

VOLUME 9

THE BAHÁ'Í STUDIES REVIEW

A PUBLICATION OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR BAHÁ'Í STUDIES

English-speaking Europe

1999/2000

Invited Commentary

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Compilation

THE HIDDEN WORDS

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This issue is dedicated to
Greg Massiah
who died on 17.9.99.

INVITED COMMENTARY

Knowledge and the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh¹

IAN SEMPLE

Abstract

The pursuit of knowledge, in addition to ascertaining facts, requires categorization, correlation and deduction. It is a process that is influenced culturally by the researcher's understanding of the world. The Bahá'í revelation presents a new and challenging situation by its principles of the unfettered search for truth and the harmony of religion and science, by the authenticity of the writings of its Founder, and by the authority of the Covenant He established. This challenge is faced particularly by those Bahá'ís who follow an academic career in religious studies, but also by the generality of the believers, and it should lead to enrichment of their understanding.

This paper considers the relationship of knowledge to the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh. The nature of this relationship calls for a new understanding which some Bahá'í scholars have had difficulty in acquiring, for it provides a continuing source of infallible divine guidance for a religion which also "enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth."² To some, this juxtaposition presents a contradiction, which they strive to overcome by subordinating one principle to the other. It is an especially acute problem for Bahá'ís who, in order to better equip themselves for study of the Faith, have entered academic fields such as history or oriental studies, which seemed to them to be particularly relevant to their purpose. The problem they then face is that every academic field at present requires that research and writing be conducted within certain defined frameworks and be based on what are currently considered to be scientifically established premises. Only by following such methods can an academic hope to advance his career. Yet Bahá'í academics are faced with repeated exhortations from the Universal House of Justice to reexamine the postulates of established

¹ Based on a talk given at a conference on "Knowledge and Scholarship" in the Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa, Israel, 5-6 December 1997.

² Shoghi Effendi, *The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, a World Religion*. Statement prepared for the United Nations Special Palestine Committee, July 1947.

methodologies and widen their vision so that there is no dichotomy between what they believe as Bahá'ís and what they write as scholars.

Knowledge and the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh³

Beyond its relevance for Bahá'í scholars, a clear understanding of this characteristic of the Bahá'í Faith is important to all Bahá'ís, and we need to be able to explain it to enquirers. I propose, therefore, to approach the subject by commenting on the following issues:

- the importance of method in the acquisition of knowledge
- the cultural bias of existing methods of studying religions, and the Bahá'í principle of the harmony between religion and science
- the concept of paradigm shifts
- 'Abdu'l-Bahá's analysis of the avenues through which we attain knowledge, and the centrality of divine revelation to this process
- the relationship between the knowledge conveyed by revelation and that acquired by research
- some implications for the attitude and ethical standards of scholars
- the role of the Universal House of Justice in relation to the work of scholars.

Methods and cultures

There are, of course, many methodologies in use in academia. They evolve, are subject to revision, and are applied with varying rigour in different places. The Bahá'í viewpoint is critical of only certain aspects of some of them, and mainly requires Bahá'ís who employ them in their work to widen their vision beyond the limits any particular method may prescribe. Some of those convinced by their training that current academic methods are scientific and are the most reliable route to ascertaining the truth misjudge the House of Justice's exhortations as arising from a desire to obscure unpalatable facts, or as a reversion to medieval practices of subordinating research to ecclesiastical dogma. There is a temptation, therefore, to divide science and religion into complementary but mutually exclusive realms, perpetuating the division that has long ruled western thought. Bahá'í scholars need to study the implications of the principle of the harmony of religion and science, and to develop methods faithful to it. It is not likely that this is a task the Universal House of Justice will perform for them. Let us consider some of the issues which are involved.

Any pursuit of knowledge and understanding requires the seeker to group facts into categories. One could say that the inter-relationship of facts is as important and illuminating as the facts themselves. Yet one of the shortcomings displayed by many Bahá'ís in their study of the teachings is precisely the failure to perceive such relationships. Too often do they see deepening in the teachings as the study of separate subjects and isolated laws and principles, while it is only through the process of deductive reasoning that one comes to perceive how the teachings, laws and principles of the revelation dovetail into and illuminate one another, producing a pattern of extraordinary beauty and perfection.

For example, consider the relationship between husbands and wives in

marriage. One can find many references in the teachings specifically referring to marriage and the family, and many to the principle of the equality of men and women. But according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the true station of a human being is that of servitude, that every person should be a servant to all others. Surely this applies to the relationship between husbands and wives. While there must certainly be equality, each should also see himself or herself as the servant of the other. This simple realization illuminates the other aspects of the marriage relationship.

In the academic study of religions, there is a natural tendency to try to fit the Bahá'í Faith into the categories that have been developed by Europeans and Americans in their study of Christianity and non-Christian religions. The standpoint of the researcher is, therefore, that of Christian-based western culture. Yet much of the spirit and practice of modern science developed in opposition to the church. Since scientific study was subject to ecclesiastical dogma, a reactive attempt was made to explain all phenomena without any reference to God or religion. This produced marvellous results, and so the scientific method, whereby each hypothesis is tested by experiments that anyone else can repeat, and where new theories are built on old ones, with a steady increase in knowledge, became the ideal for all researchers. There was consequently a determined effort to bring all fields of study, including history, economics, medicine, psychology and sociology within this pattern. However, human beings are not mechanistic structures responding unvaryingly to external stimuli. Humans are complex, sentient, thinking beings, and therefore any study of human beings as a class, or even of a human individual, presents such a vast array of factors that it is impossible to incorporate all the information essential for fully reliable conclusions.

Understandably, the rigid modernist view of science has been challenged by postmodern philosophers who perceive that much of what has been accepted as the objective truth is, in fact, culturally produced, including the categories into which facts are marshalled. Only when these categories are confronted by facts they cannot explain does change in the structure of scientific thought occur. Thomas Kuhn, an important writer in this field, has referred to such changes as paradigm shifts.³

One of the features of human life never satisfactorily explained by modernist science is the periodic appearance of the Manifestations of God and their enduring influence on society. The science of comparative religion explains these phenomena as the product of social influences. However, since the concepts of comparative religion were developed in a basically irreligious society, the explanations they afford are consistent with an understanding of human society that, from the outset, ignores the existence of God, and so pays scant respect to the statements of the Manifestations themselves on the

³ *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

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subject.

Another formidable difficulty facing students of religion arises from the long time elapsed since the birth of the religions studied and the mass of confused and conflicting material available. For example, nearly two millennia have passed since the lifetime of Jesus. Although as far as is known, He taught in Aramaic, the closest we have to His original teachings are Greek translations in the books of the New Testament. It is not surprising, therefore, that modern scholars have devoted enormous effort to trying to ascertain exactly what He taught and how much of this was faithfully retained in the doctrines of the many churches. Lack of success has brought some theologians to conclude that it does not matter; what matters, they conclude, is what His followers thought He taught, for that is what has affected the course of history. Thus, the ideas of followers of Christ became for such scholars the reality of the Christian religion.

The new circumstances of the Bahá'í Faith

With the Bahá'í Faith, however, we have a different situation. We are close enough to the lifetime of Bahá'u'lláh that, for example, many people now alive have spoken with the Hand of the Cause Taráz'u'lláh Samandarí, who, when he was a young man, was in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. We have, moreover, voluminous writings from Bahá'u'lláh's own pen, and we have the authentic writings and utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the appointed Centre of His Covenant, and thirty-six years of the authoritative guidance of Shoghi Effendi.

Further, if what Bahá'u'lláh teaches us about the function of the Manifestations of God in human history is true – and this is the fundamental belief which all Bahá'ís accept – the coming of a Manifestation of God creates in human thought a paradigm shift of incalculable dimensions. One is reminded of these words from the Báb's farewell address to his disciples:

The newly born babe of that Day excels the wisest and most venerable men of this time, and the lowliest and most unlearned of that period shall surpass in understanding the most erudite and accomplished divines of this age.⁴

In that light, one can understand the great emphasis Bahá'u'lláh places on the recognition of His mission. Someone of no education, but imbued by the new paradigm, can understand profundities beyond the conception of a mind bound by old modes of thought.

In the Bahá'í Faith, the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is supremely important.

⁴ *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996) 95.

What His followers believe is of less significance, and can always be assumed to be in some ways at variance with the reality of the Faith itself. There is a new and significant differentiation in the Bahá'í Faith between the clear and undoubted revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, along with the authoritative statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice on the one hand, and the Bahá'í community, with its members' varied and only partially accurate understanding of the Faith, on the other.

Integration of revelation and research

How, then, are we to integrate the implications of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation and the Covenant He established into our understanding of the pursuit of knowledge and scholarship? In Chapter 83 of *Some Answered Questions*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: "There are only four accepted methods of comprehension - that is to say, the realities of things are understood by these four methods." He then proceeds to enumerate these methods:

The first method is by the senses - that is to say, all that the eye, the ear, the taste, the smell, the touch perceive is understood by this method....The second is the method of reason, which was that of the ancient philosophers, the pillars of wisdom; this is the method of the understanding. They proved things by reason and hold firmly to logical proofs; all their arguments are arguments of reason....The third method of understanding is by tradition - that is, through the text of the Holy Scriptures - for people say, "In the Old and New Testaments, God spoke thus."⁵

Not one of these methods, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, can be relied upon. Our senses can deceive us; this is evident to each of us from our daily experience. Our reasoning can be faulty, either because the premises are in error or because the logic is flawed. Tradition is not a firm basis, because traditions must be understood by the use of reason, and reason, 'Abdu'l-Bahá comments, is "like a balance and the meanings contained in the Holy Books are like the thing which is weighed. If the balance is untrue, how can the weight be ascertained?"⁶ He concludes:

Know then: that which is in the hands of people, that which they believe, is liable to error. For, in proving or disproving a thing, if a proof is brought forward which is taken from the evidence of our senses, this method, as has become evident, is not perfect; if

⁵ *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994) 297ff.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 298-9.

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the proofs are intellectual, the same is true; or if they are traditional, such proofs also are not perfect. Therefore, there is no standard in the hands of people upon which we can rely. But the bounty of the Holy Spirit gives the true method of comprehension which is infallible and indubitable. This is through the help of the Holy Spirit which comes to man, and this is the condition in which certainty can alone be attained.

What can we understand by “the bounty of the Holy Spirit”? According to a purely Christian interpretation, we will understand it to be the divine inspiration that comes to a person when his or her heart is turned to God. While there is no doubt that this is one of its meanings, that meaning alone is inadequate to the statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, because we know from our own experience, as well as from the explanations given by Shoghi Effendi, that a believer has no way of knowing for sure whether what he receives through inspiration is indeed from God or is the product of his own imagination. From a Bahá’í viewpoint, however, the “bounty of the Holy Spirit” is a term that also embraces the outpouring of guidance that we receive through the Manifestations of God. It is only by comparing our intuitive understandings with that guidance that we can be confident of their correctness.

In other words, one acquires knowledge in two ways: from acceptance of the revelation of the Manifestation of God and through study. Revelation does not constrain or contradict the search for truth, it provides the spiritual dynamic and illumination which informs the process and the fruits of our study. Without it we can go far astray, and our scholarship, instead of being a light to ourselves and others, can inflate our egos and breed disdain for those who are less learned.

This theme is expounded by Bahá'u'lláh, in another manner, in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*. There He writes:⁷

Know verily that Knowledge is of two kinds: Divine and Satanic. The one welleteth out from the fountain of divine inspiration; the other is but a reflection of vain and obscure thoughts. The source of the former is God Himself; the motive-force of the latter the whisperings of selfish desire. The one is guided by the principle: “Fear ye God; God will teach you;” the other is but a confirmation of the truth: “Knowledge is the most grievous veil between man and his Creator.” The former bringeth forth the fruit of patience, of longing desire, of true understanding, and love; whilst the latter can yield naught but arrogance, vainglory and conceit. From the sayings of those

⁷ *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1983) 69.

Masters of holy utterance, Who have expounded the meaning of true knowledge, the odour of these dark teachings, which have obscured the world, can in no wise be detected. The tree of such teachings can yield no result except iniquity and rebellion, and beareth no fruit but hatred and envy. Its fruit is deadly poison; its shadow a consuming fire. How well hath it been said: "Cling unto the robe of the Desire of thy heart, and put thou away all shame; bid the worldlywise be gone, however great their name."

Another passage relating directly to this theme:⁸

They should put their trust in God, and, holding fast unto Him, follow in His way. Then will they be made worthy of the effulgent glories of the sun of divine knowledge and understanding, and become the recipients of a grace that is infinite and unseen, inasmuch as man can never hope to attain unto the knowledge of the All-Glorious, can never quaff from the stream of divine knowledge and wisdom, can never enter the abode of immortality, nor partake of the cup of divine nearness and favour, unless and until he ceases to regard the words and deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets.

In another passage, Bahá'u'lláh indicates how the acceptance of divine knowledge fertilizes the seeker's capacity for true research and understanding.⁹

In like manner, endeavour to comprehend the meaning of the "changing of the earth." Know thou, that upon whatever hearts the bountiful showers of mercy, raining from the "heaven" of divine Revelation, have fallen, the earth of those hearts hath verily been changed into the earth of divine knowledge and wisdom. What myrtles of unity hath the soil of their hearts produced! What blossoms of true knowledge and wisdom have their illumined bosoms yielded! Were the earth of their hearts to remain unchanged, how could such souls who have not been taught one letter, have seen no teacher, and entered no school, utter such words and display such knowledge as none can apprehend? Methinks they have been moulded from the clay of

⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

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infinite knowledge, and kneaded with the water of divine wisdom. Therefore, hath it been said: "Knowledge is a light which God casteth into the heart of whomsoever He willeth." It is this kind of knowledge which is and hath ever been praiseworthy, and not the limited knowledge that hath sprung forth from veiled and obscured minds. This limited knowledge they even stealthily borrow one from the other, and vainly pride themselves therein!

Would that the hearts of men could be cleansed from these man-made limitations and obscure thoughts imposed upon them! haply they may be illumined by the light of the Sun of true knowledge, and comprehend the mysteries of divine wisdom. Consider now, were the parched and barren soil of these hearts to remain unchanged, how could they ever become the Recipients of the revelation of the mysteries of God, and the Revealers of the divine Essence? Thus hath He said: "On the day when the earth shall be changed into another earth."¹⁰

These passages in no way contradict the many sacred texts stressing the importance of education; those which praise the virtues of the arts and sciences; or Bahá'u'lláh's own injunction in the *Hidden Words*:

O SON OF SPIRIT! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbour. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.¹¹

Neither are they at variance with the Guardian's written statement that the Bahá'í Faith "enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth."¹²

Complementary elements of the search for knowledge

The Bahá'í teachings seem to say that knowledge must be pursued

¹⁰ Qur'án 14:48.

¹¹ Arabic Hidden Words, number 2.

¹² Shoghi Effendi, *The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, a World Religion*. Statement prepared for the United Nations Special Palestine Committee, July 1947.

simultaneously in a number of ways: through immersion in the divine revelation, through the unfettered processes of the human mind, through the inspiration of the human heart, and through the application of the teachings in our lives and actions.

It is the correlation of these avenues – and probably of yet others – that the Universal House of Justice intends Bahá'í scholars to work out. A valid methodology can in no way imply blind acceptance of unexamined statements, but there is a point in the search for truth at which the seeker has risen above doubts to certitude. This does not mean that his mind is no longer searching and enquiring, but that experience and study have caused him to attain that faith which 'Abdu'l-Bahá defines as “conscious knowledge.”¹³ One can see this process in operation in subjects far less exalted than religion. If one tells a tribesman that the earth is a sphere floating in space, the tribesman only has to use his eyes to see how ridiculous a claim it is. Someone who has had a thorough modern education, however, who has learned at school the evidence for this assertion, and who has seen photographs of the earth taken from space, no longer can have any doubts on the subject. He has not been brainwashed into accepting an absurd assertion; he has been enlightened by study and experience and has risen to a higher level of knowledge.

Thus it is not logical to adopt an atheistic basis for research into religions – unless, that is, one is an atheist. Accordingly, the premises on which scholars of different backgrounds base their studies are likely to differ one from another. It would be entirely reasonable for a non-Bahá'í scholar to study the life and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh as if He were merely a mid-nineteenth-century Persian man. A Bahá'í, however, knows that Bahá'u'lláh was not subject to His environment in the way a normal human being might be. On the contrary, His knowledge and understanding transcended His environment and, although He undoubtedly “tuned” His revelation to the level and nature of His hearers' understanding, and used the Arabic and Persian languages in traditionally acceptable ways, He Himself was conveying to His hearers, both current and for centuries to come, truths which they were, and are, scarcely able to apprehend.

A Bahá'í scholar thus regards the actions and words of Bahá'u'lláh with the eye of a humble pupil. How different this is from the attitude likely to be adopted by a non-Bahá'í, perhaps one who thinks himself the learned possessor of the wealth of modern civilised knowledge and regards with a tolerant but condescending gaze the actions and statements of a nineteenth-century reformer, inevitably the product of his age and surroundings no matter how revolutionary his ideas. Nevertheless, this is the difference in attitude towards Bahá'u'lláh and His Faith – which shows up as well in the resultant

¹³ *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas, vol.3* (Chicago: Bahai Publishing Committee, 1930 printing) 549.

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deductions drawn from the evidence – that must distinguish a Bahá'í scholar from any other.

In the Tablet of Wisdom, Bahá'u'lláh writes: “Empedocles, who distinguished himself in philosophy, was a contemporary of David, while Pythagoras lived in the days of Solomon, son of David, and acquired Wisdom from the treasury of prophethood.”¹⁴ There are some who have adduced this passage as an argument that Bahá'u'lláh was by no means omniscient and is therefore not to be relied upon in other matters. However, as has been pointed out, Bahá'u'lláh introduces this passage with the statement that He was about to mention “some accounts of the sages”, and it can be seen by comparison with the sources that He quotes verbatim from the works of such Muslim historians as Abu'l-Fath-i-Shahristání and 'Imádu'd-Dín Abu'l-Fidá. The question facing a Bahá'í scholar who knows that western historians date Empedocles and Pythagoras some centuries away from David and Solomon is why did Bahá'u'lláh decide to quote this particular passage? Was He merely quoting an account familiar to His readers, with the primary purpose of illustrating His main argument? Was He drawing to the attention of future Bahá'í historians that they should re-examine their basis for the historical dating of these events? Or is there yet some other implication to be drawn from this passage?

A Bahá'í will also consider such a passage in light of other comments in the writings. For example, earlier in the Tablet of Wisdom, after discoursing on creation and the nature of the Word of God, Bahá'u'lláh says:

We are loath to enlarge on this subject, inasmuch as the unbelievers have inclined their ears towards Us in order to hear that which might enable them to cavil against God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. And since they are unable to attain to mysteries of knowledge and wisdom from what hath been unravelled by the Source of divine splendour, they rise in protest and burst into clamour. But it is true to say that they object to that which they comprehend, not to the expositions given by the Expounder, nor the truths imparted by the One true God, the Knower of things unseen. Their objections, one and all, turn upon themselves, and I swear by thy life that they are devoid of understanding.¹⁵

Scholars adhering to old paradigms will tend to place the Bahá'í Faith into one or another of the categories those paradigms have created, and try to

¹⁴ *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995) 145.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

understand it in that way. But since it does not fit into any such category, such comparisons, even if true in some respects, can be highly misleading. A Bahá'í scholar who has a deep understanding of the Faith will avoid this trap.

Particular challenges of an academic career

How can a Bahá'í academic, however, who is constrained by the current methods of his discipline, express his own proper understanding? As a Bahá'í scholar rises in eminence in his field, he will be progressively able, just as any other scholar, to break the shackles of the current paradigm. A student or young scholar, however, is compelled to follow current methods if he wishes to pass his examinations or have his writings published by academic journals. He is in the same position as a teacher of the Faith who has to simplify what he says in order not to overstrain the receptivity of his hearers. The talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá are perfect examples of how to do this without in any way violating the teachings of the Cause.

Historical research, for example, involves the ascertainment of facts, and the drawing of conclusions which combine those facts into a reasonable pattern. Both processes require the use of judgement, and, for a Bahá'í scholar, they will be affected by his knowledge of the nature of Bahá'u'lláh and His revelation. So, even if forced by circumstances to present only evidence acceptable to the current academic methodology, he would not permit this limitation to lead him to draw conclusions that, as a Bahá'í, he would know to be false.

This quandary is, however, only a side-issue to the more fundamental question of the interplay of revelation and the fruits of scholarly investigation. I believe that there is a passage in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* which provides the key to this larger question. It is the section which begins: "But, O my brother, when a true seeker determines to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must..." There are many gems of advice in this passage. A striking feature is the inclusion of requirements that would normally be understood to be related to ethics and morals rather than to research. One sentence which is particularly relevant to public discussion of the teachings by Bahá'ís is:

He [the true seeker] must never seek to exalt himself above anyone, must wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vainglory, must cling unto patience and resignation, observe silence, and refrain from idle talk. For the tongue is a smouldering fire, and excess of speech a deadly poison. Material fire consumeth the body, whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart and soul. The force of the former lasteth

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but for a time, whilst the effects of the latter endure a century.¹⁶

Not that a seeker should never speak, but rather, he should use discipline in what he says, avoiding mere combative arguing and refraining from idle talk, thinking always of the purpose of his comments.

This passage, often called “The Tablet of the True Seeker,” teaches us that our whole being, our attitude to others, our outward behaviour as well as our inward spirit, are essential elements in our search for truth. It is another reminder of the inter-relatedness of all elements of the Bahá'í revelation. As we study the many passages in the writings touching on the acquisition of knowledge, we come to see that there is not, and cannot be, any conflict between divine revelation and an unfettered search after truth. The revelation lifts us to a higher level of understanding and throws light on all we could ever want to know. I am reminded of Jesus' advice, “Seek ye first the kingdom of god and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”¹⁷

Institutions of the Covenant and the search for knowledge

Now we must consider how the operation of the Covenant and its institutions affect the search for knowledge. Every religion of the past, in the absence of a Covenant as clear and binding as that of Bahá'u'lláh, has sunk into division and error because of the inability of its followers to remain true to the teachings of its Founder. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained in the passage from Chapter 83 of *Some Answered Questions*, the possession of a body of sacred scripture is no certain guide to true knowledge:

This method equally is not perfect, because the traditions are understood by the reason. As the reason itself is liable to err, how can it be said that in interpreting the meaning of the traditions it will not err, for it is possible for it to make mistakes, and certainty cannot be attained. This is the method of the religious leaders; whatever they understand and comprehend from the text of the books is that which their reason understands from the text, and not necessarily the real truth; for the reason is like a balance, and the meanings contained in the text of the Holy Books are like the thing which is weighed. If the balance is untrue, how can the weight be ascertained?¹⁸

¹⁶ *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 193.

¹⁷ Matt. 6:33

¹⁸ *Some Answered Questions* 298.

Bahá'ís would be no different from the followers of other religions in this, were it not for the Covenant which provides, first in 'Abdu'l-Bahá and then in the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice, divinely protected and guided centres. To fully understand the nature and inter-connectedness of the twin institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice is beyond our capacity at this time, but we can appreciate their essential functions and can see how, even in the absence of the Guardian, which deprives the Faith of a centre of authoritative interpretation, the Covenant is still inviolable.

Some friends have said that, in the absence of the Guardian, the Universal House of Justice will be compelled to make authoritative interpretations, but the House of Justice has ruled this out. Without quoting at length here from the letters written by the House of Justice on this theme, it is clear that there are two kinds of interpretation and divinely inspired authoritative interpretation is the sphere of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian alone. They could say what the meaning and intention of Bahá'u'lláh was, and no one has any right to say the contrary. Thus if, to a follower of the Faith, there ever seems to be a contradiction between the Sacred Text and the authoritative interpretation, it is clearly the latter which must guide his understanding.

There is, moreover, an immense amount of guidance from 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi that not only interprets the revelation, but also, by example, shows us how we ourselves can understand the writings and draw our own conclusions where no authoritative interpretation exists. Thus, although our conclusions are prone to error, such examples should help us to avoid the more serious ones.

The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice

Bahá'ís have a vast body of writings, both revelation and its authoritative interpretation, on which they must build their knowledge and understanding of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Their own ideas and conclusions must evolve based upon the texts. What are they to do, then, if their own fallible interpretations differ from one another, as they inevitably must do? The Universal House of Justice cannot issue an authoritative interpretation, any more than an individual Bahá'í could. It does, however, have other authority which is quite adequate to protect the Covenant.

In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the members of the Universal House of Justice are to "deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book." It is, moreover, significant that this passage appears in the second part of the Will and Testament written when 'Abdu'l-Bahá was in great danger and Shoghi Effendi was still a child, and refers specifically to the elected members of the Universal House of Justice, of whom He writes, "Whatever they decide

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has the same effect as the Text itself.”¹⁹

Various questions have been raised concerning the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice in the absence of a Guardian. These questions have been addressed in letters from the Universal House of Justice. Moreover, it is only the Universal House of Justice that can give authoritative answers to such questions. Sometimes the answer becomes clear by what the House of Justice writes, and sometimes by the way it acts.

Unlike the situation in past dispensations, Bahá'u'lláh, directly and through the authority He conferred upon ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, has expressly removed from individual believers, no matter how learned, the right to make authoritative interpretations or deductions from the scriptures, and has concentrated central authority in only two institutions: the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice. He has enjoined upon all Bahá'ís the duty to investigate truth for themselves; He has called upon us to study the writings and to arrive at our own understanding of them; nevertheless at the very end of His Will and Testament, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written, concerning the central authority in the Cause:

Beware lest anyone falsely interpret these words, and like unto them that have broken the Covenant after the Day of Ascension (of Bahá'u'lláh) advance a pretext, raise the standard of revolt, wax stubborn and open wide the door of false interpretation. To none is given the right to put forth his own opinion or express his particular convictions. All must seek guidance and turn unto the Centre of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error.²⁰

If we wish to understand how this strict injunction relates to the principle of the independent investigation of truth, we should study the way in which both the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice have applied it.

Qualifications of a true believer

Related to this question is the observance of those limits to the actions a person performs, and the ideas he promulgates, that permit him to be regarded as a Bahá'í. For a long time there was no clear distinction between those regarded as Bahá'ís and those understood to be sympathisers. But as the Bahá'í community began to take form with the upbuilding of the administrative order in obedience to the injunctions in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, it became necessary for the Bahá'í

¹⁹ *Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971) Part 2, paragraph 8.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Part 3, penultimate paragraph.

institutions to make a distinction between those who had accepted the Faith, and could take part in its administrative functions and come under the jurisdiction of Bahá'í law, on the one hand, and those, on the other, who although sympathetic to the Faith's teachings, did not really accept Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God and did not consider themselves as having an obligation to obey Bahá'í law. Previous religions have tried to solve this problem in various ways. In Christendom the church attempted to solve it by the formulation of creeds. The Bahá'í solution is quite different, as can be seen from the advice Shoghi Effendi gave in a letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, in a letter written on 24 October 1925:

Regarding the very delicate and complex question of ascertaining the qualifications of a true believer, I cannot in this connection emphasize too strongly the supreme necessity for the exercise of the utmost discretion, caution and tact, whether it be in deciding for ourselves as to who may be regarded a true believer or in disclosing to the outside world such considerations as may serve as a basis for such a decision. I would only venture to state very briefly and as adequately as present circumstances permit the principal factors that must be taken into consideration before deciding whether a person may be regarded a true believer or not. Full recognition of the station of the Forerunner, the Author, and the True Exemplar of the Bahá'í Cause, as set forth in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Testament; unreserved acceptance of, and submission to, whatsoever has been revealed by their Pen; loyal and steadfast adherence to every clause of our Beloved's sacred Will; and close association with the spirit as well as the form of the present day Bahá'í administration throughout the world - these I conceive to be the fundamental and primary considerations that must be fairly, discreetly and thoughtfully ascertained before reaching such a vital decision. Any attempt at further analysis and elucidation will, I fear, land us in barren discussions and even grave controversies that would prove not only futile but even detrimental to the best interests of a growing Cause. I would therefore strongly urge those who are called upon to make such a decision to approach this highly involved and ever-recurring problem with the spirit of humble prayer, and earnest consultation, and to refrain from drawing rigidly the line of demarcation except on such occasions when the interests of the Cause absolutely demand it.²¹

²¹ *Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922-1932* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1995) 89.

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This passage establishes the very restrained manner in which Bahá'í institutions are authorised to approach the delicate matter of deciding when a person should be admitted to membership of the Bahá'í community or excluded from such membership. In matters of behaviour, for example, assemblies do not pry into the lives of individuals. Only if a Bahá'í's behaviour constitutes a flagrant breach of Bahá'í law or a blatant offence against Bahá'í moral standards, bringing disgrace upon the name of the Faith, does an Assembly intervene, try to get the believer to correct his ways and ultimately, if he does not heed the advice and warnings, deprive him of his administrative rights. In the area of belief, while the institutions have the task of educating the believers in the teachings, they do not concern themselves otherwise in the beliefs of individual friends, accepting that we are all but infants in our strivings to understand this infinitely glorious revelation. If, however, believers persistently give voice to views which are in conflict with the clear teachings, the institutions would have the duty of explaining to them the folly of such behaviour. And if by the active promulgation of such ideas they are seen to be attempting to undermine the authority of the Covenant itself, this would, naturally, be a far more serious situation, and would call into question their membership in the Bahá'í community.

So acceptance and understanding of the ancient Covenant, that is, the concept of divine revelation as elucidated in the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, raises our understanding of knowledge – and of scholarship, which is the pursuit of knowledge – to a more inclusive level. Whether a human being accepts this revelation is a question of his or her own free choice, but once accepted, it cannot but affect one's approach to knowledge. The Bahá'í teachings not only promote the concept of the independent search after truth, and stress the great importance of education, but also foster a community in which there is a tolerant and undogmatic spirit and in which the Lesser Covenant and its central institutions safeguard the unity of the whole – with all its diversity of views and expression – by providing an authoritative point of reference for the resolution of disputes and problems.

What is more, no matter how exalted a station the Faith upholds for the learned, or how urgent the call to excel in scholarship, every Bahá'í should always hold before his eyes these words of Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*:

The understanding of His words and the comprehension of the utterances of the Birds of Heaven are in no wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit.²²

²² *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* 211.

Infallible Institutions?

UDO SCHAEFER

Abstract

Infallibility is a complex term in Bahá'í scripture that has not been much discussed in Bahá'í secondary literature. The concept, which has analogies in Catholicism and Islam, is historically burdened and has become obsolete in secular thought. This paper analyses two categories of "infallibility": essential infallibility which is inherent in the messengers of God, and conferred infallibility which is a characteristic of the institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice. This paper focuses on the Universal House of Justice. Does its infallibility operate to an unlimited extent? Are every one of its decisions infallible, and if not, what are its boundaries? The immanent limits of this charisma are analysed and a detailed argument provided that supports a defensible restrictive interpretation.

Introduction¹

Reason (*'aql*) has been called "the first and foremost" among the "favours, which the Almighty hath conferred upon men,"² however, it is not an infallible source of knowledge,³ and is "liable to err."⁴ All human thought must be prefaced with St. Jerome's dictum *errare human est*.⁵ "Mortal man is prone to err", says Bahá'u'lláh.⁶ The question then arises whether there is anything that could unreservedly be called truth, whether there is any infallible source of truth.

Revealed religion is inseparably associated with a claim to truth. If it is the Word of God that is proclaimed, it cannot be but truth, and, indeed, all the

¹ I am much indebted to Dr. Geraldine Schuckelt for checking and making stylistical improvements to my English draft. References to Bahá'í scripture are by section/chapter followed by paragraph.

² *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978) 95:1; see also 83:1; *Paris Talks. Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1911* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995) 11:4; 8:23, 8; *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970) 1-2; *Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981) 58:3.

³ On the limitations of reason see my *Bahá'í Ethics* (in preparation), ch. 6, 4.

⁴ *Some Answered Questions* 83:4.

⁵ *Epistulae* 57, 12.

⁶ *Gleanings* 93:6.

prophets claimed to be the “straight Path of Truth.”⁷ The Qur’án is “a guidance to the God-fearing,”⁸ by which “the right way [is] made distinct from error”⁹: “Nay, we hurl the truth at falsehood, and it shall smite it, and lo! it shall vanish.”¹⁰ To the Bahá’ís Bahá’u’lláh is “the living Book who proclaimeth the Truth”, his message “a Truth [which is] not overtaken by error.”¹¹ His book “that judged between truth and falsehood,”¹² is the divine standard of all morality, the “essence of justice,”¹³ the “infallible balance.”¹⁴

Under the premise of faith that he is the “mediator between God and men”¹⁵ and has come with the truth, the messenger must be considered an infallible source of knowledge. This is a logical conclusion. Referring to the Gospel of St. John,¹⁶ Christian theology claimed for Jesus Christ not only infallibility but even omniscience.¹⁷ In Islamic dogmatics the doctrine of ‘*ima*’ was developed according to which immunity from error and sin is ascribed to the prophets.¹⁸ Whereas the term “infallibility” does not occur in the sacred

⁷ *Gleanings* 81. As to the “straight path” (*a-iráu’l mustaqím*) cf. *Qur’án* 1:6; 4:70; 5:15; 37:118; *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1978) 4:8, 10; 5:17; 6:11; *Gleanings* 81; 82:5; 110; 114:1; 116:3; 128:3; *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The Most Holy Book* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992) 14, 186. The terms “path” or “way” are known in all religions: “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). In the Buddhist canon and in the scriptures of Hinduism the term is “magga” (*Iti-Vuttaka. Sayings of Buddha* [New York: AMS Press Inc., 1965] Sutta 62). In the Chinese religion one of the meanings of *Tao* among others (law, teaching, fundamental principle) is “the way” (cf. Phyllis Chew, *The Chinese Religion and the Bahá’í Faith* [Oxford: George Ronald, 1993] 22ff.).

⁸ Qur’án 2:1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:256.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21:18.

¹¹ *Tablets* 8:17.

¹² *Ibid.*, 14:2. There are numerous passages which equate revelation with truth, i.e. *Gleanings* 17:5; 29:3; 47; 82:2; 133:2; 1143:1; 153:8; *Tablets* 4:31; 5:21; 6:15-16; 9:6; 17:45, 106, 115 etc.

¹³ *Gleanings* 88.

¹⁴ *al-qistas al-hudá* (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 183); *al-qistas al-aqq* (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 99), literally “the balance of guidance”, “the balance of truth”.

¹⁵ 1. Tim. 2:5.

¹⁶ 1:8; 2:24-25; 5:20; 8:12; 9:5; 14:6; 16:30; 21:17.

¹⁷ *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag, special ed. 1986), vol. X, 1193, 951.

¹⁸ Sunni theologians differ in opinion as to the extent to this immunity. Some apply it in unlimited fashion to Muammad only, others to all the prophets. Some Sunni authorities differ in the question whether this charisma existed before or only after the vocation of the prophet to his prophetic ministry. The Shí’a ascribes ‘*ima*’ to all prophets (*rusul*) and to the imáms also (on this subject see *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam [SEI]* by H. A. R. Gibb and

writings of the past, neither in the Bible nor in the Qur'án, Bahá'u'lláh has dealt with this subject explicitly and, as I will explain below, confirmed infallibility as an inherent attribute of the Manifestation of God.

However, the claim to infallibility has been also raised for two institutions of the community: the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice. According to the holy texts both are explicitly “freed from all error”¹⁹: “Whatsoever they decide is of God²⁰ ... God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth.”²¹ Whereas infallibility is an essential attribute of the Manifestation who occupies an ontologically higher station in the hierarchy of creation than human beings and is endowed with innate knowledge, those individuals who serve in these two institutions are human beings. The *charisma*²² of infallibility has been *conferred* on the institution (not on the persons in office). To secular thought the concept of *conferred* infallibility has become untenable and unacceptable. In the age of “fallibilism,”²³ “infallibility is an obsolete claim.”²⁴ Moreover, the concept is historically burdened, it conjures up all sorts of negative connotations, provokes fierce rejection and is regarded as an expression of human presumptuousness and hubris, a sign of antiquated thinking.

In western thought infallibility is closely associated with the Catholic church and its disputed dogma of papal infallibility, which was promulgated by the first Vatican council in 1870 under the Pontificate of Pius IX.²⁵ The

J. H. Kramers, Leiden, photomechanic reprint 1961) 178).

¹⁹ *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1944) 1:17; 1:25.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:17.

²¹ *Tablets* 6:29; 3:24; 8:60.

²² The Greek term taken from the New Testament (see Rom. 6:23; I Cor. 7:7) is used in the original sense: a gift of grace, a gift of God.

²³ See Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 78ff.

²⁴ Heiner Barz, *Postmoderne Religion* (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 1992) 136.

²⁵ Even early on, the Fathers of the Church expressed their conviction that the Church is guided by the “Spirit of Truth” (John 14:16ff.) which Christ has promised to his disciples: “And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). Thomas Aquinas formulated: “*Ecclesia generalis non potest errare*” (S. th. Suppl. 25.1). The criterium of truth has been the general consensus in the Church as it has been expressed by Vincentius de Lérin (d. 450 CE) in his formula “*Magnopere curandum est, ut id teneamus, quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est, hoc est enim vere proprieque catholicum*” (“Great care must be taken that we keep to that which has been believed everywhere, always and by all, for that is really and truly Catholic”, *Commonitorium*, ch. 2, 5, quoted from Mirbt, *Quellen zur Geschichte des Papsttums und des römischen Katholizismus* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1967), vol. I, no. 432, p. 203). This Catholic principle of the *consensus omnium* has an analogy in Sunni Islam where infallible authority is based on the *ijma'*. On this subject see footnote 139.

dogma²⁶ defines the Roman bishop to be infallible if he takes a final decision in matters of doctrine or morals and speaks *ex cathedra*,²⁷ i.e. in performance of his teaching office (*magisterium*). The dogma of papal infallibility was accepted by the Council after many disputes, with the result that a major splinter-group, made up mainly of German bishops, left the Catholic church and founded their own church, the so-called “Old Catholics”. The term is still controversial in Catholic theology. Hans Küng has written a sizeable book²⁸ on this subject in which he radically contests this dogma. The discussion among Catholic theologians on this issue continues and the Curia has been unable to silence the voices of dissidents. Today the concept of infallibility is discredited, inasmuch as a significant number of Christian theologians do not even ascribe infallibility to Christ, since he is presumed to have erred with regard to the question of parousia. Hans Küng has coined a formula for a wide-spread conviction among Catholics: “*Nemo infallibilis nisi Deus ipse*” [“No one is infallible save God”].

In the sceptical climate of western societies, infallibility is a concept that is virtually impossible to impart; that of *conferred* infallibility is even more difficult to explain. Indeed, this concept cannot be validated through rational argumentation. Nevertheless, it ought to be possible to demonstrate that the idea of conferred infallibility is not necessarily irrational under the premise of religious faith. In order to do so, however, it would be necessary to clarify this notion in a critical discourse. We will only be able to avoid the accusation of superstition if we manage to show that the infallibility of the institutions is not a magical element in the Bahá’í system but rather something that is reasonable and acceptable for those who believe in the revelation of Bahá’u’lláh.

In this critical discourse the discussion of the immanent limits of conferred infallibility would be of crucial significance. The idea that the Universal House of Justice is invested with unlimited infallibility leads to untenable and unacceptable consequences. Unfortunately, experience has shown that in the Bahá’í community a critical discussion on this subject is not an easy thing – too strong are the convictions of many that Bahá’u’lláh’s assurance, “Whatever they decide is of God,”²⁹ is valid for absolutely every kind of decision, the Bahá’í community thus being in possession of a kind of oracle that can be consulted and from whom the community gets *infallible* guidance in all matters.

²⁶ *Constitutio Pater aeternus* (D 1838, 1839).

²⁷ It should be noted that the Catholic church is extremely reluctant in making use of this dogma. In this century it has happened only once, in 1954 when Pius XII proclaimed the dogma of the bodily Assumption of the Virgin Mary. None of the papal doctrinal encyclicals such as *Humanae vitae* by Paul VI (on birth control) claim infallibility; whereas they demand obedience, they are open to revocation.

²⁸ *Infallible? An Inquiry* (London: William Collins, 1972).

²⁹ See footnote 20.

As Shoghi Effendi himself has clarified the extent of his infallibility as Guardian and formulated its immanent limitations, the focus of this article is on the Universal House of Justice: does its infallibility operate unlimitedly with the result that absolutely every decision is covered by it? Or, if this question is to be answered in the negative, what exactly is the scope of its infallibility?

At the outset we have to elucidate the concept of the “essential infallibility” of the messengers of God, but it is beyond the scope of this article to deal with this issue comprehensively. I will neither discuss the issue of omniscience,³⁰ nor will I go into details (e.g., the question as to whether references in the holy texts to facts or historical events³¹ are infallible statements), nor will I discuss the nature of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s infallibility.³²

The issue of institutional infallibility has already been the subject of a discussion in the context of the refutation of the confused and blatantly erroneous accusations by a covenant-breaker.³³ An English edition of this rebuttal³⁴ has meanwhile been published by George Ronald under the title *Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahá’í Apologetics* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000) to which I refer.³⁵ The present article contains some further arguments.

“Infallibility” (*ima*)³⁶ is a complex term which has, according to Bahá’u’lláh, “numerous meanings and diverse stations.”³⁷ In one sense (in

³⁰ On this subject see John Hatcher, “The Doctrine of the Most Great Infallibility”, in John Hatcher/William Hatcher, *The Law of Love Enshrined* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1996).

³¹ For example, statements in the *Law-i-Hikmat* on Empedocles and David, Pythagoras and Solomon as contemporaries (*Tablets* 9:25).

³² The “Most Great Infallibility” is confined to the Manifestations. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was not a Manifestation. Nevertheless, the question arises whether he was in possession of innate knowledge or whether his knowledge was acquired. If his infallibility was conferred, then it was inherent to his office as Bahá’u’lláh’s successor (cf. *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 121, 174; *Kitáb-i-‘Ahd*) which began with the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh. Then the question arises whether ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s oral and written utterances before the inception of his office are free from error. Moreover, “conferred infallibility” is immunity against error, it does not comprise immunity against sin. However, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is exalted in his rank, he is “the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings ... The embodiment of every Bahá’í virtue” (*The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* [Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1974] 134). “Stainlessness” indicates sinlessness. All these questions are still in need of reflection and discussion.

³³ F. Ficicchia, *Der Bahá’ismus — Religion der Zukunft? Geschichte, Lehre und Organisation in kritischer Anfrage* (Stuttgart: Quell-Verlag, 1981).

³⁴ Udo Schaefer, Nicola Towfigh, Ulrich Gollmer, *Desinformation als Methode. Die Bahá’ismus-Monographie des F. Ficicchia* (Hildesheim: Olms-Verlag, 1995).

³⁵ See pages 166-194.

³⁶ From *‘asama, ya ‘imu* (to protect, save from).

³⁷ Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets* 8:17, p. 108.

that of immaculateness) it can be applied “to every soul whom God hath guarded against sin, transgression, rebellion, impiety, disbelief and the like.”³⁸ This “gift of grace” is “a ray of the bounty of infallibility” and “is granted to every holy soul.”³⁹ Bahá’í scripture distinguishes between *essential* infallibility and infallibility that has been *conferred* through divine bestowal.⁴⁰

Essential infallibility (*al-‘ima adh-dhátíya*)

Essential infallibility is an inherent attribute and confined to the prophets; it is an exclusive characteristic of the ontological station of the messengers of God, just as the sun’s rays are inherent in the sun. This concept can only be understood in the context of Bahá’í prophetology⁴¹ which shall be shortly delineated.

In the past, there have been different answers to the question as to the nature of the founding figures of the various religions. The starting point of the theophanology of the Abrahamic religions was the dualism existing between God and man. Again and again, the question has been raised as to whether the mediator of the divine will is a human being called upon by God to carry out a special mission, or whether, instead, God has incarnated himself, taking on the human form in the person of the “Manifestation” or messenger of God. According to Jewish, Zoroastrian and Islamic doctrine, Moses, Zoroaster and Muammad are human beings who have been called upon to act as the mouthpiece of God.⁴² Christian theology, on the other hand, defined the nature of Christ at the Council of Nicaea in the year 325 CE, giving an ontological interpretation to the dignitary title of the Messiah “Son of God”, expressed by the formula “*vere homo, vere Deus*” [“true man, and true God”]. According to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, Christ is the incarnate Son of God, being simultaneously man and God in “hypostatic union.”⁴³

Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation conveys a more differentiated view of the divine

38 *Ibid.*

39 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 45:4, p. 172.

40 Cf. *Ibid.*, 45:2, pp. 171–172.

41 On this subject see Juan R. Cole, “The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahá’í Writings,” *Bahá’í Studies* 9 (1982). A summary of the Bahá’í doctrine on the nature and station of the Manifestation can be found in *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, note 75, p. 200. On this subject see U. Schaefer, *Beyond the Clash of Religions* (Stockholm: Zero Palm Press, 2nd edn. 1998) 124ff.

42 Nevertheless in Islam they have been elevated above the rank of mortals by assigning to them immunity from error and sin (*‘ima*).

43 On the doctrine of the Holy Trinity see the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Mahwah, N. J.: Paulist Press, 1994), nos. 249-256. This doctrine has become an insurmountable obstacle in interfaith dialogue with Jews and Muslims.

messengers. The scripture imparts a conceptual scheme of Bahá'í ontology, a trichotomy according to which there are three worlds: the eternally inaccessible world of God ('*álamu'l-aqq*) which is "exalted beyond the grasp of the minds of men",⁴⁴ the world of creation ('*álamu'l-khalq*) and an intermediate world, the world of the revelation of the divine command ('*álamu'l-amr*). The prophets and messengers of God are part of this intermediate world.

This view has been expressed terminologically: In place of the Qur'anic terms *nabí* (prophet) and *rasúl* (messenger), we find in Bahá'í scripture the frequently occurring term *maharu'lláh* or *a-uhúr* (Manifestation of God)⁴⁵ by which it is indicated that these figures are exalted above normal human existence and have an ontological station above that of man, that they are beings *sui generis*. A twofold nature has been assigned to them: a human station and a spiritual station which is "born of the substance of God himself" (*iláhi*).⁴⁶

The fundamental ontological difference between human beings and the prophets is pre-existence⁴⁷ and their innate knowledge of the world of creation (*násút*) and of the metaphysical world (*malakút, jabarút*): "They are the Treasuries of divine knowledge⁴⁸ ... the Mines of divine Wisdom."⁴⁹ Their knowledge is not acquired, not gained by reflection or experience. Rather it is "divine knowledge,"⁵⁰ the "knowledge of being" ('*ilmu'l-wujúd*)⁵¹ which is "like the cognizance and consciousness that man has of himself."⁵² The Manifestations of God "are aware of the reality of things,"⁵³ of the needs and

44 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, 26:1, 3; 78:2; 94:3; 160:1 [pp. 60, 61–62, 150, 193, 335–336], *Tablets* 8:26, p. 113.

45 Cf. Nicola Towfigh, *Schöpfung und Offenbarung* (Hildesheim: Olms Verlag, 1989) 172ff.

46 *Gleanings* 27:4, p. 66.

47 "The soul or spirit of the individual comes into being with the conception of this physical body. The Prophets, unlike us, are pre-existent. The soul of Christ existed in the spiritual world before His birth in this world" (Shoghi Effendi, quoted in Helen Hornby, *Lights of Guidance* [New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994] 505 (no. 1699). John 17:5; 8:58 refer to Christ's pre-existence (cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's commentary on this verse in *Some Answered Questions* chap 28, sections 3-5 [pp. 116–117]). According to Catholic doctrine, Christ is the pre-existent, eternal Word of God. Bahá'u'lláh alludes to the pre-existent nature of the prophets in the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* [Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1998] section 225, p. 155 and in *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, verse 177, p. 84).

48 *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983) 160, p. 100.

49 *Ibid.*

50 *Some Answered Questions* 40:6, p. 158.

51 *Ibid.*, 40:4, p. 157.

52 *Ibid.*

53 *Ibid.*, 40:7, 58:4, pp. 159, 218–219.

exigencies of the human world, they are “sanctified Mirrors”⁵⁴ reflecting the light of God,⁵⁵ “the focal points where the signs, tokens and perfections of that sacred pre-existent Reality appear in their splendour.”⁵⁶ Their “knowledge of being”⁵⁷ has been expressed by Bahá’u’lláh in a metaphor according to which the Manifestation is like a “Divine and Infallible physician”⁵⁸ who “has His finger on the pulse of mankind” who “perceiveth the disease and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy.”⁵⁹

Thus, the divine messengers are “Manifestations” of God and not his incarnations.⁶⁰ In relation to God, the Manifestation appears as utter nothingness, but in relation to the world of creation (*‘álamu ’l-khalq, násút*) he is endowed with all the attributes of God.⁶¹ Only through knowledge of the Manifestations is knowledge of God attainable.⁶² Each of them has been the “representative and mouthpiece of God.”⁶³

Whoso recognizeth them hath recognized God. Whoso hearkeneth to their call, hath hearkened to the Voice of God, and whoso testifieth to the truth of their Revelation, hath testified to the truth of God Himself. Whoso turneth away from them, hath turned away from God, and whoso disbelieveth in them, hath disbelieved in God. Every one of them is the Way of God that connecteth this world with the realms above, and the Standard of His Truth unto every one in the kingdoms of earth and heaven.⁶⁴

The charisma of infallibility is a logical precondition, an “essential

54 Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 106, p. 99.

55 *Ibid.*

56 *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre 1978) 21:12, p. 50.

57 Cf. *Some Answered Questions* 40:4, 6.

58 *Gleanings* 106:2; 34:6; 120:3.

59 *Ibid.*, 106:1.

60 The concept of incarnation (*ulú’l*) has been decidedly rejected by Bahá’u’lláh (cf. *Gleanings* 20, p. 49, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 104, p. 98).

61 Bahá’u’lláh testifies: “When I contemplate, O my God, the relationship that bindeth me to Thee, I am moved to proclaim to all created things ‘verily I am God!’; and when I consider my own self, lo, I find it coarser than clay!” (quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order* 113).

62 *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 106, pp. 99–100.

63 *Gleanings* 28:2, p. 70.

64 *Ibid.*, 21, pp. 49–50.

requirement”⁶⁵ for this representation of God, by which he safeguards and protects his word, his laws and ordinances, from all error. God’s sovereignty which has been expressed in the verses:

The Will of God is not limited by the standards of the people, and God doth not tread in their ways... Verily He is to be praised in His acts and to be obeyed in His behests. He hath no associate in His judgement nor any helper in His sovereignty.⁶⁶

God’s sovereignty is also an attribute of the Manifestation:

He doeth what He willeth, He chooseth, and none may question His choice...⁶⁷ Were He to pronounce water to be wine or heaven to be earth or light to be fire, He speaketh the truth and no doubt would there be about it; and unto no one is given the right to question His authority or to say why or wherefore. Whosoever raiseth objections will be numbered with the froward in the Book of God, the Lord of the worlds. ‘Verily He shall not be asked of His doings but all others shall be asked of their doings.’ He is come from the invisible heaven, bearing the banner ‘He doeth whatsoever He willeth’ and is accompanied by hosts of power and authority.⁶⁸

Thus, God’s sovereignty is represented through his Manifestations. Therefore they are “not under the shadow of the former laws.”⁶⁹

Bahá’u’lláh has confirmed the doctrine of ‘*ima* (infallibility) which has been deduced from the Qur’án and developed in Islam according to which the prophets are *ma’úm*, i.e., sinless, immaculate, morally infallible, and rendered by God immune to error, and infallible in their judgement and decree. He termed this essential infallibility, “the Most Great Infallibility,” (*al-‘imatu’l-kubrâ*) which is confined to the Manifestation, to the

One Whose station is immeasurably exalted beyond ordinances or prohibitions and is sanctified from errors and omissions. Indeed He is a Light which is not followed by darkness and a

⁶⁵ *Some Answered Questions* 45:2, p. 171.

⁶⁶ *Tablets* 8:18, p. 109, cf. also *Prayers and Meditations* (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, rev. ed. 1978) 103:1, 139:1, 176:46; 184:22 (pp. 172, 227, 286, 339).

⁶⁷ *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* verse 7, pp. 21–22.

⁶⁸ *Tablets* 8:17, p. 108.

⁶⁹ *Some Answered Questions* 45:5, p. 173.

Truth not overtaken by error⁷⁰ ... He Who is the Dawning-place
of God's Cause hath no partner in the Most Great Infallibility.
He it is Who, in the kingdom of creation ... is the Manifestation
of "He doeth whatsoever He willeth."⁷¹

⁷⁰ *Tablets* 8:17, p. 108.

⁷¹ *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* verse 47, p. 36. The Qur'anic formula *yaf'alu má yashá'* (3:40, 14:27, 22:18) is frequently recurring in the scripture (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* verses 7, 20, 47, 131, 157 [pp. 21, 26, 36, 66, 76], *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 103, 182, 184, 271 [pp. 97, 170, 171, 243], *Gleanings* 59:3, 101, 102, 129:12, 134:3, 136:1 [pp. 116, 206, 284, 291, 295], *Tablets* 5:13; 6:56; 7:40; 8:12, 17, 19, 71, 74; 12:12, 14:14 [pp. 51, 80, 96, 105, 108, 109–110, 132, 133, 184, 216].

By virtue of their essential infallibility everything that emanates from the Manifestations “is identical with the truth and conformable to reality... Whatever they say is the Word of God, and whatever they perform is upright action.”⁷²

Bahá'u'lláh has made this principle the touchstone of man's faith and has formulated its consequences in challenging language:

Blessed is the man that hath acknowledged his belief in God and in His signs, and recognized that “He shall not be asked of His doings”.⁷³ Such a recognition hath been made by God the ornament of every belief and its very foundation. Upon it must depend the acceptance of every goodly deed... Were He to decree as lawful the thing which from time immemorial had been forbidden, and forbid that which had, at all times, been regarded as lawful, to none is given the right to question His authority. Whoso will hesitate, though it be for less than a moment, should be regarded as a transgressor. Whoso hath not recognized this sublime and fundamental verity, and hath failed to attain this most exalted station, the winds of doubt will agitate him, and the sayings of the infidels will distract his soul. He that hath acknowledged this principle will be endowed with the most perfect constancy.⁷⁴

This passage is undoubtedly a provocation which should be seen in the light of “the showers of tests from His realm of glory,”⁷⁵ the divine purpose of which is that “the true should be known from the false, and sun from shadow.”⁷⁶ Bahá'u'lláh elsewhere speaks of the “fears and agitation which the revelation of this law provokes in men's hearts.”⁷⁷ Similar tests happened in previous dispensations.⁷⁸

⁷² *Some Answered Questions* 45:5, p. 173.

⁷³ *lá yus'al 'ammá yaf'al*, Qur'án 21:23, a frequently occurring formula in the scripture (*Tablets* 8:17, p. 108, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 182, pp. 170–171, *Gleanings* 37, 114:8 [pp. 86, 239]).

⁷⁴ *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, verses 161-3, pp. 77–78.

⁷⁵ *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 56, p. 53.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, cf. also *ibid.* 55, p. 51, *Qur'án* 2:143.

⁷⁷ *Gleanings* 88.

⁷⁸ For instance, when Jesus taught in the synagogue in Capernaum it happened that “many of his disciples, when they heard this, said, ‘This is an hard saying, who can hear it?’ “ (John 6:60). And it is reported that “from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked

Conferred infallibility (*al-'ima al-ifátíya*) ⁷⁹

There is a categorical difference to *essential* infallibility: *conferred* infallibility covers only one of the two categories of *'ima*, the inability to fall into error, and the infallibility of judgement. Infallibility conferred to an institution does not imply freedom from sin, sinlessness, and immaculateness.⁸⁰ In the Bahá'í Faith infallibility has been exclusively conferred on the Guardian in his function as the authoritative interpreter of the holy writ and on the Universal House of Justice.⁸¹

Referring to the Guardian and to the Universal House of Justice, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Testament proclaims:

The guardian of the Cause of God as well as the Universal House of Justice... are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One⁸² ... Whatsoever they decide is of God,⁸³

and with reference to the Universal House of Justice it is stated that this institution has been made "the source of all good and freed from all error"⁸⁴ by God, and that whatever it decides is "the Truth and the Purpose of God himself."⁸⁵ Bahá'u'lláh has given the assurance that, "God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth."⁸⁶ Hence, the *charisma* of infallibility rests not upon the community as a whole (as in the Catholic Church)⁸⁷ and not upon the individual members of the House, but upon the office,⁸⁸ which

no more with him" (John 6:66).

⁷⁹ *Some Answered Questions* 45:4, pp. 172–173.

⁸⁰ "No Guardian of the Faith... can ever claim to be the perfect exemplar of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh or the stainless mirror that reflects His light... he remains essentially human" (*World Order* 151).

⁸¹ As to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, refer to footnote 32.

⁸² i.e. the Báb.

⁸³ *Will and Testament* 1:17, p. 11.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:25, p. 14.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:7, p. 19.

⁸⁶ *Tablets* 6:29, p. 68.

⁸⁷ See footnote 25.

⁸⁸ The individual members of the Universal House of Justice have no share in it.

constitutes the objective, inherent limit of infallibility.⁸⁹ It is therefore important at this juncture to consider the critical question of the immanent limits of conferred infallibility, in order to clarify the principles involved.

The question is whether absolutely everything written and spoken by the Guardian claims to be free of error, and, similarly, whether everything decided by the Universal House of Justice, even down to day-to-day administrative decisions or decisions on trivial matters, are governed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s dictum, “Whatever they decide is of God?”⁹⁰ ... Whatever they decide has the same effect as the Text itself.”⁹¹ In other words, is the infallibility conferred upon these institutions without restriction or does it have inherent limits?

The extent of conferred infallibility

It is easier to define the extent of the conferred infallibility in the case of the Guardianship than for the Universal House of Justice, because Shoghi Effendi himself defined the limits of the infallibility conferred upon the Guardianship. His infallibility was restricted to the sphere of his interpretative power (*auctoritas interpretationis*)⁹² and to his office, i.e. to his authoritative interpretation of the scripture⁹³ and his role as protector of the Faith. Beyond

⁸⁹ In comparing this with the infallibility of the Pope (cf. can. 749 CIC; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* nos. 891, 2035), which even “extends to the individual commandments of the natural moral law” (ibid. no. 2036), it is evident that there are differences not only in content but also in legitimation: papal infallibility is legitimated by means of deductions. According to canon law, the Pope’s jurisdictional primacy, which implies doctrinal authority, is based on the calling of Peter to his station as leader of the apostles (Matt. 16:18, John 1:42, 21:15, Luke 22:32) and on the apostolic succession of the Bishop of Rome to the station of Peter. The infallibility of the Pope in his “teaching office” (*magisterium*) is deduced from the promise of the Holy Spirit: “And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20), and the promise of the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:16ff.), through which the purity and authenticity of the faith preached by the apostles and their successors is guaranteed forever (cf. Luke 10:16; for more detail on this subject see *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 10, col. 482ff.). These deductions are disputed by the non-Catholic churches and are controversial even within the Roman Church (cf. Hans Küng, *Infallible?* 53ff., 64ff., 88ff.).

The institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice, on the other hand, are directly legitimated explicitly by the scripture, namely Bahá’u’lláh’s *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Testament. The promise of the charisma of immunity to error is, as shown above, an explicit component of Bahá’í scripture.

⁹⁰ *Will and Testament* 1:17, p. 11.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 2:8.

⁹² Cf. Udo Schaefer, *Die Grundlagen der ‘Verwaltungsordnung’ der Bahá’í*, Heidelberg 1957 (Diss.), 138ff., U. Gollmer, *Gottesreich und Weltgestaltung. Grundlegung einer politischen Theologie im Bahá’ítum* (unpublished dissertation), chap. 11.2.2.

⁹³ The question arises whether the Guardian’s infallibility extends also to his judgements on issues of morality, as it is claimed for the teaching authority of the Pope (see above, footnote 89). I think this question has to be answered affirmatively. It is true that the revelation of

these functions the Guardian was expressly not infallible,⁹⁴ and indeed he made no decisions concerning anything “that is not in the teachings.”⁹⁵ As far as the recorded facts are concerned, his historical works do not fall within the sphere of his interpretative authority and are therefore not covered by the charisma; however in those parts of his historical writings that constitute “narrative theology,” where it is “his interpretation of the theological significance of historical events”⁹⁶ that is at the forefront, this charisma is, indeed, brought to bear.

There is no explicit statement either in the scripture or in the writings of Shoghi Effendi concerning the specific spheres in which the functions of the House of Justice are granted infallibility.⁹⁷ No statement on the subject has

Bahá'u'lláh does not give support to the concept of natural law (*ius divinum naturale*), on which Catholic doctrine is based (Thomas Aquinas called it *lex aeterna, lex indita non scripta* [S. th. 1, 2 q. 91 a.2]). Bahá'í ethics is *theonomous* (from Greek, *theos*: God; *nomos*: law) and voluntaristic in the sense that all moral values have their origin in the decisions of God's arbitrary will (“He doeth whatsoever He willeth and ordaineth whatsoever He pleaseth” [Tablets 8:19, pp. 109–110, cf. *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, verse 7, pp. 21–22]. “He shall not be asked of His doings” [*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* verse 161, p. 77]). This concept of ethical voluntarism leaves no room for the idea of natural law. However, if all morality is based on God's sovereign will, as it is expressed in his revelation to mankind, it must be concluded that the Guardian's teaching power (and with it his infallibility) also covers all issues of morality. As to the origin and derivation of ethical norms, refer to my *Bahá'í Ethics* (in prep.) chap. iv; see also *Making the Crooked Straight*, pp. 403ff.

94 “The infallibility of the Guardian is confined to matters which are related strictly to the Cause and interpretation of the teachings; he is not an infallible authority on other subjects, such as economics, science etc... The Guardian's infallibility covers interpretation of the revealed word, and its application. Likewise any instructions he may issue having to do with the protection of the Faith, or its well-being must be closely obeyed, as he is infallible in the protection of the Faith” (letter dated 17 October 1944 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in: Loni Bramson-Lerche, ‘Some Aspects of the Establishment of the Guardianship’, in Moojan Momen (ed.), *Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions*. Vol. 5 [Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1988] 257 with reference to the literature cited on p. 284).

95 Letter written by Shoghi Effendi dated 29 September 1953.

96 Loni Bramson-Lerche, *op. cit.*, p. 258, where it is pointed out that Shoghi Effendi, despite his extremely careful research, made some insignificant errors in his book *God Passes By* (Bramson-Lerche, *ibid.* 285, footnote 20). Robert Stockman, too, states that: “The same observations are true of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi who quote informations that appear to be historically inaccurate in their books. Shoghi Effendi's secretary stated the Guardian was not infallible in matters of economics and science and apparently he did not claim infallibility in matters of history (though his historical writing clearly reflects a very high level of precision and accuracy)” (quoted from Abstracts of lectures delivered at the ‘Fourth H. M. Arjmand Conference on Scripture’ 4–6 November 1994 in Nijmegen, the Netherlands).

97 In my doctoral thesis, published in 1957 before the death of Shoghi Effendi, I left open the question as to whether this institution's immunity to error extended to other spheres beyond that of its legislative power, while at the same time expressing my preference for a restrictive interpretation of the scripture (*Grundlagen* 174). In the relevant literature, this question has more recently been discussed by Gollmer (*Gottesreich* chap. 12.4.3).

yet been made by the Universal House of Justice itself. Indeed, it is hardly likely that any official statement will be issued since, as will be seen later, although this is a question with far-reaching psychological implications on the consciousness of the believers and the institutions, it has no relevance for the *legal* authority of that supreme body, which derives simply from the fact that it has been ordained by Bahá'u'lláh. The strict obedience the believers have to pay to this institution, as expressed in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Testament, "Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God,"⁹⁸ is not based on their special charisma.

I think that, analogous to Shoghi Effendi's self-restricting interpretation, the infallibility conferred on the Universal House of Justice does not extend to all its acts, but covers only those functions which are explicitly mentioned in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's testament. These are all acts of supplementary legislation on matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book,⁹⁹ including the decisions on problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and on issues that are of universal relevance.

Reasons for a restrictive interpretation

Several factors might support this interpretation of the infallibility conferred on the House of Justice. The starting point of our discourse is the fact that the Universal House of Justice possesses the fullness of *jurisdictional* power, comprising executive (administrative), judicial and legislative functions, whereas the Guardian has been invested with the power of interpretation. There is a strict separation of the two powers between the two pillars of the order.¹⁰⁰

From the very beginning the House of Justice was envisioned as a legislature and invested with the function of supplementary legislation. The norms of the book that constitute the law of God are valid and unchangeable for at least one thousand years,¹⁰¹ and have therefore been formulated on a more abstract level.¹⁰² The House of Justice has been empowered to elaborate

⁹⁸ *Will and Testament* 1:17.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:8, p. 20.

¹⁰⁰ "...each operates within a clearly defined sphere of jurisdiction... Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested" (*World Order* 148–150).

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* verse 37, p. 32.

¹⁰² For instance: crimes such as murder, arson, theft, adultery and sodomy (cf. *ibid.*, verses 19, 62; pp. 26, 41; Questions and Answers no. 49, p. 121) have not been legally defined; the degrees of the offences, the details of the punishments and the manner in which they are to be carried out is left to the Universal House of Justice to decide "in light of prevailing conditions when the law is to be in operation" (*ibid.*, note 86, p. 204).

these laws and to provide for subsidiary laws according to the requirements of a steadily changing society through the enactment of supplementary legislation.

The future development of Bahá'í law will not come about, as was the case in Islam, through *authoritative interpretation* by the “learned ones” (*al-'ulamá'*),¹⁰³ but rather through *supplementary legislation* by an authorized legislative body that is, moreover, empowered to abrogate its own laws and to adapt its own legislation to the exigencies of a continuously changing world. Thus the Bahá'í law has been provided “with an essential element of flexibility.”¹⁰⁴ The Bahá'í sacred law is constituted by both the laws Bahá'u'lláh has given his people in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* which is the kernel of the law of God, and the supplementary laws enacted by the Universal House of Justice.

Another factor supporting this interpretation is the testimony provided in written sources. Whenever the supreme body is mentioned in the holy text or referred to in the writings of Shoghi Effendi it is in the context of matters “which have not outwardly been revealed in the book,”¹⁰⁵ i.e. matters that are not covered by the holy text and need to be regulated by legislation. This becomes evident from the “eighth leaf” of the *Kalímát-i-Firdawsíyyih* where Bahá'u'lláh defines the functions and competences of the House of Justice and promises to this body the assistance of the holy spirit:

It is incumbent upon the Trustees of the House of Justice to take counsel together regarding those things which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book, and to enforce that which is agreeable to them. God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth, and He, verily, is the Provider, the Omniscient.¹⁰⁶

Also in *Ishráqát*, Bahá'u'lláh undoubtedly refers to the legislation when, after having paid tribute to the “two pillars, reward and punishment” as the “sources of life to the world” and after having mentioned that “for each day there is a new problem and for every problem an expedient solution,” he continues: “Such affairs should be referred to the Universal House of Justice that the members thereof may act according the needs and requirements of the

¹⁰³ The '*ulamá' fi'l Bahá'* (cf. *ibid.* verse 173, p. 82) have no authority, “unless they are endorsed by the House of Justice” ('Abdu'l-Bahá, in *ibid.*, 5).

¹⁰⁴ Universal House of Justice, in *Aqdas* 6.

¹⁰⁵ *Tablets* 6:29, p. 68.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

time.”¹⁰⁷ He also refers to legislation when he states shortly afterwards that, “all matters of State should be referred to the House of Justice”.¹⁰⁸ The same is true when Bahá’u’lláh, dealing with the subject of interest, says that he “desisted from laying down its limits”¹⁰⁹ and entrusts “the conduct of these affairs” to the “men of the House of Justice.”¹¹⁰

Whenever ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions the Universal House of Justice it is clear that the purpose of this body is future legislation.¹¹¹ He defines in his testament the purpose, competences and functions of the House of Justice, “the source of all good and freed from all error.”¹¹²

Unto this body all things must be referred. It enacteth all ordinances and regulations that are not to be found in the explicit *Holy Text*. By this body all the difficult problems are to be resolved... This House of Justice enacteth the laws and the government [*ukúmat*] enforceth them.¹¹³

Unto the *Most Holy Book* every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the truth and the purpose of God Himself.¹¹⁴

... It is incumbent upon these members (of the Universal House of Justice) to ... deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the *Book*.¹¹⁵ Whatsoever they decide has the same effect as the *Text* itself... The House of Justice is

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 8:61, p. 129.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* By continuing “but acts of worship (*‘ibádát*) must be observed according to that which God hath revealed in His Book” Bahá’u’lláh makes clear that the House of Justice is not empowered to legislate in the sphere of worship, such as devotional acts, prayers etc.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 8:77, p. 134.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ For instance: “The Universal House of Justice, likewise, wardeth off all differences and whatever it prescribeth must be accepted and he who transgresseth is rejected. But this Universal House of Justice which is the *Legislature* hath not yet been instituted.” (*Selections* 187:2, p. 215 [my emphasis]). “All must consider themselves to be of the order of subjects, submissive and obedient to the commandments of God and the laws of the House of Justice” (*ibid.* 33:6, p. 68).

¹¹² *Will and Testament* 1:25, p. 14.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* (my emphasis).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:7, p. 19 (my emphasis).

¹¹⁵ The “Book” is the whole canon of revealed texts.

both the Initiator and the Abrogator of its own laws.¹¹⁶

Shoghi Effendi's references to the Universal House of Justice leave no doubt that the ultimate purpose of this body is "to fill in those gaps which the author of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* has deliberately left in the body of His legislative and administrative ordinances;"¹¹⁷ that the Universal House of Justice "has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings," that it has the "exclusive right and prerogative... to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgement on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly revealed."¹¹⁸

As long as the Baha'i Faith is still "in its infancy"¹¹⁹ and has not yet attained "the plenitude of its power",¹²⁰ there is little need for the House of Justice to exercise its legislative powers. Indeed, there has so far been little in the way of legislation. The only enactments made by the Universal House of Justice which I can discern as constituting acts of legislation were:

- a. its declaration on 6 October 1963 that the office of Guardian was to remain permanently vacant,¹²¹
- b. the establishment of the Continental Boards of Counsellors by its message to the Bahá'í world of 24 June 1968,¹²²
- c. the enactment of the *Constitution of the Universal House of Justice* on 24 November 1972,¹²³
- d. the establishment of the International Teaching Centre by its message of 8 June 1973,¹²⁴
- e. the enactment of the law of the *uqúqu'lláh* by its Riván message 1991,
- f. the enactment of the ritual provisions of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* referring to the obligatory prayers, fasting and *dhikr* by its announcement to

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:8, p. 20 (my emphasis).

¹¹⁷ *World Order* 148.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 150, cf. also 153.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹²¹ *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986. The first Epoch of the Formative Age* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996) no. 5, p. 14.

¹²² *Ibid.*, no. 59, pp. 130ff.

¹²³ *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice. Declaration of Trust* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1972).

¹²⁴ *Messages* no. 132, p. 246.

the Bahá'í world on 28 December 1999.

The activities of the Universal House of Justice have, up to now, been purely administrative in nature, with the exception of those judicial decisions made on the basis of article VIII of its constitution. Since Shoghi Effendi foresees a time when “officially constituted Bahá'í courts” will be in existence,¹²⁵ the question arises as to whether the House of Justice will retain its judicial function as set out in its constitution. In the course of time, the judicial and executive functions of this institution will certainly give way to its main task of legislation, whose importance will steadily increase.

It should be noted that the spheres of competence mentioned in the holy text along with supplementary legislation, i.e. to resolve “all the difficult problems,”¹²⁶ to “deliberate upon problems which have caused differences, questions that are obscure,”¹²⁷ are to be counted as legislative functions.¹²⁸ The context¹²⁹ reveals clearly that this refers not to *ad hoc* executive/administrative or judicial decisions, but to decisions that are of general, universal relevance.

The fact that pneumatic direction, unerring guidance,¹³⁰ has been promised by Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the context of those scriptural passages that define the legislative competence of this body, and is accompanied on every occasion by a reference to the “Book” or the “Holy Text”,¹³¹ is strong support for the suggested *restrictive* interpretation

¹²⁵ *World Order* 200.

¹²⁶ *Will and Testament* 1:25, p. 14.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:7, 8, p. 20.

¹²⁸ An example of “problems which have caused difference” might be the decision of the Universal House of Justice (6 October 1963) that “there is no way to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi” (see footnote 121). This decision on a vital issue of the world community was an act of legislation. The decision has the character of a law, because it is an authoritative clarification of the question whether one of the two pillars of the constitutional order will continue or not. This clarification is of permanent legal relevance for the entire world community. Its public announcement meets another prerequisite of legislation, that a law must be brought to the attention of the people by its publication. It is not a classical law in the sense of general abstract norms but rather a so-called “statute of special provision” (*Maßnahmegesetz*). Cf. footnote 207 of Schaefer, Towfigh, Gollmer, *Making the Crooked Straight* 180.

¹²⁹ Namely the explicit recourse to the holy text in each case and the reference to these additional functions as “matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book,” (*Will and Testament* 2:8, p. 20) combined with the express statement that all decisions made as part of this sphere of competence “have the same effect as the Text itself” (*Ibid.*).

¹³⁰ “freed from all error” (*Ibid.*, 1:25, p. 14).

¹³¹ There is only one exception, a passage in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Testament, where the Universal House of Justice is mentioned for the first time, named together with the Guardian: “The

according to which infallibility covers only acts of legislation.¹³² The “Book”, the “Holy Text”, is of universal validity. From this it can be concluded that only those decisions are “infallible” that are likewise of universal validity, whereas decisions concerning individual cases are not covered by the charisma because they have no legal relevance for the world community.

A third reason to support a restrictive interpretation of conferred infallibility relates to certain logical arguments. Like any other decision-making body the Universal House of Justice is *dependent* on information,¹³³ but the quality of this information varies according to the level on which the decision is made. At the executive and judicial levels, knowledge of the historical facts of a specific case is required, while at the legislative level what is needed is general knowledge of the matters to be regulated.

As to the first category, the ascertainment of historical facts, the House of Justice is dependent on others. The factual information necessary for executive and judicial decisions is gathered by subordinate institutions or individuals. An infallible decision would require that, in every case, the factual information provided were absolutely error-free. How should that be possible? There can be no guarantee that all the facts relevant to the decision are indeed compiled, and that these are correctly assessed as to their respective importance before being conveyed to the Universal House of Justice. If this cannot be guaranteed, then there can be no guarantee on the absolute correctness of decisions made at these levels. The correctness of any decision in such an instance is *conditional*: it depends on the correctness and absolute reliability of the information provided concerning the matter in hand.

guardian of the Cause of God as well as the Universal House of Justice... are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One... Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God...” (*Ibid.*, 1:17, p. 11). Here, indeed, no reference is made to what kind of decisions the statement “whatsoever they decide is of God” refers. However, it cannot be concluded from this passage that everything one of the two institutions decides is under the shelter of the unerring guidance. Statements Shoghi Effendi made concerning matters that are not in the scripture are, as he declared himself, not covered by this promise. This relatively long passage focuses on the obedience, the submissiveness and subordination every believer has to pay to these supreme institutions. The passage must be understood in the context of the other statements in the Testament. I think it is clear that “whatsoever they decide” presupposes decisions which are later on specified in the Testament.

¹³² Cf. *Tablets* 6:29, p. 68, *Will and Testament* 1: 25, 2:7, 2:8, pp. 14, 19–20. See the texts referring to notes 113–116.

¹³³ “The Universal House of Justice in arriving at a decision needs to have before it all the facts involved in the matter. If, after making a decision, new facts emerge, it may well be changed” (Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated 13 August 1981). “With regard to decisions taken by the Universal House of Justice itself, instructions it issues, and the relationship of these to the information supplied, it is obvious that the nature of a decision or instruction is affected by the information on which it is made” (Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated 26 May 1993).

Conditional infallibility, however, is a contradiction in terms. A decision that is based on fragmentary or wrongly transmitted relevant facts cannot be guaranteed to be correct. The Universal House of Justice's statement that a decision can be "*corrected*" when "new facts emerge"¹³⁴ confirms this interpretation.

The situation is different in the case of legislation (that is, the establishment of general abstract norms) and of decisions on specific issues of universal relevance.¹³⁵ In these cases, the decision is made at the abstract level of norms; it is independent of any concrete historical case and the ascertainment of its relevant facts. What is required is general information. Here, too, the Universal House of Justice needs to inquire into the conditions of all aspects of the matter to be regulated and to know the legal dogmatic implications¹³⁶ of legislation. However, legislation is not dependent on the clarification of historical data and the provision of facts by other institutions or individuals that always remain fallible. The House of Justice is thus independent from the necessarily fallible acts of other institutions or individuals. This *independence* of the supreme body is a logical precondition for a decision that is free of error.

What is the purpose of an infallible legislature? The seal of immunity to error means that the law passed by the Universal House of Justice constitutes sacred law, which is qualitatively different from any *ius humanum* and is ascribed in the hierarchy of law to the divine law (*ius divinum*).¹³⁷ Infallibility is expressed in different categories.¹³⁸ The sphere of *interpretation* is governed by the categories "true-false." An infallible interpretation is one that is absolutely "true;" it is a manifestation of divine truth. The law enacted by an infallible *legislature* is not "true" but rather "just." Therefore an infallible legislation means an enactment of legal norms that are in accordance with divine justice. Both the divine law of the revelation and the laws that result from the supplementary legislation of the Universal House of Justice constitute that divine justice, the advent of which Bahá'u'lláh has prophesied:

¹³⁴ Letters dated 22 August 1977 and 13 August 1981 (my emphasis).

¹³⁵ Universal relevance is a decision that has legal relevance for the 'people of Bahá' i.e. for the world community.

¹³⁶ Legal dogmatics and legal techniques are among the necessary foundations of any type of legislation. This legal dogmatic groundwork, which is a prerequisite for the clarity and reliability of the law laid down, will be conducted by the "scholars" or the "learned ones in Bahá'" (*al-'ulamá' fi'l Bahá'*), who are at "the focal centre of the legislative (power)" (cf. *Kítáb-i-Aqdas* verse 173, p. 82, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* 37) but whose legal views "have no authority unless they are endorsed by the House of Justice" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Wellspring of Guidance* 85). On the whole subject see also U. Gollmer, *Gottesreich* chap. 11.2.3, 12.4.3.

¹³⁷ Cf. *Grundlagen* 174.

¹³⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 74ff.

“The reign of justice will assuredly be established amongst the children of men, and the effulgence of its light will envelop the whole earth.”¹³⁹

¹³⁹ *Tablets* 11:6, p. 164, cf. *Will and Testament* 2:5, p. 18. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá elucidated in a tablet (cf. *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 5 [introduction]), the significance of the provisions made by Bahá’u’lláh and by himself for the future development of Bahá’í law becomes apparent if it is considered in the context of Islamic law. For this reason a comparison shall be made which will reveal some parallels, but more cardinal differences.

Both religions claim to possess a divine law, but even the primary sources of that law are different. In Islam it is the Qur’án and the Sunna (the sayings, actions and customs of the Prophet Muammad as reported in the *ádítih*). In the Bahá’í Faith it is only the scripture: the canon of the tablets of Bahá’u’lláh and the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Tradition is not recognized as an authoritative source in the Bahá’í Faith, neither for doctrine nor for law. (As to the *sola scriptural*-principle see *Grundlagen* 66-70; *Making the Crooked Straight* 682-683 and note 27). In both religions the revealed law had and has to be developed.

In Islam this process took place through the interpretation of the sources by the *‘ulamá’* who claimed authority, although the Qur’án contains no legitimation for such an authority. The development of the law (*fiqh*) has been worked out in Sunni Islam by the four legal schools (*madháhib*), in *Shi’a* Islam by the *Uúli* school. In Sunni Islam the authority is ultimately based on the *ijma’*. From a *ádítih* reported by Ibn Mádjá, “My people will never agree on an error” (*SEI* 157) it was deduced *per argumentum e contrario* that a consensus, *ijma’*, on a question of faith or law would always be based on truth. An *ijma’* was held to exist when the recognized religious scholars of a period, the *mujtahids*, agreed on a question of faith. Anything that had once been decided by *ijma’* was regarded as the truth and deemed binding for all time (on this subject cf. Bergsträsser, *Islamisches Recht* [Berlin-Leipzig: de Gruyter 193] 131ff., Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* [Princeton/New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981] 50ff., *SEI* 157). The *shari’a*, the Islamic code of duties is regarded as divine. A human legislation is unimaginable for Islamic thought. Therefore Islam never had a legislative body.

In contrast to Islam, the Bahá’í community is in possession of an infallible legislature so that in the fullness of time the “people of Bahá” will be governed by a universally applied sacred law, beyond which there will be wide scope for the legislation of human law according to the different conditions and exigencies on earth. A major difference in comparison with Islamic law is the fact that the Universal House of Justice can repeal its own legislation and adapt it to changed social conditions, as will be further elucidated below.

An analogy (F. Ficicchia, *Der Bahá’ismus — Religion der Zukunft? Geschichte, Lehre und Organisation in kritischer Anfrage* [Stuttgart: Quell-Verlag, 1981] 162, 283; Hermann Römer, *Die Bábi-Behá’i. Eine Studie zur Religionsgeschichte des Islams* [Potsdam: Verlag der Deutschen Orient-Mission, 1911] 118) between the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice and the Islamic principle of consensus, *ijma’*, is not convincing as the following cardinal differences demonstrate:

- a) *ijma’* is neither an institution nor a decision made and proclaimed at a particular point in history, but is, rather, a statement that at a particular point in the past there was a unanimous consensus of the *mujtahids*;
- b) legal issues and questions of faith are authoritatively clarified by *ijma’*. The Universal House of Justice is a body that makes decisions that are not concerned with matters of doctrine. It is a legislative organ that has never existed in Islam;
- c) this legislation is preceded by consultation, whereas *ijma’* was not based on consultation between all the recognized *mujtahids* because the institution of a council never developed in Islam. *Ijma’* could only ever be ascertained with the passage of time (*postero tempore*);
- d) an *ijma’* requires a unanimous consensus, whereas the Universal House of Justice

Infallible decisions are “the Truth and the Purpose of God himself,”¹⁴⁰ they are manifestations of the divine will. In principle, such decisions are as unchangeable for human beings as the will of God. Just as the will of God cannot be “corrected”, infallible acts are not liable to “correction.”

The Guardian’s interpretations of the holy writ are infallible and – as they are “of God” – unchangeable until the next divine revelation. The legislation of the House of Justice is infallible and – as its laws are “the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself”¹⁴¹ – they would not be liable to abrogation had ‘Abdu’l-Bahá not provided an explicit provision in his Testament, according to which the Universal House of Justice has not only the power “to enact laws that are not explicitly recorded in the Book,” but also “the power to repeal the same.”¹⁴² Only by virtue of this *clausula salvatoria* is the House of Justice empowered to abrogate its own legislation and to adapt the law “to the exigencies of the time”¹⁴³ so that it is “the Initiator and the Abrogator of its own laws.”¹⁴⁴

If one extends infallibility to decisions of the House of Justice in the sphere of its administrative, executive and judicial powers, this body would not be empowered to correct its own judgements when new facts have emerged, since the text does not contain such an explicit provision for decisions outside the supplementary legislation. This result would be unacceptable. I think this is one more argument for my view that executive and judicial decisions are not covered by infallibility and are therefore liable to change.

In this context it should be noted that the abrogation of a law given by the Universal House of Justice in order to supersede it by a new law that is appropriate to the changed conditions, and the cancellation of a decision in the sphere of executive or judicial power because new facts have emerged, have different qualities. By the abrogation of one of its laws the House of Justice does not “correct” its former legislation, it is rather adapting it to changed conditions.¹⁴⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has made it clear that only “circumstances having profoundly changed and conditions having altered” legitimates the House of Justice’s abrogating and adapting of its own laws to the “exigencies

makes its decisions on the basis of a majority vote following consultation.

140 *Will and Testament* 2:7, p. 19.

141 *Ibid.*, 2:8, p. 20.

142 *Ibid.*, 2:8, p. 20.

143 *Ibid.*

144 *Ibid.*

145 Cf. *ibid.*

of the time.”¹⁴⁶ A relatively long period has been envisioned, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speaks of “another House of Justice” (perhaps only after a complete change of its membership) and exemplifies this with “a hundred years.” There is no contradiction between these two acts of legislation, each one was perfectly appropriate to the conditions of the time.

The change of a decision related to the administrative and judicial power of the House in the same matter after new facts have emerged is of a different quality. However one looks at it, the change due to new facts is a *correction*. There are two contradictory judgements of which only one can be true. If one claims infallibility for all administrative or judicial decisions of the House of Justice, a crucial question arises as to how one can cope in a reasonable way with contradictory decisions of the same House of Justice on the same matter. How is one to escape the logical dilemma? I think the claim to infallibility for both decisions is untenable; it cannot be maintained without violating the principles of logical thinking.

The “infallibility” of an erroneous and therefore corrected decision cannot be upheld by means of the sophistical argument that the (wrong) decision would have been free of error if the facts on which it had been based had been correct. This would amount to a merely *hypothetical* infallibility, whereby it is not the decision itself that is infallible, but rather the process by which it was arrived at. This sort of argument would reduce the principle to an absurdity. Thus the fact that such decisions are liable to correction appears to me to constitute another rational argument that these decisions are not covered by the conferred charisma of infallibility.

A fourth support for this view derives from the implications of a claim to unlimited infallibility. Such a claim would have far-reaching consequences. It would imply that decisions in even the most trivial, daily routine affairs are included and covered by infallibility. Should, for instance, the appointment of a person responsible for certain functions at the Baha’i world centre be seen as an “infallible” decision, an embodiment of the will of God with the result that this appointment has “the same effect as the Text itself”?¹⁴⁷ Should such a decision be one of “the ordinances and regulations that are not to be found in the explicit holy text”?¹⁴⁸ What if the individual appointed to the position were to fail to fulfil what was expected of them? Claiming this charisma for such things would reduce it *ad absurdum* and trivialise the will of God and the august concept of infallibility. This cannot be the intention of the text.

I think it is obvious that infallibility cannot be claimed for decisions in

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:25, p. 14.

such relatively trivial matters.¹⁴⁹ If one tries to exclude them and to restrict the sphere of the infallible to more essential issues,¹⁵⁰ the question arises as to the criteria for delineating the boundaries for those administrative or judicial decisions for which infallibility should be maintained. I do not see any such criteria.

To claim infallibility for virtually everything that has been decided by the Universal House of Justice, without exception, would be, in my opinion, extremely risky and utterly unwise. Such an interpretation of the infallibility of the House of Justice is untenable and indefensible and could easily become its Achilles heel. There are undoubtedly many people zealously searching and taking great pains in order to find one single evident error which would suffice to disprove empirically and for all time the infallibility of the House of Justice. One single error would suffice for a “falsification” of the claim infallibility.¹⁵¹ I am sure that an *extensive* interpretation of this concept would lead to never-ending queries and unresolved discussions, and Bahá’ís would constantly feel obliged to refute the ongoing accusations.

Moreover, such a concept of infallibility also has far-reaching psychological implications affecting the consciousness of the believers.¹⁵² An unreflected, even magical vision of the unerring guidance which has been conferred on the House of Justice currently prevails in the community.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ For example, on such petty details of administration as the decoration of the holy places, the design and construction of the buildings at the world centre, the publication of the holy texts in English etc.

¹⁵⁰ The publication of an English edition of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* was undoubtedly a significant act of the Universal House of Justice. However, this body did not raise such a claim for the text of the book, although it had consulted upon and approved it, but rather states that the translation “represents an acceptable rendering of the original” (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 11 [Introduction]).

¹⁵¹ I refer to Sir Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York-London: New York-London: Harper & Row, 1968); *Objective Knowledge. An Evolutionary Approach*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), according to whom we approach truth not by verification of a hypothesis, but rather by its “falsification.” A thesis “all swans are white” is valid as long as no black swan has ever been seen. As soon as one black swan is discovered, the thesis is falsified and no longer valid. Thus, one single error would suffice for the falsification of the claim to infallibility. It should be noted that one of the main arguments brought forth against the papal infallibility is that a great number of papal decisions made over the course of time have evidently been erroneous. The concept of conferred infallibility without any limits is, I feel, indefensible.

¹⁵² Perhaps that of the members of this body as well.

¹⁵³ In seminars on the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, when the arguments against capital punishment were analysed, I sometimes came across the argument that an error of the judiciary and the irreparability of an execution would cause no problem in a Bahá’í society, since the House of Justice would have to approve such a verdict and confirm only those in which the convicted is guilty □ and this without knowing the files, without consultation on facts, just by virtue of meditation and prayers! Meditation and prayers would, by virtue of the Holy

Some imagine the community to be in possession of some kind of Delphic Oracle, to which everyone can appeal whenever they are in a quandary. This is an utterly unacceptable attitude that fosters the frequently shown inclination to avoid making one's own decision and to escape one's own responsibility by submitting difficult matters to the Universal House of Justice in order to get "infallible guidance."

This attitude and way of thinking is irrational. Furthermore it reveals that one presupposes that the Universal House of Justice does not operate in a rational way and does not decide after having conducted a rational consultation, but rather acts as a mere recipient, transformer and mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit; that its decisions are *revelational* in character. In reality decisions do not come about through quasi-prophetic inspiration ("*quasi per inspirationem*", "*Divino afflante spiritu*"). Instead, they are reached in the course of a rational discursive process in which, subsequent to clarification of the normative guidelines set out in the scripture and the establishment of the relevant facts, a formal process of consultation leads to a *consensus* of opinion and finally to a decision reached by majority vote or by unanimity. This means that the Holy Spirit does not act as a *deus ex machina*. Information on every decision must be prepared and every decision must be the subject of consultation. Shoghi Effendi has expressed this in an incontrovertible statement: "They may, indeed they must, acquaint themselves with the conditions prevailing among the community, must weigh dispassionately in their minds the merits of any case presented for their consideration," then "they are to follow, in a prayerful attitude, the dictates and promptings of their conscience."¹⁵⁴ Thus, infallibility is not, as the Universal House of Justice has expressly stated¹⁵⁵ synonymous with omniscience, nor does it preclude rational consultation and judgement.

According to Bahá'u'lláh, mankind has "attained the stage of maturity,"¹⁵⁶ and I think such expressions of irrationality and obscurantism as mentioned above are not a sign of maturity but rather of self-incapacitation and of contempt for human reason (*'aql*), which – together with wisdom and prudence (*ikma*¹⁵⁷) – has been so highly praised by Bahá'u'lláh¹⁵⁸ and by

Spirit, directly result in an infallible decision. If that were true, the question arises, why is the House of Justice dependent in its decisions on facts at all, and why is consultation required if prayers and meditation suffice for its illumination by the Holy Spirit?

¹⁵⁴ *World Order* 153.

¹⁵⁵ Letter dated 22 August 1977.

¹⁵⁶ *Gleanings* 33:2, p. 77; *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* verse 185.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. *Tablets* 6:52, 7:7, 7:32, 11:41, 13:5, 17:43 (pp. 77, 85, 93, 175, 196, 242).

¹⁵⁸ "First and foremost among these favours which the Almighty hath conferred upon man, is the gift of understanding... This gift giveth man the power to discern the truth in all things, leadeth him to that which is right, and helpeth him to discover the secrets of creation"

‘Abdu’l-Bahá.¹⁵⁹

The limits of infallibility conferred on the House of Justice should be compatible with reason. The charisma should be reflected upon with the intention of arriving at an understanding that does not imply a *sacrificium intellectus*. To believe in the *conferred* infallibility of an institution with certain immanent limits, to believe that legislative acts are immune to error by virtue of divine guidance, to believe that the will of God is manifested in them according to the promise of infallible guidance is an act of faith that is not in contradiction with human reason.

Aspects of divine guidance (*hudá*)

The view expressed here is of no consequence for the *legal* authority of the supreme House of Justice. This authority is – as already pointed out – not based on its special charisma, but rather results simply from the fact that this institution has been ordained by Bahá’u’lláh. As it is the supreme body, it has the last word¹⁶⁰ in all spheres of its powers. Everything the House of Justice decides has to be obeyed. This obedience to the two supreme institutions, the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice, has been emphasized by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in unequivocal language:

Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God... May the wrath, the fierce indignation, the vengeance of God rest upon him!¹⁶¹

The infallibility conferred on the supreme House of Justice reaches far beyond its authority to have the final say in all matters. By virtue of its unerring guidance the Bahá’í community is permanently in possession of an institution that by its legislation ensures “the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of our Faith” and safeguards “the unity

(*Gleanings* 95:1, p. 194).

159 “He has chosen the reality of man and has honoured it with intellect and wisdom, the two most luminous lights in either world... This supreme emblem of God stands first in the order of creation and first in rank, taking precedence over all created things. Witness to it is the Holy Tradition, ‘Before all else, God created the mind’” (*The Secret of Divine Civilization* 1).

160 One could modify the famous dictum of Augustine “*Roma locuta, causa finita*” (*Sermones* 131,10) to say “*Haifa locuta, causa finita*” (“Haifa has spoken, the matter is closed”).

161 *Will and Testament* 1:17, p. 11.

of its followers.”¹⁶²

One objection could be made: Does this restrictive interpretation not result in a reduction of the divine guidance that is granted to this supreme body, if its decisions in administrative and judicial matters are excluded from the sphere of conferred infallibility? I do not think so.

Divine guidance has different aspects. The Arabic term *hudá* is used in the Qur’án to mean the divine revelation, i.e. the Qur’án itself, of which is said, “That is a book, wherein is no doubt, a guidance for the God-fearing.”¹⁶³ This book is the divine guidance to the “straight path”¹⁶⁴ for those who believe. Besides that, God grants guidance in all matters to all those who turn to him.¹⁶⁵ Beyond this individual guidance there is the guidance which has been promised in this dispensation to institutions of the community. I can observe two categories of divine guidance in the scripture:

- a) a *general* divine guidance that is promised to all elected bodies, which is a relative one, because it depends on certain preconditions, “prime requisites for them that take counsel together”¹⁶⁶ and
- b) a *specific* divine guidance conferred on the twin pillars which is an absolute one, because it is not made dependent on preconditions. This absolute divine guidance is *infallibility*.

In contrast to the *absolute* divine guidance, the *relative* one does not exclude error. Hence, decisions of the Universal House of Justice that have

¹⁶² *World Order* 148.

¹⁶³ *Qur’án* 2:2, cf. also 2:97, 2:120, 2:285, 3:73, 6:71, 18:89 etc.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:6.

¹⁶⁵ Among the prayers revealed by the Báb and by Bahá’u’lláh there are many for this purpose.

¹⁶⁶ “The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrances, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold. Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Bahá shall be vouchsafed to them.” (*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* 43, 45, p. 87, *Bahá’i Administration* [Wilmette: Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 6th ed. 1953] 21ff.) “The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the assembly. They must be wholly free from estrangement and must manifest in themselves the Unity of God... Should harmony of thought and absolute unity be non-existent, that gathering shall be dispersed and that assembly be brought to naught... They must, when coming together, turn their faces to the Kingdom on high and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one’s views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden... Should they endeavour to fulfil these conditions the Grace of the Holy Spirit shall be vouchsafed unto them, and that assembly shall become the centre of the Divine blessings...” (*ibid.* 87–89). Thus, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes clear that the guidance of the Holy Spirit will be granted only to those assemblies whose consultation is conducted under the conditions he has set out in these passages.

been made in the sphere outside its legislation can be cancelled. However, one can presuppose that the members of this supreme institution are highly motivated for meeting these sublime “prime requisites” enumerated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and that this institution partakes of that *general* divine guidance, undoubtedly in an incomparably higher degree than all the subordinated elected bodies.

Taking this proposition for granted, the practical consequences of restricted infallibility for the believers would be insignificant: they can continue to regard the House of Justice as divinely guided, as a source of divine guidance, and could nevertheless admit that in a special case this (relative) guidance might not operate because the House of Justice was wrongly or not fully informed. This would be an unassailable position against all criticism and all attempts to deny the concept of (conferred) infallibility by empirical argumentation. Instead of saying “We have an infallible body,” one would then say “We have a divinely guided body that is infallible in the sphere of legislation.” The scheme outlined in Figure 1 below might be helpful for a better understanding of my views.

By contrast, all the other decision-making institutions, the local and national “Houses of Justice,” are also promised divine guidance, but only under certain, legally unverifiable circumstances that have been defined by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.¹⁶⁷ They have not been granted infallibility. One indication that the local and national bodies do not share in the charisma is the fact that both their governing statutes and the constitution of the Universal House of Justice¹⁶⁸ include rights of review and appeal to ensure that erroneous decisions can be revised. Such rights would be superfluous and meaningless if the decisions of the local and national assemblies were also an expression of the divine will.

The purpose of a restrictive interpretation

My proposal for a restrictive interpretation of the concept of infallibility should not be misconstrued as an attempt to adjust opportunistically a concept that has negative connotations in our secular society and is regarded as a provocation by sceptical contemporaries in order to make it acceptable to the consciousness of people that are “feeble and far removed from the purpose of God”.¹⁶⁹ General acceptability is quite certainly no seal of truth. Some norms of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (such as capital punishment in cases of murder and arson, the stigmatization of the thief, prohibition of adultery, pre- and extramarital intercourse (*ziná*’) and acts of homosexuality [*liwáth*]) are

¹⁶⁷ See footnote 166

¹⁶⁸ *Constitution of the Universal House of Justice* Art. VII (The right of review), VIII (Appeals).

¹⁶⁹ Bahá’u’lláh, quoted in *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 6 (Introduction).

perceived as a slap in the face by the general public (especially in Europe).

It is not my intention to deny or to reduce anything that has been conferred on the House of Justice by the holy text, thus unintentionally undermining its *spiritual* authority. My aim is rather to examine the sources in order to attain a better understanding of the provisions of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá and a rationally satisfying answer to a crucial question. My only purpose in touching on the different aspects of this issue was apologetical: to make the Faith and the authority of the House invulnerable against the attacks, the cynical criticism of those contemptuous of religion and the ridicule of critics by offering an interpretation that is unassailable and can be accepted as reasonable by people of good will.

We should have a clear vision of a term with such far-reaching implications, so that we are able to explain it to others and defend it against the objections of our sceptical contemporaries. An open exchange of views and opinions on this matter should take place in the community. This contribution is considered a step towards such a discussion. The problems we are facing cannot be solved by making the issue taboo and by leaving the field to the discussions of those who question the whole concept of infallibility and are purposely undermining the spiritual authority of the House of Justice. A critical discourse is the means to clarify such issues. Such theological discourses should not be misconstrued as "idle disputations,"¹⁷⁰ as "the investigation of useless conceits," or as "empty, fruitless debates" and "useless hair-splittings and disputes."¹⁷¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement according to which "the shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions"¹⁷² is a common truth and not only valid in the context of consultation within the assemblies. As the Universal House of Justice has emphasised, Bahá'ís must learn to live with a variety of theological opinions.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, verse 77 and note 110. On this subject see also Schaefer/Towfigh/Gollmer, *Making the Crooked Straight* 289ff.

¹⁷¹ *The Secret of Divine Civilization* 106.

¹⁷² *Bahá'í Administration* 21.

¹⁷³ Letters dated 20 October 1977 and 28 May 1991.

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Jamál Effendi and the early spread of the Bahá'í Faith in South Asia¹

MOOJAN MOMEN

Abstract

Over a period of twenty years, Jamál Effendi travelled throughout India and succeeded in converting many people, including some notable figures, to the Bahá'í Faith. Jamál Effendi had even more influence in the establishment of the Bahá'í Faith in Burma than in India, as the present Bahá'í community in Burma can trace itself back to the sojourn there of Jamál Effendi and his companion Sayyid Muafá Rúmí. Jamál Effendi also visited other countries in south-east Asia and central Asia. This paper is an attempt to establish the routes and dates of his journeys, although some details of his activities remain uncertain. This paper concludes with a discussion of his techniques for spreading the Bahá'í Faith.

Although the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths reached India in its earliest days, it was not until the 1870s and 1880s, through the efforts of Jamál Effendi that the basis for the present-day Bahá'í community was laid. Jamál Effendi also spread the religion to the regions of south-east and central Asia. He was the first to take the Bahá'í Faith to the territories of some twelve present-day countries (some of these areas did not exist as separate countries at that time). The details of Jamál Effendi's journeys and the events that occurred during them have not, however, been fully investigated as yet; different sources report conflicting information. Jamál Effendi himself is also someone who has generated controversy about his methods and about the value of his efforts. This paper is an initial attempt to resolve at least a few of these questions.

It was during the time of the Báb that India's earliest contact with the Bábí and Bahá'í religions took place. Nabíl-i-A'ám's list of the eighteen "Letters of the Living" includes one Indian, Shaykh Sa'íd Hindí. He was instructed by the Báb to take the new religion throughout several provinces of Iran and back to his own homeland. Another Indian convert during this time was a blind sayyid named Sayyid-i-Baír. Nabíl states that he was converted by Shaykh Sa'íd Hindí in Multan.² Another account states that Sayyid-i-Baír

¹ This paper was presented on 4 December 1999, at a meeting of the Religious Studies Special Interest Group of the Association of Bahá'í Studies (English-Speaking Europe), held at Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

² Nabíl Zarandí (Nabíl-i-A'ám), *Dawn-breakers: Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the*

heard of the Báb's appearance in Bombay and then travelled to Mecca where he met the Báb in person.³ Both histories agree, however, that he became a zealous believer and that he was eventually executed for his faith by Ildírím Mírzá, a Qajár prince, in Luristan. A third individual who is mentioned in the histories is Qahru'lláh, who came from India and, after meeting the Báb in Chihríq, began to spread the new religion in Iran, eventually returning to India.⁴

There were a number of other Indian Bábís present in Iran during the 1840s and 1850s. Mahjúr's monograph on the Bábí insurrection in Mazandarán lists four Indians among the 318 Bábís who fought at Shaykh abarsí. Despite this evidence of a number of Indian Bábí converts in Iran, there is no firm evidence that a Bábí community was established in India.

Early developments in India

In the 1850s, however, the Afnán family established a trading post at Bombay. The first to take up residence there were ájí Sayyid Mírzá and Sayyid Muammad, both sons of ájí Mírzá Sayyid asan, Afnán-i-Kabír. They had become Bábís after meeting Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad in the 1850s. ájí Sayyid Mamúd, a grandson of ájí Sayyid Muammad, also traded in Bombay. These individuals were very successful as general merchants and commission agents, trading under the company name of Messrs. Haji Sayed Mirza and Mirza Mahmood Co.⁵ Later they were joined by ájí Muammad Ibráhím, who was known as ájí Muballigh. The latter had received a religious education and even obtained a certificate of *ijtihád* from Áqá Mírzá Muammad Taqí, one of the foremost mujtahids of Yazd, but had preferred to engage in trade. He had become a Bábí in 1280/1863-4 and had been instrumental in converting many of the Afnán in Shiraz and Yazd (he was related to the Afnán family by marriage). His activities had, however, brought him to the attention of his erstwhile teacher Áqá Mírzá Muammad Taqí, who issued a fatwá (judgement) of death against him. Consequently, it became necessary for ájí Muballigh to flee and he took up residence as a merchant in Bombay in the late 1860s. It was as a result of the endeavours of another member of the Afnán family, Mírzá Ibrahím (a son of ájí Abu'l-Qásim, the brother of the wife of the Báb), that the first Bahá'í printing and publishing company, the Náirí Press, was established in Bombay and began to publish Bahá'í books from about 1882–3 onwards. These Baha'is realised, however, that there was also potential for

Bahá'í Revelation (trans. Shoghi Effendi. Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974) 588-90.

³ Hamadání, *The Táríkh-i-Jadíd, or, New History of Mírzá 'Alí Muhammad the Báb* (trans. E. G. Browne. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893) 244-47, 388-94.

⁴ Hamadání, *Táríkh-i-Jadíd* 241.

⁵ Roumie, "Baha'í Pioneers", p. 77. Rúmi, "A Short Historical Survey", section A, p. 2; see note 6.

teaching the Bahá'í Faith. They therefore wrote to Bahá'u'lláh asking if a Bahá'í teacher could be sent to Bombay and offered to defray his expenses.

For this mission, Bahá'u'lláh chose Sulaymán Khan, later known as Jamál Effendi, an Iranian from a minor noble family of Tunukábun in Mazandarán, not far from Bahá'u'lláh's own ancestral home.⁶ His father was named 'Ísá Khan Tunukabuní. The year of Jamál Effendi's birth is not known but was probably in the second decade of the 19th century.⁷ Many details about his early life remain obscure. Most of the information that we have is from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's account in *Memorials of the Faithful* and from Mírzá Káim Samandar who met Jamál Effendi in Istanbul and spent some time with him there. 'Abdu'l-Bahá indicates that Sulaymán Khan was brought up "cradled in wealth, bred to ease, reared in the comfortable ways of luxury."⁸ In his youth, he was married to the daughter of his maternal uncle Hidáyat Khan.⁹ We know he came to Tehran seeking some high position in court or in the government. 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Samandar both indicate that he encountered the Bábí movement and became a believer in Tehran, although

⁶ For this account of Jamál Effendi's life I have used several sources: The most important is an account by Sayyid Muafá Rúmí entitled "A Short Historical Survey of the Bahai [sic] Movement in India, Burma, Java Islands, Siam and Malay Peninsula." I am grateful to Roger Dahl for providing a copy of the manuscript of this work which is in the archives of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States of America. The manuscript is in several sections which were sent separately, and the numbering of pages is renewed at the beginning of each section. I have, therefore, assigned letters to each section: Section A is undated, 14 pages, section B is undated, 14 pages, section C is dated 6 June 1931, 31 pages; section D, 18 pages; the subsequent sections do not deal with Jamál Effendi's life. The first part of this manuscript was published in a series of articles: Siyyid Mustafá Roumie, "Baha'i Pioneers", *Baha'i Magazine*, 22.3 (June 1931) 76-9; 22.4 (July 1931) 112-6; 22.7 (Oct. 1931) 208-11; 22.8 (Nov. 1931) 250-3; 22.9 (Dec. 1931) 272-6; 22.10 (Jan. 1932) 313-5; 22.11 (Feb. 1932) 342-4. All information that is not otherwise referenced is from this work. Although Rúmí's account is presumably the most reliable for the period that Rúmí was with Jamál Effendi (mainly 1877-87), there are some probable inaccuracies in Rúmí's information about other periods of Jamál Effendi's life. These are discussed as they occur in this paper. For information to supplement and correct Rúmí's account, the following were consulted: 'Azízu'lláh Sulaymání, article on Jamál Effendi, *Maábí-i Hidáyat* (9 vols., Tehran: Mu'assisih Matbú'át Millí, 104-32 B.E./1967-75) 8:125-46; idem, article on Sayyid Muafá Rúmí, *Maábí-i Hidáyat*, 8:231-322. Fail Mázandarání, *uhúr al-aqq*, vol. 6 (unpublished manuscript) 453-7. Káim Samandar, *Tárikh Samandar* (Tehran: Mu'assisih Matbú'át Millí, 131/1974) 213-4. All information is from the account by Rúmí unless otherwise indicated. All further references to the Rúmí account will be given in the format "Rúmí, *op. cit.*, X:Y / Z". X is the section number of the manuscript, Y is page number of manuscript and Z is page number of the published account. Where there is no second number, this refers to the last part of the manuscript which was not published.

⁷ This statement is based on the fact that he is already described as an old man with a white beard when he arrived in India in about 1876, travelling around India became very difficult for him by the 1890s, and he died in 1898.

⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful* (trans. Marzieh Gail, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971) 134.

⁹ Fail Mázandarání, *uhúr al-aqq* 6:454.

the exact details of this are not known. This probably occurred sometime before the general proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh's claims in Iran in about 1868, since both Samandar¹⁰ and Sayyid Muafá Rúmí¹¹ state that he had been a Bábí before becoming a Bahá'í.

When Bahá'u'lláh's claim was known, Jamál Effendi accepted it immediately. He became so enthused that he set out to meet Bahá'u'lláh in about 1288 (1871-2), travelling by way of Tabriz, leaving behind wife and children. Samandar implies that it was at this time that he changed from the garb and lifestyle of the Iranian nobility and took up the clothing and way of a Sufi darvish.¹² A minor flirtation with Sufism was not at all unusual among the sons of the Iranian nobility but with Sulaymán Khan it became his permanent way of life. After visiting Bahá'u'lláh in Akka, Sulaymán Khan began a period of wandering as a darvish mainly in the Ottoman domains. Samandar met him in Istanbul in 1291 (1874-5). Samandar reports that Jamál Effendi had tried to teach the Sufis in the Ottoman domains about the Bahá'í Faith but had had little success.¹³ During this time, he had obtained a Turkish passport.

Jamál Effendi's first visit to India

When the request of the Afnáns for a Bahá'í teacher in India reached Akka, Sulaymán Khan happened to have returned to Akka. Bahá'u'lláh chose him for the task, giving him the titles Lámi' (the shining or brilliant one) and Jamálu'd-Dín (beauty of the religion). Henceforth he was known either as Shaykh Jamálu'd-Dín or Sayyid Jamálu'd-Dín, or more simply as Jamál Effendi. The exact date of Jamál Effendi's arrival in Bombay is uncertain. Some authors, and in particular, Sayyid Muafá Rúmí, who was converted by Jamál Effendi and was his close companion for many years, give the date as 1872-3.¹⁴ But this would negate Samandar's assertion that he met Jamál Effendi in Istanbul in 1291 (February 1874- February 1875). Others, including Fail Mazandarání, give the date 1295 (1878)¹⁵ or 1296 (1879),¹⁶ but this would negate Rúmí's assertion that Jamál Effendi attended the Durbar

¹⁰ Samandar, *Taríkh* 213.

¹¹ Rúmí, *op. cit.* A: 1/76, see note 6.

¹² Samandar, *Taríkh* 213.

¹³ Samandar, *Taríkh* 213.

¹⁴ Rúmí, *op. cit.* A:2/77; W. Garlington appears to follow this dating giving 1872, 'India,' Part 1, *Bahá'í News* 528 (March 1975) 17-8.

¹⁵ Fail Mazandarání gives 1295 (1878, cited in Sulaymání, *Maábí-i Hidáyat* 8:129). Balyuzi follows this dating giving 1878, *Eminent Bahá'is* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985) 122; Taherzadeh also gives 1878, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 4 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987) 181.

¹⁶ Fail Mázandarání, *uhúr al-aqq* 6:454.

(proclaiming Queen Victoria as Empress of India) which was held on 1 January 1877 in Delhi.¹⁷ If we assume that Samandar and the Durbar date are correct, this leaves only a narrow window of time between 1874 and 1876 for Jamál Effendi to have proceeded from Istanbul to Akka, been selected for the mission to India, travelled to Bombay, had the initial meetings that are described below and then gone on to Delhi. We may therefore tentatively date Jamál Effendi's arrival to around 1875.

Jamál Effendi arrived in Bombay with a relative, Mírzá usayn, who was to act as his companion in his travels. He was welcomed to Bombay by the Afnáns and installed in the Shi'í usayniyyih (building for commemorations of the martyrdom of the Imám usayn). According to Rúmí's account, Jamál Effendi called upon asan 'Alí Sháh, the first Aga Khan, the spiritual head of the Nizá'í Ismá'ílí community, who are known in India as Khojas. Also according to Rúmí, Jamál Effendi spoke to Mír Sayyid Muammad, the mullá and religious head of the Twelver Shi'í community, and converted him to the Bahá'í Faith. His activities, however, stirred up antagonisms and it was felt that he should leave after only a few months in Bombay.

As Jamál Effendi travelled through India and other regions, it was his custom whenever heading towards a new region to write to the ruler or governor and the leading colonial administrator of that region and announce his intention to travel there. Upon arrival, he would call upon them and speak to them.¹⁸ He proceeded in this manner as far as Rampur in the Rohilkhand division (later Bareilly division) of the United Provinces (later Uttar Pradesh), adjacent to the Himalayan foothills in north-west India. The chief of that state was Nawab Kalb 'Alí Khan (1834-1887). He was a Sunni who had become chief of Rampur on the death of his father in 1865. He was regarded as a good administrator who greatly developed his state during his rule. He was, as were many educated Indian Muslim, proficient in Arabic and Persian. Jamál Effendi was presented at the court of Nawab Kalb 'Alí Khan and stayed with the chief's uncle, Colonel Nawab Asghar 'Alí Khan. He debated with the leading Sunni 'ulamá there on the subject of the non-existence of evil.¹⁹ In Rampur and nearby Hassanpur, he succeeded in making many converts on this and subsequent trips.

¹⁷ Rúmí, *op. cit.* A:4/78; Rúmí in fact gives the date 1876, but although Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India in 1876, the Durbar did not occur until 1 January 1877.

¹⁸ *Bahá'í Newsletter of India*, 31 (May 1944) 1-2, cited in Garlington, *op. cit.* 18.

¹⁹ Rúmí, *op. cit.* A:3-4/77-8.

Jamál Effendi was in Delhi for the great Durbar which was held on 1 January 1877, at which Lord Lytton proclaimed Queen Victoria as Empress of India. Many rulers and dignitaries from all over India were gathered in Delhi for this occasion and Jamál Effendi took the opportunity to meet with them. For example, he met and formed good relations with Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-83), the founder of the Hindu reform movement Arya Samaj.²⁰

Next Jamál Effendi proceeded south to Hyderabad in the Deccan in south central India (see Map 1). The ruler, Mír Mahbúb 'Alí Khan the Nizam, was very young and the prime minister and regent was Sir Salar Jung Mukhtarul-Mulk (1829-83). The latter's real name was Mír Turáb 'Alí Khan and he came from a notable family who had served as ministers to the Nizam of Hyderabad for generations. He was highly regarded as an administrator and statesman. He was a Shi'i and proficient in Arabic and Persian. Jamál Effendi spoke to this man and Rúmí reports that he was inwardly converted (and a tablet of Bahá'u'lláh was revealed for him), but he was compelled to remain outwardly a Muslim.

Jamál Effendi also visited Bangalore and Colombo on the island of Sri Lanka at this time.²¹ Fáil Mazandarání states that, at Colombo, Jamál Effendi met some opposition from Buddhist religious leaders. Mazandarání also states that Jamál Effendi's companion Mírzá usyan took ill, died and was buried there, but this seems unlikely in view of later events (see below).²²

Madras on the east coast of India was Jamál Effendi's next destination. It was here that Sayyid Muafá Rúmí first met Jamál Effendi and was attracted to him. Rúmí was then a young man of twenty-five years. He was born on 24 December 1852 in Karbala to a Shi'i family of Iran who had migrated there (his father had acquired the name Rúmí when he arrived in India in about 1826 after a prolonged residence in Istanbul). His mother had died a few days after his birth and he had been brought up in Karbala by his maternal uncle. He had come to India in the company of his father and was now starting to set himself up in business in Madras, trading in cashmere woollen shawls. We have Rúmí's eye-witness statement that Jamál Effendi "attracted large gatherings" in Madras. It appears that at this point, Jamál Effendi had two travelling companions, in addition to his relative Mírzá usyan. These were ájí Ramaán of Rampur and Rafi'u'd-Dín Khan of Hassanpur, who had both presumably accompanied him from north India.

The next episode is an indication of the trust and faith that Jamál Effendi was able to inspire in those he met. He was on the point of departing for

²⁰ Rúmí, *op. cit.* A:4/78.

²¹ Rúmí, *op. cit.* E:10.

²² Fáil Mazandarání cited in Sulaymání, *Maábí-i Hidáyat* 8:130.

Burma when a message arrived from the ruler of Rampur asking him to come to Rampur. The brother of the ruler, Nawab Mamúd 'Alí Khan, had fallen under the influence of a well-known atheist, Nazir Ahmed Hassan of Aligarh. The ruler was asking Jamál Effendi to come back to Rampur to deliver his brother from his disbelief. Jamál Effendi set off for Rampur accompanied by ájí Ramaán, Rafi'u'd-Dín Khan, and Sayyid Muafá, but sent Mírzá usayn on to Burma with his baggage. On the way, however, Jamál Effendi went to Gulbarga, where friends from Hyderabad came to meet him, and Bombay, where he met with the Afnáns.

As the party proceeded north, they were met at Cawnpore, south-west of Lucknow, by Nawab Mamúd 'Alí Khan who had been sent by his brother to receive Jamál Effendi. The latter remained in Rampur for one and a half months and succeeded in restoring Nawab Mamúd 'Alí Khan's faith, thereby incurring the enmity of Nazir Ahmed Hassan. On the journey back from Rampur, Jamál Effendi was accompanied by Sayyid Muafá Rúmí and a servant boy. They proceeded to Lucknow where Jamál Effendi called upon the Rajas of Amethi, Balarampur and Kashipur, as well as the British governor of the United Provinces. At Benares (Varnasi), he stayed with the Maharaja and met with Áqá Muammad Taqí Banárisí, of Khurasan, ájí Amad Bindání of Rangoon and some of the Iranian Muslims of Calcutta. Here he spoke at length about the fulfilment of the prophecies relating to the return of the Twelfth Shi'i Imam. At Patna, he was arrested as a result of the machinations of Nazir Ahmed Hassan, but proved his innocence and was able to meet with many of the prominent citizens of that city over Muslim month of Muarram, January 1878.

In Calcutta, Jamál Effendi took up residence in a house in Kolutollah provided for him by an uncle of the ruler of Rampur, Nawab Safdar Ali Khan. Here he met with many prominent people including the Iranian merchants of that city. In the gatherings that took place at the house of one of the Iranian merchants, ájí Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Karím Shírází, Jamál Effendi used the events that were occurring in the Russo-Turkish war as a way of bringing the discussion round to the question of the fulfilment of prophecy. At this time, ájí Mírzá Muammad 'Alí Afnán (eldest son of ájí Mírzá Sayyid Muammad, the Báb's maternal uncle) and his assistant Áqá Mírzá 'Abdu'l-amíd arrived in Calcutta from Hongkong and came to visit ájí Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Karím Shírází. Observing the great warmth between Jamál Effendi and these two merchants who were known as Bahá'ís, the Iranians guessed that Jamál Effendi was also a Bahá'í. It was at this time that Sayyid Muafá Rúmí became a Bahá'í and received a tablet from Bahá'u'lláh.

After a few months stay in Kolutollah, Jamál Effendi moved to Garden Reach, near Calcutta, at the invitation of Mír Ramaán 'Alí Munshí as-Sulán Bahadur, private secretary to Wájid 'Alí Shah, the former king of Oudh. Jamál Effendi had great hopes of converting the king who was reported to be a pious Shi'i Muslim. He found the king, however, to be immersed in luxury, merely

following the form of his religion, and oblivious to things spiritual. Mír Ramaán 'Alí, however, became a follower of Bahá'u'lláh.

From Calcutta, Jamál Effendi left for Rangoon with Sayyid Muafá Rúmí and Imtiyáz usayn Khan (later known in Burma as Dr 'Abdu'l-akím; he was the son of 'Abdu'r-Raím Khan, a Bahá'í of Rampur). Something of how well-known and established he had become in Calcutta can be judged by the fact that, as he sailed to Rangoon, he carried with him letters of introduction from several well-known people: Sayyid Amír 'Alí (1849-1928), the prominent Shi'í jurist and writer who was later to become a Muslim leader and author of a very well known book: *The Spirit of Islam* (1891); Mr 'Abdu'l-Laíf, a presidency deputy magistrate; and Amír 'Alí Khan (1810-79), the prime minister of the ex-king of Oudh. This departure ended Jamál Effendi's first period of time in India. Apart from the places already mentioned, Rúmí also lists Jaipur, Gwalior and Baroda as being places that Jamál Effendi visited in this period.²³ It would seem probable that he visited Baroda and Jaipur on his initial journey northwards from Bombay, while Gwalior could have been visited on the journey south from Delhi to Hyderabad after the Durbar.

Burma

Jamál Effendi left Calcutta in May 1878 and arrived in Rangoon seven days later. In Burma, Jamál Effendi met with perhaps his greatest success in converting individuals who would go on to form the basis of the Bahá'í community of Burma. At this time, the British had occupied lower Burma, but King Mindon (reigned 1853-78) still ruled over upper Burma and it was the latter's reputation for justice and tolerance of all religions that had attracted Jamál Effendi. Prior to his arrival, he had written to a certain young Iranian merchant, ájí Sayyid Mahdí Shírází, whose brother ájí Sayyid Muammad Shírází was a well-known Bahá'í merchant of Egypt, asking him to make arrangements for their accommodation. Upon arrival they immediately wrote to ájí Sayyid Muammad. The latter, according to Rúmí, replied, informing them that Mírzá usayn, Jamál Effendi's relative and travelling companion, who had been sent on to Burma earlier, had died and Jamál Effendi needed to retrieve his belongings from police custody.²⁴ According to Fáil Mázandarání, however, Mírzá usayn died in Sri Lanka (see above). Rúmí's account is likely to be the more accurate as he was an eye-witness of these events.

Thanks to the letters of introduction that Jamál Effendi had brought with him from Calcutta, he had no difficulty in seeing the British Chief Commissioner, Charles Aitchison (1832-90), the chief secretary, Mr J.E. Bridges, and the deputy commissioner, Major Evanson. Through these officials, he eventually managed to get authorisation to have his belongings

²³ Rúmí, *op. cit.* A:11.

²⁴ Rúmí, *op. cit.* A:11.

(that had been with Mírzá usayn) returned. On going to the police lock-up to retrieve his belongings, however, Jamál Effendi discovered that many valuable items, some of which he intended to present to the King of Burma, had been stolen. Jamál Effendi then undertook a prolonged court case lasting over a year against the Secretary of State for India for redress for the property that had been lost. The court case resulted in a double blow for Jamál Effendi. Not only was the case lost (the judge, Rúmí reports, ruled that as Jamál Effendi had described himself as a darvish and faqir in his passport, it would make no difference to him if his possessions were lost) but in the interval, King Mindon of Burma died on 1 October 1878.

Assuming his correspondent was a merchant, Sayyid Mahdí had rented for Jamál Effendi a large house in the commercial district. Here, and later in another house in Mogul Street, Jamál Effendi received a constant stream of visitors. He talked to large numbers about the Bahá'í Faith and many became convinced Bahá'ís. Among these was Sayyid Mahdí himself, Áqá Muammad Qásim Shírází, and members of the Kázirúní family (all Shi'is), Mawlaví 'Abdu's-Subhán Qurayshí (originally of Bijnaur in India) and a large number of his relatives and Qádir Khan akím (all Sunnís), Madurai Namassavaya Pillay (a Hindu, who took the name Jamálu'l-Haq), and 'Alí Bhogah (a Khoja).²⁵ Many of these were among a large group of pilgrims from Rangoon to Akka in 1899 who took with them a marble sarcophagus which 'Abdu'l-Bahá used to hold the remains of the Báb. While still a new convert to the Bahá'í Faith, Sayyid Mahdí was rash enough on one occasion to make a public statement about the Bahá'í Faith during the Friday prayers in the Shi'i mosque and was fortunate to escape with his life.

Following the instructions of Bahá'u'lláh, Jamál Effendi proceeded to Mandalay, the capital of upper Burma, in early 1879 and remained there for some eighteen months. Along with Rúmí, he took with him three of his new Rangoon converts, Dr 'Abdu'l-akím, Dr Khabíru'd-Dín and Fakir Muammad, a servant. In Mandalay, Jamál Effendi was able to speak about the Bahá'í Faith to the Muslim population of that city. Although Jamál Effendi and his companions faced some hostility and were forced to move from their first lodgings near the mosque on account of this, they eventually found many who were willing to ally themselves with the new religion. A certain 'Abdu'l-Wáid (Burmese name Ko Thin) became enthused with the new message and introduced Jamál Effendi to his uncle 'Abdu's-Sattár (Burmese name U Koo), a silk merchant. The latter arranged for Jamál Effendi to take up residence in a house in the Koyandaw quarter belonging to him and built a special platform from which he could address the crowds that came. Jamál Effendi wrote during this time a number of pamphlets in Urdu regarding the prophecies of Islam and a 300-page book in Urdu entitled *Mi'yár al-aqíqat* (*The Standard of*

²⁵ Rúmí, *op. cit.* B:7-8.

Reality or Truth) for U Koo.²⁶ Even among the Iranian Shi'i community, thanks to the efforts of Áqá Muammad Qasim Shírází who had come from Rangoon, there were some who listened to the message favourably. It was not possible, however, under the regime of the new king, Thibaw (the last king of Burma, reigned 1878-85), to proclaim the new religion publicly or to government officials.

After his sojourn in Mandalay, Jamál Effendi returned to Rangoon and appears to have remained there for some six years, living first in Lewis Street, then in 39th Street, and taking up trade in ponies and hackney carriages in order to secure an income. A severe set-back in the financial affairs of the Afnán family that occurred at about this time may have caused his funds to dry up, forcing Jamál Effendi to seek to earn a living for himself. After about a year (i.e. in about 1881-2), Jamál Effendi undertook another trip to Mandalay, but an Iranian Shi'i who was hostile to the Bahá'í Faith caused a spurious case to be brought in the courts against him. It required a Bahá'í who was chief commissioner of customs (Mullá Ismá'íl) to intervene with the prime minister Kewun Mingyi before the case was dismissed. After this, it was judged best for Jamál Effendi to return to Rangoon. Over the next few years, Sayyid Muafá made several journeys taking ponies and gems to Calcutta (in about 1882) and Penang (about 1883). In the latter town, he stayed with Towan Omar Khalidi, a Sufi shaykh. He tried to teach the Bahá'í Faith to those he met there, but had little success. In about 1884, Rúmí returned to Calcutta with ponies and precious stones for sale. On this occasion, he met ájí Mírzá Abu'l-Qásim Náir Ifahání, a Bahá'í who was supposed to be preparing the way for a tour by Bahá'u'lláh's son, Mírzá Muammad 'Alí, to teach the Bahá'í Faith. He was surprised to find this man publicly saying that his object was to open Muslim centres of Freemasonry in India, under the auspices of the Freemasonry movement headquartered in Istanbul.

It is recorded by Áqá Sayyid Ismá'íl, the son of ájí Sayyid Mahdí Shírází, that the Bahá'ís of Burma used to ask Jamál Effendi to mention their names in the reports that he wrote back to Akka. These would be sent to the Afnáns in Bombay. They would send these on to their trading office in Egypt, from where pilgrims would take them to Akka where they would be delivered to Mírzá Áqá Ján, Khádimu'lláh.²⁷

Journey to south-east Asia

The next journey that Jamál Effendi undertook was to south-east Asia in about

²⁶ Rúmí, *op. cit.* B:12.

²⁷ Sayyid Muafá Rúmí cited in Sulaymání, *Maábi-i Hidáyat* 8:131.

1884-5 (see Map 2).²⁸ He and Sayyid Muafá left their business affairs in the hands of some of the Bahá'ís and initially set off for India. In Calcutta, they found most of their old friends had moved away or died and so they pressed on to Dacca (now Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh) where they met some “interesting and important people”²⁹: including Khája ‘Abdu’l-Ghaní, who is described as a descendent of the former chief of the province, and Mawlavi ‘Ubaydu’lláh al-‘Ubaydí, who was professor of Arabic at Dacca College.³⁰

While they were in Dacca, an urgent telegram arrived from the Afnáns in Bombay summoning them there. They set off somewhat perplexed. Upon arrival, they hired a room near Batliwalla Hospital in Byculla and went forthwith to the Afnáns’ office in Fort Bombay. Upon their arrival, Jamál Effendi was shown into a private room while Rúmí was left in the outer room for a couple of hours wondering what was going on. Eventually Jamál Effendi re-appeared and told Rúmí that Mírzá Muammad ‘Alí, the son of Bahá’u’lláh, had arrived. Jamál Effendi instructed Rúmí that when Mírzá Muammad ‘Alí emerged from the inner rooms, Rúmí should “bow reverently before him and fall prostrate at his holy feet.”³¹ When Mírzá Muammad ‘Alí appeared, however, Rúmí only bowed before him to the extent that good manners dictated and did not prostrate himself. This caused great annoyance to Jamál Effendi, the Afnáns and others present. Mírzá Muammad ‘Alí stayed a little while and then went out for a walk with ájí Mírzá Abu’l-Qásim Náir. The group remaining talked among themselves of plans for Mírzá Muammad ‘Alí’s visit. Among these were plans for Mírzá Muammad ‘Alí, who was a fine calligrapher, to prepare a number of collections of the writings of Bahá’u’lláh for publication. As they stood to leave, ájí Sayyid Mírzá Afnán asked Rúmí why he had not prostrated himself at the feet of “Áqá” (the Master). Rúmí replied that according to the text of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, it was forbidden to adore or to fall prostrate before any individual,³² that there was no question regarding the matter of who was our “Master” while Bahá’u’lláh was still alive, and we did not know who would be our “Master” after his passing. The Afnáns were very annoyed at Rúmí’s answer and attacked Jamál Effendi when he tried to intervene to calm matters down. Eventually they told

28 This date is given in a letter of Rúmí cited in Sulaymání, *Maábí-i-Hidáyat* 8:233. It also corresponds to the information (see later) that while they were away on this trip, the British took over Upper Burma, an event that occurred in November 1885.

29 Roumie, “Baha’i Pioneers” 274.

30 Rúmí, *op. cit.* C:4.

31 Rúmí, *op. cit.* C:5.

32 This is not in fact stated in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* but in other tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, see *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992) n. 57, p. 193.

Jamál Effendi that he was not to bring Rúmí to their office again.³³ Mírzá Muammad 'Alí stayed about one year in India on this occasion but none of the teaching activities that had been expected of him materialised. Mírzá Muammad 'Alí returned to Bombay in about January 1890 and again stayed for just over a year, supervising the publication of a number of compilations of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. A few years later, after the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, these Afnáns, ájí Sayyid Mírzá and Sayyid Muammad, sided with Muammad 'Alí against 'Abdu'l-Bahá and were declared covenant-breakers.

Jamál Effendi and Rúmí stayed for three weeks in Bombay and then went to Madras where they found the Bahá'í community numbered some four hundred persons. Sayyid Muafá was re-united with his father there, while Jamál Effendi lectured and met with numerous enquirers. Among those who were counted as Bahá'ís in Madras were Nawáb Fírúz usayn Khan, Nawáb Mamúd Miyán, Sayyid Káim 'Alí, the chief contractor for the building of Madras harbour, 'Uthmán Khan Subadar Major Bahadur, aide-de-camp to the governor of Madras's bodyguard, Sayyid Dáwúd, the leader of the Nawáb Walajah Mosque (Sunni) and Mullá Muammad 'Alí Rampúrí, a learned scholar of Arabic from the Bohra Ismá'ílí community, together with his nephew Murád 'Alí, a merchant.³⁴

From Madras, Jamál Effendi and Sayyid Muafá sailed to Singapore with two servants, one Shamsu'd-Dín, the son of Dr Khabíru'd-Din, and the other Lapudoodoo of Madras. On board they talked with a Portuguese general who was on his way to take up a post for his government in the Pacific. In Singapore, they were the guests of an Arab merchant Abú Bakr ibn 'Umar al-Junayd, who was the Turkish vice-consul (Jamál Effendi held a Turkish passport). Here Jamál Effendi was easily able to get permission to travel to Java on his Turkish passport, but Rúmí was asked to pay a large bond as surety. Of course, no-one in Singapore was willing to stand surety for a complete stranger. Rúmí eventually persuaded the British authorities to issue travelling documents on the basis of which the Dutch consul gave him and the two servants a permit to travel (the country that is now known as Indonesia was then the Dutch East Indies).³⁵

Jamál Effendi and his party sailed on to Djakarta (Batavia), the seat of the Dutch colonial authorities, where they were assigned to the Arab quarter, Pakhojan. The Dutch authorities were extremely nervous about any religious propaganda in their colonies. Rúmí reports that their travel permits therefore only allowed them to visit the coastal ports of the Dutch East Indies and that spies were set to watch their activities. The Turkish consul-general in Batavia,

³³ Rúmí, *op. cit.* C:4-6.

³⁴ Rúmí, *op. cit.* C:6/p. 274.

³⁵ Rúmí, *op. cit.* C:7/p. 274.

‘Alí Ghalib Bey, however, gave them every assistance. Jamál Effendi did not know Malay, the language most widely spoken in this region; he spoke Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Urdu and Hindi. Fortunately, however, Rúmí was gifted with languages and soon picked up Malay to add to the long list of languages that he was able to read, write and speak: Arabic, Persian, Hindi, Tamil, Gujarati, Urdu, Burmese and English.

Finding that they could not teach effectively in Batavia, Jamál Effendi and Rúmí travelled to Surabaya, further along the north Java coast, where they stayed for a couple of months. Here a certain Sayyid Akhíl ibn Háshim al-Habashí became a Bahá’í together with his family. They travelled along the coast, dropping anchor at the island of Bali, which Rúmí calls Bali Amfinan, and then on to Lombok, which Rúmí calls Bali Lombok. Here they were eagerly anticipated by Sayyid ‘Abdu’lláh, the chief collector of customs, for not only were they bringing with them his estranged son Muammad Nat, but Rúmí was in a position to verify Sayyid ‘Abdu’lláh’s claim to descent from the eminent Sufi shaykh Sayyid ‘Abdu’l-Qádir Gílání of Baghdad. Rúmí drew up the appropriate genealogical chart and Sayyid ‘Abdu’lláh gave a great banquet to celebrate the occasion. Sayyid ‘Abdu’lláh arranged for them to be received by the Buddhist king and his Muslim queen, with whom they spoke on religious matters.

Jamál Effendi’s next stop was Macassar (now Ujung Padang) on the Celebes Island (now Sulawesi), where he and Sayyid Muafá narrowly escaped death at the hands of a treacherous host. The Celebes Island contained numerous small principalities which had come under Dutch suzerainty but retained their independence. The Dutch were anxious to retain control of the rich supply of spices and timber which this part of the world supplied against the incursion of other powers. As the Turkish consul in Batavia had asked them to visit an aged Turkish soldier on this island, they were able to persuade the Dutch governor, Mr Brooghmann, to allow them to go into the interior. They first sailed northwards along the coast in a small native boat to the port of Pari Pari. This was the capital of a small kingdom ruled by Fatta Arongmatua Aron Rafan. Here they were received by the king and his daughter, Fatta Sima Tana, who was married to Fatta Talloo Latta, the king of Sedendring. Jamál Effendi succeeded in curing the king of his psoriasis through the use for a month of a herb called cassia fistula, some other herbs that they collected in the jungle, and carbolic soap. Consequently, Jamál Effendi was able to teach the Bahá’í Faith openly here and the king became very favourably disposed to the new religion.³⁶

Jamál Effendi and Sayyid Muafá then travelled on to the town of Sedendring, which is situated inland on a large lake, and beyond that to the province of Padalia and Fammana, where they found a warm welcome from the ruler King Fatta Chikourdi (or Fatta Padali Arong Fammana) and Queen

³⁶ Rúmí, *op. cit.* C:13-15/313-5.

Diammarala but little response to the Bahá'í message. They were planning to leave again when there was an outbreak of small-pox. The king called upon Jamál Effendi for assistance and the latter used scabs from children who were recovering together with breast milk from a woman to make a vaccine with which to inoculate the children. This reduced the death-rate to one percent.³⁷

The two Bahá'ís then travelled by canoe along a river until they reached Boonay (Bone, Boni), the province of the Bugis people with its capital at Watampone. The Bugis were a fiercely independent people who had rebelled against the Dutch several times, most recently in 1859. Here the king, who was a young and well-educated man, and the queen, who was descended from the royal house of Goa (the area around Macassar), welcomed them warmly and they had the opportunity to teach the Bahá'í Faith. The king asked them to prepare a handbook for the administration of the kingdom and Sayyid Muafá reports that they wrote this in line with the Bahá'í teachings. The king and queen are reported to have accepted the Bahá'í teachings and to have been prepared to promulgate them "as soon as they were divinely confirmed."³⁸

Unfortunately, the two Bahá'ís were not able to prolong their stay as the Dutch governor at Macassar had given them a strict four month limit. They retraced their steps, but when they reached Padali, news came of the death of King Fatta Arongmatua of Pari Pari. Therefore Rúmí pressed on by pony to Pari Pari to attend the funeral while Jamál Effendi remained behind. Later Rúmí returned and the two men went on to Pari Pari. Their servant, Lapudoodoo, died at Sedendring on the way. At Pari Pari, Queen Fatta Sima Tana presented them with adoption papers for two native Bugis boys, Naír and Bashír, to be servants in the holy household in Akka.³⁹

At Macassar, the governor refused to allow the two Bugis boys to continue and said that the matter must be resolved in Batavia. So Jamál Effendi and Rúmí returned to Batavia, spending a week at Surabaya with Sayyid Akhíl on the way. In Batavia, 'Alí Ghalib Bey, the Turkish consul-general, was absent on leave and the French consul-general was looking after the affairs of Turkish citizens. Through the latter, they managed to get an appointment with the Dutch viceroy of the East Indies and persuaded him to allow them to keep the adopted Bugis boys. While in Batavia on this occasion, they had much more success in teaching the Bahá'í Faith. Sayyid 'Uthmán ibn Háshim, who is described as a great sage, and Sayyid 'Abdu'-Raím ibn 'Aqíl

³⁷ Rúmí, *op. cit.* C:16-17/342-3. It not clear from where Jamál Effendi obtained his medical knowledge, but his use of carbolic soap to treat psoriasis and his use of scabs from cases of small-pox with the active virus neutralised by antibodies from the milk of a nursing mother to inoculate children shows the workings of a knowledgeable and resourceful mind.

³⁸ Rúmí, *op. cit.* C:17-20/343-4.

³⁹ Rúmí, *op. cit.* C:20-23.

as well as several others became Bahá'ís.⁴⁰

Eventually, the two men left for Singapore. They had with them letters of introduction to the French consul-general in Thailand and the king of Thailand from the French consul-general in Batavia who knew both of these individuals. Jamál Effendi, therefore wanted to go on to Thailand. He remained in Singapore, while Rúmí returned to Rangoon, taking their servant boy Shamsu'd-Dín back to his father and purchasing there some precious stones, suitable to present to the king of Thailand. This trip took two weeks and on the day of his return to Singapore, the older of the two Bugis boys, Naír, disappeared. After painstaking investigations, it was discovered that he had been enticed by some Arabs and then abducted onto a boat that had sailed that day to Mauritius with labourers for the sugar plantations there. Jamál Effendi was very upset by this news.

Jamál Effendi and Rúmí sailed on to Thailand, together with Bashír, the younger Bugis boy, and Mas'úd, a black servant boy. The French consul-general welcomed them and arranged for them to stay in a government guest house near the royal palace. Rúmí writes that they had arrived at a time when the mother of King Chulalongkorn (reigned 1868-1910) had just died. But it must have been another royal death that had just occurred, since Queen Debininindra (Princess Rampoe), the mother of the king, had died in 1861. The king was in mourning and was seeing no visitors. After staying a month or so, the two men returned without having met the king but having spoken of the Bahá'í teachings to Iranian Shi'is who were settled there and to Sayyid 'Alí Yamání and other prominent Muslims.⁴¹ They returned to Singapore and then back to Rangoon. In another account, Rúmí also mentions that they taught the Bahá'í Faith in Malaya.⁴² It may, however, be that he was counting Singapore as being part of Malaya.

Journey to Akka

Upon their return to Rangoon, Jamál Effendi and Rúmí found matters greatly altered. The political situation had changed drastically with the British annexation of upper Burma in November 1885 and the deposition of the king. Among the Bahá'ís, much had also changed. In view of the new political and economic conditions, Dr Khabíru'd-Dín had sold up the pony and hackney carriage business that had been the main economic support of the two men and had returned to working in the Rangoon General Hospital; akím Imtiyáz usayn was without employment and homeless; while Mawlaví 'Abdu's-Subán Qurayshí, the first Burmese Sunni to become a Bahá'í had passed away.

⁴⁰ Rúmí, *op. cit.* C:24-5.

⁴¹ Rúmí, *op. cit.* C:26-7.

⁴² In a letter of Rúmí cited in Sulaymání, *Maábí-i Hidáyat* 8:233.

Furthermore, Sayyid Mahdí Shirází had been negligent in pursuing tenure of a plot of land in a prestigious location that the British authorities had agreed to hand over for a Bahá'í centre to be built. The government had now allocated it to a British missionary society for a church. They went to Mandalay for a few days to ascertain the situation there. Upon their return to Rangoon, some of the Bahá'ís there persuaded Jamál Effendi to agree to a plan to send Rúmí back to Mandalay to set up a business office to connect with the businesses of the Rangoon Bahá'ís such as Abu'l-Zafar Qurayshí.

After about four months of trading successfully in Mandalay, Rúmí was urgently summoned to Rangoon. Here it was announced to him that Jamál Effendi was going on a trip back to Akka and that prior to his departure, he had arranged for Rúmí to be married to the daughter of the late Mawlaví 'Abdu'l-Subán Qurayshí. In the account that he has written of these years, Rúmí clearly betrays his unhappiness at this unexpected turn of events. He hints that he was not altogether pleased with having this marriage foisted upon him, and especially so suddenly. He was also heart-broken that Jamál Effendi was planning to go off to Akka, to the presence of Bahá'u'lláh, without taking him. He realised, however, that if he refused, he would disgrace Jamál Effendi and run the risk of the powerful Qurayshí family turning against the Bahá'í Faith. Somewhat reluctantly he consented to the marriage, although even almost fifty years later his writing about those events still reveals his resentment.⁴³

The wedding took place in September 1886. Shortly afterwards, Jamál Effendi left for Akka. Rúmí states that he took a boat from Rangoon headed for Port Said via the Suez Canal, eventually arriving in Akka. He was accompanied by two recently-converted Iranians and the young Bugis boy, Bashír, who was to work in the household of Bahá'u'lláh.⁴⁴

Second journey to India and travels in central Asia

Bahá'u'lláh did not allow Jamál Effendi to remain in Akka for long but urged him to return to India to continue his work. On 20 March 1888, Jamál Effendi set out for India accompanied by ájí Faraju'lláh Tafri^{shí}, who was married to Jamál Effendi's sister and replaced Mírzá usayn as his travelling companion.⁴⁵ On the way, he stopped at Aden for over a month and taught the

⁴³ Rúmí, *op. cit.* C:28-30.

⁴⁴ It is presumably this boy who can be seen in one of the photographs of Jamál Effendi, see Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís* 123.

⁴⁵ There are some problems regarding the identity of ájí Faraju'lláh Tafri^{shí}. Fáíl Mázandarání (*uhúr al-aqq* 6:451-2) writes that this man was a brother of Mírzá Naru'lláh, who died in Edirne (see Balyuzi, *King of Glory* 236-7), Mírzá Riá-Qulí, who was killed in Akka, (Balyuzi, *King of Glory* 323, 325) and Badrí-Ján, the wife of Azal. He states that he was married to a sister of Jamál Effendi, but that he died in 1276 (1859-60), leaving a son who became a well-known Bahá'í physician Dr 'Atá'u'lláh Khan. On the other hand, there was a

Sultan of Lahej, a town some 18 miles north-west of Aden. In Bombay, he taught the Zoroastrian community. Then Jamál Effendi began to travel throughout India once more. Rúmí was not with Jamál Effendi on these journeys but he mentions the following towns that were visited: Calcutta, Delhi, Lucknow, Cawnpore (Kanpur), Moradabad, Rampur, Bareilly, Gwalior, Fatehgarh, Bhopal, Indore, Ujjain, Malwa, Kailaspur, Hyderabad (Deccan), Madras, Bangalore and Simla (see Map 3).⁴⁶ Jamál Effendi was constantly on the move, cultivating his contacts, encouraging the converts, visiting members of the nobility, and writing reports of all this to Bahá'u'lláh, who would reveal tablets for many of the princes and others who were attracted to the Bahá'í Faith through the activities of Jamál Effendi. Rúmí describes Jamál Effendi's movements from place to place as being restless and swift like quicksilver.⁴⁷ He states that Jamál Effendi's travelling expenses on these journeys were paid by Nawab Safdar 'Alí Khan (d. 1893), the chief and president of Rampur state.⁴⁸ Rúmí writes that Bahá'u'lláh wrote an exhortation and proofs to the head of the Bohra Ismá'ílí community Sayyid-ná Najmu'd-Dín of Bombay. Jamál Effendi got Mullá Muammad 'Alí Rámpúrí, a learned scholar of that community who had become a Bahá'í, to come from Madras where he resided to Bombay to deliver this message to the Bohra leader. Rámpúrí addressed the Bohra leader in front of a large audience and debated with him.⁴⁹

From his base in the United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh), Jamál Effendi must have undertaken several trips to Sind and the Punjab. From the list of towns that Rúmí reports that he visited, we can assume that he probably travelled to Delhi, then to Jaipur, Jodhpur and Hyderabad in Sind. We can assume that he then spent some time in the Khairpur area of Sind north of Hyderabad, since we know that he managed to convert a number of people there, including the Rajah of Khairpur, Mír 'Alí Murád (d. 1894). The latter had been put into power in place of his brother after the British annexation of Sind in 1843. He had at first ruled over a large area of upper Sind, but had

áji Faraju'lláh Tafrishí who was a companion of Bahá'u'lláh in Akka (see Balyuzi, *King of Glory* 279, 331). It seems most likely that these are both the same person, that Mázandarání is wrong about his date of death, that he migrated to Edirne at about the same time as his brothers, was exiled to Akka, and then chosen by Bahá'u'lláh to accompany Jamál Effendi on account of his close relationship to him.

46 Rúmí, *op. cit.* D:1.

47 Rúmí, *op. cit.* D:1.

48 It appears from the files in the national archives of the Government of India that Nawab Safdar Ali Khan and Jamál Effendi had a falling out shortly before the former's death in 1893 since he registered a complaint against Jamál Effendi with the foreign department of the government of India alleging that Jamál Effendi had obtained money from him under the false pretense of having influence with the British authorities. See file Foreign: Secret E, Sept. 1898, no. 102, pp. 14-15; national archives of the government of India, New Delhi.

49 Rúmí, *op. cit.* D:2.

been stripped of much of his domain in 1856 after a British commission had enquired into his activities. We can assume that Jamál Effendi then continued north since we know he visited Lahore, Amritsar, Puneh (Punch) and Gujrat in the Punjab and even Peshawar in the north-west frontier.

Jamál Effendi also travelled into central Asia. We have few details and no reliable itinerary of this journey. The whole trip is said to have taken eighteen months. It appears that on one of his visits to the Punjab, he travelled on to Jammu and Kashmir. From this point onwards, however, there is confusion.

We have two itineraries suggested by Rúmí in two different sources. These may represent two separate journeys but this is unlikely as some episodes are common to the two accounts. In one account cited in Sulaymání from a letter of Rúmí, he states that Jamál Effendi travelled to Ladakh and then on towards Yarqand (now Shache in the Chinese province of Xinjiang). This route probably took him south-east at first skirting the Karakorum range and entering Tibet. On the boundary of Kashmir and Tibet, all of Jamál Effendi's books, tablets and luggage were lost when one of the pack animals fell down a ravine into a mountain stream. In this same area, he is said to have come across some Ismá'ílí followers of the Aga Khan. As a consequence of frost-bite which affected Jamál Effendi's feet, he was forced to remain in Yarqand for six months, probably the winter of 1888-9 or 1889-90. Jamál Effendi appears to have been dispirited by the rough reception that he received from the people of these parts. He pressed on to Badakhshan which today straddles Afghanistan and Tajikistan and further to Balkh in the north of present-day Afghanistan.⁵⁰

Another account by Rúmí, in his manuscript history, states that having wintered in Kashmir, Jamál Effendi went, in April 1889, to Ladakh and Leh, then to Gilgit and on into the Pamir range of mountains (Badakhshan) where he met the followers of the Aga Khan. Here he experienced a severe snow-storm which resulted in frost-bite to his feet and he turned aside to Kandahar. According to this account it was on his way back from Kashmir to India that he lost all of his baggage in a mountain stream.⁵¹

It can be seen that in the first account it is written that Jamál Effendi experienced frost-bite to his feet and met followers of the Aga Khan between Ladakh and Yarqand, and in the second, these two events happened in the area of the Pamir mountains. Similarly, there is a story in both accounts that he wrote to 'Abdu'r-Ramán Khan, the Amir of Kabul, explaining that his feet were damaged by frost-bite and asking for permission to proceed to Kabul. The Amir replied that he was forbidden to come to Kabul and that if he came, his hands would go the way of his feet. However, in the first account, it is

⁵⁰ Letter of Rúmí, cited in Sulaymání, *Maábí-i Hidáyat* 8:134-6. Some of the details of this account, such as the six month stay in Yarqand, are also recorded in Fail Mázandarání, *uhúr al-aqq* 6:456.

⁵¹ Rúmí, *op. cit.* D:3-4.

stated that Jamál Effendi wrote this letter from Yarqand and in the second that he wrote it from Kandahar.

Both of these accounts have problems with them. On the one hand, Rúmí's account in his manuscript history seems more credible because the Ismá'ílí followers of the Aga Khan are located in the Pamir (Badakhshan) area. On the other hand, the suggested itinerary given going from Kashmir to Ladakh, Leh and then to Gilgit seems somewhat tortuous, and it is by no means clear how Jamál Effendi would have got from the Pamirs to Kandahar without having gone through Kabul in the first place. On the other hand, it would make more sense for Jamál Effendi to write to the Amir of Kabul from Kandahar, asking for permission to travel through Kabul and the Khyber Pass into India, than it would if he were writing from Yarqand.

One source states that Jamál Effendi even reached Khuqand (Kokand in Uzbekistan) and the western confines of Turkistan.⁵² All sources are agreed that Jamál Effendi found these areas inhospitable and eventually returned, remaining for a time in Ladakh where he had converted Ahmadu'd-Dín, the secretary to the British commissioner, to the Bahá'í Faith. He finally reached Srinagar in Kashmir in August-September 1889. From there he returned to India.

We have an account of Jamál Effendi's activities in his last years in India from an unusual source. We have noted previously that Jamál Effendi at times styled himself Shaykh Jamál ad-Dín and Sayyid Jamál ad-Dín. It appears that at one stage, the British authorities in India confused Jamál Effendi with Sayyid Jamál ad-Dín Asadábádí, who called himself "Al-Afghani". Al-Afghani was a thorn in the side of the British, advocating the liberation of Muslim lands such as Egypt and India from British colonial rule. The confusion between the two is rendered less surprising when it is remembered that two Azalí Bábís, Shaykh Amad Rúí and Mírzá Aqá Khan Kirmání, were members of al-Afghani's inner circle, and al-Afghani himself was commonly thought to be a "Bábí".⁵³ Thus, for example, when a follower of al-Afghani assassinated Náir ad-Dín Sháh, this was followed by vengeance being taken on two Bahá'ís, Varqá and his son Rúu'lláh.⁵⁴ There was no distinction in the minds of most people between Bábís and Bahá'ís. All were still called Bábís at this time.

It was not surprising then that the British authorities kept a close eye on Jamál Effendi and compiled some reports about him. One of these, dated 1891, is from an unnamed Indian Muslim who was a British agent and who

⁵² Fail Mázandarání, *uhúr al-aqq* 6:456.

⁵³ For an account Sayyid Jamálu'd-Dín "al-Afghani", see Nikki Keddie, *Sayyid Jamál ad-Dín 'al-Afghání'* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1972). On accusations that he was a Bábí, see p. 411. On his close association with Azalís, see pp. 275, 377-82.

⁵⁴ Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís* 93-4.

pretended to become a Bahá'í in order to gather more information. Although it may be considered a hostile account, it does nevertheless paint a useful picture of Jamál Effendi in his final years in India, travelling about, cultivating and educating his circle of contacts and converts in the different parts of India:

The following is the substance of a statement made by an apparently well informed person, as to the real objects of the presence in India of Saiyid Jamal-ud-din, who is described by the informant as a Persian, but who calls himself a Turk of Constantinople:—

In the city of Akka (? Acre) shore now lives one Husen Ali, a Turk, who calls himself Baha-ullah Effendi alias Jamal Mubarik [the Blessed Beauty]. This man declares all religions to be bad, and says that he himself is God. He converted a number of people and collected them at Baghdad. About 4 years ago they rebelled against the Shah, but they were suppressed and gradually withdrew from Persia to Turkey in Asia. Baha-ullah is now under surveillance at Akka, which is called "Az Maksud" [*Ar Maqúd*, a common term among Iranian Bahá'ís for the Holy Land] by the converts. Baha-ullah's agents go about to all countries and endeavour to persuade people that he is visited by messengers of God, and that his converts will become rulers of the earth. Baha-ullah's son, Muhammad Ali, came to Bombay on this mission, and then returned to Akka. Agents are appointed everywhere, Saiyid Jamal-ud-din is one of these agents. He came to Kailaspur and stayed 10 days with me. He told me all about Baha-ullah and his own mission, and proposed to appoint me as his agent, and asked me to go with him to Bombay to see Muhammad Ali. I agreed to become a disciple of Baha-ullah in order to discover why Saiyid Jamal-ud-din had come to India. I agreed to become his agent for the same reason, and he now often writes to me. I have not got his letters with me, but can produce them if wanted. He is now in Farukhabad, and I believe that he has obtained a number of converts in India. He has plenty of money and spends it freely, and goes first class by railway. There is in Bombay a man named Agha Saiyid Mirza [Afnan], a merchant of Shiraz, who supplies him plentifully with money. It is Jamal-ud-din's intention now to go to Hyderabad in Sind in order to visit a convert named Mir Ali Murad, Raja of Khairpur. He promised to make me the Raja's Wazir. Nawab Safdar Ali Khan, President of the Rampur State Council, is also a convert, and Saiyid Jamal-ud-din lived at his house in Rampur for 2 months, and was there when General Azim-ud-din Khan was

murdered. He is now staying, at the house of a Native gentleman of Fatehgarh, named Imam-ud-din Khan. Rafi-ud-din Khan and Akbar Khan of Hasanpur, in the Moradabad district, are also his converts. The converts agree to do what Baha-ullah may direct.⁵⁵

On the 21st September 1891, the same informant wrote direct to the General Supdt., T. and D. Department [General Superintendent, Thagi and Dakaiti Department, responsible for monitoring criminals and trouble-makers], as follows:— “The man Saiyid Jamal-ud-din Shah is no ‘Rumi,’ he is a man from Astrabad Mazinderan in Persia, and his name is Mirza Muhammad Ali. He is no Muhammadan but a ‘Babi,’ and his head-quarters are at Akka in Palestine.”

This information regarding, Jamal-ud-din is curious, if true, and may explain the wanderings of this individual. It is the first intimation received in the C. S. B. [Central Special Branch] of any attempt on the part of the ‘Babi’ sect to proselytise in India. The success of the sect in Persia was mainly due to the communistic doctrines proclaimed by the founder, which attracted the masses. In 1851, the Shah caused the leader of this sect, styled the ‘Bab’ to be seized and executed, and a large number of his followers was put to death. The sect, however, was not extinguished, though compelled to practise their faith in secret. A recent authority (Benjamin) states that there are some 400,000 ‘Babis’ in Persia to be found among all conditions of society. The ‘Babis’ are also said by him to be unusually active in the present day, and to be sending forth emissaries widely to make proselytes. The sect has extended to Turkey, the leader of the Turkish branch residing at Constantinople. (C.S.B.)⁵⁶

In December 1892, Jamál Effendi was reported by the British authorities to have been in Bangalore from where he proceeded to Hyderabad in the Deccan.⁵⁷ It would have been in the early summer of 1892 that news of Bahá’u’lláh’s passing reached India and eventually Jamál Effendi. At this time, Bombay became a centre for the activities of the partisans of Mírzá Muammad ‘Alí, with the presence there of such persons as Mírzá usayn

⁵⁵ N.W.P.S.B., 29-8-91 [North West Province Special Branch, 29 August 1891].

⁵⁶ Report of D.E. McCracken, dated 14 August 1897, in file Foreign: Secret E, Sept. 1898, no. 100, pp. 13-14; national archives of the government of India, New Delhi. Words in rounded parantheses are in the original document. Comments in square parantheses have been added by the present author.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, citing a memorandum of the central special branch, no. 102, pp. 14-15.

Kharúmí, ájí usayn 'Alí Jahrumí, ájí Sayyid Mírzá Afnán and Sayyid Muammad Afnán. Eventually, 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent a number of Bahá'ís to Bombay to demonstrate the falseness of their position and guide the Bahá'ís there. To what extent Jamál Effendi was involved in these events is not certain. He was probably in Bombay for short periods of time during these years for we know that his companion, ájí Faraju'lláh, died in Bombay in April 1894. Rúmí also mentions that Jamál Effendi made one more journey to Burma. The two leading Bahá'ís of Mandalay, 'Abdu'l-Wáid (Ko Thin) and his uncle 'Abdu's-Sattár (U Koo), had died by this time but he met others who had remained firm Bahá'ís.

The last years of Jamál Effendi's life

As the years passed, it became increasingly difficult for Jamál Effendi to continue his arduous travels. Eventually he returned to Akka, leaving Madras for Port Said in April 1896.⁵⁸ He was accompanied by two Bahá'ís of Rangoon, ájí Sayyid Mahdí Shírází and Dr Khabír ad-Dín. He either brought with him or had sent previously a number of people to serve in the household of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Of these the most well-known are Isfandiyár, who served as the coachman of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Khusraw, who served in the household.

After Jamál Effendi had remained some months in Akka, 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent him on an important mission to Iran. Since Jamál Effendi was a member of the nobility, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wanted him to go to Qum where the former prime minister 'Alí Asghar Khan, Amín as-Sulán, was in exile and deliver to him a message. Amín as-Sulán had intervened to save a Bahá'í, Áqá Siyyid Asadu'lláh, and had sheltered him in his own office. For this Bahá'u'lláh had wanted someone to give him a message acknowledging his help and urging him to dedicate himself to the service of the Cause of God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells the story of that journey:

After a time Amínu's-Sulán lost the Sovereign's favor. Hated, in disgrace, he was banished to the city of Qum. Thereupon this servant dispatched Sulaymán Khan to Persia, carrying a prayer and a missive written by me. The prayer besought God's aid and bounty and succour for the fallen Minister, so that he might, from that corner of oblivion, be recalled to favour. In the letter we clearly stated: "Prepare to return to Tihran. Soon will God's help arrive; the light of grace will shine on you again; with full authority again, you will find yourself free, and Prime Minister. This is your reward for the efforts you exerted on behalf of a man who was oppressed." That letter and that prayer are today in the possession of the family of Amínu's-Sulán.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

From Tihran, Sulaymán Khán journeyed to Qum, and according to his instructions went to live in a cell in the shrine of the Immaculate [Fáimih]. The relatives of Amínu's-Sulán came to visit there; Sulaymán Khán inquired after the fallen Minister and expressed the wish to meet him. When the Minister learned of this, he sent for Sulaymán Khán. Placing all his trust in God, Sulaymán Khán hastened to the Minister's house and, meeting him in private, presented the letter from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The Minister rose, and received the letter with extreme respect. Then addressing the Khán he said: "I had given up hope. If this longing is fulfilled, I will arise to serve; I will preserve and uphold the friends of God." Then he expressed his gratitude, indebtedness and joy, and added, "Praise be to God, I hope again; I feel that by His aid, my dream will come true."

In brief, the Minister pledged himself to serve the friends, and Sulaymán Khán took his leave. The Minister then desired to give him a sum of money to defray the expenses of his journey, but Sulaymán Khán refused, and despite the Minister's insistence, would accept nothing. The Khán had not yet reached the Holy Land on his return journey when Amínu's-Sulán was recalled from exile and immediately summoned to the Premiership again. He assumed the position and functioned with full authority; and at first he did indeed support the believers, but toward the end, in the case of the Yazd martyrdoms, he was neglectful. He neither helped nor protected the sufferers in any way, nor would he listen to their repeated pleas, until all of them were put to death. Accordingly he too was dismissed, a ruined man; that flag which had flown so proudly was reversed, and that hoping heart despaired.⁵⁹

Jamál Effendi returned to Akka and lived out the last days of his life there. He died on 9 November 1898.⁶⁰ He was buried in the Akka cemetery near the grave of Mírzá Músá, the brother of Bahá'u'lláh. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote a tablet of visitation⁶¹ for him and instructed that on his grave be written the following words:

Verily, Jamál ad-Dín, a traveller famous in every clime, the spreader of the fragrance of the love of God, has now become a

⁵⁹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful* 137-8.

⁶⁰ 24 Jamada II 1316, from a letter of Rúmí, cited in Sulaymání, *Maábí-i Hidáyat* 8:140. Balyuzi gives the date 20 August 1898 without indicating his source; *Eminent Bahá'is* 128.

⁶¹ A poor translation of this may be found in Rúmí, *op. cit.* D:11-12.

traveller in those realms of God which are hidden from the eyes
of the people of realm of veils. 1316 AH⁶²

Jamál Effendi's method of promulgating the Bahá'í Faith

Bahá'u'lláh could scarcely have chosen a more suitable person than Jamál Effendi for the task of spreading the Bahá'í Faith in India. Islam had spread in India largely as a result of the effort and sacrifices of itinerant Sufis who planted the message of Islam in every part of India, following to some extent the model of the Hindu sadhus. Among the Indian Muslims, Sufi shaykhs had largely substituted for the role of spiritual mentorship exercised by the guru and swami in Hindu society. It was not at all unusual for a Sufi shaykh to be accorded greater respect than an orthodox Muslim religious leader. Wherever they travelled or settled, these Sufi shaykhs would be the natural centre of attraction and devotion. Because of the eclectic and inclusive nature of much of Indian spirituality, these Sufi shaykhs would even be the object of the respect of non-Muslims. It is also important to note that many of the Sufi shaykhs who had spread Islam throughout India had been of Iranian origin. Therefore the Persian language had become the language of the Indian and eastern Islamic world; it became the language of commerce, literature and, under the Moghul empire, the language of government. Most educated Indian Muslims therefore knew Persian well. Rúmí commented on this thus:

Because in ancient times generally all those who promulgated the Faith of Islam in India were Persian sages, and mostly were dervish in appearance, and as the Indian Empire formerly was ruled by [the] Mogul Dynasty, therefore at the time when Jamal Effendi came to India, though it was then India under the British Government, yet the majority of the [educated] people were well acquainted with the Persian language and literatures, and as Jamal Effendi spoke a very high Persian, and travelled all over India in [a] princely manner, with two or three companions, yet with gentle behaviour of exemplary independence and virtue; therefore the people [were] attracted by his venerable appearance and eloquent discourse. It was very easy for him to interview with the chiefs of the states and the government high officials.⁶³

Jamál Effendi's previous life as a wandering darvish suited him admirably for

⁶² Provisional translation of text given in Sulaymání, *Madbí-i Hidáyat* 8:140. Immediately before the date at the end, there is the word "al-Fátiah", which is a reference to the opening súra of the Qur'án, traditional for tombstones, and not translatable.

⁶³ Rúmí, *op. cit.* A:11.

travelling through India, attracting the attention of Indian Muslims in the role of a Sufi shaykh. As he stepped off the boat in Bombay in about 1875, Jamál Effendi was the picture of a Sufi shaykh (master or *walí* - loosely translated as “saint”). He is described as having had a radiant and attractive face, white beard and whiskers, the Mawlavi head-gear upon his head, an ornamented scarf around his neck and prayer-beads in his hand.⁶⁴ His command of a high literary Persian would have added to his aura. From several sources, in particular Sayyid Muafá Rúmí, we have accounts of his personal charisma, his ability to speak eloquently and in a manner able to charm and attract his audience.⁶⁵

We do not have a precise description of the teaching methods of Jamál Effendi but we can put together a picture from the evidence to hand. Among the pieces of evidence that we have are the following:

1. Jamál Effendi’s appearance: we know that Jamál Effendi dressed in the attire of a Muslim holy man, more specifically that of a Sufi shaykh of the Mawlaví Sufi order (the Mawlaví or Mevlevi Order of Sufís follow the very influential Iranian mystic of the 13th century, Jalálu’d-Dín Rúmí). In a traditional society such as that of Muslim India, a person’s appearance classifies that person: you are as you appear. Thus, if Jamál Effendi appeared as a Sufi shaykh, then he was a Sufi shaykh to everyone around him.
2. Jamál Effendi’s name: Jamál Effendi was known by such names as Jamálu’d-Dín Sháh⁶⁶ or Darvish Jamalu’d-Dín Bábí.⁶⁷ The designation “Sháh” is a title typically taken by Sufi shaykhs.
3. Events in Mandalay: ‘Azízu’lláh Sulaymání records the following information on the authority of Mafúal-aqq ‘Ilmí, one of the prominent Bahá’ís of India, who in turn learned this from Khalífa Muammad Yúnis of Mandalay. In the town of Mandalay alone, Jamál Effendi had made some six thousand people followers of Bahá’u’lláh. In accordance with the exigencies of prudence (*ikmat*), however, he had not told them that this meant a new religious dispensation (a new *Sharí’ah*). They were under the impression that they were still under the Islamic dispensation. In the time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Mírzá Maram came to Mandalay and endeavoured to guide them to the fact that a new religious dispensation had arisen. Some four thousand of these

⁶⁴ Fail Mazandarání cited in Sulaymání, *Maábí-i Hidáyat* 8:129.

⁶⁵ See Rúmí comments in *op. cit.* A:11.

⁶⁶ Roumie, “Baha’i Pioneers”, p. 76. The British secret reports also refer to him as “Saiyid Jamal-ud-din Shah.”

⁶⁷ Fail Mazandarání cited in Sulaymání, *Maábí-i Hidáyat* 8:130.

persons were extremely dismayed and turned upon Mírzá Maram and attacked him - he was only saved by the speedy arrival of the British police. Some two thousand, however, remained Bahá'ís.⁶⁸

4. Mírzá Mamúd Zarqání's account: The following account of Jamál Effendi needs to be treated with some caution. It is written by Mírzá Mamúd Zarqání who appears to have had some degree of animus against Jamál Effendi - this can only be described as a hostile account. The present author is unaware of any cause for this although it may be that its writer experienced the same sort of events that befell Mírzá Maram as described in 3 above:

The first messenger to carry the Bahai Revelation to India was an old Persian named Suleyman Khan who was known among the friends as Jamal Effendi, in order to distinguish him from Suleyman Khan the Martyr. About 40 years ago, he visited Baha'u'lláh at Acca, and received permission to make a tour in India. His intention was not to go as a Bahai teacher, but Baha'u'lláh told him he ought to take the opportunity of spreading the teachings. He visited the principal cities of India and Burma and made the acquaintance of many of the nobles and distinguished men. He went in the character of a Dervish leader (Sufi), and when he found that people were attracted, he would read to them some of the Tablets, such as *Hidden Words*. He printed and published *Seven Valleys* as if he himself were the author. Little by little he introduced more of the teachings, telling some of his most intimate friends that they should repeat the name: 'Allah'o'Abha,' and finally showing them the book of *Ighan*. Occasionally, he spoke about one higher than himself, whose representative he was, but he made no specific mention of Baha'u'lláh, and it was usually supposed among his followers that he was himself the head of the cult he represented.

After spending some five years in India, he returned to the Holy Land. Baha'u'lláh reproved him for having published *Seven Valleys* in his own name, but the work he had done was followed up by others and turned to good account. Most of his teaching had been in the towns of Mandalay and Rangoon. In the latter city there lived a Bahai from Shiraz named Seyed Mehdi, who after the departure of Jamal Effendi, began to teach the Cause publicly. He was joined by one of the friends of Jamal

⁶⁸ Fail Mazandarání cited in Sulaymání, *Maábí-i Hidáyat* 8:137-8. Sydney Sprague relates the story of Mírzá Maram's troubles but without mentioning Jamál Effendi's previous involvement. See *A Year with the Bahá'ís of India and Burma* (London, 1908) 34-5.

Effendi named Seyed Mostafa, who is still an active teacher.⁶⁹

Zarqání's accusation that Jamál Effendi hid the name of Bahá'u'lláh entirely in his discourse and let people think that he was the leader of the movement that he was preaching is discounted by the evidence of the British secret papers. In the British account, Jamál Effendi is portrayed as clearly informing the inner circle of those who gathered around him that their true allegiance was to Bahá'u'lláh. Indeed the extent of Jamál Effendi's sharing of orthodox Bahá'í teachings in relation to Bahá'u'lláh to his inner circle can be seen from the presence in this account of terms very familiar to Bahá'ís who know Persian and Arabic; such terms as "Jamál-i-Mubárák" (the Blessed Perfection, as a designation for Bahá'u'lláh) and "Ar-i-Maqúd" (land of the heart's desire, for Akka).

Zarqání's accusation that Jamál Effendi published *The Seven Valleys* in his own name is, however, probably true since it can be found in other places. Fáil Mázandarání gives a statement by 'Azízu'lláh Jazzáb that he heard Bahá'u'lláh state that Jamál had taken *The Seven Valleys* and added a page of his own at the beginning and published this as his own work.⁷⁰

Thus, from the various pieces of information that we have, we can build up a picture of Jamál Effendi's method of proselytisation. When he arrived at a city, it was his custom to approach its ruler or major official. He often had a letter of introduction to them. He would either write to them or call upon them. He would talk to them on general religious themes. Sufi holy men were regarded as possessing the ability to cure disease. Jamál Effendi appears to have obtained some rudiments of medical knowledge and to have put them to good use. The combination of the appearance of a Sufi holy man and medical skills produced in many places a favourable impression that then attracted crowds to hear his discourse.

Apart from the *baraka* (blessings) bestowed by merely being in his presence, part of the attractiveness of the Sufi shaykh is the implication that he will teach his pupils a secret path, esoteric knowledge that is not available through the mere reading of books. We may surmise that Jamál Effendi attracted large numbers of people by holding forth on the usual Sufi themes. He probably then introduced some of the mystical writings of Bahá'u'lláh such as *The Seven Valleys*, which he had had published in India. It is evident that Jamál Effendi was able to inspire in many people a love for the writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

It seems that, following the efforts of Jamál Effendi, many people

⁶⁹ This is taken from an account of the Bahá'í history of India by Zarqání that is to be found among Esslemont's papers in the archives of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United Kingdom.

⁷⁰ Cited in Fáil Mázandarání, *uhúr al-aqq*, vol. 8, pt. 2, (Tehran, 132/1975), p. 1154 footnote.

considered themselves followers of Bahá'u'lláh but only in the same sort of way as others might consider themselves followers of a Sufi shaykh. Bahá'u'lláh had thus the status of the *qub* (pole, axis), the supreme leader of a Sufi order, while Jamál Effendi was his local or regional agent or representative, authorised by the *qub* to deliver his teachings. To these people Jamál Effendi taught the greeting "Alláhu Abhá" as well as giving them copies of Bahá'u'lláh's *The Seven Valleys*.

To a much smaller inner circle, Jamál Effendi then revealed the true extent of the revolution brought about by Bahá'u'lláh, the inauguration of a new religious dispensation. To these he gave copies of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (which was published by the Náirí Press in Bombay) and mentioned them in letters to Bahá'u'lláh so that they received tablets from Bahá'u'lláh. We cannot know what proportion of his circle of admirers was brought into Jamál Effendi's confidence in this manner, since of course many would have rejected the teachings, while others would have subsequently been lost to the community because there was probably insufficient follow-up of Jamál Effendi's work after he left the sub-continent. We know however that several of those whom he introduced to the Bahá'í Faith later became important individuals in the history of the Bahá'í Faith in the Indian sub-continent. Among those whom we know were introduced to the full teachings of the Bahá'í Faith by Jamál Effendi are: Sayyid Mustafá Rúmí (converted in Madras, accompanied Jamál Effendi in his later journeys, settled in Burma, named Hand of the Cause by Shoghi Effendi), Rafi'u'd-Dín Khan (of Hasanpur), and ájí Ramaán (of Rampur), Sayyid Mahdí Shirazi, Dr *Khabíru'd-Dín* and many others in Rangoon. We also read in the above account of some two thousand persons in Mandalay. In assessing these accounts, it would appear that Jamál Effendi's greatest success in bringing people to the Bahá'í Faith were in Burma (Rangoon and Mandalay) and in the area of the United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh) to the east of Delhi (in towns such as Rampur, Moradabad, Fatehgarh and Farrukhabad). While it has not been possible to establish a firm ongoing link between Jamál Effendi's converts in the Rampur area and the later Bahá'í community, there is no doubt about the existence of such a link in Burma.

The results of Jamál Effendi's labours in south-east Asia await further investigations but there are as yet unconfirmed reports that remnants of Jamál Effendi's teaching on Celebes Island can be found in the religious milieu of that area and found their way into the political system of Indonesia in the form of the concept of *mufakat*, or "consensus," arrived at on the basis of extensive consultations (*musyawarah*) aimed at reaching unanimous agreement. Decisions are seldom arbitrary or made by one person but are the result of extensive discussions. This is the traditional approach to all problems. Similarly the results of his efforts in central Asia cannot at present be adequately assessed. There is, for example, a Sufi order in Gansu Province in central China. It is called Lingming Tang (the Hall of the Mind or Soul

Enlightenment) and is a suborder of the Khúfiyyah which is a main division of the Naqshbandiyyah in China. The oral tradition of this group states that its doctrines are based on what a Bábí who came from the central Islamic world to China at some time in the nineteenth century taught to the founder of the order Ma Lingming (1853-1925).⁷¹ Whether this is a remnant of the work of Jamál Effendi or not remains to be determined.

Zarqání and others have accused Jamál Effendi of being a charlatan, of not really teaching the Bahá'í Faith, or of having journeyed from place to place accepting luxurious hospitality and being of very little benefit to the Bahá'í Faith. While there is a certain amount of truth in this (in view of his publication of *The Seven Valleys* in his own name), it is evident that he was operating in an environment where any direct and open teaching of the Bahá'í Faith would have evoked violent opposition. Thus the approach that Jamál Effendi took, that of using indirect public methods to identify those who might be inclined to hear about the Bahá'í Faith and then teaching these in private, would appear to have been appropriate to the situation and in line with Bahá'u'lláh's oft-repeated advice to exercise prudence and wisdom in promulgating his religion.⁷²

Conclusion

It may perhaps be helpful to compare Jamál Effendi's teaching of the Bahá'í Faith to other teaching campaigns. Whatever may have been Ibrahim Kheiralla's faults and whatever opinion one may have about his later conduct, there can be little doubt that he conducted a very successful initial campaign in bringing the Bahá'í Faith to north America, resulting in several thousand conversions.⁷³ It must immediately be stated that Jamál Effendi and Kheiralla used different approaches to the Bahá'í Faith: Jamál Effendi relied on mystical themes, while Kheiralla concentrated on eschatological ones. They

⁷¹ Personal communication from Dr Jianping Wang of the Institute for World Religions, Beijing, derived from researches carried out by Prof. Ma Tong of the Institute of Nationalities in Gansu. Ma Tong, *Zhongguo Yisilan jiaopai menhuan suyuan* (Studies of the Origins of Islamic Factions and Sufi Orders in China) (Yinchuan: Ningxia People's Publishing House, 1986).

⁷² Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1976) no. 10, pp. 13-14; no. 97, pp. 196-7; no. 136, p. 296; no. 164, pp. 343-4. See also Susan Stiles Maneck, "Wisdom and Dissimulation: the use and meaning of *Hikmat* in Bahá'í writings and history," *Bahá'í Studies Review* 6 (1996): 11-23.

⁷³ On Kheiralla, see Robert Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America*, vol. 1: *Origins 1892-1900* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985); Richard Hollinger, "Ibrahim George Kheiralla and the Bahá'í Faith in America," in Juan R. Cole and Moojan Momen ed., *From Iran East and West, Studies in Babi and Bahá'í History*, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1984) 95-133; Peter Smith, "The American Bahá'í Community, 1894-1917: A Preliminary Survey," in Moojan Momen (ed.), *Studies in Babi and Bahá'í History*, vol. 1 (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1982) 85-223.

were also operating in very different environments. Jamál Effendi was in situations where he had to proceed very cautiously, otherwise he would have stirred up fanaticism, which might have even occasioned his death. Kheiralla was operating in a much freer environment. Despite these differences, we can detect certain common features between Jamál Effendi's efforts in India and Kheiralla's in north America:

1. The slow introduction of the concepts of the Bahá'í Faith. Both Kheiralla and Jamál Effendi took a very gradualist approach towards revealing to their audiences the basis facts of the Bahá'í Faith. Kheiralla had a series of public lectures during the first ten of which he said almost nothing about the Bahá'í Faith, but rather dwelt on Biblical prophecy and general spiritual teachings.⁷⁴ Jamál Effendi similarly appear to have taught initially on general Sufi themes only gradually introducing some of Bahá'u'lláh's more mystical and spiritual writings.
2. A secret teaching. At the end of the series of Kheiralla's lectures, which usually consisted of twelve or thirteen lectures, people were invited to accept the "Greatest Name" and only then, if they went through this stage, were they invited to a further series of private lectures at which they learned of the teachings of the religion. Similarly, Jamál Effendi chose from among those who attended his orations a small circle of people to whom he revealed the full message at private sessions.
3. Use of popular religiosity. Both Jamál Effendi and Kheiralla appear to have owed their success to a large extent to their ability to blend elements of popular religiosity into their presentation of the Bahá'í Faith. Kheiralla was able to blend elements from various apocalyptic themes that had been present in north American society since the early 19th century, as well as certain themes from the "cultic milieu". Jamál Effendi was able to tap into the Sufi element of popular religiosity in Muslim India. Both used a combination of approaching the Bahá'í teachings through popular religious themes and utilising popular means of communicating these teachings. They were successful, perhaps more successful than any subsequent Bahá'í teachers have been, at presenting the Bahá'í Faith in terms of popular religiosity.

If we examine other occasions in which there has been relatively greater success in converting large numbers of people to the Bahá'í Faith, then we can see that this theme of adapting the Bahá'í Faith to popular religiosity recurs. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that there was again the same

⁷⁴ See one person's notes on thirteen lectures in Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Bábí Religion* (Cambridge: University Press, 1918) 128-42.

level of mass teaching of the Bahá'í Faith in India that there had been in the time of Jamál Effendi. But at this time it was Hindus rather than Muslims who were converted in large numbers. Once again the combination of adapting the Bahá'í message to popular religiosity and using a medium familiar in popular religion played a part in the success of this campaign. At this time, the Bahá'í message was adapted to Hinduism by such means as avoiding the Islamic elements in the Bahá'í Faith and identifying Bahá'u'lláh with the Kalki avatar. Traditional and popular Indian methods of communication were also used such as the composition of *bhajans*, a popular religious song form.⁷⁵ At about the same time, there was an upsurge in conversions in the west. One of the main groups that became Bahá'ís were young people. Once again, the success was achieved when Bahá'ís led people to the Bahá'í teachings through the popular issues of the time and also used popular music and theatre as the means of communicating the message.

It may also be instructive to compare Jamál Effendi's methods of proclaiming the Bahá'í Faith to those of Martha Root. His bold approach to rulers and high government officials, his writing to them before his arrival in their city or calling upon them immediately after arrival, his use of high level contacts in one place to provide introductions in another, and his presentation of books to those that he called upon all resemble the methods used by Martha Root many years later.⁷⁶

In summary, then, although ideas about the success of the efforts of Jamál Effendi may have been exaggerated in certain accounts, he did nevertheless succeed in establishing small groups of Bahá'ís across a very wide area of the Indian sub-continent as well as proclaiming the Bahá'í Faith across a still wider area including central and south-east Asia. He was the first person to teach the Bahá'í Faith in these countries, whose combined populations represent more than half of the population of the world. He was the first to teach the Bahá'í Faith in India (where reside the largest number of Hindus in the world), in China (the population of which includes the largest number of Buddhists in the world) and Indonesia (the largest Muslim country in the world). He operated, however, in a potentially dangerous environment and it was therefore necessary for him to use a gradual method of introducing people

⁷⁵ William Garlington, "Bahá'í Bhajans," *World Order* 16.2 (Winter 1982): 43-49. Idem, "The Bahá'í Faith in Malwa," in G. A. Oddie (ed.), *Religion in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1977). Idem, "Bahá'í Conversions in Malwa," in J. R. Cole and M. Momen (eds.), *From Iran East and West* 157-185. Idem, "The Bahá'í Faith in Malwa: A Study of a Contemporary Religious Movement," unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Australian National University, 1975. Steven Garrigues, "The Bahá'í Faith in Malwa: Identity and Change Among the Urban Bahá'ís of Central India," unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Lucknow, 1975.

⁷⁶ On Martha Root, see M. R. Garis, *Martha Root, Lioness at the Threshold* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983).

to the Bahá'í Faith. His success in initiating the Bahá'í community in Burma, and to a lesser extent in India, may usefully be compared to that of Kheiralla in north America, while his success in proclaiming the Bahá'í Faith to a wide assortment of rulers and prominent figures throughout India and in central and south-east Asia may be compared with the efforts of Martha Root in other parts of the world some fifty years later.

Countries visited by Jamál Effendi

Countries where Jamál Effendi was the first Bahá'í to visit and to teach the Bahá'í Faith

(with Mírzá Huayn):

Sri Lanka

(with Sayyid Muafá Rúmí):

Burma (Myanmar)

Bangladesh

Indonesia

Thailand

(With ájí Faraju'lláh Tafrishí):

Pakistan

Tajikistan

Afghanistan

Countries where Jamál Effendi was the first to teach the Bahá'í Faith:

India

Singapore (probably first visited by Sayyid Muammad 'Alí Afnan)

Countries where Jamál Effendi may have been the first to visit and to teach the Bahá'í Faith (evidence not conclusive):

China (and Tibet)

Uzbekistan

In addition, Sayyid Muafá Rúmí appears to have been the first Bahá'í to visit and teach the Bahá'í Faith in Malaysia

Catastrophe, Armageddon and Millennium: some aspects of the Bábí–Bahá’í exegesis of apocalyptic symbolism

STEPHEN LAMBDEN

Abstract

A wide range of sometimes disturbing Abrahamic and related religious texts and traditions have warned humankind of an impending eschatological calamity or catastrophe. Additionally the sacred books of the world not only predict global catastrophe but also an ensuing millennial world peace. This paper is a preliminary consideration of selected Bábí–Bahá’í doctrines expository of apocalyptic symbolism associated with major Abrahamic religious prophecies. I will endeavour to show that many of the Bahá’í interpretations of end-time catastrophe are best viewed in their evolving historical contexts.

A brief consideration will be made of the war of the last days referred to in the canonical Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation, as the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:14). A cursory examination of dimensions of the catastrophe and ensuing millennial peace by the central figures of the Bahá’í religion will be set down. For several decades, some Bahá’ís have been troubled by expectations of concrete global catastrophe. Awareness of the fact that Bábí–Bahá’í sources anticipate numerous “catastrophes” with aspects that have already been outwardly realised or spiritually interpreted is not widespread in the contemporary Bahá’í community. On occasion, both the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh undertook a courageous demythologization of apocalyptic scenarios anticipated in Biblical and Islamic scripture and tradition. It is the Bahá’í belief that the “catastrophe” or the apocalyptic upheaval of the last days has very largely if not completely been realised in the troubled yet brilliant 20th century.

The catastrophe

The sacred books of the world predict both global catastrophe and world peace. Bahá’í scripture anticipates, extends, and interprets such prophecies; sometimes literally, sometimes spiritually, and occasionally in both these ways. These writings speak about an imminent catastrophic calamity or “apocalyptic upheaval.” They predict the subsequent appearance of universal peace; an imminent secular “lesser peace” (*sul al-akbar*; lit., “greater peace”)

and a future a spiritual world order of Bahá'u'lláh, the “most great peace” (*sul al-a'am*).

In the Bahá'í view, the coming of peace will be gradual, and to some extent realised in the 20th century. In the light of the Bahá'í teachings it is possible to argue convincingly that with the end of the cold war and the increasing trend towards disarmament, international co-operation, and globalization that the “lesser peace” has all but been realised. Yet this secular, politically oriented “lesser peace” is not comparable to that peace which is spiritually rooted; the future truly millennial peace which is more than a virtual cessation of many intractable global conflicts. Realistic about the establishment of global, political peace, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá predicted multi-national disarmament. The *Montreal Star* of 11 September 1912 reported that he had stated that nations would be *forced* into peace in the 20th century. Humanity would sicken over the cost of warmongering.¹ Prior to the unfoldment of that secular disarmament which is the “lesser peace,” varieties of “calamity” or “catastrophe” are clearly anticipated in Bábí-Bahá'í scripture. It is clear, however, that Bahá'í scripture does not expect or support a literal apocalyptic collapse of the cosmos or an absolute “end of the world.”² Scriptural writings that appear to suggest this possibility are not interpreted literally.

It is the Bahá'í position that the appearance of a new religion is itself a revolutionary, a “catastrophic” religio-political event; a “Day of the Lord” and “Day of Judgement” which causes the “limbs of mankind to quake.”³ It precipitates inner and ultimately outer change; an end to existing “global disorder” through the appearance, in the language of the apocalypse, of “a new heaven and a new earth.” The advent of a new religion involves new, revolutionary ways of thought and action. The religion which culminates in “peace” comes also as a civilization changing “sword,” “woe” or “catastrophe.”⁴

The nature of the diverse eschatological catastrophes predicted in the sacred books of the world are too numerous and complex to be detailed here; including, for example, the disruption of the cosmos, earthquakes, eclipses, wars, famine, and pestilence, and so on. Neither can their multi-faceted Bábí-Bahá'í interpretations be set down in detail. The following few notes attempt

¹ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *‘Abdu'l-Bahá in Canada* (Montreal: NSA of the Bahá'ís of Canada, 1962) 34–35.

² Cf. Letter of Shoghi Effendi dated July 5 1947 cited in H. Hornby (comp.) *Lights of Guidance* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 3rd ed., 1994) Para. 437.

³ Bahá'u'lláh, *Ishrqt in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978) 58/ trans. 118.

⁴ In explaining the words “the second woe is past; and behold the third woe cometh quickly” (Rev. 11:14), ‘Abdu'l-Bahá cited Ezekiel 2:3 and reckoned as “woes” the three successive religions of Muhammad (Islam), the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh (see *Some Answered Questions* [Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981] chapter XI on Rev 11:14).

to summarise some key Abrahamic religious predictions of eschatological
“catastrophe.”

Hebrew Bible and the New Testament

An apocalyptic “end” or cosmic catastrophe is predicted or presupposed in numerous texts within the Hebrew Bible. It is one of the senses of the (eschatological) expression “Day of the Lord [YHWH = Yahweh].” The prophet Zephaniah (fl. late 7th cent. BCE) boldly proclaimed that YHWH would destroy “all the inhabitants of the earth” on the “Day of his wrath” (see Zeph 1:7ff). Isaiah had it that the whole world would be punished for its evil on the “Day of the Lord” (Isa. 13:6f). A horrendous catastrophe is envisaged in Zech 13:8-9 which reads,

In the whole land, says the Lord, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, “They are my people”; and I will say, “The Lord is my God.”⁵

According to Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus’ disciples asked him, “What will be the sign of your [Jesus’] coming and of the *end of the world*.”⁶ The Greek here was only loosely and inadequately translated in the authorised version as “the end of the world.” More recent Christian translations such as the revised standard version have “close [completion] of the age” or something similar. This is not to say, however, that a multitude of apocalyptic predictions presupposing a collapse of the cosmos and an end to existing civilization do not exist in the New Testament (e.g. in the *Apocalypse*) and elsewhere in the Bible. These predictions are generally understood by Bahá’ís to refer to the “end” (=completion) or fulfilment of an era or religious cycle.

Such apocalyptic events as the darkening of the “sun” and the “moon” (Mk. 13:24b=Matt 24:29; cf. Lk. 21:25), the qur’anic reference to the “conjoining of the sun and the moon” (Q. 75:9) or according to Islamic traditions “the rising of the sun in the west” are not interpreted wholly literally in Bábí-Bahá’í scriptural texts. The apocalyptic implications of such words of Jesus as “heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away” (Mk. 13:31 = Matt. 24:35 = Lk. 21:33) are likewise not interpreted literally in Bahá’í sacred writings.

⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is reported to have interpreted this text referring to the fact that a “great disturbance,” a “great catastrophe” or terrible “calamity” will happen in the world after the 1335 day [=year] period referred to in Daniel 12:12 have passed (cf. Ruth White, *‘Abdu’l-Baha and the Promised Age* [J. J. Little and Ives 1927] 174-5).

⁶ Authorised Version [=King James version]; Gk. = *sunteleias tou aionos*, Matt 24:3 + synoptic parallels.

Qur'án & adíth

The central importance of Muslim belief in the twin concepts of “God and the Last Day” (*Allh wa'-l yawm al-khír[ah]*) is constantly enunciated (20+ times) in the Qur'án.⁷ There are several references to an eschatological “calamity” in this holy book (revealed piecemeal between c. 610 and 632 CE). One of the brief (11 verse) Meccan sras (Q. 101 cf. 13:31; 69:4) is entitled *al-Qr'ia*, which has been variously translated, “the striking” (Sale); “the smiting” (Rodwell); “the calamity” (Pickthall) and “the clatterer” (Arberry); the word has connotations of “sudden misfortune” and eschatological judgement.⁸ In the Qur'anic “Sra of the Resurrection” (*al-qiyma*; 75:24-5) we read, “Upon that day faces shall be radiant gazing upon their Lord; and upon that day faces shall be scowling, thou mightest think the Calamity (*fírah*) has been wreaked on them.”⁹ Another verse contains an important reference to the *mmah* or “great catastrophe” as Arberry rendered it,

Then, when the Great Catastrophe (*mmah*) comes upon that day
when man shall remember what he has striven... (79:34)¹⁰

Both Sunní and Shí'í sources contain material bearing upon end-time catastrophe. In Muhammad Báqir Majlísi's *Bíar al-anwr* (“Seas of Lights”; a massive Shí'í encyclopaedia quoted quite frequently by both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh) there exists a section based upon texts of the Qur'án, commentary and various traditions of the Twelver Imáms entitled, “The blowing into the Trumpet and the destruction of the world (*fan' al-duny*) (cf. Q. 55:26 below) and that every soul shall taste death.”¹¹

The theme of the “destruction of the world” (*fan' al-duny*) is closely related to the exegesis of Qur'án 55:26:

All that dwells on earth shall perish (*fní* cf. *faná'*), yet still abides
(*yabqa*) the Face of thy Lord (*wajh rabbika*), possessed of
Majesty and Glory (*dhu'l-jall wa'l-ikrm*).

⁷ See Hanna Kassis, *A Concordance of the Qur'an* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1983), 130ff.

⁸ Ian Netton, *A Popular Dictionary of Islam* (London: Curzon Press, 1992) 203.

⁹ Trans. A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1983) 619.

¹⁰ In due course we shall see that certain of Bahá'u'lláh's references to the “catastrophe” utilise this Qur'anic *hapax legomenon* (unique term).

¹¹ *dhá'iq al-mawt* Q. x 3 = 3:185[2]; 21:35[36]; 29:57.

Bahá'í interpretations

Biblical and Qur'anic (Arabic) "catastrophe" terminology is utilised, extended, and interpreted in Bábí-Bahá'í scripture. As I will show interpretations offered in Bahá'í texts include the conference of Badasht, the religion of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh's proclamation to the kings and rulers of his time, and the two world wars of the 20th century.

The "catastrophe" predicted in the "Sra of the Terror" (Q. 56) and elsewhere, for example, was understood to be the revolutionary 1848 Bábí conference of Badasht at which the Báb's claim to be the promised Qá'im was announced and the Islámic law formally abrogated. This was tantamount to an apocalyptic "catastrophe." 'Abdu'l-Bahá in his *Memorials of the Faithful* mentions Bahá'u'lláh's suggestion that the Sra *al-wqi'ah* ("the Terror", "Inevitable") be read at this time.¹² This srah begins,

When *al-wqi'ah* ("the Terror") descends... abasing, exalting,
when the earth shall be rocked and the mountains crumbled, and
become a dust scattered, and you shall be in three bands –
Companions of the Right (O Companions of the Right!),
Companions of the Left (O Companions of the Left!) and the
Outstrippers (*sbiqn*) those are they brought nigh the Throne, in
the Gardens of Delight. (Q. 56, trans. Arberry)

Shoghi Effendi wrote in *God Passes By*, "On that memorable day the 'Bugle' mentioned in the Qur'án was sounded (*nuqrih- ' nqr*), the 'stunning trumpet blast' was loudly raised (*nafkhih- ' r*), and the 'Catastrophe' (*mmih- ' kubr*) came to pass."¹³

In his *Law-i Ishrqt*, Bahá'u'lláh refers to the Báb as "the Harbinger of His Great Revelation which hath caused the limbs of all mankind (*faqr' al-umam*) to quake."¹⁴ The religion of the Báb was a revolutionary phenomenon; a kind of "catastrophe" preparatory to the emergence of the Bahá'í Faith. A cursory examination of the brief but turbulent history of the Bábí religion bears this out.

There are many texts within the writings of the central figures of the Bahá'í religion and its authoritative and secondary interpreters that in one way or another bear upon 19th and 20th century "catastrophe[s]." The relevant passages are best viewed chronologically and in historical context – a task that

¹² *Memorials of the Faithful* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1975) 201.

¹³ *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970) p. 33; Per. trans. *Mavaddat*, p. 96.

¹⁴ R-'-D VII = "tremble!"; *Majm'a az alw-i jaml-i aqdas-i abh'* (Cairo: 1338/ [1919-] 1920, rep. Wilmette, 137BE/1980) 580; *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 102.

can only be summarily attempted or sketched here.

The writings of Bahá'u'lláh

A fairly large number of Bahá'u'lláh's writings bear directly or indirectly upon the theme of latter-day "catastrophe". It is stated that various of his revelatory "Tablets" (*alw*) as expressions of the creative Word are tantamount encapsulations of end-time, catastrophic "trumpet blasts" precipitating revolutionary "terror" and calamitous change. Certain of his major *Tablets to the Kings*, for example, were accorded suggestive qur'anic rooted titles by Bahá'u'lláh himself. In a Tablet to Nabíl [-i Zarandi?], which at one point dwells on the theme of his revelations in the light of end-time "judgement" or "catastrophe", he states that,

Each one of them [the "Tablets to the Kings"] hath been designated by a special name. The first hath been named "The Rumbling [Shout]" [*al-aya*, Q. 54:31... etc], the second "The [Catastrophic] Blow" [*al-Qri'a*, Q. 101] the third "The Inevitable [Calamity]" [*al-qqah*, Q. 69], the fourth, "The Plain" [*al-Shirah*, Q. 79:14], the fifth "The Catastrophe" [*al-mmah*, Q. 79:34] and the others, "The Stunning Trumpet Blast," [*al-khkhhah*, Q. 80:33] "The Near Event," [*al-zulfah*, Q. 67:27] "The Great Terror," [*al-faza' al-akbar*, Q. 21:103] "The Trumpet," [*al-r*, Q. 6:73...] "The Bugle," [*al-Nqr*, Q. 74:8] and their like...¹⁵

It is of particular interest to note that Bahá'u'lláh, alluding to Q. 79:34 in various of his writings of the late 'Akká period cites an earlier (c. 1869/70?) tablet – dating to around the time of the universal proclamation to the kings and rulers of the earth – containing "perspicuous verses"¹⁶ in which the following line is contained:

Hath the Catastrophe (*mmah*) come to pass? Say: Yea, by the

¹⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *Iqtidrt va chand law-i dígr* (n.p. [Bombay] 1310/1892-3) 298, trans. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980) 46, cf. *God Passes By* 212 + Per. trans. *Mavaddat* 425). I have supplied the transliteration and the qur'anic references. Compare with the tablets as arranged by Bahá'u'lláh in his *rat al-haykal*, (1) Tablet to the Pope [Pius IX]; 2) Tablet to Napoleon III [2nd Tablet]; 3) = Tablet to the Czar of Russia; 4) = Tablet to Queen Victoria; 5) Tablet to Náir al-Dín Sháh; 6) Srat al-Rá'is, etc. Later in this same tablet, Bahá'u'lláh addresses Nabíl informing him that it is his eschatological "Announcement (al-nidá)" which has caused the heavens to be "cleft asunder", the "mountains" crushed to dust and the "Great Terror" (*al-faza' al-akbar*, Q. 21:103) been made manifest (see *Iqtidarat* 300).

¹⁶ *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 117-119, and *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971) 131-4.

Lord of Lords!¹⁷

It is indicated in Bábí-Bahá'í scripture that at the moment just prior to the declaration of the Manifestation of God when none have yet grasped his purpose or come to faith, purposeful “creation” ceases to be; all but his Being, “the Face of God” are annihilated. There follows mystic “recreation” through the Divine Grace and through the assent to faith of his disciples and followers.¹⁸

In this connection it is also worth noting that Bahá'u'lláh specifically stated that power had been taken from “two ranks amongst men: kings and ecclesiastics”,¹⁹ both secular and religious sources of authority. In *The Promised Day is Come* (1941), Shoghi Effendi reckoned the century from the 1840s towards the 1940s was “one of the most *cataclysmic* periods in the annals of mankind” as far as the “fortunes of royalty are concerned.”²⁰

As early as 1858 in his 63rd Persian Hidden Word – the only one specifically addressed to the “peoples of the [earth] world” [*big'ay ahl-i ar*] – Bahá'u'lláh refers to an “unforseen” (*n-gahní* = “suddenly”; “unexpectedly”; “unawares”) “calamity” (*bal[']*=“trial”; “tribulation”) and an “grievous retribution” (*'iqb-i 'aimí* =[infliction of punishment]) awaiting humankind on account of its misdeeds.

In a well-known extract from a Persian tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to Muhammad Ibrahím Khalíl-i Qazvíní dating to around 1878 CE²¹ it is stated that,

The world is in travail (*munqalab* = lit. “turned upside down”) and its agitation (*inqilb*= lit. “overthrow”, “alteration”) waxeth day by day. Its face is turned toward waywardness and unbelief. Such shall be its plight that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly. Its perversity will long continue. And when the appointed hour is come, there shall suddenly appear that which shall cause the limbs (lit. “flanks of the body”) of mankind (*faqr' al-'lam*) to quake (“tremble”). Then, and only then, will the [Divine] Standard be unfurled (lit. “the signs, banners [*al-a'lm*] be lifted up”), and the Nightingale of Paradise (lit. *'andil* =

¹⁷ *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 67; see Qur'án 79:34 above.

¹⁸ See Arabic and Persian Bayans on “death” and “resurrection.”

¹⁹ Cited in *Promised Day* 20.

²⁰ *Promised Day* 49. My emphasis.

²¹ Shawwál 1925 AH; see *Bahá'í World* (Haifa, Bahá'í World Centre, 1920) 1:37; = AQA 1:21-2, trans. *Gleanings* LXI:118.

“nightingales”) warble its melody.²²

In the *Advent of Divine Justice* (1939)²³ and at the beginning of *The Promised Day is Come* (1941)²⁴ and elsewhere, Shoghi Effendi cites various apocalyptic prophecies from miscellaneous tablets of Bahá'u'lláh;

The time for the destruction of the world and its people hath arrived (*hangm fan 'yi 'lam va ahl-i n rasíd amad*).

The hour is approaching when the most great convulsion (*inqilb-i akbar*) will have appeared.

Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead.

By Myself! The day is approaching when We will have rolled up the world and all that is therein, and spread out a new Order in its stead.

The day is approaching when its [civilization's] flame (*nr*) will devour the cities, when the tongue of Grandeur will proclaim: “The Kingdom is God's, the Almighty, the All-Praised (*al-mulk li-lhí al-ái al-amíd*).”²⁵

Such passages could be greatly multiplied. Among other things, as we shall see, Bahá'is believe that these texts prophesy the wars of the 20th century and beyond as well as possible apocalyptic upheavals. At this point some further Bahá'í interpretation[s] of “catastrophe” and of the “battle of Armageddon” can be sketched.

The battle of Armageddon

One of the expressions indicative of end-time “catastrophe” as final conflagration, unique to the New Testament Book of Revelation, is the battle “at the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon” (Rev. 16:16) which is a “battle of the great day of God, the Almighty” (16:14). The loose, conflated English transliteration of the Greek [*h*]ar'-mageden, “Armageddon” (so AV

²² *Gleanings* 83/tr.118.

²³ *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969) 68.

²⁴ *Promised Day* 2f., 17.

²⁵ *Advent* 166 and *Promised Day* 3; *ibid.*; *Promised Day* 17; *ibid.*; *Advent* 68.

[KJV]) is most probably correctly read as *Har-magedon* (NRSV; cf. the ancient mss. readings), the place-name of the final eschatological conflict. In "Hebrew" this signifies (an unknown) "mountain of Megiddo" (cf. LXX Zech 12:11 = *Ma[e]geddo*). Megiddo is, in fact, the name of an ancient city (ruined since the 4th Cent. BCE). It is now but a 70 foot mound (hardly a mountain) known in Arabic as *Tell el-Mutesellim* ("the Tell of the Governor") located 60 miles north of Jerusalem in the western section of the Jezreel (= Gk. Esdraelon) valley; more or less at the foot of or just 7 miles from the southern end of Mt. Carmel.

Armageddon, understood as "Mount Megiddo," is now not infrequently identified with Mount Carmel. E. Lohmeyer (d. 1946, a German commentator on the apocalypse), for example, reckoned that Armageddon (= Har-magedon) should be translated "Megiddo range" and signify Mt. Carmel.²⁶ Many others have thought similarly though it should be admitted that the philological sense and geographical meaning of Armageddon remains something of a mystery. The Biblical mention of Megiddo very likely indicates something geographically near Mount Carmel.²⁷

Having brilliantly and succinctly reviewed the complicated theories of the past, Jon Paulien writes in the 1990 *Anchor Bible Dictionary* entry "Armageddon" that none of the many theories "preclude the possibility that the author of Revelation saw elements of the ideological battle on Mount Carmel as decisive in the final battle between good and evil."²⁸ He further writes, "while Megiddo was not a mountain, it wasn't a valley either – it was located on an elevation overlooking the Plain of Jezreel... Since the city was located at the foot of the Carmel range, 'mountain if Megiddo' could easily be a reference to Mount Carmel (1Kgs. 18:19, 20; 2Kgs. 2:25; 4:25). It was on Mount Carmel that fire was called down to prove that Yahweh was the true God (cf. Rev. 13:13,14). It was there that the false prophets were defeated (cf. Rev. 16:13-16)..."²⁹

It is also fascinating to note that one of the Qumran texts ("Dead Sea Scrolls"), part of a fragmentary commentary (*peshar*) on texts from the book of the prophet Isaiah (4Q161 or 4QpIsa^a), seems to relate the messianic implications of Isaiah 11 and the defeat of the enemy of the last days referred to by means of the cipher "Kittim" (= inhabitants of Kition, a Phoenician

²⁶ Cf. Jeremias in Kittel, Gerhard and Gerhard Friedrich (eds. trans. G.W. Bromiley), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Vol. I (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987) 1:468; Massingberde Ford, *Revelation* (Anchor Bible vol. 38) (New York: Doubleday, 1975) 263.

²⁷ Cf. W. H. Shea, "The Location and Significance of Armageddon in Rev. 16:16," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* (Berrien Springs, MI.) 18 (1980): 152-162.

²⁸ *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 1:395.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

colony on Cyprus³⁰) indicating Greeks, or Romans;

...[The interpretation of the] decree concerns the coming end of days.... [trem]bles when he [the Messiah?] ascends from the vale of Accho [= Akká'] to wage war against...³¹

Though the text and meaning of this fragment is far from clear it has been argued that “We must therefore think of the Messiah landing at Acco (Ptolemais) as the nearest point of entry to the NT battlefield of Armageddon.”³²

Armageddon as world war

On a number of occasions ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke of Armageddon in connection with the “Great War” of 1914-1918. In an address delivered at Stanford University in October 1912 he is reported to have stated,

We are on the eve of the battle of Armageddon, referred to in the 16th chapter of Revelation. The time is two years hence, when only a spark will set aflame the whole of Europe. The social unrest in all countries, the growing religious skepticism antecedent to the millennium are already here. Only a spark will set aflame the whole of Europe as is prophesied in the verses of Daniel and in the Book [Rev.] of John....³³

The first world war initiated something of a concrete “Armageddon.” In a sense, the “Armageddon” of the first world war helped topple the Ottoman Turkish powers which had imprisoned Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (whom it planned to assassinate) and inhibited the spread of the religion they championed. Interestingly, a military manoeuvre associated with the plain of Armageddon on 19 September 1918 ensured the safety of the then head of the Bahá’í religion (‘Abdu’l-Bahá) who himself often visited the “Mount of

³⁰ G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Penguin Books, n.d.) 28.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 267.

³² John Allegro, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 75/3 (1956): 177. For a recent partly alternative reading and interpretation see F. G. Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scolls Translated* (2nd ed, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996) 186, 484-5. It is of interest to note here that a Latter-Day-Saint (“Mormon”) commentator has written that Armageddon may be “a symbolic representation of worldwide conflict centered in this [the Megiddo, loosely Mt. Carmel] area” (D.H. Ludlow, (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992) vol. 1:67.

³³ See further *Star of the West* VII/9 (August 20th 1916): 85; Masson, “The Bahai Movement – Is it the coming world religion,” *Helena Daily Independent* (February 2nd 1919) cited in *Star of the West* X/3 (April 28th 1919) + *Reality Magazine* IV/no.II (Nov. 1921).

Megiddo" (Mt. Carmel). In 1920 General Allenby (who came to be entitled Viscount Allenby of Megiddo and Felixstowe) and his wife were taken by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí (near 'Akká, not far from Mt. Carmel).³⁴ In his *God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi, summed up the effects of the "outcome" of world war I as "that tremendous struggle" in Palestine, yielded the complete liberation of "the Heart and Centre of the [Bahá'í] Faith" from Turkish yoke.³⁵

For Bahá'ís, theories associating "Armageddon" and Mt. Carmel are of great theological interest since the Bahá'í world centre and certain sacred shrines are situated on this mountain. It could be argued from the Bahá'í writings that the "battle of Armageddon" has several senses; a semi-literalistic significance and a spiritual or transcendentalised meaning. The literal sense is related in Bahá'í sources to concrete 20th century warfare. A non-literal "Armageddon" is also expressed in the varieties of anti-Bahá'í persecutions; in concrete and "theological" attacks upon or controversies within this religion.

Since Megiddo is not far distant from the foot of Mt. Carmel, it could also be taken to be indicative of the Mt. Carmel-centered Bahá'í religion, "the Heart and Centre of the Faith"³⁶ which is engaged in a spiritual battle of Armageddon ("Mt. Carmel") against the forces of irreligion. Observing a regiment of soldiers from his hotel window whilst in Stuttgart Germany in early April 1913, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have said,

The Bahá'í Grand Army consist of the invisible angels of the Supreme Concourse [*al-mal' al-a'l*]. Our swords are the words of love and life. Our armaments are the invisible armaments of Heaven. We are fighting against the forces of darkness. O my soldiers, my beloved soldiers! Foward! Foward! Have no fear of defeat; do not have failing hearts. Our supreme commander is Bahá'u'lláh. From the heights of glory he is directing the dramatic engagement. He commands us! Rush foward! Rush foward! Show the strength of your arms. Ye shall scatter the forces of ignorance. Your war confers life; their war brings death. Your war is the cause of the illumination of all mankind. Your war means victory upon victory. Their war is defeat upon defeat...³⁷

³⁴ H. Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1971) 444.

³⁵ *God Passes By* 304-5.

³⁶ *God Passes By* 304.

³⁷ *Star of the West* VII/16: 157, translit. corrected.

Catastrophe, Armageddon, and Millennium 93

The diffusion of the Bahá'í teachings is not infrequently spoken about in "militaristic" terms; in terms of an Armageddon-type conflict of "light" and "darkness." Before the first world war, Abdu'l-Bahá foresaw the victory of the power of truth; "For at the end the illumination of the Kingdom will overwhelm the darkness of the world..."³⁸

On another occasion he reckoned that,

The darkness of error that hath enveloped the East and the West is, in this most great cycle, battling with the light of Divine Guidance. Its swords and its spears are very sharp and pointed; its army keenly bloodthirsty.³⁹

Certain of Shoghi Effendi's letters reflecting upon the challenges accompanying the spread of the Bahá'í religion use the language of an apocalyptic battle. Echoing the Armageddon scenario he, with almost Churchillian rhetoric, wrote the following in 1947 in "The Challenging Requirements of the Present Hour":

The stage is set. The hour is propitious. The signal is sounded. Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual battalions are moving into position. The initial clash between the forces of darkness and the army of light ... is being registered by the denizens of the Abhá Kingdom ["celestial worlds"]. The Author of the Plan that has set so titanic an enterprise in motion is Himself mounted at the head of these battalions, and leads them on to capture the cities of mens' hearts.⁴⁰

In a cable of 5 June 1957 Shoghi Effendi drew attention to the fact that horrendous events and anti-Bahá'í activity foreshadowed the "dire contests" predicted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá which were destined to "range the Army of Light against the forces of darkness, both secular and religious."⁴¹

Such apocalyptic and millennial terminology, such militaristic language rooted in the Bible and the Qur'án is not uncommon in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. In spreading the Bahá'í teachings, Bahá'ís believe that they are working for the establishment of the "Kingdom of God" on earth "as it is in heaven" (to cite the Lord's Prayer; cf. Mk. 8:38; Matt

³⁸ *Star of the West* I/10 (1910): 1-2.

³⁹ Cited in *Advent* 5.

⁴⁰ *Citadel of Faith* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1965) 26.

⁴¹ Cited in Universal House of Justice, *The Ongoing March of the Faith* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974) 3.

16:27; Lk 29:6, *Bahá'í World* 5:98). The “people of Bahá” as Bahá'u'lláh referred to his followers, strive both indirectly for the “lesser peace” and more distantly and directly for the “most great peace.” In many of his letters Shoghi Effendi counselled Bahá'ís to spread the unitative message of Bahá'u'lláh; not to obtain a privileged place in an exclusivist “heaven” but in order to shift humanity away from the consequences of its sometimes materialistic, racist and divisive ways.

An Armageddon scenario has continued after world war I. This terrible war could be viewed as having had continuing ramifications on into world war II and beyond. Shoghi Effendi saw world war I as a “terrible conflict, the *first stage* in a titanic convulsion long predicted by Bahá'u'lláh...”⁴² As early as 18 October 1927, in a letter to the national assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, in the course of surveying world trends and bemoaning the post-war nationalism and rejection of a “world super-state”, he anticipated world war II when he stated that “another deadly encounter”, a “cataclysm” that must ultimately hasten “the approaching era of universal and lasting peace” will come about.⁴³

In a letter addressed to the national spiritual assembly of the United States and Canada a year or so before the outbreak of world war II (dated 5 July 1938), Shoghi Effendi reckoned the years ahead “pregnant” in the light of “...The twin processes of internal disintegration and external chaos” which were being “accelerated” daily and “inexorably moving towards a climax.” Clearly predicting world war II, he wrote that, “The rumblings that must precede the eruption of those forces that must cause ‘the limbs of humanity to quake’ can already be heard...” Reference was made to biblical terminology when he further stated that ‘... The time of the end’, ‘the latter years’, as foretold in the Scriptures, are at long last upon us. The Pen of Bahá'u'lláh, the voice of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, have time and again, insistently and in terms unmistakable, warned an unheeding humanity of impending disaster...”⁴⁴

Shoghi Effendi wrote *The Advent of Divine Justice* in 1939 at the time of the outbreak of the world war II. This terrible war is referred to in its opening lines as “A tempest, unprecedented in its violence, unpredictable in its course” and “catastrophic in its immediate effects.”⁴⁵ That *Hidden Word* (Persian No.

42 *God Passes By* 305. My emphasis.

43 *Bahá'í Administration* (5th rev. ed. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1968) 145.

44 *Messages to America* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1947) 13-14, cited in *Lights of Guidance* 442.

45 *Advent* 3. This war was viewed by the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith as a “great and mighty wind of God”; a “judgement of God” (*Advent* 4); “a retributory calamity and an act of holy and supreme discipline”; “at once a visitation from God and a cleansing process for all mankind”. It was viewed theologically by Shoghi Effendi as something “unimaginably glorious in its ultimate consequences” (*Advent* 3-4).

63, see above) mentioning an “unforseen calamity” and a “grievous retribution” was cited in this connection.⁴⁶ In a communication of Shoghi Effendi dated 13 December 1941, world war II was clearly identified as the “most great convulsion” prophesied throughout the ages,

[The] most great convulsion envisaged by [the] Prophets from Isaiah to Bahá'u'lláh, catastrophic in violence, planetary in range [is] assailing, at long last, [the] predominating nations [of the] Asiatic [and] American continents.⁴⁷

The two world wars do not, in Shoghi Effendi's viewpoint, close the period of apocalyptic “calamity.” In a letter to an individual Bahá'í dated 8 January 1949, he reckoned that, in the light of the continuing waywardness of humanity, it was “too late to avert catastrophic trials” and anticipated “still more violent upheaval and agony.”⁴⁸ Later that same year he stated that “we do not know what form the immediate future will take, anywhere” and mentioned that “great suffering will be experienced.”⁴⁹ Then also on 21 November 1949, Shoghi Effendi's viewpoint was expressed as follows, “... We have no indication of exactly what nature the [coming] *apocalyptic upheaval* will be; it might be another war.”⁵⁰ According to a letter written on his behalf in 1954, he “has never stated how far-reaching the effects of a future war will be, or what other catastrophes may accompany it or follow it.”⁵¹ On 19 July 1956, he stated that “... the condition that the world is in is bringing many issues to a head. It would be perhaps impossible to find a nation or people not in a state of crisis today. The materialism, the lack of true religion and the consequent baser forces in human nature which are being released, have brought the whole world to the brink of probably the greatest crisis it has ever faced or will have to face.”⁵²

A variety of possible apocalyptic scenarios were foreseen by Shoghi Effendi in the light of international affairs and the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. While most notably in the late 1940s and early 1950s he both wrote and spoke of terrible, cataclysmic trials to afflict humanity and

46 *Advent* 5.

47 *Bahá'í News* 150 (Jan 1942): 3.

48 *Light of Guidance* 431.

49 Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated 5 Nov 1949 cited in *Light of Guidance* 433.

50 Letter cited in *Bahá'í News* 230/1 (April 1950). My emphasis.

51 Cited in *Light of Guidance* 130.

52 From a letter was written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, dated 19 July 1956 cited in *Bahá'í News* 307 (Sep. 1956): 1-2.

destabilize humankind,⁵³ he nonetheless articulated a variety of possible futures which may or may not be realised. Future events depend on interrelated, complex, numerous and often all but unfathomable factors; such as, for example, the “positive” and “negative” state of humanity (ever-changing segments of global society), that of the constantly evolving Bahá'í and other religious communities and the inscrutable operations of the divine providence. Futurology and “prophecy” involves multiple possible futures. A third possibly nuclear world war, for example, is not necessarily anticipated in the Bahá'í writings. Scores of conflicts currently afflict humanity along with many tokens of international co-operation and reconciliation. Apocalyptic trials have afflicted humanity for most of the 20th century; a century of “light” (progress) as well as a century of terrible “darkness” (calamity). Current and increasing globalization, is furthermore, both renewing and destabilising.

The basic purpose of whatever does or does not comes to pass is, from the Bahá'í point of view, viewed positively. Human history is fundamentally for the furtherance of the unity in diversity of humankind. It has been stated that it is often through cataclysmic difficulties that, “humanity can and must be welded into some form of political unity – such as a World Federal State.”⁵⁴

Bahá'í scripture, then, has a realistic appraisal of “catastrophe” when it focuses upon the major wars and continuing socio-economic and other disruptions of the 20th century. It recognises various underlying dimensions of “catastrophe”; such as human activities revolving around materialism; racism and excessive nationalism. The decadent state of aspects of contemporary society may be seen to be an aspect of the end-time “catastrophe.” Humanity is only now beginning to see itself as an international community in need of a world order and internationally regulated justice. “Lesser peace” secular co-operation among nations and peoples is beginning. Whether or not the many “catastrophes” currently afflicting humanity will precipitate yet another major war is something that cannot be predicted. Bahá'ís are certainly advised not to dwell on such a possibility and remain confident of the bright millennial future of mankind, the coming “most great peace.”

⁵³ One of the most concrete apocalyptic predictions of Shoghi Effendi is contained in the letter of 28 July 1954 printed in *Citadel of Faith* 126. There a possible Soviet (nuclear?) bombing of racist American cities seems to be anticipated. Certain 20th century Bahá'í factions were distinctly apocalyptic in their orientation. Details cannot be gone in to here though reference, for example, might be made to R.W. Balch et. al., “When Bombs Drop, Reactions to Disconfirmed Prophecy in a Millennial Sect,” *Sociological Perspectives* 26 (1983): 137-158, and “Fifteen Years of Failed Prophecy, Coping with Cognitive Dissonance in a Bahá'í sect,” in *Millennium, Messiahs and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*, ed. Thomas Robbins et al. (New York, London: Routledge, 1997) 73-90.

⁵⁴ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, dated 5 September 1954 cited in *Lights* 130.

The millennium

Among other things, *millennium* (Latin *mille* = 1,000+ *annus* = “year”) means “a thousand years”: that thousand year or millennial period of peace which is often thought to follow the return of Christ or a final catastrophic event. An English equivalent to the term “millennium” is “chiliasm” which derives from the Greek words *chil[ia]* = “thousand” and *ete* sometimes translated *millennium* in Rev 20:1ff. It is, in fact, only in Revelation 20:1-6 that the millennium is explicitly mentioned in the Bible as a period which follows the virtual destruction of evil (see Rev. 20:2). It presupposes the reign of the returned Christ and is usually thought to precede the realisation of the “new heaven” and “new earth” prophesied in Revelation 21:1ff.

The historical placing of the millennium in the complex, multi-faceted eschatological scheme of events has led to a number of theories three of which have come to be labelled as: 1) premillennialism, 2) amillennialism and 3) postmillennialism. These varieties of millenarianism all have devout evangelical adherents today and may be briefly and sketchily summed as follows:

1) **Premillennialism** – the belief that the return of Christ will be preceded by various “signs” including wars, famines and earthquakes and followed by the “end of the world”, the “resurrection of the dead” and an ensuing millennial peace and righteousness. This view was dominant in the early Christian centuries being articulated by Papias (d.c. 130?), Justyn Martyr (d. c. 165), Irenaeus (d. c. 190) and Lactantius (d. 320) and later cautiously and variously revived by a number of Protestant reformers.

2) **Amillennialism** – the conviction that human affairs will not culminate in full millennial peace before the “end of the world” and second coming of Christ on earth. The millennium of Rev. 20 is currently the heavenly reign of Christ and the deceased saints though a future “kingdom of God” as an earthy millennium will ultimately come about. Becoming dominant after the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine (d. 337) and championed by Augustine of Hippo (d. 430), this perspective became normative during the middle ages.

3) **Postmillennialism** – the view that the “kingdom of God” now gradually being extended and realised through Christian preaching and teaching will result in that peace which is the millennium. There then follows the return of Christ and the resurrection and final judgement. This perspective was espoused by many 19th Protestant century Christian

millennial factions.⁵⁵

Other Christians, including the erudite Origen (d. circa 254 CE), have interpreted the millennium spiritually in terms of the spiritual growth of the soul in this world and the next. This to some degree, for example, foreshadows the existentially oriented interpretation of New Testament eschatology by the great Marburg theologian Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976), in which the individual encounters the end-time not as the goal of cosmological history, but by virtue of an openness towards the future in the present.

Bahá'í interpretations of the millennium

While an originally Zoroastrian dualistic time-scheme of world eras – “This [perishable] Age” and “The [eternal] Age to Come” – is “an essential feature of apocalyptic”⁵⁶ since antiquity, the scheme of history has been divided into millennial periods from the early Christian era. On the basis of such texts as Genesis 2:2 and Psalm 90:4, six periods of 1,000 years were envisaged as being consummated by a seventh millennium, the commencement of the era of fulfilment – though there is also the notion of the “timeless new world of the eighth day” which follows a kind of “messianic sabbath millennial day.”⁵⁷ Notable is the foundational early Christian *Epistle of Barnabas* (c. 125CE?):

Notice particularly, my children, the significance of *he finished them in six days* [Gen. 2:2a]. What is meant is, that He is going to bring the world to an end in six thousand years, since with Him one day means a thousand years; witness His own saying, *Behold, a day of the Lord shall be as a thousand years* [Psalm 90:4]. Therefore, my children, in six days – six thousand years, that is – there is going to be an end to everything. After that, *he rested on the seventh day* [Gen 2:2b] indicates that when His Son [Christ] returns, He will put an end to the years of the Lawless One, pass sentence on the godless, transform the sun and moon and stars, and then, on the seventh Day, enter into His

⁵⁵ For further details see Robert G. Clouse, *The Meaning of The Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1977) 8; Massyngbearde Ford, ABD IV: 832-4; Malcolm Bull (ed.), *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

⁵⁶ See Vielhaur & Strecher in *New Testament Apocryph*, ed. E. Hennecke (2nd ed. Trowbridge: SCM Press, 1973) II: 549f.

⁵⁷ G.B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* (London: A&C Black 1966/71) 250.

true rest.⁵⁸

The Bible incorporates divergent chronological schemes. Neither in antiquity nor today has the search for a clear cut “original” chronology behind the three major manuscript traditions (Masortaic, Samaritan, Septuagint [LXX]) yielded satisfactory resolution.

The Bahá’í interpretation of the millennium is basically premillennial. Asked the questions, “When is the millennium? Will I see it?”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in one of his tablets wrote,

Concerning the one thousand years as recorded in the Book [Bible]: It signifieth the beginning of this Manifestation until the end of its predominance throughout the contingent world; because this Cause is great, its powers are growing and its signs are dazzling. It shall continue in elevation, exaltation, growth, promulgation and promotion until it shall reach the apex of its glory in one thousand years – as the Day of this Manifestation is one thousand years. Thou shalt see its conquering power, its manifest dominion, its eternal might and its everlasting glory.⁵⁹

It is thus presupposed that for Bahá’ís, the millennium began in 1260/1844 when Sayyid ‘Alí Muhammad, the Báb declared his mission to Mullá usayn, the first believer (*biqu*) and “Letter of the Living” (*al-urf al-ayy*) whose coming to faith was, symbolically speaking (see above), a millennial, collective “resurrection” of all humanity. It was also in the same year that Bahá’u’lláh became a Bábí through the instrumentality of this first Bábí believer; very possibly as a result of a perusal of a portion of the Báb’s first major work, the *Qayyym al-asm’* (mid. 1844 CE).

When Bahá’u’lláh semi-secretly declared his mission on the outskirts of Baghdad (Iraq) in 1863, one of the key threefold aspects of this declaration, according to a Persian tablet of the ‘Akká period revealed in the name of his amanuensis (Mírzá Áqá Ján Khadim-Alláh), was his announcement that no succeeding Manifestation of God would appear for 1000 [solar] years.⁶⁰ The Bábí-Bahá’í era is to extend for at least a millennium when another Messenger of God will renew this latest expression of the eternal religion of God. Hence Shoghi Effendi wrote that the “... the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh

58 Trans. M. Staniforth, *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968/75) 214.

59 *Tablets of Abdul Baha Abbas* vol. III (comp. A. R. Windust, Chicago: Bahai Publishing Society, 1919) 659-660.

60 See INBMC (Iranian National Bahá’í Manuscript Collection, 105 vols. Privately printed mid-1970s) 44:225.

will last for at least one thousand years.”⁶¹ The Bahá'í millennium, lasting for at least 1000 solar years, will mature into a future condition of global peace, justice and well-being. First there will be an imminent secular peace and later a future global spiritual peace characterised as the “most great peace.” At the conclusion of his *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* (written in 1934), Shoghi Effendi indicates that the “New World Order” of Bahá'u'lláh has as “its consummation” the advent of that “golden millennium” which he defines (alluding to Rev. 11:15) as “the Day when the kingdoms of this world shall have become the Kingdom of God Himself, the Kingdom of Bahá'u'lláh.”⁶²

The Bahá'í millennium of peace is not a naive utopian pipe-dream for it exists in embryonic form now; Bahá'í communities exist in thousands of communities internationally and strive to attain and contribute to individual and collective peace. Neither is it an era of social or spiritual perfection. Rather the Bahá'í millennium implies a greater degree of collective security, spiritual progress, and global justice and unity. It presupposes an ongoing and balanced spiritualisation of humanity. For Bahá'ís, the “millennium” is on one level a new era of prophetic fulfilment. It can indicate the long-awaited global peace symbolically reflected in, for example, the Isaianic image of the ultimately harmonious feeding activity of the “Wolf” and the “Lamb” (Isaiah 65:25; cf. 11:6a), understood to symbolise diverse “nations” led by a “little child” (Isa. 11:6b) who shall help erect – to skip testaments and indicate Bahá'í exegesis – the “New Jerusalem” (Rev. 21) of the Bahá'í Faith. In Bahá'í exegesis the “millennium” can be viewed as the global working out and establishment of those practical and spiritual principles laid down by the central figures of the Bahá'í religion.

⁶¹ *Directives from the Guardian*. Comp. by Gertrude Garrida. (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1973) 21.

⁶² From the conclusion of the extended letter of Shoghi Effendi dated 8th February 1934 and entitled *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* cited in *World Order* 157 (cf. 74).

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Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví-i Mubárák*: introduction and provisional verse translation

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Abstract

Bahá'u'lláh composed several formal poems in rhyme and meter. One of these poems, the Mathnaví-i Mubárák, concerns Bahá'u'lláh's disclosure of his station to the Bábís and to humanity. Bahá'u'lláh's Mathnaví alludes to the world-famous Mathnaví of Jalal al-Din Rumi, whose followers founded the spiritual confraternity known as the "Whirling Dervishes" (Mevleviye or Mawlaviiyah Order), which was quite active in Istanbul and Edirne during the time of Bahá'u'lláh's exile. This paper suggests the theological and rhetorical significance of Bahá'u'lláh's use of the discourse of Sufism, specifically Sunni Persian poetry; discusses the importance of Rumi among 19th century Iranians, in particular the Bábís and the Baha'is; outlines the date and circumstances of composition of Bahá'u'lláh's Mathnaví; proposes some of the factors to consider in establishing critical editions of the poems of Bahá'u'lláh; and finally theorizes about some of the aesthetic factors to consider in translating the poetry of Bahá'u'lláh. The article accompanies the first provisional translation of the poem to English, an experimental translation in blank verse.

Bahá'u'lláh and the poetic tradition

The rhetorical conventions of expository literature in Persian and Arabic call for authors to quote lines of verse, usually from a famous poet, as a means to close an argument with a flourish, point a moral, or adduce a respected authority for the view expressed. Following this tradition, particularly in his early works, Bahá'u'lláh¹ quotes from many poets, including Sanâ'i, 'Attâr,

¹ The Bahá'í community uses an official transliteration system which Shoghi Effendi, in his capacity of Guardian of the Bahá'í community, adopted in the 1920s to standardise spellings of the many Persian and Arabic terms and names being rendered into English. This transliteration system was, at that time, the academic standard, but now has fallen rather out of fashion. The Library of Congress system remains close to the Bahá'í system, though the *Encyclopedia of Islam* differs in several respects from this, as does the *Encyclopædia Iranica* and most of the major Iranian studies or middle east studies journals. The most recent transliteration norms for Persian words would more likely render Bahá'í and Bahá Alláh, but insofar as the purpose of accent marks in modern English is primarily to help readers pronounce words with which they are unfamiliar, it does not seem necessary to use

Hâfez, and especially Rumi.

Beyond the quotation of verse of earlier poets, however, Bahá'u'lláh himself composed several poems employing Sufi terminology in verse. For modern readers accustomed to free verse, the words “poem” or “poetry” or “poetic” may connote no more than a certain kind of imagery or style of language, with little or no restriction as to form. Indeed, much of Bahá'u'lláh's writing is popularly described as “poetic” or “flowery” language, drawing on tropes and images from the natural world metaphorically. In this discussion, however, the word “poetry” or “poem” has a more precise meaning. In 19th century Persian literature, free verse, as such, had not yet been invented; there was a kind of rhymed but unmetred prose, known by the technical term of *nasr-e mosajja'*, a literary device relying upon parallel cadenced phrasing and homophony, much used in the early suras of the Koran, and in most of Bahá'u'lláh's prayers and tablets. However, such cadenced rhyming prose was not considered poetry proper. Poetry (*she'r*) had a more restricted sense, denoting rhymed speech (*moqafâ*) composed in lines (*bayt* / *abyât*) following one of the established quantitative meters (*bahr* / *bohur*) and arranged according to a particular form. The major poetic forms include the couplet (*masnavi*, or in the Bahá'í system of transliteration, *Mathnavi*), the lyric (*ghazal*), the ode (*qasida*), the fragment (*qet'e*), and the quatrain (*robâ'i*).

Probably the first thing Bahá'u'lláh wrote subsequent to his revelation experience in the Siyáh Chál was just such a poem. This poem in ghazal form, “Sprinklings from the Divine Cloud,” *Rashh-i 'amá*, adopts a refrain which had been earlier utilized by the Persian poet Sâ'eb (1607-1677), who practised his art at the Moghul court of Shah Jahân and the Safavid court of Shah 'Abbâs II. Bahá'u'lláh composed another poem in the mountains of Sulaymaniyyih in Iraqi Kurdistan (some time between 1854 and 1856), “The Dove Ode” (*Qasídiy-i 'izz-i varqá'iyih*), this one in Arabic (though with a Persian title) and expressly modelled on the famous “Magnificent Ode rhyming in the letter T” (*tâ'yyat al-kubrâ*) by Ibn al-Fârid (1181-1235). Provisional translations of both of these poems of Bahá'u'lláh have been

accent marks for words like these, which, I would argue, have become domesticated in English and should be rendered as Bahauallah and Bahai.

In this article, however, the names of works by Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb, as well as the personal names of individuals known from Bahá'í history books are given according to the official transliteration system, for the ease of readers looking for further references in Bahá'í secondary literature (with the exception that I do not underline digraphs or underdot letters, hence you will find here: sh for sh, th for th, t for , etc., and I do not give the dash after the – i of the ezâfe [*Kitâb-i Iqân* for *Kitâb-i-Iqân*]). Other Persian names, however, such as the names of Persian poets (Rumi, 'Attâr, Hâfez, Sâ'eb), are Romanized according to modern Persianist conventions. Please note that the Bahá'í spellings for Karbilá and Mihdí differ from the technically agreed upon vocalisations of Karbalá and Mahdí, but I have elected to follow the Bahá'í system here for the benefit of readers familiar with these works in Bahá'í sources.

published by Stephen Lambden and Juan Cole, respectively.²

A provisional translation of another Persian poem from the Baghdad period, *Halih*, *halih yá bishárát*, has appeared in two separate versions, the first by Stephen Lambden and other more metrical version, by Sen McGlinn.³ There are several other poems of Bahá'u'lláh, most of which date to the Baghdad period, such as two Persian odes, “The Cup Bearer of the Unseen Realm of Eternity” (*Sáqí az ghayb-i baqá*), and “Come Back and Serve the Chalice” (*Báz á va bidih jámí*).⁴ Shoghi Effendi did not translate any of Bahá'u'lláh's versified poems, and to my knowledge, with the exception of the three unofficial translations mentioned above, Bahá'u'lláh's poems have not yet been Englished.

The date of Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví-i Mubáarak*

Bahá'u'lláh's poem entitled *Mathnaví-i Mubáarak*⁵ is apparently the longest work he composed in verse, and perhaps also one of the last, though the dating of many of his books, tablets, poems and his voluminous correspondence remains rather tentative.⁶ Eshrâq-Khâvari describes Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví* among the tablets revealed during the four months spent in Istanbul (Constantinople), that is between 16 August and 12 December 1863, pointing out that Bahá'u'lláh closes the poem with a section lamenting his exile from Iraq and his house in Baghdad.⁷ The late Adib

² Stephen Lambden's translation of *Rashh-i 'amá* appeared in *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin* 3:2 (1984); Juan Cole's translation of the “Dove Ode” appears on the internet at the Baha'i library site: <http://bahai-library.org/provisionals/ode.dove.html>

³ Originally published in *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin* 2:3 (December 1983): 105-112; Lambden's version subsequently circulated on the internet with the comments of a few readers, and is now available in a revised version at <http://bahai-library.org/provisionals/hallelujah.html>, along with a more literary version by Sen McGlinn.

⁴ These, along with a number of Bahá'u'lláh's other poems, are found in 'Abd al-Hamid Eshrâq-Khâvari's *Mâ'ede-ye Âsmâni*, vol. 4 (Mo'assese-ye matbu'ât-e Amri, 129 B.E./1972-3) 176-211.

⁵ We might render this title as “The Blessed Couplets,” though the word “blessed” (*mubáarak*) is also used as part of a title of Bahá'u'lláh, The Blessed Beauty (*Jamál-i mubáarak*), so that Persian Bahá'ís would perceive this as a double meaning: the Blessed Couplets, and/or the Couplets of the Blessed One. Either way, the title certainly alludes to the famous poem of Rumi, called the *Masnavi-ye ma'navi*, usually translated as “the Spiritual Couplets.”

⁶ An excellent effort is underway at the website <http://h-net2.msu.edu/~bahai/bahatext.htm>, which should help not only to date the works of Bahá'u'lláh more precisely, but also to identify variants in the existing manuscripts.

⁷ 'Abd al-Hamid Eshrâq-Khâvari, *Ganj-e shâyeġân* ([Tehran]: Mo'assese-ye matbu'ât-e Amri, 124 B.E. / 1967-68) 71-2. The spiritual significance of Baghdad and Bahá'u'lláh's house there can be deduced from the fact that the the *Kitáb-i Aqdas* (K32 and K133; Q&A 25, 29, 32; n54, n154) ordains an obligatory pilgrimage to either Bahá'u'lláh's house in Baghdad, or to the house of the Báb in Shiraz, the places where the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh were respectively living when they revealed their stations as Manifestations of God. In the

Taherzadeh likewise placed this poem in the Istanbul period.⁸ More recently, however, Vahid Rafati has shown that the text of Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví* could not have been entirely composed in Istanbul.⁹

The poem would appear to have been completed in Istanbul, though some lines may have been revised in Edirne (Adrianople).¹⁰ Various pericopes, or thematic sections, are clearly discernible in the poem, though this fact in itself would not constitute decisive evidence that the poem was composed in sections. This we may rather adduce from the words of Bahá'u'lláh himself, speaking through the voice of Áqá Muhammad-'Alí in the *Kitáb-i Badí'*, a book composed in Edirne in 1866 or 1867 (1283 A.H.),¹¹ and addressed to Mírzá Mihdíy-i Qádí,¹² in refutation of the arguments of the Azali Bábís. The *Kitáb-i Badí'*, in a passage explaining how God exists beyond the plane of time and does not necessarily work to the schedule of human expectations, quotes several verses from the *Mathnaví-i Mubárák* (lines 147-152 of the poem), describing them as a few individual lines (*chand fardí*) that had been revealed in Iraq by the most wondrous, inimitable tongue.¹³ It would therefore

two tablets called *Súriy-i Hajj*, Bahá'u'lláh prescribed certain rituals for the pilgrimage to each of these houses. See Adib Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* 1:212 and especially 2:240, which indicates that the provisions of the *Súriy-i Hajj* "were later affirmed in the *Kitáb-i Aqdas* and will be implemented in the future..." However, Bahá'u'lláh later abrogated some of these pilgrimage rites (specifically, the shaving of the head) in the *Kitáb-i Aqdas*, as per the Questions and Answers section (see *Aqdas*, Q&A 10; n54).

8 Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh: Adrianople, 1863-68* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1977) 2:29. The late Mr. Taherzadeh was the first person to sketch in English the history of Bahá'u'lláh's books and tablets. His mammoth work on the subject provides more specific detail on his unpublished writings than is found in Hasan Balyuzi's *Bahá'u'lláh: King of Glory*, though the latter work gives more systematic biographical information. A large number of articles on various tablets and books of Bahá'u'lláh were commissioned and completed for the *Bahá'í Encyclopædia* project, but as this work has not yet been published, the vast amount of new and supplemental information it would add to our knowledge of Bahá'u'lláh's writings still remains inaccessible.

9 Vahid Rafati, in his postscript to the facsimile edition of Mishkín Qalam's calligraphic *Mathnaví Mubárák* ([Langenhain Germany: Bahá'í Verlag?], 1992) 1-2.

10 The latter conjecture about the revision of lines is based upon the fact that there are minor differences in certain lines of Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví* as they appear in the published text of the poem, and as they are quoted in his *Kitáb-i Badí'*. I believe these differences (which are noted in the endnotes to the provisional translation of the poem which accompanies this article) are more likely due to revision, though it cannot yet be ruled out that they stem from scribal errors made during the decades that manuscripts of the *Mathnaví* and the *Kitáb-i Badí'* were copied out by hand, before they had been published by a printing press.

11 Fâzel-e Mâzandarâni, *Asrâr al-âsâr* 2:32-34.

12 He was appointed as the Shiite religious judge of Istanbul by the Persian Ambassador, Hâjji Mírzá Husayn Khân.

13 As I do not have access to the edition in the hand of Zayn al-Muqarribín printed in Tehran, quotations from the *Kitáb-i Badí'* (99-100) are taken from a manuscript copied in *shekaste* hand, 15 lines to the page, which was acquired by Hand of the Cause Abul-Qasim Faizi in the fall of 1940.

appear that at least these five lines, if not more of Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví*, date to Bahá'u'lláh's time in Iraq, and therefore prior to his arrival in Istanbul. The theme and diction of these lines seem to evoke the schematic stages of the gnostic quest, and one might conclude on this basis that the lines date to the period during Bahá'u'lláh's stay in Sulaymaniyyih, or to the general time frame in which the *Seven Valleys (Haft Vádí)* or the *Four Valleys (Chahár Vádí)*, both works which likewise draw upon the Sufi tradition, were written (sometime between 1854 and 1863).

However, as extensive passages from the *Mathnaví* of Bahá'u'lláh allude to Bahá'u'lláh as the fulfilment of the promise of the Báb, we may conclude that they were written, or at least publically shared, only after Bahá'u'lláh's declaration on 21 April 1863 to his companions in the private garden of one of the notables of Baghdad, Najíb Páshá, later designated by the Bahá'ís as the Garden of Ridván. Twelve days after this declaration, at noon on the 3rd of May, 1863 (14 Dhí al-qa'dih 1279 A.H.), Bahá'u'lláh set out for Istanbul in response to the summons of the Ottoman government. Despite the difficult circumstances of the journey, Bahá'u'lláh continued to write; he revealed the "Tablet of the Howdah" (*Súriy-i Hawdaj*) in Samsun, on the Black Sea,¹⁴ some 600 kilometres east of Istanbul, before finally arriving in the Ottoman capital on 16 August 1863 (1 Rabí' I 1280 A.H.).

Bahá'u'lláh remained in Istanbul for four months before proceeding to Edirne, again at the command of the Ottoman state. While in Istanbul, Bahá'u'lláh composed the tablet for the Ottoman Sultan 'Abd al-'Aziz and his ministers (*Lawh-i 'Abd al-'Azíz va vukalá*), which though no longer extant,¹⁵ most probably announced Bahá'u'lláh's presence in the city and his divine mission to the highest officials of the Ottoman state. In the Arabic "Tablet of the Bell" (*Lawh-i Náqús*), also known as "Glory be to Thee, O He", revealed on 5 Jamádí I 1280 A.H., the 20th anniversary of the declaration of the Báb according to the Islamic lunar calendar (corresponding to 18 October 1863), Bahá'u'lláh announces his claim.¹⁶ The *Mathnaví* was also completed in Istanbul, for the *Kitáb-i Badí'* indicates that the concluding lines of the poem (specifically, lines 312-317), were composed after Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in "the Great City" (*Madíniy-i kabírih*), an epithet used in Bahá'í texts for Istanbul (Constantinople).¹⁷

We may therefore tentatively conclude that parts of the poem, perhaps the

¹⁴ Eshrâq-Khâvari, *Ganj-e shâvegân* 67.

¹⁵ It is possible, given the Ottoman government's extensive penchant for record keeping, that a copy of this tablet has been preserved somewhere in the vast Ottoman archives.

¹⁶ Denis MacEoin translated the text in his *Rituals in Babism and Baha'ism* (London: British Academic Press/I.B. Tauris, 1994) 169-172; it is also available on the internet at: <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jrcole/bahai/naqus/naqus.htm>

¹⁷ *Kitáb-i Badí'*, page 263 of a manuscript in *shekaste* script acquired by Abul-Qasim Faizi in the fall of 1940 (303 in the manuscript copied out by Zaynu'l-Muqarribín).

first half, date from the Baghdad period. No known Bahá'í sources mention anything about Bahá'u'lláh continuing the poem during the journey en route to Istanbul, but the *Kitáb-i Badí'* does testify that the poem was completed in Istanbul, in the autumn of 1863. There is also substantial internal evidence suggesting that much of the poem must have been composed sometime after the proclamation in the garden of Ridván in April of 1863 (to which the poem seems frequently to allude), but before Bahá'u'lláh had made his claim publicly known beyond his immediate companions and family. Bahá'u'lláh eventually announced his claim to the wider Bábí public in the *Súriy-i Asháb*, "Tablet to the Companions," revealed early on in Edirne, probably sometime in 1864.¹⁸ Since many lines in the *Mathnaví-yi Mubárák* describe Bahá'u'lláh, or God's truth, as being still wrapt in veils, they must have been written before the *Súriy-i Asháb*.

It therefore seems that Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví* consists of at least two parts, composed at different times in different locations over a period of at least several months, perhaps even a few years. The earliest stratum of the *Mathnaví* may date to as early as the mid 1850s in Sulaymaniyyih, or the period in Baghdad. A large portion of the poem must, however, date to the period in Istanbul, where it assumed its final shape by the late autumn of 1863. Because the various sections of the poems were all composed in the same form (*mathnaví*)¹⁹ and meter (*ramal-e mosaddas-e mahzuf*),²⁰ it was possible to combine them into one larger poem, much as one might link several independent stanzas of heroic English couplets into a larger poem, so long as they were all in the same meter.

Rhetorical orientation of Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví*

Many lines in Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví* call to mind passages from the Persian *Hidden Words*, employing the same imagery or vocabulary. Noticeably absent from the *Hidden Words*, the *Seven Valleys*, and the *Four Valleys* are any mention of Husayn, 'Alí, the Mihdí (now usually spelled as Mahdí or Mahdí), or the Imami traditions of Shiism. Even more remarkably, these works never refer explicitly to the Báb or the Bábí tradition, though a Bábí reader would

18 A translation of this by Juan Cole is available on line at <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/trans/vol3/ashab.htm> and also at <http://bahai-library.org/provisionals/ashab.html>

19 A poem of an indefinite number of lines (stichs), all composed in a specific meter, where the first and second hemistich (*mesrá'*) of each line rhyme, but the rhyme differs in each successive stich (conforming to the pattern aa bb cc dd ee, etc.)

20 Catalectic hexameter Ramal, consisting of six feet of four syllables each, alternating in the pattern long-short-long-long, divided in two hemistichs, with caesura in the middle after the first rhyme word. In the Mahzuf, or catalectic version of Ramal, the last foot in each hemistich (i.e., the third and sixth feet of the hexameter line) is truncated to long-short-long, as follows:

- _ - - | - _ - - | - _ - - | - _ - - | - _ - - | - _ - -
1 2 3 A 4 5 6 A

almost certainly have recognised allusions to the Báb and his works.²¹

The Bábí community in Baghdad, over which Bahá'u'lláh increasingly presided from about 1856, by virtue of his character, if not in name, had many momentous and unresolved theological problems to work through. These included: When would appear the figure to whom the Báb referred as “Him Whom God shall make Manifest”; who should lead the Bábí community until that time; what might the Shiite prophecies about the reign of justice which the Mahdí was supposed to usher in mean, since the Bábí uprisings in Zanzan, Nayriz and Mazandaran had been defeated and the Bábí community decimated? One might expect that in such circumstances, Bahá'u'lláh would have devoted close attention to exegesis of the works of the Báb or explanation of the meaning of prophecy.

Nevertheless, the noticeable absence of overt reference to either the Shiite or the Bábí tradition, and the emphasis on non-sectarian ethical and mystical themes in works like the *Hidden Words*, *Seven Valleys* and *Four Valleys*, all makes perfect sense for the wider audience Bahá'u'lláh must have been addressing in Ottoman Iraq. The shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala were, of course, major centres of Shiite theology and the populace there, both native Arabs and Iranian visitors, would have been predominantly Shiite. However, Baghdad and northern Iraq, especially Kurdish Sulaymaniyah, as with most of the Ottoman empire, were predominantly Sunni.

It is true that the Bábí community in Iraq, though composed mostly of Iranian exiles, also had a number of Arab supporters, including those who had been taught by Qurrat al-'Ayn Táhirih and a few early Shaykhi converts to the Báb. But the Iranian Babi refugees were now living with a small cadre of their Arab co-religionists in a land where Sunnism was the religion of the ruling class. Most of the Arab Sufis, religious scholars and government officials with whom Bahá'u'lláh and the Bábís in Iraq had contact would have been Sunni, and to them, the eschatological claims of the Bábís would probably not have been appealing. Furthermore, Iranian travellers and Iranian government officials had given the Bábís a negative image as revolutionaries.²² Foregrounding the pan-Islamic (i.e., non-Shiite) and spiritual components (i.e., personal, not political, transformation) of Bábí teachings and of Bahá'u'lláh's own beliefs, that is to say the ethical and mystical teachings, would have been an effective way to counter this image.

Bahá'u'lláh did, of course, address Shiite millennial expectations, or

²¹ For example, the English translation of the *Seven Valleys* makes an allusion to the *Bayán* in the Exordium explicit, though this word would likely have been read by non-Bábís as an allusion to the Koran (verses 75:19 or 96:5), with the meaning “explanation”, and not as the title of either of the two works of the Báb by that name. The same is true of the reference to “all things” (*kullu shay'*), which had a special esoteric significance for Bábís, but was also a term well-known to Sufis and the Sunni ulama without any necessarily sectarian connotations.

²² *Mâ'ede-ye ásmâni*, ed. 'Abd al-Hamid Eshraq-Khâvari (Mo'assese-ye Melli-ye matbu'ât-e Amri, 129 B.E. / 1972) 4:33.

matters of Bábí history and doctrine, when directly questioned about them. For example, Hájí Mírzá Sayyid Muhammad, the maternal uncle of the Báb, posed several questions about how the drama of the Báb and the Iranian government's ruthless repression of his religion could possibly fulfil the prophecies relating to the Mahdī, and Bahá'u'lláh responded with the *Kitáb-i Iqán*. Even here, however, Bahá'u'lláh's reply does not deal primarily with the minutiae of Shiite prophecy, nor does it delve into the Báb's writings or the history of his followers in great detail.²³

Instead, Bahá'u'lláh replies with general principles about the nature of interpretation of prophecy and the observation that all prophets have been opposed by the religious and political authorities of their day. The focus in the *Iqán* on the New Testament prophecies about the return of Christ make it easier for a Shiite audience to accept the principles of interpretation Bahá'u'lláh proposes, because Shiites were not invested in the maintenance of the Christian clergy or any particular dogmas about Christian prophecy, and could therefore reflect on them with an open mind. Perhaps even more importantly, with this explanation Bahá'u'lláh leads Bábí theology out of its micro-Shiite milieu and brings it into conversation with the millennial traditions of a non-Islamic religious tradition.

The *Hidden Words* (*Kalimát-i maknúnih*), originally circulated among the Bábís under the title *Sahífi-yi Fátimiyih*, or "Fátimih's Scroll," provides evidence for the continuing importance of millennial concerns and the fulfilment of prophecy for the Bábís. "Fátimih's Scroll," or the "Hidden Book of Fátimih," is an apocryphal Shiite text, supposedly revealed by the angel Gabriel to Fátima to console her when her father, the Prophet Muhammad, died in 632. Fátima's scroll was supposed to be in possession of the Qá'im or Mahdī, along with the sword of 'Alí and the Prophet's cloak. That this book of hitherto "hidden words" was in the possession of Bahá'u'lláh, or revealed by him, would constitute a fulfilment of the Shiite prophecy and establish Bahá'u'lláh's authority as successor of the Báb.

The fact that this book eventually became known as the *Hidden Words*, and that the prologue introduces the contents as the inner essence of what all the previous prophets had revealed, heightens the appeal of the work for a Sunni audience. Indeed, the concern with ethics and piety reflected in the *Hidden Words*, a text of 1858 (1274 A.H.), draws the Bábís away from political/eschatological concerns to interior spiritual and mystical concerns, and also creates a bridge to the non-sectarian tradition of Islamic ethics and piety among the Sunni ulama. Furthermore, the concentration on interior spiritual themes would have helped assure the Iranian officials spying on the Bábí community that the Bábís were not focused on the millennial hope of toppling the Iranian government and establishing the promised Qá'im or his

²³ It does, however, address specific theological concerns such as the meaning of *qiyámat* (resurrection), *liqá Alláh* (the meeting with God), or *ra j'at* (return), but tends to explain them in metaphorical and non-technical or non-esoteric terms.

successors on the throne.

That the themes and style of Bahá'u'lláh's writings in Iraq reflect the concerns of Sunni Islam and of non-sectarian Sufism, and not the particular millennial expectations of the Shaykhis or Bábís, should not come as a surprise. Bahá'u'lláh reflects the theological concerns and assumptions of his intended audience in many tablets; outstanding examples would include the Perso-philism and Zoroastrian cosmology in the tablet for Mánikchí Sáhíb (Manakji Limji Hatari) and in the Tablet of Seven Questions (*Lawh-i haft pursish*) for Ustád Javán-Mard, or the appeal to the Islamic philosophical and cosmological tradition reflected in the Tablet of Wisdom (*Lawh-i hikmat*).

Likewise, the mystical concerns reflected in many of Bahá'u'lláh's works from the Baghdad period, such as the *Seven Valleys*, written in reply to Shaykh Muhiyyu'd-Dín, the Qádí (magistrate or religious judge) of Kháníqayn, or the *Four Valleys*, addressed to Shaykh 'Abdu'r-Rahmán of Kirkúk, make perfect rhetorical sense in transcending the particular concerns of the Bábís and relating to a Sunni audience, and beyond that to a kind of non-denominational and gnostic religious orientation that transcended the particularities of doctrine and creed. Although there were many Shiite Sufi authors, classical Persian Sufism was a preeminently Sunni phenomenon (the majority of the populace in Iran followed the Hanafi or Sháfi'î rites of Sunni Islam until the 16th century, when Shiism became the state religion of the Safavids).

The Kurds of Sulaymaniyyih with whom Bahá'u'lláh was in contact during this period were primarily Sunnis with a strong inclination to Sufism, specifically the Naqshbandî-Khâlidî and Qâdirî Orders.²⁴ Some of them were quite opposed to Shiism, influenced by men such as Mawlânâ Khâlid Ziyâ al-Dîn Baghdâdî (1193-1242/1779-1827), founder of the Khâlidî branch of Sufis, who was from Qarâdâg, five miles from Sulaymaniyyih. He went to Delhi, India, where he was initiated by a Naqshbandi Shaykh in about 1810, and on the way, he stopped in Iran in 1809 to argue with Shiite scholars, including Shaykh Ismâ'il Kâshî, a mujtahid in Tehran. Khâlid was designated as the head of the Naqshbandis in western Asia, and returned to Iraq, but on the way back, he stopped in a number of cities (Yazd, Shiraz, Isfahan, Hamadan, Sanandaj) to debate against Shiites. In 1813, he turned a run-down structure in Baghdad into a Sufi lodge and began to recruit Naqshbandi disciples there; the governor Mahmúd Páshá later had another lodge built for Khâlid in Sulaymaniyyih. He moved in 1823 to Damascus, where he died in 1827, but not before the Khâlidî order spread to the Balkans and throughout the Ottoman territory, where it promoted the Ottoman state, opposition to imperialism and adherence to religious law. Several important Ottoman officials affiliated with the Khâlidî order.²⁵

²⁴ See Juan Cole's "Bahá'u'lláh and the Naqshbandi Sufis in Iraq, 1854-1856," in *From Iran East and West*, ed. Juan Cole and Moojan Momen (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1984) 1-28.

²⁵ See the articles "Bahá al-Din Naqshband" and "Baghdadi, Mawlânâ Khâlid Ziâ al-Din" in

Bahá'u'lláh would employ the idiom of these staunchly Sunni Kurds in Baghdad and Sulaymaniyyih during his stay there. As 'Abdul-Bahá explains, Bahá'u'lláh would attract the Kurds to him by speaking in the terminology of the gnostics and the Sufis, for discourse must proceed according to the inclination of the audience and the requisites of the time, with elegance of expression and temperate words.²⁶

Bahá'u'lláh, Sufism, Sufi poetry, and Rumi

Despite embracing some of the themes and writings of classical Persian Sufis like 'Attár and Rumi, Bahá'u'lláh was not in agreement with the entirety of the large and rather loose body of teachings and doctrines held by members of various Sufi orders. Bahá'u'lláh mentions some theological differences with Sufism in the *Seven Valleys*, where he categorises the mystical schools of thought known as “unity of being” and “unity of appearances” (*vahdat al-vujûd* and *vahdat al-shuhûd*), which had become prevalent doctrine among most Sufis, as limited understandings of the nature of spiritual reality.²⁷

More important, however, was Bahá'u'lláh's opposition to the popular phenomenon of Sufism. Popular Sufism allowed men to grow their hair long, ignore social constraints and religious law (many “Sufis” were addicted to narcotics, as Browne's account of his travels in Persia show), and to beg for food. Mírzá Abú al-Fadl attacks the effete nature of such popular “Sufism” in his *Kitábu'l-Fará'id*,²⁸ and the laws of Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb-i Aqdas* (c.1873) would later prohibit men from these practices: growing their hair long, begging, monasticism, practicing feats of asceticism, etc.²⁹

Encyclopedia Iranica.

26 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as recalled by Mírzá Mahmúd-i Zarfání, *Badáye' al-âsâr* (Bombay, 1914; reprinted Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1982) 1:175.

27 Mention is made of these doctrines in the 7th of the *Seven Valleys* (True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness, p. 39 in the Gail/Khan translation). Naim Nabil Akbar and Nader Saiedi have studied the Bahá'í scripture's interpretation of the Sufi quest in an article originally called “Ab'âd-e soluk” [The Dimensions of the Quest], most of which has been incorporated into Nader Saiedi's *'Aql, din va jáme'e dar andishe-ye Bahá'í* [Reason, religion and society in Bahai thought] (Dundas, Ontario: Persian Institute for Bahá'í Studies, 1988).

28 Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* 2:27-8.

29 Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* 2:24-5, reports that Bahá'u'lláh encouraged his companions to adopt the guise of Bektâshi dervishes on their way to Istanbul as a measure of protecting them from recognition as “heretical” Bábís. However, the disguise of Sufis seems to have been used mostly by Mírzá Yahyá, who tied a black cord around his head and carried the begging bowl of a dervish in order to dissociate himself from the Persians in the entourage, who would have been openly identified as Bábís. Mírzá Yahyá travelled with an Arab companion and initially maintained contact only with the Arab and Turkish members of the party, according to a tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the memoirs of Áqá Muhammad Ridá-yi Qannád, as reported in Hasan Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: King of Glory* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980) 183-4. Finally, outside of Diyárbakr, Mírzá Yahyá abandoned this disguise (ibid 190), once it had become clear that the party of Bábí/Bahá'í travellers were not in

danger from government authorities. Though there was at least one actual dervish among the 72 members of Bahá'u'lláh's party, Bahá'u'lláh and most of his companions travelled openly. Námiq Páshá, the Governor of Baghdad, had provided a ten-man mounted military escort and a letter of introduction for Bahá'u'lláh, instructing the officials along the way to treat the party well. At most of the towns along the way (with the exceptions of a region near Mosul controlled by Yazidi Kurds, and Diyárbakr, where the Governor was uncooperative), Bahá'u'lláh was met with respect by the local dignitaries. See Balyuzi 175ff, and Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 156-7.

Why then, did the *Mathnaví-yi Mubárák* assume the particular form it did? Why poetry, rather than prose? Since Bahá'u'lláh had earlier revealed his mystical ideas in a long poem in Arabic (The Dove Ode, or *Qasídiy-i varqá'-iyyih*), why choose to write this in Persian?³⁰ Why did Bahá'u'lláh give it this particular title? Why choose this particular meter (*ramal*) and rhyme scheme (rhyming couplets, or *mathnaví*)?

The Báb had revealed very little of his teachings in the form of poetry. One poem in the *rajaz* form is ascribed to the Imam Husayn, and the Báb did compose a verse-like commentary on this poem, though it does not strictly observe the rules of prosody.³¹ In a letter written from Bushehr, the Bab includes two lines of Arabic verse, which he may either have composed or quoted. The Bab also quotes a quatrain from the poet Vahshi-ye Báfqí (d. 1583) in another letter.³²

Bahá'u'lláh liberally quotes from Sufi poets like Sanâ'i, 'Attâr and Rumi, as well as other poets thought to be Sufis, such as Hâfêz and Sa'di. All of these poets were Sunnis, a fact which would later cause some discomfort when the Safavid dynasty made Shiism the state religion of Iran in the 16th century. Some zealous Iranian Shiites felt uncomfortable reading Sunni poets and some of the Shiite ulama harboured hostility toward Sufis. The fact that Islam's greatest mystical poet, Rumi (1207-1273), around whose memory a Sufi order formed, had denounced the Shiite practice of ritual mourning for Husayn in his *Mathnaví*³³ led some Iranian Shiites to condemn Rumi and call for copies of his books to be burned.

But Rumi's *Mathnaví* (pronounced *Mass-na-vee*, and usually now written as *Masnavi*) was almost certainly the most widely read poem from the Balkans to Bengal.³⁴ Jâmi had reportedly said of it:

The mystic *Mathnaví* of our Rumi:
Koran incarnate in the Persian tongue!
How can I describe him and his majesty?

³⁰ We may safely exclude the possibility of writing in Turkish, even though Bahá'u'lláh lived the latter half of his life in an area where Turkish was the official language of government. Bahá'u'lláh probably did not know literary Turkish well enough to compose a poem in that language, and, besides, few of the Bábis to whom Bahá'u'lláh is directly addressing his early writings would have known Turkish, but were primarily versed in Persian and/or Arabic.

³¹ Ruhollah Mehrâbkhâni, *Maqâm-e she'r dar adyân* (Tehran: Bahá'í Youth Committee, 1331/1952) 23ff, 33-35.

³² *Ibid.*, 35-6.

³³ *Masnavi-ye Ma'navi*, Book 6, lines 777-805 in Reynold Nicholson's critical edition.

³⁴ For the details of Rumi's popularity, see my *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000).

Not prophet, but revealer of a Book.

The enduring quality of his poetry, the magnanimity and insight of his beliefs, eventually redeemed Rumi in the eyes of most Shiites, and Rumi's *Mathnaví* enjoyed wide popularity in Iran in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and as books began to be printed in Persian, Rumi's *Mathnaví* was among the more frequently published. Mirzâ Mohammad Bâqer Khwânsâri (1811-1895), a Shiite scholar contemporary with Bahá'u'lláh, describes Rumi's *Mathnaví* as a book "esteemed by scholars and the common folk, whether Shiite or not."³⁵

This assertion is amply attested by the fact that the six books of Rumi's *Mathnaví* were repeatedly printed or lithographed in the mid-nineteenth century, beginning in Egypt (Bûlâq, 1835), then in Tabriz (1847), and repeatedly in Bombay (beginning in 1851). While Bahá'u'lláh was in exile in Iraq, an edition of Rumi's *Mathnaví* appeared in Tehran (1856), and shortly after Bahá'u'lláh arrived in Edirne, yet another edition was lithographed in Lucknow (1865). Before the end of the century, Rumi's *Mathnaví* was reprinted over twenty more times. Rumi's *Mathnaví* was even popular among non-Muslim Iranians; Mullá Hizqîl Nâmdâr, a Jewish convert to Islam in Mashhad, even possessed a Judeo-Persian version of it (Persian written out in Hebrew characters).³⁶

Other Mathnavís

For Islamic scholars with mystical bent, especially among Sunnis and more ecumenically minded Shiites, writing a commentary on Rumi's *Mathnaví* was quite common practice. Iran's greatest Islamic philosopher of the 19th century, Mullá Hádî Sabzivârî (1798-1873), offered an analysis of Rumi's *Mathnaví* in a work he wrote in 1858 for a Qajar prince, Soltân Murâd.³⁷ Bahá'u'lláh himself, in the *Lawh-i Salmân*, quotes the following verse from Rumi's *Mathnaví*³⁸ and comments on it:

Once the colourless became enmeshed in colours
A Moses came into conflict with a Moses

³⁵ *Rawzat al-jannât* (Beirut: Dâr al-Islâmiyya, 1991) 8:63.

³⁶ Nâmdâr was the father of Áqá 'Azîzu'lláh, who became a Bahá'í in 1874, and later met with Leo Tolstoy to proclaim the Bahá'í Faith; see Hasan Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís In the Time of Bahá'u'lláh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985) 178.

³⁷ Selections from this work are offered in *Sharh-e Masnavi*, ed. Mostafâ Borujerdi (Tehran: Vezârat-e Farhang va Ershâd-e Eslâmi, 1374/1995).

³⁸ Nicholson edition, Book 1, line 2467.

In Baghdad, Bahá'u'lláh even copied out a poem of Rumi's for Ustád Ismá'íl, and instructed him to turn his face toward the Báb and chant these lines melodiously.³⁹

Beyond this, many poets wrote poems in imitation of parts of Rumi's *Mathnaví*. One poem in the form and meter of Rumi's *Mathnaví* by Sohbat-e Lâri (d. 1835) was apparently understood among the Bábís as an allusion to or prediction of the advent of the Báb.⁴⁰ Táhirih took a particular interest in Sohbat's works and sometimes quoted from them. There is even a *mathnaví* written in praise of Bahá'u'lláh attributed to Táhirih.⁴¹ Whether this poem is indeed hers or not, it is clear that the *mathnaví* was a form appreciated by many of the Bábís and, later on, by Iranian Bahá'ís. Hájí Mirzá Haydar-'Alí, for example, is said to have lived in seclusion for four months, during which time he took four books with him: The Koran, the *Mathnaví* of Rumi, the *Bayán* of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh's *Iqán*.⁴² Nabíl-i Zarandí, author of the *Dawn-Breakers*, after completing his pilgrimage to the House of the Báb in Shiraz as per Bahá'u'lláh's instructions in the *Súriy-i Hajj*, composed a *mathnaví* describing the experience.⁴³ Nabíl also composed another *mathnaví* describing the history of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.⁴⁴ Both of Nabíl's *mathnavís* seem to derive their inspiration from Bahá'u'lláh's own *Mathnavíy-i Mubáarak*, but Rumi could not have been far from his mind, either; when describing Bahá'u'lláh's ascension, Nabíl twice quotes from Rumi's *Mathnaví*, including this line:⁴⁵

When the rose has gone and the garden's passed
You'll hear no more tell of the nightingale

39 This according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own testimony in *Memorials of the Faithful*, tr. Marzieh Gail (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971) 30.

40 Mehrâbkhâni, *Maqâm-e she'r* 93-104.

41 *Ibid.*, 106-110.

42 Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* 2:70.

43 Eshrâq-Khâvari, *Ganj-e shâyegân* 83-5. Nabíl's *masnavi* is called the "Couplets of Reunion and Separation," and this title may have something to do with the section in Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví* (see lines 270ff), which addresses the question of reunion (divine immanence) and separation (divine transcendence).

44 *Masnavi-ye Nabil-e Zarandi dar târikh-e amr-e Bahá'i va so'ud-e Hazrat-e Bahâ Allâh* (Cairo: Mohyi al-Din Sabri-ye Kordi, 1924), and recently reprinted in Germany (Langenhain: Lajne-ye Melli-ye Nashr-e Âsâr-e Amri be Lesân-e Fârsi va 'Arabi, 152 B.E./1995).

45 *Masnavi-ye Nabil-e Zarandi* 70 and 76. The theme of this line seems to echo in Bahá'u'lláh's *Hidden Words*, Persian #15. The poem of Rumi translated here is from his *Mathnaví*, 1:29. The other lines quoted by Nabíl are 3:4718 and 3:4716, all according to Nicholson's edition.

Summoned by the Ottoman authorities to Istanbul, where he arrived in August 1863, Bahá'u'lláh perhaps observed for the first time the rituals of the “dancing dervishes,” or Mevlevis, a Sufi order dedicated to the memory, poetry and turning meditation of Rumi. Further exiled to Edirne, a city of about 100,000 people at the time, during the last week of December 1863, Bahá'u'lláh resided in the northeast part of the city, in the Murádiyyih quarter near the Mevlevi lodge. He moved to another house shortly thereafter, where he remained for about ten months, announcing his claim with increasing openness in tablets such as the “The Tablet of the Traveller” (*Lawh-i Sayyáh*) and the “Tablet of the Point” (*Lawh-i Nuqtih*).⁴⁶ Still within proximity of the Mevlevi lodge, at least one member of the Bahá'í entourage was in contact with the nearby Mevlevis.

Hájí Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí describes in his memoirs⁴⁷ how a public encounter between Bahá'u'lláh and Mírzá Yahyá was arranged at the Sultan Selim mosque in Edirne in September of 1867. Bahá'u'lláh entered the mosque on a Friday and his presence caused the preacher to stop speaking in the midst of his sermon. Mírzá Yahyá failed to show up and Bahá'u'lláh eventually set out for home.⁴⁸ Along the way, Bahá'u'lláh heard the Mevlevi dervishes dancing, repeating their *zeker*:⁴⁹ *huwa Alláh, yâ Alláh* (He is God, O God!). Bahá'u'lláh indicated an intention to “visit” Rumi (Mowlânâ), and headed towards the Mevlevi lodge⁵⁰ with the governor, the mayor and various town notables respectfully following along, as if part of Bahá'u'lláh's retinue. Bahá'u'lláh entered the Mevlevis' lodge, followed by these dignitaries. Although well into the *samâ'* or meditative dancing, the Mevlevi dervishes stopped their turning and their music, and the hall fell silent. Only after Bahá'u'lláh had seated himself and his companions, and motioned to the dervishes, did they continue their turning ritual. Hájí Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí describes this event as if an eye-witness, though he does not explicitly indicate that he was present. Haydar-‘Alí does state that Bahá'u'lláh himself

⁴⁶ See Balyuzi, *King of Glory* 219-20.

⁴⁷ *The Delight of Hearts*, trans. A.Q. Faizi (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1980) 22-24.

⁴⁸ Shoghi Effendi dates this incident with Mírzá Yahyá to September 1867 (Jamádiyü'l-avval 1284), and the details given by the Guardian in *God Passes By* 168-9 (perhaps based upon Nabil's unpublished history of Bahá'u'lláh), differ slightly from the account given by Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí. The Guardian does not mention Bahá'u'lláh's visit to the Mevlevi lodge at all.

⁴⁹ Or *dhikr*, literally, “remembrance,” a mantra-like chant used by Sufis in their devotions. Bahá'u'lláh instructs Bahá'ís to chant the *zeker* “Alláh-u-Abhá” 95 times daily.

⁵⁰ These lodges, called *khâneqâh* in Persian and usually *tekke* in Turkish, were hospices and centres for Sufis, much like a monastery, where adepts and masters of a particular order would live. Most of the major cities of the Ottoman empire had a Mevlevi lodge, as well as the lodges of some other Sufi orders, such as the Refâ'is, the Bektâshis, the Jelvetis, etc.

described the incident to him on the following day as a kind of miracle.⁵¹

As part of their turning ceremony, or “whirling,” the Mevlevis almost certainly recited from parts of Rumi’s *Mathnaví*, which they still do today, and seem to have been doing since the 14th century.⁵² When Marion Jack made a pilgrimage to Edirne in 1933 to see Bahá’u’lláh’s house, she painted a picture of this Mevlevi lodge.

But it was in Istanbul in the autumn of 1863 that Bahá’u’lláh completed his *Mathnaví* partly in response to the Mevlevis’ devotion for Rumi’s great *Mathnaví-y-i ma’navi*, the “Spiritual Couplets.” Although Rumi’s *Mathnaví* was read wherever Persian was spoken, the Mevlevi order operated mostly in Anatolia, the Levant, and the Balkans. Although Rumi had lived in Konya, Mevlevi activity in the 19th century entered on Istanbul, where literally dozens of commentaries on Rumi’s *Mathnaví* had been written in Turkish. In the closing lines of the *Mathnaví-y-i Mubáarak*, Bahá’u’lláh indirectly alludes to the fame of Rumi’s *Mathnaví*, which begins with the reed pipe. Because translations of this part of Rumi’s poem are widely available, I will not give it at length here,⁵³ but quote the opening lines in Sir William Jones’ 1794 translation:

Hear, how yon reed in sadly pleasing tales
 Departed bliss and present woe bewails!
 “With me, from native banks untimely torn,
 Love-warbling youths and soft-ey’d virgins mourn
 O! Let the heart, by fatal absence rent,
 Feel what I sing, and bleed when I lament”⁵⁴

Indeed, the title chosen by Bahá’u’lláh, *Mathnaví-y-i Mubáarak* (the “blessed couplets”) evokes the title of Rumi’s work. Rumi derived the name of his *Mathnaví-y-i ma’navi* (the “spiritual couplets”) from the verse form it employs – rhyming couplets with the rhyme scheme following the pattern aabbccdd, etc. Poets generally employed the *mathnaví* form for narrative verse; Ferdowsi used it in the epic *Shâh nâme*, whereas Fakhr-e Gorgâni and Nezâmi used it in the romances *Vis and Râmin* and *Layli and Majnun*, respectively. Beginning with Sanâ’i, poets adapted this form to ethical-didactic and mystical themes, and Rumi modelled his narrative couplets on

⁵¹ Haydar-‘Alí, *Delight of Hearts* 23-4.

⁵² See Chapter 10 of my *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West*.

⁵³ Chapters 13 and 14 of my *Rumi: Past and Present* give a history of translations of Rumi’s *Masnavi*; a recent attempt to render the “Song of the Reed Pipe” to English can be found in Chapter 8 of that work.

⁵⁴ *Asiatick Researches* of 1794, in *Collected Works of William Jones* 4:230-31.

the genre of such works as exemplified in Sanâ'i and 'Attâr. The adjective *ma'navi* means relating to the inner meaning, or for concision's sake, "spiritual." Hence in English one sometimes encounters the translation "Spiritual Couplets" for Rumi's *Mathnaví-i ma'navi*. Though many works prior to Rumi's *Mathnaví* and a great many more after Rumi employed this verse form, Rumi's work is usually known as the *Mathnaví*, par excellence. Already within a few generations after its composition, according to the testimony of Qâzi Najm al-Din-e Tashti, as reported by Aflâki, the book was commonly referred to simply as the *Mathnaví*: "When they say the name *Mathnaví*, reason naturally assumes the *Mathnaví* of Mowlânâ [Rumi] is meant."⁵⁵

In addition to the title and the trope of the reed pipe which opens Rumi's *Mathnaví* and closes Bahá'u'lláh's, Bahá'u'lláh's poem shares the same meter as Rumi's poem. Both poems also allude frequently to the Biblical prophets and to Muhammad, and to Sufi interpretations of Islam. However, the *Mathnaví* of Rumi includes many rather lengthy tales in its 25,000 lines to illustrate the mystical points it makes. These include philosophical, humorous and even bawdy stories. Bahá'u'lláh's poem, which is far shorter, at 318 lines, does not digress into stories, as Rumi's work does.

By the mid-nineteenth century, Rumi's fame had even spread to Europe, where Hegel and other European philosophers and poets drew inspiration from him.⁵⁶ William Jones had described the *Mathnaví* as perhaps one of the most extraordinary books known to man and said of Rumi (Mowlavi):

I know of no writer, to whom the Maulavi can justly be compared, except Chaucer or Shakespeare.⁵⁷

Factors bearing upon the provisional translation of the *Mathnaví*

History of the text of the Mathnaví-i Mubáarak

Compared to the textual history of the *Divân* of Hâfez, for which multiple variant readings and multiple orderings of the lines of almost every poem are attested, the textual history of Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví* is quite straightforward. However, because the printing press did not come into general use in Iran until the 20th century, all copies of the texts of Bahá'u'lláh were written out

⁵⁵ Shams al-Din Aflâki, *Manâqeb al-'ârefîn*, ed. Tahsin Yazici, 2 vols. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1959) 597.

⁵⁶ See *Rumi: Past and Present*, Chapter 10, for the activities of the Mevlevis in Istanbul; for the history of Rumi's reception in the West, see chapters 12-14.

⁵⁷ *The Letters of Sir William Jones*, ed. Garland Cannon (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) 632, 735.

by hand until about the 1890s, when Bahá'í texts began to be lithographed in India. The transmission of books in a chirographic culture, where every single copy of a given text must be copied out by hand (hence "manuscript," a hand-writ book), usually by a scribe who did this work professionally, typically results in a variety of changes over time.⁵⁸

Bahá'u'lláh's texts circulated in manuscript for a relatively short time, a period of only two or three decades, before they were lithographed or printed. He wrote out most of these letters and books in his own hand, of course, or verified his secretary's copy with his seal. But most Bahá'ís in Iran did not have access to these original holographs (manuscripts copied out by the hand of the author) of Bahá'u'lláh; instead, they wrote out their copies from copies that were made from Bahá'u'lláh's copy, and so on. Although these scribes took great care in copying out the works of Bahá'u'lláh, which they regarded as divine revelation, errors or lapses did sometimes occur. Certain scribes, such as Zaynu'l-Muqarribín, were known for the greater accuracy of their manuscripts⁵⁹ (a function of their level of learning in Persian and Arabic, as well as their care and precision in copying, and the legibility of their handwriting); this indicates that there may have been at least some inferior manuscripts in circulation among the Bahá'ís, no doubt copied by individuals with insufficient knowledge to understand all the words (Arabic being a foreign language for most Iranians, a certain degree of learning was necessary to correctly read and therefore copy the books and letters of Bahá'u'lláh).

Thus, some relatively minor variants are reflected in the wording of a few passages of various manuscripts of Bahá'u'lláh's works. This is also true for the *Mathnaví-i Mubárák*: a few lines are preserved in slightly different readings in various manuscripts. As we have seen above, the poem was apparently composed over a period of time, and the poem may have been shared with family members and close companions at various points before it was completed in final form. The *Kitáb-i Badí'*, completed several years later in Edirne, quotes several lines from Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví*, and at this time Bahá'u'lláh may have chosen to revise these lines slightly from the earlier version written down in Istanbul or Baghdad. In one letter, 'Abdu'l-Bahá quotes four lines from the "Mathnaví of the Abhá Beauty," but gives variants that are not to be found in any of the editions mentioned above.⁶⁰ Therefore,

58 This is not to say that the printing process does not also introduce changes into a work over time (by changing spellings, by editing, abridging, etc.). However, the large number of examples of a given text that the printing process creates makes for more stable texts in print culture.

59 See, for example, the comments of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in *Memorials of the Faithful* 153, about his "faultless care" in copying the tablets.

60 *Montakhabát-e makâtib*, 3:227. We may either assume that 'Abdu'l-Bahá quoted these from memory, inexactly, or that he had heard Bahá'u'lláh recite the poem in this manner, at variance with the written version, or that he had access to yet a different manuscript of the

the attested variants may indeed stem, not necessarily from scribal error, but from Bahá'u'lláh's own revisions. We can hypothesize that an earlier version of the poem, dating to before Bahá'u'lláh's departure from Baghdad, circulated among the Bahá'ís in Iraq, in both written and oral form. A later, and slightly amended recension of the poem may have circulated among the Bahá'ís in Istanbul, where Bahá'u'lláh completed and perhaps revised the poem.

Literary scholars attempt to resolve any textual variants reflected in the manuscript tradition by collecting as many manuscripts as possible and comparing the readings of the most authoritative manuscripts. Generally speaking, a manuscript written by the author is considered the most authoritative; next in rank comes the oldest manuscripts, and after that, the most carefully copied manuscripts. By collating the various manuscripts, an editor can reach conclusions about which readings are oldest or most likely, and on this basis, a critical text is established, with the variants noted in the footnotes.

Insofar as I am aware, no effort has as yet been undertaken to establish a critical text of Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví* on the basis of the existing manuscripts. At least two important manuscripts of the poem, both copied out by noted Bahá'ís, and probably both copied within twenty years of the poem's composition, exist: one manuscript by Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín, copied on 8 Ramadán 1299 (24 July 1882), and one by Mishkín Qalam, which is undated.

However, the Persian text of the poem has been published at least five times, as follows:⁶¹

- 1914 (1332 A.H.), printed in Cairo by Faraj Alláh Zakíy al-Kordí in an

poem.

Three of the lines quoted in this letter have minor variants (*haqiqat* for *elâhi*; *ma'âni* for *elâhi*; *yowm* for *ruz*). One of the lines, however, exhibits a significant difference from the reading attested in the published manuscripts: lines 148 and 149 of the published text of the poem are condensed into one line and given a different ending, an ending which eliminates one particular textual difficulty. *Âsâr-e qalam-e a'la*, volume three, has:

vay to az khamr-e 'enâyat gashte mast
hich yâd-at âyad az ruz-e alast
goft yâd âyad marâ ân sowt o goft
ku be-day bud o nabâshad shegoft

(See the text of the translation below.) 'Abdu'l-Bahá's letter, on the other hand, renders the following:

hich yâd-at âyad az ruz-e alast
goft âri chunke andar vay bod-ast

Do you recall the day of "am I not"?
He said, "Yes, for it was on that day"

⁶¹ The information on the 1932 and 1953 editions of the text comes from Vahid Rafati's afterword to the facsimile reproduction of Mishkín Qalam's manuscript of the text, *Mathnaví-i Mubârak* (n.p., 1992) 2-3.

edition which included the text of the *Seven Valleys* and the *Hidden Words*.

- 1932 (89 B.E.), jellygraphed in Iran, a version in the hand of Jináb-i Musammá-parast, including poems of Táhirih and Na'ím, and an apologetic treatise by the latter.
- 1953 (110 B.E.), printed in Delhi in a volume of 54pp.
- 1964 (121 B.E.), in *Âsâr-e qalam-e a'lâ*, volume 3 (Tehran: Bahá'í Publishing Trust; reprinted in New Delhi by the Bahá'í Publishing Trust).
- 1992 (149 B.E.) a facsimile reproduction of Mishkín Qalam's calligraphic copy of the poem, published with an afterword by Vahid Rafati.

For the purposes of this translation, I have compared the 1914, 1964 and 1992 editions mentioned above, as well as the text of the *Kitáb-i Badí'*, in which Bahá'u'lláh quotes twelve lines of his own *Mathnaví*. In the endnotes to the poem, I have indicated most of the variant readings found in these three published editions of the poem. However, before we can claim to have a critical edition of the Persian text, a rigorous comparison of the surviving manuscript exemplars, and not just the printed texts, should be undertaken, noting and evaluating all variants (minor though they may be) in the number and order of lines and readings of certain words. Obviously, no translation could be considered completely accurate unless and until a critical edition of the original language text it renders has been established.

Interpretation and the translation process

Religious communities naturally read their respective scriptures for their timeless meaning, searching for the transcendent significance they have for the reader and her society at its particular point in history. Since the text of scripture, as Bahá'u'lláh affirms by quoting a tradition from the Imams, intends "one and seventy meanings," each of which can be explained,⁶² and thus validated, in the realm of divine transcendence, the historical and cultural circumstances that shape each reader's perspective may reveal some aspect of the true meaning of a particular passage of scripture. Thus, though the significance that a particular tablet of Bahá'u'lláh had for an Iranian exile in Ottoman Istanbul in the 1860s may differ from the significance it has for a Chinese reader in the 21st century, both understandings may intersect on some plane and contribute to the transcendent meaning.

Jews, Christians and Muslims continue to find new understandings of the Bible and the Koran in the light of theological developments, social and cultural transformation, and philological and historical scholarship. Each new reading, if valid, does not necessarily invalidate prior understandings, but

⁶² Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i Iqán*, tr. Shoghi Effendi, 255.

deepens or tempers them, adding a new aspect to the multi-faceted aspects of the truth enshrined in that text. A rather extensive philosophy of the meaning of historical and religious texts has been developed over the last 150 years or so; the discussion of such matters is beyond the scope of this article, but readers interested in such matters can turn to the works on hermeneutics (e.g., Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*) and to the works of theologians influenced by “Process Theology” (as outlined by Alfred North Whitehead).

Bahá'ís have been particularly successful at abstracting the transcendent ethical and social message of their scripture, and the process of understanding the immediate historical context of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh is underway: Fâzel-e Mâzandarâni, Eshrâq-Khâvari, Taherzadeh, and more recently, Amanat and Cole have all made major contributions to the dating of the books and tablets of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, and the historical circumstances to which they respond. Since the situating of texts in their particular historical context can help us gain a deeper appreciation of the author's immediate intentions and the audience's immediate understandings, the Bahá'í community ought to be open to the ongoing unfoldment of the meaning of revelation through the study of Bahá'u'lláh's texts in their micro-historical environment.

In making this provisional translation, I have tried to uncover historical information that would help to explain some of the allusions in the poem. I have also tried to recover, wherever I could, the Koranic, Sufi and Babi referents. This information is given in the above introduction and in the endnotes to the poem, in hopes that this will help re-create one horizon of the poem, though much work of this nature remains to be done for this text. This project will not be important to all or perhaps most of the Bahá'ís interested in reading or reciting Bahá'u'lláh's poetry. My hope has been, however, to provide background information to enhance a reader's appreciation of the poem without dictating how the poem should be interpreted or understood. This seems to me the most appropriate approach to take for future translation of the corpus of Bahá'u'lláh's poetry, in the absence of an authoritative interpreter of Bahá'í scripture. The meaning for me will be slightly different than the meaning another reader, with a different life experience, different knowledge base and different theological outlook, will derive.

Toward a provisional translation of Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví*

No provisional translation of Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví-y-i Mubáarak* has as yet been published in English, and I am unaware that any of the lines of the poem are given an official translation anywhere in the corpus of Shoghi Effendi's published writings. I am aware of only one previous translation, a literary version in Castilian Spanish by Juan A. Guzmán, based upon a direct literal translation from the Persian by Kurosh Owrang and Miguel Cintas, published as *El Poema del bendito (Masnaví Mubarak) de Bahá'u'lláh* (Huelva, Spain:

Diputación Provincial de Huelva, 1997).⁶³

The following provisional translation is offered in accordance with the permission given in a letter of the Universal House of Justice dated 30 June 1999, indicating that translations of Bahá'í scripture made by individuals may be published in circulars and journals "without review other than by the editors of such publications," as long as they are "clearly identified as 'provisional translations.'" This new arrangement, it is hoped, will lead to "the availability of a greater amount of translated material and avoid the present delays in approving fully authorized translations."

The version offered here is by no means, therefore, meant as a definitive translation of Bahá'u'lláh's poem; it is merely an illustration of one possible approach to rendering this and other poems of Bahá'u'lláh into English. That the translation stands in need of revision I will be the first to admit. Aside from improvements which can undoubtedly be made to the wording of the English, there are several points in the text which remain unclear or uncertain to me (most of these have been indicated in the endnotes). While I have suggested specific circumstances for some of the allusions in the poem, many others remain to be elucidated. Furthermore, one may reasonably disagree on the degree to which implicit historical allusions should be signalled in a translation; perhaps a hermeneutic of the timeless applicability of the images and ethics of the poem is to be preferred, particularly within a community reading the text as scripture.

Despite the tentativeness of the reading, I am nevertheless emboldened to offer this effort here in public because of the following factors:

- 1) It is perhaps better to give English-speaking Bahá'ís some idea, however inadequate and provisional, of the contents and style of the poem for devotional purposes, than for them to have no access at all to the poem.
- 2) Making a provisional translation available in this journal to a wider audience seems to me the best way to highlight problems and solicit improvements from translators with technical expertise, those with further insights into the allusions and references in the poem, and readers of literary taste.⁶⁴ For this reason, I have numbered the verses, to aid readers wishing to

⁶³ This small volume of poetry (52pp) appeared in the series Colección de Poesía Juan Ramón Jiménez (ISBN: 84-8163-103-5). The version by Juan A. Guzmán seems quite accurate, and includes a glossary of technical terms. Guzmán's prologue (dated 1995) also provides a concise historical introduction to Bahá'u'lláh's writings. Without mentioning his source(s), Guzmán twice asserts that Bahá'u'lláh composed the *Mathnaví* in a single night in 1863 during his stay in Constantinople/Istanbul (7, 9).

⁶⁴ Indeed, substantive corrections have been made even to official translations, such as the *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre), subsequent to its first publication in 1978 (see the supplement, which included an index and 6 pages of errata).

compare the lines of the poem with the original Persian.

3) Though he translated a number of prayers with poetic imagery and sonorous phrasings, Shoghi Effendi did not translate any formal poetry of Bahá'u'lláh. The Bahá'í community will therefore need to experiment to find satisfying ways to render these poems into English, whether it be artistic prose, free verse, blank verse or rhyming verse. This translation is then not only provisional but also experimental, in that prior translations have not attempted to render Bahá'í scripture into traditional English verse forms.

Approaches to the translation of poetry

Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví* is in rhyme and verse. Anyone wishing to translate a poem in rhyme and meter must decide whether to translate word-for-word, giving a very literal meaning, to paraphrase in prose, to dispense with rhyme and meter and make a free verse translation, or to try to recreate the verse features of the original.

In Persian literature, poetry prior to the mid-20th century invariably observed rhyme. There are different rhyme schemes, but there are no poems which dispense with rhyme altogether. Due to the structure of its verb system, along with other morphological features of both its native lexicon and the large influx of lexical borrowings from Arabic, Persian is a rhyme-rich language. Although it is of course possible to produce rhyming translations into English,⁶⁵ the English reservoir of rhyme is far smaller, and this may often result in either a relatively free rendering, less precision in the rendering of specific terms, and/or a translation that seems artificially archaic. English is an analytic, not an inflected language, and English word order has become increasingly fixed. Modern English verse is less supple than it once was; poets three hundred years ago did not feel as constrained by the natural word order of English and would blithely place objects before verbs, or verbs before subjects. Such prepositioning is now largely out of favour amongst those who still write and read traditional verse meters. Too much finessing of normal syntax in order to get the proper rhyme at the end of a line will likely leave modern readers of English bemused and disoriented.⁶⁶

However, for anyone who believes that form is an essential component of meaning, or for anyone wishing to experience a verse poem in translation as a measured rhythmical concatenation of syllables, a simple prose paraphrase

⁶⁵ One may turn to the works of Dick Davis for a modern example; see his *The Legend of Seyâvash* and his earlier *The Conference of the Birds*, by Ferdowsi and 'Attâr, respectively, both published by Penguin.

⁶⁶ Most modern poets writing in rhyme do not feel the freedom to prepose verbs before subjects or objects before subjects, and other licenses which poets did not feel the least bit of discomfort in employing from the 16th through the 19th century.

will not do. Particularly in the case of Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví*, which was designed for recitation, and the cadenced phrases of which unquestionably contribute to the effect of the poem on the listener, I felt it desirable and more authentic to translate to some form of English verse.

Blank verse, which observes a regular meter while dispensing with rhyme, seemed the best solution. Invented by Surrey in the 16th century, and employed by Milton for his Biblical epic, *Paradise Lost*, this form has been used by Shakespeare and others as a dignified vehicle for dramatic and epic poetry. Blank verse does not force the translator to stray as far from the original as a rhyming translation might, but it does impinge upon the translator's diction by limiting the number of syllables she may use per line, and by imposing an alternating pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. These constraints obviously affect the translation's precision and its ability to explain technical or theological terms. However, these constraints also help to shape the translation and create an aural experience similar to that of a person experiencing the poem in its original verse form.

But blank verse is by no means the only alternative. Other English verse forms available to a translator might include Skeltonics, the cadenced phrasings that John Skelton developed in the 16th century. These would give the advantage of breaking up metrical lines into parallel phrases that do not need to count syllables. A phrase-by-phrase translation, rather than a line-by-line one, would perhaps afford the translator the room to be more precise in formulating English equivalents of the Persian. However, most ears find Skeltonics awkward and jerky after a short while.

Poulter's meter (an alexandrine twelve-syllable line followed by a fourteen-syllable line) would also allow more precision in finding English equivalents for the *Mathnaví*, because it would give the English twenty-six syllables for every twenty-two syllables of Persian, as opposed to the twenty syllables of English for every twenty-two of Persian that iambic pentameter gives us to work with. Poulter's meter is rather old fashioned, however, and does not seem as successful in conveying a sense of rhythm.

The accentual prosody of Old English has been successfully mimicked in modern English, but seems far more appropriate to traditional epic and martial works than to religious verse. On the other hand, non-regular free-verse cadences, such as Walt Whitman uses, would perhaps work quite well.

I have chosen blank verse, in iambic pentameter, though this may not meet every reader's taste. As with all metrical poetry, variation is important; an entire poem of exactly regular iambic pentameter would make for a lilting, lulling, if not stupefying, litany of syllables. In the translation below, the reader will find the iamb frequently abandoned for an anapest or dactyl or spondee, sometimes to fit the meaning in the line, occasionally for dramatic effect. Sometimes you will need to read words with syncopated syllables (the noun "confines," for example, may be accented unnaturally on its second syllable to fit the iamb), or with elided syllables ("mysteries" for example,

will usually be read in this poem as two syllables: “mys-tries”). Such are the poetic licenses of which one speaks for verse, though I have generally avoided graphically marking elisions (e.g., Th’ Ethereal); versifiers in the 18th and 19th century would have done this as second nature, but it looks rather unfashionable today.

This *Mathnaví*, while theologically preparing the way for the wider proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh's station, I have treated as more of a devotional text, intended for recitation like a prayer, than as an informational or doctrinal tablet about belief. It does, of course, elaborate certain ideas about progressive revelation, which Bahá'u'lláh had earlier put forth in the *Iqán*, and it also employs Sufi terminology. But it will probably have more use as a work to be recited in Bahá'í gatherings for its inspirational qualities, rather than as a text to be studied like the *Iqán* or the *Tablet of Wisdom*. For this reason, it seems important to translate the poem as a poem.

What follows is, then, an effort to create a poetic effect through verse using a recognisably Bahá'í vocabulary that nevertheless shares somewhat more in common with the late-twentieth century literary idioms of American English. For example, I do not use the archaic “thee” and “thou,” nor do I use the early modern English verbal inflections (doest, doth, etc.).

These days translators of poetry will often drop some lines, or alter the meaning slightly by introducing images or situations more native in the culture of the target language, in the belief that this creates a more successful poem in translation. They may well be correct, but I do not agree with this premise and have not left out lines. I have tried to convey the imagery and import of each line without greatly altering or nativising it.

I have been greatly assisted in understanding the poem by the comments of many individuals who read drafts of the translation, especially Dr. Khazeh Fananapazir, whose immense knowledge and unfailing kindness have been instrumental to me in understanding the intended referent of too many lines to note each one individually. I am grateful to Dr. Fananapazir for suggesting several improvements to the translation. Likewise, Dominic Brookshaw at Oxford University has painstakingly compared a draft of this translation to the original Persian and provided copious comments and commentary which have helped make the English more precise.⁶⁷ My sincere hope is that others reading this provisional translation will further improve it by forwarding their comments and corrections.

⁶⁷ I would also like to thank the following individuals for their suggestions on various points, which came via the Tarjuman discussion list, where the first draft of the poem was offered: Iskandar Hai (who graciously supplied me with a copy of the 1914/1332 text); Nosratollah Zamani (who helped me collate and evaluate the readings of the various texts); Ahang Rabbani (who made valuable suggestions about the reading of *lajlāj* and pointed out the letter from Mirza Haydar ‘Alí to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in which lines of the poem are quoted); Sen McGlinn, Juan Cole, Peter Terry, Susan Maneck, Todd Lawson, Stephen Phelps, Iraj Ayman, and Manuchehr Salmanpour.

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BAHÁ'U'LLÁH'S "MATHNAVÍY-I MUBÁRAK"
A PROVISIONAL VERSE TRANSLATION

He is the Most Glorious!

You!
Life-force of God's throne,
compassion's sun!
Time's universe
has birthed
no light like Yours! 1

From seeing God, creation's eyes are barred,ⁱ
or in few words I'd show the Unseen world 2
that all souls might pledge fealty to Youⁱⁱ
that every heart become a thrall to You 3
that all the world grow drunk and mad with love,
with both hands offering up their willing souls; 4
Pride of the age!
Just state the word, Your Cause,ⁱⁱⁱ
and they'll lay scattered at Your blessed feet 5

Raise up Your sunny head above souls' peaks
that all from every point may see You plain 6
Reveal that face bright as the orb of night^{iv}
make verdant with Your grace this withered straw 7
From Your ocean, heaven's rivers ask one drop^v
Let flow paradise, since You are Lord and King! 8
The atoms beg their share of light from You:
through Your unquestioned boundless grace, illumine! 9
The seeds turn up their mouths unto the heavens
hoping for Your gifts: anointing glory^{vi} 10
Rain the droplets of Your mercy on them
O Ruler of the realms, King of the Throne! 11
Rend through these curtains of a hundred folds
Regale us now with glimpses of Your face 12
Pile up provisions for us through Your grace,
for Your munificence is past all doubt. 13
Make our West light up with global dawn^{vii}
Spice this drink with cheer like vintage wine 14

- i See the Koran, 7:143. Moses asks God to reveal Himself in person, to which God replies “thou shalt not see Me.” Instead, God reveals his majesty on a mountain, which splits apart from the force of the Lord’s *mysterium tremendum*, knocking Moses unconscious.
- ii “Fealty” to be read as three syllables: fê-al-ty.
- iii One meaning of the noun *amr* (plural *avâmer*) is “command,” “order;” this meaning occurs in Baha’i theology to distinguish between the realm of God’s command (*amr*) and the contingent realm of creation (*khalq*). However, *amr* also has the meaning of “cause,” “affair” (plural *omur*), as in the phrase “The Cause of God” (*Amr Allâh*). I have attempted to preserve both meanings by rendering “word” and “cause.” Literally, the line appears to suggest that as soon as God’s cause is revealed, or as soon as God commands, all will respond to that announcement with exuberant joy.
- iv i.e., the moon, which in the dark, pre-electrified skyline, was an impressive sight dominating the nightscape, and compared frequently in Persian poetry to the beautiful, radiant face of the beloved, which likewise dominated and illumined the field of vision of the lover.
- v *Qatre mi-juyad ze bahr-at kowsari*: This could also be understood as: the drop seeks from Your ocean heaven’s stream.
- vi Glory here renders “Bahá’”, a double meaning alluding to Bahá’u’lláh himself. Thus the earth’s face turns to heaven, hoping that in the absence of the Báb, God will send down Bahá, in a shower of glory.
- vii Among the signs of the Day of Resurrection and the appearance of the Qá’im is sometimes included that the sun would rise from the west.

- Light up the heart's light with the shafts of light^{viii}
 that they may see in Your face Sinai's lights 15
 Unsheathe the dagger of Divinity
 and swiftly slay those hostile to Your Faith 16
 Stoke your Lordly fire, incinerate
 the heretics who war against You 17
 They are nocturnal bats; but raise Your head,
 O Sun of day, and burn all dark away 18
 Clarify this vintage of grief-tainted dregs^{ix}
 Light up this candle which the night oppressed 19
 You stood up in our soul, the world arose^x
 to make clear through Your cause "Be and it was"^{xi} 20
- Soul's glory!^{xii} in remembrance of Your face
 I'll speak whole volumes of Your character 21
 to rouse with wisdom all the spirits
 to see who'll pay the price for Your love's pearl 22
 I'll strike a conflagration through the world,
 consume the veils concealing heaven's holies 23
 I'll lead the Mystic Maiden from her veil,
 draw back the curtain from the hidden light 24
 I'll give a hint, since You've returned in spirit,
 Of Love's eternal unseen mystery 25
- Soar, fiery bird, through exposition's heaven^{xiii}
 till no more sign of being can be seen 26
 Purify these envy-riddled hearts
 Guide these consciences which lack all compass^{xiv} 27
 Let those heedless, Great One, of Your covenant,
 sip the ancient chalice to regain their wits, 28
 to transport us with Your melodies, my Friend,
 past rubrics like "intoxicated," "sober" 29
 Heraldic angel of Bahá! Spirit's Lord!^{xv}
 Inspire the dead with new vitality 30
- He is that primal tree branched from the heart
 redeem Him from earthmire, from air and water 31
 that He, released, may transcend form and matter,
 His candle may set solar stars ablaze 32
 Plant this tender sapling in the heart's soil
 and keep it sacred, safe from sun or shade:^{xvi} 33
 protect it from contrariness of wind,

set free from pagan supposition's hold,³⁴
make strong and firm its roots in soil of soul,
and raise its branches past the firmament 35
Bring anew a new green spring for all to see
raise up the dead for Your Resurrection 36
Love's oceans all are surging with Your tide,
immortal birds through Your awareness know 37
From Spirit's Egypt send us that coat's scent^{xvii}
Reveal right here the burning bush of Moses^{xviii} 38
Your face, my Beauty, sets the spring in motion
and with it, spring brings countless mystic truths:^{xix} 39
Each rose, an album of the beauteous Friend
Each heart He fills with God's Edenic grace^{xx} 40
No fall will ever overtake such springs^{xxi}
all flowers circumambulate round Him⁴¹
Such spring as this the soul cannot conceive
Such spring as this reanimates the spirits 42
For fair-faced youths the mortal springs bring ardour,
while such a spring as this brings love of God 43
Mortal springs will wane and fade out in the end
Such springs as this we designate "immortal" 44
Earthly spring arrives in nature's season
This spring basks in light from His breath-taking face^{xxii} 45
Those earthly springs bring forth the tulip buds
This spring ethereal now fills up with wails^{xxiii} 46

The eternal spring which shines in this King's light
illuminates vistas of God's court and throne^{xxiv} 47
All cross the threshold of His court's Pavilion;
You of insight, look, if you have eyes, and see! 48
When our King casts the veil from off His face,
eternal springs will blossom in the skies^{xxv} 49
When our Friend casts the cover from His face,
eternal springs will shine with undimmed glory 50

His face in springs eternal bathes us all
– No garden's rose can draw our eyes from Him 51
His remembrance blots out thought of treasure^{xxvi}
His daystar makes us shine throughout the world 52
Should breezes touch us from His pleasant spring,
you'll see Joseph after Joseph come in view 53
Should breezes reach us from this rosy bower,

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you'll see Josephs of the spirit fill the world	54
You'll see the bodies seeming just like souls	
– the souls confirmed by victories all the time	55
In the Beloved's sacred springtime sing	
countless expositions; yet who can hear? ^{xxvii}	56
Such Exposition transcends any tongue;	
how could these nobodies grasp its meaning? ^{xxviii}	57
This Exposition's not just words and sound –	
this Exposition's life itself, undying	58
You'll see the lovers in this endless spring,	
a million strong, freely offer up their lives ^{xxix}	59
This is the Spring of Spiritual Might,	
the holy vernal tidings of the Lord	60
If this zephyr's breeze wafts over you	
your fleeting soul will drain the immortal cup	61
If breezes touch you from the Friend's abode,	
give life – which comes from Him – in sacrifice	62
See this Spring's tulips of unicity, ^{xxx}	
the Friend's locks: hyacinths of sanctity.	63
Buds of mystic knowledge line this stream bank,	
all turn longingly in search of Him ^{xxxi}	64
Its cypress trees evoke that Darling's stature,	
Its leaves a book depicting our Friend's cheeks,	65
Its ringdoves drunk on beauty of the Friend,	
Its nightingales on cups of "Am I not" ^{xxxii}	66
The songbirds in desire of tryst with Him	
all drunk on breezes of the grace of "He" ^{xxxiii}	67
This nightingale's soft melody, if heard, ^{xxxiv}	
would purge creation's souls of jealousy	68
The seas of meaning surge with Exposition	
The Ark of Being rides this bounty's crest ^{xxxv}	69
Every wind-flower blooming in this spring ^{xxxvi}	
tells countless truths and mysteries of that Friend	70
The Friend's dark locks emit a fragrant musk!	
His hand of bounty showers you with gifts	71
Like salamanders in the fire, His curls; ^{xxxvii}	
they coil about the fire of the Friend's face	72

The holy songbird, separate from the Friend,
burns up both skin and marrow with laments 73
Should it heave a sigh in separation's throes
it would inflame the souls of the elect⁷⁴
(The elect alone enjoy a share of this –
so from such bounteous grace take warmth, my friend!)^{xxxviii} 75

Waft from the soul Your scent of musk divine
that these degenerates may catch sweet hints 76
This is the spring of endless spirit
– not a spring soon chased away by autumn 77
In this holy springtide, spirit blossoms
in its atmosphere, the light of Noah shines 78
It boards the passengers into the Ark^{xxxix}
and grants each one of them untold dominion 79
Beauty of God! Emerge from out the veil,
so that the sun may rise up in the west!^{xl} 80
Unseal the musk of God's own privileged knowledge
Open treasure chests of mysteries unseen – 81
so that the dead discern Your scent of musk
so that Your wine will stir the numb to mirth 82
Through kind largesse, clothe in Your robe of Might^{xli}
this Meek one of the earth of unity 83
This fleeting one – outfit in garb immortal
This abject wretch – give taste of honied riches 84
That He might step out fully from the curtain
and rend contingent being's veil to shreds, 85
intoxicated and impelled, emerge,
like a candle in the glass of "they return"^{xlii} 86

It was in Your garden that this thistle grew,
so make through it a thousand gardens bloom^{xliii} 87
Upon each garden, then, inscribe a name
and write the ancient secrets on each leaf 88
that Your face may beam with rays resplendent
and fill the earth and heavens with Your light 89
Waft over them with mercy's generous breeze;
Tear from this afflicted one all heedless veils^{xliv} 90
Grant, bright-miened Sovereign, to the spirits pure
the sheltering shade of Your Divine Lote tree⁹¹
Unlock for them a Gate^{xlv} to Riván's meaning^{xlvi} –
For God's sake! do not bar this Gate to them 92

- that I may step unveiled into the world,
expound upon one of Your righteous signs 93
- He said: By God, by God, my righteous man,
don't tell the ignorant the signs of Truth! 94
God, God! O Tongue of God! Tell this secret
soft and slow, have patience with the people; 95
perchance Your grace may take them by the hand
and free them from all fear of this and that96
- Stretch the wings of meaning, fly aloft,
soar through the spheres of nearness unto Him, 97
near Him in spirit, not by taking steps
Strive with soul and enter realms eternal 98
To thus traverse the heavens in a flash
is easy if you bow your head in prayer99
In Exposition of this let me speak –
that from the Fount of Life you quaff your share 100
and reach the Riván of eternity
and find your way to where you meet with God 101
and fathom what is meant by “Cross the earth”,^{xlvii}
and soar like spirit through His atmosphere – 102
Since at this moment you're enmeshed in clay,
How can you sense the scent of heart's Riván? 103
Strip yourself of all restriction's garments
and sanctify your soul from limitation104
Illumine your heart's darkness with His light
Make yourself in spirit's realm the leader 105
Your darkness once dispelled, His light arises;
His Sinai's rays will sparkle on your heart^{xlviii} 106
Once night comes to an end, the morning dawns
Majestic breezes of the spirit blow 107
You are, and your corrupted soul, that darkness^{xlix}
God's self-revelation, your Water of Life 108
Just pass beyond the darkness of your self;
you'll quaff, always refreshed, the wine of life 109
Then step into the shade of Soul's own Khezz^l
that from the realms of darkness you'll be freed 110
The Khezz of old drank deep, was freed from death
while this new Khezz grants countless founts of life 111
To all He has bestowed the water of life
To the sole King, he's sacrificed his soul! 112
That Khezz through striving finally arrived;

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This Khezr at once made fountains flow with life 113
That Khezr ran after traces of the fount
This Khezr is chased each step by flowing founts 114

Return, O spirit's Glory,^{li} from this trek,
and so hunt down a million meanings more! 115
Don't hunt the vagrant beasts, leave them to their graves!^{lii}
Capture mystic meaning's prize on Sinai's plain 116
You hunted lovers' souls down on the plains
till all souls passed beyond the plane of Being. 117
You have no chance to tell the nightingale,
O King of All, of secrets of the Rose^{liii} 118
Let a bird fly from the falconer's forearm
and bring back mysteries from the farther realms 119
And now hunt for the mystic bird of meaning,^{liv}
Open a treasure with the key of "Be",^{lv} 120
The promise that you made, fulfill it now,
you whose light has brightened earth and heaven! 121
Deck the world with Your spring's vernal verdure;
make Eden envious of Your own Riván 122
Of Truth, make blossom fields of wind-flowers
within this atmosphere of soul's springtide 123
So make each rose a nightingale's sign
To all the kings explain the heart's rosé^{lvi} 124
For at this moment there are strangers here
(though stranger here and confidant are one)^{lvii} 125

O morning breeze, from tresses of the Friend
bring fragrances of spiritual musk 126
O clouds of spiritual bounty, rain
so that the shells may all engender pearls 127
The mysteries divine: deciphered, shown!
The meaning "cross the earth" is mentioned, told!^{lviii} 128
Then, you who're drunk on chalices of pride,
exchange your fiery selfish souls for light, 129
and cross the span of earth with just one breath^{lix}
to win release from confines of your cage 130
Till you enter in the shelter of the Friend,
you've no conception of what's pith, what's husk 131
Your legs of meaning stand quagmired in mud,
ignorant of His fair and radiant face^{lx} 132
Once harbored in the King of soul's soft shadow

- it's time to uproot heart from worldly earth 133
 For a while at first in dust you wallowed
 but in the end you pass beyond the sun¹³⁴
 See how, sojourner, you crossed spirit's worlds
 in an instant without lifting up a foot!¹³⁵
- Now fragrance from sweet meadows of the soul
 wafts by, perfuming us and earth in scent 136
 Again that bounteous Riván's soulful musk
 wafts by, and blows away all things that were 137
 Of "heed" and "heedlessness" we here lose hold
 Both drunk and sober have been carried off 138
 Sobriety erased, effacement fades^{lxi} –
 The drunk finds wits, no sober one remains 139
 Whatever names and ways the world once had
 have been proved fleeting since my King appeared 140
 For Names, though striving towards Him for an age,
 could never comprehend His smallest station¹⁴¹
 All that your eye and ear have seen and heard,
 sure guide,^{lxii} above all that, He's holier. 142
 Then how with ear and eye of insight void
 perceive the inner mystery of the Beloved? 143
 Open your eye anew to the new Friend^{lxiii}
 Clear your inner ear, then listen! 144
 Ignorant eyes see nothing but the dust,
 Gnostic eyes see primordial secrets 145
 Gnostic eyes see down the road a million years –
 Ignorant eyes can't see the King's own face!^{lxiv} 146
- Once someone posed this question to a gnostic:
 O you, who've grasped the mysteries of God 147
 O you, by bounty's wine intoxicate,
 do you recall the day of "Am I not?"^{lxv} 148
 He said: I do recall that sound, those words,^{lxvi}
 as if it were but yesterday, no less!^{lxvii} 149
 It lingers ever in my ears, His call,
 that sweet, soul-vivifying voice of His.^{lxviii} 150
- Another gnostic, who had climbed beyond,^{lxix}
 had bored the mystic pearls divine, replied: 151
 That day of God has never ended nor
 has fallen short, we're living in that day!^{lxx} 152

His day's unending, not pursued by night –
That we're alive on such a day's not strange 153
Had Time's Soul ceased its yearning for this day,
then Heaven's court and throne would fall to dust 154
For through God's power this eternal day
was made unending by His Majesty. 155

Then you, my dear, please heed this paradox
and mind the counsels of God's mysteries, 156
that you may find soul's nurture in His wisdom,
your life be for His face a sacrifice 157
that you may always hear His melodies
and deeply drain the chalice of His grace 158
that you may comprehend love's mysteries,
quaff Love's rejuvenating streams of wine^{lxxi} 159

I'll never flinch from riff-raffs' brandished swords
though infidels may slay me over and over 160
From the start my soul drank deep Your vintage
At last I'll give my life to Your remembrance 161
O Bahá! Kindle once again the fire,
burn up earth's learning and investigation 162
and clean its soul of worldly qualities;
unlock one symbol of the hidden mysteries, 163
cast a wave up from the depths of mystic seas
and crack the Ark of superficiality 164
Pour out a glass that frees me from myself,
that I, like champions,^{lxxii} may slash through veils. 165
You, through whose name the Tree of Life bears fruit,
whose hand wields manifest the powers of Truth, 166
A world entire in Your palm's destiny
tumultuous now, grows tranquil by Your plan 167
Light up, bright King, this candle and through it,
illuminate the various directions. 168
This lantern flame which You've illumined
and protected in protection's glass,^{lxxiii} 169
with magnanimity's oil You've succoured it
and tapered it with wicks of God's Command – 170
Protect it, then, from all oppression's winds
that Your irradiant light may shine through it 171
Make hands of enemies fall short of it,
Orb of command! Of "We, in truth," the King!^{lxxiv} 172
Look at your candle, how it's buffeted

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by calamitous contrary winds! 173
 It's through Your beauty's rays it gets its light
 let no contingency, then, snuff it out 174
 Since You have kindled it, then quench it not
 Since You have made it quick, extinguish not 175
 You whose kindness makes a mote into a sun,
 whose wrath reduces lions into sparrows, 176
 Your candle, O Creator, stands exposed
 by harsh winds buffeted from every side 177
 If You wish, even water turns to fire
 but if You don't, the fire itself turns cold 178
 Through Your wisdom, demons turn to angels
 Through Your command, hell's fire turns into light 179
 Should You wish, the winds will work like oil,
 will make the spirits blaze and give off light^{lxxv} 180

O Bahá'u'lláh, how fierce Your fire!
 it burns the lovers' beings all to stubble 181
 You struck the hearts with one spark from the flame
 and set afire whole forests on Sinai 182
 So, from each heart You've conjured burning bushes.^{lxxvi}
 O Moses, here it is! come running fast, 183
 behold the meaning of the fire of God
 and free yourselves from grip of the Egyptians! 184

O Sacrifice of God,^{lxxvii} do not forsake
 love's altar; give your life in paths of love! 185
 Come soul-shorn and headlorn to the Friend's lane,
 thus worthy of the folk whose realm this is. 186

Spirit of God!^{lxxviii} Step in the vale of love^{lxxix}
 walk the road, blaze a trail, the Cross in tow^{lxxx} 187

Above the skies and physical ascent^{lxxxii}
 climb, King of soul and body's Jubilation! 188
 You're spirit's nightingale on spirit's rose
 Won't you please, O Host of spirit, return? 189
 Your home, Spirit-Falcon: the King's forearm –
 so aim directly for your home right here! 190

You, likewise, Noah, break the body's Ark
 and hurl yourself into the Sea of Light! 191

Bahá'u'lláh's Mathnaví 137

- Don't seek self-preservation; Drown this self!
then you'll come up for air in God's embrace^{lxxxii} 192
Seek out the King's protection, not the ship's
– the King's preserve will then provide refuge 193
- You, too, hasten Moses, come to Soul's Sinai!
Forget your cloak and sandals, rush unrobed!^{lxxxiii} 194
that you may know the mysteries of that Fire
which flames from each lock of the Loved One's hair 195
His locks a fire that burn the soul of love –
both faith and unbelief and love's set ways – 196
His locks a fire that dance on Mount Páran^{lxxxiv}
The back of Time's bent by His curly strands 197
- O Dove,^{lxxxv} leave now the tale of Fire's mysteries
Don't bring the pearls of Soul before the blind – 198
This Staff^{lxxxvi} – the Hand of Truth wields as a sword
and cuts contingent outward forms to shreds 199
All other staffs^{lxxxvii} are hewn from orchard tree
but this Staff's brought to be through Truth's command 200
Those staffs in stuff like clay and water grow;
Behold this Staff, composed of hot heart's fire! 201
This Staff is a consuming fire whose flame
burns through the veils of falsehood, counterfeit 202
This Staff's the wind that smote the folk of Hud^{lxxxviii}
first sifting faithful out from infidel 203
This Staff became an ark in Noah's age
and then in Jesus' time to spirit changed 204
- O Moses, you must rush to Soul's Sinai –
Your fire roars with animated flames 205
Forget the sandals! fly through spirit's realm
like wind, and leave belief and soul behind 206
(O Bird-soul, fly beyond ephemeral space
to feast eternal with cherubs rosy-cheeked)^{lxxxix} 207
The fire of Moses flares in His Lote tree^{xc}
His breaths respire with hosts of Christ-like spirits 208
- That Moses saw the fire on Sinai glow
This Moses saw his soul ablaze with fire 209
(Upon the Mount of Soul full many creeds^{xc})

- are manifest like branches lade with fruit) 210
 God's Mount, His breast; the Friend's bright flame, His fire
 Snow-white, His hand; and Sinai is His heart 211
 (Not with the whiteness His command created,
 but whiteness that itself creates Command!) 212
 Now, in this age, Love's Mount Párán^{xcii} appears
 as our Friend rends the veil from off His face 213
 The scent of soul now permeates the air
 but I know not from where this fragrance comes 214
 I do know, though, the tresses of the Friend
 draw souls forth with their scent to sacrifice 215
 The musk of God has been released, unsealed –
 His memory brought our souls to share a secret 216
 Blow, breeze of spiritual morning, soft –
 Blow, sacred zephyr of the Merciful 217
 Intoxicate the souls with your aroma
 bear them up past being's world to "Am I not"^{xciii} 218
- The Immortal Phoenix from the Mount of Faith^{xciv}
 has winged its way into the infinite^{xcv} 219
 and crossed at single stroke the world's horizons
 through confirmations from the Spirit-King 220
 Now from the Friend's Throne once again it comes
 and infinite the melodies it sings 221
 His rosy face makes dead of winter spring
 His lips of ruby make the night daybright 222
 His tresses make the lovers suffer long
 His absence brings beloveds abject need 223
 His hair lassoes brave champions by the neck
 The head of God's hosts wounded by His shafts 224
 His lips rob every lover's soul of wit
 the souls of kings for union with Him yearn 225
 The eye of inner soul – look well, you'll see –
 was made to light up by His beauty 226
 Had it not been for His eye, the founts of light
 would not have sprung or flowed throughout the world 227
 His rose brings ample gardens into blossom
 His cheeks abloom with inner meaning's roses 228
 Where He dwells, Moses' fire seeks its light
 In His face, the soul of Christ seeks spirit 229
 From behind the veil should He but step one night,
 He'll light a hundred worlds up like the sun 230
 What's night, if not the dark tress of that beauty?

What's morn, if not the light of that Friend's face? 231
Each and every monarch in Love's city
has scattered for the sake of love his soul 232
God's beauty in His beauty stands revealed
and from His lips the hearts quaff soulful wine 233
All the world's entangled in His hair
their wounded chests all heave in pain for Him 234
When the Zulaykhá of Beauty saw that face
in the place of her hand, she cut her heart^{xcvi} 235
He blew with just one breath of His own spirit
and brought a million Christ-like spirits to life 236

But this does not describe Him – just His light,
from which you, who're made of attributes, draw life^{xcvii} 237
But find a way His beauty to describe,
and you will cross a thousand seas of meaning 238
One ray, devout one, being thus described,
imagine the description of Himself! 239
When the lover's eye espied His beauty,
it cut all heart-ties to this world and beyond 240
The wave of love's seas surges with His wave
Love's phoenix finds its zenith in His heights 241
Your eye receives its light from His, and so
to turn to any other's a dark deed 242
Since the soul's eye takes its light from Him,
what shame were it to light upon another! 243
Your eye came into sight from Truth's own eye
to see naught but His beauty in the world 244

(I tell this mystery sotto voce, friend;
I bore this pearl in secret, kind companion! 245
that the evil eye may never touch Him
that the stranger may not find the way to Him) 246

Perceive this in your limbs and members, all;
Cast off the fetters of the folk of darkness 247
For your ear has heard His mystic melodies,
and hearkened to His music's soulful secrets^{xcviii} 248
Now that the handiwork divine's revealed,
turn your eyes to it and from all worldly folk 249
Look to the world with His eye, if you can^{xcix} –
a thousand realms of meaning you will see 250
His eye perceives no thing except God's face

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	His bird takes perch nowhere except His lane	251
	With Him united, lovers' souls burn up;	
	their hearts, in separation, blaze with flame	252
	So both in separation and reunion	
	the life-lorn, soul-shorn lover burns, my son! ^c	253
	Then know that love of Truth is your companion	
	that you may soar away from worldly trappings	254
	Love means a letting go of mortal life	
	to claim with heart and soul eternity ²⁵⁵	
	Seek to hear the secret meaning, if you can, ^{ci}	
	that you may make divine ascent to God, ^{cii}	256
	that spirit's harvest grow upon your palm tree,	
	and give forth luminous and sacred fruits	257
	O Breeze, bring us fragrance from His tresses	
	Clouds, sprinkle on us showers of His grace ^{ciii}	258
	that the meadows of His lovers' souls	
	may bring forth Love's most beautiful tulips	259
	The throne of God is but the lover's heart ^{civ}	
	which has been purified of all but Him	260
	Once His House, through love of such a heart, was raised ^{cv}	
	Both House and Him within the House were hid ^{cvi}	261
	Know this, O youth! His House resides in hearts	
	and was not raised upon mere stone and clay ^{cvi}	262
	And when His light has bathed and cleansed your heart	
	your heart becomes His seat – it's His Sinai!	263
	God's House, a Lover now from head to toe,	
	shines ever effulgent with the Beloved ²⁶⁴	
	When Love returns, the veil of reason burns; ^{cvi}	
	of virtue, knowledge, gnosis, harvests burn	265
	Since none but Him is in the House, my son,	
	from wall to wall know all is His command	266
	Know, then, your eye and ear and hand from Him	
	and He will see for you and take your hand	267
	The gnostic soul, His highest temple, ^{cix} and	
	the mystic treasures of His close approach ^{cx}	268
	And now a new way must be found, my son –	
	this counsel you must heed with all your soul –	269
	So rise beyond reunion/separation ^{cx}	

until you reach the precincts of the Source^{cxii} 270
Separated, you're as sure as in the fire;
reunited with Him, you are febrile, ill!271
Enter the pure and everlasting realm,
the plane where all but Him do fade away^{cxiii} 272
If you have read the Hadíth "There was God"^{cxiv}
then you know secrets of "There's naught but Him"^{cxv} 273
Walk this path with striving feet to free yourself
from either care: the Friend's absence or union 274
When you sense for sure the spirit's mystery –
that there is nothing anywhere but God – 275
then wash away in spirit's stream the mire
that you may see the Pure One's emanations 276
that you may see reunion in reunion
that you may see your heart with Beauty shine 277
Such union never will be contradicted
such union never ends in separation 278
If you've an ear for fatherly advice,
both are blasphemy: reunion, absence!279

Fly, regal bird, from either consequence^{cxvi}
into His, the Sovereign's, sphere of Unity 280
But I fear your feet will lose their footing,
that evil suppositions cloud your mind 281
I must explain the meaning for you,
uproot satanic whisperings from your heart 282
free you from games, evil, hauteur, unrest
lest this exposition^{cxvii} tempt you into pride 283
Know this: His emanations are reunion
which shine within you endless, unconditioned 284
Within you He has placed His light, in trust;^{cxviii}
Strive hard to make it become manifest! 285
Then in yourself, my sweet, seek union with Him
and you'll no longer feel the Friend's absence 286
You are yourself the storehouse of God's treasure,
yet heedless, you chase after this and that^{cxix} 287
Until His attributes appear in you,
know yourself as lost, in separation 288
His bounty has not left you portionless
of His names and ways and qualities, o sage!289
Through His grace, He's opened gates unto you
do not, like ingrates, close those opened gates^{cxx} 290

Since you have heard the reed pipe's plaint of love, ^{cxxi}	
recognize it now renewed this day through love	291
You've heard the reed pipe sing, now look Who plays it	
(or you'll stay wholly heedless of the King!)	292
The Piper felt a stranger to the world	
and so He donned the reed pipe as His veil ^{cxxii}	293
Tear off the veil then from your face, at last	
and show alone the Piper to the world ²⁹⁴	
Slice the veils to pieces like a champion ^{cxxiii}	
to show God, the Giver's, effulgence revealed	295
Cry out pipe-like in your separation	
until the Piper makes new pact with you	296
At the clarion call of spirit's Piper	
all simmering lovers' breasts begin to boil	297
With this reed pipe's sighs light conflagrations	
to purge the world of egotism's trace	298
When all the scum burns off the creed of Self	
pure reed alone remains within the world ^{cxxiv}	299
Your eye, lit with His light – O you who know! –	
at last can see, perceives alone the Piper	300
So listen to the mysteries of the Piper,	
that you inhale these roses' sweet fragrance!	301
A single spark of His love's fire caught hold	
and scorched the royal harvest of existence	302
When Beauty drew the curtain from His face	
it tore away each sovereign's veils of glory ^{cxxv}	303
As if eyelashes were arrows, that Darling	
cast His glance, pierced breastbones in the monarch's soul	304
swift struck the regal crown from off his head ^{cxxvi}	
enslaving him, reducing him to fetters ^{cxxvii}	305
Like prey he fell into the hunter's hands ^{cxxviii}	
Like straw, snatched up by wind, thrown down to dust ^{cxxix}	306
Will no messenger be heading to Iraq,	
to tell of parting's pain, separation's tale? ^{cxxx}	307
Wrenched from you, fervent pining souls are scorched	
Separation's arrows pierce the hearts of kings	308
Between you and I, city of spirit,	
a million mythic mountains intervene ³⁰⁹	

Bahá'u'lláh's Mathnaví 143

No messenger have I but fire-hot sighs
Unless the zephyr's breeze can spread the news 310
My hand cannot attain the date-palm's fruit
My soul's eyes weep deep seas in separation 311
O Zephyr, fly off now from the Beloved
waft sweetly to the exiles of Baghdad^{cxxxix} 312
and ask:

City of the Lord!
How sit still,
now that the Friend's departed from your side? 313
Your lover languishes away in prison,^{cxxxix}
suffering like Husayn on plains of Karbalâ.^{cxxxix} 314
One Husayn,
untold Yazîds have hemmed him in!^{cxxxix}
One Friend,
and hostile demons all around,^{cxxxv} 315
Like Moses
held among the folk of Egypt,
or God's Spirit
detained among the Jews,^{cxxxvi} 316
or cast like Joseph
deep into the well –
that endless pit from which there's no way out. 317
Your nightingale's afflicted in a cage!^{cxxxvii}
Bars keep him in, almost choking out His breath... 318

End Notes

- viii We are probably meant to understand a double meaning for *núr* in this line: both light, and the place from which Bahá'u'lláh's family came, *Núr*. The line literally reads, Give *núr* to the *núr* of the heart with the lights of *Núr*.
- ix The word "*d-r-d*" can be read as "*dard*" or "*dord*", meaning respectively "pain" or "dregs." Either one could make sense here, but the verb used here, to purify or clarify (*sâf kardan*), suggests a wine image, clearing the cask of dregs before pouring it out. In this case the "wine" of divine revelation is adulterated with the dregs of grief, perhaps over the martyrdom of the Báb or the exile of Bahá'u'lláh.
- x *Qá'im* is the word translated as "arose." This line, and indeed the entire strophe, would appear to be addressed to the Báb, and alludes to his station as Imami Shiism's promised Qá'im, one who would arise to fight for the Cause of 'Alí and Husayn, and their descendants. Literally, the line would mean "a world arises to its feet for you, the Qá'im, just as you stand tall within our hearts and soul."
- xi The phrase *kun fa yakûn* appears several times in the Koran (e.g., 2:117), meaning that God wills a thing by speaking it, and it comes to be; literally, God commands "Be," and it comes to be. In Bahá'u'lláh's poem the phrase is alluded to, but it appears as *kun fa kân*, using the imperative and then the past tense of the verb "to be" in order to complete the rhyme with *ân*. The word "amr" can mean Cause or command, so we can understand either "so that there will appear from your command of 'Be and it Was,'" or, as I have preferred, "so that there will appear from your Cause/religion 'Be and it Was.'"
- xii The word translated here as "glory" is again *Bahá*, but this word could also mean the indemnity or compensation paid to the family of a slain person (*khun-bahá*, "blood-money"). Thus, we could understand this to mean something like "Redemption of the soul," the compensation one receives for having offered his or her life.
- xiii Exposition renders the word *Bayán*, which can have an ordinary meaning, but which could also be taken as an allusion to the two books by that name of the Báb, one in Persian, one in Arabic.
- xiv The poetic convention typically calls for the second instance of a word in a given line of Persian verse to have a different meaning; hence the second occurrence of *qalb* here should have a meaning other than the usual "heart." *Qalb* can also mean "conscience" (and "inversion," among other things), as well as false coin. The text in *Âsâr-e qalam-e a'lâ* reads *naqd kon*, meaning to assay or test the purity of a metal coin. The *Mishkín Qalam* text is inconclusive, because of blotches on this line, but it also appears to read *naqd kon*. One is therefore tempted to read this as "Assay these unwatched-over consciences," or "Assay the mettle of these wandering values." However, the word *bi-rasad* ("unwatched" or "wandering" in the above renderings) suggests an association with astronomy, rather than one with counterfeit coinage (The 1914/1332 text of Faraj Alláh Zakíy al-Kordí reads *bi-rasad* with the letter *sin* rather than with *sâd*, which seems to be a mistake). Dr. Khazeh Fananapazir has informed me that in his family recitation tradition of this poem, the first word has been read as *naqdh kon*, with a dot over the *dâl*. This reading makes more sense, as *naqdh kon* would mean to deliver, save, lead out of trouble, and it has a Koranic basis. For example, Koran 3:103 (a verse in which the word "hearts" [*qulûb*] also occurs earlier), concludes as follows: "You were on the edge of a pit of fire, and God led you from it. Thus does God make clear to you His signs, that you may be guided." The idea of guidance or deliverance fits better with the astronomical *rasad*, for sailors and caravan drivers would navigate at night by the stars and be saved from perdition. In view of the flight imagery in the previous line, it seems particularly appropriate.

For these reasons I have opted to read *naqdh kon*, “to deliver,” and *qalb* in the meaning of “conscience.” A conclusive resolution of the matter would, however, require an examination of the most authoritative manuscripts of the poem.

- xv *Esrâfil* (cognate with the Hebrew “Seraphim”) is the angel who will blow the trumpet on the Day of Resurrection, according to Islamic apocalyptic legend. I have translated “Heraldic Angel” here, as the allusion would seem to be to the Báb announcing the advent of Him Whom God would make manifest.
- xvi Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí wrote to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asking about the Master’s station as appointed interpreter of Bahá’u’lláh’s writings. In the course of this letter, Haydar-‘Alí quotes about thirty lines from the “Blessed Couplets” of Bahá’u’lláh (from lines 25 to 41 and again from lines 147 to 157), including this one, which uses the word *aghshán* for branches, a word that Bahá’u’lláh later used in the singular in many tablets to refer to his sons, designating ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the Most Great Branch (*Ghusn-i A‘zam*) and Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí as the Greater Branch (*Ghusn-i Akbar*). In reply to Haydar-‘Alí, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá replies insisting that his station is that of servitude to Bahá’u’lláh, and that by Expounder of the text (*mobayyen-e mansus*) is meant interpreter of [his father’s] words (*mofasser-e kalemât*). In the end of the reply, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá quotes this line of the *Mathnaví-yi Mubárak* and insists that he seeks no titles, stations, praises or other distinctions, but as the verse suggests, he flees from both the sun and shade of fame. A facsimile of both Haydar-‘Alí’s letter and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s response can be seen in Mohammad-‘Ali Fayzi, *Hayât-e Hazrat-e ‘Abd al-Bahá*, 3rd edition (Langenhain, 1994) 58-61.
- xvii An allusion to the scent of Joseph’s coat, which was sent to his father, the blind Jacob, to prove that Joseph was still alive. The scent of this coat, proving that his son was still alive, restored Jacob’s sight to him.
- xviii “Burning Bush” for *Sidrih*, as in *sidratu’l-muntahá* of the Koran, which designates the tree that marked Muhammad’s utmost approach to God on his ascension into the heavens. It is translated by Shoghi Effendi as the Divine Lote Tree (beyond which there is no passing), or sometimes rendered in transliteration: *Sadratu’l-Muntahá* (Gleanings, 70). In the Persian *Hidden Words*, #7, *Sedre-ye ertefâ’-e ‘eshq* is rendered as “the celestial Tree of love.” Here, however, as in the rest of Bahá’u’lláh’s *Mathnaví* (see, e.g., lines 182-3 and 208, and the notes that go with them), Moses’ burning bush and the Divine Lote Tree are identified etymologically and theophanically, symbolizing the sacred nearness of the divine presence in revealing itself to the Manifestations. For an excellent study of this motif in Jewish, Islamic and Bahá’í scripture, see Stephen Lambden, “The Sinaitic Mysteries: Notes on Moses/Sinai Motifs in Bábí and Bahá’í scripture,” in Moojan Momen, ed., *Studies in Honor of the Late Hasan M. Balyuzi* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1988) 65-183.
- xix Mírzá Haydar-‘Alí copies it as *shaqâyeq âshkâr* (wind-flowers evident), whereas the other texts have *haqâyeq bi-shomâr* (countless mystic truths). See Fayzi, *Hayât-e Hazrat-e ‘Abd al-Bahá*, op. cit.
- xx Literally, every heart through Him is made a paradisaal river (*Kowsar*, a river in paradise referred to in the Koran) of God’s beneficence (*fazl*).
- xxi “Fall” here in its (American) sense of autumn. Though this may, following upon the mention of “Edenic grace” in the previous line, inadvertently create an overtone of Adam, Eve and the Serpent, the Persian original does not evoke the fall from heaven.
- xxii Literally, this spring comes from the light of the face of the heart-stealer, an epithet of the typical beloved in Persian poetry, who carries with him (or her) the hearts away.
- xxiii Literally, those springs bring out the tulips and these springs now have their wailing. Tulips, though associated with spring and beauty, can also suggest mourning, their red bulbs evoking the blood of those who have been laid to rest in the earth during the past year.

While earthly spring is normally a time of joy, the spring of 1863 was a time of sorrow for Bahá'u'lláh's exile (compare the concluding lines of the poem). It may not be completely impertinent here to mention that the ten days of 'Áshūrā, the Shiite period of ritual mourning for Husayn, began in 1863 at the very end of spring; the 10th of Muharram, the day of Husayn's martyrdom, fell on 27 June in 1863.

For the meter, "ethereal" should here be read as three syllables: e-thére-al.

- xxiv This suggests the scene on the plain of Resurrection, as envisioned in Islamic apocalyptic narratives.
- xxv Literally: these springs will pitch their tent upon the skies. This image of the king and his royal entourage pitching their tents on the plain is elevated here into the heavens, as something visible to the entire world.
- xxvi Reading *Kân* here in its Persian sense of a mine of precious stones. However, the word has a different meaning in Arabic, as in the phrase *mâ kân*, would mean what has past. It is tempting to understand this as an ellipsis for *zêkr-e mâ kân*, the remembrance of all that has been in the past, but the wording does not, I think, support such a reading.
- xxvii "Yet who can hear" renders *vali ku mahrami*, literally "where is a confidant," that is a close, compatible friend who can be trusted with a secret.
 "Countless expositions" renders *sad bayân*, which can be read, as noted earlier, as allusions to the two works of the Báb by that name. However, Bahá'u'lláh uses the phrase *Rabî' al-Bayân* (literally, Spring of Exposition/Bayân) in the tablet of Ridván to symbolize the advent of the new Manifestation and the renewal of the divine message (see Gleanings XIV, where Shoghi Effendi translates this phrase as "The Divine Springtime"). Both spring (*rabi'*) and exposition (*bayân*) appear in this line of the *Mathnavi* as well, and though not paired together, would nevertheless seem to echo the passage from the Ridván tablet. That same tablet also contains the phrase *rahîq al-bayân* ("the wine of utterance").
- xxviii *Bayân* means "exposition," but once again, could perhaps be understood as an allusion to the books of that name by the Báb. "These Nobodies" for *in nâ kasân*, which in Persian conveys less of a sense of social station, and more of baseness or failure to observe the standards expected of a just and noble human being.
- xxix *Sad hezâr*, literally 100,000, but one hundred thousand, which Shoghi Effendi often translated as "a myriad," does not denote a specific number, so much as it means "countless" or "unimaginably vast." "Million" not only fits the meter, but I think better connotes innumerable today than a more finite number like 100,000.
- xxx *Towhid*, the unity of God, a central doctrine of Islam, is rendered here as "unicity." Its surface meaning suggests the doctrine that God is starkly one (not multiple as in pagan belief or triune as in Christianity), and does not give birth in physical form (See Koran, Sura 112). For Muslim pietists and mystics, though, it often meant seeing God's handiwork in everything. "Sanctity," which comes in the second hemistich, renders *Tajrid*, which connotes disentangling, or abstracting, God from material and limited conception of His attributes.
- xxxi The image of buds here perhaps evokes the narcissus (a daffodil-like flower, which looks something like an opened eye), typically compared in Persian poetry to the languid eye of the beloved. Unlike the Narcissus of Greek mythology, who gazed at his own reflection in the water, these blossoms of gnostic insight (*ghonche-hâ-ye ma' refat*) look longingly for the divine beloved. *Z'in taraf-e ju*, "from this bank of the stream," perhaps also hints that the search is conducted with furtive glances (*tarf-e 'ayn*), and from a distance (across the river), as the lover would transgress against modesty by staring boldly and impudently at the unattainable beloved.

- xxxii This refers to a passage in the Koran (7:172), in which God asks the descendants of Adam at a primordial meeting, "Am I not your Lord," and the people reply "Yes! We testify to this." This motif occurs again in the poem at lines 148 and 218.
- xxxiii "He" rendering *Hu*, from the Arabic third person masculine pronoun meaning simply "he" (*huwa*). It is used among Sufis as a *zeker*, or meditative mantra, and appears in Persian poetic and esoteric texts as a mystical name of God, simply "He" in its most abstracted, and at the same time monistic sense, as the source of all being and existence.
- xxxiv "If heard" for *ar zâher shavad*, meaning literally, "if it is manifested." Since *zâher* and its derivative *mazhar* have a technical meaning in the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, this word here suggests the manifestation of God's message.
- xxxv *Lajláj* suggests tossing or heaving on the depths of the sea, and, as Dr. Khazeh Fananapazir has kindly informed me, in the writings attributed to Imam 'Alí, *lajláj* is often paired with *mavváj* (surging), the word with which it rhymes in this poem.
- xxxvi The flower here – *shaqâyeq* meaning anemone, peony, or as Shoghi Effendi translates it (Persian *Hidden Word*, #18), wind-flowers – does not seem to me to have any particular symbolic significance, but occurs because it rhymes with truths (*haqâyeq*).
- xxxvii Persian folklore holds that salamanders lived in fire. Here, the bright face of the beloved is likened to fire, while the dark curls coiling about his face are likened to salamanders.
- xxxviii "Friend" renders *habíb*, which is probably just a general apostrophe to the reader and not addressed to anyone in particular (see the note to line 253). However, "Habíb" was the title or nickname given to Jináb-i Muníb in the *Súriy-i Asháb*, addressed to him by Bahá'u'lláh from Edirne. Jináb-i Muníb accompanied Bahá'u'lláh from Baghdad to Istanbul and from there to Edirne, and thus was with Bahá'u'lláh during the time that the *Mathnaví-i Mubáarak* was revealed. For the meter of the English, read "The elect" and "fiery" and "bounteous" all as two syllables: th' elect, fie-ry, boun-tous.
- xxxix
- The Persian reads *bar neshânad ahl-e keshti rá be-folk*, but perhaps intends a visual play on the last word, *f-l-k*. Since Perso/Arabic script does not supply the short vowels, *f-l-k* could otherwise be vowelised and read as *falak* (meaning "the heavens"), particularly because the phrase *bar neshânad be falak* (to elevate someone high into the heavens) is a common metaphor in Persian. In this line the meaning, the meter, and the rhyme (with *molk*) all require us to read *folk* (Ark), giving us literally "he seats the people of the boat within the Ark", but there is perhaps a hint of a secondary image (especially in view of the imagery of atmosphere and sun that appear in lines 78 and 80), of a celestial ark swimming across the skies. "The passengers in the boat" (*ahl-e keshti*) probably intends the People of Bahá in the Crimson Ark (*al-safinat al-hamrá*'), or the Ship of God (*safinat Alláh*), or the Ark of Bahá (*fulk al-Bahá*'), a connection made explicit in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Carmel (*sawfa tajrî safinat Alláh 'alayka wa yazharu ahl al-Bahá' alladhîna dhakarahum fî Kitâb al-asmâ*'). Reference to the Ark (in the sense of the Ark of Noah, not the Ark of the Covenant [tâbût]) is also to be found in other places in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, such as *innahu min ashâb al-safinat al-hamrá' allatî ja'ala-hâ Alláh li-ahl al-Bahá...*, and again *rakibta 'alâ fulk al-Bahá' wa kunta sâyiran 'alâ bahr al-kibriyâ*, and finally in Persian, *ahl-e Bahá ke dar safine-ye elâhiyeh sâken-and...* For the English translation of these passages, see *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1939; reprint 1976), 16, 212, 302 and 170, respectively.
- xl See line 14 of the poem and the accompanying endnote.
- xli Literally, "This meek one of the earth of unity, through largesse, clothe with a robe of might, O Ruthful one." I take the apostrophe here (*ay vodud*) as an address to God (O compassionate one), which I have indirectly suggested through the adjective "kind" before

largesse, and the pronoun “Your” before “robe of Might.”

- xlii This combines an allusion to the Koranic verse of the light (24:35), with the Bábí doctrine of “return” (*raj'at*). The Koran speaks of the lamp of God shining with a flame lit from a blessed olive tree that is neither of the East nor of the West. This has often been understood as a symbol for God’s Manifestations. Various forms of the word “return” also occur in the Koran, but almost always in the sense of human beings returning to God after death or after the Day of Reckoning. Here “return” suggests the doctrine of “return” (*raj'at*), as explained by the Báb in the *Bayán*, the idea being that the Prophets return as the light in the lamp of God. A few years prior to the *Mathnaví*, Bahá’u’lláh explained this doctrine of “return” as follows in the *Kitáb-i Iqán* (167-8):

Likewise, strive thou to comprehend the meaning of the melody of that eternal beauty, Husayn, son of ‘Alí, who, addressing Salmán, spoke words such as these: “I was with a thousand Adams, the interval between each and the next Adam was fifty thousand years, and to each one of these I declared the Successorship conferred upon my father.” He then recounteth certain details, until he saith: “I have fought one thousand battles in the path of God, the least and most insignificant of which was like the battle of Khaybar, in which battle my father fought and contended against the infidels.” Endeavour now to apprehend from these two traditions the mysteries of “end,” “return,” and “creation without beginning or end.”

- xliii Though he himself feels inadequate to and unworthy of the task, Bahá’u’lláh has been raised up in God’s garden, and so asks the Holy Spirit which appeared in the Báb, and has now re-appeared in him (as light appears the same in different lamps), to make gardens of truth and beauty appear through him.

The 1914/1332 text reads *sad golestân ár az vay now padid*, whereas the other texts read *to padid*. The latter reading seems syntactically preferable to me, but the former would mean “so make a thousand [literally 100] new gardens bloom through him.”

- xliv Literally, tear off the veils of heedlessness from this afflicted one.

xlv

“Gate” renders *Báb*, and the word occurs again in the second half of the couplet, alluding to the Manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the person of the Báb: Do not allow the Gate of the Báb to be closed shut, but re-open it on to the Ridván of meaning.

- xlvi *Ridván* (pronounced *Rezvân* in Persian), connotes contentment or good-pleasure (of God), but is also the proper name of the angel guarding the gates to paradise. In a Bahá’í context, of course, it alludes to the garden outside Baghdad where Bahá’u’lláh announced his prophetic mission to his companions. For this reason, I have left it untranslated.

- xlvii This is an allusion to a belief among Sufis that a true saint had power to move through the imaginal world at will, or to “cross the earth” (*tayy al-arz* is the phrase used here, and in line 128 below, but it is elsewhere referred to in the Sufi tradition as *tayy-e makân*, *tayy-e zamân*, *tayy-e zamín*). In the hagiographies of Sufi saints, this concept of crossing the earth often leads to fabulous stories about teleportation, telekinesis, premonitions or extra sensory perception (Cf. the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in the Koran, 27:23-44, where the Queen’s throne apparently crosses the earth in the twinkling of an eye).

However, the classical meaning of *tayy al-arz*, and the one to which Bahá’u’lláh apparently refers here, distinguishes between the gnostic (*tayyâr* or bird, representing the journey of the soul), and the ascetic (*sayyâr* or traveller on foot, making a more mundane journey). This terminology is noted by Abú Nasr al-Sarráj in his *Kitáb al-luma’* for the different kinds of wayfarers on the Sufi path. Rumi also alludes to it in his *Masnavi* (M5:2180 and 2191-2):

The gnostic constant towards the King's throne arcs
 The ascete travels each month one day's road....
 Love has a thousand feathers and each one
 soars over the throne beyond the Pleiades
 The fearful ascete charges on his feet
 Lovers fly lighter than lightning and air

Ibn 'Arabî speaks at length of the imaginal, spiritual world, upon which Henri Corbin has elaborated at length in his *Spiritual Body, Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran*, tr. Nancy Pearson (Princeton University Press, 1977).

xlvi The 1914/1332 text reads *bâzeğh*, whereas both the *Âsâr-e qalam-e a'lâ* text and the Mishkín Qalam text read *bâreq*. Either reading gives very much the same meaning, but *bâreq* forms a more complete rhyme with *moshreq*, corresponding better with the expected rules of Persian prosody.

xlx See Koran which explains that the unbelievers are as if in a deep sea of darkness (24:40), or that their spiritual blindness has left them "deaf, dumb and blind" (2:18). Zu al-Qarnayn, usually identified with Alexander the Great, is said in the Koran to have travelled into the land of the setting sun and found a spring of water (18:86), and Muslim tradition has elaborated this into Alexander's search for the Water of Life. In order to find it he first had to cross through the realm of darkness (*zolomât*). This word *Zolomât* occurs in lines 108-9 of the *Mathnaví*, and the singular form (*zolmat* appears in lines 105-6 and 110).

l In Islamic lore, the mythical figure Khezr (*Khidr*, sometimes associated with the Biblical Elijah), is believed to have initiated Moses into the ways of esoteric knowledge and to have guided Alexander through the realms of darkness to the Water of Life. Khezr, who is the focus of lines 110-115 of Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví*, is not mentioned by name in the Koran, but commentators identify him with the man described as "one of God's servants" in a parable from the Sura of the Cave (*Surat al-kahf*, K18:65-82). Bahá'u'lláh here calls himself the new Khezr.

li *Bahá* is the word rendered here by glory. Hence, "O Spirit of Bahá," a clear allusion to Bahá'u'lláh himself.

lii

Literally, leave off hunting onagers to the grave. The line is predicated on a pun that is difficult to mimic in English. The Iranian royal hunt, particularly in the Sasanian period, focused on the wild onager (*gur*). *Gur* also means "grave." So, let the *gur* lead themselves to the *gur*.

liii The 1914/1332 and the Mishkín Qalam text both read

nist forsat tâ to az asrâr-e koll
pish-e bolbol gu'i ay soltân-e mol

This would mean: there is no opportunity for you, o Sultan of wine, to tell the secrets of all in the presence of the nightingale. I have, however, adopted the variant given in the *Âsâr-e qalam-e a'lâ* text:

nist forsat tâ to az asrâr-e gol
pish-e bolbol gu'i ay soltân-e koll

In view of the well-established topos of the nightingale and the rose in Persian poetry, this reading makes far more sense: there is no opportunity for you, O Sultan of all, to tell the secrets of the rose to the nightingale. But compare line 124, below, where the same topos reappears, and the words *gol* and *mol* both appear, though not in the rhyme position.

liv

This is the *Simorgh*, the mythical bird which in Ferdowsi's *Shâh Nâme* protects the epic

- warriors of Iran with its magic feather.
- lv See the note to Line 20.
- lvi Literally, "Then make the symbol/sign/secret of the nightingale appear in every rose; Explain the wine in the heart to the kings." The Persian plays upon the internal rhyme of *gol* (rose), traditionally associated with the adoring nightingale, and *mol* (sweetened or mulled wine), a staple of the ceremonial wine banquet at the Iranian court. In an attempt to preserve something of the *gol/mol* sound play, I have translated *mol* as rosé. Rosé, being a specifically French wine, is something of an anachronism or a cultural solipsism here, but I trust this poetic license will not greatly jar or intrude upon the meaning.
- lvii In Persian poetry, the lover typically cannot tell his love to strangers or in public, but only to his trusted confidants who are sympathetic to him and will not reveal his secret. Those unsympathetic will mock or reprove him for being in love. Bahá'u'lláh had at this time confided his station only to a restricted circle of his companions, but as he would soon make a general announcement, the distinction between confidant and stranger was becoming irrelevant.
- lviii See the note to line 101 of the poem.
- lix The Persian plays upon the word *nafs*, meaning the concupiscent, or selfish, soul (this must be trained so that the spiritual soul, *ruh*, gains control); and the word *nafas*, meaning breath.
- lx Ignorant and radiant should both be read as two syllables here for the meter: ig-nrant, rad-yant.
- lxi Sobriety (*sahv*) and effacement (*mahv*) are both technical terms for the Sufis. Sobriety refers to the temperate expression of mystical truths, as opposed to the ecstatic outbursts (*shathiyât*) that sometimes result in accusations of blasphemy, as was the case with Hallâj. Effacement can be (like *fanâ*) the fading away of the selfish self, the concupiscent soul, allowing the divine virtues to appear in their place. It may also refer to the absolute contingency of all created being in comparison to the divine essence, which alone can truly be said to exist.
- lxii *ay rashid*, literally a mature person, guide, or leader, probably used here as a general term of endearing address to the reader, though it could also be a masculine proper name.
- lxiii The language here is reminiscent of Bahá'u'lláh's Persian *Hidden Words*, #12. For the meter, read the following all as two syllables: "the inner" (th'in-ner); "mystery" (mystery); "Beloved" (be-loved).
- lxiv
- The Persian reads: *cheshm-e 'âref sad hezârân sâle râh*
cheshm-e jâhel mi-nabinad ru-ye shâh
- Compare this with the following verse from the *Mathnavî* of Jalâl al-Din Rumi (5:2180):
sayr-e 'âref har dami tâ takht-e shâh
sayr-e zâhed har mahi yek ruze râh
 The gnostic constantly attains the king's throne
 The ascete in a month makes one day's progress
- The similarity of theme and phrasing of these verses suggests that Bahá'u'lláh is deliberately alluding to or echoing Rumi.
- lxv See lines 66 and 218, and the note to line 66.
- lxvi Compare the passage from Rumi's *Mathnavî*, 1:2106-2111 in Nicholson's edition, in which the Caliph 'Umar has a dream, wherein he hears the call (*nedâ*) of God coming to him, described as follows:
 That call which is the root of every shout and song –
 That is the Call itself, and all the rest but sound

The Turk and Kurd, the Persian and the Arab, all
 have understood that Call, and not by ears or lips!
 Why talk of Turk and Tâjik and of Ethiop?
 Even wood and stone have understood that Call!
 At every moment "Am I not" is heard from it
 bringing essence and appearance into being.
 But were they not replying "Yes" in affirmation,
 Their coming into being from nothing would be naught!
 [or, their coming into being from nothing would be "Yes"!]

lxvii *ku b-d-i bud* seems susceptible of various readings, but I understand it to read *k-u be-di bud* (a reading which a diacritical mark supplied in Mishkín Qalam's text seems to support), meaning "which it/he was yesterday," i.e., for that was (just) yesterday.

lxviii The *Kitáb-i Badi'* quotes a variant of this line:

The sound of it's still ringing in my ears
 and His soul-vivifying spirit's voice.

The second hemistich in this reading (I cite a manuscript of the *Kitáb-i Badi'* copied in shekaste hand, 15 lines to the page, acquired by Abul-Qasem Faizi in the fall of 1940, in which this passage occurs at pp. 99-100) is as follows:

v'ân sedâ-ye ruh-e jân-afzâ-ye u

On the other hand, the *Âsâr-e qalam-e a'lâ* text, Mishkín Qalam's calligraphic version, and the 1914/1332 Cairo text all read:

ân sedâ-ye khub-e jân-afzâ-ye u

The text critical principle of *lectio difficilior* would incline us to accept the more complex wording of the *Kitáb-i Badi'* text, as would, also, the fact that the *Kitáb-i Badi'*, written later, may represent an authorial emendation to the line. However, I have translated as per the version attested in all of the printed editions of the *Mathnaví* consulted.

Compare the phrasing of this line with Rumi's *Mathnaví* 4:394:

bar sedâ-ye khub-e jân-pardâz-e to

lxix This hemistich also exhibits a slight, non-essential variant. The *Kitáb-i Badi'* records '*ârifî dîgar* (another gnostic), whereas the *Âsâr-e qalam-e a'lâ* text, along with the Cairo text of 1332 A.H., and the Mishkín Qalam text, have '*ârif-i dîgar* (the other gnostic). Since only one gnostic has been thus far introduced, the reading of the *Kitáb-i Badi'* seems logically preferable in this case.

lxx

Âsâr-e qalam-e a'lâ, Mishkín Qalam and the 1914/1332 Cairo text all read:

goft ân ruz-e khodâ âkher na-shod

mâ dar ân yowm-im o ân qâser na-shod

In the text of the *Kitáb-i Badi'*, instead of *yowm* (the Arabic word for "day"), we find *ruz* (the Persian word for "day") repeated again in the second hemistich. Though there is no difference either way in the meaning, the repetition of the word *ruz* seems stylistically inferior, and, in any case, the printed editions of the poem all attest the *ruz/yowm* variation. Therefore, unless we assume that the *Kitáb-i Badi'* version replaces any earlier version of the poem, the *ruz/yowm* reading seems preferable.

lxxi

Literally, taste the wine of eternity from the rivers of love. This is a Koranic image of paradise, in which wine that does not cause inebriation flows eternally from a fountain.

lxxii

Safdar, a brave champion who tears through the enemy lines, is sometimes used as an epithet of 'Alí.

lxxiii

See Koran 24:35 for the famous verse of the light guiding men to God, literally by an oil that is neither from the east or west, and is protected in a lamp, set within a niche. The 1914/1332 text text, as well as the Mishkín Qalam text, read: in *cherâgh-at r cho(h)*

rowshan karde'i, whereas *Āsâr-e qalam-e a'lâ* text reads in *cherâghi râke rowshan karde'i*. The difference in meaning is insignificant; the second version seems to flow more smoothly, but the first is a more complex reading (*choh* being a more difficult reading that a scribe would not be likely to accidentally introduce into the text), and perhaps therefore represents an earlier or more authentic reading.

- lxxiv Literally, the Moon of Command and the Shah of *Innamâ*. *Innamâ* is an Arabic phrase which occurs often in the Koran, meaning, “verily.” It occurs in some places in the Koran referring to Muhammad, such as (8:7): “Verily thou art a warner and to all people, a guide.” One occurrence in the Koran is believed by Shiites to apply to Imam ‘Alí (5:55): “Verily your guardian (*walíy*) is God and His messenger and those who have believed, those of you who perform the prayers and bring alms and bow in prayer.” As this was revealed, ‘Alí was kneeling in prayer and gave his ring to a beggar. Generally speaking, though, we can interpret this as a reference to the Manifestation, who speaks with the voice of God.
- lxxv The 1914/1332 text reads in the second hemistich *nuri shavad*, but the *Āsâr-e qalam-e a'lâ* text and *Mishkín Qalam* both read *nuri bovad*, which, on the principle of *lectio difficilior*, is to be preferred, though neither reading will affect the meaning. In the first instance the last syllables of *nuri* and *dohni* would rhyme, with *shavad* being understood as a refrain (*radif*). In the second case, the last syllable of *shavad* rhymes with the last syllable of *bovad*.
- lxxvi In this line, “burning bushes” translates *Sidrih (sedre-hâ)*, properly lote trees. In the previous line, *sad hezârân Sedre*, literally a hundred thousand Divine Lote Trees, has become a forest on Sinai. See line 38 and the accompanying note.
- lxxvii A traditional epithet for the son which Abraham, in conformity to divine command, took to sacrifice (Ishmael, according to the Koran and Isaac, according to the Bible). For those in Bahá'u'lláh's immediate circle, this might also possibly have had an overtone of allusion to Áqá Sayyid Ismá'il-i Zavári'i, who Bahá'í tradition records was so overwhelmed by the vision of the next world which Bahá'u'lláh revealed to him in Baghdad, that he slit his own throat.
- lxxviii An epithet for Jesus.
- lxxix See the second of Bahá'u'lláh's *Seven Valleys*.
- lxxx *Bâ salib az râh o ham bi-rah biâ*. The *Mishkín Qalam* text omits the *o (...az râh ham...)*, with no change in the meaning. *Az râh o ham bi-rah*, a phrase suggesting by whatever means possible, whether prepared or not, but literally “by the path or without a path,” which becomes in the translation “walk the path, blaze a trail.” Perhaps this means to evoke the image of Christ, veering side-to-side under the weight of the Cross as he walks along the *Via Dolorosa*.
- lxxxi An allusion to the Night Journey, or spiritual ascent, of Muhammad into the heavens to meet with God. Bahá'u'lláh obliquely alludes to this ascent elsewhere, in the *Hidden Words* (Persian #7).
- lxxxii Literally, that you may raise your head in God's collar (*jayb*). Though it is tempting to see this as a modern image of a life-preserver, what is more likely intended is that once having slain the selfish aspect of our baser being, what will remain is the divine soul, attired with divine attributes, so close to God as to be sharing the same garment.
- lxxxiii The Persian uses the word '*oryân*, which means either “naked,” or “plain” (in the sense that a thing is said or viewed bluntly or clearly). The idea here seems to be that the spirit of Moses should appear plainly and quickly, without pausing to don its prophetic insignia of sandals and cloak.
- lxxxiv The mythopoetic mountain in the “hallowed precincts” of Time (perhaps pre-eternity), where God made a covenant with man in the presence of the angels. See Bahá'u'lláh's

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- Hidden Words*, Persian #71. See also line 213, below.
- lxxxv The dove (*Varqâ*), both here and in Bahá'u'lláh's *Qasídiy-i 'Izz-i Varqâ 'iyyih* or the *Tablet of Ahmad*, seems to symbolize the Holy Spirit.
- lxxxvi An allusion to the staff of Moses.
- lxxxvii The Mishkín Qalam text of the poem has "This Staff" (*in 'asâ*), which seems to be an error, since a contrast is being drawn through these lines between an ordinary staff and the Staff of God.
- lxxxviii Among the tribe of 'Âd, God designated Hud as a messenger or prophet, calling the people to recognize the one true God, but they rejected him and were destroyed by a calamity. The Koran alludes to this story four times, pointing out the parallel to the situation of Muhammad and the Quraysh. Three times it does not specify how the tribe of 'Âd was destroyed (Suras 7, 11, 26), but in Sura 46 it specifies that a cloud, which they supposed to be a rain cloud, swooped down upon their dwellings like a horrific wind, destroying all but Hud and those who believed in him.
- lxxxix *tâ be-bazm-e bâqi-ye ân gol-rokhân* (read *bâqe-yân* for the meter) is probably an allusion to the Koranic vision of paradise, wherein feasts of delectable foods and drink are enjoyed with beautiful companions (of remarkable eyes, though not necessarily of rosy cheeks). See, for example, Suras 37, 38, 52, 55.
- xc See lines 38 and 182-3, and accompanying notes.
- xcí *dar miân-e kuh-e jân bas farq-hâ*, literally "between the mountain of (the various) souls there are many differences", though one might also read *ferqe-hâ* (sects). All of these different manifestations of the tree of Soul, like various fruits growing from the various leaves/branches (*varqe-hâ*), are good.
- xcii See the note to line 197, above.
- xciii For "Am I not," see lines 66 and 148, and the note to line 66. "Being's world" translates *arz-e hasti*, literally the world, or plane, of being/mortal life.
- xciv Read "The Immortal" as just three syllables : Th'Immortal.
- xcv This image comes from the *Hidden Words*, Persian #1.
- xcvi According to the story of Joseph in the Koran (Sura 12), Joseph is purchased as a slave in Egypt by a powerful man. The wife of his owner, finding him irresistibly attractive, attempts to seduce him and tears his shirt from behind as he tries to run out of the house. She then accuses him of attacking her, and he is put in prison. However, to stop the gossip of the women in town, the wife invites her friends to see Joseph, giving them knives first, presumably to cut the fruit she has served them. When Joseph enters, dazzled by his beauty, the women all cut their hands. This story is elaborated in Jewish and Islamic literature, and the characters are given names; the wife is given the name Zulaykhâ, and she and Joseph are the subject of Persian miniature paintings and a verse romance by the 15th century poet Jâmi. The legend also exists in the west; in English, Zulaykhâ is known as "the wife of Potiphar."
- xcvii The 1914/1332 text and the Mishkín Qalam text both read *hast-ash hayât* (she, he or it has life), whereas the *Âsâr-e qalam-e a'lâ* text reads *hast-at hayât* (you have life). This makes some difference in understanding the theological import of the line; though either reading seems equally plausible, I have translated according to the latter.
- xcviii This line probably intends for the reader to call to mind the opening lines of Rumi's *Mathnaví*, where the listener is admonished to heed the mystic secrets to which the reed flute gives voice.

- xcix Bahá'u'lláh in the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1941) quotes from the Báb as follows (151): "Behold ye Him with His own eyes. Were ye to behold Him with the eyes of another, ye would never recognise and know Him" (*be cheshm-e u u-râ be-binid va agar be-cheshm-e ghayr molâheze konid har gez be-shenâsâ'i va âgâhi fâ'ez na-shavid*). This quote, as Bahá'u'lláh explains, refers to his "Most Great Revelation." It would appear that Bahá'u'lláh here alludes to this verse of the Báb, and thereby calls upon the Bábís to recognize the new Manifestation. I am indebted to Dr. Khazeh Fananapazir for pointing out this allusion.
- c In a common convention of didactic or homiletic Persian poetry, the poet addresses the reader as a father would address a son, or as a teacher addresses a disciple. It is in this context that the lines containing apostrophes like "my son", "companion," "my friend," "devout one," etc., should be understood. It does not necessarily mean that the poet has a specific person or addressee in mind. See the note for line 75.
- ci Another allusion to the secret of the reed pipe (*serr-e nay*) to which the reader of the beginning of Rumi's *Masnavi* is encouraged to listen.
- cii An allusion to the *Me'râj*, or Muhammad's spiritual "Night Journey" into heaven. See the notes to line 268, below.
- ciii An allusion to Bahá'u'lláh's own poem, *Rashh-i 'Amâ*, "Sprinklings of the Divine Cloud."
- civ This alludes to a Hadith which Bahá'u'lláh quotes directly in one of his other tablets: "My earth and My heavens cannot contain Me, but the heart of my faithful servant contains Me" (See *Mâ'ede-ye âsmâni*, ed. 'Abd al-Hamid Eshraq-Khâvari [Tehran: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 128 B.E./1971] 1:58). Compare also the *Hidden Words*, Arabic #58 and 59.
- cv This hemistich is susceptible of different interpretations and could be understood to mean any of the following: Once the heart's house was built with the Love of God; once God's house was built through the love of God; once God's house was built through the love of that lover.
- cvi House (*bayt*) alludes to the Ka'bih, the House of God in Mecca, to which pilgrimage is made. The Ka'bih is kept draped in a black cloth and is, therefore, as it were, physically hidden. Metaphorically, since the heart is the home of God, it, too, is hidden inside the human chest.
After the errata on the colophon page of the 1914/1332 edition, the editor reports that for this line some of the manuscripts consulted gave the reading *u na bayt o bayt-e u mastur shod* (He is not the house, and His house is hidden), and this is the reading that the Mishkín Qalam text appears to give. The *Âsâr-e qalam-e a'lâ* text, however, reads *u be bayt o bayt-e u mastur shod* (he is in the house, and His house is hidden), and it is this latter variant I have adopted for the translation.
- cvii Compare this and the following lines with the story of the building of the *Masjed-e Aqsâ*, the Farthest Mosque, in the *Mathnavi* of Rumi, 4:388-90 and 4:466-486, which also refers to the House of the heart and the construction of the walls of such a temple consisting of more than the physical stones and clay.
- cviii Sufi poetry, including especially Rumi's *Mathnavi*, grapples with the opposition between human reason, or the limited rational faculties ('*aq*l), and love ('*eshq*). Love is seen as an overpowering force that carries reason away, and in so doing empowers the mystic to validate his trans-rational experience of the Divine and his longing to be with God. Reason is, on the other hand, equated with the traditional religious knowledge and book learning of the ulama.
- cix See Koran 17:1. God took his servant for a journey by night from the Sacred mosque, in

Mecca, to “the farthest mosque” (*masjed al-aqsá*), or the most distant place of prostration to and worship of God. This is traditionally associated with the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem (see Rumi's *Mathnaví* 4:388ff and 466ff, where David and then Solomon undertake this project), and an actual mosque was built here in A.H. 68 (687 A.D.), on the complex of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. The more metaphysical “distant temple,” or literally, place of prostration in worship (*masjed*), mentioned in the Koran is the referent here, and not the actual Aqsá Mosque.

^{cx} This alludes to the story of the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey (*Me'raj*) into heaven, the basis for which is in the Koran (17:1 and 53:6-11). Muhammad is taken up into the heavens, brought into the highest horizon and allowed to approach to within two bow lengths of God (as far as two arrows can be shot), or perhaps even nearer than this. At this spot, God revealed to him what He revealed (i.e., the Koran).

However, Muhammad cannot proceed closer to the Divine Essence than the Sadratu'l-Muntahá, the Divine Lote Tree beyond which there is no passing. This tree is also equated, in Bahá'í theology, with the Manifestation of God. Bahá'u'lláh refers elsewhere to this tradition of Muhammad's journey into heaven: “Whoso hath recognized the Day Spring of Divine guidance and entered His holy court hath drawn nigh unto God and attained His Presence, a Presence which is the real Paradise, and of which the loftiest mansions of heaven are but a symbol. Such a man hath attained the knowledge of the station of Him Who is “at the distance of two bows,” Who standeth beyond the Sadratu'l-Muntahá.” *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust) 70. See also line 256, above.

^{cx} *Hajr* or *hejrân* (absence, separation) and *vasl* or *vesâl* (union, reunion, embracing the beloved) are terms originating in love poetry, which later took on a theological significance. In Sufi terminology, absence can stand for the absence of Divine confirmation, as the sense that grace has left the mystic in a state (*hâl*) or station (*maqâm*) of contraction (*qabz*), whereas union represents the state or station in which the mystic feels the grace of God open freely to him (*bast*) in the form of visions or divine confirmations. These terms can also stand for divine transcendence (absence) and divine immanence (union), or in the case of progressive revelation, the absence of the Manifestation and his return.

These words inform the next several lines of the poem. They will be respectively translated as separation, absence, emptiness (*hajr*, commonly pronounced *hejr* in Persian); and as union, reunion (*vasl*, and *vesâl* in line 277), depending on the meter.

^{cxii} Here there is another allusion to the *Me'raj* story. Islamic lore elaborated upon Muhammad's journey into the presence of God, indicating that he travelled on a winged horse named Borâq to a certain distance and then continued on a kind of flying carpet or cushion (*rafrâf*). In this sense, we might think of it as something fluffy and buoyant bearing Muhammad into God's presence in the highest heaven; therefore it appears here as “precincts.”

In the *Hidden Words* (Persian #7), Bahá'u'lláh mentions this *rafrâf*, which Shoghi Effendi translated as “heights” (*rafrâf-e emtenâ'-e qorb* = the glorious heights above), for *rafrâf* also means “place,” “station.” Shaykh Ahmad speaks of the Green Place (*rafrâf-e akhzar*), one of the levels of heaven. Paired with another adjective, *rafrâf-e asnâ* or *rafrâf-e a'lâ*, this means the highest level or an exalted station.

There is perhaps also an allusion in this line to the opening section of Rûmî's *Mathnaví*, where “origin” is the divine pre-existence of the soul from which we are separated, just as the reed is cut from the reed bed. Our physical lives are spent trying to return to that original source.

^{cxiii} An allusion to Koran 55:26-7.

^{cxiv} Perhaps an allusion to the Hadîth: *Kâna 'llâhu wa lam yakun ma'ahu min shay'in*, “There was God, and there was nothing with Him.”

- cxv Perhaps an allusion to the Hadíth, "There is none but Him in the house" (*Laysa fī al-dár ghayruhu dayyár*), a suggestion I owe to Dr. Khazeh Fananapazir.
- cxvi 'aqabe (read 'aqbe here for the meter) is a difficult or dangerous passage in a mountain, and is also the name of a stony hill near Minâ between Mecca and 'Arafât, on the pilgrimage route. The semantic range of the root 'Q-B also includes something which ensues from something else, a consequence or punishment.
- cxvii Again, the word *Bayán* is used. A double meaning could be understood here: That you not fall from the book of the *Bayán* into pride. Several Bábís seem to have made claims of some sort to be Him Whom God will make manifest; this may be an allusion to those folk who filled with pride after reading the *Bayán*.
- cxviii Compare this and the following lines with the *Hidden Words*, Arabic #11, #10 and #12.
- cxix The Mishkín Qalam text appears to read *pay-ye insân davi*, which though syntactically awkward, could mean "you're running around like this." *Asâr-e qalam-e a'lâ* and the 1914/1332 text both have *pay-ye inân davi*, meaning "you're running after these" (alluding to absence and separation). In either case, the last word should probably be recited in its colloquial form, *dowî* in order to rhyme with the first hemistich's *to'i*. None of the manuscripts encourage it, but if we read *dô'î* (with a hamza), this could also be understood as "you are two," since the passage speaks of the perception of duality between God and servant.
- cxx The line actually refers to a verse of the Koran (5:67) in which the Jews claim that no prophet can come after Moses, that the hands of God are chained up. Just a year or two before composing this poem, Bahá'u'lláh had explained this verse of the Koran at some length in his *Kitáb-i-Iqán* (135-38), including this sentence: "Thou art surely aware of their idle contention, that all Revelation is ended, that the portals [gates, *abváb*, plural of *báb*] of Divine mercy are closed, that from the day-springs of eternal holiness no sun shall rise again...." This line in the "Mathnaví-y-i Mubáarak" Blessed Couplets" reads *hamchun Yahúd*, meaning literally, "just like the Jews" and the line would therefore be rendered "do not close those gates, as did the Jews" (i.e., by failing to recognize Jesus or Muhammad). I have translated "like ingrates" here for purposes of internal rhyme and wordplay, and because the point is the failure of any religious community to recognize the subsequent Manifestation.
- cxxi An explicit reference to the opening passages of Jalâl al-Din Rumi's *Mathnaví*.
- cxxii An allusion to the fact that Muslim women, when in the company of strangers or non-family members, veil themselves; similarly, Iranian kings would sometimes remain veiled from their interlocutors at court by a curtain. Here, Bahá'u'lláh, as God's pen, does not wish to speak openly and clearly, but has donned the garb of Rumi's reed flute as a veil, under cover of which form, he announces his claim to the Bábís.
- cxxiii *Safdar*, see line 224.
- cxxiv The Persian literally says that when the "ma" (in and of itself, a particle of negation) of "mani" (egotism, "I-ness") is burned up throughout the world, then will only the eternal "nî" (which as a separate word in Persian would be read as *nay*, meaning reed pipe) remain among us.
- cxxv The "sovereigns" perhaps alludes to the various Bábí heroes, all of whom were eclipsed by Bahá'u'lláh, as Him Whom God will make Manifest.
- cxxvi Perhaps an allusion to the fact that Bahá'u'lláh began to wear the *tâj*, a crown-shaped felt hat, from the time he went to the Ridván Garden and announced his mission; see Balyuzi, *King of Glory* 176.

- cxxvii Perhaps an allusion to what befell Bahá'u'lláh upon becoming a Bábí, his arrest and imprisonment and finally his incarceration in the Siyáh Chál. The chains on Bahá'u'lláh were so heavy that he gave each one a name.
- cxxviii The 1914/1332 text and the Mishkín Qalam text both read: *hamcho sayd u dast-e sayyâdi fetâd*, whereas the *Âsâr-e qalam-e a'lâ* text reads *hamchu saydi dast-e sayyâdi fetâd*, which seems to flow better to my ear, though there is no difference in the meaning.
- cxxix Compare the Persian *Hidden Words*, #23, in which the “Celestial Youth” is veiled in “the darkness of dust” and caught in the “talons of owls” (the owl being a bird of inauspicious omen, and one that inhabits ruined places). Likewise, in #77, we find the “doves of holiness” caught in the “claws of the dogs of earth,” which is perhaps an allusion to the Bábí leaders and martyrs.
- cxxx i.e., returning to Bahá'u'lláh's house in Baghdad and the Bábí community back in Iraq, which Bahá'u'lláh left behind when exiled to Istanbul.
- cxixxi *Zowrá'iyân*, literally the people of *Zowrá'*. *Zowrá'* in the Bahá'í writings is used as an epithet of Baghdad, or of the Tigris. Etymologically, *Zowrá'* could suggest visitants or pilgrims to a shrine or holy place; it may also simply be an adjective meaning inclined, sloped or crooked (perhaps a description of the course of the Tigris?). In this context, where the people of *Zowrá'* seem identified with “the City of the Lord” (See line 313), I take it to mean those who did not accompany Bahá'u'lláh on his exile to Istanbul, but stayed behind in Bahá'u'lláh's house in Baghdad, or in the city itself. However, *Zowrá'* is also used to refer to Tehran, or more specifically, a place in the old city of Rayy, where, according to a tradition ascribed to Ja'far al-Sâdeq (the sixth Imam), eighty men of religion would be martyred. The Bábís saw this prophecy fulfilled in the persecutions following the attempt on the life of Nâser al-Din Shâh. Since Tehran was the birthplace of Bahá'u'lláh, the City of God may therefore alternatively, or simultaneously, be an allusion to Tehran, which, however is more often described by Bahá'u'lláh as the “Land of Tâ” (*Arz-e Tâ'* or *Ard al-Tâ'*). See Riâz Ghadimi, *Farhang-e loġhât-e montakhabe* (University of Toronto Press, 1986), s.v. “*Zowrá'*” and “*Tâ'*” and “*Arz-e Tâ'*”.
- cxixxii The *Kitâb-i Badi'* (Faizi manuscript, 263) has: *yâr-e to dar dast-e a'dâ mobtalâ*, “your lover languishes in hostile hands.”
Âsâr-e qalam-e a'lâ, Mishkín Qalam and the 1914/1332 text, however, all read: *yâr-e to dar habs o zendân mobtalâ*. Bahá'u'lláh was not imprisoned, strictly speaking, until his arrival in the town of Akka (and the second version may very well date to the Akka period), but he was under house arrest in Edirne and, in view of the Ottoman government's summoning him to Istanbul, his freedom had been restricted and his movements proscribed. Bahá'u'lláh's followers who remained behind in Baghdad, however, were taken away as captives to Mosul, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says in *Memorials of the Faithful*, 30, 81, 102, 108, 152-3.
- cxixxiii Karbalâ lies to the southwest of Baghdad, not in the direction that Bahá'u'lláh and his band of exiles followed, and must obviously be meant metaphorically here. However, as Karbalâ was an open unpopulated plain in Iraq at the time of Husayn's martyrdom, it would have been a particularly apt comparison for the rugged open ground that Bahá'u'lláh crossed on his way to Istanbul.
- cxixxiv Yazîd, the son of Mu'âwiyya (who had usurped the Caliphate from Imam 'Alî), became Caliph in 680 and was responsible for the slaughter of the Imam Husayn and his tiny band of followers.
- cxixxv “Friend” here is an epithet for the Prophet, Muhammad. The *Kitâb-i Badi'* (Fayzi ms, 263) quotes this line, giving the text as: *o sad Abu Jahl-e 'anid*, “and a hundred hostile Abu

Jahls," a reference to the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad, who bitterly opposed him. It does not seem to me that a scribe could accidentally mistake the reading *sad Abu Jahl* for *in hame div*. It therefore seems likely that this difference reflects a deliberate change made by Bahá'u'lláh in quoting this verse in the *Kitáb-i Badí'*.

^{cxxxvi} God's Spirit is an epithet of Jesus. *Asâr-e qalam-e a'lâ*, Mishkín Qalam and the 1914/1332 text all read The Spirit of God detained among the *Sebtîân* (the twelve tribes of Israel descended from Jacob, hence the children of Israel), hence Jesus detained among the Jews. However, the *Kitáb-i Badí'* (Fayzi ms, 263) reads *Jâhedân* (atheists, those who war against God) instead of *Sebtîân*. This difference seems unlikely to result from scribal error, and is therefore once again more likely to be due to authorial revision.

^{cxxxvii} Possibly this alludes to the story in Rumi's *Masnavi* of the parrot in the cage of a merchant (*Masnavi*, Book 1, 1547-1848). The bird, alternately called parrot (*tuti*) and nightingale (*bolbol*, *'andalib*) feigns to be dead, causing the merchant to open its cage and set it free. This story gives Rumi the occasion to say that the parrot whose song comes from revelation (*vahy*) created before the beginning of creation – his song is hidden within you (1717-18). He also speaks of the bird whose every breath contains one hundred messages from God (1578), and of being veiled from speaking the divine secrets (1761-2). Elsewhere, Bahá'u'lláh himself alludes to the motif of the human soul as a bird caught captive in the cage of worldliness (e.g., Persian *Hidden Words*, #38).

SOUNDINGS

Some reflections on Juan Cole's *Modernity and the Millennium*

Amin Banani

In the strict sense of the word this is not a review of Juan Cole's *Modernity and the Millennium*¹ but rather some reflections on it with the hope that sharing these reflections may be helpful to the book's author as well as to other readers. I should say at the outset that the positive public impact of this book outweighs its shortcomings. It is the first well-documented, conceptually sophisticated, and persuasively argued treatment of a major "missing chapter" in the history of progressive ideas and movements in nineteenth century Persia. As such its value for the academically oriented readers – and particularly the non-Baha'i Iranian intellectuals – should be appreciated as it brings to the foreground subjects which have been taboo and people who have been treated as non-persons in Iranian historiography. No serious future studies in the history of modernity in western Asia, and in Persia in particular, can ignore what Cole has convincingly demonstrated in this book. Having said that I must confess that it has left a pall of sadness on my heart. While it is a work of original insights and useful conceptual constructs, it contains not a few contradictions, hasty conclusions and curious lapses. The author begins by rightly asserting that, contrary to general western perceptions, the nineteenth century Middle East was not an intellectually moribund place devoid of original and dynamic ideas. He cites the genesis of the Bahá'í Faith to prove his point. Then he tries to trace every bit of what is modern in Bahá'u'lláh's thought to direct and indirect influences from the west.

Cole, who has demonstrated in his prolific and often brilliant writings his capacity for careful and meticulous scholarship, is curiously at his most tenuous in demonstrating what he promises to do, i.e. in establishing the connection between the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the presumed sources that influenced him. Virtually all the presentation of the evidence, such as supposed casual conversations with westernised Ottoman leaders and thinkers in the coffee houses of Baghdad and Edirne, is couched in vague and subjunctive phrasing. Juxtaposition of European trends of thought on major components of modernity with the progressively emerging and ever expanding vision of Bahá'u'lláh is reminiscent of exercises in intellectual history where ideas are detached from events and very scant attention is paid to the resonance between the two.

The writings of Bahá'u'lláh from the earliest poetic visions in the Siyáh

¹ Published as *Modernity and Millennium: the genesis of the Baha'i Faith in the nineteenth century Middle-East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

Chál of Tehran to his final *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* reveal a remarkable and correlative wholeness. A compression of virtually all the major themes of his prescription for humanity is present in one of his earliest works, the *Hidden Words*. Nowhere is this unity of vision more evident than in the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, the last work to issue from his pen. It is a document of *itmam-i hujjat* (completion of proof), a final delivery of the proofs of the validity of his cause, which confronts the addressee with the crucial choice to accept or to deny. In this work Bahá'u'lláh quotes trenchant passages from his writings that span of his entire life. The unity of the whole with all its manifold facets is summed up for all fair-minded and open-hearted persons to see.

The particular recipient of this book, Shaykh Muhammad Taqí, stands for all who deny his call and rise up against him and strive to harm his Cause. The light of Bahá'u'lláh's vision did not penetrate the darkness of the Shaykh's soul; but a careful and unfettered review of Bahá'u'lláh's writings over a span of half a century and the contemplation of their majestic power and beauty have led many a receptive soul to take the leap of faith and recognise their divine source. Others who by virtue of their intellectual gifts and spiritual capacity could have attained to that potential, have instead by a curious process of what is occasionally called "formal historical scholarship," allowed that faith to elude them.

I have some difficulty with the notion of "formal historical scholarship." *A priori* categorisation of varieties of scholarship can be misleading and self-serving. I have an easier time distinguishing sound scholarship from less sound. Although Cole does not say so explicitly, close examination of *Modernity and Millennium* makes it clear that viewing Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of divine will and purpose is outside the purview of "formal historical scholarship." The crucial issue of Bahá'u'lláh's own oft-repeated and explicit claim to be a Manifestation of God is finessed by Cole as: "Acclaimed by his adherents as a Manifestation of God (*mazhar-i ilahi*) and bearer of divine revelation..." (14). In "formal historical scholarship," Bahá'u'lláh is presented as merely a perspicacious reformer who had a good ear for western ideas.

Implicit in this assertion of "formal historical scholarship" is the assumption that sound scholarship is incompatible with religious faith and is the monopoly of the agnostic. Yet the world of sound scholarship has no shortage of practitioners of profound religious faith. In my own academic career I have known such giants of scholarship as Etienne Gilson, Lynn White, Harry Wolfson, Fazlur Rahman and Alessandro Bausani whose adherence to the highest standards of sound scholarship did not drain them of their faith. If such a ubiquitous human experience as the phenomenon of faith must be excluded from the purview of "formal historical scholarship," then it is the bias and limitation of that scholarship that needs to be corrected.

Cole is right, of course, in noting a pattern of evolutionary expansion in the encompassing vision of Bahá'u'lláh. But that pattern is far more credible and comprehensible as a dimension of his progressive revelation. As the context of his unfolding mission and the identity and variety of his audience

changed and expanded, he focused upon and elaborated themes that he had touched upon as early as in the *Hidden Words*. Thus it is only natural that in his early poetic responses to Kurdish Sufis about the way-stations of the mystic path he would not touch upon subjects such as the virtues of democratic consultative government, condemnation of militarism, and the need for a universal auxiliary language as he did later when he was addressing the rulers of the world. In this light, for example, Cole's statement about Bahá'u'lláh's evolution from Babi militancy to advocacy of world peace – presumably because of his improbable exposure to Saint Simonian ideas – misses the mark and does not stand the test of historical scrutiny. Bahá'u'lláh's role as a peace-maker and conciliator even in his earliest Babi days and at the height of Babi militancy is well-attested. His condemnation of the attempt on the life of Nasir al-Din Shah was unequivocal; and from the earliest Baghdad days he was, in his own words, bent upon "sheathing the swords of the Babis."

That Bahá'u'lláh was in cordial contact with progressive Ottoman individuals in Baghdad, Istanbul and Edirne is, as Cole points out, a historical fact. But for all of Cole's suggestions that these men were conduits to Bahá'u'lláh of European ideas, there is only one reasonably well documented account of direct exchange between one of these men, the Ottoman diplomat Kemal Pasha, and Bahá'u'lláh, in Istanbul in 1863. In that encounter it was the European educated polyglot cosmopolitan Kemal Pasha who was dazzled by the novelty of Bahá'u'lláh's cogent argument for the global need to adopt a universal auxiliary language. That there were areas of convergence between the ideas and objectives of some of the Ottoman reformers and the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is true. But there are three points that no objective scholar, no matter how sceptical or agnostic, can deny: (1) that none of the ideas, programmes and agendas of those progressive Ottomans came close to the multi-faceted, correlated and integrated wholeness of Bahá'u'lláh's vision for healing the spiritual, social, economic and political ills of not just the Ottoman society but the whole of humankind; (2) that on every crucial issue of social, political and economic reform Bahá'u'lláh's prescriptions were more radical and revolutionary than what the Ottoman reformers could envision; and (3) that important components of Bahá'u'lláh's pattern for his world order were years ahead of gaining currency even in the west.

In his efforts to portray Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá as recipients and reflectors of western modernist ideas, Cole occasionally makes oblique reference to events that could be misleading to uninformed readers. For example, he makes a passing reference to 'Abdu'l-Bahá attending the study classes of Muhammad Abduh in Beirut, leaving the reader with the impression of a master-pupil relationship (181). Again, Cole is entirely right that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was well aware of the intellectual currents of his environment and was well-read in the Egyptian and Turkish modernist press; and he met and corresponded with some intellectuals including Muhammad Abduh. It would be interesting to know of Abduh's recollection of meeting with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Fortunately, we have a vignette in the memoirs of Comte de Sacy, the son of the famed French orientalist, who quotes a letter from his friend Muhammad

Abduh saying that meeting with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was more beneficial than seeing the greatest of philosophers, that he had never come across anyone with the intelligence, wisdom and vast knowledge of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, that he seemed to know the secrets of hearts and could respond to inmost questions, that it was evident that the holy spirit dwelled in him, and that his knowledge was innate and his power divine.

In the conclusion of the book, Cole blames “later Bahá’í leaders” for a growing tendency to literalism, conservatism and fundamentalism. This, he suggests, has slowed if not reversed the liberal and progressive thrust of Bahá’u’lláh’s cause. He constructs a pattern of Bahá’í polity envisaged by Bahá’u’lláh in conformity with Jeffersonian enlightenment, and makes a strong plea for separation of religious and civil authority. To uphold this view, he resorts to a literalist device of insisting on the historical etymological boundaries of certain crucial terms used by Bahá’u’lláh such as *siyasat* and *millat* (historically, governmental leadership and religious group, but evolved today to politics and nation/people). To be so hidebound at a time when the semantic fields of these terms were undergoing dynamic transformation is uncharacteristic of Cole, who is usually more alert to the pace of change in history. While it is true that Bahá’u’lláh emerged from the matrix of Shi‘i Islam and as nearly all of his interlocutors were Muslims, he necessarily spoke in terms understood by them, it is equally true that he invested familiar terms, concepts and institutions with dynamic new potentialities that emerge in the course of time. To read with a backward glance is to miss the vast prospects ahead. At any rate, doctrinaire debates about the evolving relations of Bahá’í institutions and civil authorities is an exercise in premature speculation that ignores the dynamic complexities of future developments.

These “later Bahá’í leaders,” who presumably include Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, have acted with one supreme goal: to promote the welfare of the cause of Bahá’u’lláh and preserve the unity of Bahá’í communities. The individual temperamental characteristics of members of Bahá’í institutions, especially the Universal House of Justice at the apex of the Bahá’í administrative order, have little to do with the final outcome of their deliberations. No fair-minded person can review the messages and pronouncements of the Universal House of Justice in the last thirty-five years and find them injudicious, literalist, anti-intellectual or fundamentalist.

To be sure some of Cole’s criticisms about anti-intellectualism and the thought-squelching atmosphere of some Bahá’í communities, the tendency to lifetime incumbency in Bahá’í institutions, the overdue need to amend the publication review process to peer review, and the need for nurturing and making better use of scholarship in the Faith are cogent and well-taken. There is no doubt that both human and institutional behaviour are subject to retrenchment and hardening. But in the open consultative and constructive channels of Bahá’í governance, Bahá’u’lláh has provided the mechanisms to correct these tendencies. My sadness at reading Cole’s conclusion is that he may have helped set back that natural process of correction.

Historical methodology and the development of Bahá'í scholarship: toward dispelling a false dichotomy

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Introduction

The recently published compilation on Bahá'í scholarship states that this endeavour is for everyone. Indeed, the introductory letter from the Universal House of Justice to that compilation states:

This scholarly endeavour should be characterised by the welcome it offers to all who wish to be involved in it, each in his or her own way, by mutual encouragement and cooperation among its participants, and by the respect accorded to distinguished accomplishment and outstanding achievement.³

Since this call reaches out to every Bahá'í to be involved in scholarly activity, we cannot assume that every Bahá'í will be involved in the same way. Indeed, the diversity of the Bahá'í community, and the wide range of professions, vocations and areas of expertise that are represented preclude and discourage such uniformity of thought and approach. The present paper will (1) introduce and locate one particular academic discipline, history, within the context of Bahá'í scholarship, and vice-versa; (2) present a brief introduction on historical methodologies as practised in the history profession; and (3) explain the limitations of these methodologies. It will conclude with a discussion of what sorts of contributions professional historians and other academics can make to Bahá'í scholarship.

Professional history and Bahá'í scholarship

There are countless ways one can envision engaging in the sort of “scholarly activity” mentioned in the letter cited above. For some, it might mean reading

² This paper was originally a talk presented at Bosch Bahá'í school in 1997 to a non-academic audience. It was written specifically for a Bahá'í audience with no background at all in history or historical methodologies. In my view, it is important that academics continue to communicate something about their various methodologies to Bahá'ís without any university background.

³ From a letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated 10 February 1995, published as the introduction to the “Compilation on Scholarship,” *Bahá'í Studies Review* 5.1 (1995): 105.

scholarly books and articles on Babi and Bahá'í studies.⁴ Others might enrol in evening courses offered at a local community college or university. For still others, it could mean conducting classes of a scholarly nature in our local communities: deepenings on the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, for instance, or Islamic history. For yet others, it might mean delving even deeper into one's own area of expertise. Some Bahá'ís are professional scholars and members of the academy – that is, they make their living by engaging in scholarly activities – teaching courses, conducting research, and presenting that research within professional academic settings, usually colleges, universities or research institutes. Some Bahá'ís, for instance, are professional economists, others are sociologists, engineers, specialists in literature and languages, or historians. Within this group of professional scholars, a few Bahá'ís, along with other scholars who are not Bahá'ís, have chosen as their area of specialization the study of the Bahá'í religion. These individuals study the Bahá'í religion from the perspective of their specific academic discipline, whether it be history, sociology, political science, or literature. However, whether one is a professional academic, a part-time researcher, or a thinking person interested in the life of the mind, the letter quoted above indicates that everyone in the community, with all its tremendous diversity and varieties of perspectives and backgrounds, is welcome to do what he or she can to engage in “scholarly endeavour.”⁵

Let us now examine the scholarly endeavours of one area of learning: history. The field of history is vast. It incorporates a wide diversity of people using a variety of approaches. Nearly everyone is familiar with history in one form or another – for some, the mere mention of the word causes grimacing and brings back unpleasant memories of an agonizing process of memorizing names, dates and places. Others love history, and although one's professional training may be in the sciences or other areas not at all related to history, people from a variety of walks of life still, for example, read historical works of various types, watch televised historical documentaries, and otherwise engage in historically-related activities. For some people, history becomes

⁴ See, for example, *From Iran East & West*, eds. Juan R. Cole and Moojan Momen (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1984); H. M. Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985); *Studies in Honor of the Late Hasan M. Husayn Balyuzi*, ed. Moojan Momen (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1988); Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Denis MacEoin, *The Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History: a Survey* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992); Juan R. I. Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); and various articles in the *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin*, ed. Stephen N. Lambden.

⁵ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá explains why developing one's intellect may be so compelling to some: “All blessings are divine in origin, but none can be compared with this power of intellectual investigation and research, which is an eternal gift producing fruits of unending delight. Man is ever partaking of these fruits. All other blessings are temporary; this is an everlasting possession” (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Foundations of World Unity* [Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1945] 61).

important when they learn about the roots of their own family, whether through joining genealogical societies or recording the stories heard from grandparents or other elders. Other individuals spend much of their lives deeply studying historical eras in which they are interested. In the United States, for example, history related to the Civil War and, more generally, military history are popular fields.

In the same way that a field like astronomy encompasses both amateurs (people genuinely interested in and often engaged in the study of the stars but whose profession is something else), and professionals (those who make a living as astronomers), so too does history have an amateur and a professional side. Professional historians make their living by studying the past. They find employment in a number of places: historical societies, museums, local archives, colleges and universities. Those who make a profession of history, therefore, are only a subset of all those who consider themselves historians are interested in history, or view themselves as “historically-minded.” Similarly, those professional historians who study the Bahá’í religion as their special field of research form a subset of all those individuals, professional or amateur, scientist or humanist, and many others, engaged in Bahá’í scholarship.

In today’s society, history often seems to be at the centre of numerous controversies. Current debates over historical issues, such as the publicity generated by certain historical exhibitions at museums, like the Enola Gay exhibit at the Smithsonian museum, or the debates on multiculturalism, show that far from being a marginalised, obscure endeavour, history is in fact a very powerful force. People from all backgrounds and walks of life have deep concerns about that power, not only in relation for example, to whose history is taught in schools, but how it is taught as well.⁶ Therefore, unlike certain other professions, where debates involving non-professionals or amateurs might be less passionate, history is seen as something to which everybody may feel the right of access.

Historical methodology

The fact that history is so accessible and so many people are involved in historical enterprises of various sorts tends sometimes to make one lose sight of the fact that the professional side of the discipline exists, and like its fellow academic disciplines in the arts and the sciences, is subject to its own methodologies, its own rules and its own approaches. For instance, the approach taken by a professional historian can in fact differ – although it does not necessarily have to – from that taken by a non-professional historian, in the same way that someone who has a general interest in cooking may

⁶ For example, some of these debates took place following the publication of Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

undertake the preparation of food differently than a highly trained professional chef. The lack of understanding of how professional historians “do” history as opposed to more popular approaches has led to some of the controversies and debates mentioned above, and, perhaps, tensions within the Bahá’í community as well. Far from exhibiting unique features, the debates over history on various Bahá’í and Bahá’í-related Internet forums mirror the larger context in which they are carried out. On some of these Internet discussion groups, for instance, professional Bahá’í scientists have engaged in debates about historical methodology with both non-professional and professional Bahá’í historians, all claiming the right of access to history. Those debates, however, did not often address what it is that professional historians actually do. In order to contribute to a greater understanding of historical methodology as it is practised in the academy, a brief introduction is provided below.

Historians work primarily, though not exclusively, with written texts in order to understand the past. We may define historical methodology as the process by which historians read and interpret those written texts, sometimes called “sources” or “historical sources.” This process goes by many names, some of which include “source criticism,” “critical analysis,” “textual analysis,” or “historical criticism.” It is extremely important to keep in mind two points: (1) a historian may use *any* written text for his analysis, and (2) *any* text that a historian may use for his analysis can be used by different individuals in different ways, for different purposes, which go well beyond the limits of “historical methodology.”

Let us take the following well-known text as an example:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall
All the king’s horses and all the king’s men
Cannot put Humpty Dumpty together again.⁷

Most of us are familiar with this verse as a nursery rhyme which parents will sing or recite to their child. In this case, it is the recitation of the text which serves the function of entertaining the child. The parent is not particularly interested in historical or literary questions that the rhyme raises.

A professional literary critic will look at the nursery rhyme as a literary text. Unlike the parent, who sings or recites the text, the literary specialist will “interrogate” the text, ask it specific questions in order better to understand its literary nature. Some possible questions might include, what is the rhyme metre of the verse? What are the literary allusions being made? How is this

⁷ *The Illustrated Treasury of Children’s Literature*, ed. Margaret E. Martignoni (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1955) 29, and reprinted in many other places.

rhyme related to other texts, which collectively form the literary genre known as “nursery rhymes”? Here, as a result of interrogating the text in a specific way, the text reveals certain answers that would be of interest to those who study literature.

A professional historian will ask a different set of questions, which will cause the text to yield a different set of answers. In standard accepted historical methodology, the questions asked of a particular text, if one is going to use that text for historical purposes, remain constant regardless of which text is being read, whether it be a nursery rhyme, a medieval legend or a Babi chronicle. These basic questions include the following: What is the text? Who wrote it? When was it written? Where was it written? Why was it written, and under what circumstances? Whom was it written for? By answering these questions, one learns about the greater “historical context” in which the text was produced.

“Doing history,” – writing about the past – therefore, requires one to ask and answer the specific questions listed above of any given text. By applying these questions to the Humpty Dumpty nursery rhyme, we learn the following: this text originated in fifteenth century England as a popular political protest allegory, in which Humpty Dumpty refers to King Richard III, “sat on the wall” means “attacked a Welshman,” who in this case was Henry Tudor, grandson of Queen Catherine, widow of King Henry II of England. Humpty Dumpty’s great fall refers to Richard III’s defeat at a battle in Leicestershire, where despite his large army of 23,000 men (“all the king’s men”), he still suffered defeat (“cannot put Humpty Dumpty together again”).⁸

In the example of this nursery rhyme, the parent, the literary critic and the historian each use the Humpty Dumpty text for different purposes. In each separate reading, the text performed very different functions, none of which took away from the importance of the others. It helped entertain a child, it revealed something about the literary nature of nursery rhymes and it provided information about fifteenth century British history and popular political thought. None of these functions of the text need to be in conflict with each other. The historian who studies the political implications of the Humpty Dumpty nursery rhyme is not threatening the legitimacy or validity of the same text to the parent, who enjoys entertaining the child by reciting the rhyme.

Another important consideration for historians who seek to understand the past is deciding which text to rely on. If a number of written texts describe the same events, and no two writers are exactly the same, then no two texts will be exactly the same. But this raises the question, which version should one read, and which version should one believe? By asking the five historical

⁸ See Albert Mason, *The Nursery Rhyme: Remnant of Popular Political Protest* (Kansas: Coronado Press, 1968) 67-81.

questions listed above, we can better evaluate any given text. Generally, historians favour the accounts written closer to the time of the events they describe over those written later. Likewise, accounts written by eyewitnesses are favoured over those who receive their information second hand. These criteria, however, must be weighed in light of the personal biases of the author, and since all human beings are subjective creatures, there is no such thing as a perfectly “objective” text. It is best, therefore, to read all available accounts of the same historical event.

Turning now to another example that illustrates this issue, we find the following passage in a nineteenth century historical account:

Mirza Ahmad-i-Qazvini, the martyr, who on several occasions had heard Mulla Husayn recount to the early believers the story of his moving and historic interview with the Báb, related to me the following: “I have heard Mulla Husayn repeatedly and graphically describe the circumstances of that remarkable interview . . . ‘We soon found ourselves standing at the gate of a house of modest appearance. He knocked at the door, which was soon opened by an Ethiopian servant. “Enter therein in peace, secure,” [Q 15:46] were His words as He crossed the threshold and motioned me to follow Him. His invitation, uttered with power and majesty, penetrated my soul... Might not my visit to this house, I thought to myself, enable me to draw nearer to the Object of my quest?’”⁹

Here again is a text for which we may envision numerous uses. Certainly, many Bahá’ís can remember participating in celebrations of the anniversary of the Bab’s announcement of his prophethood, and will recognize this as a passage from Nabil’s Narrative, also known as the *Dawn-Breakers*. One of the very important functions of this text has been to encourage and inspire the Bahá’ís in the west, who – as they are taken back to Shiraz, and imagine that historic meeting between Mulla Husayn and the Bab – are partaking of the fruits of Shoghi Effendi’s tremendous effort when he translated and interpreted this chronicle.¹⁰ In this scenario, Bahá’ís would probably most

⁹ Nabil Zarandí, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil’s Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá’í Revelation*, ed. and trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970) 52-54.

¹⁰ I use the word “interpret” here based on Rúhiyyih Rabbani’s statement: “Although ostensibly a translation from the original Persian Shoghi Effendi may be said to have re-created it in English, his translation being comparable to Fitzgerald’s rendering of Omar Khayyam’s *Rubaiyat* which gave to the world a poem in a foreign language that in many ways far exceeded the merits of the original” (Rúhiyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl* [London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969] 215). Those who care read both English and Persian might find it an interesting exercise to compare Fitzgerald’s translations with Khayyam’s original, and see just how much Fitzgerald changed the original Persian

often use this text for inspirational purposes, to convey the spirit of that day of declaration to their fellow believers.

The non-professional historian, or historically-minded individual, might use this text to different ends: to obtain a better understanding of Babi history, as many Bahá'is are interested in the Babi roots of their own faith. Since not everyone is able to read Persian or Arabic, Bahá'is are indebted to Shoghi Effendi for producing this English translation and interpretation, for it helps bring to life the historical figures of the past: Shaykh Ahmad and Sayyid Kazim, the Letters of the Living, the Bab himself. A non-professional historian might use the *Dawn-Breakers* as a basis from which to write a popular account of Babi history, more accessible to the general public, or to lead a local community deepening.

The professional historian will use the same text in very specific ways in order to learn and analyse the past. As in the nursery rhyme example, the uses of the text differ, as do the questions posed of the text and the answers it gives. Note that the historian will ask the *exact same* questions of Nabil's text that she asked of the nursery rhyme. Again, she wants to know: When was this text written? By whom? What was the author's background? The answers to these general questions give rise to more specific questions, which might include the following: The author, Nabil, claims to have heard the story from Mirza Ahmad Qazvini, who heard it from Mulla Husayn. When did Mirza Ahmad-i Qazvini tell the story to Nabil? Did Mirza Ahmad Qazvini tell the same story to anyone else? Did Mulla Husayn tell anyone else, and do we have other versions of the same episode? If so, how do they differ from Nabil's? Furthermore, if they do differ, whose account do we "privilege," and how do we account for the differences in the various versions?

quatrains. One of the primary reasons why Shoghi Effendi translated this work was to inspire the Bahá'is in the west. In a cable to the United States in 1931, the Guardian urged the study of this translation for he felt it an "essential preliminary to [the] renewed intensive Teaching Campaign necessitated by [the] completion [of the] *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar*" (*ibid.*, 217). See also *Priceless Pearl* 214-218 for a general summary of the history of this translation.

Thus, historians analyse any number of texts in a uniform way in order to understand the past and they present their analysis in a manner that conforms to certain standard rules, sometimes known as “scholarly apparatus.” For instance, one important aspect of the scholarly apparatus is that professional historians must cite their sources by means of a footnote or endnote reference, so that the reader may check the original “text” in order to evaluate the historian’s analysis. By providing examples and citations from their sources, historians provide “evidence” to back up, or “prove” their conclusions. Entire undergraduate and graduate seminar courses at universities are devoted to teaching students how to ask questions, how to weigh evidence, how to read and interpret texts, and how to present one’s findings or conclusions. It is very important to note that the questions and methods can become extremely detailed and complex, as students and scholars delve deeper and deeper into their topic.

Professional historians in academia specialise in various areas or “fields” of history, which are the subjects that they teach and/or research. These fields include areas such as “European history,” “world history,” “social history,” “women’s history” and “East Asian history.” Within these broad areas are subfields and more specifically designated areas of specialisation. These fields of history require different sorts of special skills. Historians like to read sources in the languages in which they were written, so that less will get lost in the translation, thus some specialities require language skills. For instance, historians of China need to be able to read their sources in the original Chinese, economic historians need to have some knowledge of economics, and so forth. In the case of professional historians studying early Babi and Bahá’í history, the field requires advanced training in (1) historical methodology, (2) Islamics, and (3) the Persian and Arabic languages.¹¹

History, then, as it is practised in the academy, is a sort of “craft,” and like gardeners who must learn the various methods of tending a garden and know how to use specific tools and materials in order to perform their tasks, so too must historians learn to use the tools of their craft, which include the skills mentioned above. Learning to master the profession, and perfecting one’s use of the “tools,” requires time, training, and commitment. Since the tools of the trade are the same regardless of what period of history one studies, the approaches used in the professional study of Bahá’í history are no different from the approaches used in the professional study of any other period or area of history, for example, early Christianity, medieval India, or

¹¹ A sample question faced by historians could be the following: “Official Qajar historical writing is a continuation of earlier traditions of Safavid, Afsharid and Zand historical writing, where imitative historiographical methods are utilized. Did Nabil utilize the same imitative methods, and if so, which earlier texts was he imitating?” (Incidentally, the Persian original of Nabil must be consulted in order to answer this particular question.)

modern Canada.

Limitations of the discipline

Having outlined the sorts of questions historians ask and the methods they use to answer them, a few words must be said about the “limits” of the discipline. We often hear what historians do; we do not often hear what historians cannot or should not do. For professional historians, the kinds of questions that can be asked of a text are limited. Returning to the garden analogy, the number of tools in our garden shed are not infinite, and they can only fix certain kinds of problems. In the case of gardening, a gardener’s tools, no matter how sophisticated, cannot prevent a winter storm from freezing the plants. Nor can these tools help the gardener explain why the storm occurred in the first place or predict when the next one is due. To require the gardener to answer such questions is making the gardener go beyond the limits of what his discipline, gardening, can tell him. Similarly, historians can only explain certain aspects of events, and answer certain questions in certain ways, due to the limitations of the discipline. It is for this reason that sometimes people read the scholarship of professional Bahá’í historians and claim that they have a problematic identity: being Bahá’ís but writing like non-Bahá’ís. Such perceptions are a result of not having sufficient knowledge of what history cannot do.

We have already established that historians ask certain types of questions of a particular text: they ask questions that the text is able to answer within the limits of the discipline. Like the gardener whose hoes, weeders and bags of fertilizer are unable to predict winter storms, there are certain questions which history cannot answer. One final example aptly illustrates this point:

Oh Ahmad! Forget not my bounties while I am absent.
Remember My days during thy days, and My distress and
banishment in this remote prison. And be thou so steadfast in
My love that thy heart shall not waver, even if the swords of the
enemies rain blows upon thee and all the heavens and the earth
arise against thee.¹²

This is from one of the best known writings of Bahá’u’lláh, the “Tablet of Ahmad.” How many times have Bahá’ís recited this passage, gaining spiritual strength and comfort from its words, which Shoghi Effendi states have a “special potency and significance.” For most believers, this work’s primary use is for prayer and meditation.

¹² Bahá’u’lláh, Tablet of Ahmad, reprinted in *Bahá’í Prayers* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1945) and many other places.

As in the example of the nursery rhyme, however, a historian – believer or not – can also use this text, and do so for an entirely different purpose than its “spiritual” function, which does not take away or invalidate its use as a prayer or a devotion. The questions a historian would ask of this text, in order better to understand the past, should by now sound familiar: Who is the author? When did the author write? For whom? Why? Specific questions could include the following: Who is Ahmad? Why is he distressed? Where is the remote prison? How long was the author in that prison? Who, specifically, are the enemies whose swords may rain down upon Ahmad?

The first of the general questions – who is the author and what is his background – is one of the first that historians routinely ask. In this case, the text is from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh. The historian writing for academic audiences would answer the first question with something like the following: “The author of this Tablet is Mirza Husayn ‘Ali, who took the title Bahá'u'lláh (‘glory of God’). He was a 19th century Persian who claimed to be a Manifestation of God.” The professional historian, whether Bahá'í or not, *cannot* justifiably state the following: “The author of this Tablet is Bahá'u'lláh, who is the Manifestation of God for this day.” The reason has to do with the limitations of the discipline. A historian could very well believe that Bahá'u'lláh is a Manifestation of God, or not, but the fact that this is a text-based discipline means that the historian cannot use *textual* evidence to back up the second statement. The gardener may very well believe that the storm will return the next day, but his gardening tools do not, cannot, and should not be used to prove his opinion. Historians can only reach certain kinds of conclusions based on textual evidence. Bahá'ís may appear to be “writing as non-Bahá'ís” but in fact they are writing as historians, restricted by the tools of their trade, able to analyse only certain problems and say things in certain ways.

What can professional historians contribute?

Why is it so important for us to understand what professional academics do? In 1989, the Universal House of Justice wrote:

Newly enrolled professionals and other experts provide a great resource for the development of Bahá'í scholarship. It is hoped that, as they attain a deeper grasp of the Teachings and their significance, they will be able to assist Bahá'í communities in correlating the beliefs of the Faith with the current thoughts and problems of the world.¹³

¹³ From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated 18 April 1989, cited in “Compilation on scholarship,” no. 41, 124.

What are some of the “current thoughts” in the world, which the Universal House of Justice has asked Bahá’í scholars to correlate with the beliefs of the faith? In academia, these include newer fields of study that have attracted the attention of scholars in a number of both traditional and new disciplines, including history. The Bahá’í writings and texts all have a great deal to offer in these areas, and as these “professionals and other experts” try to correlate “the beliefs of the faith with the current thoughts and problems of the world,” it is no coincidence that some of the most fervently debated issues in some segments of the Bahá’í community reflect this current thought. For example, current thought in the newer fields of gender studies, feminist studies and women’s history (which includes discussions about feminist approaches to texts) cannot help but lead to discussions about women serving on the Universal House of Justice. “Current thought” on hermeneutics and how one interprets and analyses a text “correlates” with questions related to theories of the interpretation of Bahá’í texts, which incidentally have included a discussion on the relative advantages and disadvantages of “compilations,” and even the relationship between science and religion. “Current thought” on the history of nationalism and religion raises issues of the relationship between church and state in Bahá’í patterns of future government. “Current thought” on post-colonialism and subaltern studies, with their emphasis on studying how some groups (such as the 19th century European colonial powers) have traditionally categorised other groups (such the colonized peoples of the Middle East) in order to maintain power over them has led to “correlated” discussions about attitudes within the Bahá’í community towards the “Other,” whether that Other is a person of colour, a woman, a historian, a homosexual, a Persian, a “scholar,” etc. As time passes, the issues that form “current thought” will of course change. Bahá’ís in academia should be able to engage in a meaningful discussion of whatever the current discourse of the time may be.

Conclusion

This paper has suggested that there are not only many ways to read a text, but that any given text can be read, analysed and used for a number of different purposes, and that for professional history, any given text yields only certain kinds of information which can be presented in certain ways. As individuals, we have the freedom to ask any and all questions of any text. As professional historians, there are only certain questions that our discipline allows us to ask and answer. Instead of creating false dichotomies between professional historians, popular historians and Bahá’í scholars, multiple approaches to the text, like the many approaches to Bahá’í scholarship, should co-exist. Given the broad call by the Universal House of Justice to all Bahá’ís to develop

Bahá'í scholarship and to welcome all who wish to be involved in it, that welcome should include professional academic historians, who along with other academics, form just one small subgroup of all people engaged in Bahá'í scholarship.

Indigenous rights and women's rights in the Samoan Bahá'í community

Maureen Sier

The Pacific islands of Samoa are governed by an indigenous system where the key decision-makers are primarily men. Bahá'í communities in Samoa are influenced by this system and, as a result, this inhibits female participation in Bahá'í administration. This paper outlines how the Samoan chiefly system operates and then demonstrates its links to the process of Bahá'í elections at a national level. The following analysis relates to the wider question of whether Bahá'ís can respect traditional Samoan culture without undermining the fundamental Bahá'í principle of equality of men and women.

Upolu and Savaii are the main islands of Samoa, known until recently as Western Samoa, and have been independently governed since 1962. The mainstays of the Samoan way of life are agriculture and fishing, remittances from family members living abroad, tourism and light industry. Politically, Samoa has maintained stability since independence. The continuation of a system of chiefly government at the village and national level is a contributing factor in this stability.

The Samoan islands are predominantly made up of villages housing between 200 and 500 people. Samoa's urban capital, Apia, on Upolu, has around 35,000 residents. The other 125,000 live in rural villages on both Upolu and Savaii. Within each village or *nu'u* people live in extended families known as *aiga*. Extended families vary in size but are much larger than the typical western nuclear family. Each extended family appoints a person as their chief; this chief is called a *matai*,¹⁴ and is usually the family chief for life. *Matai* titles are hierarchical in that some titles hold more prestige than others. Some titles have only local significance; others confer powers over very large districts and even over whole islands.

The *matai* is charged with general responsibility for the care of the family, allocation of resources, is custodian of the family land and represents the family on the village council of chiefs known as the *fono*. The *fono* is by tradition sole executive and judicial authority in each village. *Matai* are also the only people eligible to stand in national elections, ensuring that national government in Samoa is made up entirely of *matai*. Until 1990 only *matai* were eligible to vote and although now there is universal suffrage for all men

¹⁴ *Matai* titles are of two kinds, *Ali'i* and *Tulafale*. Titles that are linked to aristocratic lineage and can trace their origin back to the Samoan creator God [*Tagaloa-lagi*] are known as *Ali'i*. They are viewed as sacred. *Matai* with *Tulafale* titles render service and oratory skills on behalf of their *Ali'i* and are often referred to, by westerners, as "talking chiefs".

and women aged twenty-one and over it is still the case that only *matai* may stand for election.

The *matai* system is fairly democratic as a *matai* is the elected representative of his family and will in theory have their best interests at heart when consulting at a village *fono* meeting or when standing for national election. However, when one realizes that around 94% of all *matai* are male, the system does not appear to be democratic in relation to women's involvement in local or national government. Samoan Bahá'ís are part of their cultural milieu and, as such, Samoan Bahá'í families will appoint a *matai* as their family head and as their family representative on the village *fono*: not to do so would isolate Bahá'í families from village affairs. In fact without a *matai* they would have no one to represent their land claims or to protect their interests at a local or national level. In the history of Bahá'í persecution in villages, for example, it is often the Bahá'í *matai* who have successfully interceded and protected their fellow village Bahá'ís.

The decision making and governing body of a Bahá'í community at a national level is the national spiritual assembly. This institution is elected yearly by delegates who are themselves elected representatives of local Bahá'í communities. Annual local conventions are held, where the Bahá'ís of three or four villages or urban districts (the number varies depending on the size of Bahá'í community) come together with the primary purpose of voting for their delegate or delegates. These go forward and vote for the national spiritual assembly at a national convention. In 1999, there were 28 local conventions held for 49 communities in Samoa and 38 delegates were elected.

This process is theoretically democratic in nature as Bahá'ís the world over vote for national delegates from amongst the "most capable" men and women in their communities. In Samoa traditionally the 'most capable' people are perceived to be *matai* and therefore it is quite natural for the assembled Bahá'í communities to vote for the *matai* in their locality. As very few women are *matai* in the Samoan cultural context this spills over to the Bahá'í context and so in 1999 the majority of delegates were male *matai*. Only seven of the 38 delegates were women, four of these were actually *matai* and two were non-Samoan prominent women. The Samoan island of Savaii sent twenty-three delegates to the national convention, again the majority being *matai* and all were male. The vast majority of Samoan delegates therefore were, without doubt, *matai* and following the Samoan custom they were predominantly male. Subsequently the national spiritual assembly of Samoa for 1999 was an all male, predominantly *matai* assembly. Four members of the national assembly in fact hold prestigious *matai* titles.

Although this paper is primarily concerned with female involvement in national Bahá'í elections and institutions in Samoa, it is important to note that the electing of *matai* for both the position of delegate and national representative also precludes young talented non-*matai* men from being fully involved in national Bahá'í administration.

Women in Samoa are reasonably well represented on the local Bahá'í

institution, the local spiritual assembly. There are 49 local spiritual assemblies in Samoa and between 30 and 40% of the people serving on the assemblies are women. On the surface the 40% female involvement is very encouraging and is certainly a much higher ratio than the average 6% female representation on the Samoan village *fono*. However, this situation may only be temporary. At present, in most Samoan villages where Bahá'ís reside there will be an average of two to three extended Bahá'í families. When it comes to voting for a nine-member local spiritual assembly there will only be the potential for two to three *matai* to be voted for, leaving the other six members to be a mix of women and untitled men. In the future, should Bahá'í communities grow to say fifteen extended families at a village level, the potential is there for fifteen *matai* to be present and the further potential for nine of these to be voted for to serve on the local spiritual assembly. If this should transpire then at both a local and national level the decision making, governing bodies of the Samoan Bahá'í community may be predominantly *matai* and male at both the national and local level.

The situation is in some ways exacerbated by the very nature of Bahá'í elections where any form of electioneering is forbidden. Bahá'ís simply cannot make suggestions that certain women would make good delegates, local assembly members or national assembly members as this would violate the spiritual principle of allowing people to vote unhampered by any overt or covert pressure to vote for certain individuals. However, if the predominant Samoan paradigm of voting for *matai* is uncritically accepted then the situation in the Samoan Bahá'í communities will not reflect the Bahá'í principle of equality of men and women and this would be a tragedy for future generations of Samoan Bahá'ís. A male bias (even if it reflects current cultural practices) clearly is in contradiction to the fundamental principle of equality of men and women.

A Bahá'í paper presented in 1995 to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Equality, Development and Peace states that:

The principle of equality has profound implications for the definition of the roles of women and men. It impinges on all aspects of human relations and is an integral element in domestic, economic, and community life. The application of this principle must necessarily entail a change in many traditional habits and practices. It rejects rigid role delineation, patterns of domination and arbitrary decision-making; calls for women to be welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavour and allows for the evolution of the roles of men and women.

The development of women is considered vital to the full development of men and is seen as a prerequisite to peace. Hence, the members of the Bahá'í community, male and female alike, and its democratically elected administrative councils share a strong commitment to the practice of the principle of

equality in their personal lives, in their families, and in all aspects of social and civic life.¹⁵

Within Bahá'í communities in Samoa women have influence in most aspects of Bahá'í community life, from services at the Samoan Bahá'í temple, to consultation in the regular community gatherings. Women are also represented on all committees within the Bahá'í community, such as the national media committee, the national children's committee, the national institute board and the national teaching committee. However final decisions on national Bahá'í matters are made by the national spiritual assembly and women are under-represented on this institution.

Effort is being made by Bahá'í counsellors and auxiliary board members operating in Samoa to encourage women in Bahá'í administrative elections.¹⁶ The Bahá'í counsellors for the Pacific region show an awareness of the need for gender balance in Bahá'í administration in Samoa. This institution within Bahá'í communities may prove to be the main catalyst of change. Visiting counsellors suggested that their influence through "advice and encouragement" have the potential to alter the gender balance. They stated that they are making a conscious effort to appoint more female auxiliary board members and to encourage them in turn to appoint more female "assistants." This may have the effect of awakening an awareness within Bahá'í communities of the potential and capacity of the non-*matai* in their midst. They also hold workshops, seminars and discussion groups on the Bahá'í principle of equality of men and women and they are in constant liaison with the national spiritual assembly of Samoa.

During my fieldwork in Samoa a focus group was organized to critique an earlier version of this paper. Although the focus group had only nine participants, these participants were from diverse backgrounds, and all were either Samoan or had long term academic interests in Samoan culture. During the discussion that followed presentation of the paper some of the Samoan women spoke in defence of the role of women in Samoan society claiming that, although men make the decisions, women often influence the decisions of men. One of the participants stated that Samoans often describe men and women's roles in Samoa in terms of a fish. The men are the head of the fish and make the final decisions but the women are the tail of the fish and often influence the direction the fish should take. A Samoan national spiritual

¹⁵ Janet Khan cited in *The greatness that might by theirs* (New York: Bahá'í International Community, 1995) 3.

¹⁶ These counsellors and auxiliary board members include both men and women and are appointed to encourage development within Bahá'í communities. There are eleven counsellors appointed for Australasia, six men and five women. These counsellors appoint auxiliary board members within their jurisdiction, who work at a national level, and they in turn appoint assistants to work at a local level. In Samoa auxiliary board members and their assistants are an even ratio of male and female. They are outside of the *matai* structure as they are appointed rather than elected.

assembly member captured the Bahá'í response to the fish analogy when he stated that men and women should be present in both the head and the tail of the fish. They should not operate within separate spheres of influence but should learn to swim together.

It is apparent from statistics gathered by the international Bahá'í community that progress is being made in other communities around the world in relation to female participation in Bahá'í administration. The most recent survey (1993-1994) of the status of women in the Bahá'í community internationally found that women make up 30% of the membership of national spiritual assemblies, and 40% of the membership of local spiritual assemblies. Moreover 47% per cent of those appointed to inspire and advise the community (auxiliary boards) at the sub-national and regional level are women.¹⁷

In the Samoan context, although women are well represented on local assemblies and on the appointed institutions of the Bahá'í community, in the process of election for the national spiritual assembly, because of the *matai* bias, they are not.

In Samoa it is not only local and national government structures that favour male decision making but also religious structures, including, as has been shown, the Bahá'í Faith. One of the interesting features of the Samoan Bahá'í paradigm is the ability of the *matai* social structure to influence a new structure. In theory there is the possibility for full female involvement in Bahá'í administration at both a local and national level but because of the power of the *faa matai* (Samoan chiefly system), to date this has not occurred. This demonstrates that the Bahá'í Faith in Samoa is integrated with the local culture – however, this integration with the local culture may in fact be detrimental to the full participation of women in the Bahá'í election process.

It is quite likely that the Samoan Bahá'í community is not unique in operating within a traditional structure of government and that other cultures also operate within highly gendered structures. It is therefore critical that a start is made to explore how Bahá'ís can support traditional culture while simultaneously promoting full equality of men and women.

The Bahá'í Faith upholds the right of indigenous¹⁸ peoples to “develop and take pride in their own identity, culture and language.” However, the Universal House of Justice only supports the view that the “cultural traditions of the people should be observed within Bahá'í communities as long as they are not contrary to the teachings.”¹⁹

The Bahá'í and the UN definition of indigenous communities is “peoples

¹⁷ Janet Khan cited in *The greatness that might by theirs* (New York: Bahá'í International Community, 1995) 81.

¹⁸ The Bahá'í definition of indigenous peoples is in line with the UN Economic and Social Councils.

¹⁹ Universal House of Justice, letters dated July 1995 and August 1977 to individual believers.

and nations which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems.” This definition of indigenous people, however, inadequately describes the situation in Samoa, where the indigenous population is in the majority, and has maintained its own “cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems,” despite being colonised prior to independence in 1962. From a Bahá’í perspective, no culture is static and the Bahá’í Faith promotes the ideal of culture evolving towards ever more appropriate forms of governance. The writings of the Bahá’í Faith are clear on the encouragement of indigenous minorities within Bahá’í communities. However, guidance is not so clear when the indigenous population is in the majority and still practice their traditional way of life. This paper has shown that the traditional *matai* system of government in Samoa works against women participating equally in national Bahá’í elections.

COMMENTARIES

COMMENTARY on Franklin Lewis' "Translating the Hidden Words," *Bahá'í Studies Review* 8 (1998): 1-14.

Dominic Brookshaw

Revision of the Guardian's translations

Revision of Shoghi Effendi's translations of Bahá'í scripture into English is possible since he did not claim infallibility in matters of translation. In the case of the *Hidden Words*, this is attested to by the fact that he revised his own translation several times throughout his life (so previous versions cannot be regarded as *infallible* renderings).¹ The humble tone of Shoghi Effendi's foreword to his 1931 translation of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* is further proof that he did not consider himself the sole, infallible translator of Bahá'u'lláh's writings.²

Shoghi Effendi's fine linguistic talents and his competency as a translator are undoubted. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá's appointed successor and sole expounder of the Bahá'í writings, however, these English renderings possess an interpretative quality that sometimes steers away from literal translation.³ The Guardian's concern for the flow of the English translation sometimes superseded the need to include every word in the original.⁴ Malouf has shown, through her comparison of translations of the *Hidden Words* by Kheiralla, Fareed, Stannard, and Shoghi Effendi that several distinct renderings are often

¹ Shoghi Effendi first published an English translation of the *Hidden Words* in 1923. He added a revised foreword in 1925. In 1929 a fresh translation, revised with the "assistance of some English friends", was published in London. This version was revised at least once more by the Guardian towards the end of his life and republished in 1954. Cf. *Bahá'í Studies Bulletin* [BSB] 5/1-2 (1991): 90, excerpt from a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, 14/8/1930.

² "This is one more attempt to introduce into the West, in language however *inadequate*, this book...The hope is that it may *assist* others in their efforts to approach what must always be regarded as the *unattainable* goal –a befitting rendering of Bahá'u'lláh's matchless utterance", *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1989), my italics.

³ *BSB* 5/1-2 (1991): 89 excerpt from a letter of the Universal House of Justice (8/12/1964) "where a passage in Persian or Arabic could give rise to two different expressions in English he [the Guardian] would know which one to convey."

⁴ For example the *Hidden Words*, Arabic no.1: "...ancient, imperishable and everlasting". The original has four adjectives: "*dá'iman báqiyan azalan qadíman*". See also the short obligatory prayer: "...to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth". The original Arabic has an additional phrase: "*wa a'fi wa iqtidárika*" (to my weakness and Thy power). Presumably the Guardian felt the sense of this phrase was covered in the other two.

possible for any particular word or phrase.⁵ The incorporation of these diverse readings and the original words in transliteration in footnotes could greatly assist those readers intent on a scholarly reading of the text.⁶

In his review, Lewis appears to advocate not only the possibility of revision of the Guardian's English translations, but also, perhaps, the "dumbing down" of these writings to a level readily understood by a typical American teenager.⁷ I would suggest, however, that a higher priority might be to raise the reading sophistication of Bahá'ís, whilst improving the accessibility of existing translations with notes and glossaries.

I agree with Lewis that some revision of Shoghi Effendi's King James style, such as the replacement of the distracting archaisms "thou" and "ye",⁸ is both feasible and appropriate at the start of the 21st century. But do we really want to imitate the plain, modern translations of the *Good News Bible* in English? Shoghi Effendi presumably opted for this archaic style, not because he wanted to make Bahá'í scripture difficult to read, but because he felt it best mirrored the aesthetic quality of the original. Aesthetic compatibility with the original would surely be an important consideration in selecting any English style for the translation of the writings.⁹

Lewis maintains that the "'average reader' in the 1990s...may well come from an unchurched background and may never have read the Bible devotionally...perhaps not at all",¹⁰ as a justification for moving away from Shoghi Effendi's quasi-biblical English. This may be true in western Europe and North America, but in those regions where the majority of Bahá'ís from a Christian background reside (South America and Africa), the average literate believer's familiarity with the Bible is probably much greater.

Lewis also seems to exaggerate the link between medieval and Elizabethan English verse and the translation style of the Guardian. The suggestion that the prose of the King James Bible is as "opaque" to an audience of the 21st century as Chaucer or Shakespeare is for most contemporary Americans or Britons may be overstated.¹¹ King James English is far more accessible than Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (composed in Middle

⁵ Cf. Diana Malouf, *Unveiling the Hidden Words* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997) 67-90.

⁶ The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa, 1992) is a rare example of a well-annotated Bahá'í text.

⁷ Franklin Lewis, "Translating", 11. Cf. *BSB* 5/1-2 (1991): 95 excerpt from a letter of the Universal House of Justice (7/10/1973): "Many of the Tablets...are in exalted and highly poetic language in the original...and you will see...that when translating Bahá'u'lláh's writings into English, the beloved Guardian did not use present-day colloquial English but evolved a highly poetic and beautiful style, using a number of archaic expressions..."

⁸ Lewis, "Translating", 11.

⁹ Cf. *BSB* 5/1-2 (1991): 92 from a letter of the Universal House of Justice dated 12/8/1973.

¹⁰ Lewis, "Translating", 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

English), and the latter is commonly studied with parallel modern translations and Shakespeare's plays, mostly in editions incorporating copious notes and glossaries.

Perhaps more importantly it might be argued that re-translation of the Guardian's translations is somewhat premature when many of the writings are not yet published in the original languages, let alone available in English.¹² And what about translations into other major world languages such as Chinese, French, Spanish and Russian? The Universal House of Justice's letter dated 30 June 1999 allows for increased circulation of provisional translations (in English), but new translations still require review in Haifa before they can be published as authorised Bahá'í scripture.

Revision of English translations other than those of the Guardian would appear to be a more pressing issue, particularly Marzieh Gail's translations of the *Seven Valleys* and (especially) the *Four Valleys*, and Laura Clifford Barney's translation of *Some Answered Questions*.¹³

One possible alternative is that more Bahá'ís learn to read Persian and Arabic, something encouraged by Bahá'u'lláh and recently reiterated by the Universal House of Justice.¹⁴ This injunction is not simply confined to Bahá'ís of Iranian ancestry. Many prominent early western Bahá'ís studied Persian in order to improve their understanding of the writings.¹⁵

Possible amendments to existing editions

Some of Lewis's objectives might be achieved by the addition of more extensive footnotes to existing editions, not only to list verses from the Bible or the Qur'án, but also to indicate identical or similar passages if they occur elsewhere in the writings. Texts could also be annotated with existing (often as yet unpublished) compilations prepared by the World Centre's research

¹² The Universal House of Justice warns against constantly altering English translations of the Bahá'í writings to suit changes in general writing styles. Cf. *BSB* 5/1-2 (1991): 95, from a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice (3/2/1988): "Holy Scriptures have a profound meaning for their readers, and to change the familiar words too often can be gravely disturbing".

¹³ The Universal House of Justice is not opposed in principle to the revision of English translations *not* produced by the Guardian. Cf. *BSB* 5/1-2 (1991): 92, from a letter to an individual believer (8/12/1964): "In time, of course, old translations into English such as those of the Tablets and Talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá will have to be revised, but we feel that this is not as urgent as many other tasks".

¹⁴ Bahá'u'lláh is keen that his followers learn Persian, cf. 'Ali-Akbar Furutan, *Lughat-i Fuá va Lughat-i Núrá* (Ontario: Persian Institute for Bahá'í Studies, 1992) 10: "the Beloved of the world speaks in the Persian language. It would be praiseworthy in His eyes if His loved ones also converse and write in this language". For the Universal House of Justice's encouragement of the Bahá'ís learning Persian, see their message addressed to the Iranian believers throughout the world, 154 BE.

¹⁵ For example, John E. Esslemont's knowledge of Persian meant he was able to assist others in the translation of Bahá'u'lláh's writings into Esperanto and English.

department (the *Hidden Words* is a good case in point).¹⁶ Footnotes could also be added to indicate where phrases or words in the original have been omitted from the translation (cf. note 4). This would provide the reader with a more complete text. More comprehensive indexes of Bahá'í scripture, just now beginning to appear, are vital to increasing the accessibility of Bahá'í translations.¹⁷ Closely linked to indexes are glossaries, which the Guardian recognised as instrumental to aiding the western reader's understanding of otherwise obscure Persian and Arabic terms (cf. *Kitáb-i-Íqán*). Glossaries of rare or archaic words in English, if added to Bahá'í texts, could be very effective in making Bahá'u'lláh's writings more accessible to younger readers. Moreover, recent translations of scripture from the Bahá'í world centre seem more accessible than before, such as the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (in both English translation and Arabic text with Persian notes).

Arabic to Persian translation

Questions of the accessibility of Bahá'í scripture are, however, not solely confined to English translations. The Guardian prohibited the translation of Arabic writings into Persian, providing an interesting parallel for native Persian-speakers with western Bahá'ís.¹⁸ Bahá'u'lláh himself translated parts of or entire tablets from Arabic into Persian,¹⁹ and Persian to Arabic translation has been permitted with major works such as the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, published in Arabic at the request of the Guardian.²⁰ Persian translations of

¹⁶ One edition of the *Seven Valleys* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1992) does include notes, prepared by Michael Sours, but many are too vague to be of any use (e.g. p. 69, notes 20, 23 and 24).

¹⁷ The first edition of the *Selections from the Writings of the Báb* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1976) was not printed with an index.

¹⁸ Cf. *Dawn of a New Day: Messages to India 1923-57* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970) 85 "Regarding his instruction to the NSA of Iran to the effect that Bahá'u'lláh's writings in Arabic should not be translated into Persian, this applies to the translation of the revealed words into Persian only. Your Assembly, therefore, may proceed with its plan for the rendering of the Tablet of Ahmad, the three daily obligatory prayers and other Tablets, into Urdu". Shoghi Effendi also discouraged the printing of vowels (*i'ráb*) in some Arabic texts, cf. *ibid.*, 93-95. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also advised caution in regard to Arabic to Persian translation, cf. *Má'ida-yi Ásamání* part II (New Delhi, 1984) 53-4 on the translation of the Aqdas. Persian paraphrasing of Arabic writings is, however, occasionally permitted: cf. *arat-i Bahá'u'lláh: Bahá'í International Community Bahá'u'lláh statement*, Persian translation (Oakham: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1992). The disclaimer on p.9 of the statement explains that, since the translation of Arabic writings into Persian is "unseemly" (*mamdú va malúb níst*), approximate Persian summaries of the original quotations have been provided instead, presumably to aid the general reader's comprehension.

¹⁹ Cf. Adib Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol.1 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1976) 122-125 on Bahá'u'lláh's own translation of *Law-i urúfát-i 'Állín*. Áhira frequently translated the Báb's Arabic tablets into Persian, cf. Martha Root, *Tahirih the Pure* (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1981) 65 for the effect of her translation of the Báb's writings in Kirmanshah.

²⁰ This casts doubt on the myth common among many Iranian Bahá'ís that it is either impossible or improper to translate between the two major languages of the Bahá'í

Arabic writings, if they do exist at all, however, are not readily available, let alone published. Persian-speaking Bahá'ís are therefore required to learn Arabic to read the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, say their obligatory prayers or recite special prayers for the fast and other holy days. Establishing Arabic as a liturgical language among Persian-speaking Bahá'ís is not dissimilar to the insistence on the part of most Muslims that all believers read the Qur'án in Arabic, even if their first (or only) language is different.²¹

Shoghi Effendi repeatedly urged the Iranian Bahá'ís to learn Arabic and to teach it to their children from an early age, primarily because the majority of the Bahá'í writings were revealed in that language.²² The Guardian also believed that widespread competency in Arabic among the Bahá'ís in Iran would be beneficial to the community as a whole, presumably in terms of deepening knowledge and faith.²³ Shoghi Effendi's commitment to Arabic was no doubt largely based upon numerous pro-Arabic comments made by Bahá'u'lláh himself. Whilst Bahá'u'lláh felt Persian to be “sweeter” (*alá*) than Arabic, he believed Arabic to be the “better” or “more excellent” (*asan*) language.²⁴ Bahá'u'lláh went so far as to say that all should learn to speak Arabic because it is the “most comprehensive” (*absa*) of the world's languages, and that although in this day the Tongue of God (*Lisán'ulláh*) has spoken in both Persian and Arabic, Persian has always been and – like all other languages – will ever be limited (*madúid*) and – by implication – inferior, to Arabic.²⁵

These recommendations of literacy in Arabic, however, may be less relevant to other Persian-speaking countries, such as Afghanistan and Tajikistan, where the local forms of Persian (Dari and Tajik) are less Arabicised than Iranian Farsi.²⁶ Lewis objects to the use of King James Bible-style translations at the end of the 20th century when the reader “may very well come from an unchurched background and may never have read the Bible devotionally... perhaps not at all,”²⁷ how much more so in former Soviet Tajikistan where anti-religious communism held sway for fifty years?

revelation. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's talks are also translated into Arabic: *Selections from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Table Talks*, undated Brussels edition from an earlier Egyptian translation.

21 Cf. Lewis, “Translating”, 11: “Many Muslims similarly insist that all believers read the text of the Koran in Arabic, even if the believer in question speaks Indonesian or Bengali and understands no Arabic”.

22 Cf. Furutan, *Lughat-i Fuá va Lughat-i Núra* 24-5.

23 *Ibid.*, 25 “its results in the community would be most useful” (my own translation).

24 *Ibid.*, 10.

25 *Ibid.*, 22.

26 My personal experience in Northern Afghanistan (1995 and 1996) suggested that even university-educated believers have difficulty reading the Persian writings of Bahá'u'lláh, and are confused by the lack of translations from Arabic.

27 Lewis, “Translating”, 11.

Most young Tajiks have probably never read the Qur'án, and I suspect that most Bahá'ís there opt to read Bahá'u'lláh's Arabic writings in Russian translation.

I would suggest that, if Arabic to Persian translation is not appropriate for devotional use for the time being, then perhaps a provisional rendering could be printed alongside the original as parallel text.²⁸ Bahá'u'lláh's Persian is pitted with Arabic phrases, so footnotes with Persian translations – however approximate – would dramatically enhance the accessibility of the writings.²⁹

²⁸ Qur'ans reproduced with parallel text in Persian were not uncommon in Afávid and Qájár Iran.

²⁹ The complexity of Bahá'u'lláh's writings spawned the growth of Bahá'í lexicons such as *Shish Hizár Lughat*.

COMMENTARY on Bryan Graham's "The Bahá'í Faith and Economics," *Bahá'í Studies Review* 7 (1997): 15-38.

Geeta Gandhi Kingdon

Bryan Graham has written an insightful and thought-provoking paper, reflecting a good deal of independent intellectual activity. The paper critically – but constructively – reviews nine articles written by Bahá'í economists, focusing particularly on the themes that are common to all the articles, namely the spiritual and ethical dimensions of work, distributive justice, industrial relations, and issues of cooperation and competition. Graham's main critique of the extant Bahá'í scholarship in economics is that much of it fails to utilise existing social science literature and that none of the articles reviewed make anything but passing use of the mainstream economics literature. Moreover, he is rightly disquieted by the tendency in existing Bahá'í scholarship to adopt a triumphalist world view and to be dismissive of the economics literature, perhaps in the belief that everything is in the writings. Without wishing to "suppress the magnitude of the world view articulated by Bahá'u'lláh" and recognising that there are some serious problems with modern day economics, Graham nevertheless suggests that the relationship between Bahá'ís and the economics discipline should be one of dialogue and that Bahá'ís have just as much to learn from other (non-Bahá'í) sources of knowledge as they have to give. These suggestions seem reasonable and constructive, especially in the light of the statement of Shoghi Effendi that Bahá'u'lláh did not bring a complete system of economics to the world but that Bahá'ís have at their disposal the spiritual framework that should inform any economic system.

Graham advances several ideas correlating Bahá'í teachings with tenets of economics, correlations which have not, to my knowledge, been made previously. For instance, he points out that the sanction, in the Bahá'í system, that "wages should be unequal ... and (people) should receive wages that correspond to their varying capacities and resources",³⁰ maintains the wage-productivity link which is considered economically efficient in a well-functioning labour market. He cites the well known principle of welfare economics that taxation reduces efficiency because of dead-weight welfare losses, and then notes that the Bahá'í emphasis on voluntary giving does not entail such welfare losses. He notes that a complementarity exists between the notion of equity/distributive justice – promoted by the Faith – and other social and economic goals, citing recent empirical evidence from cross-country studies showing that countries with a higher degree of equality are more likely

³⁰ Shoghi Effendi, as cited on page 157 in S. Mohtadi, "Economic Justice in a New World Order", in *Towards the Most Great Justice: Elements of Justice in the New World Order* (ed., C. Lerche) (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996).

to develop stable democracies and to experience higher economic growth.³¹ Most interesting and useful to me is Graham's discourse on economic competition, the market system, capitalism, and the Bahá'í teachings in this area. He is critical of the existing analysis of this area by Bahá'í scholars which unanimously berates competition, and he calls for a more qualified and nuanced analysis, one which recognises the usefulness of constructive competition and the disadvantages of certain types of cooperative collusion, such as those in Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries and the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Community. Graham draws a distinction between capitalism (which, strictly speaking, is merely the use of the market system as the allocative mechanism in the economy) and what he calls consumerism. He argues that while capitalism has historically had a tendency to give rise to consumerism, this is not the inevitable outcome of capitalism. These thoughts should certainly advance the dialogue among Bahá'í economists about the place of the market system and capitalism in an ideal Bahá'í economy.

The paper goes on to suggest areas of research for Bahá'í economists, identifying two as particularly important – the economics of gender and the economics of crime, morality, and peace. While Graham's suggested list of topics for future research by Bahá'í economists was probably not intended to be exhaustive, it is, nevertheless, limited. The objective of this commentary is partly to add to the list of research areas that will be fruitful for Bahá'í economists to pursue, and to suggest a framework for such research.

A suggested list of topics for research by Bahá'í economists

Our understanding of the Bahá'í teachings on economics is at a rudimentary level. While the Guardian's view 50 years ago that it was premature to formulate a Bahá'í theory of economics remains true today, it is clear that serious scholarship is needed to advance our understanding of and articulate better the nature of the spiritual solutions to the economic problems enshrined in the Bahá'í teachings.

One direction in which research could be pursued is as follows: Bahá'í teachings lay profound emphasis on a range of personal qualities and attributes (based on spiritual principles) that individuals and society should endeavour to imbibe, such as education – particularly women's education, equality of the races and nations, honesty, removal of prejudices, and well-being and prosperity (both spiritual and material). They also emphasise the

³¹ While Graham is cautious to point out that this empirical literature is crude, it would have been more informative to state that one of the major problems with the cross-country empirical growth literature is the possibility of joint determination or reverse causality, *i.e.* the possibility that democracy/higher growth cause (or permit) more equitable income distributions, rather than the other way round. Another important problem is lack of robustness of the findings to the inclusion of other factors that might explain growth.

desirability of diversity, and the need for a world government, *inter alia*. One strand of the Bahá'í economics research agenda could usefully pose the question: to what extent is there an economic case for these prescriptions?

The two canonical yardsticks used in welfare economics to judge the merit of proposed policies or prescriptions have been those of economic efficiency and equity. In the parlance of welfare economics then, can the above advocacies (for the removal of racial prejudice, education of women, honesty and lack of corruption, diversity, equality and lack of discrimination, a world government, etc.) be justified on the criteria of economic efficiency or equity?

While there is no intention of “weighing the book of God by the standards current among men,” it is of interest to collate and examine existing research by economists that has a bearing on the ethical exhortations in Bahá'í teachings. For example, do corruption and bribery in societal institutions or racial discrimination in the labour market have negative efficiency effects, *i.e.* do they lower productivity and aggregate output, or have adverse welfare effects? If economic well-being – in terms of efficiency and equity, economic growth and welfare – is better when individuals/institutions behave in accordance with these ethical principles, then this suggests at least one reason why there is a “spiritual solution to the economic problem” and why Bahá'u'lláh enunciated these spiritual principles. The research topics listed below are tentative and non-exhaustive suggestions for a research agenda for Bahá'í economists.

- 1) **Corruption** and bribery in business – its impact on productivity and national output/income. Here a rent-seeking approach is likely to be appropriate, drawing on the seminal theoretical contributions of Krueger, Bhagwati, and Schleifer and Vishny.³² Rent-seeking and corruption divert productive resources towards unproductive use and thereby shift the production possibility curve inwards. It would be fruitful to collate the findings of the existing applied studies that examine this issue and estimate the growth and welfare costs of corruption.³³ Other aspects of this topic are to do with transparency and accountability in government; here a principal-agent framework and a political economy framework both would be relevant.

³² A. Krueger, “The Political Economy of the Rent-Seeking Society”, *American Economic Review* 64/3 (1974): 291-303; J. Bhagwati, “Directly Unproductive, Profit-seeking (DUP) Activities”, *Journal of Political Economy* 90/5 (1982): 988-1002; A. Schleifer and R. Vishny, “Corruption”, *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 108/3 (1993): 599-617.

³³ An empirical paper by P. Mauro, “Corruption and Growth”, *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 110/3 (1995): 681-712, finds that corruption lowers investment and thereby significantly lowers economic growth. Krueger provides estimates the extent of India's GDP that is made up of rents.

- 2) **Labour market discrimination:** The impact of racial (or gender, ethnicity, or language based) discrimination on productivity, firm profits, and national output. Discrimination can arise from several possible sources, such as inferior access to productivity-augmenting opportunities such as schooling; less access to favourable jobs; or, given equal schooling and employment in a particular job, receiving lower wages than members of the advantaged group. A taste for discrimination among employers can result in higher wages for members of advantaged groups and higher prices for services rendered by the advantaged group. If employers have a taste for discrimination, this results in an opportunity cost in terms of forgone productive efficiency. One 1980 US study concludes that if racial discrimination were eliminated, the gross national product would have been 4.4% higher in the US in 1970. Research would review the literature on the welfare costs of discrimination and relate it to Bahá'í teachings on equality of opportunity and removal of all forms of prejudices.
- 3) **International government:** Just as the existence of market failures – such as externalities,³⁴ economies of scale, missing markets, and public goods (which have non-excludability and non-rivalness characteristics³⁵) – justifies the existence of a national government, so the existence of global market failures justifies the existence of an international government. International market failures occur due to the existence of

34 A (negative) externality occurs when an action by one agent imposes costs on another agent without compensating the latter. For example, a factory dumping effluent upstream imposes costs on farmers who use river water downstream, since farmers have to incur costs in treating the water before using it for irrigation. Without regulations (such as taxing the polluting factory to pay for cleaning the water) the farmers have no way of extracting compensation from the factory. Government clearly has a role in discouraging activities that produce negative externalities. An example of a beneficial externality is education of women which has well-known social benefits, *i.e.* benefits that accrue to society and not just to the educated woman. Another example of a beneficial externality is where R&D undertaken by one firm benefits all the firms in that industry but the innovating firm is unable to charge the other firms for the benefits they derive from the knowledge created by it. Where beneficial externalities exist, there is typically underinvestment in the activity if it is left to the market. Government intervention has a useful role in subsidising and facilitating activities which produce positive externalities.

35 The non-excludability characteristic of a good means that it is not possible to provide the good only to those who pay for it or to exclude non-payers from deriving benefit from the good. Non-rivalness of a good means that consumption of that good by some people does not reduce the amount available for others to consume. National defence force, street-lighting, and laws and regulations are good examples of non-excludable and non-rival goods. Provision of such goods gives rise to free-rider problems, implying that the private sector would be unable to supply such goods.

shared global public goods (such as the need for clean air/water, international policing of drug-trafficking, prevention of the international spread of disease etc.), the existence of global externalities (such as pollution produced by one country imposing health-costs in another country), or due to missing international markets.³⁶ The research would aim to identify global market failures and build an *economic* case for a world government. While in Adam Smith's day, common examples of public goods were defence, law and order, lighthouses etc., nowadays, public goods include income redistribution, economic stabilisation, safer streets, peace, and the standardisation of weights and measures to reduce transactions costs. Clearly international peace, global standardisation of weights and measures, and international income redistribution are some examples of *global* public goods, *inter alia*. There are now many relevant papers in this area.³⁷ International economic policy coordination would be a useful area for study, and much work exists on the European Union but less about other regional groupings. Research might also include pan African solutions to war, abuse of human rights etc.

- 4) **Sustainable consumption:** To be sustainable, consumption patterns must be such as to permit present and future generations to meet their material needs without irreversible damage to the environment. This goal can only be realised if values change, placing stewardship, fairness, and justice at the heart of the agenda for development. The research would draw upon sources such as the United Nations Development Programme's 1998 Human Development Report that focuses on the consumption patterns of the rich and it would aim to build a coherent picture of the interactions among the economic, technological, cultural, media-related, and

³⁶ Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs provides a useful example of an international public good (*The Economist*, August 1999) when he refers to externalities in research and development (R&D) and missing global market in malaria as important international market failures. The development of an effective malaria vaccine is a global public good, given that no individual developing country has the means or the incentive to produce it: means because it costs hundreds of millions of dollars to produce it, and incentive because of the externalities involved – knowledge spillovers mean that no private company or individual country investing in R&D for such a vaccine would ever be able to recoup the cost of the investment because of copycats/hijackers who would ignore the niceties of intellectual property rights or patents and plausibly argue that the poor deserve to have the vaccine at low prices.

³⁷ A few examples are: J. Stiglitz, "International Financial Institutions and the Provision of International Public Goods", *EIB-Papers* 3/2 (1998): 117-32; I. Kaul, I. Grunberg, and M. Stern (eds) *Global Public Goods: International Cooperation in the Twenty First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the UNDP, 1999); P. Streeten, "Global institutions for an Interdependent World", *World Development* 17/9 (1989): 1349-59; C. Kindleberger, "International Public Goods without International Government", chapter 9 in *International Economic Order: Essays on Financial Crisis and International Public Goods* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988).

institutional mechanisms that shape consumption. An inter-disciplinary approach is likely to be more fruitful than a purely economic one.

- 5) **Market system:** Do the Bahá'í teachings broadly endorse a free market system with a social safety-net? It seems at present that there is no consensus among Bahá'í economists about this issue. Graham states that “there is an anti-economics and anti-capitalism attitude” in all the articles on economics by Bahá'í authors that he reviewed and he calls these attitudes unconstructive. As mentioned earlier, he appeals for a distinction to be made between capitalism and consumerism (the latter being incompatible with Bahá'í teachings), and asks for recognition of the achievements of capitalism, such as massive poverty reduction over time in countries that espoused capitalism. This view appears to be in tension with, for example, what *The Prosperity of Humankind* document states – namely that “the classical economic models of impersonal markets in which human beings act as autonomous makers of self-regarding choices will not serve the needs of a world motivated by ideals of unity and justice.”³⁸ Research could usefully focus on the question: is there something fundamentally incompatible between Bahá'í teachings and the market mechanism? Or, should we believe, as Graham argues, that there is nothing wrong with the market as an allocating mechanism if there is a moral backbone in society to constructively guide it and set its parameters. The view that markets need not be eschewed but need to be guided would appear to be supported by Shoghi Effendi's statement that in an ideal world society, “markets will be coordinated and developed.”³⁹ It is also important to recognise that the early tendency, among neo-classical economists, to preach the free-market gospel – which simplistically favoured unhindered operation of markets and decried government intervention – has been replaced by more recent consensus that market failures are pervasive and that the government has a constructive role in providing/creating missing markets and guiding market behaviour by creating responsible regulations and laws to compensate for the effects of market failure.⁴⁰ This whole area is an important (if potentially contentious) subject to address in developing a deeper understanding of the Bahá'í approach to economics.⁴¹

³⁸ (New York: Bahá'í International Community, 1995) section V, 16.

³⁹ Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 202-203.

⁴⁰ See, for example, the *World Development Report* of 1997 by the World Bank which focuses on the role of the state. Also see the keynote address, at the 1997 Annual Conference on Development Economics at the World Bank, by Joseph Stiglitz, then chief economist at the World Bank.

⁴¹ Relevant to this area is research work on regulating markets (in a transparent way – for

- 6) **Intellectual property rights:** the ethics of patenting the genetic codes of foodstuffs etc. by multinational companies. What are the implications of knowledge-related patents for technology transfer between countries and for economic growth?
- 7) **Economic growth:** A good number of recent empirical studies on economic growth find that ethnic diversity is inimical to economic growth. The recent crop of Barro-style cross-country growth regressions shows this.⁴² This finding suggests that there is no economic basis for valuing racial and ethnic diversity and indeed that diversity is significantly harmful to growth. More generally it is often heard that Africa's disastrous development record is due in substantial part to conflict caused by ethnic divisions. These findings appear incompatible with the Bahá'í view (which celebrates diversity) and they suggest the need for further research, more careful examination of the evidence, and for testing whether the currently fashionable interpretation might be spurious.
- 8) **Other topics:** (a) the welfare implications of regional and international migration and relating these to the Bahá'í advocacy that in a united world, there must be free movement of people (in economic jargon, a globally integrated labour market rather than a segmented one); (b) trust and social capital are new and exciting fields of research in economics and emerging empirical research shows that social capital (which is a community property involving mutual trust among people, civic engagement, membership of associations, and high reliability and reciprocity in social networks etc.) is advantageous to business enterprises and beneficial for economic growth.⁴³ This resonates well

instance through open auctions rather than through quotas which are subject to rent-seeking activities) and work on introducing competition and market-like mechanisms in public agencies and in privatised public utilities such as telecoms, electricity, rail, and power.

42 When measures of ethnic fractionalization are included as explanatory variables in growth regressions, they appear with significant negative signs, suggesting that greater ethnic diversity is likely to depress economic growth over time. For example in Easterly and Levine's (1997) study, ethnic diversity was detrimental to the achievement of growth and also of other desirable traits such as high education, political stability, low fiscal deficits and sufficient infrastructure, all factors which are associated with economic growth (W. Easterly and R. Levine, "Africa's Growth Tragedy: Policies and Ethnic Divisions", *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 112 [1997]: 1203-50).

43 For example, see J. Temple and P. Johnson, *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 113/3 (1998): 965-90 who find that indexes of social development constructed in the early 1960s have considerable predictive power in explaining growth. The authors conclude that their results indicate the importance of "social capability" for economic growth.

with Bahá'í emphasis on trustworthiness and supports the notion that there is a good economic case for the prescription of this virtue; (c) the development of indices of well-being that recognise that human well-being does not depend on income and wealth alone or even only on somewhat wider achievements in education and health, but also on spiritual well-being. This is likely to be a challenging task and is part of a longer-term Bahá'í economic research agenda.

These suggestions for future research aside, Graham has provided much food for thought in his persuasive and cogent paper and his contribution will advance constructive dialogue among Bahá'í economists.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Ocean of His Words: A reader's guide to the art of Bahá'u'lláh

Author: John S. Hatcher

Publisher: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1997, 388 pages

Reviewer: Sen McGlinn

The aim of this book is “to demonstrate how applying the tools of literary criticism can help readers become more creative and confident in studying the art of Bahá'u'lláh” (xiii). It explains the use of the principal tools of literary criticism in a way accessible to those without a formal education in literature. In this approach, “criticism” does not mean detecting faults and influences in a literary work, or ranking works by quality from classic to pulp, or of classifying them by genres. Literary criticism is art-appreciation as applied to literature. It enables the reader to get more out of a text by systematically applying specific questions. Each question corresponds to a particular branch of literary criticism and is dealt with in one chapter, providing a clear structure for the book as a whole. The book's virtues in explaining literary methods must be set against considerable shortcomings in methodology, the author's lack of knowledge in relevant fields, and the imposition of a strong ideological agenda at some points.

Narrative perspective

Chapter 2 deals with narrative perspective, which is to say, how it can illuminate our reading if we ask, “who is speaking to me?” Bahá'u'lláh says, “At one time We spoke in the language of the lawgiver; at another in that of the truth-seeker and the mystic” (35). Hatcher adds a number of other voices: God speaking in the first person, in the *Hidden Words*; the Maid of Heaven speaking about the prophets in the 77th Persian Hidden Word; Bahá'u'lláh as a prophet reflecting on his mission in *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*; and the formal third person of theological argumentation in the *Book of Certitude*. Hatcher has difficulties in dealing with the prayers of Bahá'u'lláh, since in Hatcher's prophetology the Manifestation represents God's will to us, but does not manifest a human response to God. This forces him to read even Bahá'u'lláh's most heartfelt cries as “works ... narrated from the perspective of the believer ... the supplicant, not from the perspective of the Manifestation” (53). This is often a plausible reading, but not where Bahá'u'lláh says “Every man of insight who considereth what hath been revealed by me, will be persuaded that Thy Cause is not in my hands, but in Thy hands, and will recognize that the reins of power are held not in my grasp but in Thy grasp ...” (*Prayers and Meditations* CXXIX, cited page 58). The persona in this case cannot plausibly be God or the follower. It must be the Manifestation of God, as a suppliant, confessing his powerlessness before God. Any other reading is forced.

Historical criticism

Chapter 3 deals with historical criticism, that is, with the question “In what context

are these words spoken?" Since the revelation comes to us from a particular historical setting, it is often essential to study the circumstances to arrive at a valid interpretation. The primary context is the Islamic background. More specific information, such as the person to whom a work is addressed, may also be important. The chapter provides some examples, such as the importance of Bábí messianic expectations when reading the *Book of Certitude*, but does not tell the reader how to find relevant and reliable knowledge about the Islamic background. Given that the book is aimed at a readership without any training in the field, it would have been useful to provide descriptions of the most basic sources such as encyclopaedias, concordances, and introductory works on Islam and the history of the Middle East in that period. The chapter seems lopsided: it begins with a quotation in which Shoghi Effendi urges Bahá'ís to obtain a sound knowledge of the Islamic background (66), but the author has not done so himself. All the examples in the chapter draw on information from the works of Adib Taherzadeh concerning the *internal* history of the Bahá'í community. Hatcher supposes that the reader will not be able to find background information independently, but will obtain it from Bahá'í scholars (96). I think this is a pity: Shoghi Effendi clearly supposes that any Bahá'í can learn about Islam, and an opportunity has been missed here to encourage and help readers to make this study for themselves.

Genre and style

Despite its title, chapter four does not in fact deal with style, which would require reference to the original languages. Genre criticism addresses the question "In what literary form is this work written?" and (what Hatcher does not add) "what does this tell us about how to read it?" As he says, there has been little research on Bahá'u'lláh's use of Persian and Arabic literary models, and the author does not himself have the necessary knowledge of Persian and Arabic literature. This chapter is therefore confined to outlining nine broad categories: mystical treatise, lyrical works, doctrinal essays, gnomic verse, epistolary, allegory, prayers and meditations, homiletics and "documents of the covenant", of which the last is defined by subject rather than form or style. It was odd to find the *Hidden Words* classified as a collection of lyric poems; that most of the works classified as "gnomic verse" are neither gnomic nor verse; and that actual letters are not distinguished from the epistolary genre proper, in which a narrative framework is constructed from fictional letters.

Any use of literary critical methods without specific knowledge of previous literatures will inevitably lead to some false starts, since literary criticism consists largely of finding correlations, and then of selecting those that are relevant. Without a store of factual information to draw on, the methods may amount to no more than building castles in the air. There are large areas of Bahá'í scholarship in which Persian and Arabic scholarship are not a prerequisite, but literary criticism cannot be performed from translations, however accurate. Any word in the original may contain an allusion to a text or a concept that will be missed in translation. This problem runs throughout the book, but one example from this chapter will be sufficient by way of illustration.

As noted, Hatcher identifies nine broad categories of genre in relation to a passage in Haddad's translation of the *Surat 'ul Hykl* which says "We have caused the signs [*áyat*, verses] to descend [be revealed] after nine conditions [*'alá tis 'a shu 'ún*, in nine grades]." The Arabic phrase transliterated here reveals something

concealed in the English “nine conditions”. The word *shu’ún* points to the Báb’s *Kitáb-i Panj Shu’ún (Book of Five Grades)*,¹ a work which identifies five types of writing in the Báb’s corpus. One of the arguments Bahá’u’lláh is making here is in refutation of the Bábí criticism, mentioned a few lines earlier in the *Surat ‘ul Hykl*, that his writing is deliberately literary rather than flowing without premeditation as the revelation “is sent down.”² With one word (*shu’ún*) he reminds the reader that the Báb, in writing the *Kitáb-i Panj Shu’ún*, set out to compose one passage in each of the five “grades” each day: that is, he points out that revelation is not incompatible with planned literary artistry. Moreover, the Báb’s five “grades” in the *Kitáb-i Panj Shu’ún* do not in fact correspond to what we would call styles or genres in English literature. The fifth is simply Farsi works, and the others might be better called “modes of transforming semantic roots”. So it is a considerable assumption to suppose that “genre” as a concept of literary criticism corresponds to what Bahá’u’lláh had in mind when he spoke of “nine grades”.

Figurative language

The first section of chapter five explains how figurative language works. Later sections deal with metaphors, symbols, allusion and allegories, defining the terms, describing how they work, and illustrating their use. The chapter is a long one and the many illustrations it contains are one of the strong points of the book. Those based on New Testament texts show a good understanding of the literary criticism of the Bible.

It is unfortunate that the first example Hatcher chooses (181) to illustrate his approach to interpreting figurative language is the 72nd Persian Hidden Word, in Shoghi Effendi’s 1929 translation. This contains the ambiguous phrase “Thou art even as a finely tempered sword its value hidden from the artificer’s knowledge.” Hatcher supposes that “the artificer” is God, who made the “sword”, which would mean that the Creator does not know his own creation. Reference to Shoghi Effendi’s clearer if less poetic 1925 translation (“is unknown to the expert eye”) or to the Persian text (literally, “remains concealed from jewellers”), would have shown that “the artificer” here is not the maker of the sword, but buyers or valuers in general: it is a metaphor for the people of the world.

The section on tree imagery could have been much richer if Hatcher had known that the *Sadratu’l-Muntahá* is the same as the *Sidrat al-Muntahá* of Surah 53:14, a tree standing beside God’s throne at the highest point of paradise, representing the closest point to the Divine Presence that either humans or angels can hope to attain,

¹ See John Walbridge, “The Bab’s Panj Sha’n (Five Modes),” *Research Notes in Shaykhi, Bábí and Bahá’í Studies* 2.3 (April 1998). There may also be a reference to his *Kitáb-i Chahár Shu’ún* (Book of Four Grades, an alternative title for the *Kitáb al-asmá’*), that is, to Bahá’u’lláh’s writings as the sum of these two works of the Báb.

² The objection is stated specifically in the *Súrat ul-Haykal*: “*Má nazzalat álá al-fitra*”. *Fitra* or *fitrat* has a range of meanings in different kinds of Islamic literature and there does not appear to be any adequate treatment of *fitra* in the literature in European languages, so the reading here, as referring to spontaneity in revelation, is necessarily a personal interpretation from the context. It is clear that in relation to personal hygiene and adornment *fitra* refers to the natural appearance of the body as created in the image of God, and the extent to which it is permissible to alter this appearance; in the literature relating to the legal position of minors it refers to a sort of primal religion which children are considered to belong to at birth; and in rationalist Islamic apologetics it is the natural religion accessible by untainted reason.

and described in imaginative detail in the *hadīth*³ and in Sufi literature. It is said to be a symbol of faith and virtue, its fruit representing the mystical experience. From its foot flow four rivers, which some say represent the Pentateuch, the Psalms, the Gospel and the Qur'ān. The entire community of the faithful can gather under the shade of a single leaf. It is hardly surprising that this is a repeated image in Bahá'u'lláh's writings. The same tree, in another guise, stands in the midst of the garden in Canto XXXII of Dante's *Purgatorio*.

Subject and structure

Chapter 6 deals with the patterns of ideas that tie together the various parts of a single work, using the examples of the Lawh-i Hikmat and the *Book of Certitude*. The Lawh-i Hikmat, and the Tablet of Ahmad in the following chapter, are referred to using paragraph numbers rather than page numbers, a welcome innovation that should be carried out systematically throughout publications of the Bahá'í writings in translation and in the original languages, so that we no longer need to refer to the same edition of a work in order to locate a reference.

Structural analysis of the argument of a single work is one aspect of literary criticism that can in principle be carried out from translations. However the Lawh-i Hikmat contains many terse allusions to issues in Islamic philosophy, the contest between the philosophers and the theologians of the early classical period, and the difficult reappraisals forced on the 19th century Islamic world by Western political and technological superiority. For this tablet, considerable background knowledge is required simply to discern the structure of the argument. Hatcher has not even picked up a point that apparently lies on the surface of the translation: that the Word of God is above and behind, and therefore not identical to, the words of a particular revelation (para 10, pages 140-141 in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*). He could have used this distinction to answer his own unresolved question in chapter 1: "If the Manifestations are perfect mirrors of Divine attributes and if Their speech is naught but the Word of God, in what sense is Their revealed utterance Their own art? And if this is not Their art but the words of God, then are we correct in studying Their words with the same tools we might use with the work of a human artist?" (9).

It would have been useful to say that each reader should do his or her own structural criticism, and not rely on a structure provided by someone else, since this method can both obscure and clarify the meanings in the text. In Hatcher's summary of contents of the Lawh-i Hikmat, the content summarised under points III.A, VI.A and VII.A (238, 241 and 242) is not even present in the original, and the "tablet" Bahá'u'lláh refers to in paragraph 35 is incorrectly identified (242) as the Lawh-i Hikmat rather than that heavenly "Tablet" which is the source of revelation as a whole. Hatcher's readings of paragraphs 34 and 35 are against the grain of the text, imposing a theory of literal verbal revelation which Bahá'u'lláh, in this tablet, denies.

Something similar happens in the heading to section IV (239). Bahá'u'lláh says "Make thou mention of this Day and magnify that which hath appeared therein. It will in truth suffice all mankind". Hatcher reads this as "*the knowledge of this Revelation will in truth suffice all mankind.*"⁴ That is, "what has ... appeared in this Day" is being equated with "*this Revelation.*" There is a parallel interpretation further

³ Bukhari, *Sahīh*, 1.345, 5.227, 7.514, 9.608.

⁴ Hatcher's interpretive interpolations are in italics.

on, where Bahá'u'lláh warns his “loved ones” not to “despise the merits of My learned servants whom God hath graciously chosen to be the exponents of His Name ‘the Fashioner’ ... Exert your utmost endeavour that ye may develop such crafts and undertakings ...” (para 41). This is addressed to Muslim leaders who rejected the technologies of the west because they were produced by a materialistic, non-Islamic science. Hatcher summarises this sentence as “*Don’t judge the ‘learned’ of Bahá by common standards*” (242). But is Bahá'u'lláh talking about his own revelation here? Let us return to “what has ... appeared in this Day” and consider its place in the development of Bahá'u'lláh’s argument. This is what structural criticism is about.

We can see that the previous paragraph (para 14) begins “Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator.” and continues “Nature is God’s Will and is its expression [*zuhúr*, manifestation].” If Nature is God’s Will, the natural sciences and the empirical scientific method of the west are a path to knowledge. Then those who manifest the name of God “The Fashioner” are the scientists, technologists, industrialists and designers of the modern world, who should be honoured. What “has appeared in this day,” by way of scientific knowledge and its application, is indeed wonderful. Bahá'u'lláh is saying that there is one “Word” or Primal Will which is the cause of existence, manifest both in nature (in the aspect “The Fashioner”) and in another aspect through revealed religion, and that the faithful should therefore respect the servants of science. But in Hatcher’s interpretation this becomes a claim that Revelation is sufficient, that science is in any case dependent on the inspiration of the prophets (119); that there is a religious class, the “learned” of Bahá’ who are exempted from judgement by “common standards”; and that “secular humanist scholars” produce unreliable “esoteric knowledge” (*sic*, 245).

These are readings that have lost all contact with the original text. The political agenda is clear, and should be put in the context of the continuing strength of the politics of conservative religion in the United States. Hatcher is writing in and for a society and a Bahá’í community that is, in this respect, quite different from those of Europe. There is a legitimate need to present the Bahá’í teachings in a form that will speak to one’s own society, and it is treacherously easy to slide from this to imposing interpretations that will align the Bahá’í Faith with particular social and political agendas, as has happened here.

The second part of chapter 6 deals with the structure of the *Book of Certitude*. Hatcher begins by saying that the *Book of Certitude* is structured around the theme set out in the first two pages of the work: “if we wish to acquire certitude that a Prophet is Who He says He is (i.e., God’s Viceregent), we must become detached ...” (247). But the opening pages of the *Book of Certitude* do not contain any claim that the prophets are God’s Viceregents, and reading the book as a whole will show not only that the term is not used there, but that the *Book of Certitude* is explicitly directed at showing that the sovereignty of the prophets does *not* imply that they must act as God’s governors in this world. “Were sovereignty to mean earthly sovereignty and worldly dominion, ... such [a] form of sovereignty would not be true of God Himself, the Source of all dominion” (125).⁵ Despite this inauspicious beginning, the 80-page detailed structural analysis is generally accurate, with some exceptions and a

⁵ References are to page numbers in the 1983 American edition of the *Íqán*. Readers using the 1946 British edition should multiply by about .64. In this case, the corresponding passage is on page 80. A uniform paragraph numbering system for the *Íqán* would be a considerable help.

notable omission that will be mentioned separately.

Putting it together

Chapter 7 shows how to combine the methods of literary criticism to achieve a “close reading”, using the Arabic Tablet of Ahmad as an example. Hatcher’s reading is an equal mixture of the devotional and scholarly, after the manner of Adib Taherzadeh or what were quaintly called “improvements” on Biblical texts in the 18th century. For example, one might doubt whether the coincidence of names in the two Tablets of Ahmad (Arabic and Persian) is really so significant, but the improving moral that Hatcher deduces from this coincidence is admirable.

Hatcher’s reading of “the reward of a hundred martyrs” as “the assistance of a hundred martyrs” cannot be sustained either by the translation or the original. The context one needs to interpret this promise is the distinction between an earned reward (*ajr*) and God’s power and freedom (*qadr*) to bestow grace, and the emphasis put on the latter in Islamic theology as a result of the Qadarite controversies. But this is a detail. The chapter is a good example of scholarship in service of the devotional life. At worst, more is being read *from* the tablet than is there, which is quite different to reading prior theological positions or political programmes *into* a text.

The six chapters (2-7) discussed above explain what literary criticism is and how it can be useful. Their virtue is in demystifying the critical method as such, rather than conveying new information about Bahá’u’lláh’s writings. Although the result is something of a curate’s egg, Hatcher clearly does have considerable skill in explaining how literature works and how literary criticism is done in practice. One can only regret that he did not work with someone with an equally deep knowledge of the Bahá’í writings and the Islamic background. Collaboration could have produced a much more useful book. Even as it stands, the sections of chapter 5 dealing with the New Testament, and chapter 7, can be recommended.

Methodology

I will now turn to chapter 1, left until last so that what must be quite fundamental criticisms should not obscure the book’s other virtues. This chapter begins with a less technical rewriting of Hatcher’s earlier paper on “The validity and value of an historical-critical approach to the revealed works of Bahá’u’lláh”,⁶ the title of which is self-explanatory. Part of the chapter proposes a methodology for the reading part of Bahá’í scholarship which is quite misguided, and which has a negative effect on readings throughout the book.

Hatcher himself seems to be struggling with his methodology. On the one hand, he asks “If the Manifestations are perfect mirrors of Divine attributes and if Their speech is naught but the Word of God, in what sense is Their revealed utterance Their own art? And if this is not Their art but the words of God, then are we correct in studying Their words with the same tools we might use with the work of a human artist?” (9). He argues that literary tools can be used, on the basis that the revelation is designed to speak to people within a particular historical, religious and linguistic context, and because much of literary criticism aims at analysing the reader’s response to a work without necessarily involving suppositions about its origin. On the other hand, he wishes to consider revelation as a special case for literary

⁶ In Moojan Momen (ed.), *Scripture and Revelation* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997).

criticism. As he says, "If we establish to our satisfaction that Bahá'u'lláh is a Prophet, then there is a distinct difference in the attitude we assume as we approach His art" (13).

The argument here is difficult to summarise with justice since it is partly expressed in what may be rhetorical questions, and is far from clear: it appears that Hatcher himself has not found a satisfactory way of expressing a position that involves accepting scientific methods while rejecting their underlying logic. He states that the prophets are entirely different to "human" artists, they "are preexistent, are perfect incarnations of all the attributes of God, and Their utterance is a precise expression of the Divine Will" (7). He concludes that this means, in their case, that there is no risk of over-reading the text, "... if His art is perfect, can we not rest assured that any effort we invest, however rigorous and imaginative, will never exhaust the potential meanings of the Prophet's craft?" (11-12). But, he says, we can make the same assumption about the masters of literature. "We have no qualms about trying to discover all manner of hidden meanings and elaborate structural patterns in a Shakespearean tragedy without ever worrying that ... we may be imposing something on the work that the artist did not intend and that the art does not uphold" (12).

This is odd in two respects. First, he is arguing that the Prophets are not human, are not just inspired men, *and* that they are like the literary masters. Second, the statement is not correct: it is quite possible to read meanings into Shakespeare's works or those of Bahá'u'lláh that were not intended: Hatcher himself does so. This is a question of the fairness of the reader, not the stature of the author. He argues that we should assume Bahá'u'lláh's writings have the status of a masterwork and approach them "with this kind of reverence," which is evidently the reverence of belief rather than of literary respect, since he continues "we can make this presumption only if we have proven to our satisfaction that Bahá'u'lláh's claim to Prophethood is correct." But why is the assumption even necessary, if it is not necessary before attempting a literary appreciation of Shakespeare? And what is achieved by it? He says (13) that "Over the course of time, Bahá'u'lláh's work will assume its proper place" (i.e., among literary masterpieces), so it might appear that this a question of giving them the high literary status now that we think they will have in centuries to come. But he concludes from this that "the standards by which we judge this art must often transcend criteria that are precisely quantifiable or empirically demonstrable according to the standards of contemporary scholarship," (13) so clearly he is not talking about literary status, or applying the standards of literary criticism according to their own logic.

My sense is that this approach has been adopted as a deliberate experiment, as an attempt to clarify through practice the implications of an approach whose imprecision and internal contradictions are felt by the author as much as the reader. Given the author's background, we can assume he understands "the standards of contemporary scholarship" and their rationale: how a critic or a reader brackets out *a priori* beliefs and any expectations about what a particular text will have to say, in order to read what is really being said. Or, as Bahá'u'lláh says, in a passage Hatcher cites, "he must so cleanse his heart that no remnant of either love or hate may linger therein, lest that love blindly incline him to error, or that hate repel him away from the truth." If it *is* experimental, the book can be read as a record of successes and failures in an attempt to define the much-discussed "new paradigm" of Bahá'í scholarship.

Subjectivism

Experimental or not, the overall results are clearly negative. Hatcher's method appeals to the inevitability of subjectivism to justify reading the text through an ideological framework consciously imposed on it by the reader. As he says himself, the approach could only be used or understood by a Bahá'í. Moreover, although he does not add this, it speaks only to a Bahá'í who both agrees with the approach in theory *and* shares Hatcher's theological position. Literature's capacity to speak across boundaries and share viewpoints and experiences between peoples of differing life worlds has been abandoned, and what is left can only be the murmuring of the like-minded among themselves.

The issues here have a significance that extends beyond the evaluation of this book, justifying a brief digression to mention three considerations which are often overlooked in discussion of the methodology of Bahá'í studies when performed by Bahá'ís. The first is that "bracketing out" one's theological *a priori* positions does not mean writing as if one has adopted the opposite viewpoint. It is not necessary to adopt hate to avoid being "blindly led into error by love." It is not a choice between reading "as if the Manifestation is an ordinary human being" *or* with the assumption that "the utterance of the Manifestation is perfect art precisely because He is inherently perfect" (23, 13-14). Rather we have to set aside what we think we have discovered as believers in order to listen carefully as readers.

The second is that this "setting aside" or bracketing out does not mean accepting the ideal of objectivism and all the philosophical baggage of modernism, abstracting somehow from our own existence as the reading subject. Objectivity, in the sense of a "fair" or "tactful" reading of the text, is the goal, but impersonality is not. Rather, we bring our literary subjectivities to the fore and press our believing selves into the background, because this is what the activity of reading for understanding demands. When we pray or read for devotional purposes the roles are reversed. It is a choice between our own multiple subjectivities, not between the subjective and an impossible objectivity. No absolute priority need be claimed for rationality over other aspects of the self. In fact reading is a literary act, and good reading is creative as well as analytic. But it is necessary to say that reading demands both the maximum use of our analytic and creative modes of being and the suspension of belief and disbelief.

Thirdly, if I decide to read Bahá'u'lláh's writings within the framework of belief that the author is a Manifestation of God, I also confine those writings within the limits of what I already understand "Manifestation of God" to mean. The way to avoid weighing "the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you" is not to put Bahá'u'lláh's writings in a special category exempt from "the standards of contemporary scholarship" (13), but to set aside whatever we think "a book of God" *ought* to be or say. We empty the category "revelation" of assumed meaning in order to let it be filled again from the particular passage we are reading. Or not to be filled, as the case may be (if we are honestly open in reading, there can be no guarantees about the results). This approach is functionally identical to the approach used in what is sometimes sneeringly referred to as "secular" scholarship, and it is the only appropriate method for the "reading" component of Bahá'í scholarship.

Having performed the reading, we may find that the text is open to two or more mutually exclusive readings, and may explicitly choose that which corresponds to the needs of the community as we conceive them and the world we would like to see in

the future, that is, to our political agenda in the broadest sense. This is known as *istihsán* or *istisláh* in the formal rules of Islamic exegesis. It is sometimes necessary, where the primary texts, with the best knowledge and rigour available to us, do not make one reading more probable. We may also wish to go “behind” the texts, to elaborate a theological rationale that seems to underlie what we read in the text itself. This may involve correlating it with other passages from the scripture, selecting those that suit our purposes, and building a theological system around the bare text. Again, this is legitimate, but in both cases the political agenda or doctrinal constructs should be explicit and distinct from the reading, *not* imposed on the reading itself.⁷

Another fundamental problem throughout the book, which may well flow from Hatcher’s methodological approach, is the very limited use of sources. Apart from citations from the Bible and Qur’án, and from Holam and Harmon’s *Handbook of Literature*, all of the sources used are written by Bahá’ís. None are written by those Bahá’í scholars employing literary and historical criticism who have adopted the method of “bracketing out” or “freeing oneself from love and hate” described above. That is, Hatcher is not only speaking to a like-minded audience, his selection of sources is so narrow that it resembles sectarianism. A scholarship worthy of being called “Bahá’í Studies” has to be prepared to seek knowledge “even from China”. Sources by non-Bahá’ís are indispensable in reconstructing the relevant historical contexts, textual allusions and genre conventions, and especially to understand the questions in Islamic theology and philosophy that Bahá’u’lláh answers. It would be ludicrous to try to construct Bahá’í scholarship as a closed shop. And surely, if the purpose of the book is to introduce Bahá’í readers unfamiliar with literature to the methods of literary criticism, it would have been useful to say that many scholars, from Browne onwards, have already been applying them to Bahá’u’lláh’s writings. Chapter 6 manages to deal with the Lawh-i Hikmat without mentioning Juan Cole’s “Problems of Chronology,” in *World Order* 13:3 (1979), and deals with the *Book of Certitude* without reference to Christopher Buck’s *Symbol and Secret*, the most extended application of genre criticism and other critical techniques to the art of Bahá’u’lláh published in English to date.⁸

Docetism

The decision to read within an ideological position – in this case a theological position – is clearly wrong in principle. The theological position adopted here is itself a problem. All theologies are necessarily partial, but Hatcher takes one aspect of Bahá’í prophetology and represents it as necessarily the whole (and as applying equally to Islam and Christianity). The aspect Hatcher emphasises can fairly be called docetism, the belief that the humanity and limitations of the prophet are only apparent, assumed for didactic purposes or for reasons beyond our ken.⁹

⁷ Examples of these two methods can be found in S. McGlenn, “Some considerations relating to the inheritance laws of the Aqdas,” *Bahá’í Studies Review* 5.1 (1995): 37-50, and *idem*, “A theology of the state from the Bahá’í writings,” *Journal of Church and State* 41 (1999): 714-729.

⁸ It will be noted that Hatcher explicitly took issue with Buck’s methodology in his review of *Symbol and Secret* in the *MESA Bulletin* 30 (1996): 70-1.

⁹ My use of the term is not meant to imply that the position is heretical in the Bahá’í context, although the corresponding position in Christian theology is usually labelled as a heresy. Individual doctrines are parts of belief systems, and their truth is to be determined in relation to the system. Susan

Hatcher's docetism is explicit in a passage on page 35, where he says that "the Prophet ... is a master of dramaturgy because he conceals His true identity in the guise of an ordinary human being. For example, he veils all the attributes, power and unspeakable glory of God in the persona of a lowly carpenter's son." On page 52 he says the Manifestation "appears in the guise of a human being ... he appears powerless ... [but] is fully capable at any point of extricating Himself ..." But in the *Book of Certitude* (73, 74), Bahá'u'lláh interprets "clouds" by referring to the fact that the prophets "have been subject to poverty and afflictions, to hunger, and to the ills and chances of this world." They are "subject to such needs and wants", "had to suffer whatsoever [their enemies] decreed" and "with respect to every human limitation" were the same as the people around them. When Hatcher summarises these pages in chapter six he tidies up the points contradicting his own theological position, by adding "seems" and "illusion of" at appropriate points (266). The humanity of the prophets is said to be an "image". On page 16 he says that "the experience in the Síyáh-Chál is presented *as if* it were something quite new and, so some extent, overwhelming ..." (emphasis added).

Again in the *Book of Certitude*, pages 184-5, Bahá'u'lláh says that he once "felt it necessary to refer to [Hájí Mírzá Karím Khán's] books, in order that We might answer Our questioners with knowledge and understanding. His works, in the Arabic tongue, were, however, not available, until one day a certain man informed Us that one of his compositions ... could be found in this city." This is inconvenient for a docetic theology, since Bahá'u'lláh's says that his knowledge and understanding was conditional upon the resources available to him, and that he did not have miraculous access to all published works. Moreover, Hatcher has already (241) given a literal reading of paragraph 34 in the "Tablet of Wisdom,"¹⁰ even adding a miraculous element not in the original ("We [*the Prophets*] receive Our knowledge direct from God, not from Our own devising."). In his otherwise detailed structural analysis of this part of the *Book of Certitude* (300), Hatcher has simply omitted the offending passage. This is evidence enough I think that what Bahá'u'lláh has to say is being accepted only in so far as it can be brought into accord with Hatcher's own agenda.

One implication of an emphasis on docetism is that there is no room for development in the Manifestation's ideas and art, or for chronology in literary criticism. So we have a book devoted to the literary appreciation of Bahá'u'lláh's works as a whole, without any mention of development over time, in terms of style, ideas, the types of works written and the audience addressed in the various periods. The Manifestations are supposed to be pre-existent as individuals and fully self-aware, presumably from birth. Hatcher cites Bahá'u'lláh's description of his experience in the Síyáh-Chál ("I was but a man like others ...") and refers to other similar statements cited by Shoghi Effendi that "imply that an essential change had ... taken place in the Prophet." He refers to, but does not cite, Shoghi Effendi's own characterization of this experience as "The first intimation which its Bearer received" of his calling (*God Passes By*, 101), but concludes that Bahá'u'lláh merely "received the summons to openly proclaim what he Himself had known all along..." (18).

Maneck also criticises Hatcher's docetism in her review of *The Law of Love Enshrined* in *Bahá'í Studies Review* 7 (1997): 114-16.

¹⁰ Page 149 in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, beginning "Thou knowest full well that We perused not the books which men possess."

A docetic approach is not illegitimate in itself, as one of several ways of thinking about the relationship of the Manifestation to God that are found in the Bahá'í scriptures and the Qur'án, ranging from "I am but a man like you." to "I am God," (*Gleanings*, 54). Corresponding to this, the Manifestation has a variety of roles, manifesting the will of God to us, and also manifesting for our benefit a perfect human response to God. Hatcher takes a slice out of this whole, starting with a very "high" theology of the Manifestation. Every reader will emphasise one or other of the many tongues in which the Bahá'í writings speak of the essential mysteries (the nature of God, of the Manifestation and of the human soul, life after death and the existence of evil). A reader without a wide knowledge of the Bahá'í scriptures may be unaware of the plurality of voices they contain. This is no difficulty, *providing* the reader ignores Hatcher's advice and is prepared to bracket out whatever conceptions he or she has already attached to the notion of "prophethood". Failure to do so creates a hermeneutic short-circuit: nothing may be learned from the text which does not conform to one's – inevitably partial – starting-point.

We can see how this works in the section on the dramaturgy of the Manifestation just mentioned (35). Having set out a docetic view, Hatcher goes on to quote a passage from *God Passes By* (1974 edn.) page 244, in which Shoghi Effendi says that the soul of the Manifestation, during his earthly life, was subject to "restrictions" and "circumscribed by ... physical limitations, its radiance ... beclouded by its human temple". Hatcher has simply not noticed that the quotation he uses does not support what he has just said. The theology Shoghi Effendi is using here is "kenotic", from the Greek *kenós*, "empty" or "without". A kenotic theology says that limitations such as suffering, mortality, powerlessness and ignorance to which a Manifestation is subject are real, and not merely a dramatic role adopted to preserve a secret or shield our eyes from too much glory. But kenotic theology accommodates a high prophetology by saying that these limitations, although real during the prophet's earthly life, were freely chosen by him in pre-existence when he "empties" himself of that aspect of the attributes which is proper to the Godhead.

Although this is clear in Shoghi Effendi's text, Hatcher has missed a meaning which would in fact have been useful to him. In the framework of a docetic theology he supposes that the art of the Manifestation is perfect (14) and not subject to "limitations imposed ... by His cultural perspective, by His intellectual background, by His academic training, or by His exposure to other writers" (11, 12), and then spends some time explaining why literary criticism may nevertheless be applicable. If we follow Shoghi Effendi at this point, and say that the soul of the Manifestation is indeed (temporarily) subject to "restriction ... imposed upon it", there is no need even to suggest such casuistic arguments. More to the point, if we can approach the text without supposing that we can already define the parameters within which it will speak, there is some possibility of learning something new from it. It is not that Hatcher personally is a bad reader, but that the methodology he has adopted makes bad readings inevitable.

Literary appreciation

The use of *a priori* readings not only makes it impossible to learn new truths from the text that might force the reader to modify previous ideas, it also interferes with a sensitive literary reading. In chapter 2 again (39-40, repeated at page 216), Hatcher cites the 19th Persian Hidden Word:

Have you forgotten that true and radiant morn, when ... ye were all gathered in My presence beneath the shade of the tree of life, which is planted in the all-glorious paradise?

'Abdu'l-Bahá, according to Hatcher, says that the human soul begins at conception. As far as I know, 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not say this: the reference Hatcher is seeking is probably from a letter written by Shoghi Effendi's secretary to an individual believer, printed in *High Endeavours*.¹¹ What 'Abdu'l-Bahá says is that "the human soul has existed on the earth for prolonged times and ages" (*Some Answered Questions* 151). However the question of sources is incidental: for whatever reason, Hatcher works within a framework in which the soul cannot, *a priori*, remember "that true and radiant morn", because the concept of pre-existence is "contrary to explicit Bahá'í teachings" (216). Therefore he reads the Hidden Word as "reminding the human race as a collective organism of the guidance that has been given in the past through other Manifestations" (40). The negative effects of imposing a doctrinal position are evident here: the magic and mystery of a primordial dreamtime have been flattened to fit into historical time. The Hidden Word whispers in our ears, asking us to seek within ourselves and, in discovering our own transcendence, to realise that we were created from the beginning to respond to the Word of God. Hatcher reads it as conveying a universal and objectively verifiable truth to the race collectively – even though he has elsewhere said that the first person voice of the Hidden Words is used "to evoke a sense of intimacy and familiarity between the speaker and the reader" (37). Instead of invoking our own transcendent capacity, Hatcher reads the verse as asking us to study the history of religion: mysticism is reduced to prophetology, and

¹¹ (Anchorage: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1976) 71.

the literary beauties are no more than potentially misleading statements that have to be explained away. The reading is distorted to the point of doing violence to the text.

If the text is allowed to say what it says, without being explained away, and is then placed alongside the references from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the letter published in *High Endeavors* that were just mentioned, it would be evident that the first speaks of individual pre-existence in a “time” before time (the “conference of Alast” described in the Qur’án, 7:172),¹² the second of the human species as coming into existence in time (evolution) and the third of individual pre-existence in this world (reincarnation). A sensitive contextual reading can reveal new insights, but only if the differences between the different texts are allowed to stand.

In summary, the book succeeds in showing that the tools of literary criticism can indeed be helpful, explains what they are in an accessible way, and demonstrates by its failure that the best literary training is of little help, unless one is also prepared to approach the text without presuppositions and to listen tactfully to what it is saying.

¹² “When thy Lord drew forth from the children of Adam – from their loins – their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying):“Am I not your Lord?” ‘Yes!’ they testified.”

A Concise Encyclopedia of the Bahá'í Faith

Author: Peter Smith

Publisher: Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 2000, 396 pages

Reviewer: William P. Collins

Oneworld Publications in Oxford has published four in its series of one-volume concise paperbound encyclopaedias on world religions. Its volumes on Hinduism, Judaism, and Christianity were published in 1998. Each of the earlier volumes contained a brief introduction and approximately 250 pages of very short articles. For these older religions, the concise encyclopaedias can barely do an adequate job of covering the main points of their long history. The new volume on the Bahá'í Faith is by far the best yet of the series. The Bahá'í volume is a substantial work of some 400 pages on a religion that is barely a century and a half old. It provides very good topical coverage in a single-volume overview of the Faith's key people, places, beliefs, and sacred texts. The encyclopaedia is the logical extension of *A Basic Bahá'í Dictionary* by Wendi Momen (Oxford, UK: George Ronald, 1989), and it is an example of what Adamson and Hainsworth's *Historical Dictionary of the Bahá'í Faith* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 1998) might have been with more concision and tighter editing.¹³

Peter Smith, one of the best recognised names in Bahá'í studies, is widely respected for his careful scholarship, balanced assessments, and succinct presentation of complex ideas. Smith is social sciences coordinator at Mahidol University International College in Thailand and the author of the standard sociological study entitled *The Babi and Baha'i Religions: From Shi'ism to a World Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Smith demonstrates in this encyclopaedia his stature as a researcher and his ability to organise a vast subject and capture the salient points in few words. The reviewer noted no serious errors of fact, and few statements of belief or practice that might be called into question by Bahá'ís.

The encyclopaedia has also clearly benefitted from relatively thorough and competent editing, which ensured a clear organisation and a reasonable freedom from grammatical and typographical errors. The volume includes a chronology covering 1844–1992, a list of abbreviations, an essay on further reading accompanying a good bibliography, and an extremely helpful thematic index in which related articles are compiled under several broad headings and subheadings. The articles treat significant people, places, events, beliefs, and scriptures. Black and white photographs, and a small number of maps and charts give the book some visual appeal. A few minor misspellings appear, such as the spelling Herrigal for Herrigel in the article WHITE, RUTH, a few incorrect transliterations of Persian words, occasional unexpected switches of tense, and two photos printed backwards that only the truly knowledgeable would notice.

Each article is well-organised, stating in the first sentences the gist of the definition or topic to be covered. References in the text to other encyclopaedia articles are clearly indicated by text in small capitals, e.g. PRAYER. Cross references are kept to a well-balanced minimum. The reviewer could find no dead-end references. In one instance, the encyclopaedia would have benefitted from a cross-

¹³ See my review in *Bahá'í Studies Review* 8 (1998): 73-79.

reference at SHRINE OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH to BAHJÍ, parallelling the article title at SHRINE OF THE BÁB. Many users of the encyclopædia will probably not know to find the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh under the article on Bahjí. Some additional references might have been included, e.g. in the article on GOD, a reference to METAPHYSICS would have helped the reader find the section of the latter article that deals with “God and the world.”

Inevitably in an encyclopaedia prepared by one individual, some expressions, concepts or infelicities recur. In an effort to be inclusive and non-sexist, the author several times introduces an ungrammatical structure such as: “Each individual should work to support themselves and their families” (128). This jarring form is easily avoided by rewriting the sentence as “Individuals should work to support themselves and their families.” In the article on SHOGHI EFFENDI RABBÁNÍ and elsewhere, the author writes of the Guardian simply as Shoghi. In deference to formal protocol in the Bahá'í Faith, as requested by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, it would be appropriate to append the title Effendi.

In writing of the GUARDIANSHIP some thought might be given to a more explicit differentiation between the institution of Guardianship and the presence or absence of a living Guardian. Given Shoghi Effendi's clear indication that the Bahá'í Faith cannot safely be divorced from either the Guardianship or the Universal House of Justice, this differentiation is essential. The Guardianship still exists as an institution. The Universal House of Justice, and national and local spiritual assemblies, all consult Shoghi Effendi's interpretations before making decision. His pronouncements as Guardian are normative for understanding what Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu'l-Bahá meant. Therefore, while there was no way in which a living Guardian could be appointed by Shoghi Effendi, the institution itself still exerts influence to such an extent that the Universal House of Justice will make no decision without consulting his interpretations first.

We may well expect future editions of this encyclopaedia to be published. The publisher may wish to consider the following improvements: (1) Prepare a short introduction on the Bahá'í Faith, or one of Shoghi Effendi's introductory statements on the Faith's basic purpose, primarily to help the novice understand the basic context of the encyclopaedia. The other three volumes in the series benefitted from such introductions to the historical context of the religions covered, and it would be even more useful for a religion as relatively unknown as the Bahá'í Faith. (2) Include an index covering all names and subjects in the volume wherever mentioned. The thematic index should be retained. (3) Update the statistics on Bahá'í population in the chart on page 142, which contains information only up to 1988, although the encyclopaedia bears a publication date of 2000. (4) Include a few more maps, e.g. demonstrate the spread of the Bahá'í Faith using a two-page world map to accompany the article on EXPANSION. Admittedly, this might entail the use of colour, which would increase the book's cost, but it would provide a cartographic representation of aspects of the article. (5) Include several articles that seem to be lacking in the encyclopædia. Brief references in some of the articles suggest that more is needed:

- Holy Spirit: While this is touched upon in the article on METAPHYSICS, the importance of this concept to the Bahá'í and, in particular, the Christian, audience requires that it be given a separate entry. The article would deal with terms Holy Spirit and Primal Will, which Bahá'í scripture seems to treat as one

and the same.

- Joseph: Given the extent to which the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh compared themselves to the Biblical Joseph / Qur'anic Yusuf, this biblical figure probably requires an entry.
- Easton, Peter Z. / Miller, William McElwee / Richards, J. R. / Wilson, Samuel C.: The encyclopædia deals with Iranian opponents in individual articles. Certain individual Christian opponents are of significant importance and deserve separate entries also. The four listed here come to mind, not only because they wrote extensively against the Bahá'ís, but also because they inspired important apologetic literature, e.g. Easton inspired Mírzá Abu'l-Fal's writing of *The Brilliant Proof*.
- NICOLAS, A.-L.-M.: This article is far too short given the importance of the individual. He ranks in importance with E. G. Browne.
- Alchemy/Hermeticism: A brief reference in the article on HUMAN RACE indicates that one measure of humanity's maturity will be the transmutation of elements. There is nothing more said of this topic, which begs for additional clarification. An article on alchemical and hermetic science could prove useful background to a very difficult subject, particularly if some attention is given to "spiritual alchemy" and the process of human transformation.

The encyclopaedia is clearly a very handy reference for a wide audience: the novice who is studying the Bahá'í Faith, believers who are learning or teaching others about the religion's history and beliefs, veteran Bahá'ís who will use the encyclopaedia to check facts and verify basic concepts, and academics who need a quick and accurate resource. The references to other works included at the end of each article will send any users to the full background for their own investigation of the topic. The work is not comprehensive in terms of the possible universe of information about the Bahá'í religion, but its sound coverage of the most important topics makes *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Bahá'í Faith* a must-own for every English-speaking Bahá'í, and a model for organising future encyclopaedias on the growing community of Bahá'u'lláh's followers. It is also absolutely essential for the reference shelves of university, public, and theological libraries.

Revising the Sacred: New Perspectives on a Bahá'í Theology

Editor: J. A. McLean

Publisher: Kalimat Press, Los Angeles, 1997, xix + 231 pages

Reviewer: David Piff

Revising the Sacred is an anthology of essays by seven Bahá'í academics treating various approaches to and aspects of Bahá'í theology. Jack McLean introduces the book as the “first multi-authored volume dedicated to the understanding of Bahá'í theology per se as a free-standing discipline within Bahá'í studies.”¹⁴ It is, of course, impossible for an introductory volume, such as this one, to provide anything like a comprehensive coverage of Bahá'í theological issues, but the articles address a number of intriguing and germane topics. A common concern of the various authors appears to be an interest in broadening and deepening present Bahá'í understandings of the theological implications of the religion's sacred scriptures, and bringing some intellectual rigour to bear on prevalent understandings of Bahá'í teachings.

Dann May's essay, “The Bahá'í Principle of Religious Unity: A Dynamic Perspectivism”, is illustrated by a schematic chart (from the pamphlet *One Universal Faith*) showing the Bahá'í concept of progressive revelation. Many readers will have seen the chart or something like it: God (in the upper left hand corner) communicates with man (in the lower right hand corner) via the holy spirit, mediated by a series of divine revelators, here presented in a table of two columns. The left column identifies the religion, the right the founder. The juxtaposition of this popular portrayal with May's essay is appropriate to the entire tenor of the volume, as, inevitably Bahá'í theological positions when examined systematically are a good deal more complicated and potentially problematic than their conventional representations. The “oneness of religions” is a fundamental Bahá'í teaching, but it is obvious that doctrines and practices vary widely among the world religious traditions. Further, which religions and prophets are actually mentioned in the Bahá'í corpus? May's essay helps clarify some of these issues, but its main purpose is to develop an appropriate characterization of the Bahá'í position regarding religious unity. May rejects the assertion that the Bahá'í Faith is simply “inclusivist”, a position which posits that all religions refer ultimately to the same truth (albeit in approximations) and may be represented within a “single world view” (17). The Bahá'í view is better characterized as perspectivist, in that it suggests that religious doctrines differ according to the historical and cultural contexts in which they were formulated. According to the Bahá'í model, perspectivism operates in two directions – from man to God and also from God to man, in that “ultimate reality also adapts or accommodates the understanding of Itself to the different historical periods and cultures of the world” (22). “Bahá'í doctrine,” writes May, “combines elements of perspectivism and transcendent unity, while situating the various religious traditions within an unfolding and progressive historical process” (26). May concludes his essay with a brief discussion of “radical pluralism” or post-modernism, the view that each religion contains irreducibly unique features and incommensurable insights –

¹⁴ This claim may not, strictly speaking, be accurate. *Soundings: Essays in Bahá'í theology*, a small, multi-authored collection of essays edited by Sen McGlinn, appeared in 1989 (Christchurch, NZ: Open Circle Publishing).

that they can never be reconciled as expressions of a single truth because the very nature of truth is pluralistic (17). May believes this position presents the greatest philosophical challenge to the Bahá'í principle of religious unity. In a few paragraphs he sketches some lines of response to this "threat". A lengthier, more pointed and detailed treatment of this important topic would be a significant contribution to Bahá'í discourse.

Stephen Lambden's "The Background and Centrality of Apophatic Theology in Bábí and Bahá'í Scripture" is an historical survey of the doctrine of the unknowability of God, a foundational Bahá'í teaching. In Bahá'í theological discourse, rather than being able to describe the Supreme Being, "one can only say what God is not or use negative theological (apophatic) language when referring to God" (38). The Bahá'í scriptures are replete with passages expanding on this theme. A key adjunct to this doctrine is that of the Manifestation of God, which in the Bahá'í view constitutes a source of indirect knowledge of God. Lambden writes, "The Bábí-Bahá'í doctrine of the unknowability of God is not a bloodless theological abstraction emphasizing cold remoteness, but rather one which points to and celebrates the truth of the fact that through the Messengers an intimate nearness to God can be realized. Through God's divine representatives, the Manifestations, God is closer to human beings than their 'jugular vein'" (38). An apophatic theology is thus not incompatible with the concept of a "personal God", a crucial point for Bahá'í devotional practices and the community's religious thought generally. Lambden's discussion provides an historical account summarising references to a transcendent, unknowable God in Jewish, Christian and Islamic scriptures and in the writings of religious thinkers within these traditions, and cites specific examples of apophatic theological statements from Bábí and Bahá'í sacred writings and commentaries. The evidence Lambden marshals convincingly establishes the commonality of apophatic thought in the theological systems of Abrahamic religions, and underlines its importance in Bahá'í theology. Lambden concludes by suggesting that worshipping God for His transcendence can be a profoundly mystical experience.

Juan R. I. Cole's "Bahá'u'lláh and Liberation Theology" discusses scriptural sources for a Bahá'í theology of liberation – "a theology," in Cole's words, "that is grounded in a special commitment to the poor and the workers..., that includes their perspectives in the consideration of scriptural meaning, and that underpins reformist thought and social action by them and by others in solidarity with them" (81). Cole draws attention to passages from Bahá'u'lláh's writings that praise the spiritual station and virtues of the poor, insist on human equality and instruct the rich as to what they must do to reduce the suffering of those less fortunate, decry inequalities of wealth, exhort self-renunciation and charity, point to the need for governmental reform and link the issues of poverty and world peace; Cole further suggests that Bahá'u'lláh's special relationship with and sympathy for the poor may help explain the historical and contemporary predominance of the downtrodden among the world Bahá'í community. It is obvious that a major thrust of the Bahá'í scriptures is to encourage and bring about a just and equitable social and economic order, and Cole has eloquently and for the most part persuasively called attention to this important strand of Bahá'u'lláh's message. Unfortunately, Cole's readings are at times tendentious. For example, following citation of several of Bahá'u'lláh's *Hidden Words*, Cole suggests that "if being rich is a drawback on the path [of spiritual progress], being poor is an asset" (83). But Bahá'u'lláh's warnings against the

temptations of gold apply equally to rich and poor. Nor is it clear that Bahá'u'lláh really means us to understand from his writings that the poor are “spiritually superior to the rich” (84). It is also not entirely clear what Cole sees as an appropriate Bahá'í response to the present deeply flawed and iniquitous world order. He notes that “as a Bahá'í” he cannot advocate “any way of thinking that sanctions violence or class warfare, or indeed, entanglement in the petty squabbles of party politics” (81). He concludes his essay by a call to active engagement. “What is needed is not choirs singing to one side as corporate union busters intimidate on the shop floor or as the shock troops of an excessive industrialism murder Yanomamo Indians in order to despoil the Amazon rain forest” (95). Cole challenges readers to “listen to the poor... and join with them in radically critiquing the conditions of our collective existence” (95-96). One suspects that present-day Bahá'í activities in the realm of social and economic development, moral education and the promulgation of training institutes may not embody the radical critique that Cole has in mind.

Anjam Khursheed's “The Spiritual Foundations of Science” portrays science as an enterprise grounded in the intrinsic spiritual nature of human beings. Khursheed sketches a philosophical context for his position – an ongoing if unresolved critique (represented in the work of Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn and others) of the strictly empirical approach to science articulated by logical positivism. Despite this critique, in the mind of the educated public and of many scientists, scientific objectivity is still equated with the “application of formal methods and procedures, whether as observation, hypothesis or experiment.” Khursheed argues that “from a Bahá'í point of view, science is not founded on methodology, but is perceived to be founded on a spiritual faculty of human nature” (106). For Bahá'ís, science, as one of the creative activities of the human mind, is not separate from other areas of intellectual or artistic activity (108). Science, like religious reflection, is linked to consideration of profound cosmological mysteries. In a section devoted to “scientists and their experiences,” Khursheed briefly, and perhaps selectively, refers to the work of various noted scientists and mathematicians whose findings or writings point to the inadequacy of strictly empirical and logical scientific methods or in other ways lend support to the conception of scientific investigation as a spiritually based enterprise. By providing a critique of particular tenets of positivist science, exploring facets of a spiritual view of scientific investigation, and propounding connections between this view and the work and writings of major scientific innovators, Khursheed has helped elaborate and support the Bahá'í view of the harmony of science and religion. In my view he has not, however, fully engaged the philosophical foundations, tenets, perspective and methods of empiricist science, nor has he provided a clear picture of what an alternative to such science would be.

In “Interreligious Dialogue and the Bahá'í Faith: Some Preliminary Observations” Seena Fazel presents a cogent, forthright, and economical introduction to the topic of discourse between religions. Bahá'u'lláh enjoined his followers to “consort with all religions with amity and concord” (quoted by Fazel, p. 130); ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, in his talks in North America, also often referred to this theme. Knowing one must undertake such discourse does not render the activity unproblematic – as Fazel notes, “declarations of commonality [among the world's religions] can be maintained only at a superficial level”; they “start to lose meaning as one goes deeper into the inner landscape, the experience, beliefs and practices of the different religious traditions” (130). Fazel describes the contributions such

discourse can make to Bahá'í self-understanding and to various fields of Bahá'í endeavour. Dialogue has transformative potential, for both Bahá'ís and for other religious traditions. Reciprocity, “the challenge to mutual transformation and change”, is integral to dialogue. “Bahá'ís,” writes Fazel, “naturally are not immune from the need for self-renewal” (136). One possible area of transformation is in the very concept of religion Bahá'ís present to the world. Dialogue between Bahá'ís and other religious communities can help further the Bahá'í peace program and reinforce the public perception of the status of the Bahá'í Faith as an independent world religion. At the same time such dialogue presents challenges – one being the relative lack of development of Bahá'í theology and secondary literature when compared to that of other religious communities. There is also the potential that dialogue could be manipulated into a “soft-sell” approach to proselytising. A further challenge is that interreligious dialogue can lead participants to alienation from their community of origin, as “dialogue brings about a growth in understanding and an extension of religious experience not shared by those who have not participated” (141). Fazel concludes by examining three bridges, the “ethical,” the “intellectual,” and the “mystical-spiritual,” that provide avenues along which interreligious dialogue can progress.

Keven Brown's “Hermes Trismegistus and Apollonius of Tyana in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh” is perhaps more a specialist's piece than other offerings in the volume. The two figures, about whom traditional accounts and historical sources differ, are associated in Bahá'u'lláh's Law-i-ikmat (Tablet of Wisdom), in which Hermes is named as the “first person who devoted himself to philosophy...who...set forth in every branch of philosophy thorough and convincing statements” (quoted by Brown, p. 154). Of Apollonius of Tyana (Balinus), Bahá'u'lláh states, “Balinus derived his knowledge and sciences from the Hermetic Tablets and most of the philosophers who followed him made their philosophical and scientific discoveries from his words and statements” (154). Brown briefly dissects the various strands of legend and historical tradition surrounding the two figures, noting that Bahá'u'lláh's statements clearly follow Islamic sources concerning them. Brown is interested in two questions: “what relevance does the Hermetic legacy in Islam have to Bahá'í thought in general, and what attitude should Bahá'ís take toward these references in view of the declared infallibility of Bahá'í scripture?” (154). In answer to the first question, Brown discovers parallels between concepts and statements in Hermetic and Bahá'í literature regarding cosmological questions. There is also a close parallel between statements in one of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets of the Elixir and the Emerald Tablet of Hermes as cited in an Arabic source. In both cases it seems to Brown that Bahá'u'lláh, at least in part, quoted or paraphrased the Hermetic source and implicitly, at least, confirmed it as authoritative. Brown suggests that the close parallels between Hermetic and Bahá'í texts in these and other areas will provide fruitful ground for future comparative studies. Brown goes further than this. The Hermetic writings refer to a “craft of nature”, a “hidden craft” by which the “alchemical elixir” can be produced. “Bahá'u'lláh,” states Brown, “believed in the truth of the hidden craft” (173). Brown suggests that Bahá'u'lláh chose to keep the reality of the “hidden craft” concealed from all but a few of his followers. Readers will be aware of tantalizing references in Bahá'u'lláh's writings to the alchemical transmutation of substances, and of Bahá'u'lláh's metaphoric use of alchemical processes to describe spiritual transformation, but may be uncomfortable with the

notion of occult elements in a religion supposed to be compatible with science and reason. The alchemical strand in Bahá'u'lláh's teachings deserves a more thorough discussion than Brown has provided here; I came away from the article somewhat unsure of the status and importance of the hidden craft in the general corpus of Bahá'í thought.

The discrepancy between the Hermetic tradition as reflected in the Islamic sources cited by Bahá'u'lláh, and the findings of modern scholarship relating to Hermes and Apollonius brings Brown's second question into focus. The issue is similar to that explored by Juan Cole some twenty years ago in his article "Problems of Chronology in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom".¹⁵ In light of the Bahá'í belief in the infallibility of Bahá'u'lláh's writings, Brown sees two alternatives for Bahá'ís: "the first," he suggests, "is to accept a non-metaphorical statement given in revelation as factually true, by virtue of the authority invested in the Manifestation of God, even though by the standard of current academic scholarship it is considered improbable" (176). Despite their being unverified, Brown sees no reason why Bahá'ís could not accept Bahá'u'lláh's historical statements in regard to Hermes and Balinus as factual. The second alternative is to see the statements more broadly and contextually – an instances of Bahá'u'lláh adopting a local tradition in order to make more important points. This remains an open issue for Bahá'í scholarship.

J. A. McLean's "The Possibilities of Existential Theism for Bahá'í Theology" assesses potential contributions of "believing" or theistic existentialism to Bahá'í theology. One significant contribution, for example, drawn from the writings of Soren Kierkegaard, is to restore an engagement between academic studies and the crucial issues of religion as experienced by the individual. "We may ... well ask" writes McLean, "where [does] such a vital reality as divine love fit into the philosopher's schemes?" (190). McLean argues that the "annihilation of the religious subject in the objective question" is a concern pertinent to contemporary Bahá'í studies of religion (191), and that "Bahá'í theology should retain as one of its major tasks... the provision of meaning or insight into the 'real life' of the individual" (192). McLean discusses a number of "defining points" of existential theism from a Bahá'í perspective: the "engaged subject" in the "search for truth"; living-in-the-world; overcoming "alienation from God"; "the personal mode in divine subjectivity"; existential and "epiphanic" moments; and the "realism of confronting self" (194) and concludes his essay with a consideration of existential meanings in Bahá'í history and scripture. Summary of McLean's presentation of these various themes is beyond the scope of the present review but I confess to having found McLean's essay an accessible and persuasive example of the values of scholarship he advocates.

In summary, this volume is diverse and rich with ideas, and repays careful reading and reflection. Editor McLean, the authors, and Kalimat Press deserve thanks for producing an important contribution to contemporary Bahá'í scholarship.

¹⁵ *World Order* 13.3 (1979): 24-39.

Leroy Ioas, Hand of the Cause of God

Author: Anita Ioas Chapman

Publisher: George Ronald, Oxford, 1998, 397 pages

Lua Getsinger, Herald of the Covenant

Author: Velda Piff Metelmann

Publisher: George Ronald, Oxford, 1997, 414 pages

Reviewer: Robert Weinberg

The writing of a biography is enormously challenging because any one person's life can be interpreted in many ways. Difficult enough as it is for most human beings to make sense of their own existence, along comes a writer who attempts to weave that life into a logical story, understand its events and incidents via a chronological time frame or through recurrent motifs or areas of the subject's life activities. Authors with different viewpoints may attempt to present and interpret the life of another from the perspective of their own sphere of interest – be it historical, psychoanalytical, or voyeuristic. Take any iconic or important figure of the past century - from Winston Churchill to Marilyn Monroe – and one can find literally dozens, if not hundreds, of biographies where the evidence of a life lived is picked over vulture-like time and again from differing perspectives and ideologies.

For a Bahá'í writer, the biographical process presents still further complications. Bearing in mind we still find ourselves in the earliest years of the history of the faith, many of the books about significant figures in Bahá'í history are the first of their kind. This may create a tendency for readers, writers and publishers to see such works as “definitive” when it would be natural to assume that a multitude of books about the faith's central figures, and the likes of Tahirih, Martha Root and Louis Gregory, will be written in the future, each of them approaching their subject from different thematic viewpoints.

Equally, the “heroic” acts of many of the figures under discussion have become the stuff of our sacred history. Therefore questions arise about how “human” a picture should be painted of such heroes. Will revealing certain controversial aspects of their human natures or personal lives diminish their status as role models? Or is there yet more inspiration to be had in the realisation that these people were ordinary human beings who despite tests and idiosyncrasies of their own managed to make a significant contribution? These, after all, are individuals whom devoted believers still name their children after. Some of these characters are remembered affectionately by people still living. And some Bahá'ís today are their offspring or direct descendants.

Two recent publications from George Ronald publishers take very different approaches to this task. A biography of *Hand of the Cause of God* Leroy Ioas – remembered and loved by many – has been written by his daughter Anita, and an account of the life of the legendary teacher *Lua Getsinger*, conveyed largely through her own collected letters and talks has been compiled by Velda Piff Metelmann.

Dr Johnson said “Nobody can write the life of a man, but those who have eat and drunk and lived in social intercourse with him.” In that respect, Anita Ioas Chapman has an advantage over Velda Piff Metelmann in that she was able to observe the life and work of her subject from the most intimate of vantage points. However, even she

acknowledges that his workload allowed him little time to be with his children.

Leroy Ioas shines through this biography as a kind of all-American Bahá'í hero – energetic, talented, hard-working, practical, reliable and wise. From the age of 16, when he met 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Ioas was a dedicated servant whose life revolved around obedience to the centre of the faith. Although he was a railway executive for Southern Pacific by occupation, his talents were quickly recognised by Bahá'ís from his election to the national spiritual assembly of the United States, to his appointment as a Hand of the Cause in 1951 and then to direct service to Shoghi Effendi in Haifa as secretary-general of the international Bahá'í council and, after the Guardian's passing, as one of the "Custodians" of the Bahá'í Faith. On Ioas' arrival in Haifa, Shoghi Effendi told him, "You have had a brilliant career in the Cause, now this is the climax of it. Your work was not only satisfactory, but brilliant. Now you are reaching another stage, at the international centre of a World Faith. In your capacity as a Hand of the Cause and member of the International Bahá'í Council, you will be at the very centre - not at its circumference but at its very heart. Being its Secretary-General the work will revolve around you" (161). Ioas combined bullish determination, exhausting activity and unswerving faith to achieve his tasks and relieve Shoghi Effendi's burden of work.

What makes this biography more than the simple conveying of a life is that Ioas' story is recounted against the backdrop of historical events which saw the faith progress through the earliest years of its development in the west. It provides insight into the systematic plans of Shoghi Effendi in raising the administrative order, and how Ioas became his most valued and reliable right hand man. There is much to celebrate in this life and Ioas' daughter has fashioned an inspiring and readable account. She has not ignored the more challenging aspects of his character either. Ioas' intense involvement in activities that kept him away from home "deeply saddened" his wife, because "she almost never saw him" (126). Similarly, Ioas' interpersonal manner seems also to have attracted criticism. "Sometimes it resulted from his riding too roughshod over people's opinions, short-circuiting discussion to get things done. A colleague said he was 'not a great communicator'" (127). Ioas, like all who arise to serve the faith, had his own spiritual battles to fight, especially it seems in developing the virtue of patience. His daughter has done well to highlight quietly his struggle without diminishing the value of his mighty achievements and services.

The main frustration with Velda Piff Metelmann's work on Lua Getsinger is the one-sided account of the story largely owing to the author's almost total reliance on Getsinger's own letters and diary notes. The author has clearly had access to previously unexplored and unpublished sources. Yet some of the questions that inevitably spring to mind when Getsinger refers in her own words to a particular incident or a person's actions go unanswered or unsubstantiated because there is rarely another voice to respond or place a remark in context. This is despite the author's apparent use of Robert Stockman's works on American Bahá'í history that include information which would have given Getsinger's story greater coherence.

Otherwise this is a rich collection of previously unpublished materials charting the teaching expeditions and spiritual development of one of the faith's outstanding teachers. The author's desire to find out more about Getsinger grew from her being asked to deliver a talk on Getsinger at a women's seminar in Holland. She wondered why so little was known about this figure who became known as the "Mother

Teacher of the West”¹⁶ and “Herald of the Covenant.”¹⁷ She was puzzled that such a figure was called in her obituary by May Maxwell, “a bruised and broken reed trodden and crushed to earth”¹⁸ who died alone, “far from all those who should have loved her and cherished her as a priceless gift from God...”¹⁹ An earlier, inspirational but extremely hagiographic account by William Sears and Robert Quigley, *The Flame* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1972) did little to answer those questions.

What emerges is the story of a woman who genuinely did become aflame with love for the faith and determined to burn away her life in service to it. But her activities not only reaped marvellous victories, they resulted in her being the target of rumour and gossip, some of it possibly initiated and perpetuated by her increasingly jealous and resentful husband. Through many of these letters, the reader hears Getsinger’s version of events or her allusions to hurts inflicted upon her but one wishes for more access to Edward Getsinger’s point of view for the sake of balance.

At the beginning of the book, the author issues a disclaimer that “this book does not claim to be a complete biography.” While this book has much to recommend it, what it highlights is the need for more to be written about Lua Getsinger. Although many fascinating insights into an extraordinary life have already been unveiled, it will take yet more painstaking research and a more objective arranging of the facts to piece together the more intricate details of Getsinger’s later life. To that future enterprise, this publication will be a useful resource and starting point.

¹⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1942) 643.

¹⁷ Juliet Thompson, *The Diary of Juliet Thompson* (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1983).

¹⁸ *The Bahá'í World* Vol. VIII 1938-1940 (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1942) 643.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 642.

The Phenomenon of Religion: A Thematic Approach

Author: Moojan Momen

Publisher: Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 1999, 626 pages

Reviewer: Christopher Buck

Moojan Momen's *The Phenomenon of Religion* is a phenomenology of religion not to be confused with Ninian Smart's *Phenomenon of Religion*.²⁰ Note the distinction between the terms, phenomenon and phenomenology. Both derive from the Greek root, *phainomenon*, meaning, "that which appears." Add the suffix, *logos*, which means "reflection." The phenomenology of religion is a methodological approach to the academic study of religion, influenced by the philosophical phenomenology articulated by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). It is the complement of the history of religions. Together, the history of religions and phenomenology of religion comprise what was once called the "science of religion" (German, *religionswissenschaft*) and, later, "comparative religion," the preferred term now being the academic study of religion, also known as religious studies. (The problem with the latter term is that it is somewhat misleading in that, while the object of study is "religious," the methodology is not.)

As a "reflection" on religious "appearances," the phenomenology of religion is a branch of the academic study of religion that focuses on religious phenomena, or observable data. It is informed by several sub-disciplines, such as the psychology of religion, anthropology of religion, sociology of religion, and the philosophy of religion (Momen surveys these in Chapter 3, "Theories of Religion," 52-83). Religions are not, however, reducible to purely sociological or psychological explanations, according to phenomenologists. Their investigations are purely descriptive rather than explanatory, although the phenomenological method, on comparative grounds, may discover underlying structures, patterns, and universals in human religious experience. While phenomenology of religion opposes reductionism, and accepts the cognitive consistencies of religious "appearances," it is not theology (a normative, metaphysical approach from within a particular worldview), although phenomenology has certainly been accused of being a covert theology in making overt ontological claims that core religious phenomena may be manifestations of the Sacred. A classic in the field is Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950), *Phänomenologie der Religion* (1933, tr. as *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*). Conscious or not of writing within this tradition, Momen has chosen a title for his book that resonates with the phenomenology of religion.

The goal of the phenomenology of religion is to attain what Husserl termed "eidetic vision" (from Plato, the Greek word *eidos* signifying the "inner essence" of a phenomenon). Eidetic vision is the intuitive apprehension of essence of a phenomenon. This is achieved through the use of two methodological tools. The first is the exercise of *epoche* (Greek, "to hold back"), or suspension of judgment, in which phenomenologists "bracket" the biases of their own interpretive stances. In so doing, they are able to employ a second methodological tool, *empathe* (critical empathy), by which they can "enter" into religious phenomena. This has led to the relatively dispassionate, rather than confessional, teaching of religion at universities.

²⁰ London: Macmillan, 1973.

The myth of objectivity having now been exposed, the phenomenology of religion typically synthesizes what anthropologists have termed the *emic* (insider) and *etic* (outsider) approaches, as a constraint on the subjectivity of each. This ideal complementarity was structurally put into practice when the great Canadian historian of religion, Wilfred Cantwell Smith (mentioned on p. 82), established the Institute of Islamic Studies at Montreal's McGill University, in stipulating that half of the students should be professing Muslims, while the other half should be non-Muslims. With respect to the emic/etic dichotomy, Momen discloses his own orientation: "The present writer's inclination is to view both approaches as necessary" (81). Here, the Bahá'í Faith is represented, not as an Abrahamic faith (as many readers might have expected), but as a New Religious Movement (NRM). Placed in this category, the author circumvents the problem of strenuous objection by orthodox Muslims who privilege Islam, historically and salvifically, as the "last" world religion. To place the Bahá'í Faith on a structure par with Islam is, at this point, a move that is theologically freighted by an implicit truth-claim and one that is sure to be interpreted by academics and Muslims alike as motivated by apologetic (Bahá'í) interests.

As such, *The Phenomenon of Religion* is the first serious phenomenology of religions to be contributed by a Bahá'í scholar, apart from specialised studies by other Bahá'í academics. (In so saying, I do not think that Momen conceived of his book as a phenomenology of religion in the strict sense, because he is also interested in psychological [even biological] as well as sociological theories of religious phenomena – reductionistic approaches that phenomenologists tend to oppose. In terms of his philosophical orientation, Momen seems to be inclined towards relativism.) *The Phenomenon of Religion*, therefore, is not a work of Bahá'í studies. The reader may well ask, if this is so, why does a review of Momen's book appear in the pages of the *Bahá'í Studies Review*? The answer is to be found in the way Momen has integrated Bahá'í studies within the broader scope of religious studies. As the author himself states: "In the course of writing this book it soon became apparent that, to keep it to a reasonable size, examples for every statement could not be given from all the many religions of the world. Therefore a selection was made of six key religions. From the religions of the Abrahamic or monotheistic Western tradition, Judaism, Christianity and Islam were selected; from the Eastern, Indian line of religions, Hinduism and Buddhism; and as a representative of the new religious movements, the Bahá'í Faith" (7).

The title of Momen's book, *The Phenomenon of Religion*, is a little confusing, because the author also speaks of "religious phenomena" (4) in the plural. Momen explains the sense in which he employs the term "phenomenon": "Religion, as a human phenomenon, is founded on the basis of what is described as being the experience of the 'holy' or the 'sacred'" (21). So begins Chapter One. After surveying world religions and theories of religion in Part I (19-83), the author employs a three-dimensional approach in his phenomenology. Experiential, conceptual, social descriptions of religion comprise Parts II (85-181), III (183-297), and IV (299-527) of this four-part volume. I find that Momen weights experiential and social dimensions of religion almost to the exclusion, at times, of the conceptual.

After speaking of a "relationship between human beings and a transcendent reality" as "the central experience of religion," Momen notes that: "The study of religion becomes possible when a further factor is introduced: when this central

experience finds some form of expression. The minimal level of this expression is language – when a mystic describes his or her experience, for example. Other expressions of religion include doctrinal formulations, stories and myths, rituals, religious hierarchies and administrative structures, popular religious forms, art, music, architecture and so on” (2). For this review, I would like to inventory some of the topics that Momen covers, using a paradigm for the phenomenology of religion as a framework of analysis. This paradigm is of my own devising, although the basic dimensions derive largely from the work of Ninian Smart. The paradigm below includes most of the items Momen has listed above:

Doctrinal Dimension (*metaphysics, philosophy of religion*)

- **Cosmology** (cosmogony/theodicy): An entire chapter (8) is devoted to “The Nature of Reality” (185-212), one of the strongest chapters in the book. Cosmogony is covered in “Time, the Origins and End of the World” (207-11), which I found to be underdeveloped, as cosmogony is typically a foil for sociogony and moral order. The first creation narrative of Genesis, for instance, exalts the Sabbath to such a degree that God himself “rests” on the seventh day, in observance of the Sabbath! The Zoroastrian cosmogonic myth is paradigmatic of moral choice. However, the section on theodicy, (literally, the “justice of God,” but referring to any doctrine of the origin of evil), “Evil, Sin and Suffering” (213-225), presents a sophisticated and useful typology of theodicy, with a sidebar on the ontological dualism of “Zoroastrian Cosmology” (217).
- **Anthropology** (soul/consciousness/purpose): Chapter 9, “Suffering, Sacrifice and Salvation” (213-41), begins with an overview of the human predicament (including the problem of theodicy), which any salvation offer has to address. In the logics of any salvation- or liberation-based religion, the offer of salvation/liberation is inherently linked to what is defined as the human problem, be that sin or suffering or any other form of existential angst. While the soul/conventional self is certainly central to world religions, it gets short shrift in Momen’s book, not because of any deficiency of treatment, but from lack of an in-depth treatment. See also pages 204-205 on human nature, and the conclusion (536-7).
- **Soteriology** (predicament/salvation): Salvation is introduced in two brief sections, “The Path to Salvation” (34-5) and “The Goal of Salvation” (35). Chapter 9 is devoted to “Suffering, Sacrifice and Salvation” (213-41). A useful chart (“Words Used for Salvation in This Life and After,” 238) lists technical terms in Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá’í Faith. (Presumably Judaism lacks a definitive notion of individual salvation, although it has a more or less developed notion of corporate salvation.) No Persian or Arabic technical term is provided for Bahá’í salvation.²¹ Absent is a discussion of the several theories of the Atonement in Christianity. Momen makes this observation, which I think is quite an important one: “Probably no area in religious studies offers more intractable problems for those who look for an underlying unity in the religions of the world” (233). In view of the lack of a

²¹ As to the transliteration of religious technical terms throughout the book, from Sanskrit to Arabic, macrons and subdots are dispensed with.

Bahá'í systematic theology, Momen's comments on Bahá'í salvation are worth mentioning. He states that the Bahá'í concept of salvation involves both "individual and social salvation for humanity as a whole" and that, moreover: "A third element is also necessary to achieve salvation, and this is the grace of God" (237).

Elsewhere in the book, however, Momen presents a typology of "Pathways to Salvation or Liberation" schematically represented in charts on pages 118 and 121. This typology is given in Chapter 5, "Pathways to Religious Experience" (117-40), and is as follows: Ritualism (117-20), Legalism (120-23), Evangelism (123-25), Social Reformism (126-29), Asceticism (129-30), Monasticism (130-32), Gnosticism (132-35), Mysticism (135-37). Momen seems to equate religious experience with salvation in saying: "Since the religious experience gives one the feeling of salvation or liberation, these pathways to religious experience may be called pathways to salvation or liberation" (117). Bahá'í salvation appears to be located in social reformism (126, 128; cf. 43). One difficulty in this analysis is that a complex of several of these "motifs" have already been identified by sociologist Peter Smith in his monograph, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions*, as constitutive of a Bahá'í ethos. A dimensional analysis of Bahá'í soteriology might have disambiguated Bahá'í salvation from a common misperception of its being primarily invested in social reform, to the practical exclusion of doctrinal, mystical, artistic and other concerns.

- **Eschatology** (afterlife/apocalypse): Eschatology is the "doctrine of last things." In the same chapter, doctrines of the afterlife are treated descriptively. An entire chapter is devoted to the other major concern of eschatology, "The Promise of a Future Saviour" (242-67). Momen's chart of "Comparative Eschatology" (243) is excellent, with Taoism and Zoroastrianism added to the six religions he treats throughout the book. Texts describing "The Golden Age that will Follow the Coming of the Saviour" (252-53) enrich the discussion. The author's "Typology of Future Saviours and Millennialist Movements" (254-61), while apparently derivative, is engaging. This chapter is richly illustrated (albeit in black-and-white), although a better graphic representation of the Hindu messiah Kalki (249) might have been found. Sections on "Disconfirmed Prophecy" (262-64) and "Causes of Millennialist Movements" (264-66) are also valuable.

Ritual Dimension (*anthropology of religion*)

- **Calendar** (type/special features): I could find no substantive discussion of sacred calendars, including the Badí' (Bahá'í) calendar. This would have afforded a golden opportunity to have highlighted yet another distinctive feature of the Bahá'í religion, while commenting on its resonances with the ancient Zoroastrian calendar.
- **Rites of Passage** (rites of life/life-crisis rites/rites of faith): Victor Turner's theory of "liminality" is recounted, within the classical, three-phase analysis of "Rites of Passage" (281-84) current among anthropologists.
- **Observances** (festivals and fasts/pilgrimages): No separate section exists on festivals, and pilgrimage is hardly represented. Fasting is discussed (105-8).
- **Worship** (communal/domestic): Generally, one of the overall strengths of Momen's work is his emphasis on religious experience. Covered on pages 117-21, 105-108.

Ethical Dimension (*philosophy of religion*)

- **Laws** (prescriptions/proscriptions): The subject and significance of religious law is commented on (120-23, 352). This is an important topic in the history of religions because of recurring tensions between exoteric and esoteric polarities, as well as the problem of antinomianism, or religious indifference to law.
- **Intentions** (motives/reactions): While Momen explains the phenomenologist's quest to apprehend the intentionality or "whatness" of the phenomenon (67), the role of intentions or motives is not a focus in this volume. Like the soul/conventional self, the subject of intentionality is as central as it is elusive, its elusivity rendering its centrality too challenging for scholarship to treat in depth.
- **Virtues** (saints/saintliness): Confucian virtues are mentioned (44), but I could not find reference to the classical cardinal/theological virtues in traditional Christianity, nor Buddhist virtues. Role models - saints, paragons of virtue, moral exemplars - are noted (345).
- **Ethics** (moral principles/social principles): Covered on pages 338–62. A helpful chart of "The Golden Rule in the Religions of the World" (344).

Artistic Dimension (*art history, iconography*)

Chapter 18 is written on "Religion and the Arts" (455-74). This chapter begins with a controversial observation: "Most descriptions of religions concentrate on doctrinal or organizational matters. These aspects of religion are, however, only of peripheral importance for most religious people" (455). For Bahá'ís, however, doctrinal and organizational matters matter a great deal. Here, institutional aspects take on an equally spiritual as well as exoteric significance, as Bahá'í institutions represent the canalizing of Bahá'í spirit and moral imperatives, translated into the social sphere. Indeed, the Bahá'í administrative order comprises the very planks and pitch of "the Crimson Ark," a dynamic Bahá'í symbol allegorized in Bahá'u'lláh's "Table of the Holy Mariner" and in the "Tablet of Carmel."

- **Music** (liturgical/devotional): Various forms of scripture chanting/recitation are reviewed (104), as well as sacred music in general (456), while hymns are commented on in passing.
- **Architecture** (temples, shrines, pilgrimage sites/assembly halls): Photographs are presented (472-74, 278-9). Beyond the photographs themselves, the symbolic features as well as artistic merits are captured in some of the captions, which often prove to be one of Momen's strategic successes in effectively communicating with his audience.
- **Performance** (dance/drama): Sacred drama is mentioned (456), as is sacred dance (456, 458), with a sidebar on "Dance in Native American Religion" (458).
- **Symbols** (literary/concrete): There is a short section on "Religious Symbols" (278-79). A section of Chapter 18 focuses on "Art and the Symbolic Universe" (459-62), followed by "The Historical Development of Religious Art" (462-71). A schematic of emblematic symbols of ten world religions is provided (172), accompanied by a highly informative caption, although some of the symbols (such as the Bahá'í nine-pointed star) are not explained. A page devoted to "Religious Metaphors" (102) is also quite intriguing.

Mystical Dimension (*psychology of religion*)

- **Goal of Attainment** (quest/preparation): Momen mentions the “quest mode” (163) as one of the modalities of the religious life. The quest is the point of departure for mysticism itself, which is arguably the most fascinating of all religious phenomena.
- **Activities** (spiritual exercises/mystical orders): There is a stimulating section on “Meditation and Brain Function” (169-70). Monastic communities (130-32) serve as mediators of contemplative experience. This is Momen at his finest, contributing uniquely, from the vantage of his medical expertise, to the phenomenology of religion.
- **Stages** (path/progress): While stages of mystical ascent are not discussed, there is a fascinating section on “A Psychological Model of the Stages of Religious Experience” (99-100) as well as “Fischer and a Map of Mental States” (173-76).
- **Peak Experiences** (visions, auditions/transformations): “The Mystical Experience” (95-7) is adumbrated briefly (with some relevant texts on page 38). “Experiences of Trance or Mystical Ecstasy” (176-78) are treated in a somewhat medical fashion. A chart depicting “Pathways to Altered States of Consciousness” (174) reflects Momen’s interest in the medical literature on the subject. Visions are mentioned in passing, as is meditation (108).

Social Dimension (*sociology of religion*)

- **Distribution** (heartland/diaspora): Diffusion is an important element in the social description of religion. Two charts, “Estimated Number of Adherents of World Religions” (504) and “Rate of Growth and Spread of World Religions” (505), are very useful. A chart, “The Spread of Islam” (318), follows the historical diffusion of Islam, as does “the Spread of the Bahá’í Faith up to 1950” (500) for the Bahá’í religion. Religious diasporas have received much recent attention in academic literature, as significant immigrant populations in North America and Europe have radically altered the religious landscape of the West. There is very little discussion of this important religious phenomenon in Momen’s volume. Notwithstanding, the author provides a chart, “Distribution of World Religions” (32).
- **Organization** (hierarchy/community): “From Personal Piety to Organized Religion” (323-28) focuses on the development of Islamic identity and praxis. A typology of religious sects is elsewhere given (74-77), followed later by a thought-provoking section on “Exclusion of Women from Religious Hierarchy” (440-42). Absent is a systematic treatment of forms of religious governance, although religious functionaries are discussed *in passim*.
- **Relations** (church/state relations/interfaith relations): A strong chapter discusses church/state relations (404-31).
- **Missions** (domestic/foreign): Missionary activity in Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Bahá’í Faith is covered in passing. The three great missionary religions of the world are Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, along with the Bahá’í Faith and certain New Religious Movements in the Hindu and Buddhist worlds. Judaism was once a missionary religion, during the Second Temple period. Momen provides an arresting photograph, well worth a thousand words, of Hasidic Jews in Safad, Israel trying to convert other Jews (486). The

desired effect of missionary work is conversion. Attention to conversion is one of the strengths of Momen's book, with an entire chapter (6), "Faith, Belief and Conversion" (141-65), written on this topic.

Other comments

In the section, "Definitions of Religion" (26-28), what is probably the most famous definition – that of anthropologist Clifford Geertz – is notably missing. (Momen provides his own definition, which is repeated in the "Conclusion" [535-6]). The author says that Geertz is among those who do not find "grand theories of religion" helpful (80). Momen prescinds from his own theorising about religion, allowing the reader to take into account the wide array of theories that the author is able to pack into this information-rich volume. While Momen's three dimensions of the experiential, conceptual, and social are useful organizing principles, the reader is presented with a veritable maze of data. This is both amazing and confusing. The data presented are bewilderingly eclectic, in what might be described as an organised fragmentation.

From the foregoing inventory, one can see that Momen's treatment of mysticism – a major dimension of religious experience – engaging, but piecemeal. The same holds true for Momen's discussions of religious symbols, although, in the concluding chapter, the author pulls together the various treatments of religious symbols to be found throughout the book (528-29). While Momen is cognizant of important theorists whose work he admirably integrates into the book, my sense is that this integration, although skilful and relatively seamless, is not synthetic. To be fair, this was not the author's purpose. He had, in fact, anticipated such criticism in writing a disclaimer in his conclusion: "The disadvantage is that the work as a whole lacks any overall unifying theoretical basis and is thus less coherent" (528). More consistency in data selection and representation might have helped crystallize the book, as I explain below.

As stated above, there were six religions that Momen had originally intended to foreground: viz., Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith (7). Taking the book as a whole, the six religions that Momen said he would primarily focus on do not receive even treatment. The appetisers (an abundance of anthropological data and data from religious traditions other than the six religions) overwhelm the main dishes (the six religions themselves). This, in my opinion, weakens the overall comparative power of Momen's work. Speaking as a comparativist myself, I would have liked to have seen a more consistent and thorough treatment of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith in all of the major phenomenological categories. This is partly accomplished in the various charts and other sidebars that Momen provides throughout the book, such as "Differences between Eastern and Western Religious Thought" (37) and "Comparative Eschatology" (243). There should have been more charts like the latter, perhaps one for each major category of religious doctrine. Fortunately, a number of sidebars show the author to have been faithful to his intention, such as "The Start of the Ministry" (306-8), where experiences of "prophet-founders" Moses, the Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, and Bahá'u'lláh are represented. (Presumably, the figure of Kṛṣṇa is probably too mythical to have been included here.) Charts of the "Lives of the Founders of World Religions" (310) and "religious Role Models for

Women" (442) show the author's typological and comparative prowess at his best.

Conclusions

Momen's erudition is vast, magnetically eclectic. His eclecticism is unique in this respect: In the academic literature to date, the Bahá'í Faith has frequently been unrepresented or, at best, under represented. This is because the Bahá'í Faith is not (yet) regarded as a major world religion. As an emergent movement, the Bahá'í Faith is more accurately classed as a minor world religion (although it may be a major world religion in the making). Momen has implicitly suggested that the Bahá'í Faith is the most significant of the NRM's (New Religious Movements), and he may well be right. Bahá'í readers will appreciate the abundant yet judicious representation of the Bahá'í Faith throughout.

While the author is himself a Bahá'í, all religions are treated with critical empathy. A test of the merit of an academic work in religious studies is its methodological integrity, independent of any confessional or reductionist bias, and its intersubjective availability. *The Phenomenon of Religion* withstands that scrutiny. Moreover, it is an accessible book. With patience and perseverance, the nonspecialist will be able to understand it. This is no *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. Momen's volume is formidable, not by virtue of its style, but by dint of its sheer massiveness. As a complement to the more established theories of religion, Momen contributes a chapter (7), "Towards a Scientific Understanding of the Religious Experience" (166-81), a treatment rarely found in the standard literature. This is probably the most challenging chapter in the book. This mass of data and theory notwithstanding, Momen succeeds in articulating his phenomenology with engaging clarity.

The Phenomenon of Religion comprehends some of the major theorists in the academic study of religion and translates their theories for the benefit of the nonspecialist. The major strength of *The Phenomenon of Religion* – indeed, its signal contribution – is that, for the first time, it has made the academic study of religion and its phenomenology available to the public.

Just as Momen's earlier work, *An Introduction to Shi'a Islam*, was first published by George Ronald and later reprinted by Yale University Press, I would like to recommend that joint publishing ventures between Bahá'í-owned and academic presses be more vigorously pursued. I would like to close with a comment on the problem of "market": Bahá'ís and readers in general who support such valuable and illuminating scholarship as Momen's *The Phenomenon of Religion* need to make it a priority to purchase and promote such books in the marketplace. This sends a clear message to academic publishers that there can, indeed, be a popular appreciation for academic endeavours that make a significant spiritual difference in deepening our understanding of what it means to live in a religiously pluralistic and socially evolving world.

Poetry 227

Let Us Proclaim the Apocalypse of Faith

1. Interfaith Conference

Monsignors filibuster world population.
Lamas in exile win valuable prizes!
Settlers will yet be avenged on the Hittites —
Wallace Fard's faithful prepare their bow ties.

Missionary Latter-Days invoke holy undergarb.
Druids park Range Rover convoys on ley lines.
Asahara transfers his gas to the A train.
Baha'is syncretize. Ayatollahs spill from their coffins.

2. New Masada, TX

The prophet picks out the riff from "Layla."
Emergency generators strain with feedback;
the chosen air-guitar atop guardposts.
ATF jackboots set up a backbeat.

Fifty-cal squirrel guns bristle from the wagons.
The prophet sets his Stetson, spittoons.
Back of the chapel he gathers the ladies:
"Baby, light my fire." Johnny Law locks and loads.

3. Drop-In Clinic

Youth-group conscripts picket outside.
Cameramen angle to cover their screens;
carpooling mothers mug outraged for interviews.
Ministers' sunglasses ogle their seams.

A welfare recipient greases the wall.
The doctor, dying, phones the police.
"To save that fetus, the Lord had to take it" —

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smirking, the martyr proffers his wrists.

4. Louis E. Coira, Maj. Gen. USAF (Ret.)

Granddad wakes his dogs at dawn.
Deafness mutes their bays in his ear;
his hand darts sure to right his falls.
His eye plucks delicate quail from the air.

Granddad gnaws the faith of our fathers;
his children's households abandon their laws.
The Vatican's hardcover flowers and pablums.
The parish committee remodels the pews.

Alec Dinwoodie

MUSIC REVIEWS*Traces**Chris Ruhe's Chartreuse Blues**Masnaví: Improvisations on Spiritual Themes**Reliance**Merz*

Various Artists and Labels (see below)

Reviewer: Simon Mawhinney

Kandinsky writes, "A painter who finds no satisfaction in mere representation...in his longing to express his inner life, cannot but envy the ease with which music, the most non-material of the arts today, achieves this end."¹ In the reviews that follow, the efforts of several Bahá'í artists to realise "inner longings" is examined. All the artists discussed here are highly motivated, with little shortage of inspiration. However, the conclusion is reached that the music often fails to realise its inspirational potential. This is due mostly to technical achievements which are often quite impressive.²

Traces

Artist: Geoff and Michaela Smith

Sonrise Audio Duplication, 1999, UK19

The opening song, *Through the Valley*, is one of the most convincing musical versions of translated writings I have heard. A passage from *The Seven Valleys* has been set to music to create stanzas and chorus. The ametrical text has been grafted on to a metrical structure which convinces the ear that music and text were achieved simultaneously. However, with music of this nature the main problem is usually singing, and this arises notably after the chorus. A new verse begins at 2'10" with the words "The steed of this valley is pain." The singer (whose voice has a very flat timbre) attempts to ornament the word "is" and the result is quite embarrassing. A similar thing happens with the word "journey" on the next line. (And why did she decide to ornament the word "is" anyway?)

Of the second song, *Tamasha* the liner notes inform us, "Inspired by the grandson of Bahá'u'lláh who loved to go on outings with his grandfather. His death at the age of four was commemorated by a Tablet³ in which Bahá'u'lláh described him as sightseeing in the next world." As I was unaware of this story, this song was especially memorable. Lucid lyrics commemorate this little known member of the holy household. The music is dreamily effective, with a sensitive use of guitars, but again the singing causes aural problems.

A further concern relates to the liner notes. A short note explaining the inspiration

¹ Quoted in Peter Stacey, *Boulez and the Modern Concept* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987) 5.

² Throughout these reviews I have adopted a ratings chart, ***** (masterpiece) to * (poor), similar to that used in *Bahá'í Studies Review* 8.

³ If this CD has a "non-Bahá'í" audience, the word "Tablet" may be confusing.

for the song often accompanies the lyrics. The fact that *Tamasha* was explained is very helpful, but in other cases, such as *The Whole Me*, the explanations are unnecessary and lack subtlety. Consider this explanation of *I Believe in You*, “I was blessed by a dream in which I was held in an enormous hand, cradled and told that everything would be all right.” (Incidentally, in the chorus of this song the backing vocals intone the name of Bahá’u’lláh, but the resulting effect lacks taste.) Another example reads, “We are all born with potential talents, capacities and virtues that are deep within us like jewels in a mine. Shouldn’t the goal of education be to bring these gems to the surface?” Of course, everyone agrees with this sentiment, which is as much common sense as “new” Bahá’í teaching, but it is quite unnecessary as an appendix to the song lyrics. It is rather like the Bahá’í T-Shirts which the public find so off-putting.

Interlude is a pseudo-Pink Floyd instrumental track which contains apparently sampled Sheila Chandra-style Indian singing. Now, we Bahá’ís are all world-embracing believers with multi-cultural families, but, once again, I must draw attention to the fact that stealing timbre and line (or plain sampling) from selected exotic cultures is orientalism of doubtful ethics.⁴ It seems odd that people forget that the music of different civilisations has taken thousands of years to evolve separately. The inevitable connections between world musics as globalization continues cannot simply involve juxtaposition, but must occur at deeper structural levels.

Little Eyes was inspired by the death of James Bulger, a child from Liverpool who was murdered by two children a few years ago. This is a sincere effort but it sounds like an advertisement soundtrack. (As are the final tracks, *Tree of Unity* and the happy-clappy *One People One Planet* which features a children’s chorus – wonderfully microtonal!)

The problem with this album is that the songs are well-written, but the singing is unsatisfactory. (Perhaps, like Dolly Parton’s *I Will Always Love You* these songs will find their true expression in the future?)⁵ **

Chris Ruhe’s Chartreuse Blues

Artist: Chris Ruhe

Nine Partners Music BMI, 1996, NPM 5870

This is a quintessentially American work, with a very specific audience in mind. For those who are not interested in blues, or country, this album will prove rather difficult to like. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the recording is the liner notes:

Thank you for buying my new album. My labor of love. Here it is, a

⁴ There is a wealth of discourse on the subjects of orientalism and representation in music. A useful introduction to this debate is Nicholas Cook, *Music – A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁵ Some will doubtless feel that such analysis is misplaced nitpicking. There may be some truth in this, but I continue to reassure myself that the reason for illustrating such defects stems from a passionate belief that there exists an urgent need for greater critical acuity among the public when consuming cultural artifacts. We cannot expect masterful, pure forms of artistic discourse until we create a demand for higher levels of technical accomplishment.

musical pastiche, some paint upon the canvas...bright splashes of color...two colors predominate...chartreuse...brilliant green of parrots wings, of mountain moss and secret wild Honduran callings of loud, raucous, muscley, rowdy life...mix it then with cobalt blue, of cold Magellanic ocean deeps, of nearnight skies, of gliding jays wings, of my love's eyes, of yon supine Appalachians, and there we sort of have it...my music, my chartreuse blues, (for youse). (yeah)

Many wonderful musicians, all my friends, have contributed to this album ... they range from 17 to 75 years old, and come in all shapes, sizes, and hues ... all members of the ancient, noble tribe of music-makers ... and, it is undeniable ... we are products of history ... all music comes from deep well-springs of human experience, from that age-old and unutterably profound drama that is our struggle upward ... as we remember throbbing night drums, and slender flute trills in the high desert dawn ...

It is quite a Terence Trent D'Arby-style piece of writing, rich with signification. It is difficult, however, to determine the connections between this vivid meandering prose and the staid music which accompanies it.

The opening track, *Life's a Highway*, demonstrates a typically unimaginative bass line which ruins the music. However, the bluesy track which follows, *Going Down to the River*, is quite evocative. Ruhe has used the word "neurosis" in his description of this track, and the use of a droning keyboard part helps reinforce this mood. The lyrics are strangely interesting: "Well I see four wasps dying on a window, but I don't lift a finger to help them. I know you won't understand." I was encouraged to hear a Bahá'í artist embracing negativity and dissonance – vital aspects of any healthy art.

The greatest difficulty with this music is the quality of the singing, the colour of the voice. The enunciation of lyrics is admittedly clear, but there is a distinct lack of strength or charisma. After a few tracks it becomes difficult to listen any further. Here is yet another example where guest singers would really help demonstrate the strengths of the song-writer.

Ultimately I couldn't help wondering why blues is so popular. It is bland and harmonically effete. There is no structural ambiguity, just fulfilled expectation. If you take one of these songs out of context maybe it will not do much harm. But if you try to listen to the whole album at one sitting, you quickly tire. The artist has written that "two colours predominate." That is the crux of the problem. **

Masnaví: Improvisations on Spiritual Themes

Artists: Kamran, Khodjasteh, Averill

IST, 1996, IST 0219

Reviewing a recording of Persian/Arabic chant is extremely difficult for a listener who does not understand the original languages. Fortunately, the recording is produced with the intention of reaching those who rely on translations. Detailed liner notes provide an avenue for approaching the chants, which are correctly identified as an "experience rather than a performance."

What you hear is very standard, such as you will have heard on numerous occasions. However, it is pleasing to be able to hear the textured verbal intricacy of the writings any time you wish. I was a little confused by the backing vocals which appear on some of the tracks. As far as I am aware, this rather distracting addition does not stem from middle eastern practice. It may be a potentially radical innovation, but I found it a little melodramatic. However, it underlines some key issues in this area of endeavour. As this form of chant evolved, it was not considered music, but a recitation of the text. It was not designed for mass marketing, nor for repeated listening. Therefore we cannot listen to it with musical ears. However, westerners find it nearly impossible to listen to a CD of "singing" in an unfamiliar language without a concept of "music" coming into play. I am fascinated by the challenges and difficulties brought about by this paradox.⁶ ***

Reliance

Artists: Ben Koen and the Unity Ensemble
Qing Shan Music, 1997

When I observed that the group here was called "The Unity Ensemble," I was a little suspicious that their music would reveal itself to be emotion-driven. However, I was pleased to find that my prejudices had been completely misplaced. *Reliance* turns out to be an accomplished piece of music making.

The initial track, *Preparation*, which is based on a single drone, immediately propels us into a unique soundworld. *Bathsheba* provides us with our first taste of their jazz style. It is an eclectic mix which suggests not only musicians such as John Coltrane, but also the European Quartet of Keith Jarrett, while the piano solos (with fistfuls of chords and inelegant spiky rhythms) are reminiscent of some McCoy Tyner.

Two of the tracks include sung extracts from *The Hidden Words*. These are wonderfully melodic settings in English. The singer, Destan Owen, has an attractive warm voice. The moving *Temple of Being* is a case in point. The music is very relaxed in all parameters (check out the stylistic parallels here with an album such as Jarrett's *Personal Mountains*). A particularly effective technique is the overlapping of solos which occurs at 1'44". It is not an original technique of course, but the context in which it is employed is very successful.

The recording is dedicated to Bahá'u'lláh. When we consider that earlier in the century jazz was roundly maligned for its decadence (for example by the Sufi musician Inayat Khan), it is fascinating to observe this musical language evolving to become of the vehicle of adoration. ***

⁶ I can envisage an excellent way to present future recordings of this nature. CD-rom, or DVD-rom technology would make it possible to provide a recording which can also be "viewed" through a computer or television screen. In addition to the music the screen would provide the original Arabic text, plus a transliteration and a translation. In this manner listeners who do not understand the original language will be able to follow the words, and by reading transliteration and translation at once will get closer to an understanding of the chanted act. Besides, it will reward repeated listening.

*Merz*⁷

Artist: Merz

Epic, 1999, 495500 2 Epic, 1999, 495500 2

Recently attracting a wave of media praise, Merz (aka Conrad Lambert) has been described as “one of the country’s more original talents” with “a sound that is like no other.”⁸ This recently released album is a strikingly important contribution to the development of the Bahá’í Faith in the British Isles. Merz is potentially a prominent ambassador for the Faith, which must place him in a difficult position as he decides just how much (if at all) he should broadcast his religious adherence. If it is completely concealed that may be a lost opportunity. But if anyone caught even the faintest hint that his efforts are an attempt to “teach,” then it would all come to nothing.

In producing this album, Merz is to be congratulated on getting the balance right. He has produced an album designed for public consumption. There is no explicit ecstatic celebration of Bahá’í identity.⁹ His concern with musical expression, rather than proselytising, is very welcome. And yet, he does provide the URL of a Bahá’í website.¹⁰ Further, his lyrics are replete with indirect references to his religious ideals. It might be tempting to discuss this music purely from the perspective of the artist as a Bahá’í. I feel such thinking would lack integrity, for it is important to discuss this album from a musical point of view. After all, it is on the musical level that Merz’s public career will continue. It is a great pleasure to report that the purely musical response is for me a positive one. The songs are all well-written, both as music and text. The recording itself is attractively produced and mixed.

To describe the music is rather difficult, as the influences are so varied. Conrad Lambert’s influences range across the gamut of contemporary music from Bob Dylan to Nine Inch Nails¹¹ – a range that has earned him the moniker “the British Beck.”

⁷ This Merz review was written with Shamim Razavi.

⁸ *The Guardian* newspaper, 29 July 1999.

⁹ We know that he is capable of this, see his *Heathrow Terminal 1 Revisited*, Seventh Valley, 1994, AVC250.

¹⁰ This is www.warble.com/bahai. I checked out this site and must admit that I don’t feel it is a particularly good place for people to find out about the Faith. For example, one of the first pictures you get is a photograph of a youth-gang, with the caption, “Warriors of the Covenant.” This website also contains articles on Huququ’llah and jokes about Persians. Outsiders will not only fail to understand these things but will probably feel alarmed and alienated. www.bahai.org would have been a much better choice.

¹¹ This range of influences poses an interesting question as to how the nihilism of Trent Reznor’s Nine Inch Nails (as heard on Merz’s “asleep”) can possibly combine with the Bahá’í teachings. The theoretical possibility of presenting the Bahá’í message through such abused media is to be relished. However, in practice, the diversity of styles makes for a somewhat uncomfortable sound. While the whole project is kept together by Conrad’s larger than life personality and voice, one can’t help feeling that this is more a sampler of Merz’s prodigious talents than a holistic album-experience. In producing such a range of sounds and styles Merz has undoubtedly enchanted critics and the more discerning listeners but disappointing album and single sales reflect a failure to strike a chord with the wider listening public. While this reluctance to “sell out” is in itself no bad thing, old Conrad anthems such as “Awake” show that he is capable of combining popularism and spirit with a deft

Moreover, his Bahá'í influences are apparent throughout. This comes across not only in the "unity in diversity" of the eclectic range of musical styles found on the album or the upbeat and positive message found in lyrics like "the world is gonna be better" repeated ad infinitum on *Am (good morning)* but most interestingly in the almost subconscious influence of Shoghi Effendi's prose style on Conrad's poetry. We find echoes of Bahá'í prayers in "I'm alive, I was hopelessly dead" (cf. "I was as one dead, Thou didst quicken me with the water of life"¹²) on *Many weathers apart* and "never dwell on your wrongs" (cf. "I will not dwell on the unpleasant things of life"¹³) on *Am (good morning)*. Who other than a Bahá'í would pen lines such as "we could do much better than being so fettered"? – Shoghi Effendisms such as "fettered" are scattered throughout Conrad's work. There is a strong element of dance in many of the tracks (as well as the overall timbre), but this overall characterisation is somewhat belied by the ballads. With a high degree of electronic programming, Merz is no guitar band (for which I am grateful.) For more detailed information on Merz's style and influences it is worth looking at his website, www.merz.co.uk (where the Bahá'í mentions are sensitive and mature.)

The most refreshing aspect of Merz's music is the subject matter of his lyrics. In a medium foetid with paeans to loves lost, found and lost again, Merz contemplates such esoteric themes as perseverance in a decaying world order ("I pray for strength in this trashed world" in *Engine heart*) and the process of spiritual awakening and becoming a Bahá'í (as heard on *cc conscious* and in particular the line "once they've got your name you're in wicked company"). Moreover, he makes comments that can surely only be fully appreciated by a Bahá'í audience with lines such as "dream of the Master, believe in the future" (*Asleep*) and the tongue-in-cheek take on Bahá'í marriages in *Lovely daughter* ("your father loves me your mother loves me you're very prestigious I've studied your family tree").

It remains to outline a few of the more interesting aspects of the album. *Forsake* is an example of a well-written, moving song – a three minute whisper whose elusiveness cannot be explained, notwithstanding the power of amplification. Merz's unusual voice has fascinated his listeners, and he uses its idiosyncrasies to great effect here; an example is the subtle ornamentation on the word "worry" at 0'42". Later in the song electronic modification endows the voice with an echo-style effect as if in a huge acoustic. The music is vocalise at this point (the text has already been sung), but greatly aids the emotive strength of the composition. One of the great strengths of the entire album is the highly sensitive arrangements. Merz's attention to surface detail puts many other artists to shame.

Starlight night is a curious track. The string writing is notably adept, with its use of portamento, tremoli, and pizzicato bass. Note the use of portamento to highlight the words "grey lawns." It is an obvious idea to use a string orchestra to accompany a Romantic lyric, but here it could be interpreted as a sort of postmodern nostalgia. The pathos of the music, the sense of a lost idyllic era, is enriched by the electronic effects, which add a dystopian touch. Taken together, this song is a rather complex text. Merz's voice merely adds to the mystery.

artistic touch if he so chooses.

12 *Bahá'í Prayers* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991) 20.

13 *Ibid.*, 152

As a listener, I am always interested in the second listening. Will repeated hearings of a piece of music continue to hold interest? To create enduring musical interest, it is important not only to achieve a high degree of technical expertise; the compositions themselves must be sufficiently complex or ambiguous as to provide an endless network of structural/expressive revelations. It is a delight to confirm that these Merz tracks seem to hold this promise. The songs combine both an attractive surface detail with intricate musical construction. In *engine heart*, there is an intricate relationship between the lyrics and the musical construction. The lyrics have imagery of automated emotion, the engine heart. The imagery is welded to the processes of the music, which is constructed from a number of basic instrumental layers that overlap and interrelate with one another. The haunting effect of this song is due partly to its harmonic structure, which is centred around D minor. The modal nature of the melodic lines stimulates musical memories that extend through cultures and centuries. This track, perhaps more than any other in the album, demonstrates a compelling balance of simplicity, intricacy, and ambiguity. ****

FILM REVIEW

Film: *Festen (The Celebration)*
Director: Thomas Vinterberg
Distributors: Nimbus Film, Denmark
Reviewer: Jonathan Ledgard

There are moments in *Festen (The Celebration)* when all that has been simply disintegrates. Nothing can ever be the same again. Paternal loyalties fall away, and truth turns in new and unsettling directions.

It is summertime, hot and yellow in the Danish countryside, and the Klingefeldt clan gather to honour the sixtieth birthday of the patriarch, Helge, at his elegant country house hotel. They have barely begun to enjoy the evening banquet when Helge's eldest son, Christian, is invited to make a toast and reveals that his father is in fact a paedophile, whose relentless sexual abuse of Christian and his twin sister, as children, drove her to suicide and him to despair.

The camera work here is jittery and grainy. The sound is stripped of any musical score. It was shot for little money, on videotape, in Danish, with a cast unrecognisable outside Scandinavia, yet it is so compelling that when Helge blurts out his admission over brandy, that he raped the twins because that was all they were good for, it feels like a punch. Actions here have consequences that ripple out, seemingly forever. After watching the film, critics have noted, audiences often sit in silence, stunned at the emotional violence of it all.

Although *Festen* received considerable acclaim, including the 1998 Prix De Jury at Cannes, the director, Thomas Vinterberg's name appeared nowhere on the credits. That, along with the film's distinctive look, was a stipulation of Dogma rules. In 1995, Lars Von Trier, the acclaimed Danish director of *Breaking The Waves*, had an idea for this new style of film making. He called up his friend, Mr Vinterberg, and the two of them drew up a list of how a film should be made. "It was easy," Mr Vinterberg admitted, "we just listed all the things we hated about modern cinema."¹⁴ A so-called vow of chastity was drawn up with which all Dogma films had to comply. There were to be no genre movies, no superficial action, no flashbacks, no added lighting, no props brought in, no make-up, no camera filters, no added sound. Directors would receive no credit. Most importantly, the entire film would be shot with a handheld camera.

Dogma was a cinematic rescue operation, Mr Vinterberg said. "We wanted to purge film so that once again the inner lives of the characters justified the plot." Dogma films make no presumption of what an audience will like. The audience itself, Mr Vinterberg pointed out, does not know what it wants. The entire philosophy brings to mind a comment Aki Kaurismaki, the great Finnish film director, once made. "If you tune a film down to a minimalist level," he said, "the striking of a match is drama." Dogma offers fiscal hope for a more diverse and independent cinema. Instead of expensive pyrotechnics and special effects, a Dogma production needs only a video camera, a cast, and a script. But it is risky. To succeed at all a Dogma

¹⁴ Quotations are from a personal interview by the reviewer with Thomas Vinterberg.

film has to be exquisitely crafted.

The many are no more justified in silencing the one, John Stuart Mill reminded us, than the one is in silencing the many. The justice meted out in *Festen* by Christian's clumsy, courageous revelation, is brutal. Helge is destroyed as a father and a grandfather; his wife is revealed as a betrayer of her own children, a hypocrite who covered up his crimes. You shall know the truth, the Bible says, and the truth shall set you free. For Christian, the surviving victim, a burden is lifted. His sister appears to him in a dream. Shall I come with you, he asks her, offering suicide. No, she replies, smiling.

Were justice "to shed its light upon men," Bahá'u'lláh tells us, "the face of the earth would be completely transformed." In topographical terms, perhaps, at a cinematic stretch, we can see injustice as a flooding sea, a watery deep of lies, greed, fear, and the abuse of power. The face of the "just" earth, drained of injustice, might be an exposed sea floor, an alien place studded with the skeletal shipwrecks of foundered relationships, frightening in its candour, but not we hope too salty for a fresh blanket of meadows and nature's rebirth. The extended Kligenfeldt family, gathering for breakfast the next morning, seem drained by Helge's terrible admission. Exhausted, disorientated and scared, they tread the floor of their own freshly drained sea.

**Bernard Leach, Potter
Biographical Sketch**¹⁵

In order for a potter to begin to throw a perfectly balanced shape, there is one critical routine to be performed - that of “centring” the lump of clay on the wheel. Bernard Leach wrote that: “The clay spins like a top, seeming to prefer the centre of the wheel to any other position, but if the onlooker tries his hand his first discovery is that the clay actually has a preference for any other place than that. So the first thing a beginner has to do, before there can be any question of making shapes at all, is to learn how to centre the clay and keep it centred.”¹⁶

The life of Bernard Leach revolved around just such a centre. From his earliest years, he identified the centre of life as “Spiritual Energy (God).” Later, in the aftermath of the Second World War, he realised that the key to a harmonious and peaceful future was the “replacement of self at the centre of the circle by ‘The Other Power’ – God.”¹⁷ The act of throwing thus became a metaphor for the unique soul, centred in God, allowing itself to become malleable so that His will might use it as a vehicle through which to operate. Leach’s lifelong commitment to the coming together of east and west was reinforced by his belief in the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. But this acceptance and devotion came hard to him, after years of agnosticism, dabbling with eastern spirituality, and doubt.

Bernard Howell Leach was born in Hong Kong on 5 January 1887. His father was a judge, his mother died in childbirth. Shortly after he was born, he was sent to Japan to live with his grandparents, until his father remarried. At school, Leach showed a talent for drawing and in 1903, he went to study at the Slade School of Art under Henry Tonks, transferring later to etching classes at the London School of Art. During this period, freed from his Roman Catholic background, he opted for agnosticism. At the Slade he formed a lifelong friendship with the painter Reginald Turvey who would also in later years become a Bahá’í.

In the spring of 1909, Leach returned to Japan. For two years, he drew, painted and tried to introduce etching to Japanese artists. He married his cousin, Muriel, built a house and lived on an income from his father’s will and remained in Japan for the best part of eleven years. It was in 1911 that Leach’s much-reported epiphany with pottery occurred at a *raku* party. Here, guests were invited to decorate pots which were then immediately plunged into a burning kiln to be fired. Leach was entranced by the process, amazed that the pots did not explode. Through the craft of pottery, he sensed a way could be found to transfer the values and techniques of the past into the future, bringing east and west together, allowing the artist to have a wholesome impact on people’s lives in a mechanised society. Leach was suspicious of industrial methods and blamed them for the destruction of spiritual values in society. It was during this period that Leach developed his fundamental philosophy about east and

¹⁵ Adapted from the introduction to *Spinning the Clay into Stars – Bernard Leach and the Bahá’í Faith*, ed. by Robert Weinberg (Oxford: George Ronald, 1999).

¹⁶ Leach, *A Potters Book* (London: Faber & Faber, 1940) 71.

¹⁷ Leach, *My Religious Faith* (London: NSA of the Bahá’is of the UK, 1987).

west. To him, the West embodied materialistic values, an over-emphasis on the intellectual and the mechanical, while the east represented spirituality and intuition. Coincidentally, it was during this period also that Leach first encountered the Bahá'í Faith through the person of Agnes Alexander, who had been encouraged by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to pioneer to Japan. Leach asked her why she was there, to which she replied, "You will not understand, but I came because a little old Persian Gentleman asked me to come."¹⁸

When Leach returned home in 1920, he hoped that he could introduce his newly discovered enthusiasms into England. He wanted his pottery to be appreciated in the same way as fine art was and saw himself fundamentally as an artist-potter. He was accompanied to Britain by Hamada and the two men set about founding the Leach pottery at St. Ives in Cornwall. The lack of suitable raw materials in the area meant that the challenges were immense but they forged ahead, building a traditional wood-fired eastern kiln consisting of three chambers.

Leach was shocked by the lack of interest in artist pottery in England. Their work was criticised as precious and eclectic, at worst dull. Soon, out of financial necessity, Leach was forced to reinvent himself more as a functional potter, initially opting for tile production but later moving into a whole range of ware for use in the home. For the rest of his life, he would promote a philosophy by which the potter, in the repetition of similar shapes and forms, expanded his true spirit at the expense of the lesser ego. The Leach Pottery began to take on students who carried out much of the production work. More than a hundred pupils worked in the pottery over the decades.

Leach, however, longed to reconcile the dilemma he faced between his beliefs about the value of pottery as an art form and the necessity of producing a range of functional items for the home to ensure a regular income. His marriage to Muriel was also running into difficulties and increasingly he felt the need to break away. What appeared to be the perfect solution was offered when he was invited to set up a pottery in 1932 at Dartington Hall in Devon, an experimental community founded by Dorothy and Leonard Elmhurst who hoped to integrate education, arts and crafts with the agricultural work on their large estate. The Elmhursts were also fascinated by oriental thinking and practices and Dartington became a magnet to all manner of creative minds. It was here that Leach began a devoted friendship with the American painter Mark Tobey, a practising Bahá'í.

The two men talked especially about Tobey's belief in Bahá'u'lláh. "After my loss of faith at about the age of eighteen," wrote Leach, "following a long period of uncertainty, this was more than I could take."¹⁹ Nevertheless Leach read the Bahá'í literature which Tobey had given to him and went to meetings of the Bahá'ís which deeply challenged him. In 1934, the Elmhursts, seeing how close Tobey's friendship with Leach had become, gave Tobey the funds to accompany him to the orient. After a week in Hong Kong, the two friends separated, Tobey stopping in Shanghai while Leach went to Japan, where Tobey later joined him. There Tobey studied calligraphy and painting, writing, poetry and meditation. During the period while they were apart, Leach realised that the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith were totally "without egocentricity." "I found myself convinced, almost against my will, that the absence of

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Leach, *Beyond East and West* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978) 164.

self implied the presence of Truth – the Universal ‘I am that I am.’”²⁰ Leach saw this realisation as a door opening between Buddhism and Christianity, between east and west but he still struggled with the concept of Bahá’u’lláh’s claim to being a manifestation of God. It was not until 1940, at a public meeting in Torquay, Leach asked the speaker Hasan Balyuzi whether it was sufficient to consider Bahá’u’lláh as a “spiritual genius.” Balyuzi replied “Yes” at which point Leach “declared” his faith in Bahá’u’lláh.

Returning to England in 1936, Leach moved permanently to Dartington with his secretary Laurie Cookes who would become his second wife. His son David continued to run the St. Ives pottery allowing his father time to concentrate on writing a book on pottery making which became a bible for the ceramicist’s art and is still in print today, *A Potter’s Book*. During the years of the second world war, Leach was in the privileged position to be able to keep the St. Ives pottery running in spite of the fact that many of its workers were conscripted. At the end of the war, this gave him the great advantage of being able to satisfy the boom in consumer demand and supply the major London department stores with pottery which was attractive and refreshing to customers who had become bored with the plainness of wartime products. Leach also became a member of a national committee looking after the interests of craftsmen. Consequently, Leach had an enormous impact on the standards and ethics of the British craft movement. The outcome of these reforming endeavours in the 1940s was the establishment of the Crafts Centre of Great Britain which received an annual grant from the government.

1948 saw Leach’s second marriage in trouble. Despite having formally accepted the fundamental principles of the Bahá’í Faith, Leach had not yet fully come to terms with the claims of Bahá’u’lláh as a divinely-inspired Messenger from God. He was open about his belief in the teachings with his close friends and colleagues but, “there remained a hidden wavering” on the issue of the station of Bahá’u’lláh, “which undermined my activity.”²¹

In 1950 Leach travelled in the United States for four months at the invitation of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Washington. While there he met a young potter named Janet Darnell who subsequently became the third Mrs Leach. The immediate post-war years meant good business for the Leach Pottery, and Leach found time to develop further his theories of the contribution potters might make to society. A turning point in his thinking occurred in July 1952 when he organised the International Conference of Craftsmen in Pottery and Textiles at Dartington.

Leach hoped the conference would raise the issues which confronted craftsmen in contemporary society and what they could do to transform society. What he found however was a sudden awareness of how small a group of people he was expecting to change the world through the integrity of crafts. As a result, he found his wavering on the Bahá’í Faith was broken down. He came to understand more fully that individualism does not answer the communal need and that unity was the only solution to meeting the needs of society and ensuring survival. “I believe that Bahá’u’lláh was a Manifestation and that His work was to provide the spiritual foundation upon which the society of mankind could be established,” he wrote to his

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 165.

²¹ Leach, *Religious Faith*.

friends and associates, "In becoming a convinced Bahá'í, the only discarding of slowly gathered convictions has been the replacement of self at the centre of the circle by... God – and the result has been strange, for the jigsaw pieces begin to fall into place – seemingly by themselves."²² Leach's religious sentiments were even more stirred when in 1954, he was able to make a pilgrimage to the Bahá'í holy places in Israel and personally meet with Shoghi Effendi. His experience praying in the shrines had a profound effect on him, reinforced his feeling that he should step up his efforts to unite east and west, and return to the Orient to "try more honestly to do my work there as a Bahá'í and as an artist..."²³

Leach planned to move with Janet to Japan leaving the St. Ives pottery in the hands of his sons, David and Michael. However, both sons left to set up their own potteries and Janet took charge of the day to day running of St. Ives, thus freeing Bernard up to concentrate on his art pieces, exhibiting, travelling and lecturing.

The remaining two decades of Leach's long life were filled with activity – exhibitions throughout the world, the accumulation of awards, honours and honorary degrees. The marriage to Janet was not an altogether happy one either but they remained united by their interest in Japan, and their mutual respect endured.

As his life drew to a close, Bernard Leach was increasingly horrified by the world's nuclear arsenals and the implications of the Cuban missile crisis. He felt instinctively that he should use his position of fame and respect to speak out on the Bahá'í solutions to the world's problems. Thus the octogenarian Leach spent his mornings working on articles and books, and would arrive at the pottery in the afternoon to make his pots. As his eyesight failed in the early 1970s, it did not frustrate him to the extent that people might have expected. For Leach, it was almost a release and he was no longer torn between potting and developing his writing on religious matters. He accepted his loss of sight as the will of God. He died in 1979, aged 92, following a major retrospective exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the publication of his memoirs *Beyond East and West*.

Leach's death was widely reported throughout the world. On hearing of his death, the Universal House of Justice sent a cable saying "HONOURS CONFERRED UPON HIM RECOGNITION HIS WORLDWIDE FAME CRAFTSMAN POTTER PROMOTER CONCORD EAST AND WEST ADD LUSTRE ANNALS BRITISH BAHAI HISTORY AND HIS EAGER WILLINGNESS USE HIS RENOWN FOR SERVICE FAITH EARN ETERNAL GRATITUDE FELLOW BELIEVERS."²⁴

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Letter from Bernard Leach to Reginald Turvey, 25 January 1955, reproduced in Johnson, *Reginald Turvey: Life & Art* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1986) 55.

²⁴ Trudi Scott, "Bernard Leach" in *The Bahá'í World* Vol. XVIII (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1986) 671.

OBITUARIES

**Alimurad Davudi (1922-1979 [kidnapped, presumed dead])
Professor of Philosophy, Bahá'í Administrator,
Probable Victim of State Execution**

Some twenty years after his kidnapping and probable execution by agents of the Iranian government, Alimurad Davudi's memory remains powerful in the minds and hearts of his many admirers. For those who heard his talks in Iran, the now available transcripts of his lectures provide another opportunity to "hear" Davudi's rhythmic and measured speech, always delivered with exceptional eloquence, despite his usual lack of any preparation. He was an outstanding Bahá'í administrator, a professor of philosophy at Tehran University, and perhaps the foremost intellect of his generation in the 500,000-strong Iranian Bahá'í community. Nasr, a well-known Iranian Islamicist at George Washington University, in his survey of philosophy in modern Iran, counted Davudi among a small number of first rate philosophers in that country.¹ Davudi's study of philosophy in a country where the practical sciences such as engineering and medicine were highly regarded said much about his courage and independence of mind.

Alimurad Davudi was born in 1922 in Shams-Abad, a 600-family village in Iranian Azarbaijan that was owned by his family and which he later inherited. His mother was the granddaughter of Fath Ali Shah and his father was the grandson of the military commander of Georgia. Both his parents were recipients of several letters from 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. At the age of 10, Davudi left Shams-Abad for Tabriz, the provincial capital, where he lived for 8 years. Davudi described his sober youth in an interview:

I didn't have much of a youth. This is not to advise the youth now not to enjoy their lives, but just to say that due to my temperament, I felt myself old much earlier than would be natural or necessary. Generally I did not feel a great sense of joy in those years and spent very little time on games and sports and entertainment. Instead I spent most of my time reading. I don't say this as a good thing, but as I was something of a recluse and didn't relate to people too easily, reading was a kind of refuge for me.... My only regret now is that I didn't serve the Bahá'í Faith much during my youth.²

On finishing high school, Davudi left for Tehran where he graduated from the teacher training college after three years studying education, literature and

¹ S. H. Nasr, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia*, edited by Mehdi Aminrazavi (London: Curzon Press, London) 1996.

² Quoted in *The Collected Works of Dr Ali-Murad Davudi* (Persian), Volume One, compiled and edited by Vahid Rafati, (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1987).

philosophy. He then taught Persian literature at various schools in different Iranian towns. In Zanjan, at the age of thirty-one, he married Maliki Afagh Iranpoor, who became a Bahá'í some twenty years later. They had three daughters and two sons. The young family spent their summer holidays at Davudi's ancestral village where he would see to the health and educational needs of the villagers by, for example, building public baths and schools.

In 1955, at the age of thirty-three, Davudi moved back to Tehran and began to study philosophy at Tehran University while working full-time as a school teacher. He spent one year in France to improve his command of French (which proved important for his later translations of French philosophical texts; see below). In 1964, he gained one of the first doctorates in philosophy ever awarded by Tehran University with a thesis on Aristotle and Descartes. He was then invited to join the university's faculty where he subsequently became a professor.

Davudi was elected to the Iranian Bahá'í community's national governing body (the National Spiritual Assembly or NSA) in 1973. He became its secretary (or its chief executive officer) one year later. This position entailed substantial travel throughout the country, leaving little time for his writing and lecturing. He once commented that he much preferred an academic life to an administrative life, but he nonetheless served the Bahá'í community tirelessly and accepted neither a salary for what was effectively full-time work nor reimbursement for expenses. In addition to his wide-ranging administrative responsibilities as NSA secretary, he played a key role in the development of Bahá'í literature in Iran, serving on both the national publishing and review committees. He also made a significant contribution to the deepening work of the community, co-supervising (with Badiullah Farid) the establishment of the institute for advanced Bahá'í studies in 1976, an initiative proposed by the Universal House of Justice to promote scholarship and research, especially among young Bahá'ís: "The training of a few talented youth with the capacity and ability to undertake research and acquire deep knowledge in the field of religious studies and mysticism is very important."² Davudi devised much of the institute's curriculum, including classes on philosophy and mysticism in which he encouraged the study of primary texts (rather than the prevailing preference for commentaries), especially by Islamic authors such as Attar, Tusi and Shabestari whom he believed provided a rich context for understanding Bahá'í mystical writings.

Perhaps Davudi's most important contributions to the Bahá'í community were his lectures and writings. He was a very popular speaker: his university classes attracted large audiences, and he devoted a great deal of his time to Bahá'í youth, running regular study classes in Tehran and at summer schools. I attended two summer schools for youth in Iran where Dr Davudi gave impressive talks on rational proofs for the existence of God and the concept of Godhood and manifestation in the Bahá'í writings. The youth, in return, admired him greatly. One of his pupils writes: "Students truly love him and regard him as their teacher. He is one of those rare teachers with whom, when the time comes for saying good-bye, many of the students are in tears."²

His rare gift for public speaking was described by Hooshang Mahmudi (also a member of the NSA of Iran who was himself kidnapped and presumed killed in August 1980 for being a member of that body). He frequently drove Davudi to the recording studio for his regular taped lectures that were subsequently distributed as cassette tapes to the Bahá'í community. Mahmudi recounts how Davudi was

normally informed of the subject matter of his talk for the first time on the way to the studio. He would then deliver a detailed and eloquent lecture without notes, from memory, and without any need to edit or retape any sections of the recorded talk.

Davudi had a distinctive and absorbing literary style reflected both in his talks and written work. In addition to Persian, the extensive use of Arabic quotations in his talks revealed his fluency in both languages. His superb literary skills were evident even in rudimentary NSA correspondence, while the annual reports written and read by him at national conventions were greatly appreciated by delegates for the beauty of their prose.

Davudi's lectures and writings on philosophical and metaphysical themes from a Bahá'í standpoint probably still remain unmatched in the Bahá'í world, and are rich and untapped resources for serious Bahá'í scholars. His essay on "Divinity and Oneness" and his talks on "The Station of Bahá'u'lláh" shed light on some of the foundational aspects of Bahá'í beliefs. His essays and lectures on life after death; the meaning of freedom; freewill and determinism; the station of man; prayer; the soul; philosophy; the study of history; science and religion; and non-involvement in politics are impressive examples of his ability to apply his substantial knowledge of western and Islamic philosophy and the Bahá'í writings to diverse areas of vital interest to Bahá'ís.

His writings on Bahá'í themes were published by Bahá'í journals in Iran or separately as booklets. His publications in the field of philosophy consisted primarily of translations into Persian of French philosophical works. Most of these were published by Tehran University Press and included works by L. Meynard, Emile Brehier and Etienne Gilson. He also published original articles in the journal of the Faculty of Literature and Humanities of Tehran University on the philosophy of Farabi, Avicenna, and the Greek philosophers.

After the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the society of Muslim students declared Dr Davudi "anti-Islamic" and "anti-revolutionary." He found it impossible to continue his work as a professor and resigned from his post. During this time, members of militant Islamic groups frequently gathered outside his house. In the midst of the escalating persecution of the Iranian Bahá'ís, Davudi was the most visible member of the national body that had the task of representing the Bahá'í community and defending the rights of its members to the new government. As secretary of the NSA he also had to encourage the community through letters and talks to be patient and to act with wisdom, co-ordinate relief efforts, and do what he could to protect the community and mitigate its suffering.

He was aware of the danger he faced and had prepared himself for arrest and imprisonment. His daughter described the situation:

In April 79, a few months after the Revolution, I went to Iran and begged my father to go to the USA or Canada. He refused, saying that the Bahá'í youth in Iran needed him and he did not want to disappoint them. The phone would ring all day and night and he would talk to the friends, comforting and consoling them. He also received several phone calls from people who said that they were coming to arrest him. I cried so much. All my father did was to pack his pyjamas, razor, aftershave and prayer book in a small bag and kept it by his bed and waited. In all that time he didn't even look concerned. I cannot forget his smiles in those days.²

A few days before his disappearance he told one of his relatives that "I have not suffered much for Bahá'u'lláh. I have not even been slapped on my face for the Faith. I hope that I have a chance to attain this honour."²

A glimpse into the character and devotional attitude of Dr Davudi can be discerned from the account of his visit to the house of the Bab in Shiraz soon after its partial destruction in 1979 by the government authorities. He had asked for arrangements to be made for him to be taken there. At this stage, the house had already been severely damaged, its roof caved in, walls broken and doors and windows smashed, with piles of rubble and debris in every room. As Davudi approached the stairs leading to the upper room where the Bab had declared himself to Mulla Hussein, he removed his shoes, climbed the stairs and, with great reverence and unconcerned with the state of the building, simply sat on a heap of broken stonework, surrounded by the debris, and prayed.

On 11 November 1979, while out for a walk alone in a park near his home in Tehran, Davudi was kidnapped. The newspaper *Liberation Front* reported the incident with the headline, "Dr Davudi, University Professor, is Kidnapped." He was never seen again. The Iranian government has denied any involvement in his disappearance, but three revolutionary guards later admitted that Dr Davudi had indeed been kidnapped on the order of the government.

*Novin Doostdar*³

³ In writing this article I have relied heavily on the three volumes of essays and transcribed and edited talks of Dr Davudi produced by Dr Vahid Rafati. Dr Rafati has rendered the Bahá'í world a tremendous service in compiling these volumes, which also contain a substantial amount of biographical material on the life and works of Dr Davudi.

James Heggie (1915-1992)**Teacher, Administrator, Compiler of Bahá'í writings**

James Heggie was a teacher, administrator, and scholar of the Bahá'í Faith. In his childhood Jim's family migrated from Scotland to Canada in search of a better life. When he expressed interest in a young woman who did not meet the approval of his family, Jim was handed a one-way ticket to visit relatives in Australia. While the intention was that he would forget the lass while earning his fare home, Jim decided to stay in the antipodes, and rarely saw his family again. He was 20 when he arrived in Sydney and 22 when he encountered the Bahá'í teachings through Oswald Whitaker in 1937. At the age of 26, having completed his studies in chiropractic at B. J. Palmer's Chiropractic college in Davenport, Iowa, he met the Faith's leader, Shoghi Effendi, while serving with the Australian Army in the middle east; and at the age of 32, the year of his marriage to Merle Brooks, he was first elected to the national spiritual assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand. He served on the national spiritual assembly for all but a few years from then until 1972, including many years as national secretary. He died in 1992.

The Bahá'í community

In 1937 the Sydney Bahá'í community had fifteen members, including Clara and Hyde Dunn, who had brought the Faith to Australia in 1920. On occasion Jim visited the Dunns, assisting Hyde, who was by then advanced in years, and almost blind, with his papers. Jim was also a regular guest of Oswald Whitaker.

I had actually attended a meeting or two of some weird nature, and was associated with a Christian Scientist when in July I found myself in need of the service of an optometrist - and so by chance I called in to the George Street shop of Alex Hale, to find Mr. O. Whitaker who not only prescribed the necessary spectacles but also attracted me so that I'd always call on him to say hello and talk a little (though it meant waiting perhaps an hour to do so). After a few weeks I was invited to a youth meeting at Mr. Whitaker's home where I first heard the word Bahá'í. The following weekend when I visited the George Street shop I told Mr. Whitaker I wasn't interested in religion and he said that it didn't matter and that we'd talk of 'science', for he was wonderfully informative, so that soon I came to realize that my disbelief was not against religion but against the inadequate church doctrines.⁴

Other small Bahá'í groups existed in Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth, and Auckland, and together numbered approximately 100. Of Bahá'ís his own age, Jim recalled:

In 1937 there were three Bahá'í youth, Lucy Trueman and Merle Brooks in Adelaide and myself in Sydney (though I didn't meet them

⁴ Undated memoir in the possession of the author.

until I returned from Palestine in 1942). In Sydney there were three Bolton children, in Adelaide two Dobbins children, and at Booleroo South Australia, two Brooks, all of whom continued in the Faith - three other children of Bahá'ís did not continue as Bahá'ís.

Not long after Jim became a Bahá'í, preparations commenced for the visit of Martha Root, a travelling Bahá'í teacher. He attended her lectures in Sydney, and in Honolulu in August 1939 was the last Australian Bahá'í to see her, shortly before her death.

The Australian and New Zealand Bahá'í communities were not only small in numbers but were relatively unfamiliar with each other, as the costs of travel and the vast distances between the major centres inhibited regular contact. Although the first national convention was held in Sydney in 1934, the national body was elected by correspondence during the war years when travel for non-military purposes was impossible.

Meeting Shoghi Effendi

Jim volunteered for the Australian Army's medical corps, knowing that volunteers had a choice of field of service, and anticipating that a posting somewhere in the middle east would enable him to visit the Holy Land and meet Shoghi Effendi. The decision was a conscious one; a colleague had offered to sign papers that would have exempted him from service (on the grounds that his services were essential to a business), but Jim was intent on meeting the Guardian. According to Jim's memoir:

My first project upon joining the army was to take steps to get sent to the Middle East where after several months of army training (in the medical corps) I arrived late November. We couldn't get leave for a full month so it wasn't until just before Christmas 1941 that I got to Haifa on three days leave. After some difficulty I was able to contact the Bahá'ís, finding the Guardian just before dark inspecting the terracing of the Bahá'í gardens on Mt. Carmel and arranging to meet him the next morning. But that evening I was taken to the Archives by the Guardian's brother. Rúhíyyih Khánum welcomed me the next morning at the house of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and sat in at the interview with the Guardian. The first of many. I was the first westerner to visit Haifa for over two years, and as I'd just recently been to Wilmette the Guardian asked of many of the friends, especially of Hyde Dunn, who'd died early in the year. I was able on that occasion to visit 'Akká and Bahjí and the Garden of Ridván. I asked if it was possible to get a Bahá'í ring-stone as well as some photos of recent date of Haifa and the offer of any Bahá'í book I desired; as the only one I hadn't read was the recently published Epistle to the Son of the Wolf I chose that book. Also I had an invitation to stay at the Western Pilgrim House on my next visit - which was a month later. This time I made the acquaintance of Sutherland Maxwell who was staying in Haifa at the time, had a number of interviews with the Guardian, one of which was of over an

hour, and again visited 'Akká and Bahjí. This time I met the father of Shoghi Effendi who had rooms at Bahjí. The Guardian liked to meet the young Bahá'ís and to talk to them – they certainly felt the impact, and for a life time. I couldn't tell anyone what the feelings were that I went through during those visits to the Guardian but they established a direction and planted a seed that has never ceased to grow. I was the first male believer from Australia that the Guardian had met, before that he's only met three others – Effie Baker in 1925, Clara Dunn about 1933, and Ethel Dawe in 1938 on her return from England.

Soon after these visits Jim received a letter written by the Guardian's secretary: "He was very happy indeed to meet you, and feels that if you are an example of the Bahá'í youth of Australia, they will render the Cause many valuable services."⁵ A day later Shoghi Effendi expressed similar sentiments when writing to the Australian and New Zealand national assembly:

A few days ago Mr Jim Heggie came to see the Guardian. He was able to visit all the shrines and archives as well. Shoghi Effendi was delighted with him; he found him devoted, full of faith and zeal, and very well read in the teachings. He feels that if this is a sample of the Bahá'í youth of Australia, there is, indeed, a wonderful future ahead of that country!⁶

These few lines had a significant impact on Jim, who felt that they implied he should remain in Australia and not consider returning to Canada.

Family and career

Jim returned from Palestine in 1942 and in 1943 was posted to Buna in New Guinea. At the end of the war he returned to New South Wales. Stanley W. and Mariette Bolton, who had also graduated from Palmer College, employed Jim in their chiropractic business. As already noted, Jim married Merle Brooks in 1947. Merle continued her career as a teacher of English and music, and raised their children Jennifer, Adrian and Christopher. In 1948 the Heggies moved to Brisbane to work toward the formation of the first assembly there. They later returned to Sydney, where they helped establish a local assembly in Hunters Hill. In 1960 Jim established his own chiropractic clinic in Parramatta, where he remained until retiring from full-time practice in 1987.⁷

Promoting the Bahá'í Faith

⁵ 25 December 1941, *Messages to the Antipodes* (Mona Vale: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1997) 178.

⁶ 26 December 1941, *Messages to the Antipodes* 178-180.

⁷ At which time Jim passed the practice to Christopher Heggie.

In addition to work, Jim became much involved in Bahá'í teaching activities. Jim was an effective teacher of the Faith, especially in the 1940s, when there were few new Bahá'ís in any one year. He was able to teach actively during his army years:

Wherever I was in the army I was able to speak of the Faith and thus caused many hundreds to hear of Bahá'u'lláh. The first to respond and accept the Faith was a young farmer near Warwick, Queensland. The only other, one in my hospital unit who became a Bahá'í in Buna, New Guinea in 1943. No doubt the first New Guinea believer. In fact it was my presence in New Guinea for two and a half years and that of Jim Chittleborough in Milne Bay that allowed the Guardian to state in *God Passes By* the opening up of those areas of the Faith.

In 1946 Jim was appointed to the regional teaching committee for the states of New South Wales and Queensland, and was elected secretary. In 1948 he commenced service on the national teaching committee, and was frequently a speaker at firesides and public meetings.

The national spiritual assembly

In 1947 Jim was elected to the national assembly, and elected secretary. That year also marked the commencement of Australia's first six-year plan. The national assembly negotiated a number of transitions in the 1940s. Hilda Books of Adelaide, (Merle Heggie's aunt), had been secretary of the national assembly from its establishment in 1934 until 1944, when it was decided that the secretary should work from the newly acquired national Bahá'í centre at 2 Lang Rd, Paddington, in Sydney. Dulcie Dive was elected to the position, and transferred her residence from Auckland.

Jim was not elected to the national assembly in 1951-52, but was re-elected in 1953, the year the ten-year plan commenced. Six members of the assembly elected that year pioneered to Islands in Asia and the Pacific, and at a by-election in January 1954 Jim was once more elected secretary. He subsequently served on the national assembly every year until 1972, except for the year 1969; in that year, however, national assembly member John Davidson was appointed as an auxiliary board member and Jim was elected as his replacement in a by-election.

Each year from 1954 until 1967 (except 1957-59) Jim served as secretary of the national assembly. As an administrator of Bahá'í institutions, therefore, Jim played a vital role during the years of the ten-year and the nine-year plans. In these years Bahá'í communities were established in all the neighbouring islands of the Pacific, the house of worship was built in Sydney, and large-scale systematic proclamation activities were implemented.

In 1955 he received a letter from Shoghi Effendi asking the national assembly to commence plans, in the strictest confidence, for the construction of a house of worship in Sydney. Detailed investigations into the design, and the costs of construction had to be undertaken before they were announced to the community in the Guardian's 1957 convention message. For nearly two years Jim and his fellow members of the national assembly laboured on these plans in secret, as Shoghi Effendi did not want the community to be disappointed should they have to be

postponed for whatever reason. Between 1957 and 1961 Jim remained closely involved in the construction work. Likewise, for the three decades following the dedication of the house of worship, from 1961 until his passing, both Jim and Merle devoted themselves its support. For at least a decade Jim printed the programmes for Sunday services. Dressed always in a dark suit, he stood at the entrance to the temple prior to the Sunday services (in earlier years held at 3pm and more recently, at 11am), with a stern yet kindly face, handing programmes to visitors.

Jim's departure from the Australian national assembly is intriguing. He had attended the international convention in Haifa in 1973, and having been encouraged in his work by Hugh Chance and Ali Nakjavani, he announced at the subsequent Australian national convention shortly afterwards that he would be moving to Haifa to continue his indexing. However, he had perhaps acted too quickly, as he was subsequently informed that he should continue his work from Australia. Perhaps he was happy to have this news spread. In any case, relief from the burden of national assembly service would allow him to pursue his other activities.

Jim's character

Jim was an intensely practical man whose character was frank and down-to-earth. He showed little desire for material wealth, or for any form of status. As his youngest son Christopher explains:

Dad was offered a commission (having reached the level of Staff Sergeant) but declined as he preferred to remain with his men. This was viewed with askance by some, but dad had absolutely no pretensions to that form of leadership, military or civil.⁸

He had dry sense of humour that he spread throughout his time-consuming tasks. At one time, when writing to Shirin Fozdar about her travel in Australia he mentioned that Frank Wyss had obtained a three-month visa that allowed him to go to the remote Cocos Islands:

Mr Frank Wyss left Friday by plane for Cocos and can stay for two months without permission - he'll have to apply for an extension from the island. As there is no accommodation it will be necessary for him to camp on the island. He took a tent and food with him. I fear he will find it very quiet...⁹

At another time he wrote to Alvin Blum in the Solomon Islands with news of efforts to settle the difficult post of Loyalty Islands:

We have a Mr Shapur Suhaili ... in Sydney at the moment on his way to

⁸ Chris Heggie, November 1999.

⁹ 6 June 1955. 0025/0007. Australian national Bahá'í archives.

New Caledonia. He is trying to crack Loyalty: anyway, we'll see what things are like when he gets there.¹⁰

Scholarship

Study of the Bahá'í teachings has been an integral part of the life of the Australian Bahá'í community since its inception. In addition to providing study and deepening activities at community level, summer schools at Yerrinbool commenced in 1938 and contributed to an emerging ethos of systematic learning. Jim Heggie's contribution to this tradition was to move beyond personal study to the production of texts for use by a wider audience. In an age before computers, and in which the Bahá'í writings were gradually appearing in print in English, his principal contribution was the production of indexes and concordances that facilitated systematic study, and in some cases brought together passages thematically. He stated in a 1985 memoir:

Though Bahá'í literature was very limited, we had the *New Era*, *Gleanings*, *The Hidden Words* and *Some Answered Questions*, I found myself learning a new language and toying with such words as Manifestation, Omniscient, Omnipotent. I found myself confirmed in Bahá'í belief long before I met any of the members of the Sydney community, at that time of fifteen members...

In the 1940s he also learnt Braille, and commenced producing Bahá'í books for the blind.

Through the 1940s into the 1960s Jim provided information on the Bahá'í Faith for a number of publications. In the 1950s, for instance, he assisted the Rev. E. H. Vines (Minister of St. Margaret's Presbyterian Church at Turramurra, and Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in New South Wales) with information about the Bahá'í Faith for the 1958 edition of his study in comparative religions, *Gems of the East*. He subsequently wrote an entry for *The Australian Encyclopaedia*, published by the Grolier Society in 1962.

While studying in North America 1939-41, Jim became friends with Gertrude Struven. Each month she came to Devonport to speak at public meetings he organised as part of an effort to establish a local assembly in the city. Mrs Struven had written a manuscript on Islam that had not made it into print. Whatever the reason for this, she impressed on Jim the significance of the study of Islam for Bahá'ís, and he embarked on one of his life-long interests. His *Qur'anic Study* index, produced in 1946, was authorised by the Australian national spiritual assembly for distribution in 1957. His undated work *Muhammad and Islam: A Bahá'í Qur'anic Study* includes a 38-page essay introducing Islam's key teachings and history, Islamic references found in the Bahá'í writings and in the Bible, and a note on the history of the Imamate.

Jim accomplished his projects by rising early, and spending some time in his study before departing for work. On evenings and weekends he combined these

¹⁰ NSA to Blums, 20/4/55, "ATC of the NSA of Australia and New Zealand" – Honiara.

projects with other administrative and community activities, and regular attendance on Sundays at the house of worship.

George Ronald has published *An Index of Quotations from the Sacred Writings*¹¹ and *Bahá'í References to Judaism, Christianity and Islam*.¹² But most of Jim's projects remain unpublished in book form: *Bahá'í Scriptural Index*;¹³ *Index to the Writings of Shoghi Effendi*;¹⁴ *Index, God Passes By*;¹⁵ *An Index of Quotations from the Writings of Shoghi Effendi*;¹⁶ *An Index of Quotations from the Bahá'í Sacred Writings, Vol II*; Indices to "*Selections from the Writings of the Báb*", "*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*", and "*Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*"; an "*Index to Promulgation of Universal Peace and Star of the West*"; *Some Studies, Vol I, II, III*; and an *Index to the Compilation of Compilations*.¹⁷ In November 1991, Jim compiled 57 quotations under the title "Spiritual Aspects of Health." Some of these projects were reproduced by Gestetner and sold by the Bahá'í Book Committee. MacEoin also lists *Messages from the Guardian Taken from Bahá'í News*.¹⁸

These works are far more creative and useful than the terms "Index" and "Compilation" imply. Those that are compilations draw together Bahá'í writings on a theme in insightful ways, and those that are indexes find subjects in their content that may not be apparent on a first reading. Thus Heggie's indexes and compilations in fact offer original insights into the meanings that the texts convey. Although many feel that compilations have been superseded by the power of the computer, an alternative view is that compilations continue to be useful "because they are the product of long hours of intellectual activity in matching texts to subjects. The keyword searching that one does on computer databases does not necessarily retrieve everything relevant or exclude everything irrelevant."¹⁹

Jim could not have imagined having a large audience for his work when he first commenced these studies, and so he adopted the habit of binding a small number of volumes for presentation as gifts, mostly to family, but also to a few fortunate friends. That Jim Heggie has left a legacy of indexes and concordances, rather than essays and commentaries, indicates another of his defining characteristics: a casual conversation with him would include precise references concerning the topic in the Bahá'í writings. As a scholar, Jim was singularly interested in mastering the content

11 James Heggie, *An Index of Quotations from the Bahá'í Sacred Writings* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1983) 811pp.

12 James Heggie, *Bahá'í References to Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1986).

13 n.p. [Australia], n.d. [1971].

14 n.p. [Australia], 1972. This was also titled "Bahá'í Concordance Vol II."

15 n.p. [Sydney, N.S.W.]: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia, 1976.

16 n.p. [Australia], n.d. [1984].

17 *Compilation of Compilations* (Mona Vale: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991).

18 Comp. James Heggie. [Australia], 1972, 97 pages. Listed in Denis MacEoin's "The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions: an annotated bibliography," at <http://www.bahai-library.org/books/biblio/>

19 Ralph Wagner, Westfield State College Library, posted to Bahai-Studies on 21 February 2000.

of the “Creative Word” rather than commenting on it. He never lost the zeal that Shoghi Effendi had identified during those three fateful interviews in Haifa.

At his passing the Universal House of Justice cabled:

DEEPLY DISTRESSED LEARN PASSING JAMES HEGGIE WHO
RENDERED OUTSTANDING SERVICES CAUSE BAHAUULLAH IN
ANTIPODES OVER FIVE DECADES HIS DEVOTED
ENDEAVOURS MANY YEARS MEMBER NATIONAL SPIRITUAL
ASSEMBLY AUSTRALIA INCLUDING LENGTHY PERIOD
SECRETARY CONTRIBUTED ESTABLISHMENT SOUND
ADMINISTRATIVE FOUNDATION NATIONAL COMMUNITY.
LOVINGLY RECALL HIS CONSTANT DEDICATION TEACHING
CAUSE HIS ENTHUSIASM STUDY WRITINGS FAITH HIS
SCHOLARLY WORKS VARIOUS ASPECTS TEACHINGS ...

*Graham Hassall*²⁰

²⁰ I thank Christopher Heggie and Merle Heggie for providing helpful information.

References of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi to *The Hidden Words*

Introduction

“That marvellous collection of gem-like utterances, the ‘Hidden Words’ with which Bahá’u’lláh was inspired, as He paced, wrapped in His meditations, the banks of the Tigris.”¹ Such is the Guardian’s description of the *Kalimát-i Maknúna*² (Baghdad c.1858), probably Bahá’u’lláh’s best known and most widely translated work.³ The broad popularity of the *Hidden Words* means this enlightening, if somewhat slim, compilation of passages from the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi will be of interest both to scholar and general reader alike. Future publication of an annotated edition of the *Hidden Words*, incorporating the quotations in this selection together with previously translated and published references, would greatly assist us all to gain greater insight into this work which occupies a position of “unsurpassed pre-eminence among the...ethical writings of the Author of the Bahá’í Dispensation.”⁴

It is interesting to note that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá advised daily recitation of the *Hidden Words* (2). This is perhaps why selections from the Arabic and Persian sections of the work appeared in early printed prayer books such as *Ad’íyya-yi arat-i Mabúb*.⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s emphasis on personal conduct (3, 4, 25, 28, and 35) is noteworthy, although not surprising given the mainly ethical concerns of the work, and his use of the New Testament (9) and the Qur’án (19) to expound the meaning of certain passages in the *Hidden Words* is a good example of Bahá’í scriptural correlation.⁶

Shoghi Effendi’s comments on the circumstances of the revelation of the *Kalimát-i Maknúna* and its link to the mythical “Hidden Book of Fatima” (5) suggest that the Guardian valued research into the historical and literary background of Bahá’í scripture. Perhaps future annotated editions could also include valuable information on the *Hidden Words* uncovered in more recent Bahá’í scholarship.⁷ Passage 13 of the compilation illustrates the evolution of the Guardian’s translation

¹ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Company, 1950) 140.

² *The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh*: Arabic, Persian and English edition (Brazil: Editoria Bahá’í, 1995).

³ Cf. Diana Malouf, *Unveiling the Hidden Words* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997) 67-107 on English translations of the *Kalimát-i Maknúna*.

⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 140.

⁵ Published in Egypt (76 BE, c.1919) by Farraju’lláh Dhakíy al-Kurdí.

⁶ Bahá’u’lláh quotes from the New Testament just as he would from the Qur’án to illustrate his theological arguments (cf. *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and *Javáhir al-Asrár*), something extremely uncommon in Shi’i texts.

⁷ Cf. Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Baha’u’llah* 1:71-83; Franklin Lewis, “Scripture as Literature: sifting through the layers of the text”, *Bahá’í Studies Review* 7 (1997): 125-46.

of the *Kalimát-i Maknúna* through his own revision and the review of some English-speaking Bahá'ís.⁸ Shoghi Effendi's defence of his translation "ungodly" for *ashrár* (the evil-ones) in Persian no.3 and his insistence that this passage refers to those who disbelieve in God and who are "perverse", shows that the Guardian sometimes favoured a more literalist interpretation of Bahá'u'lláh's work (16). His comments on Arabic no.70 (14) and Persian no.19 (22), however, show that he was equally open to an allegorical interpretation. (Cf. commentary on pages 181-186 in this issue by Brookshaw).

'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi provide a model for the interpretation of Bahá'í scripture with their multiplicity of interpretations for Persian no.19, suggesting that there is no single correct understanding for the phrase "true and radiant morn" (*án sub-i ádiq-i rawshani*) and that "Tree of Anísá" (*shajara-yi anísá*) can signify both Bahá'u'lláh Himself and the Tree of Life (17-22). 'Abdu'l-Bahá's emphasis on how the Covenant and loyalty to Him as the Centre of the Covenant is expressed in the *Hidden Words* must be viewed in light of the machinations of the covenant-breakers at the time of writing (17, 20, 26, 29 and 35). 'Abdu'l-Bahá's pronouncement that the "Preserved Tablet" (*law-i mafú*) refers to Bahá'u'lláh's *Kitáb 'Ahdí* (26) will be of interest to students of Islamic theology.⁹

Although many of these passages derive from tablets previously unpublished and/or untranslated, it would be useful for those wishing to cross-reference with the original if the source of the quotation was listed where possible.¹⁰

Dominic Brookshaw

⁸ Cf. Ruhyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust 1969) 204-5.

⁹ Shoghi Effendi offers another interpretation (27). Muslims believe the text of the Qur'án revealed to Muhammad through Gabriel is kept with God in Heaven on a "Preserved Tablet." Cf. Qur'án 85:21-2 *bal hurwva Qur'ánun majidun fi lawin mafú*.

¹⁰ For example, passage 23 appears in *Má'ida-yi Ásamání*, part II (New Delhi, 1984) 56.

Compilation: references of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi to the *Hidden Words*

Research Department of the Universal House of Justice¹¹

I. General

The *Hidden Words* is a treasury of divine mysteries. When thou ponderest its contents, the doors of the mysteries will open.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet to an individual – translated from the Persian) [1]

It behoveth us one and all to recite day and night both the Persian and Arabic *Hidden Words*, to pray fervently and supplicate tearfully that we may be enabled to conduct ourselves in accordance with these divine counsels. These holy *Words* have not been revealed to be heard but to be practised.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet to an individual – translated from the Persian) [2]

Be thou assured in thyself that if thou dost conduct thyself in accordance with the *Hidden Words* revealed in Persian and in Arabic, thou shalt become a torch of the fire of the love of God, an embodiment of humility, of lowliness, of evanescence and of selflessness.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet to an individual – translated from the Persian) [3]

We should memorize the *Hidden Words*, follow the exhortations of the Incomparable Lord, and conduct ourselves in a manner which becometh our servitude at the threshold of the one true God.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet – translated from the Persian) [4]

Next to this unique repository of inestimable treasures must rank that marvellous collection of gem-like utterances, the “*Hidden Words*” with which Bahá’u’lláh was inspired, as He paced, wrapped in His meditations, the banks of the Tigris. Revealed in the year 1274 AH, partly in Persian, partly in Arabic, it was originally designated the “*Hidden Book of Fáimih*,” and was identified by its Author with the Book of that same name, believed by Shi‘ah Islam to be in the possession of the promised Qá’im, and to consist of words of consolation addressed by the angel Gabriel, at God’s command, to Fáimih, and dictated to the Imam ‘Alí, for the sole purpose of comforting her in her hour of bitter anguish after the death of her illustrious Father. The significance of this dynamic spiritual leaven cast into the life of the world for the reorientation of the minds of men, the edification of their souls and the rectification of their conduct can best be judged by the description of its character given in the

¹¹ Revised November 1995. All passages are extracts from previously untranslated or unpublished Tablets unless the source of publication is given.

opening passage by its Author: "This is that which hath descended from the Realm of Glory, uttered by the tongue of power and might, and revealed unto the Prophets of old. We have taken the inner essence thereof and clothed it in the garment of brevity, as a token of grace unto the righteous, that they may stand faithful unto the Covenant of God, may fulfill in their lives His trust, and in the realm of spirit obtain the gem of Divine virtue."

(Shoghi Effendi, "God Passes By" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), pp. 139-40) [5]

With regard to your question concerning the meaning of the name "Hidden Words": It is, indeed, one of the most suggestive titles of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. These words are called "hidden" due to the fact that men have had neither the knowledge nor a true sense of appreciation of them before they were revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. It is through Him, Who is the sole Mouthpiece of God in this age, that spiritual realities and truths have been once more reinterpreted and revealed afresh to mankind. Bahá'u'lláh's message is thus the only key to a true understanding of the mysteries that envelop man's spiritual life.

(From a letter dated 1 September 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [6]

...concerning those passages in "The Hidden Words" in which Bahá'u'lláh refers to man as "Son of Spirit", "Son of existence", "Son of humanity", etc., the word "son" used in this connection is a kind of collective noun meaning mankind and has, therefore, no connotation of any sex differentiation between man and woman whatever.

(From a letter dated 19 January 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [7]

II. Arabic Hidden Words

Arabic No. 7

As to the reference in the Arabic "Hidden Words" that the human being must become detached from self, here too the meaning is that he should not seek out anything whatever for his own self in this swiftly-passing life, but that he should cut the self away, that is, he should yield up the self and all its concerns on the field of martyrdom, at the time of the coming of the Lord.

("Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá" (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), No. 181, p. 207) [8]

Arabic No. 13

Thou hast asked about the statement in the Hidden Words: "O Son of Spirit! Turn thy sight unto thyself that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, Mighty, Powerful and Self-Subsisting." This is the same statement as was made by Christ to His apostles in the Gospel: "The Father is in the Son, and the Son is in you."¹²

It is evident that, when a heart is purified and through divine education and heavenly teachings becometh a manifestor of infinite bounty, it is like a clear mirror. The Sun of Truth will be reflected in it with might, power and omnipotence, to such an extent that whatever is brought before it is ignited and consumed. This is a brief interpretation because of lack of time. Therefore, do thou reflect and meditate upon it

¹² Cf. John 14:20

so that the doors of inner meanings may be opened before thine eyes.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet to an individual believer – translated from Persian and Arabic) [9]

Arabic No. 13

As to the passage Arabic No. 13 of the Arabic “Hidden Words”: that which Bahá’u’lláh declares we can find abiding within us is the power of the Divine Spirit, the reflection of the light of His Revelation. This reflection of the Divine Spirit, however, can in no way be compared to the Revelation which God discloses to His Prophets and Messengers. The similarity in the terminology should not confuse this distinction, which is most fundamental.

(From a letter dated 15 November 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers) [10]

Arabic No. 57

As to your question about the meaning in the Arabic Hidden Words, “...couldst thou but see with Mine eye”: When man reacheth the station of selflessness, and his love of self is entirely wiped out, his existence becometh like unto non-existence, and a ray from God’s presence sheddeth its light upon him. Then he can see with the eye of God, and can hear with His ear. This is like iron in the fire. The qualities of the iron, its coldness, darkness and hardness are concealed, and it manifests heat, luminosity, and fluidity, which are the qualities of the fire.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet to an individual – translated from the Persian) [11]

Arabic No. 59

Bahá’u’lláh in the Hidden Words stated that God, through His Prophets and Chosen Ones, explained that the heart of man is His home; it should be sanctified for His entry, and that his spirit is His place of Revelation; it should be cleansed so that it may become His abode. We, therefore, understand that nearness to God is possible through setting our faces towards Him.

Nearness to God is through entrance into the Kingdom of God. Nearness to God is made possible through service to humanity. Nearness to God is possible through the unity of all peoples and religions. Nearness to God is dependent upon kindness to all mankind. Nearness to God is made possible through investigation of the Truth. Nearness to God is through the acquisition of knowledge and praiseworthy virtues. Nearness to God is possible through service to universal peace. Nearness to God is dependent upon purity and sanctity. Nearness to God is dependent upon self-sacrifice, self-abnegation, and the giving up of one’s glory and position for Him.

Consider how the sun shineth upon all creation, but only surfaces which are pure and clear can reveal its full glory and light. The light of the sun is bright, but the darkened stone hath no portion of the revelation of the light.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a talk, earlier version published in “Star of the West”, vol. 3, no. 8, 26 May 1912, pp. 20-22) [12]

Arabic No. 63

“úr”¹³ and “Sinai” should not be taken literally; the first is an allusion to Mount Sinai, which in this case means the Manifestation of God; the second, “Sinai”,

¹³ This statement referred to an early translation. The word “úr” was later translated by the Guardian as “sacred Mount”.

represents the human heart.

(From a postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi to a letter dated 3 May 1947 written on his behalf to an individual believer) [13]

Arabic No. 70

Hidden Word No. 70: this is not addressed to any person¹⁴ but is a mystical expression and an allusion to the Manifestation of God.

(From a letter dated 3 May 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [14]

Arabic No. 71

The intent is total fulfilment of, and complete adherence to, the divine ordinances and exhortations.¹⁵

(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi on the margin of an incoming letter – translated from the Persian)[15]

III. Persian Hidden Words

Persian No. 3

In the passage “eschew all fellowship with the ungodly”, Bahá'u'lláh means that we should shun the company of those who disbelieve in God and are wayward. The word “ungodly” is a reference to such perverse people.

(From a letter dated 27 March 1938 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [16]

Persian No. 19

The “true and radiant morn” is the dawn of the Covenant, and the first light of the Testament of the Day-Star of the world. The “Tree of Anísá”¹⁶ is the blessed tree which hath flourished in the Most Great Paradise and casteth its shadow upon all regions.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet – translated from the Persian) [17]

Persian No. 19

By the term “that true and radiant morn” mentioned in the Hidden Words is meant the Dawn of divine Revelation when the Exalted One¹⁷ manifested Himself in the plenitude of His glory, while the Blessed Tree referreth to the Ancient Beauty. By those “surroundings” is meant the realm of the heart and of the spirit, and the gathering of the people implieth a spiritual communion, not a physical one. However when the Call of God was raised in the realm of the heart and spirit, mankind remained heedless and inattentive, and therefore was dumbfounded.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet to an individual – translated from the Persian) [18]

14 Response to a question asking to whom the words “O SON OF HIM THAT STOOD BY HIS OWN ENTITY IN THE KINGDOM OF HIS SELF!” were addressed.

15 Response to a question asking about the stations which are higher than martyrdom in His path, mentioned at the end of the Arabic Hidden Words.

16 In Shoghi Effendi’s translation of the Hidden Words, the term “Tree of Anísá” is rendered by him as the “tree of life”.

17 The Báb.

Persian No. 19

By the “Tree of Anísá” is meant the Tabernacle of the Lord of Grace, the divine Lote-Tree, the Tree of Life, “the Olive that belongeth neither to the East nor to the West, whose oil would well nigh shine out even though fire touched it not”.¹⁸

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá – translated from the Persian) [19]

Persian No. 19

This is the Covenant and Testament which the Blessed Beauty established through the Supreme Pen in the Holy Land under the shade of the Tree of Anísá and which was promulgated after the Ascension.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá – translated from the Persian) [20]

Persian No. 19

This has many spiritual meanings. Among them is that it designates the Tree of life, and at times it refers to the Temple of the Manifestation.¹⁹

(From a letter dated 9 June 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi – translated from the Persian) [21]

Persian No. 19

The passage²⁰ in “The Hidden Words” no. 19 has a spiritual meaning and is allegorical, as are also the other passages in that book. It refers to the spiritual presence of Bahá’u’lláh.

(From a letter dated 14 January 1938 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [22]

Persian Nos. 20, 37, 48

These are the Tablets of the Kingdom written by the Supreme Pen in the Preserved Tablet. Such Tablets have not descended from the Realm of the Kingdom to the earthly world; nay they are preserved and protected in an invisible treasury. If at any time a soul show such Tablets attributing them to God saying that it is the “Ruby Tablet” or the “Fifth Tablet of Paradise”, it is without truth.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá – translated from the Persian) [23]

Persian No. 37

Thou hast asked about the pearls treasured in the Hidden Words where, addressing the abject and the foolish, Bahá’u’lláh hath admonished: “Abandon not for that which perisheth an everlasting dominion”.

This is when man depriveth himself of the manifold favours of God, is debarred from the goodly gifts of the All-Merciful, is bereft of His infinite bounty and gracious rewards by following the prompting of his selfish desires, by seeking earthly pleasures and by indulging in corrupt imaginations. Hence “that which perisheth” is an allusion to every kind of corrupt inclination and evil deed. God indeed is the source of clear tokens!

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá – translated from the Arabic) [24]

18 Qur’án 24:35.

19 Response to an inquiry about the meaning of the Tree of Anísá.

20 Response to an inquiry about the meaning of this passage of the Hidden Words, especially the last part in which reference is made to a “place” and “those surroundings”.

Persian No. 38

Regarding the statement in “The Hidden Words”, that man must renounce his own self, the meaning is that he must renounce his inordinate desires, his selfish purposes and the promptings of his human self, and seek out the holy breathings of the spirit, and follow the yearnings of his higher self, and immerse himself in the sea of sacrifice, with his heart fixed upon the beauty of the All-Glorious.

(“Selections from the Writings of Abdul-Bahá” (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), no. 181, p. 207) [25]

Persian No. 63

Thou hast asked about the “Tablet of Chrysolite” and the “Preserved Tablet”. By the “Chrysolite Tablet” is meant the Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant which is the Preserved Tablet. It was hidden and preserved, now it is made manifest and resplendent. The Chrysolite Tablet is recorded and enshrined in the inmost recesses of the Book of the Covenant.

(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet – translated from the Persian) [26]

Persian No. 64

The “Preserved Tablet” is a spiritual expression and has no actual existence. It sometimes refers to the Manifestation Himself, Whose knowledge encompasses the knowledge of the former and the latter generations.

(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi on the margin of an incoming letter dated 8 July 1929, instructing his secretary – translated from the Persian) [27]

Persian No. 69

“For erelong the assayers of mankind shall, in the holy presence of the Adored One, accept naught but absolute virtue and deeds of stainless purity.”

This holy verse is replete with meaning, and as time is pressing only a brief mention is made as follows: naught else but upright conduct and pure deeds shall be accepted at His divine Threshold.

(‘Abdu'l-Bahá from a Tablet to an individual believer – translated from the Persian) [≤DIV align=right>](#)[28]

Persian No. 71

The “Covenant” mentioned in the Hidden Words is the Covenant and Testament which was entered into by the pen of the Most High in the hallowed precincts of the Paran of the love of God, the summit of timeless time.²¹ The “dwellers in the city of eternity” and the “concourse on high” are souls who are firm in the Covenant.

(‘Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet to an individual believer – translated from the Persian) [29]

Persian No. 71

The meaning of the references to “Párán” and “Zamán” in the passage no. 71 of the Persian “Hidden Words” has been explained by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá...

(From a letter dated 15 November 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers) [30]

Persian No. 77

When considering the identity of the Name which at that time was not fully divulged,

²¹ Zamán.

thou wilt readily see what unspeakable cruelties the company of the faithless perpetrated and what misdeeds they committed. No injury did they spare and no harm did they fail to inflict. With the sword of unyielding cruelty they cut this Wronged Body to pieces. This is clear and evident to everyone.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet – translated from the Persian) [31]

Persian No. 77

This great name is the Greatest Name. The Blessed Beauty is intended. What we have today are the meanings of two of the letters of the Greatest Name. They are: B and H.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet – translated from the Persian) [32]

Persian No. 77

It should also be borne in mind that, great as is the power manifested by this Revelation and however vast the range of the Dispensation its Author has inaugurated, it emphatically repudiates the claim to be regarded as the final revelation of God’s will and purpose for mankind...

A reference to some of the already quoted utterances of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá will surely suffice to establish, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the truth of this cardinal principle. Might not the following passage of “The Hidden Words” be, likewise, construed as an allegorical allusion to the progressiveness of Divine Revelation and an admission by its Author that the Message with which He has been entrusted is not the final and ultimate expression of the will and guidance of the Almighty? “O Son of Justice! In the night-season the beauty of the immortal Being hath repaired from the emerald height of fidelity unto the Sadratu’l-Muntahá, and wept with such a weeping that the concourse on high and the dwellers of the realms above wailed at His lamenting. Whereupon there was asked, Why the wailing and weeping? He made reply: As bidden I waited expectant upon the hill of faithfulness, yet inhaled not from them that dwell on earth the fragrance of fidelity. Then summoned to return I beheld, and lo! certain doves of holiness were sore tried within the claws of the dogs of earth. Thereupon the Maid of heaven hastened forth unveiled and resplendent from Her mystic mansion, and asked of their names, and all were told but one. And when urged, the first letter thereof was uttered, whereupon the dwellers of the celestial chambers rushed forth out of their habitation of glory. And whilst the second letter was pronounced they fell down, one and all, upon the dust. At that moment a voice was heard from the inmost shrine: ‘Thus far and no farther.’ Verily We bear witness to that which they have done and now are doing.”

(Shoghi Effendi, “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh”, “The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh: Selected Letters” (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 115-116) [33]

Persian No. 77

Concerning your second question, these two letters – the first and the second – refer to the blessed Name of the Ancient Beauty, namely B and H. What is intended by Bahá’u’lláh is this: that which is latent and enshrined within the inmost reality of these three letters has not been revealed, inasmuch as the world of being still does not possess the capacity and receptiveness to reflect fully the glorious radiance of this divine Revelation. Thus whatever is hidden in the inmost essence of the third letter of His blessed Name will gradually be unfolded before the eyes of all men.

In another sense these letters bear reference to the incalculable sufferings borne by the Blessed Beauty, while the people of the world are acquainted with but a fragment thereof.

(From a letter dated 27 August 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer – translated from the Persian) [34]

Persian No. 79

Concerning “wings” and “the comb” mentioned in the Hidden Words this means the Covenant of God. This Covenant was taken so that the believers would remain loyal to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and not lacerate Bahá’u’lláh’s blessed throat, meaning His blessed Cause. However, they completely shut their eyes to fairness, committed misdeeds and indulged in grievous injustice.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet – translated from the Persian) [35]

Persian No. 79

The expression “tend My raven locks, and not wound My throat” is an allegorical warning by Bahá’u’lláh against the misuse of anything bestowed by Him on the world.

(From a letter dated 6 September 1937 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [36]

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