. How are the just to be requited and the unjust punished?
2. The twelfth Imám was born at a certain time and lives on. There are traditions, all supporting this belief. How can this be explained?
3. Interpretation of holy texts. This Cause does not seem to conform with beliefs held throughout the years. One cannot ignore the literal meaning of holy texts and scripture. How can this be explained?
4. Certain events, according to the traditions that have come down from the Imams, must occur at the advent of the Winn. Some of these are mentioned. But none of these happened. How can this be explained? (Balyuzi, *King of Glory*, pp. 164–5).

In answering these questions, Bahá'u'lláh brought to them 'such words as He Himself would utter about Himself in the Day of His Manifestation'. The 'hidden' text, that is, was partially unveiled. Precisely in this bounteous unveiling lay the seemingly indirect method of Bahá'u'lláh's answers, an indirect method which brought the Báb's uncle face to face with the outpouring of a divine Revelation in which God is finally answerable only to Himself. The supreme subtlety of the levels of discourse in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* resides in the station of Bahá'u'lláh, which is simultaneously revealed and concealed.

13. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 93, p. 187.
14. *ibid.*
15. *ibid.* no. 1, pp. 4–5.

16. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 140.
17. Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, p. 12.
18. *ibid.*
19. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 59.
20. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 153, pp. 325–6.
21. *ibid.* no. 7, p. 11.
22. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, vol. 1, p. 304.
23. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 153, pp. 327–8.
24. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 175–6.
25. *ibid.* pp. 70–1.
26. Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle*, p. 22.
27. *ibid.* p. 21.
28. Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 101–2.
29. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 14, p. 30.
30. *ibid.* no. 14, p. 29.
31. *ibid.* no. 77, p. 151.
32. Bahá'u'lláh, in *Bahá'í Prayers*, pp. 225–9.
33. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 25, p. 60.
34. Metaphor, as the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* makes clear, is the natural language of the soul. Indeed, at its point of origin in the Logos or Word all language is metaphorical. Separated from its original in the Word and bound to the world of sense, language thus reduced renders its essential metaphoricity a fantasy of sense rather than the spiritual reality of sense.
35. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 24–49.
36. *ibid.* p. 26.
37. *ibid.* pp. 26–7.
38. Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*, pp. 28–31.
39. Shelley, in Shelley's *Poetry and Prose*, p. 535.
40. Bahá'u'lláh, in *Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 230.
41. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 250.
42. *ibid.* pp. 251–2.
43. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 1, p. 5.
44. Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Ahmad, in *Bahá'í Prayers*, p. 210.

45. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 256.
46. Nabíl, *Dawn-Breakers*, p. 413.
47. *ibid.* p. 183.
48. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 78, p. 151.
49. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 3.

50. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 103, pp. 327–8.
51. *ibid.* no. 27, p. 68.
52. *ibid.* no. 14, p. 30.
53. *ibid.* no. 74, p. 142.
54. *ibid.* no. 74, p. 141.
55. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, pp. 57–8.
56. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 22, p. 55.
57. *ibid.* no. 27, pp. 64–5.
58. *ibid.* no. 22, p. 55.
59. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p. 138.
60. *ibid.* no. 27, p. 65.
61. Bahá'u'lláh, *Hidden Words*, Arabic no. 3.
62. Qur'an 96:1. trans. Muhammad Asad, quoted in Armstrong, *History of God*, p. 137.
63. Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, pp. 47–8.
64. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *World Order*, p. 112.
65. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 14, pp. 27–8.
66. *ibid.* no. 14, pp. 27–8.
67. *ibid.* no. 14, p. 29.
68. *ibid.*
69. *ibid.* no. 14, pp. 30–1.
70. *ibid.* no. 14, p. 35.
71. *ibid.* no. 14, p. 32.
72. Paula Drewek compares the Tablet of Carmel to 'a courtship dance with feelings of separation and longing for reunion followed by movements ever closer culminating in a consummation recalling the divine marriage of heaven and earth, a theme to be found throughout the Western religions' ('Feminine Forms of the Divine in Bahá'í Scriptures', p. 18).
73. Bahá'u'lláh in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 101–2.
74. *ibid.* p. 102.
75. Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, no. 11, p. 14.
76. *ibid.* no. 11, pp. 14–15.
77. *ibid.* no. 11, p. 15.
78. *ibid.* no. 11, p. 16.

79. *ibid.* no. 11, pp. 10–11.

80. *ibid.* no. 11, p. 11.