

# BAHA'I STUDIES REVIEW

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# An Officer and an Orientalist: Alexander Grigorevich Tumanskii and His Contribution to Russian Historiography on and Policy towards the Babi-Baha'i Religion

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## Abstract

*Official Russian attitude towards the Babi-Baha'i religion seems to have changed dramatically between the mid- to the end of the nineteenth century. At first, in the formative years of the Babi movement in Iran in the 1840s, Tsarist Russia saw in it what British India saw later in Bolshevism, namely something that could not only destabilize Iran, but could even spill over into their own territory. Thus, Russian diplomats in Iran requested from the Iranian authorities to keep the Bab away from the Russian borders. This early attitude changed almost dramatically by the mid-1880s and onwards, when Iranian Baha'is were not only permitted to immigrate into Russian territory, but even to create their own communities under the protection of the Russian government.*

*One of the main reasons for this volte-face with regards to Russian policy towards the Babi-Baha'i religion seems to have been the relatively poor knowledge of that religion in its formative, or Babi years; while gradually, especially following the declaration of Baha'u'llah and with the vast majority of Babis adopting the Baha'i Faith, fears of the negative implications of the Babi-Baha'i religion made way for a more positive attitude towards it. This trend stood in direct relation to the growing flow of information on the Babi-Baha'i religion, which came not only from Russian academic circles, but growingly from a new breed of Russian officers and officials, who also had academic training in 'oriental studies'.*

*One of these 'orientalist' officers and officials, who were tasked to collect material on the Babi-Baha'i religion and communities, was Alexander Tumanskii, who stands out in both the volume and depth of his research and findings about the Babi-Baha'i religion. His official reports were quite important for the direction of Russian policy towards the Babi-Baha'i religion, and his academic publications (and primarily the translation of the Kitab-i-Aqdas and several Tablets into Russian) are still used by scholars today. It is the purpose of this paper to try and evaluate the contribution of Tumanskii on Russian historiography, and on policy towards the Babi-Baha'i religion.*

## Keywords

Alexander Grigorevich Tumanskii  
Russian oriental studies  
historiography  
Russian Academy of Sciences  
Transcaspia  
Baha'i Faith

## The Development of Russian Oriental Studies

Russian oriental studies developed as a result of Czar Peter the Great's (1682–1725) expansionist aspirations to the west (i.e. the Caucasus), south (i.e. mainly to Iran, the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan and India) and east (i.e. Central Asia) of the Caspian Sea. Lacking experts and material, Peter put major stress on acquiring these, thus sending people to both study the main languages of these territories (i.e. Persian, Turkish and Arabic) and collect relevant material. In addition, the first academic chair was established in 1725 and a program in oriental studies was opened in the Russian Academy of Sciences.

As a result of the two Irano-Russian Wars in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1804–1813 & 1826–1828), which marked the beginning of 'the Great Game' – the Russo-British rivalry over mastery and influence in Asia, which spanned over the lion's share of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – a more urgent need for knowledge of cultures, societies and languages of the above-mentioned regions was felt in Russia. This resulted in the creation of two academic positions for orientalists within the Academy.

Concurrently, teaching of oriental languages became prevalent in a number of universities in Russia. Also, these languages were taught at the Asian Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to diplomats destined to serve in Asian countries. Cooperation was carried out between ministries, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence, mainly for the specific purpose of training specialists for military purposes.<sup>1</sup>

## Russo-Iranian Relations and Russia's Interest in the Babi-Baha'i Faith

Russia's relations with Iran began already in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but it was sporadic in nature and limited mainly to commerce and trade. A growing Russian interest in Iran took place only in early 18<sup>th</sup> century, under Czar Peter the Great, whose ambitions for commerce and conquest coincided with the decline of the Safavid power and disintegration of the Iranian state. These made Peter make a move on Iran's Caspian provinces. Although this move failed, still it marked a new phase in Russo-Iranian relations, characterized by Russia's desire to take control of the Caucasus, a task which it managed to achieve by 1828.<sup>2</sup>

The terms of the Turkamchai Treaty from 1828, which terminated the state of war between Iran and Russia, characterized a new phase in Russo-Iranian relations, which saw the growing influence and meddling of Russia in Iranian affairs, a trend which stood in direct relation to popular hatred towards Russia in Iran. Also, Russia managed to divert Qajar attention eastwards to Afghanistan, which was considered a highly important British zone of influence and interest. This proved very costly for Iran, because it brought Britain to identify Iran as a Russian satellite, as a result of which Britain not only suspended her relations with Iran (1838), but as well began to meddle in Iranian affairs, went to war against her (1856–1857) and managed, to a large extent, to check all Iranian irredentist designs on her eastern flank (mainly in Western Afghanistan and Baluchistan).<sup>3</sup>

Thus, Iran found herself in the middle of the 'Great Game'. Hence, what took place in Iran became of utmost interest to those two European rival powers, whose agents and officials were constantly following developments,



gathering information and searching out new allies in Iran.<sup>4</sup> The appearance of the Bab and the outbreak of the Babi movement in the mid-1840s was a major event, which had not only a religious dimension, but also political and socio-economic ones as well. Russian (and British) officials in Iran followed the Babi-related events and developments and constantly updated St Petersburg. The Babi movement was constantly spreading, with new members joining. The arrest and later the execution of the Bab (1850) brought only a series of clashes between Babis and the government forces. The exile of Baha'u'llah (d. 1892) did not only fail to stem the growth of the movement in Iran, but it even helped to spread it into other parts under the new leadership, carrying a new revelation. Although aware of the highly sensitive attitude of the Qajar rulers and the majority 'Shi'i' population of Iran to the Babi-Baha'i Faith and community, the Russians were probably aware of the potential benefits of protecting such a widespread community in Iran and the region in the future. After all, protection of Eastern Orthodox groups throughout the Ottoman Empire had already given Russia a channel of influence therein,<sup>5</sup> and similar protection of the Baha'is could have similar benefits in Iran in the future.

The opportunity for direct relations between Czarist Russia and the Baha'is was created in the early 1880s, after the Russian conquest of Transcaspia. By the mid-1880s, Baha'is from Iran began to immigrate to the newly-conquered Russian lands, first in small groups, but soon – especially after having felt the relative safety which Russian Christian rule provided – in greater numbers. It is roughly at the same time that Russian interest in the Babi-Baha'i Faith and teachings grew as well, coming both from the academic and official circles.

If Mirza Alexander Kasimovich Kazem-Bek (1802–1870) was the first Russian scholar who systematically studied the Babi-Baha'i Faith after its appearance, then there is no doubt that it was Baron Viktor Romanovich Rosen (1849–1908) who managed to lay the basis of what could be described as 'Babi-Baha'i Studies' in Russia. Rosen managed to gather a group of scholars, begin an extensive mechanism of Babi-Baha'i-related collection of documents, establish academic cooperation with other leading scholars of the Babi-Baha'i Faith (primarily, Edward Granville Browne), organize a library of works on the subject, and encourage research and studies on the Babi-Baha'i Faith and communities. Rosen managed not only to interest his colleagues and students in this field, but also his former students, a number of whom were employed as officers and officials in Iran, Turkey and the Transcaspien region, whom he found extremely important for the collection of documents and sources of information and intelligence on the Babi-Baha'i Faith and communities.<sup>6</sup> Alexander Grigorevich Tumanskii was among those former students and judged from his work on this subject, there is no doubt that he stands out as the one with the most important contribution to the study of the Babi-Baha'i religion.

### **Alexander Grigorevich Tumanskii (1861–1920)**

Tumanskii was born into a noble family from St Petersburg province. In 1879, at the age of 18, and after having completed his secondary schooling, he started a long career in the field of artillery in the Russian army, first as a volunteer artillerist (1879) and finally retiring as a Major General (1917). In

1880 he became an officer and some eight years later he began his studies at the Educational Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from which he graduated in 1891. It was during these studies that he became interested in doing research on the Babi-Baha'i Faith, an interest which over time produced a growing and an impressive portfolio of articles, reports, translations, annotations, collection of relative material of primary and secondary nature on the Babi-Baha'i Faith.

In 1891, after his graduation, he joined the headquarters of the Military-Administrative Department of the Transcaspian Region at Ashgabat, where he served for four years and became acquainted with the new local Baha'i community, and through them he managed to further deepen his knowledge of the Babi-Baha'i Faith. He also managed to establish close contacts with leading Russian and foreign scholars and orientalists in the field of Babi-Baha'i Studies.

In 1893 Tumanskii became a member of the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society and a year later he was sent by the Ministry of Defence to Iran in order to conduct a secret 'research into the religious-political sect of Babis'.<sup>7</sup> In 1895 Tumanskii returned to his service in the Artillery, and was promoted to the rank of Captain. In 1900 he was moved to the civil service as vice-consul in Van, Turkey, a post in which he served for five years. In 1905 he returned to military service, promoted to the rank of Colonel and served in Tbilisi in the Caucasian Military Region. Three years later he was sent once again to Iran, this time for five months. In 1908, after his return from Iran, he became involved with the question of the appointment of officers-orientalists in military headquarters, and during 1911–1912 Tumanskii headed the Regional Officers' School for Oriental Languages. With his health deteriorating, he was moved to the reserve (1915), and two years later he resigned from military service with the rank of Major General. He continued to be involved in oriental studies, whether as a teacher of Arabic to officers, publishing articles or studying on Iran. During the 1917 Revolution Tumanskii and his family emigrated to Turkey, where he died in 1920 at the age of 59.<sup>8</sup>

### **Tumanskii and His Contribution to Russian Historiography on the Babi-Baha'i Faith**

In a letter dated St Petersburg, 29 September 1890, a certain Lieutenant General (possibly Commander of the Russian Artillery) to unknown (possibly Commander of the Turkistan/Transcaspian region), we learn that a certain 'student of the Course in Oriental Languages' by the name of 'Lieutenant Tumanskii of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Grenadier Guards Artillery Brigade' was posted to Ashgabat, the new centre of the Transcaspian Region, as part of his military, 'obligatory duty'. The same letter goes on to say that Tumanskii 'used his stay in Ashgabat for the study of the Babi sect, who are persecuted in Persia and are supported here [Russia]'.<sup>9</sup>

The letter then goes on to describe what seems to be Tumanskii's first contribution in the field of Babi-Baha'i historiography:

Until now, the Lieutenant has managed to compose only the short account presented herewith [i.e. enclosed] about the Babis, but he brought with him their 'Holy Book', which will disclose the foundations of this teaching, which up to now has barely been researched.

This 'short account' by Tumanskii, was dated 22 September 1890, and titled 'A Short Note on the Baha'is or Contemporary Babis'. Already from its title one can gather that contrary to the prevalent unprofessional view that did not differentiate between Babis and Baha'is, Tumanskii seems to be able to differentiate between the two, although not making the best choice of terms when he describes the Baha'is as 'the new Babis'.<sup>10</sup>

According to his own account, Tumanskii learned about the existence of Babi-Baha'is in Russian territories only after having read in the *Novoye Vremia* (New Time), one of the most popular Russian dailies at the time, about the murder of Hājī Muhammad-Rizā Isfahānī (1889).<sup>11</sup> This, combined with the curiosity which was aroused in him about the Babi-Baha'is (which he called 'these mysterious sectarians'), caused Tumanskii to want to learn more about this religion. He thus started to collect all available material, which included the following:

A book in Russian by Kazem-Bek titled *The Bab and the Babis* (St Petersburg, 1865). A book in French by Comte de Gobineau, titled *Les Religions et les philosophies dans l'Asie centrale* (Paris, 1866). Two articles by E. G. Browne in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (vol. 21, articles 6 & 7, titled 'The Babis of Persia. I. Sketch of their History' and 'The Babis of Persia. II. Their Literature and Doctrines', which were the result of Browne's 1887–88 tour of Persia).<sup>12</sup>

Thus, given the great attention that the Iranian authorities attached to the Babi-Baha'i religion and communities, as well as the fact that the study of those was in its preliminary stage, Tumanskii asked his superiors to be posted in Ashgabat for his obligatory camp duty, where he hoped to take advantage of the new community of Iranian Baha'is of that place in order to expand his knowledge of the religion and the communities in Iran as well as in Russia.<sup>13</sup> It seems that this corresponded quite well with the Russian government's and the Transcaspian authorities' desire to learn more about the Babi-Baha'is in the framework of their endeavour to learn about the various societies and communities in the newly-conquered Russian territories; thus, they granted Tumanskii this permission.

Arriving in Ashgabat on 10 July 1890, Tumanskii's early enquiries reveal some interesting findings regarding the attitude of the local non-Baha'is towards the Baha'is. Among the local Sunnis, some regarded them as 'an entirely Christian sect, ... very close to Orthodoxy...[or] even...Baptists', while others seemed not to really understand who were the Baha'is exactly, but could definitely say that they 'preferred the Babis to the Shi'ites'. Some of the local Shi'a, on the other hand, most of whom were probably Iranian Shi'ite immigrants, regarded the Baha'is as 'a worthless sect, undeserving of any attention', while others saw them as 'no other than socialists, nihilists, communists, [and]...a rabble of dirty debauchees...' The local Christians, on the other hand, while they identified the Baha'is as non-Christians, regarded the Baha'is with 'the highest degree of sympathy... placing them, relative to morality, immensely higher than the [Shi'ite] Persians'.<sup>14</sup>

While these findings might not have been of much use for Tumanskii in his desire to collect information on the Baha'i religion itself, as far as the

inter-communal matters are concerned, they did reflect the fact that while the local non-Baha'i communities were also ignorant of the Baha'i Faith, yet the vast majority of them, apart from the Shi'ite community, had generally a positive view of the Baha'i community. As far as Tumanskii was concerned, his conclusion was that if he wanted more concrete information on the Baha'i Faith, then he would have to get in touch directly with the Baha'is.<sup>15</sup>

Tumanskii was advised to start at the local Baha'i bath-house, which was also frequented by Russians. It seems that whoever gave him this advice thought of the usual relaxed atmosphere in bath-houses, and maybe he was exposed to discussions on the nature of the Baha'i Faith. He indeed took up the advice, and as a result was invited by a Baha'i to attend a gathering of Baha'is out of the bath-house. He did so, and there he managed to learn from Ustād 'Alī-Akbar Bannā Yazdī<sup>16</sup> about the Baha'i view on the necessity of religion for mankind. He also learned the full local Baha'i account of Hājī Muhammad-Rizā Isfahānī's murder case, and its important positive meaning for the Baha'i community in Russia as well as in Iran.<sup>17</sup>

On the next day, he received a copy of the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* from two other Baha'is – 'Abd al-Karīm and Mirza Yusif Rashti; according to Tumanskii it was these two Baha'is that supplied him with most of the information on the Baha'i Faith. Tumanskii began reading the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* under the guidance of these two Baha'is. As a scholar, who used academic research methods, he felt the need to explain the importance of such guidance: 'Without this [guidance] the peculiarities of the content and mystical ways of expression would have presented insurmountable difficulties to reading it later'.<sup>18</sup>

Tumanskii had to put events in order and for this he needed a chronicle; but all he could put his hand on was the *Kitāb-i-Manūkchī* (i.e. *Tārikh-i-Jadīd*),<sup>19</sup> which covered the events down to 1852. More exact data he managed to glean later from the Baha'i propagator Mīrzā Abu al-Fazl Gulpāygānī, who stayed in Ashgabat for a few days after his return from Samarqand. He was also promised that he would get a copy of Hājī Mīrzā Jānī Kāshānī's chronicle, titled *Kitab-i Nuqta-tul-Kaf*,<sup>20</sup> which covered the first eight years of the Babi movement.

Then Tumanskii goes on to say that having read what was available to him, he 'will briefly set forth everything new' that he managed to find out about the Babi-Baha'i Faith. He describes the assassination attempt on Nasir al-Din Shah's life (in 1852), the arrest and execution of many Babis which followed, the arrest and exile of Mīrzā Husayn-'Alī Nūrī (Baha'u'llah), his reasons for choosing Baghdad as a place of exile, his exile to Acre with his family and group of followers, etc. Tumanskii concludes by stating that more needs to be done in order to attain a better and more complete knowledge of the teachings and history of the Baha'i Faith, such as visiting its main centres, namely Acre, Mosul, Cyprus and Persia.<sup>21</sup>

Gathering information about the Babi-Baha'is was not Tumanskii's main duty. As a junior officer, most of his service was due to the necessities demanded by the new Russian conquest of vast territories, primarily called Turkistan, later Transcaspia and nowadays Central Asia. Studying about the local people, most of whom were from Turkish origin, was his prime duty. The Baha'i community was new and far smaller in comparison. Thus, he could turn to his Babi-Baha'i study only when he had some respite from his other duties. Such a respite occurred 'at the middle of February [1892]',

immediately after the departure of General Kuropatkin from the office of the governor general of Transcaspia. This gave Tumanskii a golden opportunity to devote more time to his interest in the Babi-Baha'i religion, and more specifically the translation into Russian of the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* (the Most Holy Book) and the most important of the Baha'i tables, *munājāt* (hymns), etc. Thus, he was able to translate half of the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* in one month. In this translation Tumanskii was aided mostly by the above-mentioned Mīrzā Abu al-Fazl Gulpāygānī – a former Shi'i 'alim who converted to the Baha'i Faith.<sup>22</sup>

From Gulpāygānī, who was involved in the composition of *Tārīkh-i Manukchi/Tārīkh-i Jadīd*, Tumanskii was able to learn also about Manukchi Limji Hataria himself, whose importance, apart from his book, was as an eyewitness to many events in the Babi movement as well as the fact that he met Baha'u'llah and the latter addressed two Tablets to him.

Gradually, among the official 'orientalist officers', Tumanskii won a special position, mainly due to his growing knowledge on the Baha'is. In this respect, he soon found himself included in the 'Rosen circle' – a circle of academics, officers and officials with whom Baron Rosen was in constant touch in order to enrich Russian scholarship on the Baha'i Faith and communities and advise the Russian government regarding policy towards them. His posting in Ashgabat won Tumanskii a unique position from which he could glean missing information from that local community regarding the Babi-Baha'i Faith and forward it to his superiors and to respected academics both in Russia (mainly V. R. Rosen and M. A. Gamazov) and elsewhere (E. G. Browne in England). On the other hand, his deepening interest in the Babi-Baha'i Faith combined with his proximity and constant contact with the Baha'is of Ashgabat, brought him closer to the local Baha'i community, and gradually he won their confidence. For example, they asked him to try and find for them 100 copies of Browne's *Tārīkh-i-Sayyāh*,<sup>23</sup> and it seems that he was also asked to try and produce a copy of the drawing of the Bab's remains.<sup>24</sup> Tumanskii was even able to get a full report of the delegation of five Baha'is from Ashgabat, who left for Acre to visit Baha'u'llah, and who passed away during their stay there. He provides a full and detailed account of the situation in Qasr,<sup>25</sup> such as the relations between 'Abdu'l-Baha and Muhammad-'Alī, the reading of Baha'u'llah's will, the conversion of Muhammad Effendi, Azal's<sup>26</sup> son, to the Baha'i Faith, etc.<sup>27</sup>

Through Tumanskii's correspondence with Rosen one can feel the range of Baha'i-related material that Tumanskii was exposed to in his unique circumstances and position. For example, he was able to get *Lawh-i Sāmsūn*,<sup>28</sup> and forward it to Rosen who was waiting for it impatiently for some time.<sup>29</sup> As he came by other Tablets which he received, mainly from the local Baha'is, Tumanskii passed those on to Rosen.

Through his contacts with the Baha'is of Ashgabat, Tumanskii was able to put his hand on quite unique items. One such example was the two Judeo-Persian texts, which referred to 'Jews and Jewish Babis which occurred this summer [of 1892] in Hamadan'.<sup>30</sup> In another case, while questioning the local Baha'is for information about people to whom Tablets were addressed,

'ran across a very interesting small handwritten chronicle dealing with the arrests and persecution of the Babis in many places in Persia during the year

AH 1300 [1882/83]. This chronicle is the work of a certain Mirza Ali Asghar [probably, Mīrzā 'Alī Asghar Farīdī-yi Uskū'ī] written very simply, in language almost conversational, the handwriting [being in] *shikasteh* [style], [written] on Russian notepaper.<sup>31</sup>

As mentioned before, Tumanskii's official duties took much of his free time, thus forcing him to spend less time than he would have desired on his Baha'i research project. On 21 December 1893 he wrote to Rosen from Ashgabat: 'Here I am again in my Ashkhabad refuge, dealing again with the Babis, and, thank God, I haven't received any particular assignments so I can devote myself once again to my old pursuit'.<sup>32</sup>

It is then that we learn more about Tumanskii's methodology and scholarship:

I began of course with the *Kitabe Akdes*; I am comparing the canonical publication with the manuscript and noting variants, which are interesting only inasmuch as they show the variation in the grammatical opinions of the editors of this book. I will complete this work, together with the final editing of the translation, during this or the beginning of the next week, and then I will start working on the notes.<sup>33</sup>

It is in this letter that Tumanskii wrote about the idea of a trip to Iran for a better understanding of the Baha'i Faith, an idea that had probably been raised before as his former commander, General Kuropatkin, seemed to have approved of it.<sup>34</sup> By this time, it could be said with some certainty that Tumanskii is quite taken by the Baha'i Faith, for he ends this letter by the following words: 'Al-salām wa al-Bahā' 'alaikum [peace and glory be upon you]'.<sup>35</sup>

For a Russian official to enter Iran in that time was not difficult; but, if the purpose was to better understand the Baha'i Faith and the communities in Iran, then Tumanskii had to ensure the cooperation of the Baha'is therein. This was secured in the following manner:

Akka [i.e. 'Abdu'l-Baha] is informed about my journey and from there a *taūqī'* [decree] will be sent for circulation, in which full assistance to me will be made obligatory for all believers [Baha'is]...The Babis [i.e. Baha'is] also rejoice and, reciting *zikrs* [remembrance of God, pronouncement], promise me the most interesting of journeys. One of them will be sent from Ashkhabad [Ashgabat], who will accompany me in my travels.<sup>36</sup>

From these arrangements that were organized by the Baha'is for Tumanski's visit in Iran, we could gather how much this visit was important to the Baha'is. Most certainly, by that time the Baha'is and their leadership has already recognized Tumanski's Baha'i research as positive to their cause. No doubt that it was in the Baha'i interest that his research be as accurate as possible, especially in an anti-Baha'i environment such as Qajar Iran, where facts, and especially Baha'i-related ones, could have been easily distorted. Also, as his findings were reported to the Russian high state and military authorities as well as academic scholars, they would have reached a new audience and in their own language, and this, by itself, could serve Baha'i propagation and proselytization purposes. Thus, Tumanskii

finally started his six-month trip to Iran. In his first letter from Tehran to Rosen – dated 6 June 1894 – he outlined his itinerary: Tehran – Hamadān – Burūjird – Chehār Mahāl – Isfahān – Shirāz – Nayrīz – Bandar Abbas – Kirmān – Yazd – and back to Tehran. All in all, Tumanskii travelled some 3,600 versts [3,840 kms] on horseback.<sup>37</sup>

'Abdu'l-Baha's decree to assist him proved very effective, for he was able to report that 'I am in constant contact with the Babis' adding that he 'managed to obtain from the family of the late Jānī a copy of his history [*Tārīkh-i Jānī*]...' <sup>38</sup> In addition, Tumanskii managed to obtain 'two historical poems: one from the early work of Nebil [Nabīl-i A'zam], the other – ascribed to the Persian Princess under the *takhallus* [pseudonym] 'Fitnih'.<sup>39</sup> Tumanskii was also successful in putting his hand on what he described as 'two interesting documents that can typify contemporary Babis: one – a circular message by Ghusne Aazem [Ghusn-i A'zam, i.e. 'Abdu'l-Baha], of a political character [i.e. *Risālih-yi Sīyāsīyyih*]' <sup>40</sup>, and the other, which Tumanskii found in the archive of the Russian mission in Tehran, 'a secret instruction to a certain Babi about the measures necessary for a safe passage to Akka'.<sup>41</sup>

He also managed to put his hand on quite important non-Baha'i sources which referred to the Baha'i Faith. One of those was 'a copy of part of an unpublished work by the late [Qajar prince and the first minister of sciences during the Qajar period] Ali Kuli ['Ali-Qulī] Mīrẓā (Itizad us-Saltane [I'tizād as-Saltanih, 1822–1880]), titled *Kitāb-i Mutanabbi'īn* [the Book of Those Pretending to be Prophets].<sup>42</sup> This was a historical work by I'tizād as-Saltanih about those who made claims to prophecy, drawing on Sipihr's *Nāsikh al-Tavārikh* for most of the content regarding the Babis and thus reflecting the latter work's biases.<sup>43</sup>

On 7 December 1894, Tumanskii submitted a secret report on his Iranian mission, the main aim of which was to 'study the question of the Babis in Persia', but also had two other tasks, namely 'the question of the importation [i.e. import] of English and other foreign goods to Persia mainly via the port of Bender-Abbas' and the other, 'the collection of information important for military purposes'.<sup>44</sup>

Such aims could indicate a number of issues and directions, such as the following three:

First, that by the 1890s, and after a few years of close study of the Ashgabat Baha'is, the Baha'i Faith and the Baha'i communities in Iran, the Russian government probably started to consider the potential importance of the Baha'is as a possible tool or means in their policy in Iran and the region. For that they needed more information about the Baha'is in Iran.<sup>45</sup>

Second, that given Russian interest in Bandar 'Abbas and the traffic of foreign goods through it, it could be that Russia was considering a different southern outlet for her commodities from a port not fully controlled by the British (i.e., other than Bushihr, which was the headquarters of the British in the Persian Gulf).

And third, that, given the Russo-British rivalry in the region (namely, 'the Great Game'), Tumanskii's mission in Iran could have been part of Russian attempts to better position itself against Britain – its main European rival in the region.



In part 2 of his secret report – dated St Petersburg, 26 April 1895 – Tumanskii was more specific as to the orders which he received with regards to the Baha'is in Iran, namely to 'study, on location, of the organization and political significance of the Muslim sect of the Babis...' <sup>46</sup> If Tumanskii was quoting the exact words of his superiors, it means that even in that stage the Russian military commanders of the Transcaspian region wrongly regarded the Baha'is as a Muslim sect; but if it was he who was branding the Baha'is as a Muslim sect – an unlikely possibility in such advanced stage of Tumanskii's study of the Baha'i Faith – then it means that he still needed a much more serious study of this faith.

In his report, Tumanskii provides more specific details of his assignment:

In the execution of the said assignment I had to become acquainted with the situation of these sectarians both in the capital of Persia itself, Teheran, as well as in major centres of the rest of the territory of the state. Based on this, the entire route of my journey, which lasted from 30 March until 27 November 1894, was the following: Ashkhabad [Ashgabat] – Enzeli (Rasht) – Teheran, Teheran – Hamadan – Burujird – Isfahan, Isfahan – Shiraz, Shiraz – Neiriz [Nayriz] – Ketru [Qatruih?], a small village situated at 40 kms east-south-east of Nayriz] – Bender-Abbas (Horluz [Hormuz] Island) and back to Kirman – Yezd [Yazd] – Kashan – Teheran – Meshedeser [Mashhad-i Sar (presently, Babulsar)] – Ashkhabad [Ashgabat]. <sup>47</sup>

Tumanskii then goes on to provide some information regarding the topographical survey he has done along the above-mentioned route as well as an ethnographical survey of the nomadic tribes in those territories.

By now, Tumanskii clearly differentiates between Babis and Baha'is, stating that the latter comprise the vast majority of what was once the Babi movement. Still, throughout the report and elsewhere, 'Babi' continues to be used where 'Baha'is' is meant.

Important information which Tumanskii mentions in this secret part of his report is about the mode of communication between 'Abdu'l-Baha in Acre and the Baha'i communities in Iran:

'All the directives which are issued by Ghusn-e A'zam ['Abdu'l-Baha] are distributed by his secret agents throughout Persia by two routes: northern – via Baku-Enzeli and also via Ashkhabad-Meshhed, and southern – via Bombay and ports of the Persian Gulf. Alexandria, Constantinople, Bombay, Baku and Ashkhabad serve as halting-places.' <sup>48</sup>

There is no doubt that for a Euro-Asian power like Russia, with expansionist aspirations and imperial designs, such a secret network of information gathering and distributing could be an important asset, and from the Russian point of view this could be easily achieved if Russia could bring the Baha'is under her wing. The strategic importance of the Baha'is for Russian designs in Iran is further reiterated through additional data that Tumanskii provides in his report:

The major part of the Babis are found in the provinces of Isfahan, Fars, Mazanderan and Khorassan. In Teheran itself their number reaches 3,000–4,000 people. It is impossible to present an exact statistical figure of the total



number of Babis in view of the fact that the majority of them profess this teaching in secrecy, but everything leads us to suppose that their number is no less than 100,000 and no more than 200,000.<sup>49</sup>

Tumanskii continues his report about the Baha'is in Iran with some important socio-economic data on them:

Babism is prevalent most of all among the urban population. To this sect also belong many of the merchant class and officialdom of low rank in Teheran. As for the high-level officials of the state, they carefully hide their membership in the aforesaid sect, although, of those, many patently treat the sectarians favorably, not excluding even the Grand Vizier [Mirza 'Ali Asghar Khan Amin al-Sultan] himself. Special significance is given to this sect by the membership in it of many of the khans and sheikhs of the nomadic tribes. Of those, it is possible to point to several sons of the late *Il'khani* of the tribe of the Bakhtiars, Husein Kuli [Husayn-Qulī] Khan and of the former *kelantar* [*kalāntar*] (head) of the Arabo-Turkish tribes of Fars, although removed from this position, but still enjoying great authority among his tribes.<sup>50</sup>

As far as the Shi'ite clergy was concerned, Tumanskii found that 'many secretly profess Babism...[and]...even among the *mujtehids*<sup>51</sup> it is possible to name several influential persons who are attracted to the new teaching'.<sup>52</sup>

In light of the data that Tumanskii presents in his report, and from the view-point of Russian strategists and policy-makers it is quite obvious that the Baha'i Faith and communities formed an excellent tool in the service of Russian strategic designs in Iran and the region. This data was up to date, and for its collection Tumanskii not only had the support and assistance of the Russian authorities at home and in Iran, but also those of the Iranian government, for he 'obtained from the [Persian] Sadr-Aazem [*Sadr-i A'zam*] a letter of recommendation to all the governmental officials' on his way, and was even given 'a Cossack from the Shah's Cossack Guards Squadron' as an escort.<sup>53</sup> It is therefore most probable that with such official assistance, as well as the cooperation of the local Baha'is which was secured by the direct orders of 'Abdu'l-Baha, Tumanskii was able to collect more reliable data on the Baha'is of Iran.

Tumanskii dwells on this latter issue of data collection in more detail in a separate letter to Rosen, dated Ashgabat, 16 January 1895:

The material for this report will be my personal impressions, gained from acquaintance of Babis in Resht [Rasht], Kazvin [Qazvīn], Teheran, Hamadan, Isfahan, Shiraz, Neiriz [Nayrīz], Yazd [Yazd] and Kashan. Besides these places, I also met Babis in other intermediate places, namely in Melair [Malāyer] (Doulet Abad) [Daūlatābād] on the way from Hamadan to Burujird. There are also a lot of them in the area of Isfahan, namely in Nejaf-Abad [Najafābād], in Sideh [Sidih], [and] in Abadeh [Abādih]. In Fars they concentrate in Zergan [Zargān], Servistan [Sarvistān] and in Neiriz [Nayrīz]. In southeastern Fars there are none of them whatsoever, the same as in Bender Abbas. I also noted a complete absence of them in Burujird. In Kirman there are only a few of them, although a rather large number of them in Sirjan and Rafsanjan. In Yazd [Yazd] and its surroundings, there are also rather a lot of them.<sup>54</sup>

In the same letter, Tumanskii seems to be more cautious about the number of the Baha'is in Iran: 'In general the total number of them cannot exceed a hundred or a hundred and fifty thousand and the number given by Curzon and cited by Browne is, in my opinion, exaggerated'.<sup>55</sup>

However, if this numerical evaluation of Tumanskii's about the Baha'is in Iran might cause anyone to consider them less important, then Tumanskii hurries to add that 'this does not in the slightest lessen their importance. At the present time, Babis are particularly numerous in Teheran, among whom are found very high-ranking and influential individuals'.<sup>56</sup>

He then goes on to reiterate the political threat that the Baha'i Faith poses for the Qajar rule in Iran:

Furthermore, Babism serves as a banner round which elements dissatisfied with the existing regime gather. Among these, one encounters very influential khans and leaders of the nomadic tribes, and, to be specific, I personally know two very influential khans from the Bakhtiars and one sheikh amongst the Banu Shayban Arabs of Fars.<sup>57</sup>

Among the conclusions that Tumanskii reached after his tour of research in Iran, as specified at the end of his report, the following are noteworthy: First, that 'Babism [i.e., the Baha'i Faith] deserves attention due to its growth in the Muslim world'; second, that 'Babism has nothing threatening in its teaching'; and third, and the most important conclusion as far as Russian interests were concerned, was that 'with careful and skilful use' the Baha'is could 'be of service both for our diplomacy as well as for military purposes'.<sup>58</sup> For this service, Tumanskii was praised by his superiors and promoted in rank.

## Conclusion

A fitting description of Tumanskii's importance and contribution to the Russian historiography of the Babi-Baha'i Faith could be what *Al-Ahrām*, a leading newspaper in the Arab world since 1875, wrote about the Baha'is and Tumanskii in one of its issues in 1896:

There was nothing despicable left that they did not attribute to them – namely the Baha'is – and no vice which they did not ascribe to them, and therefore the rumours increased, and thoughts became agitated, and their situation was unclear for the most honourable of the Europeans. Then a group of distinguished and fair-minded people arose to examine the doctrines of the Babis and study their habits, and among them the famous scholar, Baron Rosen, one of the greatest professors in the schools of Petersburg ... and ... Alexander Tumanskii, one of his students, [who was sent] to the city of Ashkhabad and to Iran. And this [Tumanskii] lived with the Babis more than three years and learned all their rules and habits; and he took their books and printed and distributed them in Russia and other European countries. And among them Mr Browne Edward, teacher of oriental languages at Cambridge University; and this [Browne] also travelled to Iran in AH 1303 [1886], lived among the different peoples who live in Iran, studied the habits of all of them, and took Babi books. Then he travelled to Syria and visited Akka, attained the presence of Baha'u'llah and returned to Europe and published all his observations in scientific journals.<sup>59</sup>

It seems that nothing could be more commendable for Tumanskii, from the scholastic point of view, than to be included in the same company as Rosen and Browne in the field of Baha'i Studies. Without doubt among the small circle of Russian orientalist officers/officials in the field of Baha'i Studies, Tumanskii was the most outstanding of that circle, whether by his academic activities (such as writing articles, producing translations, collecting relevant documents, being in touch with leading scholars on the Babi-Baha'i Faith, etc.) or by those activities which he carried out in the field as a Russian officer in or out of duty (touring and studying the Baha'i communities in Ashgabat and Iran, establishing contacts with the Baha'i leadership, creating a network of intelligence gathering about the Baha'is, etc.). These activities not only enriched the material available in Russia on the Baha'is, but they helped shape Russian attitude towards the Baha'is, both in and out of the Russian territories.

Tumanskii's work on the Baha'i Faith and communities, whether as a scholar or an official, was part of a wider effort to collect information on the Baha'i Faith and communities, an effort which, like a spider's web, was growing, with more intelligence coming from other Russian officers and officials as well as research by orientalists. There is no doubt that the Czarist government in St Petersburg, which was following events in Iran very closely, slowly came to appreciate the potential of the Baha'is as a possible strategic tool in their policies first in Iran, and later (mainly after the conquest of Central Asia and the immigration of Baha'is to Ashgabat and other parts of the new Russian-controlled territories) in the region. On the other hand, by the late 1880s (and especially after witnessing the Russian authorities' reaction following the murder of Haji Muhammad-Riza Isfahani), the Baha'i leadership seems to have noticed the advantages of having good relations with the Russian authorities. But while the Russian interest seems to have been mainly out of potential strategic gains, that of the Baha'i leadership seems to have been mainly out of their desire to have a safe haven for their severely-persecuted brethren in Iran, as well as their desire to provide the Russian government with the means to better and more accurately understand the tenets of the Baha'i Faith. Without doubt, Tumanskii was an important part of these Russian-Baha'i relations, and his activities with respect to the Baha'i Faith and communities provide a glimpse into those relations and the interests of each side. However, in order to deepen our knowledge about the Baha'i connection in Russia's Iran policy, there is need for further research into the Russian archives.<sup>60</sup>

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## Endnotes

1. For a more detailed account of the early development of Russian oriental studies, see: B. Morozov, 'Russian Orientalism and Babi/Bahā'i Studies', in *The Baha'is of Iran, Transcaspia and the Caucasus*, trans., ed. and annotated Soli Shahvar et al., 2 vols., London: I. B. Tauris, 2011, vol. 1: *Letters of Russian Officers and Officials*, 49–52; and for further reading, see: A. M. Kulikova, *Vostokovedenie v rossiiskikh zakonodatel'nykh aktakh (konets XVII v. – 1917 g.)* [Oriental Studies in Russian Legislative Acts (From End of the 17th Century to 1917)], St Petersburg: Peterburgskoe Vostokovedenie, 1993.
2. Firuz Kazemzadeh, 'Russia i. Russo-Iranian relations up to the Bolshevik Revolution', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/russia-i-relations> (Accessed 12 June 2017); and idem, 'Iranian relations with Russia and the Soviet Union, to 1921' in Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly and Charles Melville (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7: *From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 314–16.
3. Kazemzadeh, 'Russia', *E-Ir*. For a detailed account of these events, see: Malcolm E. Yapp, *Strategies of British India: Britain, Iran and Afghanistan, 1798–1850*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980; and the following books by Edward Ingram: *Britain's Persian Connection, 1798–1828: Prelude to the Great Game in Asia*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992; idem. *Commitment to Empire: Prophecies of the Great Game in Asia, 1797–1800*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981; and idem. *The Beginning of the Great Game in Asia, 1828–1834*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.
4. See Kazemzadeh, 'Iranian Relations with Russia', 324–341; and Rose Greaves, 'Iranian Relations with Great Britain and British India, 1798–1921', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 7: 374–425, for a detailed account of the Russian and British activities in Iran.
5. Under the capitulations of the Ottoman Empire to European powers, the French became the formal protectors of Roman Catholics, and the British of Jews and other groups.
6. See Morozov, 'Russian Orientalism', 55–68 for a detailed account of Baron Rosen's life and activities in the field of Babi-Baha'i Studies. On Baron Rosen and his personal archives, see also: Youli Ioannesyan, *The Development of the Babi/Baha'i Communities: Exploring Baron Rosen's Archives*, Abingdon, Oxon & New York: Routledge, 2013.
7. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv (Russian state military-historical archive hereafter: RGVA), collection 401, series 5, file 36 (1895) [hereafter in this manner: RGVA/401/5/36], 17rev-18. It should be stressed here that neither the Babis after 1848 nor the Baha'is considered themselves a sect, that is, a subset, of Islam.
8. See the Service List of Alexander G. Tumanskii at RGVA/409/1/1728/2, 6, 15-20rev & RGVA/400/1/3723, 1-1rev.
9. A certain Lt.General (possibly Commander of the Russian Artillery) to unknown (possibly Commander of the Turkistan/Trans-Caspian region), 29 September 1890, RGVA/401/4/27 (1890), 342.

10. 'A Short Note on the Behaists or Contemporary Babis', by A. Tumanskii, St Petersburg, 22 September 1890, enclosure in RGVA/401/4/27 (1890), 343–52.
11. Muhammad-Rizā Isfahānī was a respected and prominent elderly Baha'i leader and a merchant who acted also as the agent of the Afnan commercial network in the newly-established town of Ashgabat. He was bold in identifying himself a Baha'i. On 8 September 1889 he was murdered in public and in daylight. The Russian authorities managed to catch the culprits and bring them to justice. The case is a watershed in Baha'i history; see: Shahvar et al, *The Baha'is of Iran, Transcaspia and the Caucasus*, 1:20–26, for more details on this case.
12. Tumanskii, 'A Short Note', 66.
13. By 1890, or at the time that Tumanskii was writing his 'A Short Note', the number of the Baha'is in Ashgabat had swelled to over 1,000! Asadullah Fazil Mazandarani, *Tarikh-i Zuhur al-Haqq* [History of the Manifestation of the Truth], 8 vols., Tehran: Mu'assasah-yi Milli-yi Matbu'at-i Amri, 1974-75, 8:983.
14. Tumanskii, 'A Short Note', 67.
15. Tumanskii, 'A Short Note', 67.
16. He was among the first group of Iranian Baha'is who immigrated to Ashgabat in the mid-1880s and was the chief builder of the first Baha'i house of worship (Mashriq al-Azkar) ever, which was built in that place.
17. Tumanskii, 'A Short Note', 67, 69.
18. Tumanskii, 'A Short Note', 70–71.
19. Mīrzā Husayn Hamadānī, *The Tārīkh-i-Jadīd or New History of Mirza 'Ali Muhammad the Báb*, by Mīrzā Husayn of Hamadān, translated from the Persian with an introduction, illustrations and appendices, by E. G. Browne, London & Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893.
20. Hājī Mīrzā Jānī Kāshānī, *Kitāb-i Nuqtatu'l-Kāf, being the Earliest History of the Bábis compiled by Hājī Mīrzā Jānī of Kāshān*, ed. E. G. Browne, Leiden: E. J. Brill, Imprimerie Orientale, London: Luzac & Co., 1910.
21. Tumanskii, 'A Short Note', 71–73, 75–76.
22. Tumanskii to Rosen, Ashgabat, 11 March 1892, Arkhiv Rossiiskoi akademii nauk, Sankt-Peterburgskii filial [ARAN (SPF)] (Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg Branch), collection 777, series 2, file 458 [hereafter: ARAN (SPF)/777/2/458], 1-4rev. Tumanskii completed the translation of *Kitāb-i-Aqdas* only in 1899, when it was published.
23. 'Abbās Effendī, *A Traveller's Narrative (Makāla-i-Shakhs-i-Sayyāh) Written to illustrate the Episode of the Báb*, edited in the original Persian, and translated into English, with an introduction and explanatory notes, by E. G. Browne, vols. 1-2, London & Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891.
24. *The Baha'is of Iran, Transcaspia and the Caucasus*, vol. 1, 106–107.
25. *Qasr* refers to what the Baha'is now normally refer to as Bahji, being the mansion in which Baha'u'llah lived before he passed away in 1892.
26. Mīrzā Yahya Nūrī was the younger half-brother of Baha'u'llah, and follower of the Bab, who conferred on him a high station and leading role in the Babi community. Later, he became opponent of Bahá'u'lláh and came to be known as Azal (Eternity or Pre-eternity) and Subh-i Azal (Morning of Eternity), leading to his followers becoming known as Azalis. On Azal and Azali Babism, see: Moojan Momen, 'Yahya, Mirza (c. 1831–1912)', *The Baha'i Encyclopedia Project*, at: [http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=71:yahya-mirza&catid=37:biography](http://www.bahai-encyclopedia-project.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=71:yahya-mirza&catid=37:biography); and Denis M. Maceoin, 'Azali Babism', *Encyclopedia Iranica*, at: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/azali-babism>. (Accessed 25 May 2014).
27. Tumanskii to Rosen, Ashgabat, 20 September 1892, ARAN (SPF)/777/2/458, 9–11.
28. Lawh-i Sāmsūn, also known as Lawh-i Hawdaj, is a Tablet written in Arabic and revealed by Baha'u'llah in Samsun, while he was on his way from Baghdad to Istanbul.
29. Tumanskii to Rosen, Ashgabat, 7 January 1893, ARAN (SPF)/777/1/87, 1-2rev.

30. Tumanskii to Rosen, Ashgabat, 7 January 1893. Tumanskii provides a short version of these texts in: Shahvar et al. *The Baha'is of Iran, Transcaspia and the Caucasus*, vol. 1, letter 6, 125–127. For the full translation and analysis of these two Judeo-Persian texts, see: Soli Shahvar, 'Oppression of Religious Minority Groups in Times of Great Upheaval in Late Qajar Iran: The 1892 Persecution of the Jewish and Baha'is of Jewish Origin Communities of Hamadan (based on two newly discovered letters)', *Jewish Quarterly Review*, forthcoming in vol. 108, no. 2 (Spring 2018) issue.
31. Tumanskii to Rosen, Ashgabat, 21 July 1893, ARAN (SPF)/777/2/459, 9–14rev.
32. Tumanskii to Rosen, Ashgabat, 21 December 1893, ARAN (SPF)/777/2/459, 17–18rev.
33. Tumanskii to Rosen, Ashgabat, 21 December 1893, ARAN (SPF)/777/2/459, 17–18rev.
34. Tumanskii to Rosen, Ashgabat, 21 December 1893.
35. Tumanskii to Rosen, Ashgabat, 2 February 1894, ARAN (SPF)/777/2/460, 4rev.
36. Tumanskii to Rosen, Ashgabat, 8 February 1894, ARAN (SPF)/777/2/460, 5–6rev.
37. Tumanskii to Rosen, Ashgabat, 22 December 1894, ARAN (SPF)/777/2/460, 14–15rev.
38. Tumanskii to Rosen, Tehran, 6 June 1894, ARAN (SPF)/777/2/460, 10–10rev.
39. Tumanskii to Rosen, Tehran, 9 November 1894, ARAN (SPF)/777/2/460, 11–13.
40. *The Risāliḥ-yi Sīyā siyyih* ('Treatise on Politics') is the title of a work written by 'Abdu'l Baha in 1892/3 in response to the Tobacco Revolt in Iran and the role of the Shi'i clergy in it. It discusses the destructive role of the clergy in politics, religious persecution and tyranny and emphasizes the need for civil government to be guided by ethical principles and to safeguard the welfare of the people. See: Soli Shahvar et al, *The Baha'is of Iran, Transcaspia and the Caucasus*, 1: 252–253, n. 189.
41. Tumanskii to Rosen, Ashgabat, 16 January 1895, ARAN (SPF)/777/2/460, 16–19. Tumanskii published this document in the supplementary material included in his edition of the *Kitāb-i-Aqdas*; see: A. G. Tumanskii, *Kitabe Aqdes. Sviashchenneishaia kniga sovremennykh babidov* [Kitabe Aqdes. The Most Holy Book of the Contemporary Babis], *Zapiski Imperatorskoi akademii nauk* [Proceedings of the Imperial Academy of Sciences], 8<sup>th</sup> series, 3 (6), 1899, xviii–xvix.
42. Tumanskii to Rosen, Ashgabat, 16 January 1895, ARAN (SPF)/777/2/460, 14–15rev.
43. Abbas Amanat, 'I'tezad-al-Saltana, 'Aliqoli Mirza', *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, at: [www.iranica.com/articles/etezad-al-saltana](http://www.iranica.com/articles/etezad-al-saltana). (Accessed 12 June 2017.)
44. 'Report of Staff Captain Tumanskii, subordinate to the Commander of the Troops of the Transcaspian Region', part 1: 'Materials devoted to the Babis', RGVA/1396/2/1856, 15–15rev.
45. It should be made very clear that whatever designs Czarist Russia had with regards the Baha'is, whether those in Russian territories or elsewhere (Iran), it does not mean that the Baha'is themselves wished to be part of such designs. There have been and still are many and long-standing conspiracy theories in Iran with regards the Baha'is. It started with the forgery known as the *Dolgorukov Memoirs* from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which aimed to present the Baha'is as a Russian tool in Iran, and continued with other such theories in which the Baha'is are described as conspirators of the Americans (as exemplified in the case of the murder of Robert Imbrie in Iran in 1924, where it was rumoured that all Americans were Baha'is), similarly the British (based on such 'evidence' as the bestowing of a British knighthood on Abdu'l Baha in 1921 and Haifa being in British Mandatory Palestine) and similarly Israel (in light of the fact that the Baha'i World Centre is situated in Haifa). It should be noted that these conspiracy theories have no basis in historical fact. Going back to Czarist Russia, they may have wished to use the Baha'is for their own purposes, but the Baha'is had different intentions. Also, Russian contact with Babis and Baha'is came well after the religions had grown.
46. 'Report of Staff Captain Tumanskii, subordinate to the Commander of the Troops of the Transcaspian Region', part 2: 'Secret', RGVA/1396/2/1856, 15–15rev; *The Baha'is of Iran, Transcaspia and the Caucasus*, vol. 2, letter 33, 77.
47. 'Report of Staff Captain Tumanskii', 15–15rev; *The Baha'is of Iran, Transcaspia and the Caucasus*, vol. 2, letter 33, 78.
48. 'Report of Staff Captain Tumanskii', 21–21rev.

49. 'Report of Staff Captain Tumanskii', 21–21rev.
50. 'Report of Staff Captain Tumanskii', 21rev–22.
51. Mujtahid is a Shi'i cleric who is empowered to interpret legal issues not explicitly addressed in the Qur'ān.
52. 'Report of Staff Captain Tumanskii', 22–22rev.
53. 'Report of Staff Captain Tumanskii', 15–15rev.
54. Tumanskii to Rosen, Ashgabat, 16 January 1895, ARAN (SPF)/777/2/460, 16–19.
55. Tumanskii to Rosen, Ashgabat, 16 January 1895, ARAN (SPF)/777/2/460, 16–17rev.
56. Tumanskii to Rosen, Ashgabat, 16 January 1895, ARAN (SPF)/777/2/460, 17–17rev.
57. Tumanskii to Rosen, Ashgabat, 16 January 1895, ARAN (SPF)/777/2/460, pp. 17–17rev. The Banu Shayban are a mostly Beduin Arab tribe, one of the sub-tribes of the Rabi'a (which, together with the Mudhar, formed the Northern Arabian tribes).
58. 'Report of Staff Captain Tumanskii', part 2: 'Secret', RGVIA/1396/2/1856, 21–22rev.
59. Tumanskii to Rosen, Krasnoe Selo, 22 June 1896, ARAN (SPF)/777/2/460, pp. 22–23. In this letter, Tumanskii does not mention the name of the author of this *al-Ahrām* article.
60. An article on that very aspect is currently in the process of being written.

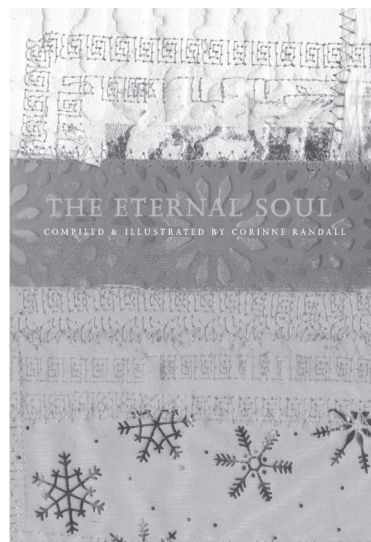


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# Scholar Meets Prophet: Edward Granville Browne and Baha'u'llah (Acre, 1890)

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## Abstract

*Rediscovery of contemporaneous handwritten notes by Cambridge orientalist, Edward Granville Browne,<sup>1</sup> of his historic meetings with Baha'u'llah, prophet-founder of the Baha'i Faith in Akka (St Jean d'Acre), Palestine, during his stay there – which lasted from his arrival on Sunday, 13 April 1890, to Browne's departure on Sunday, 20 April 1890 – significantly adds to our knowledge of those spiritual and momentous events. Given the fact that Baha'u'llah was to become widely regarded as the founder of a new world religion, Browne's published account of his 16 April 1890 audience with Baha'u'llah takes on added significance as a rare first-hand description by a distinguished contemporary from the West. Although well-known to those acquainted with Baha'i history, relatively little is known regarding the sequence of events. This article will draw from Cambridge manuscripts to add some new details, and will draw a fuller picture of what transpired by use of Browne's correspondence with Russian academics, along with known Baha'i sources judiciously compared with Azali sources. Together, a composite account of that historic encounter between scholar and prophet, Browne and Baha'u'llah, will be offered.*

## Keywords

Edward Granville  
Browne  
Akka  
Acre  
Palestine  
Baha'u'llah  
western encounters

On Wednesday, 16 April 1890, Cambridge orientalist, Edward Granville Browne, was granted his first audience with Baha'u'llah, the charismatic prophet-founder of the Baha'i Faith, in Acre (Arabic: Akka/Akko), Palestine. By having established this new world religion, Baha'u'llah may be considered to be phenomenologically comparable to the founders of other world religions – such as Jesus Christ, Muḥammad or even the Buddha. Many have wondered: 'What was Jesus like?' Or: 'Wouldn't it be wonderful to meet the Buddha in person?' This would be a perfect analogy for characterizing the nature of Professor Browne's extraordinary experience, which it is the purpose of this paper to revisit, with new information that has recently come to light. This new evidence offers a glimpse into what it must have been like to have attained the presence of Baha'u'llah. Indeed, Browne has left posterity an account of that historic encounter, where, as the title of this paper indicates, 'Scholar Meets Prophet'.

The nature of this encounter, as Browne describes it, was nothing short of profound. It is the encounter itself that is 'historical' and worthy of note. Otherwise, nothing really changed as a result of this episode. The world

went on, without noticing. No headline. No news story. This meeting, after all, was private. Yet it is 'historical' precisely because of what it tells us about Baha'u'llah as a personage. So the very thought of entering into the presence of one of those rarest of all historical personalities – one held to be a divinely inspired Messenger of God – is quite extraordinary. It is this experiential gift that endures as Browne's most enduring legacy.

It makes sense to begin with Baha'i sources, in order to review what is already widely known to students of Baha'i history. Baha'i sources rely heavily on Browne's own account in *A Traveller's Narrative* (hereafter 'TN<sub>1</sub>' for the Persian text, and 'TN<sub>2</sub>' for Browne's translation into English).<sup>2</sup> The Persian manuscript of TN<sub>1</sub> (written by Baha'u'llah's eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Baha')<sup>3</sup> was given to Browne on Sunday, 20 April 1890, just outside of Akka (Acre), Palestine.

First, the narrative presented below is taken from the official Baha'i history, *God Passes By*, written by Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Baha'i Faith (1921–1957), in 1944:

It was in that same mansion that the distinguished Orientalist, Prof. E. G. Browne of Cambridge, was granted his four successive interviews with Bahá'u'lláh, during the five days he was His guest at Bahjí (April 15–20, 1890), interviews immortalized by the Exile's historic declaration that 'these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come'. 'The face of Him on Whom I gazed', is the interviewer's memorable testimony for posterity, 'I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow.... No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain'. 'Here', the visitor himself has testified, 'did I spend five most memorable days, during which I enjoyed unparalleled and unhopd-for opportunities of holding intercourse with those who are the fountain-heads of that mighty and wondrous spirit, which works with invisible but ever-increasing force for the transformation and quickening of a people who slumber in a sleep like unto death. It was, in truth, a strange and moving experience, but one whereof I despair of conveying any save the feeblest impression'.<sup>4</sup>

Here, Shoghi Effendi is quoting Browne himself, from his lengthy introduction to his translation of *A Traveller's Narrative*. Browne was given an audience with Baha'u'llah. This historic meeting took place on Wednesday, 16 April 1890. Browne's pen-portrait of Baha'u'llah is doubtless the most oft-quoted passage in all of Browne's writings.

The relatively recently discovered E. G. Browne's correspondence with Baron V. Rosen in the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg has revealed some interesting new information about Browne's research on the Babi and Baha'i Faiths.<sup>5</sup> Browne kept active correspondence with Rosen until the time of the latter's passing. Most of this scholarly exchange of letters was related to the emerging new religion. It contradicted the common view that the appearance of new religions was only possible in ancient times because it was thought to be characteristic of the early forms of human society. This, most probably, accounts for the keen interest of

European general public and, particularly, scholars and diplomats, in the subject at the time.

These archival materials remained unpublished for more than a century until they were brought together and published with commentaries in Youli Ioannesyan's book: *The Development of the Babi/Baha'i Communities: Exploring Baron Rosen's Archives*.<sup>6</sup> Browne's correspondence with Rosen comprises 49 letters, dating 1889–1902 (two letters are in Persian, the rest are in English). These letters cover a very wide range of issues and show Browne's close cooperation with Rosen in the course of his research on the Babi and Baha'i Faiths.

Among the issues discussed in the letters is Browne's account of his trip to Cyprus and Palestine during which he met with Baha'u'llah and Mirza Yahya (Şubḥ-i-Azal, younger half-brother and erstwhile rival for leadership of the fledgling Babi/Baha'i community). Browne draws a picture of the journey from a slightly different perspective than in his published account of that historic trip. His description of his encounter with the founder of the Baha'i Faith which he shares with his Russian colleague preceded the appearance of the published version (Browne's letter is dated 6 May 1890) and, thus, preserves some details omitted in the version which he presented to the general public. Consequently, the two accounts are complementary, since each contains information lacking in the other. On the other hand, they present the same story expressed in a different language. The published version is as follows:

During the five days spent at Behjé (Tuesday, April 15th to Sunday, April 20th [1890]), I was admitted to Behá's presence four times. These interviews always took place an hour or two before noon, and lasted from twenty minutes to half-an-hour. One of Behá's sons always accompanied me, and once Ākā Mīrzā Akā Jān [Jenāb-i Khādimu'llāh] the amanuensis (*kātib-i āyāt*) was also present. In their general features these interviews resembled the first, of which I have attempted to give a description.<sup>7</sup>

In his 6 May 1890 letter to Rosen, Browne writes of his five interviews with Baha'u'llah:

After leaving Cyprus (on April 5th) I proceeded to Beyrout, & thence, after a delay of 5 days (for I had to obtain permission from Beha; to approach him) to Acre. This delay unfortunately reduced my time at Acre to 5 days (for the ride thither & back occupied 3 days each way), but during these 5 days I was completely amongst the Babis, who treated me with unbounded kindness. I was granted 5 interviews with Beha himself, but of course I could not ask him any questions.<sup>8</sup>

Both accounts confirm that Browne's visit to Baha'u'llah's residence at Bahjī lasted for 5 days (although Browne was in Acre for eight days, from Sunday, 13 April 1890 through Sunday, 20 April 1890). The letter sheds light on why Browne's stay in Acre was reduced to 5 days. The reason for shortening his trip was the delay for 5 days caused by the need to obtain permission from Baha'u'llah for these interviews. Otherwise, Browne would have spent 10 days at Bahjī, for a total of 13 days in Acre.

There is some incongruity between the two versions concerning the number of interviews Browne had with Baha'u'llah. While Browne states in the letter that he 'was granted 5 interviews with Behá himself', in the published account, Browne puts the number of such interviews at four, saying that he 'was admitted to Behá's presence four times'. However, both accounts confirm the 'unbounded kindness' with which Browne was treated by the Baha'is during his whole stay in the Holy Land, as Browne nostalgically recounts:

The spirit which pervades the Bábís is such that it can hardly fail to affect most powerfully all subjected to its influence. It may appall or attract: it cannot be ignored or disregarded. Let those who have not seen disbelieve me if they will; but, should that spirit once reveal itself to them, they will experience an emotion which they are not likely to forget.<sup>9</sup>

It is most interesting to collate and compare the two versions of Browne's description of Baha'u'llah. The published version is well-known to those interested in or studying the Baha'i Faith. It was even translated into Russian by A. G. Tumanskii and quoted in the 'Introduction' to his Russian translation of the Kitab-i-Aqdas ('the Most Holy Book'), the most important of all Baha'i scriptures.<sup>10</sup>

The pen-portrait of Baha'u'llah that the famed British orientalist draws reflects his admiration for the distinguished prophet whom he met. Recounting his first impression of Baha'u'llah in this historic encounter, Browne experienced 'a throb of wonder and awe' on beholding this venerable and charismatic religious founder:

Though I dimly suspected whither I was going and whom I was to behold ..., a second or two elapsed ere, with a throb of wonder and awe, I became definitely conscious that the room was not untenanted. In the corner where the divan met the wall sat a wondrous and venerable figure, crowned with a felt head-dress of the kind called *tāj* ['crown'] by dervishes (but of unusual height and make), round the base of which was wound a small white turban. The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow; while the deep lines on the forehead and face implied an age which the jet-black hair and beard flowing down in indistinguishable luxuriance almost to the waist seemed to belie. No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!<sup>11</sup>

As for what transpired during the course of this historic encounter, Browne recounts these memorable, and probably immortal statements by Baha'u'llah:

A mild dignified voice bade me be seated, and then continued: – 'Praise be to God that thou hast attained! ... Thou hast come to see a prisoner and an exile. ... We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment. ... That all nations should become one in faith

and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled – what harm is there in this? ... Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the ‘Most Great Peace’ shall come. ... Do not you in Europe need this also? Is not this that which Christ foretold? ... Yet do we see your kings and rulers lavishing their treasures more freely on means for the destruction of the human race than on that which would conduce to the happiness of mankind. ... These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family. ... Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind ...’. Such, so far as I can recall them, were the words which, besides many others, I heard from Beha. Let those who read them consider well with themselves whether such doctrines merit death and bonds, and whether the world is more likely to gain or lose by their diffusion.<sup>12</sup>

The term ‘audience’ best describes the nature of this meeting, insofar as Browne himself states that he could not ask any questions of Baha’u’llah. Certainly Browne did ask a lot of questions while he was at Acre/Akka, but these were interactions that he had with others in the Baha’i enclave. This may explain why Browne’s description of this event is so deeply impressionistic. While the substance of what transpired is effectively conveyed, the nature of the interaction was somewhat analogous to being admitted into the royal court of a king. Although there were no trappings of royalty, or any pretensions to any earthly grandeur, it is clear that Browne was struck – one might say, ‘awestruck’ – by Baha’u’llah’s force of personality, especially by the ‘power and authority’ that emanated from Baha’u’llah with such intensity as to practically overwhelm Browne himself. Since Browne was reasonably familiar with Baha’u’llah’s teachings, one can say that the nature of his audiences with Baha’u’llah was not so much informational as it was impressionistic.

Browne has left an independent summary of this event. The account in Browne’s letter to Rosen, though no less interesting and impressive, gives a different perspective to the reader. Here Browne is more focused on the surprise and amazement he experienced meeting Baha’u’llah:

I sat humbly before him while he talked. His discourse was oracular but rather general in character. He spoke as ‘one having authority’, but not exactly as I had expected – like a Master, and a Prophet – but not as an Incarnation of the Divinity. He is to look at a very majestic old man – but though he must be 70 at least his long beard & hair are quite black. He wears a very tall *namad* (نمد)<sup>13</sup> cap with a small white turban. His manner is gracious and dignified, but somewhat restless, suggesting great stores of energy. He talked for the most part of the necessity of all nations choosing one language as a means of international communication & one writing (a sort of sermon on the concluding text of the *لوح اقدس*)<sup>14</sup> & of the necessity of putting down war & international jealousy & hostility. Of doctrine properly so called he spoke little.<sup>15</sup>

Both accounts stress the ‘authority’ with which Baha’u’llah spoke, as well as the message of peace which was the central theme of Baha’u’llah’s words. Browne’s letter to Baron Rosen also reveals that the prominent western

scholar, despite his deep knowledge and understanding of the Babi (to a lesser extent Baha'i) teachings, had some misconceptions about the status of the prophetic credentials of Baha'u'llah (who, in Baha'i terms, was considered to be a 'Manifestation of God') in general and of Baha'u'llah's theophanic and messianic claims in particular. In his letter, Browne states that Baha'u'llah, contrary to his expectations, was 'like a Master, and a Prophet – but not as an Incarnation of the Divinity' (!). In other words, Browne believed that Baha'u'llah had laid claim to being 'an Incarnation of the Divinity'.

Whether this misconception came from rival Azali sources – and those Azalis with whom Browne kept up active correspondence – or was merely due to the 'Christian language' that Browne employed in this description (given the fact that Christians represent Jesus Christ in the very same terms) is very much open to speculation. However, even Baron Rosen himself wrote of Baha'u'llah in a similar vein, saying that 'even though his identification of himself with the Divinity may appear to us blasphemous, we should not forget that, at least, he [Baha'u'llah] has imagined himself not as a scourging divinity ... but rather a mild, forgiving, loving and peace-making one'.<sup>16</sup> In the light of this letter, we may assume that Rosen might have been influenced in his personal understanding of Baha'u'llah's claim by what Browne had previously written.

As more or less indicated in the previous discussion, Browne had three or four more audiences with Baha'u'llah that same week. Accounts vary slightly. During the course of his visits with Baha'u'llah – from Tuesday, 15 April to Sunday, 20 April 1890 – Browne says that he had five audiences with Baha'u'llah, yet elsewhere states that he had four meetings, while Mirza Badi'u'llah, one of Baha'u'llah's sons, reports three audiences, by way of this independent account:

We went to Haifa and rented a house. The house was called Oliphant. It was for the purpose of a summer residence. The house was located in German [Templar] colony. After residing in that house for little while, there the news came that Mr. Browne of England, a professor and orientalist at Cambridge, had returned from Iran and that he was coming by way of land to Bahjī ('Akka). He asked to attain the holy presence of Baha'u'llah. Because it was not proper to accept Mr. Browne into His [Baha'u'llah's] presence at that house in Haifa, then Baha'u'llah moved back to Bahjī. In the year 1890, ... Mr Browne arrived in 'Akka. Ghusn-i Akbar (the 'Great Branch', Mirza Muḥammad 'Ali) had gone to India for publication of some holy texts. Ghusn-i A'zam (the 'Most Great Branch', 'Abdu'l-Baha) was residing in 'Akka. This writer [Mirza Badi'u'llah] and Ghusn-i Āthār (Mirza Ḍiyā'u'llāh = the Purest Branch) was hosting this dear guest [Browne]. . . He was a very learned man. He spoke eloquently well in the sweet Persian language . . .

The first time that he had the honour of attaining Baha'u'llah's holy Presence, although he [Browne] had a few questions, [in fact] he only asked one question about discord and disunity of all religions. Then he observed silence and the condition and manner of his behaviour changed.

After he had been dismissed from His [Baha'u'llah's] presence, he [Browne] entered the room that we had provided for him. He was dazed [senseless]

and was just moving [silently] his lips... After that, he became motionless and quiescent. I asked him, 'What happened to you? You became completely silent!' He replied: 'After He [Baha'u'llah] looked at me, I saw a power and authority that changed my normal condition. I noticed such penetrating and influential power and authority in His eyes that I had never seen in any of the kings or rulers that I had ever met'. I asked [him] about the reason why he was moving his lips. He said: 'I repeated [to myself] the reply which He gave concerning the cause of the discord between religions in order not to forget it'.

The time of staying (residing) at the mansion of Bahjī was one week. On one occasion, Mr. Browne and the Blessed Beauty went to Junaiynih. He took the book, *A Traveller's Narrative*, with him, which he translated into English, and published both English and Persian versions of that book and sent a copy of that book [to the Baha'is in 'Akka] in both languages.<sup>17</sup>

What caused Browne to become 'dazed'? Baha'u'llah was known to have typically averted his gaze away from whoever had attained his audience, primarily because it would overwhelm the person upon whom Baha'u'llah directed his gaze. So the question arises as to why Baha'u'llah decided to look directly at Professor Browne. Perhaps it was when Baha'u'llah asked Browne a question, as noted in Browne's notes: 'Then he [Baha'u'llah] said – "You have come to see a prisoner – He went on to speak of his sufferings & the letters he had written to the Kings asking me if I had read them – He then read part of a لوح [*lawḥ*, i.e. Tablet] beginning:' (Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 5.) Alternatively, Baha'u'llah may have looked directly at Browne when the latter asked his question about interreligious discord. Of this historic encounter, Browne noted, in part: 'Wednesday, April 15th – In morning admitted to audience with Behá – It was wonderful – only one of his sons besides myself was present' Baha'u'llah 'began to talk – marvellous fire & vigour'. (Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 4.)

To further complicate matters, Browne, in his Cambridge notes, gives incongruous information regarding the sequence of dates and days:

'April Sat. 12.'<sup>18</sup>  
 'April S. 13.'<sup>19</sup>  
 'Sunday, April 13.'<sup>20</sup>  
 'April M. 14.'<sup>21</sup>  
 'April T. 15.'<sup>22</sup>  
 'Tuesday, April 14.'<sup>23</sup>  
 'April W. 16.'<sup>24</sup>  
 'Wednesday, April 15',<sup>25</sup>  
 'April Th. 17.'<sup>26</sup>  
 'Thursday, April 16',<sup>27</sup>  
 'April Fri. 18.'<sup>28</sup>  
 'Friday, April 17, 1890',<sup>29</sup>  
 'April – Sat. 19',<sup>30</sup>  
 'April – Sun. 20.'<sup>31</sup>

So which dates are correct? In *A Traveller's Narrative*, Browne refers to 'Tuesday, April 14th',<sup>32</sup> only to contradict himself later on: 'Tuesday, April 15th to Sunday, April 20th'.<sup>33</sup> The available evidence weighs in favour of the



following sequence of dates: Sunday, 13 April 1890; Monday, April 14, 1890; Tuesday, April 15, 1890; Wednesday, April 16, 1890; Thursday, April 17, 1890; Friday, April 18, 1890; Saturday, April 19, 1890; Sunday, April 20, 1890.

Briefly, this was Browne's day-by-day itinerary (assuming that dated according the UK calendar), based squarely on (Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folios 13–14), to wit: Sunday, 13 April 1890: 'Arrd at Acre ...'; Monday, April 14, 1890: 'Moved to house of Mírzá Assadu'lláh the Bábí ...'; Tuesday, April 15, 1890: 'Moved to house near BEHA's ...'; Wednesday, April 16, 1890: '*musharraf* ['honored' in Persian, i.e. had audience with Baha'u'llah] (see a few pages back)'; Thursday, April 17, 1890: '*musharraf* ...'; Friday, April 18, 1890: '*musharraf* ...'; Saturday, April 19, 1890: [blank]; Sunday, April 20, 1890: 'Farewell visit to Behá ...'. (However, Browne's dates vary in TN2.)

Hasan M. Balyuzi explains why Browne was not granted an audience with Baha'u'llah upon the former's arrival in Acre, as the latter was in Haifa that time:

Also in the possession of the present writer is the letter which Ḥājī Siyyid 'Alī Afnān wrote on this occasion. His account differs from Browne's on a point or two. Browne mentions that he travelled from Beirut to 'Akkā overland, in the company of Eyres, the British Vice-consul, whereas Ḥājī Siyyid 'Alī states that he came by sea. Oversight by Afnān in writing '*Bah̄r*' (sea) instead of '*Barr*' (land) could easily account for this. However, these are minor details. Afnān records that when Browne reached 'Akkā, Bahā'u'llāh was in Haifa, and that He returned to Bahjī the following day. This explains why Browne was given hospitality for one night in 'Akkā, in the home of a Bahā'ī, before being conducted to the Mansion of Bahjī.<sup>34</sup>

Browne describes three meetings that took place during the mornings of the following days: (1) Wednesday, 16 April 1890;<sup>35</sup> (2) Thursday, April 17, 1890 ('Met as usual');<sup>36</sup> (3) Friday, April 18, 1890;<sup>37</sup> (4) Sunday, April 20, 1890 ('Farewell visit of Baha').<sup>38</sup> Although not an audience as such, Browne saw Baha'u'llah, on one other occasion, walking in the garden, surrounded by followers, on Thursday afternoon, 17 April 1890.<sup>39</sup> Thus it appears that Browne had four audiences with Baha'u'llah, with a fifth encounter, being Browne's sighting of Baha'u'llah in a garden.

As previously stated, Browne's first audience with Baha'u'llah (on Wednesday, 16 April 1890) lasted around twenty minutes,<sup>40</sup> during which time Baha'u'llah recited a Tablet that Browne copied, in his own hand,<sup>41</sup> and later translated in TN2 itself.<sup>42</sup> These likely constitute some of 'the words which, besides many others, I heard from Beha', to which Browne refers, and therefore supplement any reconstruction of this significant meeting. In effect, these words are an accurate and added record of what the prophet imparted to the scholar in this rare and historic meeting. This was not a meeting of equals, however, as the charismatic power and intensity of Baha'u'llah simply overwhelmed Browne. At the end of this session, 'Soon we were dismissed'.<sup>43</sup>

The translation by Shoghi Effendi ('Abdu'l-Baha's appointed successor and leader of the Baha'i community from 1921 to 1957) is provided below. Shoghi Effendi's translation, which is current among Baha'is today (and



which may easily be compared with Browne's own rendering in TN2)<sup>44</sup>, reads as follows:

The Purpose of the one true God, exalted be His glory, in revealing Himself unto men is to lay bare those gems that lie hidden within the mine of their true and inmost selves. That the divers communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief, should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is, in this Day, of the essence of the Faith of God and His Religion. These principles and laws, these firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source, and are the rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated. ...

The utterance of God is a lamp, whose light is these words: Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. He Who is the Day Star of Truth beareth Me witness! So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.<sup>45</sup>

Here, Baha'u'llah 're-revealed' a 'Tablet' (i.e. epistle, considered a sacred text) previously 'revealed' (i.e. extemporaneously dictated, while inspired by divine 'revelation,' according to Baha'i belief) quoted in Baha'u'llah's last revealed book, *The Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (c. 1891). The original Tablet, in the hand of the celebrated Baha'i calligrapher Mishk īn-Qalam, is published in its entirety.<sup>46, 47</sup>

Later, that same day (Wednesday, 16 April 1890), Browne was in the company of Baha'u'llah's eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Baha, wherein Browne records the following notes (transcribed to the present writer's ability to read Browne's clear, yet idiosyncratic cursive):

Soon we were dismissed – [...] Visit from [?] 'Abbás Efendi, who spoke much of humanity & civilization. [...]

Then, a most interesting comment regarding Baha'u'llah's personal secretary:

Aḳá Mírzá Aḳá Ján also came & talked with great eloquence for a while, saying amongst other things – that Behá had said – (speaking of me)

'*Agar nusratí 'azím az dast-i-ín peydá bi-shavad ba'id az lutf rabb nist –*

A more complete transliteration may be ventured as follows:

*Agar nuṣratī 'azīm<sup>48</sup> az dast-i-ín paydā bi-shavad ba'id az lutf-i Rabb nīst –*

The following provisional translation has been proposed by Nahzy Abadi Buck:

'Should there be any support [service] [to the Cause] by this [fellow, i.e. Browne], that will not be far-fetched from God's bounty'.<sup>49</sup>

If this is an accurate reconstruction of this statement attributed to Baha'u'llah by Mirza Aqa Jan and as reported and recorded by Browne himself, the

purport seems to be that Baha'u'llah was stating that it is quite possible that Browne, through his future publications, had every potential of rendering a great service in providing accurate information and insights regarding the nature of the Baha'i Faith which, as Browne later came to recognize, was a nascent world religion, in the making. In substantive support of this interpretation, it may be pointed out that, sometime later, Baha'u'llah, in an epistle to Āqā Mīrzā 'Alī-Muḥammad Khān, Muwaqqar al-Dawla (d. 1921), recognized Browne's genuine interest in investigating this new world religion, which was just dawning on the world's historical horizon:

The youth [Browne] mentioned therein attained Our presence. Although this Wronged One had not consorted for many years past with people from foreign lands, We received him on several occasions. Portents of sincerity could be discerned on his visage.<sup>50</sup>

Besides the first meeting of Wednesday, 16 April 1890, one other meeting of note stands out: (1) Friday, 18 April 1890. Since no account of these subsequent meetings is to be found in *A Traveller's Narrative* (apart from the mention of the fact that Browne had four audiences with Baha'u'llah), one further episode warrants description in some detail, as the evidence permits. So the following information is now made public for the very first time:

**Friday – April 17 [18], 1890:** Admitted to audience with Behá in morning for some 20 min. or 1/2 an hour. He said amongst other things (as nearly as I can remember) –

بعد از دو سال همه ایران بابی میشود

شاه یا باید بابی بشود یا باید ول کند<sup>51</sup>

*Ba'd az du sāl hamī-y-i Īrān Bābī mīshavad*  
*Shāh yā bāyad Bābī bīshavad yā bāyad val kunad*

After two years, all of Iran will become 'Babi'.  
The Shah should either become a Babi or quit.

These particular (and somewhat peculiar) words, as taken down by Browne (Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 10), are open to serious question and may not withstand scrutiny once critically read and evaluated. For it is highly doubtful that these words were either spoken by Baha'u'llah directly or written down correctly by Browne. Baha'u'llah, moreover, disclaimed any 'political' pretensions, and would not have spoken of the Shah in such a crass fashion. One only needs read Baha'u'llah's lengthy *Lawḥ-i Sulṭān*, 'Tablet to the Sultan' (King of Persia), to appreciate the difference.

Leaving aside its content, the main reason for questioning the authenticity of this passage, or at least its wording, is the nature of the language that Browne attributes to Baha'u'llah. On sociological grounds, it is highly doubtful, if not altogether surprising, that in 1890 – only two years before Baha'u'llah's ascension, after the *Kitāb-i Aqdas* (c. 1873) had been revealed and the Baha'i community had fully taken shape, with a clear Baha'i self-identity – that the charismatic prophet-founder of the Baha'i Faith would still refer to this religion as 'Babi' and to its followers as 'Babis'.<sup>52</sup>

By that time (in 1890), Baha'is had long been referred to in Baha'u'llah's writings as 'the people of Bahā' (*ahl-i Bahā*). That Baha'is already applied this term to themselves is also attested by Baha'u'llah's epistles to followers in Ashkabad and by the poem in honour of the Russian emperor composed by an unknown Baha'i poet from Ashkabad (recently discovered by Youli Ioannesyan in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, and published, with a Russian translation).<sup>53</sup> However, at that time, it is true that Westerners and Russian writers still referred to Baha'is as 'Babis', although the term, being an anachronism, was already obsolete.

Browne continued his notes of that meeting:

He again insisted very strongly on the necessity of unity & concord amongst the nations, & spoke of the صلح اكبر which will come soon (1886–1887) [*sic*] ??? (Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 10.)<sup>54</sup>

**Note:** Considering that the year was 1890, Browne's reference to '1886–1887' is puzzling. Here, Baha'u'llah speaks of 'The Most Great Peace' (*ṣulḥ-i akbar*), which represents the international peace plan that Baha'u'llah offered to the political and religious leaders of the world by way of a series of open epistles, as part of the general proclamation of purpose and nature of Baha'u'llah's prophetic purpose and mission.<sup>55</sup>

Browne continues his account as follows:

There must be one language & one writing – The former may be either one of those now existing, or one invented for the purpose by a conference of savants of all countries. All nations must bind themselves to combine & put down any nation which attempts to disturb the general peace – <sup>56</sup>

Behá also spoke of the بيت العدل [Bayt al-'Adl, 'The House of Justice'] which, he said, is to settle all disputes. The members of this will be 'inspired' (ملهم) [Arab./Pers. *mulham* – 'inspired']. Jihád is entirely forbidden in this ظهور [Zuhūr 'Manifestation' of God].<sup>57</sup>

Of the الواح سلاطين [*Alvāḥ-i Salāṭīn* 'Tablets to the Rulers'] the only ones actually sent to the Kings were – : –

1. The لوح سلطان [*Lawḥ-i Sulṭān*, 'Tablet to [the] Sultan'] was addressed to the Sháh and conveyed by بدیع [Badī].
2. The لوح ملك پاریس [*Lawḥ-i Malīk-i Pāris* – lit., 'Tablet to the King of Paris'] to Napoleon –
3. The لوح رئیس [*Lawḥ-i Ra'īs*, 'Tablet of Ra'īs'] to Sultan Abdu'l-Azīz.<sup>58</sup>

**Note:** This reference by Baha'u'llah to the 'House of Justice' is quite significant. It shows that this institution was one of the foremost topics and teachings that Baha'u'llah privileged as among the salient features essential to the religion that Baha'u'llah imparted to Browne during the course of that historic interview on Friday, 18 April 1890. That the members of the 'House of Justice' would be 'inspired' indicates the divine nature of that institution, as conceived. In keeping with Baha'u'llah's mandate, one of the principal purposes of the Universal House of Justice, according to its 'Constitution', is 'to provide for

the arbitration and settlement of disputes arising between peoples; and to be the exponent and guardian of that Divine Justice which can alone ensure the security of, and establish the reign of law and order in, the world' – a function (as told by Baha'u'llah to Browne) that has not yet been formally exercised, yet is preordained and destined as part of its mission, purpose and service (as an arbiter of international disputes) in the future.<sup>59</sup> Browne introduces the topic of Baha'u'llah's proclamatory epistles addressed to kings and ecclesiastics, referring to these public letters by using the general title, *Alvāḥ-i Salāṭīn* ('Tablets to the Rulers') as the collective name of this historic correspondence. Browne then lists three specific Tablets. He first speaks of the *Lawḥ-i Sulṭān* ('Tablet to the Sultan') as being 'in his possession', and, in a letter dated 22 August 1889 to Baron Rosen, expresses his doubts as to whether a related text, known as the *Sūrat al-Mulūk* ('Sura of the Kings') was actually authored by Baha'u'llah:

[P. 10/b] '... I confess that the point which puzzles me most at present with regard to the Babi literature is the relation of the سورة الملوك [*Sūrat al-Mulūk* – 'Sura of the Kings'] described by you to the الواح سلاطين [*Alvāḥ-i Salāṭīn* – 'Tablets to the Rulers'] in my possession. The differences of style are so great that it would seem as if they could hardly be by the same author...

[P. 12/a] On the whole I cannot help thinking that the letter described by you must be by one of the other Babi chiefs, but it is curious that the author calls himself حسين بن علي [Husayn bin 'Alī] since Beha's name is certainly ميرزا حسين علي مازندرانی [Mīrzā Ḥusayn-'Alī Māzandarānī].<sup>60</sup>

It should be noted that Browne conveyed these serious reservations about Baha'u'llah's authorship of the *Sūrat al-Mulūk* in 1889, well before his trip to Palestine. His doubts were later dispelled by Rosen's counterargument and further dispelled, most probably, during his trip to the Holy Land.<sup>61</sup>

Browne elsewhere writes of 'the text of the instructions [i.e. by Baha'u'llah] to the bearer of the لوح سلطان [i.e. Badī', the youth who bravely approached the Shah, delivered Baha'u'llah's epistle, and was then subjected to brutal torture and killed] of which I had only heard the general purport at Acre'.<sup>62</sup> This is further evidence that Browne had asked questions about Baha'u'llah's epistles to kings and ecclesiastics, while at Acre. In fact, Browne had prepared to do so by bringing with him his original manuscript of Baha'u'llah's Tablet to Napoleon III:

By the way I have copies of the الواح سلاطين<sup>63</sup> which I made from Kirman MS. with some idea of printing these before I knew that you intended to publish the whole of سورة هيكل.<sup>64</sup> If they would be of any use to you for purposes of collation I should be very pleased to lend them to you. I meant to say this before, but forgot & I fear that it is now rather late in the day – as you have already got to the لوح پاپا<sup>65</sup> and the لوح ملك پاریس.<sup>66</sup> And besides I expect that your MS. is a very good one & would gain but little by collation with the not very accurate text I have. The original of this latter I took with me to Acre to clarify certain points about it, & the Bábís would hardly let me have it back again, saying it was a corrupt text & had better be destroyed! However I told them that it was the only one I had of these writings, & I should like to keep it till I got a better one, so they rather unwillingly gave it back to me.<sup>67</sup>

**Saturday 19 April 1890:** This day is a complete cipher. Browne records nothing for that day.

**Sunday, 20 April 1890:** Browne's record of his final audience with Baha'u'llah is laconic in the extreme: 'Farewell visit to Behá'.<sup>68</sup> Balyuzi provides a useful summary of what last transpired right before Browne's departure back to Cambridge University:

Siyyid 'Alī Afnān corroborates in his letter Browne's statement that books were presented to him. Browne names two books: a manuscript copy of the *Kitāb-i-Īqān* (The Book of Certitude) in the handwriting of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabīn, and a copy of *A Traveller's Narrative*, also in manuscript form, in the handwriting of the same eminent scribe. Afnān mentions a copy of the Tablet to Nāṣiri'd-Dīn Shāh as being among the gifts. He corroborates, too, the statement of Browne that they travelled back together overland to Beirut, which they reached on April 22nd.<sup>69</sup>

In a letter dated 4 August 1890, 'Abdu'l-Baha, in the first of a series of letters in years to follow, expressed to Browne high hopes that Browne would publish what would come to be regarded as 'the undisputed authority' and even as the definitive 'sacred history' of the origins of the Baha'i Faith:

You had referred to history; you should so endeavour that in future centuries your history may become the undisputed authority, may be considered sacred history, and accepted both by the communities of the people of the Kingdom and by the just amongst the people of the world, because the greatness of this Cause is not as evident as it should be, due to repressive measures repeatedly taken by the Government of Persia, and the severity of assaults, but ere long will its Truth, like unto the luminous sun, be seen and discerned.<sup>70</sup>

In this 'mission', Browne only partly succeeded. His work was tendentious to a fault, something for which he later tried to apologize to 'Abdu'l-Baha when the latter was in Europe.<sup>71</sup>

**Conclusion:** This study contributes to a fuller understanding of the events that transpired during the week of 13–20 August 1890, in Acre, Palestine, especially of Edward Granville Browne's historic audiences with Baha'u'llah at the latter's mansion at Bahji. Four sources were judiciously drawn upon to further reconstruct the events that transpired during that academically and spiritually momentous encounter: (1) Baha'i historical sources; (2) an Azali historical account (*Memoirs of Badi'u'llah*); (3) recently published archival correspondence edited, with critical annotations by Youli Ioannesyan (*The Development of the Babi/Baha'i Communities: Exploring Baron Rosen's Archives*); and (4) previously unpublished archival manuscripts from Cambridge University Library, obtained by Christopher Buck.

The information that was previously unavailable was primarily details of Browne's audience with Baha'u'llah on Friday, 18 April 1890, which Browne described in some detail. Beyond corroborating most of what was previously known about this episode in Baha'i history, and in addition to providing previously unknown and/or little-known details that combine to present a fuller picture in greater appreciation of these memorable events, this study serves to accentuate and amplify the emotional impact that this

experience had on the Cambridge orientalist, and further heightens the disappointing aftermath wherein this otherwise judicious scholar betrayed a certain bias in favour of Baha'u'llah's rival (but not rightful) claimant, which is fully discussed in Balyuzi's book and, more recently, in Buck and Ioannesyan's 2013 *Baha'i Studies Review* article.<sup>72</sup> Buck's 2014 *British Writers* article<sup>73</sup> on Browne may serve to rehabilitate Browne somewhat, by pointing to positive contributions on Browne's part, in what perhaps may be considered a partial (although by no means complete) fulfilment of Baha'u'llah's reported statement: 'Should there be any support [service] [to the Cause] by this [fellow, i.e. Browne], that will not be far-fetched from God's bounty'.<sup>74</sup>

Professor Browne's narrative of his audience with Baha'u'llah has taken on a life of its own, far and away above and beyond Browne himself. This episode, as described in *A Traveller's Narrative*, and as corroborated in the supplemental sources discussed in this paper, has achieved a kind of immortality that transcends all considerations of the author himself. What Browne has done is to re-create an experience into which we, as individuals, can enter and vicariously relive. The narrative is a 'time capsule' in the truest sense, since no one can doubt the authenticity of the experience that Browne has indelibly impressed in the annals of history, when 'scholar meets prophet', as happened when Cambridge orientalist, Edward Granville Browne, met Baha'u'llah in Acre, 1890.

### Suggested citation

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Christopher Buck and Youli Ioannesyan have asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the authors of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.

## Endnotes

1. Edward Granville Browne, Notebook entries for the dates of 14–21 April 1890. Browne Manuscripts, Cambridge University Library, Classmark: Browne Sup.21(8). Ordered by Christopher Buck, University Library Image Order, RoW N2724 (CAM125186, 600 dpi Studio Images). Cost of digital scans underwritten courtesy of Mr. Sahab Mahboubi, with grateful acknowledgment for his generous support of this research.
2. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *A Traveller's Narrative written to illustrate the Episode of the Bāb (Maqālah-i shakhsh-i sayyāh kih dar qazīyah-i Bāb nivishtah ast)*. Edited in the original Persian, and translated into English, with an Introduction and Explanatory Notes. Edited by Edward G. Browne. Volume 1: Persian Text; Volume 2: English Translation and Notes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891; paperback edition, 2012.
3. *A Traveller's Narrative* is thought to have been written in or around 1866 by Abbas Effendi (1844–1921), surnamed 'Abdu'l-Baha ('Servant of Baha') who, after his father's passing, served as Baha'u'llah's designated successor, interpreter and exemplar, whom Browne met on Tuesday, 15 April 1890, which left a lasting impression, which Browne describes as follows:  

Seldom have I seen one whose appearance impressed me more. A tall strongly-built man holding himself straight as an arrow, with white turban and raiment, long black locks reaching almost to the shoulder, broad powerful forehead indicating a strong intellect combined with an unswerving will, eyes keen as a hawk's, and strongly-marked but pleasing features—such was my first impression of 'Abbās Efendī, 'the master' (Ākā) as he par excellence is called by the Bābīs. (Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative*, 2: xli.)
4. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Wilmette, IL: U.S. Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1979 [first edition, 1944] 194.
5. For a general description of the Babi and Baha'i manuscripts archived in the St Petersburg Collection, see Youli Ioannesyan, 'The St. Petersburg 19th c. Collection of Materials on the Babi and Baha'i Faiths: Primary and other Sources'. *Written Monuments of the Orient* (English version) 2.2(2015): 85–107.
6. Youli Ioannesyan, *The Development of the Babi/Baha'i Communities: Exploring Baron Rosen's Archives*. Iranian Studies Series, London and New York: Routledge, 2013. See Christopher Buck, Review of *The Development of the Babi/Baha'i Communities: Exploring Baron Rosen's Archives*, by Youli Ioannesyan. *Nova Religio* 18(4), 123–125. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/nr.2015.18.4.123>.
7. Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative*, Vol. 2: xli.
8. Ioannesyan, *The Development of the Babi/Baha'i Communities*, 143–144.
9. Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative*, Vol. 2, pp. xxxix.
10. See Tumanski, A. G. (1899) 'Kitabe Akdes. Svyashenneyshaya Kniga Sovremennykh Babidov: Tekst, Perevod, Vvedeniye i Prilozheniya' ('The Kitāb-i-Aqdas, The Most Holy Book of the Present-day Babīs: Text, Translation, Introduction, Supplements'), *Mémoires de l'Académie impériale des sciences de St.-Petersbourg*, VIII Série, vol. 3, St Petersburg: Royal Academy of Sciences xxv.
11. Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative*, 2: xxxix–xl.
12. Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative*, 2: xl.
13. 'Namad', i.e. the same word spelled in Persian.
14. Literally, 'The Most Holy Tablet' which, probably, implies here the Most Holy Book.
15. Ioannesyan, *The Development of the Babi/Baha'i Communities*, 144.



16. See V. R. Rosen, 'Poslaniye Blagiye Vesti' ('The Glad Tidings Epistle'), *Memoirs of the Oriental Branch of the Russian Archaeological Society* (ZVORAO) 7 (1893b): 183–184. (Youli Ioannesyan's translation.)
17. Mīrzā Badi' u'llāh, *The Memoirs of Badi' u'llāh, Bahā's Youngest Son*, 10–11. Translation courtesy of Adel Shafipour. Persian text online: <http://www.bayanic.com/showPict.php?id=badi&ref=10&err=0&curr=10>. (Accessed 9 August 2015.) Translation previously published in Christopher Buck and Youli A. Ioannesyan, 'Baha' u'llāh's *Bisharat* (Glad-Tidings): A Proclamation to Scholars and Statesmen'. *Baha'i Studies Review* 16 (2010): 3–28 [25]. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1386/bsr.16.3/1>. **Note:** The translation published here is verified, emended as needed, and supplemented by the present co-author, Youli Ioannesyan.
18. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 13.
19. Ibid.
20. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 1.
21. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 13.
22. Ibid.
23. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 2.
24. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 13.
25. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 4.
26. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 13.
27. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 9.
28. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 13.
29. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 10.
30. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 14.
31. Ibid.
32. Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative* 2:xxxv.
33. Ibid. 2:li.
34. Hasan M. Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1970 52–53.
35. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 4.
36. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 9.
37. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 10.
38. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 14.
39. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 9.
40. Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative*, Vol. 2, p. xl.
41. See Browne's meticulous transcription of those portions of this Tablet that Baha' u'llāh read aloud, which Browne copied in a clear, Persian script: Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folios 5, 6 and 7.
42. Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative*, 2: xl–xli.
43. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 8.
44. See Browne, *A Traveller's Narrative* 2:71–72 for Browne's translation of this Tablet. For the Persian original, See *ibid* 1:91–93.
45. Baha' u'llāh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá' u'llāh*, Wilmette, IL: U.S. Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1990 287–289.
46. The original Tablet (untitled) is published in *Ishrāqāt va Chand Lawḥ-i-Dīgar* (first published circa 1892–93 in Bombay, India), pp. 133–143 (the portion Baha' u'llāh read to Browne is in pp. 133–135), available online at <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/b/1/i-133.html> and ff. (Accessed 1 October 2017.) (Reference courtesy of Omid Ghaemmaghami, personal communication, 1 October 2017.)



47. Baha'u'llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, Wilmette, IL: U.S. Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1988 13–14.
48. Transliteration is Browne's.
49. Provisional translation by Nahzy Abadi Buck, personal communication, August 11, 2015.
50. Translated by Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith*, p. 52. The recipient of this Tablet was Hasan Balyuzi's father, Mírzá 'Alí-Muhammad Afnán Shírází. (This information courtesy of Adel Shafipour.) Balyuzi's father "knew Edward Browne intimately in London", was referred to as "Mírzá 'Alí" in Browne's *A Year Amongst the Persians*", and was "instrumental in facilitating Browne's visit to 'Akká and to Bahá'u'lláh". (Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Baha'i Faith*, p. 6.)
51. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 10.
52. In a letter dated 1 November 1899, written shortly before his trip to Palestine in 1890, Browne writes of 'Behaists' (i.e. Baha'is'), which is the first instance in which Browne actually referred to the Baha'is by their proper (or at least approximately so) name:
 

I hope that you are well, and that your official work leaves you some time free for the Babis. I think I told you that the sect has established itself in America. And has several hundred ardent behaists [sic: read 'Behaists'] in New York, Chicago and San Francisco. I had a visit from one of them last June. As a rule they seem to know very little about it, but some of them perform pilgrimages to St. Jean d'Acre [Akka] . . . ' Ioannesyan, *The Development of the Babi/Baha'i Communities* 189–190 (citing Deposit: 777/Inventory: 2/Unit: 47).
53. See Youli A. Ioannesyan, Бахаи в Российской империи. Первая организованная община за пределами Ирана/Baha'is in the Russian Empire: The First Organized Community Outside Iran', in *Strany i Narody Vostoka (Religii na Vostoke = Religions of the East)*. Irina Fedorovna Popova; Tat'jana Dmitrievna Skrynnikova (eds.), Moscow: Nauka – Vostochnaja Literatura, 2015, Vol. XXXVI, 72–96 (in Russian).
54. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 10.
55. See Christopher Buck, 'The Eschatology of Globalization: Baha'u'llah's Multiple-Messiahship Revisited'. In *Studies in Modern Religions, Religious Movements and the Babi-Baha'i Faiths*. Moshe Sharon (ed.) Numen Book Series: Studies in the History of Religions, 104. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004, 143–178.
56. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 11.
57. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 11.
58. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 11.
59. See 'The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice: Declaration of Trust' (adopted 26 November 1972), <http://universalhouseofjustice.bahai.org/constitution/constitution-universal-house-justice>. (Accessed 1 October 2017.)
60. Deposit: 777/Inventory: 2/Unit: 41. See discussion in Ioannesyan, *The Development of the Babi/Baha'i Communities* 138–139.
61. See the recent discussion in Ioannesyan, 'The St. Petersburg 19th c. Collection of Materials on the Babi and Baha'i Faiths: Primary and other Sources', 97–98.
62. Ioannesyan, *The Development of the Babi/Baha'i Communities* 148 (citing Deposit: 777/Inventory: 2/Unit: 42).
63. *Alvāḥ-i Salāṭīn* ('Tablets to the Rulers').
64. '*Sūrat-i Haykal*'.
65. 'The Tablet to the Pope' [Pius IX] which is part of Baha'u'llah's *Alvāḥ-i Salāṭīn* (Tablets to the Rulers').
66. 'The Tablet to the French (lit.: Paris) King [Napoleon III]' is also part of Baha'u'llah's *Alvāḥ-i Salāṭīn* ('Tablets to the Rulers').
67. Ioannesyan, *The Development of the Babi/Baha'i Communities* 146–147 (citing a letter dated 20 July 1890, Deposit: 777/Inventory: 2/Unit: 42).
68. Browne Sup.21(8), Acre, folio 14.
69. Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith* 53–54.

70. Translated by Balyuzi, *ibid* 98–99.
71. Mina Yazdani, 'Chapter 6. Orientals Meeting in the West: Foes Become Friends', in 'Abdu'l-Baha's Journey West: The Course of Human Solidarity, Negar Mottahedeh (ed.) New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 145–170.
72. Christopher Buck and Youli A. Ioannesyan, 'The 1893 Russian Publication of Baha'u'llah's Last Will and Testament: An Academic Attestation of 'Abdu'l-Baha's Successorship'. *Baha'i Studies Review* 19, 2013, 3–44, doi:10.1386/bsr.19.1.3\_1.
73. Christopher Buck, 'Edward Granville Browne'. In *British Writers*, Supplement XXI. Jay Parini (ed.) Farmington Hills, MI: Charles Scribner's Sons/The Gale Group, 2014, 17–33.
74. Provisional translation by Nahzy Abadi Buck, personal communication, 11 August 2015.

# Shoghi Rabbani as 'Abdu'l-Baha's Secretary, 1918–20

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## Abstract

*A brief account of Shoghi Effendi's work as 'Abdu'l-Baha's secretary during the period between his arrival in Haifa from Beirut in 1918 and his departure for Europe in 1920, focusing on Shoghi Effendi's role as English-language translator and interpreter for his grandfather.*

## Keywords

Shoghi Rabbani  
Shoghi Effendi  
Guardian of the Cause  
Baha'i Faith  
secretariat  
Baha'i World Centre  
'Abdu'l-Baha  
translation

## Chronology

- 1918 British capture of Haifa and Akka (23 September).  
Ahmad Sohrab leaves Haifa (23 December).
- 1919 'Unveiling' of 'Abdu'l-Baha's *Tablets of the Divine Plan* in New York (26 April–1 May).  
The Treaty of Versailles between the victorious allies and Germany is concluded (28 June).  
'Abdu'l-Baha's letter to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace (the '*Tablet to the Hague*') is translated (17 December) and dispatched.
- 1920 Shoghi Effendi enters the sanatorium at Neuilly (April).  
'Abdu'l-Baha is knighted by the British (27 April).

Shoghi Rabbani had been sent to study at the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut in October 1913, having earlier graduated from its preparatory school. He completed his degree – a Bachelor of Arts – in the summer of 1917. By that time, he had taken courses in English, Arabic and French, as well as introductory courses in science, mathematics, philosophy and the social sciences.<sup>1</sup> The World War then still in progress had already brought starvation and other hardships to much of Ottoman Syria, including the death of between one third and one half of the population of Mount Lebanon,<sup>2</sup> and in October 1917 British Imperial forces brought the prospect of actual fighting closer when they invaded Palestine, taking Jerusalem in December. There were also reports of threats to the life of 'Abdu'l-Baha from the local Ottoman commander.<sup>3</sup>

Early in October 1917, Shoghi Effendi – then styling himself Showqi Hâdi Rabbâni – re-registered as a graduate student at the College, writing to 'Abdu'l-Baha a few months later that he was focusing his studies on what would be of greatest benefit to the Baha'i Cause and to 'Abdu'l-Baha.<sup>4</sup>

Assuming that he returned to Haifa after the end of the academic year, he might have re-joined his grandfather in Haifa in the summer of 1918, but this is not yet clear. He then seems to have remained in Haifa until March 1920 when on 'Abdu'l-Baha's instructions he moved to France to recover from exhaustion, entering a sanatorium in one of the Paris suburbs in April. We can therefore assume that he was living in Haifa for about nineteen months, and whilst the details of his activities are as yet unknown, it is evident that for at least a significant part of this period, he was working as 'Abdu'l-Baha's English-language secretary and general assistant. With his now considerable fluency in English, the twenty-one-year-old Shoghi Effendi was eminently suited to help his grandfather with this work.

The need for a competent English-language secretary had developed from the 1890s onwards as an increasing number of Westerners had become Baha'is and wished to correspond with 'Abdu'l-Baha. Initially, there was no one living in the household of 'Abdu'l-Baha capable of fulfilling this role, and 'Abdu'l-Baha's communications with his American and other Western followers had to be directed through Persian- and Arabic-speaking Baha'is visiting or resident in the West. This was presumably unsatisfactory as it left 'Abdu'l-Baha dependent on the words of the various intermediaries and their own understandings of what his own letters ('Tablets') meant, and there was only very rarely any opportunity for verbal clarification of meanings. Again, when Western Baha'is started to visit 'Abdu'l-Baha in Palestine (1898–), there was an obvious need for someone to interpret, as very few of the early Western Baha'is knew more than a few words of Persian.

Over the years, various Persian Baha'is assumed this role, seemingly including 'Abdu'l-Baha's own youngest daughter Munavvar for a time,<sup>5</sup> but it was only after 'Abdu'l-Baha's return from his North American tour in 1913, that a permanent English-language secretary was appointed. This was Ahmad Sohrab (1893–1958), who continued with this work until Shoghi Effendi took over from him towards the end of 1918.<sup>6</sup> The exact date of the 'handover' is unclear, but it seems that there was a period in which the two men were working together in service to their 'Master'. Sohrab himself left Haifa on 23 December, bound for the United States, where he would present 'Abdu'l-Baha's *Tablets of the Divine Plan* to the North American Baha'is, but he was still sending letters and translations for *Star of the West* from Haifa as late as 16 December 1918.<sup>7</sup> Shoghi Effendi's first published translation of 'Abdu'l-Baha's letters to Western Baha'is are dated 12 December 1918.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, the British had resumed their advance northward in September 1918, taking Haifa on 23 September (and incidentally securing the safety of 'Abdu'l-Baha). For their part, a French fleet took Beirut on 6 October, and all Ottoman forces had effectively evacuated Syria by mid-October, a formal armistice being agreed on 31 October. Ottoman rule over the Arab provinces had ended, and in Palestine, the British were now in occupation.

Effective communications between the Baha'i colony in Haifa and the wider Baha'i world had resumed by mid-November, one of the first visitors being the English Baha'i Captain (shortly Major) Wellesley Tudor-Pole (1884–1968), then with the British forces, who was able to meet 'Abdu'l-Baha on 19 November, bringing with him letters from Baha'is around the world. On the same day, Shoghi Effendi wrote what may have been his first

post-war letter to the wider world. Addressed to the Persian Baha'i Lotfullah Hakim, then in London, he noted Tudor-Pole's visit. He also expressed his own feelings at having the privilege to serve his grandfather after having completed his university degree, and referred to the 'golden opportunity' that now presented itself to promulgate the 'Word of God' without restriction in 'this liberated region' [i.e. British Palestine] in the new 'Era of Service'.<sup>9</sup>

## Correspondence and Translation

Apart from removing the dangers against 'Abdu'l-Baha's life, the British occupation reopened the lines of communication with the wider world, resulting in an incoming flood of correspondence for 'Abdu'l-Baha.

Shoghi Effendi made reference to this mass of letters in several of his own letters to Baha'i friends, as on 26 December 1918, when he wrote that '[e]very day' carried with it 'fresh tidings and happy news' from first one and then another part of the world, and that early that very morning he had been ushered into his grandfather's presence to find him sitting on his sofa, with letters ('supplications') scattered around him, Shoghi Effendi's task being to put down the words 'that flowed from His lips'.<sup>10</sup> Again, on 7 January 1919, in a letter to Lotfullah Hakim in England, he noted that 'often from morn till eve', 'Abdu'l-Baha spent the 'present days' in revealing 'vigorous and enthusiastic words' for the Baha'is of 'America, Persia, England, India, Russia, Japan and Egypt'.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, on 29 January, he wrote to Dr Zia Bagdadi in Chicago that 'Abdu'l-Baha had already revealed almost one hundred 'tablets' for the American Baha'is, and that supplications and cables were pouring in from around the world (Iran, India, Japan, France, England and Switzerland), reporting that the Baha'is were ablaze in service to the Cause.<sup>12</sup>

Again, on 14 February, Shoghi Effendi noted in his 'Diary Letter' to Ahmad Sohrab that 'Abdu'l-Baha had spent the whole forenoon in correcting and signing sixty letters that had been made ready in the past few days,<sup>13</sup> whilst on 17 February, he referred to the '[s]upplications from every corner of the globe, of different length and character, written in different languages, enclosing clippings of papers, pamphlets, typewritten reports, petitions, etc.' which were 'ceaselessly pouring in', such that 'the time for their perusal is sufficient to exhaust all the time that one might possibly have at his disposal', adding that '[a]lthough the ways have not yet fully opened and communication with all parts has not yet been restored, one is baffled at the amount of letters, books and magazines that the post office daily delivers'.<sup>14</sup> Again, on 17 March, Shoghi Effendi wrote to Corinne True in Chicago that the 'doors of communication' with Iran and India were now open and that 'supplications' from the Baha'is were 'constantly pouring in'. In response, 'Abdu'l-Baha was 'engaged in revealing Tablets' 'from morn till eve, even at midnight'.<sup>15</sup>

Just over a month later, however, the pace of work slackened off for a while, Shoghi Effendi, writing to Zia Bagdadi again on 25 April, and explaining that he now had ample time to respond to Bagdadi's letters because there had been a lull in 'Abdu'l-Baha's correspondence. Therefore, he wished to share with him news both of 'Abdu'l-Baha's health and safety and of Baha'i activities around the world.<sup>16</sup> By 8 May, the pressure was back on,

however, Shoghi Effendi commenting to Lotfullah Hakim that 'Abdu'l-Baha had recently been revealing many Tablets – to Baha'is in the United States, England, France, Switzerland, Corsica, Germany, Iran, Egypt, India, Japan and New Zealand – and that as a consequence, Shoghi Effendi was much involved with receiving dictation from 'Abdu'l-Baha and with translation, so that he had had little time to write, and even now would have to abruptly stop due to the '[e]xtreme pressure of work'.<sup>17</sup>

Again, on 12 July, he wrote to J. E. Esslemont in England that 'supplications' from the Baha'is were pouring in incessantly, and that in response 'Abdu'l-Baha was revealing '[m]ighty and numerous' Tablets every day, so that often Shoghi Effendi had to remain at his desk translating outgoing letters until after midnight. Nevertheless, he was 'happy and grateful' [for the privilege of serving his grandfather].<sup>18</sup> Later in the same month, 'Abdu'l-Baha himself commented on the sheer volume of incoming letters which poured down on him 'like unto rain from the East as well as from the West', so that there was insufficient time for more than short replies to be written.<sup>19</sup> Yet again, on 9 August, Shoghi Effendi referred in his Diary Letter to the '[p]iles of supplications' that awaited 'Abdu'l-Baha's 'immediate consideration'; the telegrams that were 'pouring in every day from different parts of the globe'; and the newspaper reports, clippings, books and pamphlets that were being received. In response, 'Abdu'l-Baha's own replies had now reached 'the proportion of booklets', and had to be 'immediately revised, translated and transcribed'.<sup>20</sup>

The work of translation itself could be extremely time-consuming, of course, Shoghi Effendi noting in a letter in May 1919 that a whole afternoon had been spent translating only part of the contents of letters from Baha'is in England for 'Abdu'l-Baha.<sup>21</sup> Also, it was not just letters that had to be translated, as on 7 January 1919, when Shoghi Effendi noted that in addition to translating a correspondent's 'long letter', the contents of a short article in the periodical *Christian Commonwealth* had been 'presented' to 'Abdu'l-Baha.<sup>22</sup> Again, as noted above, the work involved not just receiving dictation from 'Abdu'l-Baha, but then transcribing the dictated material for 'Abdu'l-Baha to check before it was sent out in the original Persian or Arabic or translated into English.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, knowing the long hours of work accomplished by his grandfather encouraged Shoghi Effendi to push himself hard. Thus, 'even until late at night' when everything was 'hushed in silence', the 'wakeful Beloved' continued to reveal 'his soothing words' and 'precious lines', so that Shoghi Effendi felt moved to present himself at those hours in 'Abdu'l-Baha's presence so as to take down his words responding to recently received mail.<sup>24</sup>

An indication of Shoghi Effendi's translation skills whilst he was serving as his grandfather's secretary can be gained from 130 'Tablets' of 'Abdu'l-Baha translated by Shoghi Effendi which have been published.<sup>25</sup> These letters show a distinct periodicity, with two peak periods – December 1918/January 1919 and July 1919 – between them accounting for 90 (69 per cent) of the published letters, whilst the intervening five months from February to June 1919 account for only 32 letters and the five month period from August to December 1919 for only 8.<sup>26</sup> This does not mean that other unpublished Tablets may not have been translated at this time, of course, but clearly the editors tried to print as many letters as they could. The letters themselves

range in length from a few lines to a page or more, but regardless of length, were evidently expressions of a painstaking concern to accurately translate 'Abdu'l-Baha's words into good English.<sup>27</sup>

An additional item of considerable importance was the lengthy letter to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace (the '*Tablet to The Hague*'), the translation of which was probably largely done by Shoghi Effendi, but with some help from Dr Zia M. Bagdadi, Mirza Lotfullah Hakim and Dr J. E. Esslemont. The finished translation was ready on 17 December 1919.<sup>28</sup>

## Other Activities

Whilst serving 'Abdu'l-Baha as his secretary, Shoghi Effendi had a number of distinct duties. These included translating letters and materials sent in by Western Baha'is into Persian, and then taking down 'Abdu'l-Baha's dictated replies, transcribing good copies, and then translating them into English. Whether he was much involved in the correspondence between 'Abdu'l-Baha and the Persian- and Arabic-speaking Baha'is 'of the East' is unknown to me, but he certainly knew of the major items of Baha'i news from the Middle East and communicated them in his own letters.

Apart from acting as 'Abdu'l-Baha's translator, Shoghi Effendi also served as his assistant and interpreter. Thus, he was present as one of his grandfather's retinue, as for example during visits to the shrine of Baha'u'llah at Bahji. The importance of his role as 'Abdu'l-Baha's interpreter in his meetings with Westerners also grew rapidly. As both the leader of a worldwide religious movement and a local Palestinian notable, 'Abdu'l-Baha had always received many visitors.

Prior to 1918, most of these visitors spoke Persian, Arabic or Turkish and could thus speak to 'Abdu'l-Baha directly, and it was only the Western Baha'i pilgrims and the occasional Western non-Baha'i enquirer who needed an interpreter. This situation changed dramatically with the British conquest. Now, the leading local authorities were British, and particularly after military rule gave way to a new civilian administration, the former restrictions on movement ended, and a larger number of non-Middle Eastern pilgrims and visitors arrived. Although various members of 'Abdu'l-Baha's household were able to help cater for the language needs of pilgrims on an ad hoc basis, an effective 'official' interpreter was of value when more formal contacts were needed. Again, although the details are largely unknown, it must be assumed that with his language skills and close family relationship to 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi was able to play a useful role here.

Certainly there were occasions when Shoghi Effendi accompanied his grandfather to meetings with the new British authorities and others, he himself describing a visit on 13 February 1919, when they were motored by a Major Nott to meet the British Commander-in-Chief, Sir Edmund Allenby ('a very gentle, modest and striking figure'), at his home, Shoghi Effendi noting that Allenby received 'Abdu'l-Baha with warmth and respect, and the two of them then talking about the progress of the Baha'i Cause – presumably with Shoghi Effendi acting as interpreter.<sup>29</sup> Again, a visiting American journalist in 1919 was probably referring to Shoghi Effendi when she remarked on 'Abdu'l-Baha's 'well trained secretary' who interpreted 'Abdu'l-Baha's 'low, soft words' for her into good English.<sup>30</sup> Shoghi Effendi's language skills also came into use with unexpected visitors, as with the



British private soldier who called at 'Abdu'l-Baha's house on 14 February 1919 (the day after the Allenby meeting) asking for more information about the Baha'i teachings.

Despite being tired and sleepy from his fortnightly visit to the Turkish bath ('which ameliorates so much his health and strengthens his physical constitution') and intending to sleep, 'Abdu'l-Baha found the energy to talk to the soldier in detail about the need for lasting peace based on the Word of God.<sup>31</sup> We should assume that Shoghi Effendi interpreted for him. The soldier called again the next day (15 February), Shoghi Effendi writing that his own head was 'in a whirl so busy and so eventful was the day', at least 'a score of callers from prince and pasha to a simple private soldier' having sought interviews with 'Abdu'l-Baha.<sup>32</sup> Given that these audiences were in addition to the by then not inconsiderable work of correspondence, the pressure of activity must have been very great, and it would seem that one of the ways in which Shoghi Effendi was able to help 'Abdu'l-Baha was by entertaining guests after their 'audience' with 'Abdu'l-Baha had ended, as with a visiting Baha'i from Damascus who, having been warmly greeted by 'Abdu'l-Baha, reported on local Baha'i activities, and having been given words of advice, was left with Shoghi Effendi and other attendants whilst 'Abdu'l-Baha retired to his room to correct letters.<sup>33</sup>

Additional work was also sometimes assigned, as when 'Abdu'l-Baha asked Shoghi Effendi to attend to the paperwork involved to enable a donated motor car to be cleared from the port and brought to 'Abdu'l-Baha's house.<sup>34</sup> Shoghi Effendi also acted as one of his grandfather's chosen companions during his visits to Bahji, as on 18 February – a few days after the exhausting programme of events outlined above – when, with a few others, he escaped from 'life's tumult and bustle' and the 'constant movement and circulation' of 'Abdu'l-Baha's house in Haifa to the 'solemn solitude' of Baha'u'llah's tomb, where one could forget one's cares and feel uplifted and inspired.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to his 'designated duties', Shoghi Effendi clearly wanted to do more. One wish was to disseminate news of 'the Cause' to other Baha'is, as well as to collect it – as in his letter to Lotfullah Hakim in November 1918, when he emphasized 'Abdu'l-Baha's expectation that he would now hear from Hakim 'frequently and directly' regarding the progress of the Baha'i Cause, and Shoghi's Effendi's own expectation that by relaying such news to 'Abdu'l-Baha he would be able to make him 'happy, glad and strong'.<sup>36</sup>

Shoghi Effendi's desire to disseminate news assumed formal shape in a series of 'Diary Letters' which he started to write, summarizing the events of the day in relation to 'Abdu'l-Baha's activities and teachings and news of Baha'i activities from around the world. In this, he followed the example of his predecessor, Ahmad Sohrab, who had published a number of such letters during his tenure as 'Abdu'l-Baha's secretary. Indeed, according to Sohrab, it was he himself who first requested Shoghi Effendi to undertake this labour so that the Baha'i world would continue to be kept 'fully informed' of important news, and it was he (Sohrab) who was their initial recipient, copying and distributing them amongst some members of the Baha'i assemblies. The first 'issue' was dated 23 December 1918, the very day of Sohrab's own departure from Haifa.<sup>37</sup> A few – covering eleven days (8–18) in February 1919 – were also published in *Star of the West*.<sup>38</sup> Shoghi

Effendi himself seems to have made multiple carbon copies of these originally typewritten Letters and to have distributed them to various trusted friends.<sup>39</sup> As with the translations, the Diary Letters reveal a concern with style on the part of their writer, and some passages are extremely evocative, as exemplified by Shoghi Effendi's 'soliloquy' from Bahji in February 1919.<sup>40</sup>

Another activity of note was Shoghi Effendi's evident interest in photography, a number of the published photographs of 'Abdu'l-Baha and visiting Baha'is in Haifa at this time originating with Shoghi Effendi. He himself both sent photographs to *Star of the West* and gave copies of photographs to visiting pilgrims.<sup>41</sup>

### Introduced to the Baha'is

It was during this period that 'Shoghi Effendi' (named as such, an initial spelling of 'Shogi' later being changed to the now familiar 'Shoghi') first came to the notice of the larger Baha'i world, making his first 'public appearance' in the January 1919 issue of *Star of the West* with published letters from him to Lotfullah Hakim and Major Wellesley Tudor-Pole, the former dated 19 November, and the latter 17 December 1918. In the letter to Hakim, he introduced himself as 'Abdu'l-Baha's grandson, whilst that to Pole was prefaced by a similar description – presumably added by the editors of *Star of the West*.<sup>42</sup> Occasional reminders of his relationship to 'Abdu'l-Baha were also included after several of his subsequent published letters where it was necessary to emphasize that he was transmitting his grandfather's instructions.<sup>43</sup> Then, in the 27 September 1919 issue of *Star of the West*, 'Shoghi Rabbani' was effectively formally 'introduced' to the Baha'i world, with a full-length photograph of the 'Grandson of Abdul-Baha' who was the 'Translator of recent Tablets' and letters to the North American Baha'is as well as the writer of the Diary Letters beginning in that issue.<sup>44</sup> The photograph itself was evidently taken in a studio, and shows Shoghi Effendi in oriental robes over which he is wearing a Western-style overcoat. He also wears a low fez on his head. The stance is relaxed and his hands are in his pockets.

### Shoghi Effendi's Health

Judging by the few of his own letters from this time which have so far been published, Shoghi Effendi was both exhilarated and exhausted during the period he was working as his grandfather's secretary. At some point, he also contracted malaria, and in a letter in May 1919 referred to suffering from 'repeated attacks' of the disease, in response to which 'Abdu'l-Baha had instructed him to spend several nights in the vicinity of the Shrine of the Bab on Mount Carmel, so that he could enjoy 'the pure invigorating and spiritual atmosphere' there<sup>45</sup> – and also no doubt escape from the bustling atmosphere of 'Abdu'l-Baha's house and gain some rest.

Eventually, however, Shoghi Effendi appears to have experienced what was to be the first of a number of major periods of serious exhaustion. The details of this collapse are as yet unclear, but it is likely that it was basically a response to a prolonged and intense period of overwork. The point at which 'Abdu'l-Baha decided that his grandson needed a period of rest is unclear. Certainly, very few published translations of individual Tablets were completed after July 1919, and in the month of September 1919 there were

none at all, but it may simply have been that he was busy during this time with the considerable task of producing a good draft translation of the long *Tablet to the Hague* – finished in December, presumably after his collaborators had arrived in Haifa and had had a chance to check it.<sup>46</sup>

Whatever the case, Shoghi Effendi probably left Haifa for Paris sometime in March 1920, and was installed in a convalescent home, the *Maison d'hydrothérapie et de convalescence* (House of Hydrotherapy and Convalescence) in the Paris suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine by early April.<sup>47</sup> He seems to have been extremely run down both physically and psychologically, reporting to a friend on 8 May that his health had been in a state of crisis and that after a month of treatment he was still not recovered.<sup>48</sup> On the doctor's instructions, he was staying in bed, resting till noon each day and then going for an afternoon walk. Following his grandfather's instructions, he was not reading any books. Initially hoping for an early recovery, he evidently had a relapse in mid-May, feeling unwell and completely losing his appetite – for which the doctor prescribed medicine and a complete day's bed-rest. It was apparently not until June that his recovery was complete.<sup>49</sup>

### Shoghi Effendi's Successor

Shoghi Effendi's full-time successor as 'Abdu'l-Baha's English-language translator and assistant was Azizullah S. Bahadur, some translations by him dating from as early as late January 1920.<sup>50</sup> A little before this, and overlapping with Azizullah's early months of work, Zia Bagdadi from Chicago appears to have filled this role on an interim basis – arriving in Haifa with his family on 9 December 1919 and staying for the best part of a year – he arrived back in New York on 4 October 1920.<sup>51</sup> Bagdadi also commented on the enormous workload of 'Abdu'l-Baha's correspondence which had to be dealt with, the mail coming 'in boxes and baskets' and being so voluminous that it was 'of course, impossible to even read', four interpreters giving over a large part of their time endeavouring to select those letters which were most important. He also noted that on a routine basis 'Abdu'l-Baha received fifty or so guests each day – in addition to being the fulcrum for the approximately one hundred family members and other permanent residents in the Baha'i colony in Haifa-Akka.<sup>52</sup>

### In Retrospect

Although our present knowledge of this first step in Shoghi Effendi's adult service to his grandfather and the Baha'i Cause is woefully incomplete, a number of observations may be made. Firstly, whilst Shoghi Effendi had no inkling at this time that he had already been appointed as 'Abdu'l-Baha's legal successor,<sup>53</sup> this period gave him opportunity to observe closely and at first-hand the varied activities which 'Abdu'l-Baha engaged in as head of the Faith, the role which Shoghi Effendi himself would very soon have to shoulder. Secondly, Shoghi Effendi used these months as his grandfather's secretary to practise his skills as a translator and English stylist. Thirdly, probably at 'Abdu'l-Baha's own instigation, Shoghi Effendi was now formally introduced to both the Baha'i world and to British Palestinian officialdom as 'Abdu'l-Baha's grandson and trusted assistant.<sup>54</sup> Fourthly, this was evidently a period of fulfilling personal experience for the young man,

as he worked closely with his much-loved grandfather and felt the excitement of incoming news of Baha'i activities around the world.

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### Endnotes

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6. Sohrab had been living in the United States and subsequently served as one of 'Abdu'l-Baha's interpreters during the latter's second Western tour (1912–13).
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26. The monthly and daily figures for the number of letters are as follows:

December 1918	12	(12 <sup>th</sup> =2; 17 <sup>th</sup> =2; 27 <sup>th</sup> =5; 30 <sup>th</sup> =3)
January 1919	29	(8 <sup>th</sup> =3; 9 <sup>th</sup> =6; 10 <sup>th</sup> =8; 18 <sup>th</sup> =1; 19 <sup>th</sup> =1; 26 <sup>th</sup> =2; 28 <sup>th</sup> =7; 30 <sup>th</sup> =1)
February 1919	6	(1 <sup>st</sup> =3; 3 <sup>rd</sup> =1; 7 <sup>th</sup> =1; 9 <sup>th</sup> =1)
March 1919	7	(15 <sup>th</sup> =2; 17 <sup>th</sup> =2; 30 <sup>th</sup> =3)
April 1919	8	(4 <sup>th</sup> =1; 11 <sup>th</sup> =3; 13 <sup>th</sup> =1; 25 <sup>th</sup> =1; 26 <sup>th</sup> =2)
May 1919	3	(22 <sup>nd</sup> =1; 23 <sup>rd</sup> =2)
June 1919	8	(2 <sup>nd</sup> =2; 3 <sup>rd</sup> =2; 4 <sup>th</sup> =1; 24 <sup>th</sup> =3)
July 1919	49	(16 <sup>th</sup> =3; 18 <sup>th</sup> =7; 20 <sup>th</sup> =11; 22 <sup>nd</sup> =11; 23 <sup>rd</sup> =3; 24 <sup>th</sup> =4; 25 <sup>th</sup> =2; 26 <sup>th</sup> =5; 29 <sup>th</sup> =2; 30 <sup>th</sup> =1)
August 1919	2	(2 <sup>nd</sup> =1; 27 <sup>th</sup> =1)
September 1919	0	-
October 1919	2	(13 <sup>th</sup> =1; 14 <sup>th</sup> =1)
November 1919	2	(12 <sup>th</sup> =2)
December 1919	2	(24 <sup>th</sup> =2)

With so many letters, replies could apparently sometimes be misdirected, as with a Tablet addressed to Mrs Mabel Rice-Wray of Detroit in July 1919, which referred to questions which Rice-Wray thought must have been asked by someone else but had been sent to her by mistake (*Star* 11/10, 1920, 163–64).

27. It is of interest to see an appended note – presumably by Shoghi Effendi – to one tablet in which he includes a word by word transliteration and translation of one sentence which he evidently felt was difficult to translate exactly (see *Star* 11/14, 1920, 242n).
28. *Star* 11/8, 1920, 123–27, 129–34. See also 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, trans. M. Gail et al. Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1978, 296–307.
29. *Star* 11/3, 1920, 50.
30. *Star* 10/10, 1919, 195.
31. *Star* 11/3, 1920, 50–51.
32. *Star* 11/3, 1920, 51.
33. *Star* 11/3, 1920, 49–50. Shoghi Effendi also describes a morning meeting in which he and the guests sat in almost total silence, drinking tea, whilst 'Abdu'l-Bahá read the letters from other Baha'is which the visitors had apparently brought with them (*Star* 11/3, 1920, 53).
34. The car, a Cunningham, had been donated by one of the American Baha'is. It is an indication of Shoghi Effendi's determination that despite notice of the ship's arrival in the port

being received just as the weekend was about to begin, he insisted on seeing the relevant officials at their homes so that they would sign the relevant papers and 'Abdu'l-Baha's vehicle be delivered without delay (Rabbani 29).

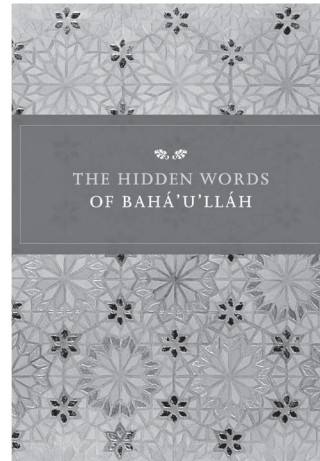
35. *Star* 11/3, 1920, 53–54.
36. *Star* 9/17, 1919, 194–5.
37. Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, *Broken Silence: The Story of Today's Struggle for Religious Freedom*. New York: The New History Foundation, 1942, 50–51.
38. *Star* 10/11, 1919, 216–20; 11/3, 1920, 48–54. There are also a few extracts from other letters from June 1919: see *Star* 10/18, 1920, 336; 11/1, 1920, 15, 19; 12/3, 1921, 53–55.
39. The work was all done on a manual typewriter of course. Khadem cites extensively from the Letters for January 1919 and later summarizes many more for later in the year, all of which he found in the British Baha'i National Archives – probably in the papers of J. E. Esslemont, who received copies of at least one batch (Khadem, *Prelude* 39–49, 79). The English Baha'i E. T. Hall was also given a large batch by Shoghi Effendi during his stay in England (personal observation of the Hall Papers now held in the British National Baha'i Archives). The practice of making and sending out multiple carbon copies of documents to disseminate news was still being followed by members of the British National Spiritual Assembly as late as the mid-1970s (personal observations).
40. *Star* 11/3, 1920, 53–54.
41. For examples see *Star* 10/13, 1919, 242, and *Star* 10/16, 1919, 290–91.
42. *Star* 9/17, 1919, 194–95.
43. e.g. *Star* 9/19, 1919, 220; 10/2, 1919, 23.
44. *Star* 10/11, 1919, 210. The photograph was apparently on the back of a postcard to Ahmad Sohrab, itself dated 13 July 1919 (Sohrab 51).
45. Cited in Khadem, *Prelude* 68.
46. Esslemont arrived in Haifa early in November 1919 (Moojan Momen, *Dr J. E. Esslemont*, London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1975, 12), and Bagdadi arrived on 9 December (*Star* 10/17, 1920, 314).
47. Florence Khan and her daughter Marzieh visited Shoghi Effendi at Neuilly on about 9 April, presumably shortly after his arrival and he came and had dinner with them two days later (Marzieh Gail, *Arches of the Years*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1991, 179–80). On 8 May 1920, Shoghi Effendi wrote to Ali Yazdi that he had been in the convalescent home for 'a month' (Yazdi, *Blessings* 72).
48. Yazdi, *Blessings* 72–73.
49. Khadem, *Prelude* 131–35.
50. *Star* 11/13, 1920, 229–31.
51. *Star* 10/17, 1920, 314; 11/12, 1920, 208. In addition to serving as 'Abdu'l-Baha's translator and interpreter, Bagdadi also acted as the doctor for the Haifa Baha'is (*Star* 11/8, 1920, 128–29).
52. *Star* 11/12, 1920, 208–9.
53. The appointment was made whilst Shoghi was still a child in 'Abdu'l-Baha's will, but was kept secret from all but a few individuals. See Balyuzi, *Abdu'l-Baha* 484–93; Rabbani, *Priceless* 1–4, 11–13.
54. Rabbani, *Priceless* 28.

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# Messianic Concealment and Theophanic Disclosure

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## Abstract

*In this paper, I start by discussing a controversy that has erupted recently over the issue of the exact point in time that Baha'u'llah became aware of his mission. The controversy revolves around the translation of a phrase in the writings of Baha'u'llah which appears to state that he does not have any 'amr'. One side to the controversy claims that the translation of this phrase indicates that Baha'u'llah had no thought of advancing any claim as late as 1857, while the opposing party contends that this is a mistranslation of the phrase and that Baha'u'llah was fully aware of his mission from at least the time of his imprisonment in the Siyah-Chal. I intend to show in this paper that the whole controversy is an illusory one caused by the specific nature of the meaning of the word 'amr' and that the phrase that is the subject of dispute proves neither side's case, however it is translated. Evolving out of my discussion of this issue, is a theological schematic of the stages of the evolution of the mission of those persons that Baha'is call Manifestations of God. I then putatively impose this schematic upon the dispensation of the Bab creating a new interpretation of his ministry.*

## Keywords

Baha'u'llah  
the Bab  
Sahifih-yi-Shattiyyih  
amr  
qa'imiyat  
revelation  
wahy

In recent years, a disagreement has emerged among scholars about the exact meaning of a particular phrase in Baha'u'llah's work, the *Sahifih-yi-Shattiyyih* (Book of the River or Book of the Tigris), and the evidence that it might contain about Baha'u'llah's thinking at the stage in his ministry to which this work can be dated.<sup>1</sup>

On the one hand, Cole contends that, from his translation of a certain phrase in the Book of the River, it is clear that, at the time that he composed this work (which Cole dates to about 1857), Baha'u'llah 'is making no claim to have a divine Cause'.<sup>2</sup> Cole states that he believes that it was not until about 1859 that Baha'u'llah began to put forward a claim and that the Book of the River is evidence that, in 1857, Baha'u'llah had no thought of such a claim. This view is opposed by Saiedi who states that Cole's translation of a particular phrase is incorrect. Saiedi argues that Baha'u'llah was fully conscious of his mission and station during the Baghdad period and rejects any suggestion that Baha'u'llah's consciousness evolved in this regard.<sup>3</sup>

The key area in dispute revolves around the translation of a phrase which occurs in the *Sahifih-yi-Shattiyyih*. The sentence in which this phrase occurs may be transliterated thus: 'Walakin, chihguyam, kih hich iqbal bih amri nadaram'. The first part of this sentence, 'Walakin, chih guyam', is an idiomatic Persian formulation expressive of despair or frustration. Saiedi has rendered it 'Yet, alas', while Cole has translated it more literally 'But what

shall I say?'. The difference of opinion focuses, however, upon the meaning of the second half of this sentence. The literal word-for-word rendering of this phrase would be 'no approach to any *amr* do I have'. Cole has considered that the word *amr* has 'the connotation of 'divine Cause''<sup>4</sup> and thus this phrase is an indication that Baha'u'llah, at this stage, had no idea of advancing a claim to a divine mission. Saiedi responds by asserting that this phrase is 'a common polite Persian idiom which indicates reluctance or disinclination to approach an issue or engage in a task'.<sup>5</sup> Saiedi therefore disputes Cole's conclusion that this phrase indicates that Baha'u'llah conceived of no divine mission at this stage.

Part of Saiedi's argument is that the context within which this phrase appears makes his interpretation the more likely one. In the preceding paragraphs, Baha'u'llah is likening divine revelation to a river and divine omnipotence to the power of a river when it floods. The sentence in question appears at the end of this discourse, just after Baha'u'llah has stated that if it were not for the malice in people's hearts, he would continue his theme and disclose all of the spiritual meanings inherent in this analogy of the river. Saiedi argues that it is clear from the context that Baha'u'llah is using this sentence to terminate this discourse, thus making Saiedi's translation more likely. To demonstrate this argument, I will here give the translations of both Cole and Saiedi of the passage in which the disputed phrase occurs:

Cole: If it were not for fear of the hidden hatred in the breasts of the people, I would have continued to mirror forth all divine parables and subtleties of the celestial laws with reference to the very flowing of this physical river. But what shall I say? I make no claim to a Cause. The intensity of the sorrow and grief that have befallen me during these days has left me sorely tried between the Gog of silence and the Magog of speech. I beseech God to send down an Alexander who will erect a protecting wall. Hidden allusions have been concealed in these phrases and sacred letters have been treasured up in these words. Happy are those who have grasped these pearls, have appreciated their value, and have attained their presence.<sup>6</sup>

Saiedi: Were it not for fear of the malice hidden in the hearts, I would have assuredly unveiled all the inmost divine analogies and all the subtleties of the heavenly principles with regard to the course of this outward river. Yet, alas, I am disinclined to approach any matter. On account of the intensity of My anguish and sorrow, in these days I am sore tried between the Gog of silence and the Magog of utterance. I beseech God to send down an Alexander who will raise an insurmountable barrier.<sup>7</sup>

Cole has recently countered Saiedi's contextual argument by finding another passage in the writings of Baha'u'llah from the same period in which a similar phrase appears: '*ma'lum va mubarhan ast kih in bandih az khud dhikri va amri nadarad*'.<sup>8</sup> In this passage, Baha'u'llah states that, should Baha'u'llah's name be mentioned, this would not become a cause of contention, because he has not put forward with respect to himself any mention or *amr*.<sup>9</sup> Cole claims that these two occurrences are cognates of each other and hence refutes Saiedi's contextual argument (since the context of the second occurrence is completely different).

Cole has also supported his argument by pointing out that at the beginning of the *Sahifih-yi-Shattiyyih*, Baha'u'llah rejects any claim that he has performed any miracles although he asserts that the claims that the Bab and the Mirrors (*mirat*, a station given by the Bab to some of his leading disciples) of the Babi dispensation performed miracles should not be doubted. Cole maintains that this is evidence that Baha'u'llah was, at this time, subordinating himself to the Mirrors of the Babi dispensation, and is thus further evidence that he was not claiming any station for himself.

Cole's conclusions from all of this is that there is no historical evidence for Baha'u'llah putting forward a claim to a divine mission before 1859 when there are accounts by such people as Fitnih and Nabil-i-Akbar that Baha'u'llah intimated such a claim to them.<sup>10</sup> Cole rejects the evidence that Baha'u'llah's account of his experience in the Siyah-Chal constitutes an experience of divine revelation (*wahy*); rather he states that 'it appears that it consisted more of *ilham* (inspiration) than of *wahy* (revelation), and that Baha'u'llah began thinking of *islah* (reform) of Babism rather than of making any claim of his own'.<sup>11</sup> Cole thus maintains that the notion of claiming a divine mission did not occur to Baha'u'llah until sometime after about 1857 and before 1859.

Saiedi has presented a number of other pieces of evidence to support his position that Baha'u'llah was aware of his station and mission since at least the Siyah-Chal experience and possibly earlier. In affirmation of the fact that Baha'u'llah considered the Siyah-Chal experience of 1852–3 to be revelation (rather than inspiration as Cole claims), Saiedi quotes several references to this episode in the writings of Baha'u'llah. Of particular interest is the reference from the writings of Baha'u'llah which parallels the Tablet to the Shah but instead of referring to 'the breezes of the All-Glorious' wafting over him, he uses the phrase 'the breezes of Revelation (*wahy*)',<sup>12</sup> thus indicating that Baha'u'llah thought that what occurred in the Siyah-Chal was revelation (*wahy*) rather than merely inspiration (*ilham*).

Saiedi also cites several instances where Baha'u'llah has stated that his revelation arose in the year Nine, i.e. 1852–3 or the year 'after *Hin*' (after 68, i.e. 1269/1852–3).<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, Saiedi questions Cole's dating of this work to about 1857. Cole has based this on the fact that one of the *Hidden Words* is quoted in the *Sahifih-yi-Shattiyyih*, but it is quoted slightly differently from the form in which it appears in the final form of the *Hidden Words*. Cole argues from this that the *Sahifih-yi-Shattiyyih* can be dated to a time after the *Hidden Words* were first revealed but before the final version was distributed, which he considers to be about 1857. Saiedi states, however, that there are numerous instances of Baha'u'llah quoting his own works slightly differently from the way that they were originally revealed and many years after the work was originally revealed. Indeed, in the case of the *Hidden Words*, one of these is quoted in a slightly different form in the Tablet to Nasiru'd-Din Shah. If Cole's reasoning were correct then this Tablet would also date from about 1857, whereas it belongs in fact to the late Edirne period.

The correspondence on this issue has been extensive and has gone on over several years, but as far as I am aware, Cole has not responded to any of these latter points that Saiedi has raised.

## The Meaning of the Word 'Amr'

My purpose is reviving this issue is to raise a further point that has not been considered by any of the numerous persons who have discussed this question on several e-mail lists. It is clear that the original point over which Cole and Saiedi disagreed was the meaning of '*hich iqbal bih amri nadaram*'. Indeed, it could be said that the disagreement focused on the word '*amr*' – whether this word was being used by Baha'u'llah in the specific and technical sense of 'Divine Command or Cause' or whether it was being used in the more general sense of 'matter' or 'affair'. The word *amr* is also central to the second example that Cole has found – in which Baha'u'llah states: '*ma'lum va mubarhan ast kih in bandih az khud dhikri va amri nadarad*'.

In a paper presented at the Irfan Colloquium in 1999,<sup>14</sup> I have given an extensive analysis of the word '*amr*' in both the Qur'an and in the *Kitab-i-Iqan*. I will not here repeat the detailed analysis given there, but it can be stated in summary that in the Qur'an the word *amr* has a complex range of meanings which is not easily translated by a single English word. When used in connection with God, it certainly means the divine commission or decree which descends upon a Messenger of God in the form of revelation, as Cole has stated. But it also is used to denote the judgement of God upon the people – those who accept the Messenger of God are saved and rewarded and those who refuse and disobey him are punished. Instances of this latter meaning of *amr* can be found throughout the Surah of Hud, for example (11: 40, 43, 58, 66, 76, 82, 94). Thus the semantic range of the word *amr* involves not only the descent upon the Messenger of God of divine revelation but also the imposition upon people of an obligation to accept the revelation, such that if they refuse, there is a consequent punishment.

In Baha'u'llah's *Kitab-i-Iqan*, one finds the same range of meanings for the word *amr*. Regarding Noah, for example, it is stated:

When He was invested with the robe of Prophethood, and was moved by the Spirit of God to arise and proclaim His Cause [*amr*], whoever believed in Him and acknowledged His Faith, was endowed with the grace of a new life.

(Iqan 154)

This meaning of *amr* becomes of significance for Baha'i polemic in the interpretation of Qur'an 32:5 which states:

He [God] establishes *al-amr* from heaven to earth and it will return to Him in a Day, the length of which is one thousand years in your reckoning.

If we now take these points back to the disagreement between Cole and Saiedi, the critical distinction that becomes evident in connection with the meaning of the word *amr* is the distinction between that of merely being the bearer of a revelation and that of imposing upon people the obligation of abandoning the previous revelation and accepting the new revelation. Revelation (*wahy*) and *amr* are thus two separate conditions which do not necessarily co-exist. It is possible to have *wahy* without *amr* (although not, I think, *amr* without *wahy*). In other words, it would appear that for a period of time while he was in Baghdad, Baha'u'llah was the conscious bearer of a

revelation but that he chose not to openly declare this fact and thus impose upon the people the necessity of choosing whether to accept his new revelation or not. During the entirety of the Baghdad period, therefore, the *amr* of the Bab held sway – the obligation of people was to accept and follow the religion of the Bab.

I assume that both Cole and Saiedi would agree that in 1857 and indeed during the whole of the Baghdad period, Baha'u'llah was not advancing a claim to revelation in such a way as to challenge and oblige those with whom he was in contact (mainly the Babis) to follow him. If there is agreement on that, then given the full meaning of the word *amr*, he was not putting forward an *amr*. In other words, regardless of whether we accept Cole's claim that Baha'u'llah did not in 1857 envisage advancing a claim to divine revelation and that his thinking only developed later in this direction or we accept Saiedi's contention that Baha'u'llah was fully aware of his station as a revelator of God's will and was indeed hinting at this in his writings, the phrase '*hich iqbal bih amri nadaram*' has no bearing on this issue. Even if Cole is correct in translating it as 'I make no claim to a Cause', this would still be in accordance with Saiedi's view that Baha'u'llah was fully aware of his station and was hinting at it in his writings. Given the full meaning of the word *amr*, even if Baha'u'llah were fully aware of his station, he was not at this time proclaiming it and calling people to follow him. Thus the *amr* – the obligation of people to follow Baha'u'llah and God's judgement upon them depending on the decision they made – had not yet been laid upon people.

### **Baha'u'llah's Messianic Concealment and Theophanic Disclosure**

Christopher Buck,<sup>15</sup> Juan Cole<sup>16</sup> and others have written of Baha'u'llah's Baghdad period as being that of 'messianic secrecy' or of 'a messianic secret'. This term reflects Baha'u'llah's own description of this period, the 'set time of concealment'.<sup>17</sup> MacEoin appears to believe that during this period, Baha'u'llah had no messianic secret and that the idea of putting forward a claim occurred to Baha'u'llah only in about the beginning of 1863. MacEoin believes the accounts of Baha'u'llah's experience in the Siyah Chal (and possibly also the Ridvan Garden) to be a retrospective rewriting of history in order to conform to certain Shi'i and Shaykhi expectations about the year 1269 and 1280.<sup>18</sup> Initially Cole disputed MacEoin's position and asserted that even in Baha'u'llah's earliest works, such as the *Rashh-i 'Ama* and the *Qasidah al-Warqa'iyah*, which date from Baha'u'llah's Tehran and Sulaymaniyyah period respectively, Baha'u'llah was signalling that his true station was that of being the bearer of a revelation and a number of individuals realised this station during the Baghdad period.<sup>19</sup> More recently, Cole has gone back from this position and now states that he considers that Baha'u'llah reached a consciousness of a Divine mission in between about 1857 and 1859.<sup>20</sup>

It seems to the present writer that, given the fact that the references to denying an *amr* are not relevant to this issue, as indicated above, we are left with the supporting evidence that Saiedi has presented (as described above – Baha'u'llah's use of the word 'revelation (*wahy*)' in relation to his Siyah Chal experience and the instances where Baha'u'llah has stated

that his revelation arose in the year Nine), which Cole has not countered. Cole's reference to Baha'u'llah denying the performance of miracles at the beginning of the *Sahifah-yi-Shattiyyih* would not seem to be relevant since Baha'u'llah dismissed the importance of miracles throughout the whole of his ministry. And in any case, if the *amr* of the Bab still held sway during the whole of the Baghdad period, then it would not surprise us to find Baha'u'llah expressing this fact in various ways.

An additional point that needs to be made here is that, according to Shi'i traditions, the Imams, who receive inspiration (*ilham*), only hear this inspiration, whereas a Messenger of God (*rasul*) who receives revelation (*wahy*), sees the Angel who delivers the revelation.<sup>21</sup> The fact that Baha'u'llah reports seeing the Maid of Heaven is in itself a strong indication that he considered that he was in receipt of a revelation (*wahy*) rather than merely inspiration (*ilham*).

There seem to be no good grounds for accepting MacEoin's assertion that this was all rewriting of history by Baha'u'llah and so, unless Cole can produce some grounds for refuting this evidence, it would appear reasonable to accept Baha'u'llah's statements regarding the significance of the Siyah Chal and Ridvan episodes at their face value, which more or less corresponds to the traditional Baha'i interpretation as given by Shoghi Effendi in *God Passes By*. This would then divide the life of Baha'u'llah theologically into three stages:

1. The period before the onset of revelation, which Baha'u'llah describes by the words 'I was but a man like others, asleep . . .'<sup>22</sup> and which 'Abdu'l-Baha expounds as meaning that although the Manifestation of God is the Manifestation from birth, his mission is not activated until a particular time.<sup>23</sup>
2. The period during which revelation (*wahy*) is present but no claim had been advanced that represented the imposition of *amr* upon the people, the messianic concealment.
3. The period during which both *amr* and revelation are present, the theophanic disclosure, following which the laws of the new religion are given.

Incidentally, we have evidence from as early as 1867 that the ordinary Baha'is understood this concept that Baha'u'llah had revealed himself gradually. In a letter written in 1867 by the Baha'i community of Baghdad to the United States Congress, we have the following statement regarding Baha'u'llah: 'That wise man revealed himself till he appeared like the high sun in midday'.<sup>24</sup>

Although the broad outline of these three stages in Baha'u'llah's life are now clear, the exact dating of these stages is not as clear-cut as one may think. Although the onset of revelation is generally regarded as having started with the appearance of the Maid of Heaven to Baha'u'llah in the Siyah-Chal, sometime between September 1852 and January 1853, this does not fully take into account the episode of Baha'u'llah's meeting with Shaykh Hasan Zunuzi in Karbala in 1851. Nabil Zarandi, who appears to have known Shaykh Hasan personally, records that Baha'u'llah confided to Shaykh Hasan 'the secret that He was destined to reveal at a later time in Baghdad'.<sup>25</sup> Now it may be that since the claim put forward by Baha'u'llah

to Shaykh Hasan was that of being the return of the Imam Husayn this did not necessarily imply a claim to revelation. It does, however, mean that Baha'u'llah was communicating some inkling of a higher station earlier than 1852.

Similarly, the date for the end of this period of messianic secrecy is not exactly defined. It is clear from the statements of Baha'u'llah that he made some form of claim to a small number of his companions in the Garden of Ridvan in April 1863. But at what point in time can it be said that the *amr* – the obligation to follow Baha'u'llah – had been laid upon the people? Was it in April 1863, when only a small number were informed and there appears to have been no attempt to spread this news, or in 1864 when a few Tablets written by Baha'u'llah began to make his claim to authority clear, or in 1866–7, when he began to send individuals to Iran to propagate his claim to the Babis and at the same time he openly challenged Mirza Yahya, who was widely acknowledged as the head of the Babi community, or should we, for theological reasons, delay this until the period of Baha'u'llah's proclamation to the kings and rulers of the world in 1868–72 (the kings and rulers acting in a sense as proxies for their people)?

During the years when Baha'u'llah lived in Baghdad, he 'appeared in the guise of, and continued to labour as, one of the foremost disciples of the Bab'.<sup>26</sup> The main thrust of his activities were towards reforming and purifying the Babi community. A significant number of individuals are, however, reported as having come to realise that he occupied a much higher station. These are said to have come to this conclusion either from reading his writings<sup>27</sup> or from meeting him (for example Nabil Akbar and Shams-i Jahan Khanum Fitnih).<sup>28</sup>

Following the open declaration of his mission in 1863–8, Baha'u'llah began to reveal the new laws of his dispensation, most particularly in the Kitab al-Aqdas, followed by the new social teachings of his religion, in a series of important Tablets revealed after the Aqdas. Baha'u'llah himself links the theophanic disclosure and the imposition of the *amr* upon the people with the revelation of a new law in the following passage from the Tablet to 'Abdu'r-Razzaq, referring to the rejection of Baha'u'llah by the Azalis:

And when the Cause (*amr*) of God was revealed and the laws, by which the entirety of the Bayan was confirmed and upon which it is dependent, were promulgated, they then pushed these aside, as you have seen and heard.<sup>29</sup>

In summary then, we may discern three periods to the life of Baha'u'llah and two periods to the ministry of Baha'u'llah. There was initially a period when, although there are some hagiographical accounts of wonders in his childhood and youth, there is nothing to indicate that he put forward any claim or was in receipt of any special divine guidance. From 1844 onwards, he acted as one of the followers of the Bab. Then came the first phase of his ministry, a period of messianic concealment, during which Baha'u'llah was in receipt of revelation (*wahy*) but had not yet openly advanced a claim, which would have laid the obligation of acceptance, the *amr*, upon the people. This period lasted from roughly 1852 to 1863, but may, for the Babis of Iran, have extended to 1867. During this period also, Baha'u'llah acted as



one of the followers of the Bab. The second phase of his ministry, and the third period of his life, was the period of theophanic disclosure, which was initiated with the Declaration in the Garden of Ridvan in 1863 but only gradually attained its full force as Baha'u'llah successively disclosed his claim to the Babi community in 1866–7 and to the rest of the world in 1868–72. This was the period when both *wahy* and *amr* were present.

### The Ministry of the Bab

Having outlined a schema for the life and ministry of Baha'u'llah, I would now like to see in what way this can be overlaid onto the life and ministry of the Bab. In Babi-Baha'i history the start of the ministry of the Bab is usually stated to date from his declaration to Mulla Husayn Bushru'i on the evening of 22 May 1844. The exact equivalent in the life of the Bab to Baha'u'llah's experience of the Maid of Heaven in the Siyah-Chal is, however, dated by the Bab to have occurred about 2 months before. In the *Kitab al-Haramayn*, the Bab writes:

In truth, the first day that the Spirit descended in the heart of this slave was the fifteenth of the month of Rabi'u'l-Avval [1260, i.e. 4 April 1844].<sup>30</sup>

This may correspond to the vision that the Bab describes of the severed head of the Imam Husayn. This vision is described by the Bab in one of his writings which is quoted in Nabil's Narrative: In one of His writings revealed in the year 1260 A.H., the Bab declares the following:

The spirit of prayer which animates My soul is the direct consequence of a dream which I had in the year before the declaration of My Mission. In My vision I saw the head of the Imam Husayn, the Siyyidu'sh-Shuhada', which was hanging upon a tree. Drops of blood dripped profusely from His lacerated throat. With feelings of unsurpassed delight, I approached that tree and, stretching forth My hands, gathered a few drops of that sacred blood, and drank them devoutly. When I awoke, I felt that the Spirit of God had permeated and taken possession of My soul. My heart was thrilled with the joy of His Divine presence, and the mysteries of His Revelation were unfolded before My eyes in all their glory'.<sup>31</sup>

This vision may also correspond to the episode related by Khadijih Bagum, the wife of the Bab, in which she saw the Bab one night intoning a prayer: 'His face was luminous; rays of light radiated from it. He looked so majestic and resplendent that fear seized me'. Later the Bab said to her: 'It was the will of God that you should have seen Me in the way you did last night, so that no shadow of doubt should ever cross your mind, and you should come to know with absolute certainty that I am the Manifestation of God Whose advent has been expected for a thousand years. This light radiates from My heart and from My being'.<sup>32</sup>

The claim that is explicitly made, however, in the first chapter of the *Qayyum al-Asma*, which the Bab wrote in the presence of Mulla Husayn on 23 May 1844 was that of being the Gate to the Hidden Imam. In all of the books written in the early years of his ministry, the Bab never makes any explicit claim to any higher station. He also does not abrogate the law of

Islam – indeed he urges his followers to be meticulous in carrying out the Islamic law.<sup>33</sup> Thus just as Baha'u'llah, in the Baghdad period, appears to be a reformer and purifier of the religion of the Bab, so the Bab, in these early years, appears as a reformer and purifier of Islam. Within the Shaykhi community to whom the Bab and the Letters of the Living predominantly addressed themselves in the early years, the Bab appeared to be a leader in succession to Sayyid Kazim. Even the title of 'the Bab' was not exceptional as Shaykh Ahmad and Sayyid Kazim had occasionally been known by this title.

The Bab did not proclaim his full identity as the Mahdi and the revealer of a new revelation until the summer of 1848. At this time, two events occurred almost simultaneously. First, those attending the conference of Badasht heard Tahirih and Baha'u'llah proclaim that the Islamic dispensation had ended. Second, the Bab declared himself to be the Mahdi at his trial before the Crown Prince Nasiru'd-Din Mirza at Tabriz. It was perhaps not the declaration of being the Mahdi itself which was the decisive issue for the matter under consideration in this paper, since Muslims commonly expected that the Mahdi would follow Islam and would not bring a new revelation. It was rather that during the trial, the Bab claimed that he was revealing divine verses, and this was discussed at length by the *'ulama* present. Immediately after this, the Bab wrote the Persian Bayan in which he abrogated the laws of Islam and promulgated his own laws.

Prior to these episodes in the summer of 1848, many, possibly most, of the Babis thought that the Bab was merely claiming to be an Islamic leader, a leader of the Shaykhi sect, the gate to the Hidden Imam. This was what he appeared to be claiming in his writings and this is the evident meaning of the title of 'Bab' that he had taken. There is evidence for this assertion in the fact that when the Bab's full claims became known at the conference of Badasht, there were some who left the Babi movement as a result. Some of those attending the conference apostatized and left and we are told that in Maraghih, where most of the Shaykhis had become Babis, they apostatized when they learned that the Bab had abrogated the laws of Islam.<sup>34</sup>

There were also many, however, who realized, before the summer of 1848, that the Bab's claim was far higher than that of merely being a gate to the Hidden Imam. As early as the first year of the Bab's ministry, Sunni and Shi'i *'ulama* gathered at the trial of Mulla 'Ali Bastami in Baghdad perceived that while the text of the *Qayyum al-Asma* may claim that its author is the gate to the Hidden Imam, the language, through use of such terms as *wahy* and *nuzul* (the descent [of divine revelation]), in fact denoted a claim to divine revelation. If Sunni and Shi'i *'ulama* could discern that there lay a claim to revelation, a claim to a station equivalent to that of the prophet Muhammad, behind the text of the Bab, we can be sure that the leading disciples of the Bab also did. They were, after all, educated in exactly the esoteric tradition of Shaykhism that was most informed about such subtleties. Some of these leading Babis were more explicit in revealing their discovery of his high station (for example Tahirih), while others kept the knowledge hidden. I have discussed this theme in more detail in a paper regarding the trial of Mulla 'Ali Bastami.<sup>35</sup>

We may therefore see that, just as with Baha'u'llah in the Baghdad period, when the main body of the Babis saw Baha'u'llah as an inspiring

leader but still basically within the circle of Babism, so during the early years of the ministry of the Bab, the majority of the Babis probably conceived of the Bab as a Shaykhi leader, as a gateway to the Hidden Imam who is the true Lord of the Age. However, just as there were some leading Babis who recognized, either from meeting him or reading his writings in the Baghdad period, that Baha'u'llah's true claim and station were far higher, so also there was undoubtedly a group of the followers of the Bab in the early years who recognized, either from his writings or from meeting him that his claim was much greater. We could say that just as during the Baghdad period, the *amr* still lay with the Bab and the people were not yet called upon to believe in Baha'u'llah as the purveyor of a new religion from God, abrogating the religion of the Bab, so from May 1844 to July 1848, the *amr* still lay with Muhammad and the generality of the people were not yet called upon to believe in the Bab as the bearer of a new religion from God. The period of May 1844 to July 1848, thus becomes a period of messianic concealment, which ended with the theophanic disclosure occasioned by Tahirih's proclamation at the conference of Badasht and the Bab's declaration at his trial that he was the Mahdi and the author of a new revelation.

Continuing the parallels, we might point out that just as there are statements in the writings of Baha'u'llah during the Baghdad period denying that he was possessed of any *amr* and appearing to subordinate himself to the authority of the Bab and the Babi hierarchy (as in the *Sahifah-yi-Shattiyyih*), so there are similar statements of the Bab in these early years. There is for example the episode in the Masjid-i Vakil in Shiraz, when his enemies had forced the Bab to issue a recantation of his claims. There are several versions of this episode. Nabil gives the following:

The Bab, as He faced the congregation, declared: 'The condemnation of God be upon him who regards me either as a representative of the Imam or the gate thereof. The condemnation of God be also upon whosoever imputes to me the charge of having denied the unity of God, of having repudiated the prophethood of Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets, of having rejected the truth of any of the messengers of old, or of having refused to recognise the guardianship of 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, or of any of the imams who have succeeded him'.<sup>36</sup>

The following is an alternative account of the Bab's words which occurs in a letter written by Sayyid Husayn Katib, the Bab's amanuensis:

O people! Whoever believes in my prophethood (*nubavvat*), may the curse of God be upon him. Whoever considers that I am an appointed gate (*bab-i mansus*) sent by the grace of the [Hidden] Imam (upon him be peace), may the curse of God be upon him. I am but a servant, believing in God and in his verses.<sup>37</sup>

And yet another account exists from Haji Mirza Muhammad Sadiq, who was not a believer in the Bab:

O people! Know ye that I have not said anything that my ancestor the Messenger of God did not say. That which Muhammad has made permissible

[in the Holy Law] is permissible until the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyyama*) and that which Muhammad has made illicit is illicit until the Day of Resurrection. As the Immaculate [Imam] (upon him be peace) has said: When the Qa'im arises, that is the Resurrection.<sup>38</sup>

In the *Sahifah-yi 'Adliyyah* and other writings from this period, the Bab also denies any new revelation and commands the people to follow the laws of the Qur'an and the teachings of Muhammad.

The parallels between the Bab and Baha'u'llah can even be extended to the ways in which they made their full claim known – the manner of the theophanic disclosure. Baha'u'llah proclaimed his full station in three ways. First privately to a small group of his followers in the Garden of Ridvan, openly to the Babis in the early years of the Edirne period, and then to the peoples of the world through their kings and rulers in the late Edirne, early Akka period. The full station of the Bab was declared to the Babis at the conference of Badasht and it was proclaimed to the Crown Prince and leading religious figures of Tabriz at his trial. The Bab at this time also wrote to the Shah of Iran and the Prime Minister Haji Mirza Aqasi. There is even a parallel to the private Ridvan Garden declaration of Baha'u'llah in the declaration by the Bab that he was the Qa'im to one of his foremost disciples 'Azim shortly before his public declaration at his trial.<sup>39</sup> The fact that even a leading disciple such as 'Azim, who mixed freely with the Babis in Tehran and Adharbayjan, was perturbed by this claim at this late date is further evidence that the realization of the full station of the Bab was not very widespread among the Babis prior to the summer of 1848.

In his book, *The Seven Proofs*, the Bab explains that the need for a period of messianic concealment and the gradual unfoldment of his claims arose out of the lack of capacity among the people to accept his full claim at the start of his mission and out of a desire to assist people to gradually come to a full realization of the magnitude of his claim:

Consider the manifold favours vouchsafed by the Promised One, and the effusions of His bounty which have pervaded the concourse of the followers of Islam to enable them to attain unto salvation. Indeed observe how He Who representeth the origin of creation, He Who is the Exponent of the verse, 'I, in very truth, am God', identified Himself as the Gate [Bab] for the advent of the promised Qa'im, a descendant of Muhammad, and in His first Book enjoined the observance of the laws of the Qur'an, so that the people might not be seized with perturbation by reason of a new Book and a new Revelation and might regard His Faith as similar to their own, perchance they would not turn away from the Truth and ignore the thing for which they had been called into being.<sup>40</sup>

Baha'u'llah has recapitulated and expanded on this in a Tablet written to Aqa Mirza Aqa Nuru'd-Din:

Thou art well aware that the Commentary on the Ahsan al-Qisas (the Qayyum al-Asma of the Bab) was revealed according to what was current among the people (*bi ma 'ind an-nas*) and this was purely out of bounty and grace that haply the people of negligence and error may ascend to the heaven of knowledge (*jabarut-i 'ilm*). Thus most of what is mentioned in that book is what

has been accepted as truth among the Muslims (*ahl al-furqan*). If what was the Will of God had been sent down from the start, no-one would have been able to bear it and no-one would have remained. All of this is out of His grace and bounty towards His creatures. Observe that at the start of his ministry, that holy one revealed himself in the station of gatehood (*babiyyat*). This was out of consideration that the birds of the hearts of humanity were not capable of flying above that station . . . The people have been and will continue to be immersed in the ocean of idle fancies and veiled from what God doth will, except those whom God has delivered through His Grace and whom He has caused to recognise what He hath revealed through His command . . . Thus out of grace to them, the Sun of Truth occupied himself with uttering trivia and the Ancient Ocean spoke forth only droplets. Thus it is that the Primal Point hath appeared in the name of gatehood (*babiyyat*), and the people did not accept even this limited station, let alone any mention of guardianship (lordship, *vilayat*) and such matters. And this despite the fact that all of these stations and those beyond them have been revealed and come into existence by a single word out of the ocean of his bounty and by his command they also return to annihilation and oblivion.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, in a Tablet which appears to date from the Edirne period, the *Surat al-Fath*, Baha'u'llah restates this theme and draws the parallels between the Bab's gradually unfolding claims and his own initial concealment of his claims. First, he describes the gradual unfoldment of the claims of the Bab:

So recollect, O people! The moment when there came unto you the Revealer of the Bayan with wondrous, holy verses. At that time, he said: 'I am the Gate of Knowledge (*bab al-'ilm*) and whoever asserts more than that in relation to me has assuredly invented lies about me and has sinned greatly'. Then later he said 'I am the Qa'im, the True One, whose manifestation you were promised in mighty, noble scrolls'. Then he said, magnified be his utterance, 'I, verily, am the Primal Point. And this is, in reality, Muhammad, the messenger of God, the same [person] as thou hast heard and witnessed in the tablets of God, the King, the Ruler'. And when the beings of a number of souls had progressed [sufficiently], thereupon, the veils were torn asunder and, from the Dawning-Place of holiness, there rose up [the call]: 'I verily am God, no God is there except Me, thy Lord and the Lord of all the worlds'. And also: 'I, verily, from the beginning which hath no beginning, was a divinity, the One, the Single, the Unique. I did not take unto myself any partner or likeness or deputy. I verily sent the prophets and the Messengers from all eternity and will continue to send them to all eternity' . . .

Then in this Tablet, Baha'u'llah comments on the gradual unfoldment of his own claims, mentions explicitly that there was a time during which he elevated the name of his brother and was submissive before the authoritative figures in the Babi movement, and clearly indicates that the *amr* did not lie with him in those days:

By God, O people! I did not desire any Cause (*amr*) for myself and followed all the Manifestations of old. I supported the Cause (*amr*) of God in every way during the days when faces were concealed out of fear of the oppressors.

I humbled myself before every soul in the Bayan and lowered the wing of submission before every worthy believer. I safeguarded my brother [Mirza Yahya] . . . and elevated his name among the servants of God . . . There was none of the people of the Bayan for whom I did not reveal a tablet in which I mentioned him with high praise. Every fair-minded and trustworthy person will bear witness to this.<sup>42</sup>

## Conclusion

The thesis of this paper is that the phenomenon of a period of messianic concealment followed by a theophanic disclosure is common to at least the Bab and Baha'u'llah (and a case can be made for a similar phenomenon in the life of Jesus and Muhammad). The period of messianic concealment appears to be a period when, although the Manifestation is in receipt of divine revelations, these are phrased in such a way as to conceal their identity as revelation. Since no claim to being the bearer of a new revelation and the inaugurator of a new religious dispensation is made by the Manifestation during this time, there is no obligation on the people to follow the Manifestation, although a small number do discern the reality of the Manifestation. During this period, the *amr* still belongs to the previous Manifestation. At some point, however, the new Manifestation discloses his true nature and puts forward the claim to be the inaugurator of a new religion. This disclosure is made both to the followers of the previous religion and to the secular authorities. This theophanic disclosure now puts an obligation on all to follow the new Manifestation. A new *amr* has begun. Following this the new Manifestation begins to reveal the new laws and teachings associated with his dispensation. Baha'u'llah has given something of the reason for this particular strategy in the case of the Bab and it is probable that much the same applies to the case of Baha'u'llah himself. Baha'u'llah states that the reason for the messianic concealment was that the people of the previous religion were not able to bear the full disclosure of the new Manifestation. Therefore, the station of that Manifestation was revealed to them gradually.

## PostScript: A Note on the Year Five of the Ministry of the Bab

In both the Bab's Book of *The Seven Proofs* and his *Commentary on the Verse of Light*, there is an interesting prophecy regarding the fifth year of his ministry. This prophecy emerges from the Bab's interpretation of the Tradition of Kumayl. In response to the question 'What is reality?', the Imam 'Ali responded by a series of enigmatic statements.<sup>43</sup>

In both the *Seven Proofs* and the *Commentary on the Verse of Light*, the Bab gives an interpretation of this Tradition, emphasizing in particular the fifth phrase in this Tradition, which he relates to the fifth year of his ministry. In *The Seven Proofs*, the Bab merely prophesies that in that year 'you will see a light shining from the morn of eternity if you do not flee and are not disturbed'. But in the *Commentary on the Verse of Light*, he gives some indication of what will happen in that year. He begins by quoting the Tradition and then going on to expand on the fifth phrase:

Verily in the first year, there hath appeared the uncovering of the clouds of glory without a sign;<sup>44</sup> then the obliteration of vain imaginings and the

dawning of the known; then the rending of the veils for the overthrow of the secret; then the attraction of the primal unity for the attributes of the Divine Oneness; then a light dawning forth from the morn of pre-eternity upon the temples of unity [cf Shoghi Effendi translates a slightly different phrase as 'Behold, a light hath shone forth out of the Morn of eternity, and lo! its waves have penetrated the inmost reality of all men'. Iqan 102]. And when it has entered upon the five [fifth year?], its effect is that the fire becomes a light. At that moment, the form is completed and, verily, the form of the five is the form of a human being. Its creation is not completed for five years just as we sent to thee thy form.

The meaning of the passage is not entirely clear, but what is clear is that the Bab was signalling that some process that was begun at the start of his ministry would come to fruition in the fifth year and it would come to fruition in a human form.

Now since the fifth phrase of the Tradition of Kumayl reads: 'a light dawning forth from the morn of pre-eternity (subh-i azal)', the Azalis have long asserted that this is a prophecy of the arising of Azal in the fifth year of the ministry of the Bab. However, there are problems with this assertion.

First, it is not at all clear that Azal was ever known as Subh-i-Azal until a much later period. Mirza Yahya was addressed as Azal in tablets of the Bab, on account of the fact that his name Yahya and Azal are numerically equivalent (=38). However, I have not seen anywhere that the Bab addresses him as Subh-i-Azal, and this statement is supported by the Baha'i scholar 'Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari.<sup>45</sup> It is probable that either he himself or, more likely, some of his followers such as the authors of the *Hasht Bihist*, Shaykh Ahmad Ruhi and Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani, began to give him this appellation precisely in order to make him retrospectively fit the prophecy of the Bab related to the Tradition of Kumayl. The *Nuqtatu'l-Kaf* perhaps marks an intermediate stage in the development of this line of Azali thought in that, although the link between Azal and the Tradition of Kumayl is made<sup>46</sup> nevertheless, Mirza Yahya is never called Subh-i-Azal in this text. He is always referred to as Jinab-i Azal or Hadrat-i Azal.

Second, we have another exegesis by the Bab of the Kumayl Tradition in the *Kitab al-Asma*.<sup>47</sup> Here, referring to the fifth phrase in the Tradition, he states: 'Verily, the Primal Point is the Sun of Eternity (azal)'. This would indicate that he considered himself to be the referent in this phrase of the Tradition of Kumayl.

Following on from this paper on 'Messianic Concealment and Theophanic Disclosure', I would venture to suggest that what the Bab was predicting in *The Seven Proofs* and the *Commentary on the Verse of Light* was in fact the fruition of his ministry in its fifth year through his open proclamation of the station of *qa'imiyat* (being the Qa'im) and *mazhariyyat* (being a Manifestation of God); in other words, the end of the period of messianic concealment. Thus, in the words of the *Commentary on the Verse of Light*, the Divine Light that was pre-existent in Muhammad and 'Ali (which is a Shi'i Tradition to which the Bab also refers in this Commentary) will, in the year Five, become incarnated in a human being – the light becomes flesh! And as we have seen from the above quotation from the *Kitab al-Asma*, this incarnation of the Light is the Bab.



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## Endnotes

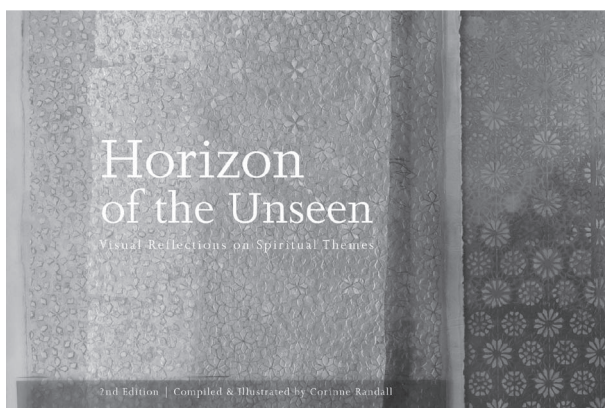
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# Baha'i Studies in Iran: A Preliminary Survey

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## Abstract

*Religions can transmit their culture by means of community religious education, writing, publication, formal scholarship and scriptural studies. This is especially important in the Baha'i Faith which is a lay religion. This essay is a preliminary survey of the history of the cultivation and evolution of religious education in the Baha'i Faith in Iran in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Key individuals who played a role in these educational processes are briefly introduced and discussed.*

## Keywords

Iran  
scholarship  
religious education  
apologetics  
transmission of  
culture  
Baha'i Faith

## Historical Context

Systematic study of any subject, including religion, can take on diverse forms, contain various degrees of depth and breadth, and be aimed at achieving different goals. The study of the Baha'i religion is no exception. The history, teachings, principles, and ultimate aims of this religion – as well as its relationship with eastern and western religious traditions – have been the subject of study in Baha'i communities for many decades. Early attempts ranged from regular classes held for children and youth to deepen their knowledge of the Baha'i tradition, to teacher training classes for preparing Baha'i teachers to promote the religion, to research and publication of treatises by Baha'i scholars in defense of the nascent religion against those who considered it a heresy.



Mirza Abu'l-Fadl.

Earliest attempts at formalizing the study of the Baha'i religion were first aimed at Baha'i children and youth – a tradition that began in 1894 when, during a 10-month stay in Haifa, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani (1844–1914), the renowned Persian Baha'i scholar, started teaching the youth and children of Baha'i pilgrims and Baha'i residents of the Haifa-Akka regions.<sup>1</sup> In the early 1900s, similar classes were held by Haji Mirza Haydar-'Ali Isfahani (ca. 1830–1920) who, at 'Abdu'l-Baha's (1844–1921) instruction, began holding informal Baha'i study classes for the children of 'Abdu'l-Baha's household – a group that included Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), who later succeeded 'Abdu'l-Baha as the head of the religion.<sup>2</sup> These early study classes slowly expanded to regions outside the Holy Land. For instance, in 1903, shortly after his conversion, Siyyid Ahmad Musavi Sadru'l-Ulama-yi Hamadani

(1868–1908), known as Sadr al-Sudur<sup>3</sup> – another prominent Persian Baha’i scholar and a contemporary of Mirza Abu’l-Fadl – began holding study classes for select Baha’i youth in Tehran. ‘Abdu’l-Baha had instructed Sadr al-Sudur to write a rational treatise in defence of the new religion. As he began working on the treatise, he developed the idea of sharing the content with some of the bright young Baha’is. After getting approval from veteran Baha’is, as well as the original Hands of the Cause appointed by Baha’u’llah



*Sadr al-Sudur (middle row, at the center) and some of his students.*

himself, Sadr al-Sudur organized what essentially became the *Lama’āt-i Khams va Tajalliyāt-i Shams* (The Five Flashes and the Effulgences of the Sun).<sup>4</sup>

His classes were held on Friday mornings. Interestingly, among those who attended Sadr al-Sudur’s classes for a few weeks in 1906 were Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney (1878–1928) and Laura Clifford-Barney (1879–1974). The couple, who were engaged at the time, received permission from ‘Abdu’l-Baha to travel to Persia and spend time with Persian believers so that eastern and western Baha’is could experience companionship with each other and begin to break down cultural and language barriers. In his biography of Sadr al-Sudur, Nasrullah Rastigar, one of Sadr al-Sudur’s students,<sup>5</sup> provides a detailed account of the visit by this western couple and their participation in Sadr al-Sudur’s classes.<sup>6</sup> Rastigar also provides another version of the account, along with the picture below, in an issue of the Persian magazine *Ahang-i Badi’* (The New Melody).<sup>7</sup> Dreyfus-Barney had become the first French Baha’i in 1901, and later wrote and translated a



*Sitting from left to right: Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney, Sadr al-Sudur, Madame Lacheney of France and Laura Clifford-Barney.*



great number of Baha'i writings into French. During this visit, Laura Clifford Barney also presented a series of questions to Sadr al-Sudur, which she compiled – along with Sadr al-Sudur's responses – into a treatise of just over a hundred pages that became known as *Istidlaliyyih-i Mukhtasar-i Sadr al-Sudur* (Sadr al-Sudur's Brief Rational Treatise).<sup>8</sup> Barney's questions concerned Islam and how the divine origin of the Babi and Baha'i revelations could be proven through the Qur'an and Muslim hadith (traditions). Upon her return to Haifa, she presented a copy of this treatise to 'Abdu'l-Baha. She had previously attempted the same approach with 'Abdu'l-Baha himself. During her 1904–1906 'Akka (Acre) stay, she had conducted a series of interviews with 'Abdu'l-Baha during lunch breaks. She later compiled her accounts of those interviews into a book called *Some Answered Questions*.



*Shaykh Muhammad-'Ali Qa'ini.*

In 1906, study classes for Baha'i children were expanded beyond the Palestine region into 'Ishqabad, which had a significant Baha'i population. 'Abdu'l-Baha had sent Shaykh Muhammad-'Ali Qa'ini (1861/62–1924)<sup>9</sup> to that city and asked him to take charge of the education of Baha'i children there. The 'Ishqabad Baha'i community had established the first Baha'i school in the world some ten years earlier.<sup>10</sup> Shaykh Muhammad-'Ali later expanded these into fully-fledged classes for Baha'i youth as well, when he began teaching at 'Ishqabad Baha'i Schools for boys and girls. These schools were adjacent to the Baha'i Temple there.<sup>11</sup> The textbook he used was called *Al-Durus al-Diyanah* (Lessons on [the Baha'i] Religion), which was in his own handwriting.<sup>12</sup> In 1908, Sadr al-Sudur's untimely death at the young age of 40 left a void for Baha'i youth training in Tehran. However, in that same year, 'Abdu'l-Baha sent the well-known Baha'i poet, Mirza Muhammad Sidihi – known as Na'im (Delight) – a tablet in which he invited Na'im to continue the tradition that Sadr al-Sudur had started. Na'im, author of several treatises himself, accepted the invitation and hand-picked sixty Baha'i youth for his classes. These were held at his own home and focused on the fulfilment of Biblical and Qur'anic prophecies by the Bab and Baha'u'llah. Na'im also offered similar classes for Baha'i girls and women.<sup>13</sup>

### **Baha'i Studies as Apologia**

By the start of 'Abdu'l-Baha's ministry, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl had already established himself as the most distinguished Persian Baha'i scholar of his time. He was the recipient of about ten tablets from Baha'u'llah and over one hundred from 'Abdu'l-Baha.<sup>14</sup> Mirza Abu'l-Fadl was highly respected by both Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, so much so that the latter had invited Baha'is to follow Mirza Abu'l-Fadl's example<sup>15</sup> and once proclaimed that Mirza Abu'l-Fadl was like 'Abdu'l-Baha's own self.<sup>16</sup> Though erudite, early Baha'i scholars such as Mirza Abu'l-Fadl often came from the ranks of Shi'ite clerics. Thus, their education and publications differed significantly



from what is today the standard in the modern Western field of religious studies. Most of the early works of such scholars were written in the form of apologias for the newly founded religion.<sup>17</sup> Thus, they were unambiguous in their commitment to the Baha'i religion. This made their publications and compilations enormously popular among the Baha'is of their era and future generations of Baha'is. In fact, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl's rational treatises in defence of the nascent religion began a tradition of essays that contained a wide range of logical presentations of the Baha'i religion to Jewish, Christian and Muslim audiences. Soon, his works became the foundation for more rigorous studies of the Babi and Baha'i religions and their truth-claims. Mirza Abu'l-Fadl's writings continue to play a significant role in Baha'i Studies to this day. He also remains the only early Persian Baha'i scholar whose works have been translated into English.<sup>18</sup> In addition to writing apologetic works, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl also travelled widely throughout his life. At Baha'u'llah's instruction, he travelled throughout Persia for about a decade. Between 1888–1891, he also travelled to Central Asian countries, including Turkmenistan.<sup>19</sup> Later, at 'Abdu'l-Baha's instruction, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl also traveled to Egypt and the United States to give presentations on the Baha'i religion.

*Fadil Mazandarani.*

After Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, Mirza Asadu'llah Fadil Mazandarani (1881–1957) and 'Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari (1902–1972) are generally considered to be next in rank of the distinguished Iranian Baha'i scholars. Fadil Mazandarani, whose mammoth nine-volume history of the Babi and Baha'i religions, known as *Zuhūr al-Haqq* (History of the Manifestation of Truth); five-volume Babi and Baha'i dictionary, entitled *Asrār al-Āthār* (Mysteries in the Writings [of the Faith]); and four-volume compilation of hitherto unpublished writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, known as *Amr va Khalq* ([Kingdoms of] Revelation and Creation), have provided students and academicians of Baha'i Studies with a wealth of knowledge and information about the early history and teachings of these religions. Mazandarani was also instructed by 'Abdu'l-Baha – and later by Shoghi Effendi – to travel widely and make presentations on the teachings of these religions. Among the countries he travelled to were Iraq, India, the United States and Canada. In the early 1920s, Mazandarani delivered a series of pioneering presentations in the US on gender equality, racial harmony, religious tolerance, globalization and constructive collaboration among the nations of the world.<sup>20</sup>

'Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari is the last of the three most accomplished Persian scholars.

*'Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari.*

He received his religious education at a seminary in Mashhad and was gaining prominence as a Shi'ite cleric when he converted to the Baha'i religion in 1927. He devoted the rest of his life to Baha'i research and activities until his death in 1972. This included compiling large volumes on Baha'i history, teachings, laws, and ordinances. Many of his works, particularly his nine-volume *Mā'idih-yi Āsmānī* (Heavenly Sustenance) – which, much like Mazandarani's *Amr va Khalq*, made a host of previously inaccessible writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha available to Baha'is – and the four-volume *Qāmūs-i Īqān* (A Dictionary of [the Book of] Certitude), are still among the most influential sources of research for Baha'i Studies in Persian.<sup>21</sup> A long list of Ishraq-Khavari's writings remains unpublished to this day.<sup>22</sup>

### **Baha'i Studies Classes for Teacher Training**

Sadr al-Sudur's classes and those held by Shaykh Muhammad-'Ali Qa'ini in Ishqabad offered a great model for other capable Baha'i teachers to follow in the ensuing decades. For instance, in the early 1940s, a Baha'i Studies class known as *Kilās-i Ālī-yi Dars-i Tabligh* (The Institute for Teacher Training) was established at the National Baha'i Administrative Centre in Tehran, known as *Hazīrat al-Quds-i Millī*. The class, which ran well into the 1960s, was taught by such eminent Baha'is as Ishraq-Khavari, 'Azizu'llah Sulaymani (1901–1985), 'Ali-Akbar Furutan (1905–2003), Ahmad Yazdani (1891–1978) and Siyyid 'Abbas 'Alavi (1893–1961). Among the students was Dr Heshmat Moayyad (1926/7–), who later became Professor of Persian at the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization at the University of Chicago.<sup>23</sup>

In 1959, Dr Nosratullah Mohammad Hosseini (1935–) began a three-year class in Advanced Baha'i Studies that covered selections from the works of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, as well as materials on Babi and Baha'i history. Muhammad Hosseini's classes were among the first in Baha'i history to include non-traditional subjects, such as Arabic syntax and grammar, the Qur'an and courses on world religions, including Jainism, Sikhism and Manichaeism.<sup>24</sup> Among the graduates of this programme was Baha'i scholar Dr Vahid Ra'fati, who has been at the Research Department of the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa, Israel since 1980.

In the 1960s and 70s, several other prominent scholars held rigorous Baha'i Studies classes in different Iranian cities, including the prolific Ishraq-Khavari in Isfahan, as well as Dr Riaz Ghadimi (1927–2006) and Dr Farhang Holakouee (1944–) in Tehran. Ghadimi designed and conducted a four-year programme of Advanced Baha'i Studies, during which students memorized selected Baha'i writings, learned Arabic grammar to improve their reading and understanding of the Arabic Baha'i writings, and studied oratory. Ghadimi's students also studied the histories and sacred texts of other religions as well as the development of philosophy as a field of study, beginning from ancient Greek philosophy to the modern schools.<sup>25</sup>

### **Baha'i Studies as Rigorous Academic Programme: The Institute for Advanced Baha'i Studies (IABS)**

In September 1974, the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Iran received a letter from the Universal House of Justice encouraging them to begin educating a select few talented Baha'i youth in the rigorous study of

the Baha'i religion, as well as traditional religious and mystical subjects. A year later, the establishment of an institute that would accomplish this goal became one of the objectives of the Five Year Plan (1974–1979) for the Iranian Baha'i community. In April 1976, the institute officially opened its doors and began operation under the title of *Mu'assisih-yi 'Ālī-yi Ma'ārif-i Amr* (The Institute for Advanced Baha'i Studies, henceforth IABS).<sup>26</sup>

IABS started with five faculty members and 20 students, mostly college-age, who were hand-picked by the faculty or other prominent Baha'is. The five instructors were Dr 'Ali Murad Davudi, Mr Badi'u'llah Farid, Dr Muhammad Afnan, Mr Muhammad Muvahhid (a former Shi'ite cleric), and Colonel Jalal Dini. Those who selected the initial students were expected to be familiar with candidates' potential and dedication to Baha'i Studies. At first, classes were focused on teaching Baha'u'llah's *Kitāb-i Aqdas* (the Most Holy Book), the Bab's the Persian Bayan, the Qur'an, Islamic Studies, the English works of Shoghi Effendi and Arabic syntax and grammar. Research areas students could focus on were also defined and a library was established. The plan was to eventually transform the institute beyond a mere centre for academic study of the Baha'i religion into an organization, the goals of which would include arranging and holding scientific, scholarly conferences, as well as conventions for consultation and discussion on religious and spiritual subjects. IABS started its educational activities with a three-cycle curriculum:

**Cycle 1:** The first cycle consisted of a two-year introductory programme in Persian, Arabic, and English. The goal of the first cycle was to provide a foundation in basic Baha'i Studies and prepare the students for more advanced topics. Subjects for this two-year programme were divided into four semesters:

#### Semester 1

- Baha'i Works in Persian
- A Short History of the Baha'i Religion
- Short Histories of World Religions
- The Baha'i Administrative Order
- Arabic Syntax
- Ancillary Subjects

#### Semester 2

- Baha'i Works in Arabic
- The *Kitāb-i Aqdas*
- Baha'i Works in English
- A Short History of the Baha'i Religion
- Baha'i Laws
- A Brief History of World Religions
- Arabic Syntax
- Ancillary Subjects

#### Semester 3

- The Study of the Works of the Bab
- Baha'i Works in English
- Logical Reasoning
- Ancient Greek Logic

- General Topics on the Social Teachings of the Faith
- The History of Western Philosophy
- Supplementary Arabic
- Ancillary Subjects

#### Semester 4

- The Study of the Works of the Bab
- The Qur'an and Qur'anic Exegesis
- Baha'i Works in English
- Scriptural Reasoning
- The Study of Wisdom
- The History of Eastern Philosophy
- Supplementary Arabic
- Ancillary Subjects

**Cycle 2:** The second cycle was a year-long specialization programme that initially started with only one area of focus – Islamic Studies. Future plans included the addition of other specializations in Eastern philosophy, world religions and jurisprudence. The specialization in Islamic Studies included the following two divisions:

#### Semester 1

- The Qur'an and Qur'anic Exegesis
- The Science of Discourse ('ilm al-kalām)<sup>27</sup>
- The Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence (Usūl-i fiqh)
- Qur'anic Studies
- The Works of the Bab
- Gnosis and Mysticism
- Islamic and Shi'ite Sciences and Idioms
- Ancillary Studies

#### Semester 2

- The Qur'an and Qur'anic Exegesis
- The Science of Discourse
- The History of Islam
- Qur'anic Studies
- The Works of the Bab
- Gnosis and Mysticism
- Muslim Sects and Their Beliefs
- Ancillary Subjects

**Cycle 3:** The third and last cycle was an advanced studies programme which was to last a minimum of one year. During this time, students who had completed the previous two cycles would engage in intensive research on a subject selected in consultation with a faculty member. The outcome of the research was to be published as a thesis. The faculty for all three cycles was to be selected from among Baha'i instructors inside and outside Iran.

Some of the most prominent Iranian scholars of the Baha'i religion were asked to serve as faculty at IABS. Below are brief accounts of their lives and descriptions of the capacities in which they served at that institute.

### Dr 'Ali Murad Davudi (1922–1979?)

Davudi was the first student in Iran to receive a doctoral degree in philosophy. His doctoral dissertation won an award from Empress Farah Pahlavi's Cultural Foundation.<sup>28</sup> Davudi went on to become one of the most prominent professors of philosophy in Iran prior to the Islamic Revolution of 1979. He eventually became the chair of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Tehran. In addition to writing many works on the history of Greek and Islamic philosophies, Davudi also became an expert translator of great works of philosophy from French into Persian.<sup>29</sup> His works also included numerous books, treatises, and audi-



Dr. 'Ali Murad Davudi.

otaped talks on Baha'i philosophy, theology and metaphysics. Many of these talks were later published in print by others, including Vahid Ra'fati, one of Davudi's students. With the recent translation of his book, *Insān dar Ā'in-i Bahā'ī*, from Persian into English by Riaz Masrouf under the title 'Human Station in the Baha'i Faith', Davudi became only the second prominent Baha'i scholar (along with Mirza Abu'l-Fadl) to have his works translated into English. At IABS, he focused on gnosis ('irfān), particularly Islamic and Baha'i mysticism. For Islamic mysticism, the main textbook he used was the classic *Misbāh al-Hidāya wa Miftāh al-Kifāya* (The Light of Guidance and the Key to Sufficiency) by the eminent Muslim philosopher and mystic Shihab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi (1154–1191), the founder of the School of Illumination (Ishraq). For Baha'i mysticism, the primary text was Baha'u'llah's *Seven Valleys*. Davudi also gave regular Baha'i study classes to the youth in Tehran and in summer schools across the country. He frequently visited a local recording studio and taped lectures on various subjects, such as prayer, the station of man, and free will. These were later distributed on cassette tapes to the Baha'i community.

On 11 November 1979, while he was walking alone in a park near his home in Tehran, Davudi was abducted and never seen again. He has since been presumed dead and was more than likely a victim of state kidnapping and execution. The Iranian government denied any involvement, but three revolutionary guards later admitted that they had been ordered to kidnap Davudi.<sup>31</sup>

### Badi'u'llah Farid (1927–1981)

Farid was instrumental in the establishment of IABS. Even though he had obtained a law degree in the 1950s, he was a teacher by profession and served in that capacity for many years. From a rather young age, Farid had developed great interest in Baha'i Studies and developed a thorough knowledge of the Arabic language, syntax and grammar. He published several works on those subjects and was also familiar with logic, philosophy, Islamic jurisprudence, theology, Persian literature, and the sacred writings of various religions, particularly the Qur'an, the *Kitab-i Aqdas* and the *Kitab-i Iqan* (the Book of Certitude).



After the passing of Fadil Mazandarani, Farid began gathering, collating and publishing his works. He also prepared and organized materials for the *Majallih-yi Akhbār-i Amrī* (Baha'i News Magazine), which was a publication of the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran and contained various kinds of Baha'i news.



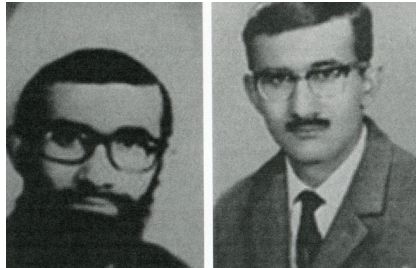
*Badi'u'llah Farid and His Wife Mahin.*

Following the establishment of IABS, Iran's National Spiritual Assembly chose Farid to manage and supervise the institute. He invested all of his time in the growth and development of this institute and served in that capacity until his arrest. Farid also served as a teacher at IABS and taught classes on the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* and *Kitab-i-Iqan*. Additionally, for a number of years, he served on Iran's Baha'i Publications Approval Committee as well as the committee for finalizing the vocalization<sup>32</sup> of words in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*. Towards the end of his life, Farid was elected to Tehran's Spiritual Assembly.

On 7 February 1980, while in his car along with his personal driver, Farid was stopped, arrested and transferred to Evin Prison. On 24 June 1981, after more than 16 months of imprisonment, Farid was executed on fabricated charges along with three other Baha'is. Among his posthumous publications is *An Essay on the Kitab-i-Aqdas*.<sup>33</sup>

### **Muhammad Muvahhid (1937–1979?)**

Muvahhid was born in Shiraz. The son of a renowned cleric, he himself was six years into his religious education at a seminary when he came across Baha'i writings at a city library and was deeply attracted to them. He eventually converted to the religion in 1957 and practised it in secret for eight years. In September 1965, Muvahhid revealed his conversion to his seminary students and his brothers. Upon hearing the news, some of his students became enraged and threatened to kill him. To protect him from harm, others declared Muvahhid mentally unsound and sent him to a mental asylum, where he remained in custody for 95 days. His doctors, however, stated that he was in perfect mental health and subsequently released him. Muvahhid then moved to Tehran, where he began studying and arranging classes for teaching the Baha'i religion.



*Muhammad Muvahhid.*

He was asked to teach at IABS in 1977, where he held classes on the Bab's Arabic Bayan as well as Arabic syntax and etymology, for which he used *Jāmi' al-Muqaddamāt* (A Comprehensive Introduction [to Arabic Syntax and Etymology]). In May 1979, Muvahhid was abducted and never heard from again. He is presumed dead.<sup>34</sup>

### 'Azizu'llah Sulaymani (1901–1985)

Sulaymani was born on 10 November 1901 into a prominent Baha'i family in the village of Kelateh Yazd-Abad in Khurasan. His maternal grandfather was Shatir-Rida, who had travelled to Baghdad and owned a bakery there that provided bread for Baha'u'llah's household. When Sulaymani was 5 or 6 years old, his family moved to Ishqabad, Turkmenistan, which had one of the most vibrant Baha'i communities in the world at the time and eventually became home to the first Baha'i House of Worship in 1908. It was there that, as a youth, Sulaymani attended a Baha'i school and received education from such eminent Baha'i teachers as Shaykh Muhammad-'Ali Qa'ini.



'Azizu'llah Sulaymani.

Later, Sulaymani studied the Arabic language and Islamic Studies, and eventually settled in Iran. In the 1940s, he began collecting biographical information about prominent early Babis and Baha'is. In 1955, he met Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i religion, who advised him to travel across Iran. Therefore, Sulaymani further expanded his travels and, in the process, continued to compile and publish life stories of early Babis and Baha'is – something he continued to do until the early 1970s. The result was a huge 10-volume series of more than 5,600 pages that covered the lives of 99 prominent Babi and Baha'i figures. The collection became known as *Masābih-i Hidāyat* (Lamps of Guidance). The first nine volumes were gradually published from 1948 to 1976. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 prevented print publication of the tenth and last volume. However, that volume was eventually published digitally in 2007.<sup>35</sup> What makes this collection unique is the fact that Sulaymani gathered the materials for these biographies through his travels across Iran, where he conducted personal interviews with descendants of his subjects or others who had intimate knowledge about them. In the process, he also collected a great number of primary source documents and manuscripts. *Masābih-i Hidāyat* remains one of the most comprehensive biographies of early Babis and Baha'is to date.

As noted above, by 1961, Sulaymani was teaching at the Institute for Teacher Training at the National Baha'i Administrative Center in Tehran with other distinguished Baha'i scholars. He was eventually asked by Iran's National Spiritual Assembly to manage this institute. At IABS, Sulaymani taught ancient Greek logic for which he used his own textbook, *Mantiq-i Sulaymānī* (Sulaymani Logic). He passed away on 24 October 1985 in the city of Gunbad-i Kavus, Mazandaran.<sup>36</sup>



Dr Muhammad Afnan.

### Dr Muhammad Afnan (1930–2017)

Dr Afnan was a descendant of the family of the Bab and an expert on the Babi religion and the Bab's works, particularly the Persian Bayan, which he taught at IABS. He



was one of the five original instructors and a key member of the faculty at IABS. After the Islamic revolution, Afnan moved to Canada and later to Israel, where he served at the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice for many years. He eventually relocated to Canada, where he passed away in August 2017. Two volumes of his essays on Babi and Baha'i studies, entitled *Majmū'ih-yi Maqālāt* (The Collected Essays of Dr. Muhammad Afnan), have been published by Andalib (Dundas, Ontario, Canada).

### 'Inayatu'llah Fananapazir (1921/22–1978)

Fananapazir was born around 1921–1922 into a Baha'i family in Isfahan. Fananapazir was a prominent scholar and teacher of the Baha'i religion who specialized in Islam, particularly Qur'anic and hadith prophecy, which were some of the subjects he taught at IABS.

From a young age, he taught Baha'u'llah's *Kitab-i-Aqdas* and *Kitab-i-Iqan*, often travelling from Isfahan to Najafabad to deepen other Baha'is in those books. Later in life, he was appointed as an itinerant teacher (*muballigh-i sayyār*). Throughout his life, he transcribed tablets and works of the Central Figures of the Baha'i religion. With his calligraphy, he copied the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* 95 times. In April 1957, he left Iran for the Gambia to serve as a Baha'i pioneer. He stayed there until 1977, when he returned to Iran to be of help to his mother-in-law. Around the same time, he started serving as a teacher at IABS until he passed away in April 1978.<sup>37</sup>



'Inayatu'llah Fananapazir.

### Jalal Dini (1910–1978)

Jalal Dini was born in 1910 into a Muslim family in Zanjan. During his childhood and youth, he exhibited great interest in Islamic hadith and had a strong desire to learn Arabic – two qualities for which he became known during his life as he engaged in deep study of the Baha'i writings.

When Dini was 16 years old, he attended a religious school to become a cleric. About two years later, his father, Aqa Khalil Dini, learned about the Baha'i religion and became a devout follower. For over two years, the young Dini vehemently opposed his father about converting to a 'heretical sect' and attempted to persuade his younger brothers and sisters to defy their father and sever ties with him, even though they all lived under the same roof. About a year later, Dini attended a fire-side by a respected Baha'i teacher named Mr Mouhebat, who was traveling



Jalal Dini.

through Zanjan. He deliberated on what he had learned at that fireside and converted to the Baha'i religion the next day. From that point on, he and his father remained under constant surveillance. They were often taken to the police department for questioning and interrogation, and were occasionally imprisoned for days and weeks at a time.

A few years after his conversion to the Baha'i religion, Dini moved to Tehran and enrolled in a military school, where he eventually became an officer. While continuing to participate in various Baha'i activities in Tehran, he married and started a family with Esmat Mahdi. In 1953, he was transferred to Kermanshah for a military post as a colonel. He continued teaching the Baha'i religion in Kermanshah and held regular study classes on the writings of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha for the Baha'i community there.

In 1961, Dini was transferred back to Tehran and, among other things, worked with Ahmad Yazdani to prepare some Arabic Baha'i texts for publication.

Like Fananapazir, Dini was also a scholar of the Qur'an and Muslim hadith. He taught Qur'an classes at IABS using *Tafsīr-i Sāfi*, a well-known Shi'ite exegesis of the Qur'an. Dini passed away on 14 January 1978 at the age of 68.<sup>38</sup>

### Other IABS Faculty

In addition to the regular teachers, several other individuals also served as adjunct faculty. Among these were:

- Dr Mashallah Moshrefzadeh (1930–2015), who taught Western philosophy
- Mr Hesam al-Din Nuqaba'i (1927–1986), who taught world religions
- Dr Jamshid Fanaian (1937–), who taught the English writings of Shoghi Effendi

### Conclusion

The seeds of Baha'i scholarship germinated in Persia with the efforts and works of a handful of Persian scholars, who were primarily concerned with defence of their faith against attacks by Shi'ite clerics, Christian missionaries and others who considered the religion a heresy. Their publications provided ample resources for the establishment of Baha'i Studies and teacher training classes. From the 1950s, the scope of these classes began to gradually widen and include such subjects as world religions, Islamic Studies, mysticism, Qur'anic studies and Arabic language and grammar. In the mid-1970s, thanks primarily to the pioneering work of Dr 'Ali Murad Davudi and his colleagues, Baha'i studies gained the rigour of an academic institution through the establishment of IABS in 1976. This institute was specifically established to prepare and nurture the next generation of Baha'i scholars in Iran. While students who initially attended IABS were mostly college students from different institutions of higher education in Tehran, the ultimate goal was to transform IABS into a full-blown Baha'i college or university that students across the country could choose as an alternative – rather than a complement – to a secular school. There were also plans to facilitate the travel and residency of some Baha'i students from other cities to Tehran so they could attend IABS.

Although the Islamic Revolution of 1979 resulted in the closure of IABS as a public Baha'i institution of higher education, IABS did succeed in



*Haji Mirza Haydar-'Ali with a young Shoghi Effendi seated to his left. Standing behind them are Mirza Mahmud-i-Zarqani (behind Shogh Effendi) and Khusraw, the gardener of 'Abdu'l-Baha.*

bringing together some of the greatest scholars and teachers of the Baha'i religion in Iran for about three years. Moreover, despite the fact that the Revolution interrupted the development of what could have been the first Baha'i college or university in Iran, IABS managed to cultivate a love for Baha'i scholarship in the hearts of some of the Baha'i youth in Iran. To this day, some of the former students of IABS are still pursuing Baha'i scholarship in different parts of the globe. Additionally, after the Islamic Revolution, the pursuit of the goals of IABS continued inside and outside Iran. For the next 20 years, a post-secondary institution offering advanced Baha'i Studies operated inside Iran. A large number of young Baha'i students attended the rigorous classes of this new institution. Many finished the structured curricula and published their own theses.<sup>39</sup>

Additionally, thanks to a personal initiative by Dr Muhammad Afnan, the former IABS faculty member – and with the approval of the Universal House of Justice – the Persian Institute for Baha'i Studies, which operates under the supervision of the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, was established in Dundas, Ontario in 1985.

### **Acknowledgements**

The present authors would like to thank Dr Iraj Ayman and Dr Robert Stockman for reviewing an early draft of this paper. Dr Ayman also provided invaluable information about some of the early Baha'i Studies classes to the authors. We would also like to thank the late Dr Mashallah Moshrefzadeh

and Dr Jamshid Fanaian, both of whom served as faculty at IABS, for providing us with important information about some of the IABS classes, and also to Hossein Taherzadeh, Dr Said Dini, Dr Sateh Bayat, and Dr Khazeh Fananapazir for providing them with biographical details about the IABS faculty. They are additionally grateful to Farnaz Masumian, Naeem Nabiliakbar, and Dariush Lamy – former IABS students – for sharing their firsthand experiences, which helped the authors paint a more complete picture of the IABS curriculum. Lastly, to those who are interested in reading more complete biographies of some of the IABS faculty members in Persian, the authors suggest Mahmeh Golestaneh's *Parvāz hā va Yādīgār hā*.<sup>40</sup> Many of the Persian books and essays mentioned in this article can be found on the Arabic and Persian Texts section of the H-Baha'i digital repository: <https://www.h-net.org/~bahai/index/diglib/arapub.htm>.

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### Endnotes

1. 'Azizu'llah Sulaymani, *Masābih-i Hidāyat* [Lamps of Guidance], Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1950, Vol. 2, 274–5. Unabridged PDF Edition Digitally republished, East Lansing, MI: H-Bahai, 2006, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/sulayman/masabih2/masabih2.htm>. (Accessed 31 August 2017.)
2. Haji Mirza Haydar-'Ali. *Stories from the Delight of Hearts*, Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1995, 162.
3. He was given the title of Sadr al-Sudūr (Foremost Among the Distinguished) by 'Abdu'l-Baha. It took many months of rigorous discussions with numerous Baha'is in two cities

(Hamadan and Tehran) to eventually win over Sadr al-Sudūr to the new religion. In his *Tārīkh-i Hadrat-i Sadr al-Sudūr* [The Chronicle of the Esteemed, Sadr al-Sudūr], Unpublished Manuscript, Mu'assasih-yi Millī-yi Matbu'āt-i Amrī (The National Baha'i Publishing Trust of Iran), 108 BE/1951, 21–37, a digital copy is available through Iran's online Parliament Library: <http://www.icnc.ir/index.aspx?pid=289&metadatald=131f4ecd-e477-4c4c-8552-96eb2606c5ec>. Rastigar notes that Sadr al-Sudūr first learned of the new religion through a certain Hajī Hakīm Mūsā, who was a Baha'i of Jewish origin and served as Sadr al-Sudūr's family physician. Hakīm, who had himself been converted by Gulpāyghānī, held a teaching session with Sadr al-Sudūr at the home of Hajī Mihdī Arjmand in Hamadan. Later, when Sadr al-Sudūr moved to Tehran to continue his religious education, he met other Baha'is through Mīrzā Sulaymān Semsār, who was recommended by Hakīm and – after months of investigation – joined the new religion. Rastigar evidently heard the conversion story from Mīrzā Na'im Sidihi, the well-known Baha'i poet who resided in Tehran at the time. Na'im – along with some of the Hands of the Cause and brothers Nayyir and Sinā, also poets – were all engaged in teaching the Faith to Sadr al-Sudūr. On the night of conversion, the three aforementioned Baha'i poets and Shaykh Muhammad-'Alī Qā'inī (see below) were present in a private teaching session with Sadr al-Sudūr. After long discussions, the final turning point for Sadr al-Sudūr was apparently hearing the recitation of sections of 'Abdu'l-Bahā's *Lawh-i Khurāsān* chanted by Qā'inī in a melodious tone. However, Yūnis Khān-i Afrūkhtih, in *Khāṭirāt-i Nuh-Sālih-yi 'Akkā*, Los Angeles: Kalimāt Press, 1983 125–132, gives a different story of the night of conversion. Afrūkhtih indicates that Mīrzā 'Abdu'llāh Farāhānī, the famous Qājār court musician who had become a Baha'i as a youth, had also held talks with Sadr al-Sudūr in Tehran. Due to his notoriety as a court musician, Farāhānī was presumably hiding his religious identity from most people. Later, Arastou Khān-i Hakīm, a Baha'i physician in Tehran, contacted Afrūkhtih and invited him to hold additional teaching sessions with Sadr al-Sudūr along with Mīrzā 'Abdu'llāh. Afrūkhtih agreed and met with Sadr al-Sudūr at the home of Mīrzā 'Abdu'llāh, where Sadr al-Sudūr eventually accepted the new religion after a moving experience that led all three individuals to burst into tears. What seems clear from these conflicting reports of Sadr al-Sudūr's conversion is that it took efforts by numerous individuals over a relatively long period of time to win him over. This is not surprising, considering the fact that Sadr al-Sudūr was an erudite man who practised unfettered search after the truth. Therefore, his initial interest, perhaps even one of these confirmations of faith, may have come across to some Baha'is as wholehearted acceptance of the new religion. However, for a while in Tehran, Sadr al-Sudūr was also attracted to Sufism, and went so far as being 'initiated into the Ni'matu'llāhi Sufi order, rising to the position of pīr-i dalīl [a station in the Sufi order reserved for individuals who serve as intermediary between the Sufi guide and his disciples]. See Moojan Momen, *The Baha'i Communities of Iran, 1851–1921*, Vol 1: The North of Iran, Oxford: George Ronald, 2015, 97.

4. Anon. *Rōhāniyūn-i Musalmānī kih bih Diyānat-i Bābī va Bahā'ī Mu'min Shudand* (Muslim Clerics who Became Believers in the Bābī and Baha'i religions), <http://negah.org/758>. (Accessed 12 June 2017.)
5. Moojan Momen, 'Tarikh-i Diyanat-i Baha'i dar Tehran' [History of the Faith in Tehran], *Payam-i Bahā'ī*, July 2011, 37.
6. Nasrullah Rastigar, *Tarikh-i Hadrat-i Sadr al-Sudur* (n.p., n.d.), 189–191.
7. Nasrullah Rastigar, *Irtibat-i Sharq va Gharb* [Association of the East with the West]. *Ahang-i Badi'* [The New Melody]. No. 182, 17(2), Ordibehesht 1341, May 1961, 40–42.
8. Sadr al-Sudūr, *Istidlāliyyih-yi Mukhtasar*, a facsimile of the original manuscript, published in Tehran, Iran: Mu'assasih-yi Millī-yi Matbu'āt-i Amrī, 132 BE. For a digitally scanned copy, see here: <http://www.afnanlibrary.org/docs/persian-arabic-mss/inba/inba-vol-025/>.
9. The Shaykh was a nephew and close companion of Aqa Muhammad-i Qā'inī (1829–1892), also known as Fadil-i Qā'inī and Nabil-i Akbar.
10. Building a school for the boys started in 1894–1895 and was completed in 1897. Ten years later, a separate school for girls was also established. For details see, Moojan Momen, 'The Bahā'ī Community Of Ashkhabad; Its Social Basis And Importance In Baha'i History' in Shirin Akiner (ed.) *Cultural Change and Continuity in Central Asia*, London: Kegan Paul International, 1991, 278–305.
11. Hasan Balyuzi. *Eminent Bahā'īs in the Time of Bahā'u'llāh*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1985, 274.
12. Azizu'llah Sulaymani, *Masabih-i Hidayat*, Volume 6. Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 125 BE/ 1969. PDF Edition digitally republished, East Lansing, Mi.: H-Bahai, 2006, 93, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/sulayman/masabih6/masabih6.htm>. (Accessed 31 August 2017.)



13. *ibid*, Vol 3. Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 106 BE/ 1950. Digitally republished, East Lansing, Mi.: H-Bahai, 2006, 163–4, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/sulayman/masabih3/masabih3.htm>. Na'im's most popular treatise was *Ahsan al-Taqwīm* [the Best of Compositions], also known as *Jannat al-Na'im* [Na'im's Paradise], which was comprised entirely of poems.
14. Vahid Ra'fati, *Nukātī chand dar bārih-yi alvāh-i sādirih bih i'zāz-i Jināb-i Abu'l-Fadā'il* [Some Points on the Tablets Issued in Honour of Jinab-i Abu'l-Fada'il], *Payam-i Bahā'ī*, January 1990, 13–19.
15. Dr Ezzatullah Jazayeri, 'Hadrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā va Mīrā Abu'l-Fada'il', *Payam-i Bahā'ī*, January 1990, 25.
16. See Mahmud Zarqani, *Kitāb badā'i' al-āthār fī asfār Mawlā al-Akhyār ilā mamālik al-gharb bi-l-'azzah wa-al-iqtidār*, Hofheim-Langenhain: Baha'i Verlag, 1982, 2:107. Abu'l-Fadl spent the last few years of his life in Egypt. Some of this time coincided with 'Abdu'l-Baha's western travels. In a telegram to Aqa Muhammad Taqi Isfahani in Egypt, 'Abdu'l-Baha instructs him to prepare the utmost means of comfort for Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, as 'He is my own self'. (In Persian: 'asbāb-i rāhat-i Abu'l-Fadā'il rā mohayā namāyid. Ū rā 'ebārat az nafs-i man ast.')
17. Mirza Abu'l-Fadl's *Farā'id* [Peerless Gems], Egypt: n.p., n.d. Digitally republished, East Lansing, Mi.: H-Bahai, 2006, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/gulpaygani/faraid.htm>, written in 1898 in response to an attack on Baha'u'llah's *Kitāb-i Iqan* [Book of Certitude], soon became the de facto Baha'i apologia in teaching the new religion and defending it against its assailants.
18. These translated works include *Hujaj al-Bahā'īyyih* [The Behai Proofs], New York : J.W. Pratt Co, 1902 repr, Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1983], *ad-Duraru'l-Bahīyyih* [The Shining Pearls] trans. as *Miracles and Metaphors*, Los Angeles: Kalimāt Press, 1981, *Rasā'il wa Raqā'im* [Treatises and Letters], trans. as *Letters and Essays*, Los Angeles: Kalimāt Press, 1985 and *Burhan-i-Lami'* [The Brilliant Proof], Los Angeles: Kalimāt Press, 1998.
19. When Haji Muhammad Rida Isfahani – a prominent Baha'i – was assassinated in Ishqabad, Abu'l-Fadl represented the Baha'i community at the trial of the murderers. His eloquent defence helped establish the independence of the Baha'i Faith from Islam before the Russian government. For details, see Moojan Momen, *The Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions, 1844–1944: Some Contemporary Western Accounts*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1981, 296–300; Gulpaygani, Abū'l-Fadl and Ahang Rabbani, 'The Martyrdom of Haji Muhammad-Rida'. *Translations of Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Texts*. Ann Arbor, MI, H-Bahai. 4, 2000, <https://www.h-net.org/~bahai/trans/vol4/mrida.htm>. (Accessed 31 August 2017.)
20. For more information, refer to the following website dedicated to chronicling Fadil Mazandarani's travels to the United States: Jinab-i-Fadil Mazindarani's Travels to the U.S. <https://sites.google.com/site/fadilmazindarani/>. (Accessed 31 August 2017.)
21. For a more detailed account of Ishraq-Khavari's life, refer to *The Bahā'ī World*, Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, Vol. XV, 518–20.
22. These include a 19-volume Baha'i Encyclopedia and a 5-volume series on Na'im's poetry, entitled *Tafsi'l al-Durr* [Commentary on [Poetic] Pearls].
23. Personal correspondence with Dr. Iraj Ayman, March 2014.
24. Personal correspondence with Dr Nosratullah Muhammad Hosseini, March 2014. A more complete biography of Muhammad Hosseini can be found in Todd Lawson, *A Most Noble Pattern*, Oxford: George Ronald, 2012, 291.
25. Personal correspondence with Jiyan Ghadimi, the son of Riaz Ghadimi, March 2014.
26. The *Āhang-i Badī'* magazine, 1978, No. 45, 7. Online copy available at: [http://www.bahai-projects.org/sites/bahaiprojects/files/resource\\_center/root/Magazines/Ahang Badee/\[32\].pdf](http://www.bahai-projects.org/sites/bahaiprojects/files/resource_center/root/Magazines/Ahang%20Badee/[32].pdf). (Accessed 31 August 2017.)
27. This refers to the Islamic discipline of seeking theological knowledge through dialectic (debate and argument).
28. Malekeh Afagh Iranpour-Davudi, 'Hamsaram Duktur 'Ali Murad Davudi' [My Spouse, Dr. 'Ali Murad Davudi], Part 1, *Payam-i Bahā'ī*, March 2011, 25.
29. *Ibid*, 26.
30. Suhrawardi's 'Illuminationism' is an important school in Islamic mysticism that was founded on Zoroastrian and Platonic ideas. The concept of 'light' as a divine and meta-physical source of knowledge is central to Suhrawardi's philosophy. See Hossein Ziai,

'Illuminationism' Encyclopaedia Iranica Online, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/illuminationism>. (Accessed 31 August 2017.)

31. Novin Doostdar, 'Obituaries: Alimurad Davudi (1922–1979 [kidnapped, presumed dead]) Professor of Philosophy, Bahá'í Administrator, Probable Victim of State Execution', *Bahá'í Studies Review* 9(1), 1999/2000, 241–245.
32. The process of adding supplementary diacritical marks to indicate short vowels in Arabic.
33. Badí'u'llah Farid, *An Essay on the Kitab-i-Aqdas*, 2nd ed., Wilmette, IL: Persian-American Affairs Office, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 1993. Available online at: [http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/farid/Essay\\_Kitab-i-Aqdas.pdf](http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/farid/Essay_Kitab-i-Aqdas.pdf). (Accessed 31 August 2017.)
34. A Persian-language account of Mr Muvahhid's life, which he himself recounted, currently exists as an audio recording on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzbXlv8AiG4>. This recording was digitized from a cassette tape. (Accessed 31 August 2017.)
35. 'Azizu'llah Sulaymani. *Masabih-i Hidayat*. [Lamps of Guidance], Vol.10, Unpublished Manuscript.1st ed., East Lansing, MI: H-Bahai, 2007. Available at: <https://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/sulayman/masabih10/masabih10.htm>. (Accessed 31 August 2017.) The original manuscript of this volume is currently in private hands.
36. Koumarth Sulaymani, 'A brief biography of 'Azizu'llah Sulaymani'. *Payam-i Baha'i*, No. 99. (trans. Adel Shafipour; ed. Rob Stauffer), available online at: [http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/sulayman/Sulaymani\\_Biography.PDF](http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/sulayman/Sulaymani_Biography.PDF). (Accessed 31 August 2017.) In addition, a more detailed account of Sulaymani's life in Persian can be found in A. Sadeghian, Zindigī, Khadamāt, va Āthār-i 'Azizu'llāh-i Sulaymānī-yi Ardakānī, *Khūshih-hā'ī az kharman-i adab va hunar*, Wienacht: Anjuman-i Adab va Hunar, Vol.13 [Dawrih-yi Nabīl Akbar Qā'inī], 213–228.
37. Personal correspondence with Khazeh Fananapazir, the son of 'Inayatu'llah Fananapazir, September 2009. An 'in memoriam' article on Fananapazir can be found in *The Bahá'í World*, Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, Vol. XVII, 453.
38. Personal correspondence with Said Dini, the son of Colonel Dini, October 2009.
39. One of the present authors (Bijan Masumian) saw an example of one such thesis from a graduate of this institution in a 2004 visit to Iran.
40. Mahmeh Golestaneh, *Parvāz-ha va Yādigar-hā* [Tribute to the Faithful] [Dallas, TX]: Supreme Publications, 1371 [1992].



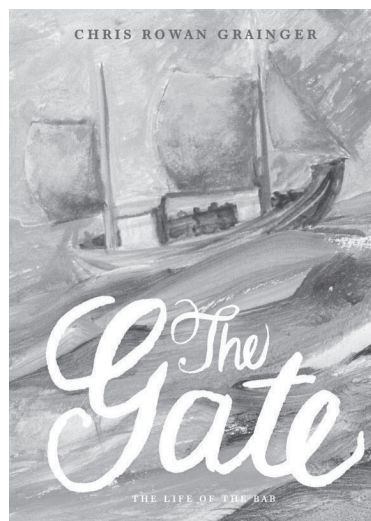
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# Translation

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## Mirza Husayn 'Ali Nuri, Baha'u'llah, Tablet of Tribulations (*Lawḥ-i Balāyā*)

William McCants *Johns Hopkins University*

### Abstract

*Many of Baha'u'llah's tablets and epistles lament his suffering, which he compares to the trials of past prophets and messengers. Baha'u'llah's favourite point of comparison in Islam is his namesake Imam Husayn, whose suffering he likens to his own and whose return he claims to be. However, in a tablet tentatively entitled the 'Tablet of Tribulations', Baha'u'llah contrasts his suffering and political persecution with the worldly success of Muhammad. This tablet is translated with brief annotations.*

### Keywords

Lawḥ-i Balāyā  
Baha'u'llah  
Muhammad  
trials  
suffering  
tribulation

### Introductory Notes

Baha'u'llah rarely compares his suffering to that of Muhammad, preferring instead to liken his mistreatment to that of Muhammad's martyred grandson Husayn,<sup>1</sup> whose return he claims to be.<sup>2</sup> But the comparison with Muhammad is apt if for no other reason than both men lived long lives as self-proclaimed prophets and died peacefully in their beds.

One of the few places Baha'u'llah makes the comparison is in the 'Tablet of Tribulations', written between 1863 and Baha'u'llah's death in 1892. In it, he draws a stark contrast between his tribulations and the 'worldly dominion' of Muhammad. Given Baha'u'llah's allusion to the calumnies directed against him by two unnamed individuals, he probably wrote the tablet during his exile in Istanbul and Edirne between 1863 and 1868 when the Iranian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire and Sayyid Muhammad Isfahani conspired against him.<sup>3</sup> A reference to the 1863 *Lawḥ-i Samsun* also suggests that the tablet dates to his exile in Istanbul and Edirne.

The tablet is not only unique for its subject matter but also for its citations. Baha'u'llah quotes or paraphrases many early Islamic histories of Muhammad's life and exegeses of the Qur'an, which is unusual in his tablets. Some of the historical episodes, especially the massacre and enslavement of a Jewish tribe, are rarely treated elsewhere in Baha'u'llah's voluminous works. I have included footnotes to provide some background from the Islamic sources.

To my knowledge, no one has written about the tablet in any language other than a brief note by Fadil Mazandarani<sup>4</sup> identifying its recipient as Sayyid Mahdi Dahaji. Sayyid Mahdi's nephew, Ali Akbar Dahaji, was the

recipient of the 'Fire Tablet'.<sup>5</sup> Baha'u'llah also mentions Ali Akbar in the 'Tablet of Tribulations'.

The text of the tablet is published in *Iqtidarāt va chand lawh-i digar*, a collection of Baha'u'llah's writings in the hand of Mishkin Qalam completed in 1893.<sup>6</sup> (The bracketed numbers in the translation are the page numbers in *Iqtidarāt*.) Because the tablet has no title, I have taken its name from the 'tribulations' (*balāyā*) mentioned throughout.

## Translation

### [116]

In His Name, the Merciful, the Gracious.

Hearken, O Mahdi, unto the call of Him Who is drowning in a sea of tribulation. When the waves recede, He will assuredly rear His head and look to the East, saying, 'The Beloved hath come, welcome Him!' Then the waves shall take and drown Him. When the waves calm, He will lift His head and gaze to the West, proclaiming in upraised voice, 'This is the Beloved of the worlds who hath come to quicken you and exalt your station! Ye have abandoned Him to this ordeal the like of which mortal eyes have never seen'. He, verily, is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.

### [117]

O Mahdi! By My life! If the veils were burnt away and thou wert to see Me in the darkness in which I dwell, thou wouldst rush out and raise a cry amongst the entire creation, forgetting thyself and the sorrows that have overwhelmed thee. Nevertheless, We have concealed it as a bounty from thy Lord, the Almighty, the Generous.

Despite these trials, I have shone resplendent above the horizon of beauty and arisen from the dawning-place of power and majesty in such wise that if anyone saw Me, he would find in the lines of my forehead the joy of God and in my cheeks the light of God, the Powerful, the Almighty, the Great. Though a man fleeth tribulation, Baha' shall accompany him in the path of God, the King of Names. Thus have we confided in thee so that thou mayest leave thy cares behind and follow Him Who is the Manifestation of the Merciful among all created things. Verily, this is true victory.

Leave aside thy disappointment and acknowledge that which the Exalted Pen hath testified unto thee in several tablets. Verily, He hath recognized thy love of thy Lord and hath revealed to thee that which hath caused the fragrance of the Beloved to waft throughout the world. Is it more befitting to bear witness to that which [118] hath been revealed to thee or rather to doubt it? Nay, by thy Lord, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful! Leave aside the latter and be content with the bounty of thy Lord. Thus doth the Wronged One' command thee. Verily, He is to be obeyed in that which He desireth.

In the Persian tongue: 'Hearken unto that which hath been revealed! Acknowledge its truth and persevere in asking the True One about that which concerns thee'. Even if the testimony of God is not sufficient for thee, He hath borne witness to thy faith and thy turning unto Him, to the prayers thou hast uttered, and to the aid thou hast rendered.

By my life! If thou knewest what the Reality of Knowledge hath revealed unto thee, thou wouldst soar on wings of longing. Take heed lest the

fragrance of hopelessness waft from thee; nay rather, be thou hopeful. Diffuse at every moment that which sheddeth the scent of joy at having stood before the Face of thy Lord, the Powerful, the Praised. This is what We have admonished thee previously and in this luminous Tablet.

O My name! From the beginning of the world until Mine own time, no one hath been afflicted by such trials. Consider the Messenger of God. Despite His evident prowess in the Battle of the Trench,<sup>8</sup> some of His Holiness's Companions, though outwardly evincing utter servitude and sacrifice, said in secret, [119] 'Muhammad promised we would devour the treasure of Khosrau and Caesar but none of us feebleth safe enough to go to the bathroom'.<sup>9</sup> This happened in the few years when there was neither outward victory nor clear dominion for the Ancient Beauty over rival claimants to power. It is well known what happened as a result.

Tu'ma,<sup>10</sup> one of His Holiness's Companions, stole armour at night.<sup>11</sup> In the morning, the Jews gathered and followed the signs and traces of the theft. When the Jews learned His Holiness had become aware of what happened, they insisted He do something. His Holiness resisted, not wanting this sin to accrue to Islam such that it damaged the Cause of God among the believers. Suddenly, Gabriel descended and recited this verse: 'Verily, We have sent down to thee the Book with the truth, so that thou mayest judge between the people by what God hath shown thee. So be not an advocate for the traitors' (Q 4:105). Afterwards, Tu'ma apostatized but amongst the people calumnies were uttered against His Holiness that the pen doth not like to describe. After a complete recantation of his faith, Tu'ma returned to Mecca [120] and lived among the polytheists.

Likewise, recall the dispute between Zubayr<sup>12</sup> and Hatib<sup>13</sup> over water and land that was referred to His Holiness. They argued until they sought His Holiness' judgment. His Holiness decreed, 'O Zubayr! Go and water thy land'. At that moment, Hatib said something that suggested His Holiness had turned away from what is right. This blessed verse then descended: 'But no, by thy Lord! They will not believe till they make thee the judge regarding the disagreement between them, then they shall find in themselves no impediment touching thy verdict, but shall surrender in full submission' (Q 4:65).<sup>14</sup> After they went outside, 'Ammar Yasir<sup>15</sup> and Ibn Mas'ud<sup>16</sup> asked, 'In whose favour did he rule?' Hatib, filled with mockery and sarcasm, sneeringly pointed at Zubayr. A Jew standing nearby said, 'May God strike them dead. What kind of group is this that testifieth to the truth of the message of this man and then mocketh his ruling?' At that moment, 'Ammar Yasir swore by the God of Muhammad, 'If Muhammad said 'Kill thyself', I would kill myself'. Thabit b. Qays<sup>17</sup> and Ibn Mas'ud also uttered such words. Thereupon, this verse descended, 'But had We prescribed for them, saying, "Slay yourselves" or "Leave [121] your habitations", they would not have done it, save a few of them; yet if they had done as they were admonished it would have been better for them, confirming them strongly' (Q 4:66).<sup>18</sup>

At another time, one of the Jews and a Companion quarrelled. The Jew sought the judgment of His Holiness and the Muslim preferred the ruling of Ka'b b. Ashraf.<sup>19</sup> The Jew insisted on bringing the complaint before His Holiness, who ruled in the Jew's favour. Afterwards, this verse descended: 'Hast thou not regarded those who assert that they believe in what hath been sent down to thee, and what was sent down before thee, desiring to

take their disputes to idols, yet they have been commanded to disbelieve in them? But Satan desires to lead them astray into far error' (Q 4:60).<sup>20</sup> The meaning of 'idol' in this instance is Ka'b b. Ashraf. The Muslim rejected the ruling, saying, 'We are going to 'Umar b. al-Khattab'.<sup>21</sup> After they mentioned details of the ruling, 'Umar said, 'Wait here until I come back'. He entered his house, took up his sword, and returned, whereupon he beheaded the man. He said, 'This is the recompense of those who are not satisfied with what [122] the Messenger of God decreeth'. When the Messenger arrived, he named 'Umar 'The Distinguisher' (al-Faruq), and from that day he was known by that nickname.

From such remembrances it is evident that today the Most Exalted Pen is preoccupied with interpreting the Qur'an and explaining its revelation, though it be sadness upon sadness. By Him Who is the Truth! From time immemorial even unto this day the mention of the chosen ones of God and their writings hath been beloved. He hath yearned for that which hath been ascribed to them and for that which their tongues have uttered. He hath recalled what transpired in their days in sadness because in every age such trials have befallen the Manifestations of Truth. On days such as these He hath decreed a benefit to recounting such remembrances, flowing from the Chosen Pen, so that thou and the lovers of truth may, by reciting the words of the Revealer of verses and the Beloved of the heavens and the earth, fathom but a drop out of the billowing ocean of tribulations afflicting Him.

Briefly, We return to the subject of Our discourse. After the conquest of Mecca was the Battle of Hunayn, which is between Mecca and Ta'if.<sup>22</sup> Much wealth was gathered for His Holiness in the form of camels, [123] cattle, and so forth. His Holiness bestowed one hundred camels upon the notables amongst the people of Mecca like Abu Sufyan<sup>23</sup> and others. To the remainder he gave forty. A person objected, 'I do not see Thee being just'. The Messenger became angry and said, 'If I am not just, then who is?'<sup>24</sup> In this instance the Ansar<sup>25</sup> became angry because they were poorer than others, and His Holiness had given them no spoils. When bitter thoughts and vain imaginings overcame them, the hand of the loving-kindness of thy Lord, the Lord of all men, seized them. The Messenger, may the spirit of all who are in the Kingdom be His sacrifice, said: 'O my Ansar! Do ye not want them to return with the camels and cattle while ye return with the Messenger of God?'.

Consider, O servant: Should we wish to mention all that occasioned the text of the divine verses, words would wax long and we would stray from our purpose. The intent is that all these tribulations befell Him even though He possessed worldly dominion and united inner rule with outer form. So manifest were the punishments He enforced [124] that He had seven hundred people beheaded on a single day. That was in the battle with the Banu Qurayza.<sup>26</sup> The details are that after the Battle of the Trench, Gabriel descended and said, 'O Messenger of God! The One Who Possesseth a great Cause commands Thee and Thy Companions to pray the afternoon prayer before the Banu Qurayza'.<sup>27</sup> The Prophet commanded His Companions to do what He had been commanded, whereon He and the Companions went to the Banu Qurayza.

When they arrived, the army of God encircled the Banu Qurayza, whose hearts were seized with fear. Whereupon the Aws<sup>28</sup> asked the Messenger of

God to expel the Banu Qurayza, just as He had expelled the Banu Qaynuqa,<sup>29</sup> the allies of the Khazraj.<sup>30</sup> In short, the Aws and the Kahzraj were two groups between whom there was much fighting and war in those days until the Messenger arose and appeared with the truth, gathering them both to Islam. Therefore, in most cases those two groups were subject to the same rule, and the Banu Qurayza were the allies of the Aws. His Holiness had previously forgiven the Banu Qaynuqa, who were allies of the Khazraj, on account of the intervention of some hypocrites who outwardly professed Islam and were numbered amongst the Companions. Thus, the Aws sought the same treatment for the [125] Banu Qurayza.

The Messenger of God, may the spirit of everyone other than Him be His sacrifice, asked, 'Do ye not desire that Sa'd b. Mu'adh<sup>31</sup> judge them since he is the chief of the Aws?' They said, 'Yes, but the Sa'd thou hast mentioned, upon him be drops of light, cannot come because of a wound he received in the Battle of the Trench'. His Holiness sent for Sa'd and he came with great difficulty. When he arrived, they informed him of what the Messenger of God commanded him to do. Sa'd said, 'I rule that their men be killed, their wealth divided, and their progeny and women enslaved'.<sup>32</sup> The Messenger said, 'Thou hast ruled in accordance with that which God hath ruled above the seven heavens'.<sup>33</sup> Afterwards, the Prophet returned to Medina and the army did as Sa'd had commanded. They beheaded the men of the Banu Qurayza, divided their wealth, and enslaved their women and children. In two days, they beheaded seven hundred individuals.<sup>34</sup> Yet despite obtaining outer and inner power and divine authority, some became apostates, some returned to idols, and some utterly denied.

#### [126]

Tribulations have afflicted and continue to afflict this Wronged One in foreign lands where everyone well knoweth that all the kings have turned aside from Him, and all the religions have opposed Him.<sup>35</sup> Thus, if someone were told, 'Do not drink wine, and do not say that which God hath not permitted', they would immediately arise with such calumnies that have never been conceived on earth. Likewise, two souls denounce a wicked act after they themselves commit countless sins. I swear by the Day Star of Majesty and Holiness! They have manifested rebelliousness the like of which men have neither seen nor heard! In the eyes of the people of the land, they impute all of their blameworthy sins to Him Who is the Sovereign Truth. Such is their state. Consider now how much harm hath been done and to what extent the tribulations have reached. They do as they wish and judge as they please, save those who have believed in God and stood fast.

How very grievous is the state of the Cause in this land! Consider the Lawḥ-i Samsun<sup>36</sup> and those tablets that hath been revealed in recent years and the reports therein [127] of what befell the Soul of Truth. And yet He remained and still remaineth occupied with that which He was bidden in the utmost joy and happiness. Therefore, thou shouldst not be angered by some of these affairs. Walk thou in the footsteps of thy Lord, for this is the law of God aforesaid and hereafter. Follow it and be of those who abide by My counsels. The more thou art oppressed, the more meritorious it hath been and shall be in the path of the wrongs suffered by thy Lord.

Convey greetings to thy nephew on behalf of this Wronged One, the Exile. Say: O Ali Akbar! A flame hath been lit by the fingers of thy Lord, which hath set the horizon ablaze. The people, however, are wrapped in a great veil. Draw nigh unto it with thine heart, wholly for the sake of God. Verily, by that fire the lamp of His love hath been kindled in thine heart in such wise that neither winds nor vast and numberless oceans can ever extinguish it. Render thanks unto thy Lord that thou hast drawn nigh, entered, and attained. The glance of thy Lord, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, hath turned unto thee. Ponder the measure of this favour and sing His praise amidst all people.

Can anything sadden thee after meeting [128] thy Lord? It behoveth thee not to sorrow. Be thou content with My love and cling unto it. This is sufficient for thee didst thou but know. Even if thou art heedless, He is not heedless of thee. He doth remember thee inasmuch as He hath detected the scent of the garment wafting from thee. He giveth thee whatsoever He willeth. Verily, He is the Forgiving, the Compassionate. Go forth and persevere in His service. By my life! Nothing created on earth can ever compare, so be of those who remain steadfast.

Call to remembrance Anis! Say: Thou hast been exiled and thy Lord is the Exile. The difference is that no one harmeth thee, tortureth thee, or speaketh of thee unkindly. But this Exile hath fallen into the hands of the oppressors. They do with Him as they will, they say of Him whatsoever they wish, and they pronounce upon Him that which hath never been pronounced by the rebellious in bygone centuries. Render thanks unto thy Lord for this state of affairs even as thou renderest thanks for this affliction. Likewise, He commandeth thee to be kind to the servants who are with thee and to have mercy upon them. Verily, He is the Compassionate, the Forgiving, the Generous. Let nothing sadden thee and remain steadfast in the Cause. Say: Praise be to Thee, O Thou praised by the sincere ones! May my soul be a sacrifice for Thine imprisonment and exile, O Wronged One in the hands of the [129] profligate.

If thou shouldst see the two who have attained the Face and from whom the scent of God hath wafted, convey my greetings to them and give them glad tidings of this transcendent Remembrance. The glory of God be upon thee and upon those who have clung to the truth and justice from the Almighty, the All-Powerful. Praised be God, the Lord of the worlds!

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## Endnotes

1. A good example is a passage from the *Suriy-i-Muluk*: 'That which hath befallen Us hath been witnessed before. Ours is not the first goblet dashed to the ground in the lands of Islam, nor is this the first time that such schemers have intrigued against the beloved of the Lord. The tribulations We have sustained are like unto the trials endured aforetime by Imām Husayn. ... Behold then, O heedless ones, how brightly the fire of the love of God blazed aforetime in the heart of Husayn, if ye be of them that ponder ... Say: That same fire now blazeth in Mine own breast, and My wish is that this Husayn may lay down His life in like manner, in the hope of attaining unto so august and sublime a station, that station wherein the servant dieth to himself and liveth in God, the Almighty, the Exalted, the Great'. Baha'u'llah, *Suriy-i-Muluk*, in *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, Wilmette IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 2002, 204–205. See also William McCants, 'The Wronged One: Shi'ī Narrative Structure in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Visitation for Mullá Husayn', *Lights of 'Irfán: papers presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and seminars*, Evanston, IL: 'Irfán Colloquia, Bahá'í National Center, 3, 2002, 83–94. [http://irfancolloquia.org/38/mccants\\_wronged](http://irfancolloquia.org/38/mccants_wronged).
2. Cf. Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, Wilmette IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, IX, 12. On 'return', see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, Art: RAJA Encyclopedia Iranica, 2005, Online Edition, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/raja>.
3. For this phase of Baha'u'llah's exiles, see Necati Alkan, 'The Babis, Iran and the Ottoman Reform Elite' Chapter 3 in *Dissent and Heterodoxy in the Late Ottoman Empire: Reformers, Babis and Baha'is*, Istanbul: Isis Press, 2008, reprinted Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009, 57–95.
4. Asadu'llah Fadil Mazandarani, *Asrar al-Athar*, Volume 5. Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 129 BE/ 1973. PDF Edition digitally republished, East Lansing, MI: H-Bahai, 2007: 256. <https://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/mazandarani/asrar.htm>.
5. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tablet of the Holy Mariner/Lawh-i-Mallāhu'l-Quds; Fire Tablet/Lawh-i-Qad-i ḥtaraqa'l-Mukhlisūn*. Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í Verlag, 1985. Illuminated edition. Text and Translation, 47–84.
6. Bahá'u'lláh, *Iqtidāraāt va chand lawḥi diīgar*. Cairo: Matba'at al-Sa'adah, c.1924. Reprinted, H-Bahai: East Lansing, MI, 2001. <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/baha/G-L/I/Iqtidar/iqtidar.htm>.
7. Even here Baha'u'llah can't resist alluding to Imam Husayn, known as 'The Wronged Martyr'.
8. Battle of Khandaq.
9. A paraphrase of an account in Ibn Ishaq's *Sira*. See Alfred Guillaume's translation, *The life of Muhammad : a translation of Ishāq's Sīrat rasūl Allāh*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, reprinted 1988, 243.
10. Abu Tu'ma Buhayr b. Ubayriq, sometimes known as the 'Stealer of the Two Breast-Plates'.
11. From Ali ibn Ahmad al-Wahidi's *Asbab al-Nuzul* commenting on verses 4:105–4:116 (I've modified Mokrane Guezzou's translation): 'All these verses were revealed regarding one incident. One man from the Ansar by the name of Tu'mah ibn Ubayriq, from Banu Zafar ibn al-Harith, stole an armour from his neighbour who was called Qatadah ibn al-Nu'man. The armour was in a sack of ground wheat. When he took the armour, the ground wheat was strewn about from a hole in the sack. Traces of ground wheat were left in his house. Tu'mah then took the armour and hid it with a Jew by the name of Zayd ibn al-Samin. When people looked for the armour in the house of Tu'mah, they could not find it. He swore to them by Allah that he did not take the armour or have any knowledge about it. The owners of the armour said: "No indeed, by Allah he entered our house and took it. We followed him until he entered his house and, therein, we saw traces of wheat". When he

swore by Allah that he did not steal it, they left him and followed the trail of ground wheat which led them to the house of the Jewish man. When they took him, he said that it was Tu'mah ibn Ubayriq who had left the armour with him, and some Jewish people testified that this was the case. Banu Zafar, the clan of Tu'mah, said: "Let us go to the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace". They spoke to the Prophet, Allah bless him and give him peace, and requested him to argue in favour of their man, saying: "If you do not do so, our man will be doomed and exposed and the Jew will come out of this as an innocent man". The Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, was on the verge of doing as he was requested – for his heart was with them – and punish the Jew when Allah, exalted is He, revealed "Verily, We have sent down to thee the Book with the truth", up to the end of the verse. This is the view of a number of Qur'anic commentators'. Mokrane Guezzou (trans.) Yousef Meri (ed.), Alī ibn Ahmad al-Wāhidi, *Asbāb al-Nuzul*, Amman: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008, 62.

12. An early and eminent Companion of Muhammad. See I.Hasson, 'Al-Zubayr b. al-'Awwām', in H.A.R. Gibb et al (eds.) *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 12 volumes 1980–2004, (hereinafter *El2*), XI: 549–551.
13. Hatib b. Abi Balta'ah, another early Companion of Muhammad and veteran of the battle of Badr.
14. From al-Wahidi's *Asbab al-Nuzul*, 65, commenting on verse 4:65 (modified Guezzou translation): 'This was revealed about al-Zubayr bin al-'Awwām and his adversary Hatib ibn Abi Balta'ah... (The son) of al-Zubayr said his father used to relate that he went to the Prophet, Allah bless him and give him peace, to settle a dispute he had with one of the Ansar who had participated in the Battle of Badr regarding a water conduit which they both used to water their land. The Prophet, Allah bless him and give him peace, said to al-Zubayr: "Water your land first and then let the water flow to your neighbor". The Ansari man got angry and said: "O Messenger of Allah! You judged in this way because he is the son of your maternal aunt". Upon hearing this, the face of the messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, flushed. He then said to al-Zubayr: "Water your land and then block the water until it goes back to its source". In this way the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, gave al-Zubayr his full right. His first command to al-Zubayr was made because he wanted to make it easy on both al-Zubayr and the Ansari. But when the Ansari man protested against the judgment of the messenger of Allah, he gave al-Zubayr his full right as he deserved this judgment in the first place'.
15. 'Ammar ibn Yasir, a Companion of the Prophet and a supporter of 'Ali. See H. Reckendorf, 'Ammār B. Yāsir', *El2*, 1:448.
16. 'Abdallah ibn Mas'ud, another Companion of the Prophet. See JC Vadet, 'Ibn Mas'ūd', *El2*, 3:873–875.
17. Thabit b. Qays, another Companion.
18. See the *Tafsir* of Muqatil b. Sulayman.
19. A Jewish poet hostile to Muhammad who, according to hadith, was eventually killed by a party of Muhammad's supporters at his request. See W. Montgomery Watt, 'Ka'b b. al-Ashraf', *El2*, 4:315.
20. From al-Wahidi's *Asbab al-Nuzul*, 55–56, commenting on Q 4:60 (Guezzou translation): 'Al-Kalbi reported from Abu Salih that Ibn 'Abbas reported that this verse was revealed about a hypocrite who had a dispute with a Jewish man. The Jew said to him: "Let us go to Muhammad [to settle our dispute]". The hypocrite said: "Rather, let us go to Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf (whom Allah described as a false deity) to settle our dispute". The Jew insisted that their dispute should be settled by the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace. When the hypocrite saw his insistence, he went with him to the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace, and his judgment was in favour of the Jew. When they left, the hypocrite stuck to the Jew and said to him: "Let us go to 'Umar ibn al-Khattab", and they went to him. The Jew said to him: "I and this man took our dispute to Muhammad and his judgment was in my favour, but this man is not happy with his judgment and claimed that he wants you to judge between us. And since he did not let me go, I came with him". 'Umar said to the hypocrite: "Is this the case?" "Yes!" replied the hypocrite. 'Umar said: "Wait for me a moment until I come back". 'Umar then entered his house, got his sword went back to the hypocrite and killed him. He said: "This is how I judge for he who does not accept Allah's judgment and the judgement of His Messenger". The Jew ran away. This verse was then revealed. Gabriel, peace be upon him, said: "Umar has differentiated between the truth and falsehood", and so he was named al-Faruq [the distinguisher]'.

21. 'Umar b. al-Khattab was a Companion of the Prophet and the second caliph after Muhammad's death. See G. Levi Della Vida, "'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb' *El2*, 10:818–821.
22. Ṭa'if is a town east of Mecca.
23. Abu Sufyan (560–652) was the chief of Muhammad's tribe and one of his greatest persecutors. He later converted to Islam. See W. Montgomery Watt, 'Abū Sufyān B. Ḥarb b. Umayya', *El2*, 1:151.
24. A quotation found in Tabari's *Tarikh* and other sources.
25. The Muslim converts in Medina who helped Muhammad and his Meccan followers when they abandoned Mecca for Medina; hence their name 'Ansar' or 'Helpers'. See W. Montgomery Watt, 'Al-Anṣār', *El2*, 1:514–515.
26. A Jewish tribe in Medina. According to some Muslim sources, the Banu Qurayza had violated a truce with the Prophet and attempted to negotiate with Muhammad's enemies during their siege of Medina.
27. Ibn Ishaq's *Sira*: see Guillaume, *Life*, 461. 'According to what al-Zuhri told me, at the time of the noon prayers Gabriel came to the apostle wearing an embroidered turban and riding on a mule with a saddle covered with a piece of brocade. He asked the apostle if he had abandoned fighting, and when he said that he had, (Gabriel) said that the angels had not yet laid aside their arms and that he had just come from pursuing the enemy. "God commands you, Muhammad, to go to Banu Qurayza. I am about to go to them to shake their stronghold". The prophet ordered it to be announced that none should perform the afternoon prayer until after he reached Banu Qurayza'. In the Shi'i *Tafsir* of Ibrahim al-Qummi (d. c.307/919), Gabriel himself gives the command to pray the afternoon prayer before the Banu Qurayza.
28. The Aws, an Arab tribe in Medina aligned with the Jewish Banu Qurayza, preferred to see its ally exiled rather than executed. See W. Montgomery Watt, 'al-Aws', *El2*, 1:771–772.
29. One of three major Jewish tribes living in Medina. According to Muslim sources, Muhammad exiled them for violating their commitments to him in the treaty known as the Constitution of Medina.
30. The other major Arab tribe in Medina and rival of the Aws.
31. Sa'd ibn Mu'adh was the chief of the Aws tribe in Medina and a Companion of the Prophet. See W. Montgomery Watt, 'Sa'd b. Mu'adh', *El2*, 697–698.
32. Accounts of the episode are found in Ibn Ishaq's *Sira* and elsewhere. Guillaume, *Life*, 463–464.
33. Almost an exact quotation from Ibn Ishaq's biography of the prophet: "You have given the judgement of Allah above the seven heavens" (Guillaume, *Life*, 464). 'Seven heavens' is a loose rendering of 'seven cobbles', which medieval Muslim authorities claim is another name for the seven heavens.
34. Elsewhere, Baha'u'llah recounts his distress as a child when reading about the episode in a book by the medieval Muslim scholar Majlisi: 'When this wronged one was a child, he read about the subjugation of the Banu Qurayza in a book attributed to Mulla Baqir Majlisi, and immediately became so grieved and saddened that the Pen is unable to recount it, even though what occurred was the command of God and had no purpose except to cut the roots of the oppressors. Despite this, with the ocean of forgiveness and boundless mercy before his eyes, in those days he beseeched the One True God, exalted be His glory, for whatever would be the cause of universal love, fellowship, and the unity of all the peoples of the earth – until before sunrise on the second day of the month of His birth, all his manners, speech and thought were thrown into confusion, a tumult that gave glad tidings of exaltation. This tumult was sent down and manifest repeatedly, without interruption, for twelve days, after which the waves of the sea of utterance became manifest and the rays of the sun of assurance dawned, until it culminated in the moment of Manifestation'. Translation by Sen McGlinn, 'Baha'u'llah's 'Tablet of the Banu Qurayza'', March 6 2010, [https://senmcglinn.wordpress.com/2010/03/06/lawh\\_banuqurayza/](https://senmcglinn.wordpress.com/2010/03/06/lawh_banuqurayza/) (Accessed 12 February 2017). See especially the discussion in the blog comments by McGlinn on the differing sources.
35. The passage 'Everyone well knoweth that all the kings have turned aside from Him, and all the religions have opposed Him', was translated by Shoghi Effendi in *The Promised Day is Come*, Wilmette IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1967, 16–17.
36. Written by Baha'u'llah in 1863 in the Ottoman port city of Samsun, as he gazed on the Black Sea on his way from Baghdad to Istanbul.



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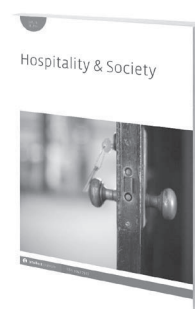
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# Translation

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## Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice: Commentary and Translation

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### Abstract

*Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice* (Riḍvānu'l-'Adl, or Riḍwān al-'Adl; also known as Lawḥ-i Riḍvānu'l-'Adl and Lawḥ-i 'Adl) may be regarded as Baha'u'llah's paradigm ('Paradise' or ideal) of 'justice'. Baha'u'llah's *Paradise of Justice* transforms received notions of 'justice'. Although typically considered a 'secular' concern within rather specific institutional confines, Baha'u'llah allegorizes, personifies, symbolizes and otherwise expatiates on 'Justice' in such a way as to vivify the concept. Justice is made sacred, deriving from the 'Name' of God as 'The Just' (al-'ādil). Justice – encompassing, as it does, both faith and action – is the essence of the Baha'i concept of salvation, both individual and societal. As a framework of analysis, this paper is organized as follows: Introduction; Historical Context; Structure (vis-à-vis Apostrophes); Highlights of Baha'u'llah's *Paradise of Justice*; Theological Dimension of 'Justice'; Revelatory Dimension of 'Justice'; Authoritarian Dimension of 'Justice'; Contemporaneous Dimension of 'Justice'; Social Dimension of 'Justice'; Individual Dimension of 'Justice'; Conclusion; Appendix: Riḍwān al-'Adl: *Paradise of Justice* (translated by Adib Masumian). This study demonstrates how Baha'u'llah's *Paradise of Justice* presents a significantly expanded paradigm of justice, both in precept and practice.

### Keywords

Paradise of Justice  
Riḍwān al-'Adl  
virtue ethics  
Baha'u'llah  
philosophy of justice  
theology of justice

### Introduction

One of the 'best-known works'<sup>1</sup> of Baha'u'llah (1817–1892), prophet-founder of the Baha'i Faith, is the *Paradise of Justice* (Riḍvānu'l-'Adl,<sup>2</sup> or Riḍwān al-'Adl<sup>3</sup>; also known as Lawḥ-i Riḍvānu'l-'Adl<sup>4</sup> and Lawḥ-i 'Adl<sup>5</sup>). This is a major Tablet of the late Edirne (in Ottoman Turkey, in 'European' Turkey) or early Akka (in Ottoman Syria or Palestine) period, during Baha'u'llah's public proclamation to the world's political and religious leaders (1866–1873). No exact date has been assigned. The circumstances of revelation have yet to be definitely determined. This paper will attempt to contribute to a fuller understanding of the place of this work within Baha'i history.

Although openly directed, in particular, to the world's political and religious leaders and, in general, to the peoples of the world, Baha'u'llah's discourse is immediately focused on winning over the allegiance of the Babi

community. Three passages have been translated by Shoghi Effendi, whose selection and privileging of these texts provides a thematic context. The first passage is as follows:

In the *Riḍvānu'l-'Adl*, wherein the virtue of justice is exalted, He makes a parallel prediction: 'Erelong will God make manifest on earth kings who will recline on the couches of justice, and will rule amongst men even as they rule their own selves. They, indeed, are among the choicest of My creatures in the entire creation'.<sup>6</sup>

This quotation is found in Paragraph 15 below. Significantly, Shoghi Effendi characterizes Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice as a work 'wherein the virtue of justice is exalted'. Taking the 'virtue of justice' as a cue for understanding Baha'u'llah's intended meaning of 'justice', the Oxford English Dictionary's pertinent definition of 'justice' may serve to further illuminate the range of meanings of 'justice' as set forth in the Paradise of Justice:

The quality of being just or right, as a human or divine attribute; moral uprightness; just behaviour or dealing as a concept or principle (one of the four cardinal virtues: cf. cardinal adj. 2a); the exhibition of this quality or principle in action; integrity, rectitude; commutative justice, distributive justice, social justice, etc.<sup>7</sup>

Shoghi Effendi's cue that 'virtue of justice' constitutes the salient leit-motiv or epitome of Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice is a natural point of departure for the present study. Indeed, the theme of 'justice' centres and unifies the entire Tablet. Since a wide range of topics (sometimes personified) and persons are referenced or addressed here, 'justice' thus serves as the principal theme underpinning and animating the entire text, as seen in this second passage of the Paradise of Justice translated by Shoghi Effendi:

Know verily that the essence of justice and the source thereof are both embodied in the ordinances prescribed by Him Who is the Manifestation of the Self of God amongst men, if ye be of them that recognize this truth. He doth verily incarnate the highest, the infallible standard of justice unto all creation. Were His law to be such as to strike terror into the hearts of all that are in heaven and on earth, that law is naught but manifest justice. The fears and agitation which the revelation of this law provokes in men's hearts should indeed be likened to the cries of the suckling babe weaned from his mother's milk, if ye be of them that perceive. Were men to discover the motivating purpose of God's Revelation, they would assuredly cast away their fears, and, with hearts filled with gratitude, rejoice with exceeding gladness.<sup>8</sup>

This passage appears as Paragraph 46 below. It indicates that 'justice' – typically regarded as a secular concern – has a sacred origin and purpose. Although, at first blush, certain laws may appear harsh to some, those whose actions are in conformity with such laws have absolutely nothing to fear. Such fear, after all, is fear of punishment, not fear of abiding by the dictates of the law. The third passage of the Paradise of Justice translated by Shoghi Effendi is as follows:



Bestir yourselves, O people, in anticipation of the days of Divine justice, for the promised hour is now come. Beware lest ye fail to apprehend its import and be accounted among the erring.<sup>9</sup>

This excerpt is found in Paragraph 49 below. The audience here is the ‘people of the earth’ (par. 46). This is a clear warning of approaching judgement and chastisement to be visited on the peoples of the world if they fail to turn towards God. (Part and parcel of this turning to God is the recognition of Baha’u’llah who, from the Baha’i perspective, is the source of revelation (divine guidance) for this day and age, and faithful adherence to Baha’u’llah’s socio-moral principles and precepts.) Such an admonition is classically prophetic in nature, harking back to the dire warnings of the ‘Minor Prophets’ of the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible).

In his seminal essay on this Tablet, the late Muhammad Afnan has suggested that Baha’u’llah’s Paradise of Justice can be read as consisting of three distinct ‘parts’, each of which was addressed to a different audience.<sup>10</sup> In the first part (pars. 1–13), the concept of justice is apostrophized as one of God’s divine attributes; in the second part (pars. 14–52), the Tablet addresses ‘the manifestations of justice’, as well as the ‘people of the Bayān’, and generally the entire human race; and in the third part (pars. 53–69), the focus shifts to Āqā Siyyid Muḥammad-Riḍā Shahrīrādī. The ‘people of the Bayān’ refers to the followers of Mīrzā Yaḥyā Nūrī (d. 1912), a younger half-brother of Baha’u’llah. Mīrzā Yaḥyā was also known as Ṣubḥ-i-Azal (‘Dawn of Eternity’, or ‘Azal’, for short). Therefore the ‘people of the Bayān’ are also known as ‘Azalīs’. As Shoghi Effendi explains: ‘It was in this period [the late Edirne period] that the phrase ‘the people of the Bayān’, now denoting the followers of Mīrzā Yaḥyā, was discarded, and was supplanted by the term ‘the people of Bahā’.<sup>11</sup>

Baha’u’llah’s decision to allegorically illustrate a ‘Paradise’ (Riḍvān) of justice through this Tablet is noteworthy. Muhammad Afnan notes<sup>12</sup> that the word ‘Riḍvān’ is only used in the title of one other Tablet by Baha’u’llah, the Riḍvān al-Iqrār, in which the word ‘Riḍvān’ conveys the idea that one’s acknowledgement of the Manifestation of God is an earthly demonstration of divine Paradise, and an act that elicits the good-pleasure of God.

Baha’u’llah’s Paradise of Justice may be regarded as Baha’u’llah’s paradigm (‘Paradise’ or ideal) of ‘justice’. As a framework of analysis, this paper is organized as follows: Introduction; Historical Context; Structure (vis-à-vis Apostrophes); Highlights of Baha’u’llah’s Paradise of Justice; Theological Dimension of ‘Justice’; Revelatory Dimension of ‘Justice’; Authoritarian Dimension of ‘Justice’; Contemporaneous Dimension of ‘Justice’; Social Dimension of ‘Justice’; Individual Dimension of ‘Justice’; Conclusion; Appendix: Riḍvān al-‘Adl: Paradise of Justice (translated by Adib Masumian); and Acknowledgements.

The provisional translation used in this paper is by co-author, Adib Masumian, whose translation has been posted online, based on the latest and best edition of the Arabic text.<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of the present study, the translation has been logically broken down into numbered paragraphs, for ease of reference. Also consulted are the independent translations by



Stephen Lambden<sup>14</sup> and Juan Cole.<sup>15</sup> With these preliminary considerations in mind, we turn our focus to the work itself.

## Historical Context

**‘Riḍā after Nabīl’ (Recipient):** Baha’u’llah revealed the Paradise of Justice in honour of Āqā Siyyid Muḥammad-Riḍā Shahrīrādī. Moojan Momen has greatly illumined the life and legacy of Muḥammad-Riḍā Shahrīrādī (1246/1830–1317/1899), also known as Mīr Muḥammad-Riḍā, along with a photograph of this illustrious Baha’i as well.<sup>16</sup> As for the date of the *Riḍwān al-‘Adl*, Stephen Lambden offers this hypothesis:

It was addressed to a certain Āqā Sayyid Muḥammad-Riḍā Shahrīrādī (= ‘Riḍā after Nabīl’ (= Muḥammad Riḍā’)) (d. 1310/1892–3) one of the Baqiyyat al-sayf (‘Remnant of the Sword’), the survivors of the Shaykh Tabarsi upheaval of 1848–9 (Ishraq Khavari, Ganj, No. 54, p. 208). This key Tablet of Bahā’u’llāh most likely dates from the late Edirne (Adrianople) period, perhaps early 1867.<sup>17</sup>

As for the recipient himself, Muḥammad-Riḍā Shahrīrādī wrote a work that provides an account of the 1848 siege of Fort Shaykh Tabarsi, and illustrates the spread of the Babi and Baha’i religions in Shahrīrādī, entitled *Vaqāyi’-i-Qal’ih va Shahrīrād* (‘Events of the Fortress [of Shaykh Tabarsi] and Shahrīrād’), which spans 131 quarto pages in length. This memoir has been scanned in full and is available on H-Bahai.<sup>18</sup> The memoir is not dated,<sup>19</sup> but Shahrīrādī must have written it after receiving Baha’u’llah’s Paradise of Justice, since he refers to that Tablet by name (‘*Lawḥ-i ‘Adl*’).<sup>20</sup> Momen notes that this local history is ‘difficult to follow, with few dates or names but numerous dreams recorded’.<sup>21</sup>

According to the late Baha’i historian, Ahang Rabbani, Shahrīrādī was just nineteen years old at the time of the Shaykh Tabarsi conflict, and did not personally witness the event he describes. Thus, his account must be based on eyewitness primary sources, and/or on personal knowledge gleaned from the reports of some of the survivors whom he may have met, including his elder brother. Muḥammad-Riḍā Shahrīrādī’s account of the Shaykh Tabarsi upheaval was evidently written late in his life.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the assertion that Muḥammad-Riḍā Shahrīrādī was a veteran of that armed struggle may be called into question. However, this problem may be resolved based on the following explanation:

In *Maṣābiḥ-i Hidāyat*, ‘Azīzu’llāh Sulaymānī notes that, although the young Muḥammad-Riḍā could not join his brothers at Shaykh Tabarsi – as his mother was old and infirm, and needed someone to take care of her – Quddus nonetheless considered him ‘one who shared in the hardships endured by the people of the Fortress’ (of Shaykh Tabarsi).<sup>23</sup> Sulaymānī goes on to say that, much later on, ‘Abdu’l-Baha named Āqā Siyyid Muḥammad-Riḍā one of the *baqiyyat al-sayf* (‘remnants of the sword’, a title given to the survivors of the upheaval of Shaykh Tabarsi). When ‘Abdu’l-Baha was later asked by a certain Ghaḍanfar – a Baha’i living in Mazandaran – why this appellation had been given to Muḥammad-Riḍā, he replied with a Tablet that begins as follows:

O servant of the Holy Threshold! Thy letter hath been received. Although Āqā Siyyid Muḥammad-Riḍā, upon him be the Glory of the All-Glorious, was not physically present at the Fortress [of Shaykh Tabarsi], yet he was there in spirit.<sup>24</sup>

Muḥammad-ʿAlī Malik-Khusravī, in the *Tārīkh-i Shuhadā-yi Amr*, introduces Āqā Sayyid Muḥammad-Riḍā as an ‘Honorary Remnant of the Sword of the Blessed Fortress’ (of Shaykh Tabarsi).<sup>25</sup> This is probably based on the foregoing information.

**‘People of the Bayān’ (Immediate Audience):** This Paradise of Justice combines time-specific and timeless elements. The key to unlocking the historical context of this Tablet may be based on internal evidence. It is clear that Baha’u’llah was writing at a time when he was experiencing fierce opposition from the ‘People of the Bayān’ (par. 57). Here, a clear historical context would help decode the text. A definite marker that this Tablet was revealed in the late Edirne period (or later) is provided by Nader Saiedi, who notes that ‘Baha’u’llah uses the title of *ahl-i Bayān* (people of the Bayān)’ as ‘a distinction that became the norm in the late Edirne period’,<sup>26</sup> referring, as previously mentioned, to the partisans of Azal. Here, Baha’u’llah represents the ‘People of the Bayān’ as his immediate opponents. This generally refers to those Babīs who not only failed to recognize the advent of Baha’u’llah as the fulfilment of the Bab’s announcement that an even greater Messenger of God would appear soon, but who openly opposed Baha’u’llah as well.

**Mīrzā Yahyā (Antagonist):** As a further internal clue to the dating of the ‘Tablet of Paradise’, Baha’u’llah evidently refers to Mīrzā Yahyā in this passage:

The appointed Hour (*al-sāʿa*) came upon you in your heedlessness, for when the Beauty of the Beloved shone forth above the horizon of the Will of your Lord – the Almighty, the All-Powerful – you turned away from Him, cavilled at Him, rejected His signs, and ascribed partners unto Him, and in this heedlessness you persisted until you resolved to shed His blood – the blood of the Most Holy, the Most Pure, the Most Powerful, the Most Luminous. (par. 26)

Jealousy on the part of Azal, intensified by his lust for leadership, grew pejoratively deeper over the course of the Edirne period. As evidence of this, Baha’u’llah apostrophizes ‘you’ who ‘resolved to shed His [Baha’u’llah’s] blood’ (par. 26). This clearly refers to Baha’u’llah’s half-brother and arch-rival, Mīrzā Yahyā (‘Azal’), who poisoned Baha’u’llah,<sup>27</sup> ‘probably’ with ‘sublimate of mercury’ (mercury chloride).<sup>28</sup> Then, failing that, Azal tried to persuade Baha’u’llah’s personal attendant and barber, Ustād Muḥammad-ʿAlī Salmānī, to slit Baha’u’llah’s throat.<sup>29</sup> Shoghi Effendi tells of such attempts on the life of Baha’u’llah:

Desperate designs to poison Bahā’u’llāh and His companions, and thereby reanimate his own defunct leadership, began, approximately a year after their arrival in Adrianople [Edirne], to agitate his mind. Well aware of the erudition

of his half-brother, Āqāy-i-Kalīm, in matters pertaining to medicine, he, under various pretexts, sought enlightenment from him regarding the effects of certain herbs and poisons, and then began, contrary to his wont, to invite Bahā'u'llāh to his home, where, one day, having smeared His tea-cup with a substance he had concocted, he succeeded in poisoning Him sufficiently to produce a serious illness which lasted no less than a month, and which was accompanied by severe pains and high fever, the aftermath of which left Bahā'u'llāh with a shaking hand till the end of His life. ...

On another occasion this same Mīrzā Yahyā had, according to the testimony of one of his wives, who had temporarily deserted him and revealed the details of the above-mentioned act, poisoned the well which provided water for the family and companions of Bahā'u'llāh, in consequence of which the exiles manifested strange symptoms of illness. He even had, gradually and with great circumspection, disclosed to one of the companions, Ustād Muḥammad-ʿAlīy-i-Salmānī, the barber, on whom he had lavished great marks of favor, his wish that he, on some propitious occasion, when attending Bahā'u'llāh in His bath, should assassinate Him.<sup>30</sup>

Consistent with his otherwise reclusive and self-protective behaviour, Azal's rivalry reached its pejorative nadir in resorting to attempted murder and conspiracy to murder. These episodes added a sordid, criminal dimension to Azal's intrigues. Obviously these were acts of desperation of unmitigated audacity, motivated by an all-consuming lust for leadership. These acts, for the most part, formerly were covert, and largely concealed. Notwithstanding, Azal resolved to openly challenge Baha'u'llah for leadership of the fledgling Babi community.

**The 'Days of Stress' (Key Historical Context):** On Saturday, 10 March 1866, the 'Most Great Separation' (*faṣl-i akbar*)<sup>31</sup> occurred, in which Baha'u'llah moved to the house of Riḍā Big in another locale in Edirne, and, for around two months, remained in seclusion. According to Moojan Momen, this signal event 'precipitated' the 'Days of Stress'.<sup>32</sup> The 'Days of Stress' (*ayyām-i shidād*) is the term by which Baha'u'llah characterizes a period of several years of intense, internecine strife, marked by the open hostility shown by Mīrzā Yahyā (or 'Azal') to Baha'u'llah, including Yahyā's efforts to wrest leadership of the Babi community by attempts to murder Baha'u'llah. The 'Days of Stress' are relevant to the historical contextualization of the Paradise of Justice because they arise in the context of opposition, by the Azalīs (followers of Azal), to Baha'u'llah's claims and leadership, particularly in relation to Mīrzā Yahyā's attempts on Baha'u'llah's life, followed by the 'Most Great Separation', and thereafter a public challenge (that was supposed to be a showdown or contest between Baha'u'llah and Mīrzā Yahyā), and, finally, machinations on the part of Mīrzā Yahyā to persuade Ottoman officials to exile Baha'u'llah to a far-off place, by way of a harsh decree.

Baha'u'llah himself has made references to the 'Days of Stress' in some of his Tablets. In a Tablet to Javād-i Qazvīnī, for instance, Baha'u'llah writes:

In this year of stress, which hath been mentioned previously in the perspicuous Tablets, the great sedition and dire calamity shall come to pass with such severity as will remove the suckling babe from his mother's breast, and

cast out the lovers from the land of their Beloved. Perchance, in these days and at those moments, that servant [Javād-i Qazvīnī?] will hold fast to the bounties of his Lord, cling to the hem of His mercy, and abide by His bidding with such firmness and steadfastness that if the people of enmity were to join forces with the hosts of obstruction, they would both be powerless to make him falter in his path.<sup>33</sup>

This is primarily an exhortation to steadfastness, as the Babi community was experiencing internal turmoil due to the challenge by Azal to Baha'u'llah's prophetic claims. In another Tablet, Baha'u'llah writes: 'O Javād! This year is the 'Year of Stress' (*sani-yi shidād*)'.<sup>34</sup> Baha'u'llah assures 'Javād' (perhaps also Javād-i Qazvīnī) that such times of tribulation will not deter Baha'u'llah from proclaiming his mission:

O Javād! This is the Year of Stress unto men, and it is the year of God's decree. Were calamity to befall Us, this would be a good thing, and We would be content therewith; and if God were to protect Us from calamity, this too would be good, and We would be grateful for it.<sup>35</sup>

Māzindarānī also mentions a third Tablet (recipient not specified), but provides a summary of its contents rather than reproducing the actual text. He writes:

In a Tablet [from Baha'u'llah] signed by Mīrzā Aqa Jan, dated 1283 AH, the 'Year of Stress' is mentioned, by which is meant the days of Mīrzā Yahyā's opposition, resistance, and adherence [to Siyyid Muḥammad Isfahani?].<sup>36</sup>

It would be reasonable to assume that the 'Year of Stress', as mentioned here, is basically synonymous with the 'Days of Stress'. Therefore, this Tablet is a contemporaneous writing that confirms that 1283 AH was one such 'Year of Stress'. (In the Gregorian calendar, 1283 AH converts to 16 May 1866 to 4 May 1867.) There were doubtless more years of prolonged 'stress'.

The timing of the 'Days of Stress', however, has never been definitely resolved in the published literature. Shoghi Effendi offers some definite statements that shed further light on the significance and duration of the 'Days of Stress'. Basically, this was an intense and protracted 'period of travail', in which the 'first major internal convulsion' within the fledgling Babi community precipitated 'the heaviest blow ever sustained by Him [Baha'u'llah] in His lifetime'.<sup>37</sup> This period of time began 'approximately a year after their arrival in Adrianople', when Azal's nefarious 'designs to poison Bahā'u'llāh' were conceived in the ferment and turpitude of Azal's fratricidal rivalry, as described above. So, the onset of the 'Days of Stress' would be around a year after 12 December 1863, which was the date of Baha'u'llah's arrival in Edirne. That is to say, the 'Days of Stress' must have begun around late 1864.<sup>38</sup> The end of the 'Days of Stress', however, apparently was not so clearly indicated by Shoghi Effendi.

Riaz Ghadimi actually gives two definitions for the terms 'Days of Stress' (*ayyām-i shidād*) and 'Years of Stress' (*sinīn-i shidād*), which he uses interchangeably.<sup>39</sup> One refers to the years following the ascension of Baha'u'llah, when Mīrzā Muḥammad-'Alī and his accomplices broke the Covenant by

opposing 'Abdu'l-Baha's newly-assumed leadership of the Baha'i community. The other definition – and the one relevant to this discussion – refers to the years in Edirne when Mīrzā Yahyā rose against Baha'u'llah, pursuing machinations that ultimately culminated in Baha'u'llah's excommunication of Mīrzā Yahyā and Siyyid Muḥammad Isfahani, which in turn resulted in the 'Most Great Separation'.

The 'Most Great Separation' (*faṣl-i akbar*), which occurred on Saturday, 10 March 1866, happened shortly before the beginning of 1283 AH. Thereafter, in September 1867 (month of Jamādīyu'l-Avval 1284 A.H.),<sup>40</sup> a public confrontation (Persian: *mubāhalih*; Arabic: *mubāhala*)<sup>41</sup> between Baha'u'llah and Azal was arranged by mutual assent, to take place at the Sultan Selim mosque (Mosque of Selim in Edirne, Turkey) on a Friday. A twist in this tryst with fate took place when Azal failed to appear for this final and decisive showdown - despite the fact that Baha'u'llah waited until sundown. In the evening, later that same day, Baha'u'llah revealed the Tablet of Confrontation (*Lawḥ-i Mubāhala*), in which Baha'u'llah stated that he would be at Sultan Selim mosque for the next two days, waiting for Azal to appear. By failing to face Baha'u'llah, Azal lost face, whereupon many of Azal's erstwhile partisans, in Edirne and Iran, deserted him.

An end date to the 'Days of Stress' may be reasonably fixed by a process of deduction. This period has been characterized by Shoghi Effendi as the 'rebellion' of Azal, as well as his covert plots and overt acts against Baha'u'llah. The 'Days of Stress' are coterminous with the continued machinations of Mīrzā Yahyā, among the Babis in Edirne, against Baha'u'llah. Unless all such evils ceased after the *mubāhala*, then the problems, although less severe, presumably continued. Shoghi Effendi indicates the unrelenting plots and cabals by Azal in this telling statement: 'The petitions of Mīrzā Yahyā which reached them through Siyyid Muḥammad, his agent, had provoked them' (here, referring to 'Mīrzā Husayn-Khān, the Mushīru'd-Dawlih, and his associates' as the 'authorities in the capital').<sup>42</sup> So notorious was this entire ordeal that news of it reached the highest echelons of authority, culminating in a 'strongly worded Farmān, issued by Sulṭān Abdu'l-'Aziz', whose decree was 'to banish Bahā'u'llāh to the penal colony of 'Akkā, and Mīrzā Yahyā to Famagusta in Cyprus'. The original decree was 'to banish Bahā'u'llāh, Āqāy-i-Kalīm and Mīrzā Muḥammad-Qulī, with a servant to 'Akkā, while the rest were to proceed to Constantinople'. This imperial decree, however, 'provoked scenes of indescribable distress' and was soon 'revoked', upon Baha'u'llah's insistence and on the subsequent order of Major Umar Effendi, commander of the armed escort, at Gallipoli, shortly after Baha'u'llah and family were taken from Adrianople on 12 August 1868. The revised order was to exile Baha'u'llah, and a retinue of seventy (along with several Azalīs), to Akka, while Azal and the bulk of his immediate followers (along with four Baha'is) were dispatched to the remote island of Cyprus.<sup>43</sup>

Clearly, Mīrzā Yahyā persisted in his machinations against Baha'u'llah, by dispatching various 'petitions' to 'Mīrzā Husayn-Khān, the Mushīru'd-Dawlih, and his associates' as the 'authorities in the capital', ultimately resulting, and culminating, in the 'strongly worded Farmān, issued by Sulṭān Abdu'l-'Aziz' which provoked 'scenes of indescribable distress'. This arguably is part and parcel of the 'Days of Stress'. Therefore, the 'Days of

Stress' reasonably may be dated from around December 1864, to (on or shortly before) 21 August 1868, when Baha'u'llah embarked in an Austrian-Lloyd steamer for Alexandria, when Baha'u'llah was finally free of Azal.<sup>44</sup> The foregoing analysis is based largely on Shahrokh Monjazeb's well grounded theory, to wit: 'We must also bear in mind that this special phrase (Ayyām-i Shidād), used by Bahā'u'llāh in His Tablets, was to underscore the psychological severity of that very turbulent period of perfidy and dissension in Edirne which brought an extraordinary level of distress and pain to the person of Bahā'u'llāh'.<sup>45</sup>

These events likely provided the historical context (and possibly predated) the Paradise of Justice. The present writers find evidence that the Paradise of Justice definitely alludes to events within the 'Days of Stress'. Whether or not this important Tablet was revealed during the 'Days of Stress' or after is an open question for future researchers to resolve.

**Dating the Paradise of Justice: Late Edirne Hypothesis:** Similarly to Lambden, Cole proposes roughly the same date, based on this rationale:

This Tablet was probably written in winter-spring of 1867, at a time before Baha'u'llah decisively promulgated the ideal of constitutional monarchy and parliamentary governance, which he does only once he arrives in Akka. ... This Tablet toward the end refers to some Baha'is who were recently martyred. The first Baha'is to be martyred were Mīrzā Mustafa, Shaykh Ahmad, and Mīrzā 'Alī Naqī, all of Khurasan, at Tabriz on 8 January 1867. These three believers had been en route to Edirne to see Baha'u'llah, but were arrested by the Iranian authorities in Tabriz. I think it most likely that these are the martyrs referred to by Baha'u'llah in this Tablet, which would then date it to winter-spring, 1867.<sup>46</sup>

Baha'u'llah mentions those 'who suffer martyrdom in the path of God in these days' (par. 66), but the martyrs are not named. Balyuzi describes the events that culminated in the martyrdoms of Mīrzā Mustafa, Shaykh Ahmad and Mīrzā 'Alī Naqī. Balyuzi relates that these three, en route to Edirne to attain the presence of Baha'u'llah, arrived in Tabriz. There, they met a certain Siyyid 'Alī-yi 'Arab, who, in the course of their conversation, deprecated Baha'u'llah in vile terms. Incensed and enraged, the three 'rushed him and tied around his neck the shawl he wore round his waist, which led to his death'. Shaykh Ahmad did not deny his role in the killing. The three were later beheaded, not because of the murder, 'but because they were Baha'is'.<sup>47</sup> The acts of these three martyrs, in taking the life of their victim, was obviously contrary to Baha'u'llah's command in the preceding paragraph: 'Do thou forbid them to shed blood', and further: 'We, verily, have made this unlawful unto them in all the Tablets (*innā qad nahyīnāhum fī kullil alwāḥi*)' (par. 65). It may be that Baha'u'llah, if alluding to these three recent martyrs, takes this recent episode as an opportunity to emphasize that, while martyrdom is praiseworthy, violence is not.<sup>48</sup> In addition to those martyrdoms, however, another Baha'i – this one completely innocent of any crime – was also martyred shortly thereafter.<sup>49</sup> Balyuzi notes that a petition – addressed to Baha'u'llah and written by Mīrzā Muḥammad-'Alī-yi Zanjānī, a physician – was found in the pockets of the Baha'i martyrs of Tabriz. This

was apparently grounds enough for the execution of that physician, despite the fact that he not only had nothing to do with the aforementioned murder of Siyyid 'Alī-yi 'Arab, but was not even in Tabriz at the time of the incident. It is possible, therefore, that Baha'u'llah's reference to martyrs in the Paradise of Justice could have also included Mīrzā Muḥammad-'Alī-yi Zanjānī.

In addition to the foregoing evidence, others have pointed to the similarity between the language Baha'u'llah uses in this Tablet when mentioning John the Baptist (pars. 20–24) and his treatment of that figure in the *Kitāb-i-Badī*,<sup>50</sup> revealed sometime between September 1867 and August 1868,<sup>51</sup> to draw the conclusion that this Tablet was probably revealed in the late Edirne period.

Cole's point that this Tablet was written prior to the Akka period is based on an argument from silence – that is, it was revealed 'at a time before Baha'u'llah decisively promulgated the ideal of constitutional monarchy and parliamentary governance'. Yet, Baha'u'llah does address the kings and rulers of the world so:

O concourse of rulers! Crown your heads with the diadems of justice (*akālī al-'adl*), that the regions of every land may be illumined with their light. Thus have We bidden ye in token of Our grace unto you.

O concourse of kings! Erelong will God make manifest on earth kings who will recline on the couches of justice (*namāriq al-'adl*), and will rule amongst men even as they rule their own selves. They, indeed, are among the choicest of My creatures in the entire creation. (pars. 14–15)

Here, if not evidence of Baha'u'llah's grander proclamation to the world's most powerful individuals, there is a clear anticipation of Baha'u'llah's increasing concern with good governance, for which 'justice' is a metonym and erstwhile mandate. Thus, if anything, Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice is transitional, from proclamation to the 'people of the Bayān' to the peoples of the world: 'O people' (par. 16). Both audiences – respectively immediate and virtual – are concurrently in view. The precise historical context of this Tablet, therefore, is a matter for further investigation.

**Dating the Paradise of Justice: Early Akka Hypothesis:** According to Ishraq-Khavari, this Tablet may have been revealed in the early Akka period. As has been mentioned previously, Baha'u'llah alludes to Baha'i martyrs towards the end of his Paradise of Justice. Among the Baha'i martyrs of the early Akka period were Āqā Buzurg-i Nishāpurī, known as Badī' (d. 1869), Āqā Naqd-'Alī Baṣīr (d. 1870) and Āqā Siyyid Ashraf-i Zanjān (d. 1870).<sup>52</sup> It is possible, therefore, that these were the individuals Baha'u'llah had in mind when making that reference to martyrs. Lack of specificity as to the identity of these martyrs, however, has led others to place this Tablet in the late Edirne period (c. 1866–1867), rather than the early Akka period (c. 1868–1870).

Internal evidence provides two further clues as to a possible alternative date for the revelation of the 'Tablet of Paradise'. Paragraph 64 states, in part: 'O My name! Cleanse My servants of every fragrance that is not of Me' (an yā ismī ṭah-hir 'ibādī 'an nafaḥāti dūnī). Then, in the very next



paragraph, Baha'u'llah commands: 'Do thou forbid them to shed blood', and further: 'We, verily, have made this unlawful unto them in all the Tablets' (innā qad nahyināhum fī kullil alwāḥ) (par. 65). 'O My name!' clearly refers to Āqā Siyyid Muḥammad-Riḍā, while 'them' has the Baha'is in mind. According to independent scholar, Shahrokh Monjazei, the first time that Baha'u'llah – in an open, 'proclamatory' epistle – publicly commanded the Baha'is, in writing,<sup>53</sup> not to kill another – under any circumstances – was possibly in the *Lawḥ-i Sulṭān* (Tablet to Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh).<sup>54</sup> Baha'u'llah writes: 'Know ye that to be killed in the path of His good pleasure is better for you than to kill'.<sup>55</sup> The *Lawḥ-i Sulṭān* was revealed in Edirne sometime between September 1867 and August 1868,<sup>56</sup> but not delivered until the Akka period, which is when this Tablet was made known to the Baha'is as well (sometime after mid-1869).

As to the time-frame of the Paradise of Justice, perhaps the most telling piece of internal evidence is as follows: 'The harmful effect of their deeds hath redounded upon the very Root of the Tree' (par. 65). On 22 January 1872, a murder took place in Akka. This may be the event to which Baha'u'llah alludes in par. 65. New light has been shed on this heinous event by Necati Alkan, whose research is based largely on minutes of court proceedings from Syria preserved in the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul: 'And whereas Baha'i sources state that the seven Baha'is killed the three Azalīs actively based on their mischief, the minutes of the Ottoman court mention that the seven Baha'is acted based on money issues between the two parties and defended themselves after being attacked by the Azalīs'.<sup>57</sup>

Considering that the martyrs of Tabriz were executed in January 1867; that Baha'u'llah may not have publicly condemned the shedding of blood, under any circumstances, in a major Tablet before September 1867; and that Baha'u'llah could be referring retrospectively to that interdict (in the *Lawḥ-i Sulṭān*) in this Tablet (par. 65: 'We, verily, have made this unlawful unto them in all the Tablets...'), one could make a case that certain allusions in the 'Paradise of Justice' ('The harmful effect of their deeds...', 'As for them who suffer martyrdom...') refer to events in the early Akka period, rather than those of Edirne, and that Baha'u'llah thus revealed this Tablet sometime after 22 January 1872 – the day when the aforementioned Azalīs were murdered.<sup>58</sup> This is simply an alternative theory for the dating of the Paradise of Justice.

In the final analysis, whether the Paradise of Justice was revealed during the late Edirne period or in the early Akka period does not have much bearing on the central message of this Tablet. As previously stated, the Paradise of Justice has both time-referenced and timeless elements, which is to say that, regardless of when it was actually written and/or promulgated among the 'people of the Bayān' as well as the 'people of Bahā', the themes of 'justice' belong to the 'timeless' dimension of the Paradise of Justice. A thematic and rhetorical analysis follows.

### Structure (vis-à-vis Apostrophes)

Linguist Christina Alm-Arvius notes that 'personification can be coupled with apostrophe'. She adds that apostrophe, as a rhetorical device, 'denotes direct, vocative addresses to beings that may not be actually or factually present'.<sup>59</sup>

Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice opens with a Preamble (pars. 1–3), followed by an apostrophe to 'O this name!' (the spirit of 'Justice', pars. 4–13). Then the population at large ('O People') is addressed (pars. 16–17). Their leaders ('O Embodiments of Justice') are called upon next (pars. 18–24). Then Baha'u'llah speaks to the Babis ('O people of the Bayān') directly (pars. 25–26). He switches back to people generally ('O people!') and to their leaders as well (pars. 27–44). This is followed by Baha'u'llah's discourse on the various forms of 'Justice' (pars. 45–52). The world at large ('O people!') is called upon once again (pars. 49–52). Then Baha'u'llah addresses the recipient of this Tablet ('O servant!'), who is Āqā Siyyid Muḥammad-Riḍā Shahmīrzādī (pars. 53–57). Baha'u'llah then closes with a special prayer and benediction (pars. 49–52).

### Highlights of Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice

**Preamble (pars. 1–3):** Baha'u'llah describes this Tablet as the Paradise of Justice, laden with 'wondrous fruits' (par. 1). He singles out one of God's names, 'The Just' (pars. 2–3), from which God inspires ('breathes') the 'Spirit of Justice' into 'all that dwell on earth'. This is stated as a potentiality, of course. The purpose is to empower people to 'arise to rule over themselves and over others with pure justice' (par. 3).

**'O this name!' (Spirit of Justice) (pars. 4–13):** Baha'u'llah addresses 'The Just' (or 'Justice') as though an intelligence, He does so by apostrophe (a figure of speech, in which some thing is addressed, as though to a person, pars. 4, 5, 6, 12, 13) and personification (another figure of speech). 'Justice' is a spiritual 'sun', the radiance of which can dispel the darkness of 'oppression' (par. 4). Divine 'Justice' is the 'very source' of justice on earth (par. 5). 'Justice' proceeds from Baha'u'llah, who 'ascended the throne of justice' (par. 6).

In this Tablet, Baha'u'llah singles out, or privileges, the quality or attribute of 'Justice' for special mention (par. 7). The various 'Names' of God, as manifested through Baha'u'llah, are 'raiments' (i.e. perfections or powers). 'Justice' may 'adorn' a person by God's will and power (par. 10). The spirit of 'Justice' is greatest when its quality of 'detachment' (or self-disinterest) is at its apex (par. 11). In due course, God will raise up the very embodiments of the spirit of 'Justice' (par. 12), 'through whom We shall roll up the standard of oppression and unfurl the banner of justice between the heavens and the earth' and through whom 'God shall blot out every trace of injustice from the earth' (par. 12).

Muhammad Afnan believes that, although this could be interpreted as a general allusion to sovereigns and others who hold the reins of secular power, it is probably a specific reference to the members of the Universal House of Justice.<sup>60</sup> Justice, moreover, is the great 'ornament of the sovereigns', who rule 'with equity and complete sincerity towards their subjects' (par. 13). The true 'crown' of rulers is 'diadems of justice' (par. 14). 'Erelong' such just kings will appear as 'the choicest of My creatures in the entire creation' (par. 15).

**'O People' (pars. 16–17):** Baha'u'llah enjoins 'justice', 'courtesy and equity' for the peoples of the world (par. 16). Baha'u'llah, moreover, has 'planted trees of justice in this Paradise' which 'will, erelong, bear fruit' (par. 17).

**‘O Embodiments of Justice’ (pars. 18–24):** Leaders should call upon the followers of the Bab to recognize Baha’u’llah (par. 18). The Babis’ belief in the Bab is questioned – i.e. compromised by their rejection of Baha’u’llah, foretold by the Bab (par. 19). Such people are ‘foolish’ and ‘heedless’ (par. 19). The Bab is compared to John the Baptist, and Baha’u’llah to Christ (par. 20). Like the followers of John the Baptist in rejecting Christ, the Babis have done the same with respect to Baha’u’llah (pars. 20–24).

**‘O people of the Bayān’ (pars. 25–26):** The Babis are then addressed directly, and castigated for their disbelief in Baha’u’llah, even though foretold by the Bab (pars. 25–26).

**‘O people!’ and their Leaders (pars. 27–44):** God speaks through Baha’u’llah, by revelation (par. 28). People should ‘judge fairly’ (par. 33) and recognize Baha’u’llah by virtue of his inherent qualities, independent of all bias, whether individually or by the influence of religious leaders (pars. 30–31). Baha’u’llah is the metaphorical ‘Flute’ of God from which heavenly ‘melodies’ are played (par. 34). Switching metaphors, Baha’u’llah rhetorically asks: ‘Can the sun that riseth above the horizon of Revelation shine aught but light from itself?’ (par. 34). Baha’u’llah is now the ‘Supreme Pen’ set in motion by ‘the fingers of your Lord’ (par. 35). ‘The dwellers of the Realms above are astonished’ by the people’s rejection of Baha’u’llah, such that the ‘Eye of Justice’ and the ‘Reality of Justice’ are perturbed thereby (par. 36). ‘Say: O people! Ye have entered Paradise, and have attained unto a Rose’ (par. 38).

**‘Explanation of Justice’ (pars. 45–52):** Baha’u’llah explains that ‘justice consisteth of innumerable degrees and incalculable meanings’ (par. 46). The ‘essence of justice and the source thereof’ are embodied in Baha’u’llah’s laws (par. 46). Baha’u’llah ‘doth verily incarnate the highest, the infallible standard of justice unto all creation’ (par. 46). ‘It is through justice that every one is rendered his due’ (par. 47). Recognition of Baha’u’llah itself is an act of justice. (par. 48.) ‘... whoso believeth not’ in Baha’u’llah hath indeed abandoned the stronghold of justice’ (par. 48).

**‘O people!’ (pars. 49–52):** The advent of ‘Divine justice’ is approaching, ‘for the promised hour is now come’ (par. 49). ‘Say: O people! Adorn your bodies with the ornament of justice’ (par. 50).

**‘O servant!’ (Āqā Siyyid Muḥammad-Riḍā Shahmīrzādī, pars. 53–57):** Baha’u’llah calls upon the ‘Supreme Pen!’ to manifest ‘Riḍā after Nabīl’ as ‘one of the embodiments of justice’ which is ‘his faith in God’, which ‘is a justice unmatched by any other’ (par. 53). The following historical account will give the reader a fair idea of the character of Āqā Siyyid Muḥammad-Riḍā Shahmīrzādī in light of Baha’u’llah’s commendation of him:

Of the two youngest sons of Āqā Mir Muḥammad ‘Alī, Mir Abu Talib Shahmīrzādī ... survived Shaykh Tabarsi, while Mir Muḥammad Rida Shahmīrzādī ... had been left behind to look after their mother. After the end of the Shaykh Tabarsi episode, a severe persecution erupted in Shahmīrzad

and after a time the family were forced to move in with their sister Ma'sumih in Sangsar. Even here they were relentlessly persecuted, at one stage being reduced to eating grass. Although still in their teens and early twenties, the two brothers took on extensive responsibilities looking after the dependents of those who had been killed at Shaykh Tabarsi. Their property had been looted and so they began as pedlars, eventually developing a pattern of travelling together through Mazandaran in the winter months, taking with them salt, fruit and dried foods from Shahmirzad, and returning to the Sangsar area in the summer with rice from Mazandaran. In all the years of their travelling, they faced many hardships and much persecution but they never hid their religion from anyone. Over the years, these two succeeded in converting many people in Mazandaran, in villages such as Ivil and Rawshankuh and towns such as 'Alīyabad (Shahi). The two brothers married the two daughters of a Babi, Mulla Amina of 'Arab-Khayl in Mazandaran, and also established a residence in that village.

In early 1861 the two brothers were arrested in Bihnamir and taken together with three of the Babis of that area to Tehran where they were imprisoned together with several other Babis for two and a half years. At the shah's court there was a native of Sangsar called Āqā Muḥammad Sangsari of whom the shah was so fond that he called him 'Dā'i' (uncle). This man had been a close friend of the brothers' father, Mir Muḥammad 'Alī, and now managed to obtain orders for their release (he had also written to Mahdi-Quli Mīrzā during the Shaykh Tabarsi episode and asked him to ensure the safety of the sons of Mir Muḥammad 'Alī – an action that enabled Mir Abu Talib to survive this episode. The two brothers would not leave the prison however until their fellow prisoners were also released and Da'i arranged this as well. The latter took the two brothers to his home in Tehran as guests and they convinced him of the truth of the Baha'i Faith. After this they undertook a trip to Isfahan, Yazd and Khurasan in the company of Ibn Asdaq, visiting Baha'i communities. Several accounts comment on the joyful and radiant faces of these two brothers and mention that the Baha'is in each place looked forward to their visits.<sup>61</sup>

Baha'u'llah calls upon Muḥammad-Riḍā Shahrīrādī to dispel the 'darts of doubt' among the Babis and to 'draw their attention to this Announcement', i.e. Baha'u'llah (par. 55). Faithful to this charge, Muḥammad-Riḍā Shahrīrādī fulfilled his mission. Here is one example:

A similarly important local cleric was Mulla Muḥammad Hasan (d. 1322/1902) who was converted in 1285/1868 after speaking with Mir Muḥammad Rida (Muḥammad-Riḍā Shahrīrādī). He renounced his religious leadership and became a builder as well as a copier of the Baha'i scriptures. Nevertheless, his relatives tried to kill him. He was responsible for spreading the Baha'i Faith to the village of Aftar. His wife was also a distinguished Baha'i.<sup>62</sup>

Another example of his effectiveness as a Baha'i teacher is seen in the fact that 'about half of the villagers (of Ivil) became Baha'is, a process that was assisted by the visits of such persons as Mulla 'Alī Jan Mahfuruzaki ... and Mir Muḥammad Rida Shahrīrādī'.<sup>63</sup>

Baha'u'llah further takes to task the Babis for their opposition (pars. 56–58) and for having 'broken the Covenant of God' (par. 59), such that Baha'u'llah is 'left alone amidst the people of the Bayān' (par. 60). The Babis are directly addressed (par. 61) and called upon to recognize Baha'u'llah as the one foretold by the Bab (par. 61). In rejecting Baha'u'llah, the wayward Babis are the oppressors, notwithstanding that Baha'u'llah has raised up the 'embodiments of justice', i.e. the Baha'is (par. 62). Such Babis are considered satanic (par. 63). Baha'u'llah asks him to 'attract' the Babis by 'the wonders of My melodies and My words' (par. 64) – in other words, to proclaim Baha'u'llah's message among the remnant Babis. As an illustration of how this illustrious Baha'i was faithful to Baha'u'llah's command, the following episode – which Momen relates – is of interest:

In 1276/1859, there was an episode of persecution in Sangsar when the mujtahid of the town wrote to the governor of Simnan complaining about the Babis in the village. (This mujtahid was related to Mir Muḥammad Rida and had been a Babi at first but had apostatized after the defeat of the Babis at Shaykh Tabarsi.) The governor sent some officials who ill-treated some of the Babis. They arrested Mir Muḥammad Rida and his nephew, bound them and took them off towards Sangsar. On the way, they came to a shrine called Imamzadih Qasim (1 kilometre north of Sangsar) of which Mir Muḥammad Rida had been custodian until he had been replaced (this was the original home village of the family). He spoke for over an hour to the people of the village that surrounds this shrine (population 500 in 1951) and several were converted. When they reached Sangsar, they arrested Ma'sumih, the sister of Mir Muḥammad Rida, her son and their cousin as well as two other Babis and insulted and harassed them. They released Ma'sumih and took the other six off to Simnan, where they were thrown into prison. After three months of imprisonment, they were fined and released.<sup>64</sup>

Baha'u'llah also calls upon Muḥammad-Riḍā Shahrīrādī: 'Do thou forbid them to shed blood' (par. 65), because those 'who dispute with and wage war against men have indeed forsaken the Paradise of Justice' (par. 64). As for those who 'suffer martyrdom in the path of God', they will be welcomed by 'the entire company of the Concourse on High', who 'shall stand ready to receive them bearing the banners of this Cause' (par. 66).

In upholding the 'Covenant of God' (par. 59), Muḥammad-Riḍā Shahrīrādī remained faithful to the end:

After the passing of Baha'u'llah, Jamal Burujirdi, who had travelled frequently to Mazandaran and was highly regarded there, wrote letters to gather support for Mīrzā Muḥammad 'Alī in Barfurush, Sari and Mahfuruzak but was unsuccessful owing to the efforts of Haji Mīrzā Haydar 'Alī Isfahani and Mīr Muḥammad Rida Shahrīrādī.<sup>65</sup>

And further:

In 1893, following the death of Baha'u'llah, Mir Muḥammad Rida visited 'Abdu'l-Baha in Akka. During this trip, he became aware of the schemings of Mīrzā Muḥammad 'Alī (even though these had not yet become public)

and upon his return, he warned the Baha'is of the area so effectively of the dangers of failing to follow 'Abdu'l-Baha that no one from the area later followed Mīrzā Muḥammad 'Alī, despite two visits to the area by Āqā Jamal Burujirdi, a Baha'i who sided with Mīrzā Muḥammad 'Alī.<sup>66</sup>

Shahmīrzādī's death is noteworthy as well:

When Mir Muḥammad Rida Shahmīrzādī ... died in Barfurush, the people of the town forbade his burial. It was the Luri Baha'is who enabled him to be buried in their quarter.<sup>67</sup>

There is also more extensive biographical information on Shahmīrzādī available in a variety of Persian sources.<sup>68</sup>

**'Prayer' and Benediction (pars. 68–69):** Baha'u'llah closes with a prayer, in which God is acknowledged as 'the One Who hath planted the trees of justice in the Paradise of Thy Revelation and Thy Wisdom', and prays that the faithful may 'abide beneath the shadow of their leaves' (par. 67). Baha'u'llah ends the Tablet by inviting the faithful to partake of 'the fruits of these trees' and to 'rest beneath the shadow of their leaves' of the trees in the 'Paradise of Justice' (par. 68). Muḥammad-Riḍā Shahmīrzādī is given this great 'Bounty' (par. 69).

### Theological Dimension of 'Justice'

Does Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice offer a new paradigm of justice? Certainly 'justice' is used in a number of ways, which can be appreciated within the following framework of analysis, encompassing theological, revelatory, authoritarian, social, contemporaneous and individual dimensions of justice. A place to begin might be termed 'theological justice'. One can say that the universe itself, in a sense, is founded on 'justice' as it pertains to order. When God, Baha'u'llah writes, ascended the 'throne of justice', He 'fashioned all created things through a single word from [His] side' (par. 6). Indeed, the 'Name' or attribute of justice is characterized as 'the very source of Our justice amidst such among Our servants as are near unto Us'. Through this justice, God has 'manifested the justice of every just one, and has adorned the sincere ones among [His] servants' with the 'ornament' of justice (par. 5). In other words, justice is a virtue, by virtue of the fact that it is an attribute of God.

Justice, therefore, is both divine and human, i.e. godly and goodly. Baha'u'llah opens this Tablet by invoking God's attributes of justice and wisdom: 'In the Name of the Just, the All-Wise' (par. 2). This 'Tablet' is a discourse on God's 'Name' (attribute, or power), 'The Just' (par. 3). From this 'Name', God has 'breathed the Spirit of Justice into the mortal frames of all that dwell on earth' so that, ideally, 'they may arise to rule over themselves and over others with pure justice' (par. 3). Thus justice, as manifested in this world, is anchored in divine justice. In this sense, Baha'u'llah makes justice sacred. In other words, justice is not simply 'secular'. It is a sacred value and virtue. However, there is a distinction between institutional and individual justice, as explained below.

In his essay on Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice, Muhammad Afnan makes the following observation:

... the establishment of justice on the Day of Recompense is the objective of the divine religions, and the promised 'Paradise' refers to a place where the effects of divine justice will encompass everyone. This Paradise will be realized when justice is established; thus, the Paradise of Justice is the very reality of that justice – promised and divine – which is mentioned in this Tablet.<sup>69</sup>

The preamble of the Tablet (par. 1) states that the 'Paradise of Justice ... hath appeared as a token of God's grace'. Muhammad Afnan notes that these two concepts – justice and grace – are often portrayed as irreconcilable, yet the two seem to be interconnected in this Tablet. He writes:

In the nomenclature of religious studies, 'justice' and 'grace' are concepts that are invariably invoked as two of God's attributes, and they are portrayed as opposites of one another. 'Justice' looks to the merit of a person or thing to ensure that they receive their due accordingly, whereas 'grace' is rooted in God's favour, his beneficence, and his disregard for an individual's capacity or talent. Could we not say, however, that at the very outset of this Tablet, the Manifestation of God looks upon all created things, in a general sense – and upon every person, more specifically – with the eye of grace and pardon?<sup>70</sup>

Afnan goes on to give another example<sup>71</sup> of how justice and grace are interconnected in his observation of par. 17, where Baha'u'llah states that God has planted 'trees of justice' in the 'Paradise of Justice', and has watered those trees with 'the waters of [His] grace'.

### Revelatory Dimension of 'Justice'

Justice, as conceived in Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice, 'consisteth of innumerable degrees and incalculable meanings', a veritable 'Ocean' from which God has given mankind a mere 'sprinkling', an amount nonetheless sufficient to 'cleanse [mankind] from the defilement of oppression, and cause [them] to be numbered with the sincere ones' (par. 46). Through the figure of speech known as 'apostrophe', Baha'u'llah hypothesizes, personifies and calls upon 'Justice' to take pride in the fact that it has been made 'the dawning-place of [God's] justice amidst all people' (par. 12).

'Pure justice' is defined as a justice from which all that dwell on earth 'shall not deviate by one jot or one tittle' in the exercise thereof 'over themselves and over others' (par. 1). In a highly intriguing explication of justice, Baha'u'llah declares that: 'The essence of justice and the source thereof are both embodied in the ordinances prescribed by Him Who is the Manifestation of the Self of God amongst men'. This Manifestation of God (Baha'u'llah) incarnates 'the highest, the infallible standard of justice unto all creation'. Baha'u'llah remarks that: 'It is through justice that every one is rendered his due', and that – contrary to what 'most of the people imagine' – this is behaviour that can be discerned 'in the manifestations of the world of being' (par. 47). What is apparently the most potent form of justice – a justice that 'causeth the pillars of tyranny to quake and the foundations of misbelief to crumble' – is none other than 'the recognition of this [the Baha'i] Revelation' (par. 48).

Those who have failed to believe in Baha'u'llah are described as having 'abandoned the stronghold of justice', whose 'name is recorded among the



oppressors in God's mighty and guarded Tablets' (par. 48). 'Even if a man were to strive until the end that hath no end and bend every possible effort to deal equitably with others, if he should ever hesitate in the exercise of justice, he would verily have committed an injustice against his own self, and would be regarded as one of the oppressors' (par. 48). Those who have 'fail[ed] to apprehend [the] import' of 'the days of Divine justice' will be 'accounted among the erring' (par. 49).

### Authoritarian Dimension of 'Justice'

Justice, in essence, is defined by Baha'u'llah as follows: 'It is through justice that every one is rendered his due' (par. 47). As for historical context, the world in the nineteenth-century was dominated by monarchs, autocrats, dictators and the like. This being the case, when speaking of 'kings' and 'rulers' (pars. 14–15), they are metonyms for government institutions in general, endowed with plenary legislative, executive, judiciary and administrative powers. Baha'u'llah calls upon those in authority to carry out their duties with self-disinterest in favour of the best interests of the people, i.e. to do whatever is best for the commonweal.

Justice is considered 'an ornament of the sovereigns'. A sovereign can best practise this 'ornament' by 'act[ing] with equity and complete sincerity towards their subjects, and decree[ing] for them what God Himself hath decreed in His mighty and everlasting Book' (par. 13). Should the rulers of the world choose to 'crown [their] heads with the diadems of justice', these diadems will have the potential to illuminate 'the regions of every land with their light' (par. 14). This mandate extends from the present to the future, with this vision or prophecy in view: God will soon 'make manifest on earth kings who will recline on the couches of justice'. These kings 'will rule amongst men even as they rule their own selves', and they are considered to be 'among the choicest of [God's] creatures in the entire creation' (par. 15).

### Contemporaneous Dimension of 'Justice'

Baha'u'llah, addressing 'the embodiment of justice', takes to task those 'who have disbelieved in [Him] and ascribed partners unto [Him], even after [His] advent' notwithstanding the fact that Baha'u'llah's advent was 'promised in every Tablet'. This suggests that the failure of the Babis (whom Baha'u'llah thoroughly castigates soon before this point) to divorce themselves from literal or superficial understandings of their scripture, which ultimately resulted in their rejection of Baha'u'llah, constituted an act of great injustice (par. 37). The 'Eye of Justice' and the 'Reality of Justice' are both distressed at Baha'u'llah's plight, suggesting that the suffering He underwent and the calamities imposed upon Him were demonstrations of extreme injustice (par. 36).

Forecasting the future consequences of contemporary tyranny, Baha'u'llah states that 'the cruelty' of those 'oppressors' (also referred to as 'infidels') who 'ascribed oppression unto the One through Whom the embodiments of justice were raised up [Baha'u'llah]' will, erelong, 'change this earth and frustrate the affairs of men' (par. 62). Baha'u'llah beseeches God, Who has 'planted the trees of Justice in the Paradise of [His] Revelation and [His] Wisdom', to 'shelter' those trees from 'the raging storms of fate

and the rolling thunder of calamity, that their boughs and their branches may grow and develop beneath the shade of [His] bounty and the canopy of [His] mercy'. He further entreats God to 'cause them who are the chosen ones amongst [His] creatures and the truly devoted amidst [His] servants to abide beneath the shadow of [the] leaves' of these trees – in other words, he beseeches God to help His servants to be just (par. 67).

### Social Dimension of 'Justice'

The peoples of the world are instructed to 'adorn themselves...with the raiment of justice, inasmuch as the exercise thereof befiteth all mankind'. By contrast, those who have 'dispute[d] with and wage[d] war against men' are described as having 'forsaken the Paradise of Justice', and have been 'numbered with the oppressors in the sublime and preserved Tablets' (par. 65). Baha'u'llah goes on to say that He has 'enjoined courtesy and equity' upon people 'in most of His Tablets', as if to suggest that justice, equity and courtesy are all somehow related (par. 16). It is 'through this name' (justice) that 'God hath shed His splendour upon all things in this Tablet'. They who have been illumined with the light of justice and have attained unto it are reckoned with 'the truly devoted among [Baha'u'llah's] servants' (par. 17). God has planted 'trees of justice' in this 'Paradise' (of justice – in other words, this Tablet), and He has 'watered them with the waters of [His] grace'. He assures, moreover, that 'every one of those trees will, ere long, bear fruit' (par. 17).

### Individual Dimension of 'Justice'

Justice is a virtue, as Shoghi Effendi explains: 'In the *Riḍvānu'l-'Adl* ... the virtue of justice is exalted'.<sup>72</sup> 'Justice', on an individual, interpersonal level, is defined primarily in terms of two corollary virtues, 'courtesy' and 'equity':

Adorn yourselves, O people, with the raiment of justice, inasmuch as the exercise thereof befiteth all mankind, did ye but know it. Thus have We enjoined courtesy and equity upon you in most of Our Tablets, that ye may be of them who comprehend. (par. 16)

Another key concept of 'Justice' is adherence to laws, socio-moral principles and ethics that are conveyed through Baha'u'llah's 'revelation':

O people of the earth! Know ye that justice consisteth of innumerable degrees and incalculable meanings, yet We have given you only a sprinkling from this Ocean, that it may cleanse you from the defilement of oppression and cause you to be numbered with the sincere ones. Know verily that the essence of justice and the source thereof are both embodied in the ordinances prescribed by Him Who is the Manifestation of the Self of God amongst men, if ye be of them that recognize this truth. He doth verily incarnate the highest, the infallible standard of justice unto all creation. ... Were men to discover the motivating purpose of God's Revelation, they would assuredly cast away their fears, and, with hearts filled with gratitude, rejoice with exceeding gladness. (par. 46)

That the 'essence of justice' inheres in 'God's Revelation' expands the notion of justice, making justice more broad-based, anchored as it is in

the Baha'i sacred texts. Humanity, collectively and individually, is instructed to 'adorn [their] bodies with the ornament of justice'. In order to do this, one must 'enjoin ... that which God Himself hath enjoined, and be not of them that transgress their bounds' (par. 50). Addressing the recipient of this Tablet, Āqā Siyyid Muḥammad-Riḍā Shāhmīrẓādī, Baha'u'llah describes Shāhmīrẓādī's 'justice' as 'his faith in God', and He declares that this is 'a justice unmatched by any other' (par. 53). The Paradise of Justice was created 'through [God's] strength and power', and was sent to Shāhmīrẓādī 'with a glorious and wondrous fruit'. In tasting 'the fruits of these trees' and 'rest[ing] beneath the shadow of their leaves', humanity can be 'protected from the fire of the infidels' (par. 68). In addition to this, Baha'u'llah also treats the teaching of Baha'i precepts and principles (along with recognition of the divine authority of Baha'u'llah) as yet another way of promoting justice.

## Conclusion

**Date of Revelation:** Historically, whether Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice belongs to the late Edirne period or to the early Akka period, in the final analysis, may be a distinction without a difference. The historical context is clear enough. This Tablet addresses both the 'people of the Bayān' and the peoples of the world – and their respective leaders. There is a consensus that Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice refers to the period of time that Baha'u'llah designated as the 'Days of Stress'. Whether or not this Tablet was revealed in the late Edirne or early Akka period is a separate, although related inquiry. The present writers, based on their independent investigation and careful review of the available evidence, are of the opinion that Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice was almost certainly revealed during the late Edirne period. That is to say, this Tablet was written during the latter part of the 'Days of Stress'. Exactly when, however, is not possible to determine with precision. That said, is it possible to fix an end-point to the 'Days of Stress'?

**Duration of the 'Days of Stress':** The 'Days of Stress' refers to the machinations of Azal against Baha'u'llah. Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice evidently alludes to Azal's attempts on Baha'u'llah's life, to wit: 'you [Azal] persisted until you resolved to shed His [Baha'u'llah's] blood' (par. 26). There is a consensus that the 'Days of Stress' belongs to the Edirne period, starting around December 1864 (approximately a year after arrival from Istanbul in December 1863). There is a further consensus that the 'Most Great Separation' (faṣl-i akbar) – on Saturday, 10 March 1866 – belongs to this same period. After the 'Most Great Separation', Azal resumed, renewed and redoubled his opposition – much 'to Bahā'u'llāh's profound distress'.<sup>73</sup> This led to the episode known as the Mubāhilih, in September 1867. The question remains as to when the 'Days of Stress' ended.

The prevailing opinion appears to favour the view that the 'Days of Stress' ended right after the episode of the Mubāhilih. However, after the Mubāhilih, Shoghi Effendi speaks of '[o]ther developments and happenings of great, though lesser, significance' that must be taken into account, if this 'agitated and most momentous phase of Bahā'u'llāh's ministry' is to be fully appreciated.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, it is possible to read Shoghi Effendi's

narrative as a sustained history of Azal's plots and cabals against Baha'u'llah, which 'was engineered throughout by the tortuous intrigues and incessant machinations of that same diabolical Siyyid Muḥammad, that vile whisperer' (Azal's instigator and accomplice in all these nefarious intrigues).

In a book entitled *God Passes By* (1944), Shoghi Effendi wrote an interpretive history of the Baha'i Faith. He devoted an entire section – 'Chapter X: The Rebellion of Mīrzā Yahyā and the Proclamation of Bahā'u'llāh's Mission in Adrianople' – to the Edirne period.<sup>75</sup> The Gallipoli episode is right afterward, and is discussed by Shoghi Effendi in Chapter Ten of *God Passes By* as well.

The present writers venture the theory that the 'Days of Stress' not only included: (1) the attempts on the life of Bahā'u'llāh, as well as (2) the 'Most Great Separation' and (3) the Mubāhilih episode, but also that (4) the 'Days of Stress' extended into the Gallipoli episode, at which time Bahā'u'llāh effectively had the Farmān altered in its implementation – a major victory over the last remaining attempts to wrest leadership away from Bahā'u'llāh:

The fateful decision was eventually arrived at to banish Bahā'u'llāh to the penal colony of 'Akkā, and Mīrzā Yahyā to Famagusta in Cyprus. This decision was embodied in a strongly worded Farmān, issued by Sultān Abdu'l-'Aziz. ... Even in Gallipoli, where three nights were spent, no one knew what Bahā'u'llāh's destination would be. Some believed that He and His brothers would be banished to one place, and the remainder dispersed, and sent into exile. Others thought that His companions would be sent back to Persia, while still others expected their immediate extermination. The government's original order was to banish Bahā'u'llāh, Āqāy-i-Kalīm and Mīrzā Muhammad-Qulī, with a servant to 'Akkā, while the rest were to proceed to Constantinople. This order, which provoked scenes of indescribable distress, was, however, at the insistence of Bahā'u'llāh, and by the instrumentality of Umar Effendi, a major appointed to accompany the exiles, revoked. It was eventually decided that all the exiles, numbering about seventy, should be banished to 'Akkā.<sup>76</sup>

Alternatively, it could be argued that the Farman itself – decreeing a separation between Baha'u'llah and Azal – marked the end of the 'Days of Stress'. Either way, the 'Days of Stress' extended well beyond the 'Confrontation' (Arabic: Mubāhala) of September 1867. To the best of the present writers' knowledge, this particular point has not been hypothesized before; yet this view is based squarely on a close reading of Chapter Ten of *God Passes By*.

**Decree Against Bloodshed:** On 22 April 1863, Baha'u'llah abrogated holy war (jihād), as Baha'u'llah later recounts: 'On the first day of His arrival in the garden designated the Ridvān, the Ancient Beauty established Himself upon the Most Great Throne. Thereupon, the Tongue of Glory uttered three blessed verses. First, that in this Revelation the use of the sword is prohibited'.<sup>77</sup> Saiedi points out that Baha'u'llah's principle of nonviolence was promulgated privately among the Babis in Baghdad, and thereafter publicly in Edirne.<sup>78</sup> But the question of when this same declaration, as a matter of 'public record', as it were, first appeared in Baha'u'llah's writings by way of an open epistle, is a distinct – albeit related – historical issue. The present

writers submit that the Paradise of Justice may well be among Baha'u'llah's first 'public' proclamations of the abrogation of jihad. Although this is not conclusive for dating purposes, this conclusion has independent value.

**Dimensions of 'Justice':** Thematically, this study demonstrates how Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice presents a significantly expanded paradigm of justice, both in precept and practice. Justice is both individual and collective. This Tablet significantly broadens the horizons of 'justice' by expanding the purview of 'justice' to encompass equity, courtesy, sincerity, faith and righteousness. The term 'justice' occurs 38 times in the text, with 'equity' mentioned twice and 'courtesy' once. The emphasis placed on these two latter terms, however, deserves comment. In par. 16, Baha'u'llah says that he has 'enjoined courtesy (al-adab) and equity (al-inṣāf)' throughout most of his Tablets. This claim, though grand, is true to fact. It is interesting that this pronouncement should immediately follow his instruction that people should 'adorn (themselves) ... with the raiment of justice (ridā' al-'adl)' – indicating that justice, equity and courtesy are all somehow related. In one of his other writings, Baha'u'llah notes that 'equity' (or 'fair-mindedness', as the word inṣāf has been translated in this particular instance) is 'but one of the expressions' of justice.<sup>79</sup> In a similar vein, Baha'u'llah also says 'It is through justice that every one is rendered his due' (par. 47). It is in this way that justice – normally the prerogative of sovereigns and institutions – can be demonstrated on an interpersonal level by any individual.

This Tablet has intrinsic interest sufficient to warrant a study on historical grounds alone. Yet, this text is a spiritual document as well. It is, after all, a scripture, and, in Baha'i belief, a 'revelation' by God, through Baha'u'llah. This is where history doubles as homily – where the narrative itself edifies. In fine, Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice transforms received notions of 'justice' and elevates this virtue to new heights of aspiration and praxis.

Not only does Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice widen the reach and scope of justice, it does more. Justice, moreover, is made sacred. Justice is divine, according to Baha'u'llah. Justice, after all, derives from the 'Name' of God as 'The Just' (al-'ādil). (See par. 47.) In other words, although typically considered a 'secular' concern within rather specific institutional confines, Baha'u'llah allegorizes, personifies, symbolizes and otherwise expatiates on 'Justice' in such a way as to vivify the concept. This rhetorical strategy operates on multiple levels, consistent with the several audiences addressed – kings, rulers, people in general and the Bab in particular, not to mention the recipient, Āqā Siyyid Muḥammad-Riḍā Shāhmīrẓādī, whom Baha'u'llah acclaims as 'one of the embodiments of justice' whose 'justice is his faith in God' that is 'unmatched by any other' (par. 53). From this we may tentatively conclude: Justice – encompassing, as it does, both faith and action – is the essence of the Baha'i concept of salvation, both individual and societal.

Mīr Muḥammad-Riḍā – immortalized by Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice – lives on, as the exemplar and paradigm of 'justice' that originates in faith and expresses itself in courtesy, fair-mindedness, equity and service to others, alive to the spiritual as well as social dimensions of life in the wider scheme of things. Baha'u'llah's metaphor of 'Paradise' is reflexive: not only is 'Paradise' a reality in the afterlife, but an angelic mode of

being in this life. For those who aspire, 'Paradise' inspires. Here, 'Justice' is its own 'Paradise'. To create a world of justice and equity is to realize Paradise on Earth. If 'Justice' is somehow a 'Paradise', then 'Paradise' is no longer otherworldly. 'Paradise' is a this-worldly paradigm of how things ought to be, and can become. That is the mission of the charismatic prophet-founder, and a function of the sacred text.

As revelatory text, Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice is best analyzed within the phenomenology of revelation, therefore may be characterized as a document that is inspired, and informed, by flashes of inspiration. As such, it is not a systematic text, nor does it pretend to be, in any sense of the word, a treatise. There is a certain 'creative' element of prophetic revelation (leaving truth-claims aside) that is intended to inspire faith, enlightened consciousness and motivate action on the part of the believers.

**Directions for Further Research:** The fact that Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice presents 'justice' multidimensionally invites further study on the basis of its wider implications in relation to social discourse and good governance.

One notable effort in this direction is Udo Schaefer's two-volume treatise, *Baha'i Ethics*.<sup>80</sup> The section 'Justice in Baha'u'llah's Scriptures',<sup>81</sup> includes discussion of Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice. Space does not permit a review of Schaefer's analysis here, except to say that future research should build upon the foundation that Schaefer has laid for further study of Baha'i concepts of justice, as these pertain to the wide-ranging and comprehensive panoply of other virtues set forth in Baha'i texts as well. It may be said that Schaefer's work represents the first systematic study of the Baha'i ethics, to which the present study may, in some way, contribute.

Another important work in this vein that should not go unnoticed is Shapour Rassekh's review of justice as it is portrayed and defined in Baha'i literature, entitled *Mafhūm-i 'Adl dar Āthār-i Mubāraki-yi Baha'i*.<sup>82</sup> Like Schaefer, Rassekh also mentions Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice in his article, in addition to other writings from Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi that discuss the concept of justice.

Although all of these writings bear on the Baha'i concept of justice and present a much fuller picture, what distinguishes the Paradise of Justice is the way that it correlates and interrelates adjunct notions – such as faith, virtue, ethics, as well as distinctively individual and institutional parameters of justice – of 'justice' as a multidimensional paradigm, by which this cardinal virtue can best be promoted on the widest possible scale.

### Translation: Riḍwān al-'Adl: Paradise of Justice

(1) This is the Paradise of Justice (riḍwān al-'adl), which hath appeared as a token of God's grace and been adorned by Him with glorious and wondrous fruits.

(2) In the Name of the All-Just, the All-Wise.

(3) This is a Tablet in which God hath raised up His Name, 'The Just', (al-'ādil) and from which He hath breathed the Spirit of Justice (rūḥ al-'adl) into the mortal frames of all that dwell on earth, that they may arise to rule

over themselves and over others with pure justice ('adl al-khālīs) – a justice from which they shall not deviate by one jot or one tittle.

(4) O this name! We, verily, have made thee one of the suns of Our most excellent names between earth and heaven. Shed thou thy mighty and wondrous splendour upon the whole of creation, that perchance they may gather together beneath thy shadow, cast the ways of oppression behind their backs, and be illumined by thy hallowed and resplendent light.

(5) O this name! We have indeed made thee the very source of Our justice amidst such among Our servants as are near unto Us. Through thee, We have manifested the justice of every just one, and have adorned the sincere ones among Our servants with thine ornament.

(6) O this name! Beware lest this station deceive thee and prevent thee from showing humility before God, the Almighty, the Most Powerful. Know thou that thy relationship unto Us is the same as any other relationship; no distinction is there between thee and all else besides thee that have been created in heaven and on earth. For when We ascended the throne of justice ('arsh al-'adl), we fashioned all created things through a single word from Our side. Thy Lord is the All-Wise, and His wisdom encompasseth all things. We have exalted certain names to the kingdom of eternity as a token of Our grace, and I verily am the Most Powerful, the Most Exalted, the Mighty, the Incomparable.

(7) Say: No relationship is there between God and His creation. Sanctified is He from whatsoever He hath created, and from the remembrances of such among His servants as make mention of Him. Indeed, the relationship which is attributed to Him and mentioned in the Tablets hath been revealed through the decree that was sent down from the Heaven of the Divine Will, Which was brought into being through My all-pervading and all-compelling behest. Nevertheless, We have singled thee out and exalted thee in this Tablet, that thou mayest render thanks unto thy Lord, and be of them that are rid of all attachment to any one but Him. Beware lest the loftiness of thy name debar thee from God, thy Lord and the Lord of all worlds.

(8) Verily, We exalt whomsoever We will through Our behest. We have, from eternity, been powerful to do what We have willed, and to ordain what We have pleased. Behold naught within thyself but the radiance of the Sun of the Word of Revelation, which hath shone forth above the horizon of the Will of thy Lord, the Compassionate, the Merciful. In like manner, behold naught within thine essence any power, any strength, any movement, or any tranquility unless it be bidden by God, the Sovereign, the Almighty, the All-Powerful. Be thou animated by the breezes of thy Lord, the Most High, the All-Glorious, and not by that which wafteth from the precincts of passion and desire. Thus biddeth thee the Pen of the Most High, that thou mayest be reckoned with them who observe Our precepts.

(9) Beware lest thou follow the example of the one We adorned with the ornament of names in the kingdom of creation – the one who, when he looked upon his own self and perceived the loftiness of his name, repudiated God, Who created him and sustained him, and thereupon fell from the most exalted station to the depths of degradation.<sup>83</sup>



(10) Say: The Names are as raiments; We adorn those of Our servants We desire with them, and We take them away from whomsoever We will through Our behest. I am the All-Powerful, the Ordainer, the Omniscient. We take no counsel with Our servants before divesting them of this bounty, even as We consult them not before We bestow Our blessings upon them. Know, then, the command of thy Lord, and be of them who possess manifest certitude. The power We hold over all things can never be wrested from Us, neither can the Hands of Our power ever be chained up, couldst thou but understand.

(11) Say: The station of every name that knoweth his Lord, and doth not transgress his limit, shall wax greater at every moment, and the Day-Star of the tender mercies of his Lord – the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous – will shine upon him continually. He shall ascend the ladder of detachment until he reacheth a station none can describe, save the One Who created it. He speaketh not except by the leave of his Lord, and moveth not unless it be ordained by Him. He is, in truth, the Almighty, the Just, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

(12) O this name! Pride thyself in this, that We have made thee the dawning-place of Our justice (*mashriqā ‘adlinā*) amidst all people. The day is approaching when We shall raise up manifestations of thee upon the earth, through whom We shall roll up the standard of oppression and unfurl the banner of justice between the heavens and the earth. It is through them that God shall blot out every trace of injustice from the earth, and adorn the whole of creation in every land with these names. All beings, both seen and unseen, shall rejoice at their advent, for They are the mirrors of My justice (*marāyā ‘adlī*) amidst My servants, and the daysprings of My names amidst My creation. Through them, the hands of oppression shall be severed, and the arms of command strengthened. Such is the decree We have set forth in this holy and preserved Tablet.

(13) O this name! We, verily, have made thee an ornament of the sovereigns (*zīnatan li’l-mulūk*). Blessed are they that adorn their bodies with thee, act with equity (*ya’dilu*) and complete sincerity (*al-ḥaqq al-khālīṣ*) towards their subjects, and decree for them what God Himself hath decreed in His mighty and everlasting Book. No better adornment is there for them than thee, for it is through thee that their sovereignty is made manifest, their praise is glorified, and their names are remembered in the Kingdom of God, the Almighty, the Most Great. Whoso depriveth himself of thee would indeed be as one denuded (*‘arīyyun*) before the entire creation, though outwardly he be clothed in the finest garments of silk (*ḥurar al-‘ālamīn*).

(14) O concourse of rulers! Crown your heads with the diadems of justice (*akālīl al-‘adl*), that the regions of every land may be illumined with their light. Thus have We bidden ye in token of Our grace unto you.

(15) O concourse of kings! Erelong will God make manifest on earth kings who will recline on the couches of justice (*namāriq al-‘adl*), and will rule amongst men even as they rule their own selves. They, indeed, are among the choicest of My creatures in the entire creation.

(16) Adorn yourselves, O people, with the raiment of justice (*ridā’ al-‘adl*), inasmuch as the exercise thereof befitteth all mankind, did ye but know

it. Thus have We enjoined courtesy (al-adab) and equity (al-inṣāf) upon you in most of Our Tablets, that ye may be of them who comprehend. The Almighty ordaineth naught for a soul unless it be what is best for him, and what shall profit him in this world and in the world to come. He, verily, is independent of the doings of every doer, and of the knowledge of every man of discernment and understanding.

(17) Through this name, God hath shed His splendour upon all things in this tablet. Well is it with them who are illumined with its light and have attained thereunto, for they are the truly devoted among Our servants. With the Hands of Our power, We have planted trees of justice (ashjār al-‘adl) in this Paradise, and have watered them with the waters of Our grace. Every one of those trees will, erelong, bear fruit. Such is the irrevocable decree We have set forth, for truly We are potent to command.

(18) O ye who are the embodiments of justice (maẓāhir al-‘adl)! When the breezes of power have wafted over all things, summon ye the people of the Bayān (malā’ al-Bayān), and call their attention to this Great Announcement.

(19) Ask of them: O people! By what proof have ye believed in ‘Alī (the Bāb), but denied the One Who brought you glad-tidings in all the Tablets? Ponder this, O concourse of foolish ones, and fear ye God, O assemblage of the heedless.

(20) Do ye claim to believe in the One Who heralded Mine advent though you have repudiated Me, the All-Powerful, the All-Wise? Ye are even as the ones who believed in John the Baptist, who summoned men to the Kingdom of God, yet when Christ, the Word Himself, appeared unto them, they rejected Him and condemned Him to death.

(21) The curse of God be upon the oppressors! At all times, and in the loudest voice, that herald imparted glad-tidings unto men. He exhorted them to swear fealty unto Christ, and informed them of His imminent advent. At last, out of his love for Christ, he yielded up his spirit to Him, the Almighty, the Wondrous.

(22) And when the veil of concealment was rent asunder, and the Word of God appeared unto men, they cavilled at Him and protested, saying: ‘This Man hath violated the decree of John the Baptist!’ Thus did their souls prompt them in such wise that they were deprived of the Presence of their Lord, the Almighty, the Most Powerful.

(23) One of the infidels among them said: ‘The thing for which the son of Zechariah (John the Baptist) came to this world hath not yet come to pass, neither hath his law been established amongst men. Unseemly indeed would it be for any one to appear until that law is established’. Such was the reasoning by which they waxed disdainful before the Spirit of God (Jesus Christ) and rejected His Truth. Still others among them said: ‘John the Baptist baptised men with water. The One Who hath appeared unto us, however, doth baptise with the Holy Spirit, yet He associateth with the sinful!’

(24) And now ye hear the same arguments made by the people of the Bayān in these days. They repeat that which the followers of John the Baptist said

aforetime; nay worse, they utter such things as have never been uttered before. Woe betide them that follow these infidels!

(25) Say: O people of the Bayān! Blush before the beauty of your Lord, the All-Merciful, Who appeared in the midmost heart of the world with a clear and irrefutable proof. The One Who came unto you aforetime by the name of ‘Alī informed you of Me and heralded unto you My coming, and He moved not except through His love for Me, and breathed not except to make mention of Me, the Most Powerful, the Most Wondrous. He proclaimed unto you that every luminous one would be eclipsed by His splendour, that every woman that hath a burden in her womb would cast her burden,<sup>84</sup> and that every bearer of a trust would cast it aside. Such is the decree that hath descended from the Heaven of the Will of your Lord, the Most High, the All-Knowing.

(26) The appointed Hour (al-sā’a) came upon you in your heedlessness, for when the Beauty of the Beloved shone forth above the horizon of the Will of your Lord - the Almighty, the All-Powerful – you turned away from Him, cavilled at Him, rejected His signs, and ascribed partners unto Him, and in this heedlessness you persisted until you resolved to shed His blood – the blood of the Most Holy, the Most Pure, the Most Powerful, the Most Luminous.

(27) Say: O people! Fear God, and confine not His command to your own limitations. He, verily, ordaineth as He pleaseth through His behest, and He is indeed the Help in Peril, the Almighty, the Most Powerful.

(28) Say: I swear by God that He speaketh in My breast, calleth out to My spirit, and giveth utterance through My tongue. It is He that hath wakened Me with the breezes of His command, and hath caused Me to speak between heaven and earth.

(29) Say: I swear by God – the Almighty, the Most High – that I am in your midst, and hear from you that which no ear hath heard before. Nevertheless, God hath, in truth, made Me manifest, and I have been bidden not to worship any one but Him, and to remind you of that which is better for you than all that is in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. Had it been in My power, I would have never consented to manifest Myself unto these makers of mischief. Yet, the Almighty is unconstrained in His bidding; He doeth as He willeth, and ordaineth as He pleaseth.

(30) Look not upon Me, O people, with your eyes, or with the eyes of your leaders. I swear by God that this would avail you not, even were you to seek the aid of the former and the latter generations.

(31) Say: O people! Behold My beauty with Mine eye, for if you look upon Me with any other sight, you will never recognize Me. Thus hath it been sent down in the Tablets of God, the Almighty, the All-Powerful, the All-Wise.

(32) Say: O people! It is neither through Mine own Self nor for Mine own Self that I cry aloud unto you; rather, God crieth out as He willeth through His own Self for His servants, and unto this do My groaning, and My wailing, and the lamentation of My heart bear witness, if ye be of them who judge fairly.

(33) This indeed is the Leaf that hath been stirred by the winds of the Will of God. Hath it any power of its own to remain still? No, by the One Who hath caused Me to speak in truth! The winds move as they will, and God indeed is powerful over whatsoever He pleaseth. The movement of that Leaf, and the manner in which it stirreth, bear witness to its truth, would ye but understand.

(34) Consider, O people, the Flute (mizmār) that resteth beneath the fingers of the Will of His Lord, the All-Merciful, and how He doth breathe His sanctified breath into it. Can that Flute remain silent in its inmost self? Nay, by your Lord, the Almighty, the Beneficent! He will, rather, make manifest from it diverse melodies as He willeth, and He verily is the All-Powerful, the Ordainer, the Omnipotent. Can the sun that riseth above the horizon of Revelation shine aught but light from itself? Is it able, moreover, to deprive anything of its light? Nay, by the essence of glory! And unto this doth every fair-minded (munṣifin) and discerning one (baṣīrin) bear witness.

(35) Say: O people! Verily, it is the fingers of your Lord – the Most High, the All-Glorious – that move this Supreme Pen. This is not My doing, rather is it the bidding of God, your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers. And do ye, O concourse of infidels, protest this Pen? Or do ye cavil at the One Who hath caused it to move through His sovereignty?

(36) Say: Woe betide you! The dwellers of the Realms above are astonished by your deeds. The Eye of Justice weepeth sore over Me, and the Reality of Justice bewaileth the harm I have sustained and the calamities I have endured. It bemoaneth, moreover, that which hath befallen Me at the hands of them who were created through My Will, who pride themselves in standing in My Presence and seek blessings from the dust that My feet – the feet of the Blessed, the Almighty, the Sublime – have trodden.

(37) O thou who art the embodiment of justice! I complain unto thee concerning them who have disbelieved in Me and ascribed partners unto Me, even after Mine advent hath been promised in every Tablet – and in the Tablet, too, that God hath preserved in His inviolable treasures, which He hath safeguarded from even the most discerning ones among His creation.

(38) Say: O people! Ye have entered Paradise, and have attained unto a Rose (wardan). Inhale it, then, if ye find its fragrance to be sweet. Fear ye God, and be not of them who gainsay Him, nor of them who recognize Him and then disclaim Him. Ye would indeed be numbered with the infidels for such an act. Were a person with a keen sense of smell to be found, he would, of a certainty, be able to detect – among all the things that are made manifest from Me – the fragrance of the Most Holy, the Most Powerful, the Most Generous.

(39) O ye who are the embodiments of this name (maẓāhir al-‘adl)! Ye were called into being through My behest, and were risen up by My command. Beware lest your rank prevent you from humbling yourselves before your Lord - the Almighty, the Omniscient – on the day when He shall come down unto you overshadowed with clouds and invested with a mighty sovereignty. On that day, He shall breathe the spirit of life into the entire creation;

adorn the whole of Paradise with My Name, the Name of the Almighty, the Beneficent; regenerate mankind with the ornament of the All-Merciful; and attire all things with the raiment of names that belongeth to the Wondrous Creator. That indeed is a day for which ye have been created. Fear ye God and take heed, lest ye deprive yourselves of so great a bounty.

(40) O ye who are called by this name! Let not the names deceive you on that day. Hasten ye to the court of grace, even if the clouds of Revelation should rain down the darts of wrath upon you. Take heed that ye not tarry for less than a single moment. On that day, none shall have any possessions to their name, for command on that day will be with God, the All-Powerful, the All-Wise.

(41) Say: Be ye faithful, O people, to the Testament of God, and break not the covenant of the One with Whom you covenanted from time immemorial (dharr al-baqā') in the Presence of God, the Almighty, the All-Powerful, the Omniscient.

(42) Say: Open your eyes! I swear by the One True God that He hath been made manifest on this day, at this very moment, and that He hath come overshadowed with clouds.<sup>85</sup> Blessed is God, the Quickener, the All-Powerful, the Most Lofty, the Almighty.

(43) Thereupon were the inmates of heaven and earth stricken with terror, and the entire company of the Concourse on High moaned, except for them who were seized by the Hand of the All-Glorious, invested with the sovereignty of the Most Powerful, the Most Exalted, the Most High – the Hand Whose Finger of decree hath rent asunder the veil before their eyes, and hath delivered them from the company of the ones who doubted the Presence of God, the Sovereign, the Almighty, the All-Glorious.

(44) Say: By God! Every name hath been changed, every thing hath cried out in lamentation, and every soul hath become perturbed, save them who were quickened by the breezes of sanctity that wafted from the precincts of your Lord, the All-Merciful – the breezes that awakened them from their slumber, and cleansed them from the defilement of the infidels.

(45) Alter thou these verses, O Tongue of Eternity, for the ears of men are incapable of hearing that which hath been sent down from the firmament of Thine Essence and the heaven of Thy Will. Impart unto them, in accordance with their capacity, that which Thou dost possess, for this verily is manifest justice.

(46) O people of the earth! Know ye that justice consisteth of innumerable degrees (marātib wa maqāmāt) and incalculable meanings (ma'ānī), yet We have given you only a sprinkling (rashḥ) from this Ocean, that it may cleanse you from the defilement of oppression (danās al-ẓulm) and cause you to be numbered with the sincere ones. Know verily that the essence of justice (aṣl al-'adl) and the source thereof (mabda'ihi) are both embodied in the ordinances prescribed by Him Who is the Manifestation of the Self of God amongst men, if ye be of them that recognize this truth. He doth verily incarnate the highest, the infallible standard of justice (mīzān al-'adl) unto all creation. Were His law to be such as to strike terror into the hearts of all that are in heaven and on earth, that law is naught but manifest

justice. The fears and agitation which the revelation of this law provokes in men's hearts should indeed be likened to the cries of the suckling babe weaned from his mother's milk, if ye be of them that perceive. Were men to discover the motivating purpose of God's Revelation, they would assuredly cast away their fears, and, with hearts filled with gratitude, rejoice with exceeding gladness.

(47) Say: If the autumn winds strip the trees of their vernal adornment (ṭarāz), this is only to allow for the emergence of another adornment. Thus hath it been decreed by the Almighty, the All-Powerful. It is through justice that every one is rendered his due, even as ye behold this in the manifestations of the world of being; it is not as most of the people imagine. Ponder, then, that ye may understand the purpose of what was revealed by the Wondrous Pen.

(48) Say: That justice which causeth the pillars of tyranny to quake and the foundations of misbelief to crumble is the recognition of this Revelation (ḡuhūr) in this resplendent dawn, wherein the Sun of Bahā shineth with manifest sovereignty above the horizon of eternity. And whoso believeth not therein hath abandoned the stronghold of justice (ḡiṣn al-'adl), and his name is recorded among the oppressors in God's mighty and guarded Tablets.<sup>86</sup> Even if a man were to strive until the end that hath no end and bend every possible effort to deal equitably with others, if he should ever hesitate in his recognition of this Cause, he would verily have committed an injustice against his own self, and would be regarded as one of the oppressors.

(49) Bestir yourselves, O people, in anticipation of the days of Divine justice (ayyām al-'adl), for the promised hour is now come. Beware lest ye fail to apprehend its import and be accounted among the erring.

(50) Say: O people! Adorn your bodies with the ornament of justice (ṭarāz al-'adl). Enjoin ye that which God Himself hath enjoined, and be not of them that transgress their bounds.

(51) Say: Should anyone drink even a drop of water in accordance with My command, it verily would be preferable to the acts of worship and devotion offered by the entire creation, for God doth not accept an act from any one unless it be adorned with the ornament of My leave amidst all people.

(52) Act ye, O people, in accordance with what We have bidden you in the Tablets that were sent down from the Kingdom of God, the Help in Peril, the Almighty, the All-Powerful. He whose sight is restored through the sweet savours that waft from the raiment of My Name – the Name of the All-Merciful – shall discern in all things the signs of his Lord, the Just (al-'ādil), the All-Wise.<sup>87</sup>

(53) O Supreme Pen! Raise up the servant who was named 'Riḡā after Nabīl',<sup>88</sup> and cause him to be one of the embodiments of justice in this contingent realm. Verily, his justice is his faith in God, and it is a justice unmatched by any other.

(54) O servant! Harken thou unto the shrill voice of the Pen of the Most High, and gather all men upon the shore of the Most Mighty Ocean, which hath emerged through this Most Ancient and Everlasting Name. Protect thou

the servants of the All-Merciful, lest the blows dealt by the evil suggestions of the manifestations of Satan transform the faces of them that have recognized their Lord. Such is the commandment of thy Lord – the Almighty, the Beneficent – unto thee. Act thou in accordance with what the All-Powerful, the Beauteous, hath bidden thee.

(55) Be thou a barrier between the forces of unbelief and the hosts of the All-Merciful, lest that blasphemous horde transgress their bounds.<sup>89</sup> Thus hath the decree been sent down from the Kingdom of the judgment of thy Lord, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. We, verily, have made thee a means of Our remembrance amidst Our servants, and a fortress for Our creation in this world, that thou mayest shelter them from the darts of doubt and draw their attention to this Announcement, through which the temples of names have trembled, the faces of men have been changed, the earth of vainglory hath been cleft,<sup>90</sup> and the fruit hath fallen from every lofty and wondrous tree. Blessed art thou for having utterly abolished the idol of vain imagination through the power of thy Lord, for having cast off from thy body the robe of blind imitation, and for having adorned it instead with the raiment of Divine Unity through this Name, the Most Holy, the Blessed, the Most Exalted, the All-Encompassing.

(56) Know thou, then, that the People of the Bayān cavilled at their Lord, and rejected the One in Whom they had already believed, and this after We had admonished them in all the Tablets not to let any thing betwixt earth and heaven prevent them from recognizing Me in the hour of Mine advent. Some among them have repudiated Me even as they read My Words, and others glory in the Book that was revealed aforesaid through My power.

(57) Say: If, in this day, the whole earth were to be filled with the knowledge contained in prized and precious books, yet from these books neither the sweet-smelling savours of My command nor the fragrances of My love could be detected, then this knowledge would not be worthy of mention in the Presence of God, thy Lord and the Lord of all worlds.

(58) Say: Woe betide you, O people! The purpose of all that hath descended from the Kingdom of the Bayān was to make mention of Me and celebrate My praise, did ye but know it.

(59) Say: Fie upon you for having broken the Covenant of God and cast it behind your backs! In so doing, ye have returned unto your abode in the nethermost hell.

(60) O My name! I am left alone amidst the people of the Bayān in the absence of the One Who revealed that Book only to make mention of Me, the Wronged One, the Incomparable.

(61) Say: Fear ye God, O people! I swear by Him that the Primal Point breathed not except to make mention of Me, and spoke not unless it was to celebrate My praise, and that the Beloved of His heart was none other than My luminous and resplendent Beauty.

(62) O My name! Know thou that the infidels ascribed oppression unto the One through Whom the embodiments of justice were raised up, and from Whom the light of grace shone forth. Such is the manner in which those oppressors acted against Me. Erelong will the cruelty of these oppressors



change this earth and frustrate the affairs of men. Thus informeth thee the Tongue of Him that speaketh the truth and is the Knower of all things.

(63) The tablets of fire have been spread throughout every land, and the manifestation of Satan passeth you by with a book in hand. Then say: O servants of the All-Merciful! Cast it behind your backs, and turn your faces towards the Word of God, the Mighty, the Wondrous. Verily, nothing that hath ever been revealed from the beginning that hath no beginning, or will ever be sent down from the supreme and glorious firmament, can compare with a single letter of that Word.

(64) O My name! Cleanse My servants of every fragrance that is not of Me, attract them with the wonders of My melodies and My words, and cause them to soar in the atmosphere of My nearness and good-pleasure, that perchance they may attain unto the sanctuary of My glory and the habitation of My grandeur. This is what hath been sent down in truth, and it verily is a thing sent down by thy Lord, the Exalted, the Omniscient.

(65) Do thou forbid them to shed blood. We, verily, have made this unlawful unto them in all the Tablets, yet they have treated the Laws of God with scorn. They have abandoned the stronghold of command, and are accounted among the wayward. The harmful effect of their deeds hath redounded upon the very Root of the Tree; such is the decree, if only thou wouldst hear it. They who dispute with and wage war against men have indeed forsaken the Paradise of Justice, and have been numbered with the oppressors in the sublime and preserved Tablets.

(66) As for them who suffer martyrdom in the path of God in these days, they are the most exalted among the entire creation. They make mention of their Creator openly, and the multitude of their enemies are powerless to prevent them from the remembrance of their Lord, until such time as they are martyred and attain the Object of their desire. And when their souls ascend, the entire company of the Concourse on High shall stand ready to receive them bearing the banners of this Cause. Such is the decree that hath, in truth, been set forth at the behest of the Most Powerful, the All-Wise.

(67) Say: O My Lord and My Master! Thou art the One Who hath planted the trees of justice (ashjār al-'adl) in the Paradise of Thy Revelation and Thy Wisdom. Shelter them, O My God, from the raging storms of fate and the rolling thunder of calamity, that their boughs and their branches may grow and develop beneath the shade of Thy bounty and the canopy of Thy mercy. O My God! Cause them who are the chosen ones amongst Thy creatures and the truly devoted amidst Thy servants to abide beneath the shadow of their leaves. Thou verily art powerful over whatsoever Thou wilt, and Thou verily art the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Merciful.

(68) We have, in truth, created the Paradise of Justice (ridvān al-'adl) through Our strength and power, and have sent it unto Thee with a glorious and wondrous fruit. Taste, then, the fruits of these trees, and rest beneath the shadow of their leaves, that thou mayest be protected from the fire of the infidels.

(69) Thus have We perfected this Bounty unto thee, that thou mayest render thanks unto thy Lord and be accounted among the grateful. Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds.

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## Endnotes

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2. Persian transliteration of the original title. This is how Shoghi Effendi referred to this Tablet in English. Refer to Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1980, 74. Online: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/PDC/pdc-20.html>. (Accessed 15 December 2016.)
3. Arabic transliteration of the original title.
4. In their Persian-language works, a number of eminent Iranian Baha'i scholars – including Abdu'l-Hamid Ishraq-Khavari, Shapour Rassekh, and Muhammad Afnan – have referred to the Tablet by this name.
5. In addition to such Baha'i scholars as Fāḍil Māzindarānī (*Asrār al-āthār*, vol. 4, Tehran: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1973, 323), the recipient of this Tablet himself – Āqā Siyyid Muḥammad-Riḍā Shāhmīrzādī – has also referred to the Tablet by this name. Refer to Āqā Siyyid Muḥammad-Riḍā Shāhmīrzādī, 'Vaqāyī-i-Qal'ih va Shāhmīrzād' ('Events of the Fortress (of Shaykh Tabarsi) and Shāhmīrzād'), n.p., n.d., 96. Reference to the former courtesy of Nosratollah Mohammad-Hosseini, personal communication, 26 December 2016, and reference to the latter courtesy of Omid Ghaemmaghami, personal communication, 1 January 2017.
6. Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day Is Come*, 74. Online: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/PDC/pdc-20.html>. (Accessed 15 December 2016.)
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13. This provisional translation is based on the recension of Baha'u'llah's Paradise of Justice published in the 133 BE printing of *Āthār-i Qalam-i A'lā*, reprinted, H-Bahai: East Lansing, MI, 2000, 4:42–60, <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/baha-A-F/A/aa44/aa44.htm>. See also a vocalized version of the complete Tablet published in 2007 in *Safīni-yi 'Irfān, Daftar-i Dahum*, Darmstadt: Asr-i Jadid 10: 10–15 [http://irfancolloquia.org/pdf/safiniio\\_laaliy-i-irfan.pdf](http://irfancolloquia.org/pdf/safiniio_laaliy-i-irfan.pdf). The last two citations are courtesy of Shahrokh Monjazez, personal communication, 1 January 2017.
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34. Bahā'u'llāh, 'Lawh-i Javad', in *ibid.*, 193. Provisional translation from the original Persian by Dr Nosratollah Mohammad-Hosseini, LL.D. Personal communication, 1 January 2017.
35. *ibid.*, 193. Provisional translation by Adib Masumian.
36. *ibid.*, 193. Provisional translation by Adib Masumian.
37. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 163–164. Online: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/GPB/gpb-11.html>. (Accessed 30 December 2016.)
38. This terminus a quo (based on Shoghi Effendi's clear statement) was pointed out by Shahrokh Monjazei, personal communication, 30 December 2016.
39. Riaz Ghadimi, *Farhang-i Lughāt-i Muntakhaba*, Toronto, 1986 [1988], 418. Incidentally, Ghadimi also has an entry on 'Year of Stress' (sani-yi shidād), which he defines as the year of Bahā'u'llāh's passing (1892 CE). Ghadimi's source for this information is probably a Tablet from Abdu'l-Bahā – addressed to the Baha'is of Ishqabad – to this effect, published in

- Māzindarānī, *Asrār al-Āthār* 4:193. The present authors are grateful to Omid Ghaemmaghami for acquainting them with this work in a personal communication, 1 January 2017.
40. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 168. Online: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/GPB/gpb-11.html>. (Accessed 1 January 2016.)
  41. See W. Schmucker, 'Mubāhala', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd Edition, 7: 276–277. Online: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912-islam\\_SIM\\_5289](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912-islam_SIM_5289). (Accessed 23 December 2016.)
  42. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 178–179. Online: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/GPB/gpb-11.html>. (Accessed 31 December 2016.)
  43. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 163–182, passim. Online: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/GPB/gpb-11.html>. (Accessed 30 December 2016.)
  44. This terminus ad quem was also theorized by Shahrokh Monjazez, personal communication, 30 December 2016.
  45. Shahrokh Monjazez, personal communication, 30 December 2016.
  46. Cole, 'The Garden of Justice'.
  47. Balyuzi, *King of Glory* 237–238. Reference courtesy of Omid Ghaemmaghami, personal communication, 1 January 2017.
  48. Insight courtesy of Omid Ghaemmaghami, personal communication, 2 January 2017.
  49. Balyuzi, *King of Glory*, 238. Reference courtesy of Omid Ghaemmaghami, personal communication, 1 January 2017.
  50. Baha'u'llah, *Kitāb-i-Badī*, Hofheim, Germany: Baha'i Verlag, 2008, 78–79. The aforementioned similarity was mentioned to the present authors by Omid Ghaemmaghami, personal communication, 30 December 2016.
  51. Glenn Cameron and Wendi Momen, *A Basic Baha'i Chronology*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1996, 78. For a more extensive discussion of the *Kitāb-i-Badī*, refer to Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah: Adrianople: 1863–68*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1972, 370–387.
  52. Ishraq-Khavari, s.v. 'Ridvānu'l-'Adl' (Entry 54), in *Ganji-i Shaygan*, 207–209. Online (start of entry): <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/o/GS/gs-207.html>. (Accessed 15 December 2016.)
  53. We know, from Baha'u'llah's own account, that he forbade holy war on the first day of Ridvān (Baghdad, 22 April 1863): 'In a Tablet written some years later [henceforth, 'Ridvān summary Tablet'], Baha'u'llah states that three announcements were made on the first day of Ridvān. First, Baha'u'llah's followers were forbidden to fight to advance or defend their faith' (John Walbridge, *Sacred Acts, Sacred Space, Sacred Time*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1996, 237). This prohibition, however, was delivered orally to an immediate, limited audience – and even though it was reiterated later in the Ridvān summary Tablet, at a time that certainly predated the revelation of the *Lawḥ-i Sultān* (Mīrzā Muḥammad-'Alī yi Zanjānī, the martyred physician, is mentioned as one still living at the time), we do not yet know the extent to which that Tablet was circulated among the Baha'is of that time. It may not have been well-known enough to justify an allusion to it from Baha'u'llah in his *Paradise of Justice*. Beyond all this, one could also argue that prohibiting holy war is not the same as forbidding the shedding of blood under any circumstances, and that the latter was only definitively articulated later in the *Lawḥ-i Sultān*. The Ridvān summary Tablet was revealed in Persian, and has been published in full in INBA (Iranian National Baha'i Archives) vol. 44, p. 225. Available online here: <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/diglib/INBA/INBAo44.pdf>. (Accessed 1 January 2017.) See now an authorized translation in *Days of Remembrance: Selections from the Writings of Baha'u'llah for Baha'í Holy Days*, Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 2016, vol. 38(9), pars. 1–2.
  54. This theory originates with Shahrokh Monjazez, independent scholar, Vancouver, British Columbia. (Personal communication, 26 December 2016.) Monjazez's dating argument has been confirmed by another independent scholar, Dr Nosratollah Mohammad-Hosseini, LL.D., of Surrey, British Columbia, personal communication, 28 December 2016.
  55. Baha'u'llah, 'Nāṣiru'd-Dīn Shāh', *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 2002, 110 (par. 213).
  56. Cameron and Momen, *A Basic Baha'i Chronology*, 78.

57. Necati Alkan, 'Bahā'u'llāh's *Lawḥ-i Ishtāq* (Tablet of the Interrogation) and the Murder of Three Azalis in Akka in 1872'. Presented at the Irfan Colloquia Session #138, Centre for Baha'i Studies: Acuto, Italy, July 5–8, 2016. Online: [http://irfancolloquia.org/138/alkan\\_istintaq](http://irfancolloquia.org/138/alkan_istintaq). (Accessed 29 December 2016.)
58. This theory originates with Shahrokh Monjazez, independent scholar, Vancouver, British Columbia. (Personal communication, 26 December 2016.) Monjazez's dating argument has been confirmed by another independent scholar, Dr Nosratollah Mohammad-Hosseini, LL.D., of Surrey, British Columbia, personal communication, 28 December 2016.
59. Christina Alm-Arvius, *Figures of Speech*, Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur, 2003, 130.
60. Afnan, *Majmū'i-yi Maqālāt* 627.
61. Momen, *Baha'i Communities* 247–249.
62. Momen, 'A Chronicle of the Babi-Baha'i Communities in Sangsar and Shahmirzad' 89.
63. Momen, *Baha'i Communities* 277.
64. Momen, 'Chronicle' 90.
65. Momen, *Baha'i Communities* 273.
66. Momen, 'Chronicle' 93.
67. Momen, *Baha'i Communities* 306.
68. 'Azīzu'llāh Sulaymānī, *Maṣābīḥ-i Hidāyat* 8:34; Muḥammad-'Alī Malik-Khusravī, *Tārīkh-i Shuhadāy-i 'Amr* 317–326; Fāḍil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-i Zuhūru'l-Haqq*, Digitally republished, East Lansing, Michigan: H-Bahai, 2001, vol. 8(2), 801 <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/are-print/vol12/tzh8b/TZHV08b.pdf>.
69. Muhammad Afnan, *Majmū'i-yi Maqālāt* 624–625. Translation from the original Persian by Adib Masumian.
70. *ibid.* 625. Translation from the original Persian by Adib Masumian.
71. *ibid.* 627.
72. Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day Is Come* 74.
73. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 168. Online: <http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/GPB/gpb-11.html>. (Accessed 2 January 2017.)
74. *ibid.* 176.
75. *ibid.* 163–182.
76. *ibid.* 179, 181.
77. Provisional translation by Nader Saiedi (of Baha'u'llah, in Fāḍil Māzandarānī, *Asrār al-Āthār*, 4:22, in *idem*, *Logos and Civilization* 242. See also pp. 243–247 and *passim*).
78. Baha'u'llah himself alludes to this fact in the *Lawḥ-i Sulṭān* where he notes that, in previous Tablets, he has defined 'rendering assistance unto God' (nuṣrat) in a nonviolent way. Refer to Baha'u'llah, *Nāṣiru'd-Dīn Shāh*, 107–110 (pars. 208–213). Two important articles that explore the way in which the concept of jihād has been defined in the Baha'i framework are also worthy of mention. The first is Sasha Dehghani, 'The Birth of a Monotheistic Religion in Modernity: On Jihad and Martyrdom in the Baha'i Faith', published in Sasha Dehghani and Silvia Horsch Al-Saad (eds.), *Martyrdom in the Modern Middle East* Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2014, 15–32. Dehghani (p. 26) translates the very same statement of Baha'u'llah that Saiedi has translated above (see the previous footnote) so: 'the use of the sword is abolished in this revelation' (sayf dar īn zuhūr murtafi' ast). The second is Todd Lawson, 'The Baha'i Tradition: The Return of Joseph and the Peaceable Imagination', published in John Renard (ed.), *Fighting Words: Religion, Violence, and the Interpretation of Sacred Texts*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012, 135–157. The present authors are grateful to Omid Ghaemmaghami for acquainting them with both of these works in a personal communication, 4 January 2017.
79. Baha'u'llah, *The Tabernacle of Unity*, Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 2006, 54.
80. Udo Schaefer, *Bahá'í Ethics in Light of Scripture: An Introduction*, vol. 2: Virtues and Divine Commandments, Oxford: George Ronald, 2009.
81. *ibid.* 429–491, et seq.

82. Published in *Safīni-yi 'Irfān, Daftar-i Dahum*, Darmstadt, Germany: 'Aṣr-i Jadīd, 2007, 187–201. Available online at: [http://irfancoolloquia.org/pdf/safini\\_o\\_rassekh\\_justice.pdf](http://irfancoolloquia.org/pdf/safini_o_rassekh_justice.pdf). (Accessed 31 December 2016.) The present authors are grateful to Omid Ghaemmaghami for acquainting them with this work in a personal communication, 30 December 2016.
83. Muhammad Afnan, *Majmū'i-yi Maqālāt* 626 notes that this is likely a reference to Iblis (Satan), particularly as his downfall is depicted in Qur'ān 7:11–18, and is probably also applicable to Mīrzā Yaḥyā.
84. A reference to Qur'ān 22:2.
85. Cf. Qur'ān 2:210.
86. An authorized translation of parts of this paragraph ('Say: ... this Revelation', 'And whoso ... guarded Tablets') has been included in a Memorandum dated 7 August 2006 from the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice and published in Schaefer, *Bahā'i Ethics*, 2:433 and 2:434 respectively.
87. This appears to be a reference to Jacob, whose sight was restored when the garment of Joseph was cast over his face. Cf. Qur'ān 12:96.
88. A reference to Āqā Siyyid Muḥammad-Riḍā Shāhmīrzādī, the recipient of this Tablet. 'Nabīl' and 'Muḥammad' share the same value in the Abjad system, and the two names are often used synonymously in the Bahā'ī writings.
89. Cf. Qur'ān 18:94, 21:96.
90. Cf. Micah 1:3–4 and Qur'ān 50:44.



# Book Review

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Book Review. English language. doi: 10.1386/bsr.20.135/5

***The Maxwells of Montreal, Vol 1. The Early Years 1870–1922, Violette Nakhjavani with the assistance of Bahiyyih Nakhjavani (2011)***

Oxford: George Ronald, xx, 422, illus., 23.4 x 15.6 cm

ISBN: 9780853985518 0853985518 (hbk) £25.95 / \$49.95

Kindle version: ASIN: B01C4R5CJK US\$9.00.

***The Maxwells of Montreal, Vol 2. Middle Years 1923–1937, Late Years 1937–1952, Violette Nakhjavani with the assistance of Bahiyyih Nakhjavani (2012)***

Oxford: George Ronald, 442, illus., 23.4 x 15.6 cm

ISBN: 9780853985617 853985617 (hbk) £25.95 / \$49.95

<http://www.grbooks.com>

Reviewed by **Graham Hassall**, Victoria University, Wellington

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The two-volume *Maxwells of Montreal* recounts the lives of three members of one family, whose contributions to the growth and consolidation of the Baha'i Faith in the first decades of the twentieth century were remarkable when considered individually, and all the more remarkable when considered as a collectivity. The Maxwells were, of course, May Maxwell (née Bolles – 1870–1940), her husband William Sutherland Maxwell (1874–1952) and their only child, Mary Maxwell (aka 'Amatul-Baha Ruhiyyih Khanum, 1910–2000).

In his *Historical Dictionary of the Bahá'í Faith*,<sup>1</sup> Adamson describes May Maxwell as 'Disciple of 'Abdu'l-Baha; Martyr; Spiritual mother of France; Spiritual Mother of Canada'.<sup>2</sup> Mary Maxwell, indexed under her later title and name 'Amatul-Baha Ruhiyyih Khanum, is described as 'Wife of Shoghi Rabbani/Shoghi Effendi, Hand of the Cause of God',<sup>3</sup> and William Sutherland Maxwell as 'Hand of the Cause of God'.<sup>4</sup> 'These three shining lights', Nakhjavani explains in her Foreword, 'were members of one family, bonded in their love for the Covenant and for each other, committed through years of uninterrupted service to the promotion and establishment of the Baha'i Faith worldwide' (I:p.vii).

At 864 pages, including bibliography and indices, this two-volume joint biography by Violette Nakhjavani is a collaborative, monumental, but far from definitive achievement. Violette Nakhjavani was, of course, Ruhiyyih Khanum's close companion for many decades, both having becoming resident in Haifa. The assistance of Nell Golden, Bahiyyih Nakhjavani and other collaborators is also acknowledged. *Maxwells* includes, in addition to Nakhjavani's text, additional biographic and autobiographic material

written by Ruhiyyih Khanum across the decades, as she struggled to write her mother's life-story (ibid. pp.1–29).

Although primarily focused on Baha'i-related events, *Maxwells* avoids the 'biographical zoning' explained by van den Hoonard,<sup>5</sup> which might privilege 'Baha'i-related' activities at the expense of all others. Indeed, *Maxwells* gives significant attention to Sutherland Maxwell's career in architecture, especially as it intersected with his family life and Baha'i service, but stopping well short of attempting a fulsome or critical account of what was a stellar career.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, although admittedly a mere '... drop in the ocean' (l:p.xx), the 3,000 letters drawn on from an estimated 60,000 (not fully catalogued) items comprising the Maxwell Literary Estate, offer extraordinary insight to the psyche and soul of the three principal subjects of the two volumes. They tell, suggests Nakhjavani, '... a magical tale' (l:p.xii).

North American-born May Maxwell encountered the Baha'i Faith whilst in France. Having met and then devoted herself to assisting Abdu'l-Bahá, she became the Faith's chief exponent in France. After marrying the Canadian William Sutherland Maxwell, she became one of its leading exponents in both Canada and the United States. Sutherland Maxwell was an architect of considerable talent who supported his wife's Baha'i activities whilst focusing for the most part on professional and artistic interests. At the request of Shoghi Effendi, he designed the superstructure for the Shrine of the Bab on Mt Carmel, Haifa. Whilst a '...famous, nearly hagiographic figure in Baha'i world history', Crosson's 2013 dissertation<sup>7</sup> notes, May Maxwell, who was '...born in New Jersey, grew up between France, America and Britain, and lived most of her adult life in Montreal ...' was virtually unknown in mainstream Canadian history, and '...mentioned only in passing as the wife of well-known *Beaux Arts* architect William Sutherland Maxwell'.<sup>8</sup> Mary, the Maxwells' only child, precociously talented but only informally schooled, dedicated her life to Baha'i service both before and after her marriage to Shoghi Effendi in 1937.

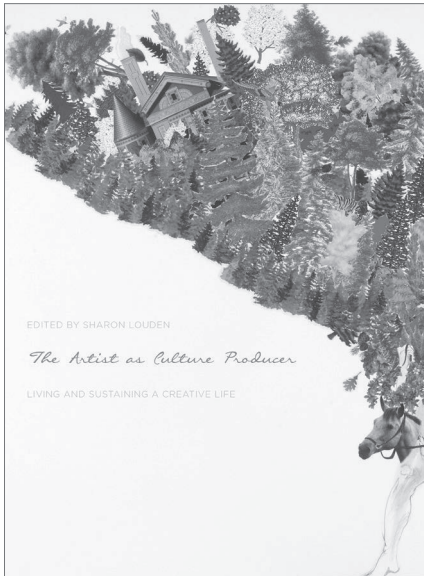
Although Ruhiyyih Khanum had produced some biographic notes, her published literary output focused on her husband Shoghi Effendi, head of the Baha'i Faith from 1921 until his passing in November 1957.<sup>9</sup> Although her activities across seven decades are reported in Baha'i newsletters and memoirs,<sup>10</sup> these only now culminate in biographic treatment, albeit only up to the first years of her marriage, and new life in Haifa. Indeed, Nakhjavani is forthright in explaining that *Maxwells* focuses on the public life-stories rather than the private. Ruhiyyih Khanum had steadfastly abstained from writing of Shoghi Effendi's private life, and this abstention continues in relation to all three subjects of this biography. Thus Nakhjavani notes 'It has been a challenge to preserve privacy while being true to facts, as well as to steer clear of hagiography. But we hope that if readers can hear the voices, glimpse the faces, and become the recipients of the actual words written to each other by the members of the Maxwell family, some measure of balance may have been achieved' (l:pp.xiii–xiv).

The lives of the individual members of the Maxwell family were so intimately and intricately linked that a group portrait, such as is offered in *The Maxwells of Montreal*, is a satisfying, indeed inspiring, biographic enterprise.

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## Endnotes

1. Hugh C. Adamson, *Historical Dictionary of the Bahá'í Faith*, 2nd ed. Lanham MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006.
2. Adamson, *Dictionary* 306.
3. Ibid. 19.
4. Ibid. 309.
5. Will C. van den Hoonaard, 'Biographical Zoning and Baha'i Biographical Writing: The Case of Rose Henderson', *The Bahai Studies Review*, 12, 2004, 50–66.
6. See, for example, Canadian Architecture Collection, McGill University 'The Architecture of Edward & W.S. Maxwell: The Canadian Legacy' (2001), <http://cac.mcgill.ca/maxwells/default.htm>.
7. Selena M. Crosson, *Searching for May Maxwell: Bahá'í Millennial Feminism, Transformative Identity & Globalism in the New World Order. Shaping Women's Role in Early Bahá'í Culture 1898–1940*, Ph.D Thesis (History) University of Saskatchewan, 2013. <https://ecommons.usask.ca/handle/10388/ETD-2013-10-1145>.
8. Crosson, *Searching* 18.
9. Rúhiyyih Rabbānī, *Twenty-Five Years of the Guardianship*, London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1947; *The Priceless Pearl*, London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1969; *The Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith*, London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988. (Abridged version of *The Priceless Pearl* with many additional plates.)
10. Violette Nakhjavani, *The Great African Safari: The Travels of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum in Africa, 1969–73*, Oxford: George Ronald, 2002.



## The Artist as Culture Producer

Living and Sustaining a Creative Life

Edited by Sharon Loudon



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When *Living and Sustaining a Creative Life* was published in 2013, it became an immediate sensation. Edited by **Sharon Loudon**, the book brought together 40 essays by working artists, each sharing their own story of how to sustain a creative practice that contributes to the ongoing dialogue in contemporary art. The book struck a nerve – how do artists really make it in the world today? Loudon took the book on a 62-stop book tour, selling thousands of copies and building a movement along the way.

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# Research Note

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 Miscellaneous. English language. doi: 10.1386/bsr.20.139/7

## Published English-Language Letters of Shoghi Effendi During the 1920s

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### Abstract

*During the course of his thirty-six year ministry (1922–57), Shoghi Effendi personally wrote an enormous number of letters, and in addition directed one or other of his secretaries to write numerous more on his behalf – to which he normally added a personal postscript.<sup>1</sup> Most of these letters remain unpublished and there has as yet been no comprehensive study of even the published letters. What follows is a brief description of what is currently available of his English-language letters during the period 1922–30. Letters and extracts from letters appearing in periodicals such as Bahá'í News, or in compilations such as Lights of Guidance, are not included, although I do refer briefly to some unpublished letters. There is as yet no English-language study of his Persian letters.*

### Keywords

Shoghi Rabbani  
 Shoghi Effendi  
 Guardian of the Cause  
 Baha'i Faith  
 secretariat  
 Baha'i World Centre  
 correspondence

### Sources

There are presently six compilations of Shoghi Effendi's letters which include letters from the 1920s.<sup>2</sup> Of particular importance are *Bahá'í Administration* (BA; first published 1928) and *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (WOB; first published 1938), both of which include major letters to the North American Baha'is (i.e. of the United States and Canada), as well as letters which were addressed to the English-speaking Baha'i world in general. Various national compilations have appeared more recently:

- to Australasia (predominantly Australia and New Zealand): *Messages to the Antipodes: Communications from Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'í Communities of Australasia* (AUS; 1997). This volume incorporates letters from two earlier compilations (*Arohanui: Letters from Shoghi Effendi to New Zealand* (1982), and *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, 1923–1957* (1970)).
- to Britain ('the British Isles', including what is now the Irish Republic): *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community* (UD; 1981).
- to Germany and Austria (including a few letters to Baha'is in German-speaking Switzerland): *The Light of Divine Guidance: The Messages of the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of Germany and Austria* (LDG; 2 vols. 1982–85).

- to India and Burma: *Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent* (MIS; 1995). This substantially supersedes an earlier compilation, *Dawn of a New Day* (DND; 1970), including far more letters than DND (particularly for Burma), as well as presenting the letters in a more complete form (MIS includes the beginning and ending of letters as well as the names of certain individuals all of which are omitted from DND). There are a few passages which are present in DND but are omitted from MIS, however.
- and to Canada: *Messages to Canada* (MC; 1999). This is the second edition which replaced an earlier edition which only contained a few letters, nearly all from a later period.

In addition to these compilations, there are copies of letters from Shoghi Effendi to the Baha'is in Japan in the publication *Japan Will Turn Ablaze*.<sup>3</sup>

The various compilations vary considerably in terms of their completeness and in the way in which they present the letters. The most limited here are the letters to the North American Baha'is (BA; WOB), which include only those letters written directly by Shoghi Effendi to the national spiritual assembly, the Baha'i Convention delegates, or the American Baha'is or the Baha'is of the West as a collectivity. Letters to individuals and on behalf of Shoghi Effendi are not included. Unlike the other compilations, both of these books have subheadings (and in the case of WOB, titles) added by the compiler, Horace Holley, 'for the convenience of the reader' and with Shoghi Effendi's permission as Holley noted in his introduction to WOB.<sup>4</sup> The spelling in these two volumes has also been changed from the letters' original British-English to American-English.

By contrast, the letters to Australasia (AUS) appear to include copies of all available messages to the region in their complete form, with the names of individual recipients being given as well as the opening salutations and secretaries' names. As in the other more complete compilations mentioned here (apart from MC), Shoghi Effendi's own words are italicized and the words of cablegrams capitalized and given in their original form without added punctuation or implied words. The British, German, Indian-Burmese and Canadian letters all include letters to individuals as well as to institutions as well as letters written on Shoghi Effendi's behalf. None of them appear to be as complete as the letters to Australasia, however. The letters to Japan are similar. Again, whilst the letters to Canada (like those to Australasia) include the secretaries' names, the rest do not (see further, below).

In the case of the letters to Germany and Austria, it is known that there was a massive loss of important Baha'i documents during the period when the Faith was banned in Nazi Germany (1937–45) and the country devastated by war. For this reason, whilst the compilers of *Light of Divine Guidance* included 'all extant letters and telegrams' to the national spiritual assembly and to the institutions of the assembly (summer schools, national conventions and conferences, etc.), they also felt it useful to add other letters such as those to the oldest local Baha'i communities and to individual national assembly members in order to reconstruct 'certain connecting links' which were vital to an understanding of the early development of the German-Austrian Baha'i community.<sup>5</sup> It is intended that other messages, only now found in German-translation, will be translated back into English at a later date and published.

In the British case, the British Baha'i national spiritual assembly noted in its prefatory remarks to *Unfolding Destiny* that 'all the sources' then

available to the assembly had been utilized in the preparation of the book, and opined that ‘no gaps of major significance’ had been left.<sup>6</sup> Selection had been made as to what to publish, however, as was made clear by the compiler (Philip Hainsworth, himself a veteran British Baha’i and a long-time member of the national assembly) in his introduction to the book. Specifically, letters written on Shoghi Effendi’s behalf were only included if they either carried a postscript in Shoghi Effendi’s handwriting or included turns of phrase which indicated that the secretary was writing directly at Shoghi Effendi’s instruction. Some sections referring to personal matters were deliberately excluded (with the omissions being indicated by ellipses).

In both the British and Indian-Burmese cases, some messages appear to have been lost or mislaid. Thus, the British national spiritual assembly minutes refer to two messages in October 1927 for which no text had been found,<sup>7</sup> and in several instances, the minutes also include partial messages which seem to exist only as extracts.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in November 1926, Shoghi Effendi referred to a ‘vitaly important’ general message to all the Baha’is of India and Burma which was being brought to the national assembly, and which should be disseminated to the Baha’is,<sup>9</sup> but the letter itself is not included in the compilation of letters to India and Burma, nor is there any note as to what it might have been. (It may not have been included because it was in Persian, of course, but this is not stated.)

## Numbers

From the main compilations we have a total of 298 separate messages, 17 of which exist in more than one copy (15 of the UD letters and 2 of the AUS letters are also found in BA). By area, 78 of the messages are to North America (51 in BA, 25 in MC and 2 in WOB); 54 to Australasia (AUS); 34 to Germany (LDG); 76 to India and Burma (MIS); and 73 to Britain (UD). The book of sources for Japanese Baha’i history has a further 19 messages.

Of the messages in the main compilations, 96 were letters written by Shoghi Effendi himself (SO in Table 1 below); 43 were telegrams (SC); 131 were letters written by a secretary to which Shoghi Effendi added a postscript (AS); and 28 were letters written by a secretary without a postscript

Type	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	Totals
SO	11	30	9	18	10	7	4	6	1	96
SC	1	4	3	7	11	5	5	5	2	43
AS	0	1	9	17	28	22	17	20	17	131
AO	0	5	5	6	2	0	2	5	3	28
<b>Total</b>	12	40	26	48	51	34	28	36	23	298

Key:

SO Letter by Shoghi Effendi only.

SC Cable from Shoghi Effendi.

AS Main letter by an assistant, but with a postscript added by Shoghi Effendi.

AO Letter written only by an assistant with no added postscript by Shoghi Effendi.

Table 1: Messages from Shoghi Effendi by year and type.



<i>Year</i>	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	Totals
<b><i>Secy.</i></b>	0	6	14	23	30	22	19	25	20	159
<b><i>Total</i></b>	7	31	24	42	48	29	28	31	22	262
<b><i>Secy %</i></b>	0	19.4	58.3	54.8	62.5	75.9	67.9	80.6	90.9	60.7

Table 2: *Percentage of messages written on Shoghi Effendi's behalf by year (AUS, LDG, MC, MIS, UD only).*

(AO). The British compilation (UD) also contains 9 extracts from letters by Shoghi Effendi or his secretary to the national assembly, as well as extracts from 11 letters to individuals, but these are not included in my analysis. By year, the largest number of messages are from 1925 and 1926 (48, 47), and the fewest from 1922 (12).

It is of note that from 1924 onwards, letters written on Shoghi Effendi's behalf by one of his secretaries (whether with or without his postscript) represent a major part of the messages. Taking only the compilations which include letters written by secretaries (i.e. AUS, LDG, MIS, UD) (Table 2), we find that overall a total of 61% of the messages were penned by secretaries, rising to over 90% in 1930.

### Shoghi Effendi's Absences from Haifa

We know that Shoghi Effendi was both emotionally devastated by the death of his grandfather and was initially overwhelmed by the sheer volume of work he felt he had to accomplish as Guardian.<sup>10</sup> Undoubtedly, his earliest months as Guardian were particularly stressful: still in a state of shock from 'Abdu'l-Baha's death, he had to establish what his new appointment as Guardian entailed; rally the Baha'is throughout the world; deal with immediate crises affecting the Baha'is in Palestine and Iraq and attend to a mass of correspondence. One result of these stresses was a series of withdrawals from Haifa in the early 1920s, often spent in solitary walks in the Swiss Alps. Later, as Shoghi Effendi learnt how to cope with the tremendous amount of work he expected himself to do, a pattern developed of sustained and lengthy hours of work whilst he was in Haifa, broken by summer holidays in which he would gain some escape from the pressures of office.

Arriving back in Haifa from England on 29 December 1921, soon after 'Abdu'l-Baha's death, and as yet unaware of his appointment as Guardian, he was so grief-stricken at his bereavement that he could hardly walk and was confined to bed for several days. 'Abdu'l-Baha's *Will and Testament* announcing Shoghi Effendi's appointment was first read aloud to senior family members on 3 January 1922, and we may take this date as marking the official beginning of the Guardianship. Over the next three months, Shoghi Effendi began an exhausting programme of activity, working long hours and resting little. Much was accomplished, including a meeting with various prominent Baha'is from around the world to discuss the future development of the Faith (February-March), and Shoghi Effendi's first instructions on the necessity of establishing local and national spiritual assemblies (see in particular his letter of 5 March).<sup>11</sup> By April, however, the strain of his

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	Jan	Feb	Mch	Apr	May	Jun	Jly	Aug	Spt	Oct	Nov	Dec
1922				-5								15-
1923						-20					14-	
1924		-23							23-			
1925						-15			[28]	15 <sup>2</sup> -		
1926	-23	[15]	3-		-20	28-						
1927					-27		14-				-28	
1928	5-				-25	[22]		(21)		10-		
1929				-11	25-		-8	20-	-20	20-		
1930							-4		19-			

Table 3: Shoghi Effendi's possible absences from Haifa.

position was affecting his ability to work, and he announced his decision to withdraw from Haifa for a while, with the hope of gaining 'health, strength, self-confidence and spiritual energy' so as to be able to resume his duties.<sup>12</sup>

For 1922, we have an exact date for Shoghi Effendi's withdrawal from Haifa: he left Haifa on 5 April, entrusting the overall management of the Faith into the hands of his aunt, Bahiyyih Khanum.<sup>13</sup> He returned to Haifa on 15 December, and immediately set to work.<sup>14</sup> His first absence then was of over eight months (April-mid December 1922). We do not yet have a chronology of Shoghi Effendi's absences from Haifa after 1922, but the letters already published enable us to construct a very provisional record of his periods of work in Haifa (see Table 3). More research is needed to establish a more exact chronology.

For 1923, we have a record of letters written personally by Shoghi Effendi from January to 2 June,<sup>15</sup> this period of activity then coming to a sudden halt, his secretary writing on 20 June that Shoghi Effendi had left Haifa that very morning, the combination of shock, fatigue from overwork, and malaria (then prevalent in Haifa during the summer months) having affected him badly, such that his family had entreated him to take a holiday.<sup>16</sup> He appears to have returned to Haifa in November after over four months' absence, his outward correspondence resuming on 14 November.<sup>17</sup>

For 1924, we have a record of letters from January through to 23 February, and thereafter nothing from Shoghi Effendi personally until 23 September, a seeming absence of seven months.<sup>18</sup> Two letters from a secretary (dated 11 June and 16 July) affirm that he was away from Haifa in the summer, but was sending instructions in response to forwarded mail.<sup>19</sup>

For 1925, we have a record of letters from January through to 15 June, and thereafter, apart from one brief extract from a letter dated 28 September, nothing until 26 October, a letter of 29 October affirming that Shoghi Effendi had returned to Haifa two weeks previously after a four-month sojourn in Europe, his cousin Soheil later writing that he had accompanied Shoghi Effendi during his vacation, and that the mail had been sent over to them.<sup>20</sup>

For 1926, there is a reference to Shoghi Effendi experiencing chronic exhaustion necessitating his leaving Haifa for a short rest in February and/or March. This fits in with the record of letters, which extends from the previous year up to 23 January and then recommences on 4 March,

suggesting a possible break between these dates.<sup>21</sup> Shoghi Effendi may also have taken a second break of about a month later in the year, as indicated by a gap in the record of outgoing correspondence between 20 May and 28 June.<sup>22</sup>

In 1927, Shoghi Effendi appears to have taken two definite breaks, with gaps in the record of letters between 27 May and 14 July, and between 28 November and 5 January 1928.<sup>23</sup> There may also have been a third gap earlier in the year, between 20 February and 22 March.<sup>24</sup>

For 1928, we have a record of letters from January through to 25 May, and then only two letters through to 10 October, after which a regular succession of letters resumes.<sup>25</sup> Of these two intervening letters, one, dated 22 June, has no postscript from Shoghi Effendi, and so does not necessarily indicate his presence in Haifa, but the second, dated 21 August, does – although it may have been forwarded to him of course.<sup>26</sup>

For 1929, there are two short breaks in the record of letters, either or both of which may indicate a period of absence from Haifa: (i) between 11 April and 25 May; and (ii) between 8 July and 20 August.<sup>27</sup> There is also a possible longer gap in the period after 20 September and before 20 November.<sup>28</sup> Part at least of this last break is confirmed by a letter from Shoghi Effendi's secretary on 29 November, which refers to what is implied as the Guardian's recent return to Haifa after a refreshing absence,<sup>29</sup> but it is not clear when this break began. This is also the time in which Shoghi Effendi made the first of his journeys through Africa, sailing from England in September, and then travelling mostly overland from Cape Town to Cairo.<sup>30</sup> Shoghi Effendi also produced at least one major letter in the interim (popularly known as 'The Spiritual Significance of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkar', dated 25 October),<sup>31</sup> but we do not know where this was composed, and it may well have been drafted away from Haifa. There is also a telegram from this intervening period, dated 27 September, but as it is signed by Bahiyyih Khanum on Shoghi Effendi's behalf, it is likely to have been composed away from Haifa.<sup>32</sup> We also know that Shoghi Effendi was ill enough in December 1929 to be kept in bed for about a month. By 6 January 1930, however, he was 'quite recovered' and 'actively at work'.<sup>33</sup>

For 1930, we have a record of letters from January through to 4 July, correspondence seemingly resuming on 14 August, suggesting an exceptionally short break – unless the August letter was written during Shoghi Effendi's holiday. There are several published letters from 19 and 20 September, two with postscripts from Shoghi Effendi, implying that he was back in Haifa by that date.<sup>34</sup>

### Shoghi Effendi's Secretaries

There is as yet no available listing of Shoghi Effendi's secretaries and secretarial help, and the omission of the secretaries' names from most of the published sources means that it is not yet possible to make a definitive list. Three of my sources do include secretaries' names, however, and I have made a provisional listing on the basis of these. Given the small number of letters involved (80 for the whole period), the possibility of significant omissions or distortion is very real. The listing only covers the English-language letters.

My main and most important source are the letters listed as having been received by the Baha'is in Australasia. During the 1922–30 period, some

54 communications are listed. Of these, 38 were written partly or wholly by 6 individuals writing on Shoghi Effendi's behalf. These were as follows:

1. Azizullah S. Bahadur ('Azizu'lláh S. Bahádur). Two letters (June 1923; October 1924).
2. Soheil (Sohayl) Afnán (Shoghi Effendi's cousin). Thirteen letters (five intermittently between December 1924 and May 1926; eight between May 1927 and March 1930).
3. John E. Esslemont. Six letters (April–May 1925).
4. Ruh-Anguiz (Rúhangíz) Rabbání (Shoghi Effendi's sister). Two letters (March & August 1926).
5. Ruhi (Rúhí) Afnán (Shoghi Effendi's cousin). Twelve letters (eleven between March and November 1926; one in August 1930).
6. Ethel Rosenberg. Three letters (January–February 1927).

A second source are the letters in the E.T. Hall collection (25 in our period).<sup>35</sup> Of these, 23 were written on Shoghi Effendi's behalf. These comprise: 8 by Ruhi (one in February 1923; 6 between November 1925 and November 1926; and 1 in October 1930); 3 by Ruh-Anguiz ('RR') (April 1923; August and October 1927); 10 by Soheil (1 in April 1924; and 9 between November 1927 and January 1930); and 1 each by Azizullah (February 1925) and Rosenberg (December 1926).

A third source are the letters to the Canadian Baha'is (25 letters, 19 of which were written by secretaries. These comprise: 2 written by Azizullah (February and October 1924); 6 by Ruhi (January and August 1926, April 1927, October 1928, June 1929 and January 1930); 2 by Rosenberg (March and May 1927); 1 by Ruh-Anguiz ('RR') (August 1927); and 7 by Soheil (between October 1927 and September 1929).

Combining the three lists, we get the following provisional periodization:

1. 1922: no secretaries.
2. February 1923–February 1925: various secretaries (Ruhi, Ruh-Anguiz, Soheil, Azizullah).
3. April–May 1925: Esslemont.
4. November 1925–November 1926: mostly Ruhi (some help from Soheil and Ruh-Anguiz).
5. December 1926–May 1927: Rosenberg.
6. May 1927–March 1930: mostly Soheil (some help from Ruh-Anguiz and Ruhi).
7. August–December 1930: Ruhi.

Looking at later letters in the 1930s, we may note that Ruhi appears to have continued to be Shoghi Effendi's main secretary until May 1933 (with some help from Soheil, Husayn Rabbání (Shoghi Effendi's brother), and Mehranguiz [Mihrangíz Rabbání] (Shoghi Effendi's other sister)), after which Husayn took over the work (until January 1941).

This listing suggests a prolonged period of change and uncertainty from the time of Shoghi Effendi's accession until May 1927, with Shoghi Effendi mostly getting what help he could from various family members as well as from Azizullah Bahadur ('Abdu'l-Baha's English-language secretary after

Shoghi Effendi had moved to Europe in 1920). Esslemont and Rosenberg (both native English speakers) were also each able to provide a few months' assistance. Ruhi helped in 1925-26, before other matters demanded his attention. From May 1927 onwards, the situation seems to have stabilized, with three successive secretaries acting as his assistants for lengthy periods of time (Soheil and Ruhi for almost three years each, and Husayn almost eight years).

### Suggested citation

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### Endnotes

1. By 2013, the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa had collected over 22,000 unique items written by Shoghi Effendi (presumably including letters written on his behalf), and had successfully authenticated most of them (Memorandum of the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice dated 6 June 2013). An earlier memorandum noted that this material amounted to over 5 million words (Memorandum of the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice dated 1 October 2010). See [http://bahai-library.com/uhj\\_numbers\\_sacred\\_writings#2013](http://bahai-library.com/uhj_numbers_sacred_writings#2013).
2. *Bahá'í Administration*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Wilmette IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1945 [BA]; *Messages to the Antipodes: Communications from Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'í Communities of Australasia*, ed. Graham Hassall, Mona Vale: Baha'i Publications Australia, 1997 [AUS] (incorporates material from *Arohanui: Letters from Shoghi Effendi to New Zealand* (1982), and *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, 1923–1957* (1970)); *Messages to Canada*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Thornhill, Ont.: Baha'i Canada Publications, 1999 [MC]; *Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent, 1923–1957*, comp. I. F. Muhajir, New Delhi: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1995 [MIS] (incorporates material from *Dawn of a New Day*, 1970); *The Light of Divine Guidance: The Messages of the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of Germany and Austria*, 2 vols., Langenhain: Baha'i Verlag, 1982–85 [LDG]; *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community*, London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1981 [UD]; *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, rev. ed. Wilmette IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1965 [WOB].
3. B.R. Sims comp. *Japan Will Turn Ablaze! Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Letters of Shoghi Effendi, and Historical Notes About Japan*. [Tokyo:] Baha'i Publishing Trust, Japan, 1974.
4. WOB v.
5. LDG 1, 5.
6. UD xi.
7. UD 71.

8. UD 72, 88–89.
9. MIS 32.
10. See Peter Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions: From Messianic Shi'ism to a World Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 115–17 and this issue, Shoghi Rabbani as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Secretary, 1918–20.
11. BA 17–25.
12. *Star of the West*, 13(4), 1922, 81–82; BA 25. *Bahá'í Administration* gives an approximate date of May 1922 for this letter (BA 25), but this is incorrect – Shoghi Effendi had already left Haifa. The date given in *Star of the West* (April) is likely to be the correct one, and is supported by Rúhiyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl*, London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1969, 57.
13. Rabbani 57; *Star* 13(4), 1922, 81–83.
14. Rabbani 63–64; see BA 26–27; UD 9–11; LDG 1: 7–8.
15. MIS 7–8.
16. MIS 8.
17. BA 50–52.
18. BA 60–65; UD 27.
19. UD 24–27.
20. AUS 34–35; UD 421; LDG 1: 25–26; MIS 19–20; AUS 37.
21. There is a letter from a secretary dated 15 February, but as it does not have a postscript from Shoghi Effendi, it may well have been written in his absence (LDG 2: 8–9).
22. Rabbani 97–98; UD 45–47; AUS 38–39; UD 53–54; UD 54.
23. BA 134–37; MIS 37, replying to a letter of 20 May; UD 72, a telegram; UD 72.
24. BA123–28; UD 68, a telegram. There is an extract from what appears to be a secretary's letter dated 26 February in the British national spiritual assembly minutes (UD 68), but given its fragmentary nature it cannot be taken as proof of Shoghi Effendi's presence in Haifa.
25. UD 71; MIS 44–45.
26. MIS 43–44.
27. LDG 2: 12–13; AUS 55; MIS 55–56.
28. MC 38; LDG 2: 15.
29. UD 87.
30. Rabbani 180.
31. BA 180–87.
32. UD 86–87.
33. MIS 59.
34. MIS 65; AUS 58–59; UD 90; MIS 65–67.
35. Edward Theodore Hall (1880–1962) was a leading early Manchester Baha'i. His papers were collected by his daughter Lucy who kindly allowed me extensive access to them before sending them on to the British National Assembly to form part of their archival holdings.



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# Essay

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## My Faith in Baha'u'llah: A Declaration

Roland Faber *Claremont School of Theology*

*For if God speaks a word today... that word will be new, if you only think about it. Consider the word, 'monotheism', about which all the manifestations of the Eternal Truth have spoken in each dispensation.... Nevertheless, in each dispensation it is an innovation, and its novel character can never be withdrawn from it.<sup>1</sup>*

### I. St. Augustine's Confessions are an Intricate Testimony of the Change of Heart and Mind

Baha'is, on the other hand, don't confess. The former indicates my heritage, the latter my choice. While the Catholic use of this word 'confession' might insinuate a relief of one's soul in some kind of public fashion (before witnesses), for instance, of sin or from the past, Baha'u'llah considered confessional utterances not as meaningful form of reflection on Self and God as they imply humiliation before other human beings – one might even say: co-creatures.<sup>2</sup> What is more, he conveyed with his life and word that no one who would be touched by either of them (Self or God) is in need of a justification for one's existence or faith. It is only then that we don't '*rely upon aught else but Him*' and we realize that '*[t]rue loss is for him whose days have been spent in utter ignorance of his self*'.<sup>3</sup> It is like knowing something: as long as we did not understand what we know now, we were puzzled by the fact *that* it could be known and *what* it is that others who know it actually know. Yet when the moment of insight strikes, we cannot even remember how it felt when we had not understood what we now know. A new insight's existence, sudden as it is, does not demand justification and the novelty it triggers cannot be confessed. In its new light, its former absence remains a puzzle of impossibility.

Yet St. Augustine's *Confessions* begin with prayers and meditations that concur with the innermost mystical desire of Baha'i existence: how to seek (to know) God who is unknown and unknowable? How to understand the paradox that although, or because, God is unknowable, God also at the same time pervades everything? St. Augustine's God is 'deeply hidden yet most intimately present'.<sup>4</sup> For Baha'u'llah, this is the very centre of his existence and mission. In one of his doxologies, we hear him exclaim:

Lauded and glorified art Thou, O Lord, my God! How can I make mention of Thee, assured as I am that no tongue, however deep its wisdom, can befittingly magnify Thy name, nor can the bird of the human heart, however great its longing, ever hope to ascend into the heaven of Thy majesty and knowledge. ... Exalted,

immeasurably exalted, art Thou above the strivings of mortal man to unravel Thy mystery, to describe Thy glory, or even to hint at the nature of Thine Essence. For whatever such strivings may accomplish, they never can hope to transcend the limitations imposed upon Thy creatures. ... The loftiest sentiments which the holiest of saints can express in praise of Thee, and the deepest wisdom which the most learned of men can utter in their attempts to comprehend Thy nature...<sup>5</sup>

... end in silence. In another prayer, he approaches this insight as liberation we might only become aware of in a mystical state of which we, as seekers, can only stammer. In the brightest moments of its consciousness we may only be allowed to clothe its perplexing experience with the dialectic of the most brilliant opposites that our language allows for.

Let Thine everlasting melodies breathe tranquility on me, O my Companion, and let the riches of Thine ancient countenance deliver me from all except Thee, O my Master, and let the tidings of the revelation of Thine incorruptible Essence bring me joy, O Thou Who art the most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the hidden!<sup>6</sup>

And in one of his *Arabic Hidden Words* (no. 13), an early mystical-ethical text, Baha'u'llah leaves us with the dazzling bewilderment of this, our own apophatic existence:

Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being, why seekest thou enlightenment from anyone beside Me? Out of the clay of love I molded thee, how dost thou busy thyself with another? Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.<sup>7</sup>

On another level, St. Augustine's *Confessions* describe a process of conversion – from the Manichaeism of his youth to his mature Christian convictions.<sup>8</sup> I cannot follow this model either; neither in reconstructing the change of mental states nor by justifying my choice. Yet, like Augustine, I will try the impossible: following the immediacy of new understanding into its coming-to-be as far as it gives accounts of itself through patterns of thoughts and feelings. Not following St. Augustine's expansive elaborations, that is, his detailed philosophical and theological justifications, brevity will attend only to the flickering residue of this brilliant star hauling through my conceptual universe as far as awareness allows.

So then, why do this experience and the account of its coming-to-be not amount to a conversion, either? Simply put, I have never felt like labelling myself with such a concept or framing a certain existential process of my own life in such a way. I feel that my turn toward the Baha'i Faith is neither a dramatic turn-around, nor is it based on an upheaval, uprooting the state that would hold me back from entering a new movement. I don't feel its volatile fluidity in terms of violence, forcing me somehow to leave behind, bury or even damn my past, my identity, my philosophy, my religion.

I don't feel St. Augustine's disgust with his upbringing and earlier choices, personally, conceptually and religiously. And I don't share his own shock, how he could have been part of that religious community of Mani that he left, eventually, even feeling saved by such a move. Rather I think of

my turn toward Baha'u'llah as some kind of coming-home. Not that I have ever left home. It feels maybe more like a fresh look around after the twinkle of an eye; granted with new eyes becoming aware of that which was there all the time, sometimes hidden, desired, un-manifest, sometimes obvious, perhaps, too obvious to sense it. If it is something discovered, it somehow was already and always in the wait.

Rather than to confess a conversion, I want to *declare* my faith in Baha'u'llah. In doing so, I recognize a process of its own nature that, incidentally, has grasped my life. Although (well, maybe even because) it is fraught with an excess of meaning, I should say that this new awareness harbours and releases a spiritual history of encounters with light and fire. In the mystical language of Baha'i scripture it appears unto me as '*new state of consciousness*'. Ever remaining a *process*, you approach the apophatic cloud '*till you become immersed in the sea of divine light*',<sup>9</sup> which '*is able to set on fire the hearts of all men, and burn away the veils that intervene between them and His glory*'.<sup>10</sup>

While neither being a confession nor a conversion, this declaration may well be called some kind of turn, a *Kehre*, a movement of *metanoia*. Not in the sense of Hajime Tanabe's *Metanoetic*<sup>11</sup> – a national (public) turn-away from the sin – or better, shame – of Japanese nationalism and its crimes before and during World War II – but more accurately in the sense of Raimon Panikkar whose Hindu perspective taught me to see the famous verse of Mark 1:15 (the concentrated account of the message of Jesus) anew: as an encounter with Reality in a radical turn of mind (*nous*) *beyond* (*meta*) itself (and its imaginations).<sup>12</sup> With an image of Ibn al-'Arabi, it would not be wrong to say that this *meta-noia* is a kind of 'polishing of the mirror'.<sup>13</sup> One may begin to sense the 'reflections' or become attuned to a mystical affirmation enwrapped in everything before and at all times. Like Plotinus and in tune with Buddhist thought,<sup>14</sup> I might even dare to affirm this: my faith in Baha'u'llah is most intimately the awareness of being caught up with an Apophatic Beyond, beyond mind and its catches.<sup>15</sup>

That Essence of the Divine Entity and the Unseen of the unseen is holy above imagination and is beyond thought. Consciousness doth not reach It. Within the capacity of comprehension of a produced reality that Ancient Reality cannot be contained. It is a different world; from it there is no information; arrival thereat is impossible; attainment thereto is prohibited and inaccessible.<sup>16</sup>

## II. Faith is an Uncanny Companion

I cannot remember a time without it. It was there when I awoke. I always felt faith in the universe – not despite all the suffering and misfortunes, cruelties and evils, but thankful for the very existence; for the beauty, which is allowed to be and is being allowed to be creative; for the good encountered and committed; for gifts received and given. It is a faith that all things *can* come together in a moment of perfection, even if it is only a moment. It is this faith of which I am dimly aware as a background, never destined to appear in bright light in its totality. It always leaves much more in mysterious darkness than anything at any moment can highlight. Faith in Baha'u'llah visited me from such a background, in the moments as it lightened up. Sudden as a flash, for a second, it reflected an imperceptible presence like

suddenly hearing the humming of the background radiation of the universe. The layers of this background began peeling their smooth surfaces whenever they were met by the vibrations I felt by reading, speaking, chanting Baha'u'llah's words.

Scripture became a new Word for me: like the Vedas – eternal, a universal code, lying in the wait, permeating everything – it revealed its patience. With the words of Dionysius the Areopagit from the beginning of his *Mystical Theology*, Baha'u'llah's writings felt like the tremouring exuded from 'the mystic scripture, where the mysteries of God's Word lie simple, absolute and unchanging in the brilliant darkness of hidden silence'.<sup>17</sup> To have faith in this silence lifts up before my inner eye the layers in which myself and all existence knows itself to be united as in Indra's web. In a moment, it took on a Face. It struck me with a continence that this hidden silence formed in the words of Baha'u'llah. You may ask: do we need another scripture? Perhaps, I will answer, we need renovation. Although any word is a restriction, in its own self-description this Word is like an infinite sea. One must have faith not to drown.

### III. I Think of Myself as a Creature of Thought

I can't help it. While for some people love might go through their stomach, faith for me flows through thought (although not by opposing mind and matter, spirit and body, here, since thought is inaugurated in our bodies, lives itself as a symbolic body, harbours landscapes and envisions universes). Thinking, however, I think, is not another activity, different from sitting, eating, loving, wandering or forging plans. Thinking, I think, is just that: a process of awareness; an awareness of awareness, changing with the landscape it touches; being its appreciation and its gown. Thinking, I think, is like dew at dawn, fragile, always on the brink of disappearing into thin air; always only dense near the ground; always threatened by the heat of the sun. As I think, I don't think: that is, analyze, compare or reckon. I let become. In thinking, I don't manipulate symbols; I see faces of realities appear from a dark background, facing each other, making their grimaces, sometimes hiding under masks, sometimes promising more-to-come. Thinking has no objects; its thoughts are but faces, which we would only understand if we could have been there when they wandered through their own paths, their ordeals, their obscure encounters of fate that made them what they are in these moments of encounter. In my view, it is not an accident that the Baha'i scriptures spell this out by insisting that the reality of being human is *thought*. In reminiscing Plotinus, one might say: as thinking reveals a Face (as Baha'u'llah repeats with the Qur'an 55:27), it is that of the Friend.<sup>18</sup> This is: its primordial appearance – Primal Mind,<sup>19</sup> *'the divine, universal mind, whose sovereignty enlighteneth all created things'*.<sup>20</sup> Of course, this image is not meant to exclude, but rather to provoke, a host of other equally unfathomable images: the Primal Will, the Word, Abyss, Love; and beyond that, perhaps, the Dharma, the Buddha-body (*dharmakaya*).<sup>21</sup> Thinking can become a mirror 'reflecting' that which is beyond thought: the invisible, too bright a sun. Thinking always becomes faith when it turns mind onto its Self, as it is also only a reflection of what is unfathomably beyond itself: *metanoia*. Thought is mystical – as it roams through inner reality and the unfathomable, I wait for the spirit to sink into my heart. Thought is prophetic – it invites the unexpected, the not yet.

It is in thinking that I found myself – one day at young age. It just happened. I remember the awakening, a sudden, intense consciousness of being-in-the-universe, in the face of its speaking to me, raising the questions of its why and whence. How can anything exist? Is it itself or empty or potentially divine? Is the All all there is? Yet, how could Reality be of and, if at all, beyond itself? And can it (and I in it) act in or on itself? I remember vividly having a metaphysical episode in which such a line of questioning led me to an intense apophatic awareness. Stripping everything away from existence, this experimental awareness left me, in the end, with – not darkness, but singing light. I wanted to become a thinker, from early age on; and I have never stopped striving, at one time, to become one.

It is this inclination to think that, in the end, also allowed me to conceive of Baha'u'llah as the one who is who he says he is: the Manifestation of this Face of the unfathomable Reality that some wish to name God and some avoid to identify at all. I am aware that this thought was (never) entirely new. Hadn't many religions of the past, spiritual movements and philosophies throughout the history of humanity, imagined such a puzzling configuration: from Philo of Alexandria to Plotinus, from Moses to Jesus, from (the Wisdom of) Solomon to Laozi, from Krishna to the Buddha, from Mohammad to the Bab? And weren't, in most of these appearances of the Nameless or Placeless, its manifestations by no means the only ones, but ones in a chain or cycle of renewal, always naming the nameless One by its novelty, revolving through the infinite cycle of existence? While it were these resonances in the diverse networks of thought that prepared me to recognize these faces, it was the *feeling* of these faces, as they came together in the existential theatre of my universe, and not any logical analysis or manipulation of concepts, that compelled me to concede my reality, my thought, my faith to Baha'u'llah.

#### IV. The Apophatic Turns Not by Conversion But by Conversance

Conversion is not as unusual a process as one might think – St. Augustine was a convert from Manichaeism; Nagarjuna (the great Buddhist sage and philosopher from the second century C.E.) was one from Hinduism – yet it could also be understood as becoming *conversant* in a new way in the realm of experience and language. In fact, so-called founders of religions can be understood as such 'conversants': Abraham became conversant with a God who made him leave Harran (Gen 11:26–32); Moses on Sinai became the one who conversed with God (Ex 19–20); Jesus in the baptism of St. John became conversant with the voice of the dove (Mt 3:16–17 par); Baha'u'llah became conversant with the Bab, reading (perhaps) from his *Qayyum'u-l asma*.<sup>22</sup> All of them, in always new ways, conversed with, and became conversant in, Reality. The 'conversion' of these extraordinary beings was not a 'confession' of a fault, but an indication of the process of their awakening to a new consciousness in which the experience of conversing with ultimate Reality and Truth made them mediators of religious (and philosophical) novelty, but also as often of a heightened remembrance of long-obliterated origins.

I was but a man like others, asleep upon My couch, when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been.<sup>23</sup>

There will always be a position from which such a conversing looks like treason against truth; and there will always be another position from which it indicates a victory over ignorance. Yet from a Baha'i standpoint, nobody can be named an apostate.<sup>24</sup> The vicious cycle of accusations, of victor and traitor, will only stop if we can agree – and I want to do so with Baha'u'llah – that all religions (and philosophies) are *one*<sup>25</sup> – *beyond thought*. Not that they are or ever were the *same* or ever could be looked at as a lump of undifferentiated uniformity. Far from it! Oneness is a delicate notion. It is neither a substance nor an abstraction like sameness. On the contrary, it is excessive with associations of complexity and relationality, fluidity and foldings. It provokes images of origami, of the polyphony of processes of life folded together, ever so differently, to one or another universe of meaning.<sup>26</sup> Baha'u'llah creatively harvests 'oneness' from a long history of pre-Islamic and Islamic philosophy and spirituality, Qur'an exegesis and the ponderings of *ahadith*. And he forcefully amplifies its meaning, conversant with the voice of the Bab, to new and radical heights.<sup>27</sup>

With Gilles Deleuze, I say: Oneness, here, means *univocity*.<sup>28</sup> To speak (to sing) with *one* voice, freed in the plurivocity of unique voices, all without *any* ground! Groundless, nameless, infinitely hidden 'is' the univocal (or 'is not') by its letting-be with equality all voices when they are unnamed of their attachment to superiority, isolation, and self-aggrandizement. It is with this *mystical* notion of unity that Baha'u'llah cautions us to understand its ultimate *apophatic* nature as the very reason for all existence, equally of intellect and revelation, mind and heart, religion and philosophy – for *all* religions and philosophies together and equally beyond all of them. To wit, their 'commonness' is their *common nothingness* in light of ultimate Reality.<sup>29</sup> They are no longer by any necessity caught up in inevitable competition. Rather they are mutually relativized and restored to the contingency of their attachments to themselves. In Baha'u'llah's call to unity, they have, as Shoghi Effendi said so effectively, become expressions of *the relativity of religious truth* and a *complementarity* in which they cling together through a progression of cycles of becoming and perishing.<sup>30</sup> It is *this* apophatic oneness of religion – based in *this* apophatic oneness of God or the Nameless – that, in my understanding, is Baha'u'llah's heritage.

It is with this openness to human legacy that Baha'u'llah cannot only claim to be the heir to the Islamic tradition, steeped as it is in the prophet Muhammad's renewal of the oneness of Allah (*la ilaha illa allah*/no God except God) and its more immediate contemplation within the Persian philosophical and Sufi heritage (from the master from Andalusia, Ibn al-'Arabi, to the great Persian philosophers Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra and the immortal poets Rumi and Hafez) or its even more recent rehearsal by the school of Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'i, the immediate forebear of the Bab's revelatory claims.<sup>31</sup> Rather, this legacy belongs to, and registers, very consciously a world-heritage by which it is enlightened and that it enlightens – be it the namelessness of *wuji* and the generosity of *taiji*; the relativity of *pratitya-samutpada* and the compassion of the *bodhisattva*; or the *deus absconditus* suffering on the cross. Reaching back into the dawn of the religious consciousness of humanity, Baha'u'llah taps into a univocal sea, to which he lends his voice of renewal.

Giving voice to exulted, apophatic oneness (*tawhid*), the oneness of Reality, religion and humanity – *the* fundamental teaching(s) of Baha'u'llah<sup>32</sup> –

the Baha'i Faith appears in a world, unaware of its potential, as a sleeping spiritual giant. Yet the perspective deceives: it is not the new Faith that is sleeping here, but conversely, it is humanity that is still being in the process of awakening to the consciousness of being human.<sup>33</sup> As the new call to univocity awakens our deepest feeling of the mystical presence of Reality – which for Shoghi Effendi articulates a common ground of virtually all religions and spiritual movements<sup>34</sup> – it also reveals that which connects us as in a promise: of a new civilization of peace and a *human* culture that will embrace the being of even the least ones. Why? Because we are only the expression of a common nothingness in light of the oneness of Reality.

## V. If Faith is Calling, it Calls Together Many Voices

From early on, three streams of religious thought resonated with me: Daoism, Buddhism and Christianity. I had the pleasure to encounter them from their expressions of cosmic universality – the *dao*, the *dharma*, the cosmic Christ – rather than in form of any rigid, dogmatic particularity. The *Yi Jing* sharpened my sense for the laws of change and mutual transformation; the Buddhist *dharma* heightened my awareness of the dialectic of emptiness and multiplicity, the cycles of becoming and decay, the connection between detachment and compassion; the incarnational views of Teilhard de Chardin resonated with my feeling of the oscillations of unity and complexity, that becoming united in Christ means a cosmic becoming of freedom from limitations of power in general and restrictions of reductionist conditioning of any kind of, but especially religious, communities.<sup>35</sup> Yet it was the encounter with the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead that, for me, provided the framework for all of them: an infinite world of becoming and perishing in which importance is a process of creativity and of divine persuasion; in which no laws are eternal or final, but invitations based on and upheld by the visions of the community of myriads of existing events and processes; in which novelty always disturbs trodden paths; in which creative transformation and salvation are a matter of (divine) perception and remembrance.<sup>36</sup> This philosophical venue finally fused, in my mind, with poststructuralist thought – so misunderstood by religionists in its intention to remind us of the powers that attach us to limited desires, making us blind for what we exclude (and unrightfully so) when we create our simplified, smooth and controllable word-views.<sup>37</sup>

Informed by this background, the 'principles' of the Baha'i Faith (without naming them individually), by which 'Abdu'l-Baha (in his journeys to the West) so diligently extracted a clear sense for the meaning and direction of Baha'u'llah's revelation,<sup>38</sup> immediately resonated with my philosophical landscape. Bound together in a web of *mutuality*, all religions and all of humanity, in these 'principles', cry for equality of all beings not to be curbed by prejudices as they are created by attachment, parochialism, and power-infestation: hiding the voices of the least ones, building barriers of opposition of race, gender, class and value. I feel most strongly this admonition: equality and justice – twins in Baha'u'llah's words<sup>39</sup> – demand that we must radically eradicate prejudices wherever they occur and hurt (and I must begin with myself)!

These 'principles' of unity, harmony, equality and justice are, of course, uneasy companions, fragile, always threatened by imbalances, the construction



of irreconcilable opposites, and the exclusion of the other. We may again and again fall back into reductionism and war between thought and heart, reason and faith, science and religion, and, most brutally between religions and ideologies. Baha'u'llah's voice of univocity urges us to invent and implement long-term strategies for the new future of a present in which the emergent universal consciousness for the necessity of comprehensive peace has not yet broken with the parochialism, traditionalism, exclusivism, reductionism and (religious and ideological) fanaticism of the past.

In all of that, the Baha'i emphasis on the harmony between science and religion must be mentioned as especially urgent today.<sup>40</sup> It really is not an empty promise of compromise and a call to irenic reductionism. As it is based in univocity, it is a necessary consequence of equality, a promise of truth on the basis of the equality of access to Reality. It is not only science that forces us to accept that everyone is equally distant from, or close to, the truth of phenomena (and can empirically test any likely story of their constitution), as some politically motivated distortions may make us believe; religion can be, and should be, a natural ally.<sup>41</sup> Steeped in an *apophatic* understanding of religious truth, religion implies a univocal *coram Deo* (being before the Face of God) or the facing of *al-Haqq* (Reality). And as the mystery is not possessed by anyone, to listen to the unique contributions of different religions seems to me as necessary as it is intelligible for Baha'is to call for the community of knowledge to become a democratic process of understanding in which everyone has a unique, but equal voice.

What gives the whole corpus of utterances and convictions its soul, however, is Baha'u'llah's mystical writing – confirming mysticism to be at the heart of the univocity of all religions<sup>42</sup> – with its unique and irreplaceable power of transformation.

It is evident that nothing short of this mystic transformation could cause such spirit and behaviour so utterly unlike their previous habits and manners, to be made manifest in the world of being. For their agitation was turned into peace, their doubt into certitude, their timidity into courage. Such is the potency of the Divine Elixir, which, swift as the twinkling of an eye, transmuteth souls of men!<sup>43</sup>

This immediately resonated with my own sustained endeavour to develop the mystical side of Whiteheadian cosmology, process thought and post-structuralism.<sup>44</sup> The paradox in the centre of Baha'i thought, namely, of apophatic *silence* of the Word that (in Baha'u'llah's words) operates without syllable and sound,<sup>45</sup> but finds its ubiquitous creative *expression* in the All and in everything (*kullu shay*), struck me as just existentially true.

This mystical undercurrent of Whitehead's thought has many facets. I will name only three. First, the mystical for Whitehead comes unto the world as unprecedented novelty,<sup>46</sup> realizing itself from the (divine) future,<sup>47</sup> suggesting that no religion can be the last one, and that new religions are expected to appear relative to that which the past can bear and the future sustain.<sup>48</sup> This makes Baha'u'llah's claim of progressive revelation accessible.<sup>49</sup> Second, the impenetrable mystery of ultimate Reality, of which we can only be silent as it always escapes our mindsets, thoughts and ability to articulate it, makes it unavoidable that Reality will always escape any approximation.<sup>50</sup> This makes

Baha'u'llah's claim for the manifestation of the mystery to carry all the divine or ultimate attributions intelligible.<sup>51</sup> Third, there cannot be any relation beyond the All of relations – as Whitehead says<sup>52</sup> – demonstrating the relativity of all (religious and philosophical) positions. It makes Baha'u'llah's claim meaningful that all of our experience, thought and adorations of this mystery must be deflected back onto the infinity of mutual relationships in the All of the created world – seeking its peaceful univocity.<sup>53</sup>

These three elements of apophatic mysticism express the deepest beliefs of the Baha'i Faith, as I understand them, namely: that some kind of revelation of ultimate Reality (instead of its mere reasonability) is intelligible – given its metanoetic inaccessibility – and that, being a process of novelty, new revelation is inevitable; that ultimate Reality is absolutely unknowable and, hence, that to 'name' this Reality (even if we believe it to be self-naming) not only reveals, but also always hides its unknowability; and that everything we signify of Reality only reflects the creature's views as they become expressive of their mutual relatedness. In apophatic language: in the manifest mirrors of the divine namelessness, Reality appears as nothingness and creatures of Reality as nothing but nothingness.

## VI. Faith and Belief are Not the Same

St. Augustine had faith in God as Manichean and as Christian, but his beliefs changed considerably. Every religion – or spiritual movement or even non- or anti-religious ideology, for that matter – has a set of core beliefs, even if it says that it doesn't. This is a matter of the human reality as thought: there is no thought without some kind of conveyance of structures, objects, contents, forms, processes of collection and renovation<sup>54</sup>. Beliefs are investments in thoughts. They reflect that which Baha'u'llah in one of his early mystical writings – *The Sprinkling of the Cloud of Unknowing*<sup>55</sup> (*Rashh-i ama*) – calls the 'rational faculty' (but which could also be translated with 'thinking soul/spirit' or with Aristotle as 'the living being that has the word' – both alternative translations with their own deep implications) of our existence. He thinks it not to be any particular or part, but the whole of human spirit as it collects itself from its sensible and mental abilities and potencies without being anything of their nature.<sup>56</sup> It is also the one reality of our mysterious existence that through its *metanoia* gives itself up (as with the Sufi *fana*) and becomes self-less (like the Buddhist *anatta*) in light of the manifestation of Reality in itself, yielding itself to what Baha'u'llah with the Sufi tradition calls the heart (*qalb*), the seat of divinity in us.<sup>57</sup>

Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee,  
mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.<sup>58</sup>

Reminiscent of Suhrawardi, the great Persian martyr-philosopher, we could say that both movements are important: mirroring as reflecting the light (*nous*) and mirroring as emptying for the divine light (*meta-nous*).<sup>59</sup> While, for instance, Catholic theology will traditionally emphasize the first movement, leaning towards a definition of faith through beliefs and being exposed to the danger to define outsiders as unorthodox or even as heretics, Baha'i thought will lean towards the second movement in which thought

becomes mystical surrender for which beliefs transform into expressions of a faith that is beyond discriminating conceptual definitions. Not that beliefs and thoughtful discriminations are not important – as proven by the Baha'i beliefs in the oneness of God, religions and humanity with their immediate implications and consequences for the future of the organization of human life and the realization of comprehensive peace. Yet the pivotal point is that faith, although it appears to itself only in the multiple mirrors of the manifestations of the divine or ultimate, finds only in the unmanifest an anchor for any kinds of beliefs. This faith is challenging, forcing us to change and register the changes in beliefs over time. While beliefs are relative to one another as a matter of horizontal connectivity, faith is not, or only in a very different way. In a metanoetic faith, I believe with the Baha'i community in the noetic relativity of (religious) truths. Beliefs look at the light as reflected in the mirrors *as if* they were the Reality they reflect; faith looks beyond these contingencies of beliefs to the Reality that, paradoxically, can only be 'known' by surrendering to apophatic unknowing. In this sense, faith is hyper-relative (in both senses of 'more than' and 'even more'), since the 'absolute' that it intends is inaccessible.<sup>60</sup> Hence, in so far as faith must trust the incommensurable by following it into its manifestations, it will take the beliefs that articulate this process of manifestation and that is articulated by themselves – as relative.

If the faith in Baha'u'llah harbours *one* belief, it is expressive of the mind-boggling and by no means simple truth of the metanoetic *oneness* of all manifestations of this inaccessible Reality.<sup>61</sup> It articulates itself in the noetic relativity of, for instance, *both* Christ and the Buddha. The *relativity* of the belief in both *at the same time* (and others beyond that) is made possible by the faith in the *one* Reality – the one that also manifests itself in Baha'u'llah. But of this Reality, *all* beliefs are as *nothing*, yielding themselves to the unspeakable. To say it again: these beliefs, although discriminative among themselves, all speak with one voice of that in light of which they (and with them we) are all (united as in) a nothingness. Other than belief-oriented movements, for which the search for exact formulation of, for instance, the nature of Christ or the Buddha became the motor for the perpetual irruption of splits and sects, I understand my faith in Baha'u'llah consistently to *suspend* any beliefs as relative to the character of the individual mind (and its cultural conditions) as well as the (psychological and social) standpoint of the believer.

Therefore consider: All the sects and peoples worship their own thought; they create a god in their own minds and acknowledge him to be the creator of all things, when that form is a superstition – thus people adore and worship imagination.<sup>62</sup>

It is Baha'u'llah's own admonition that Baha'is are to detach themselves from the clinging to any thought-pattern *as* the Truth. For instance, Baha'is are free to think and believe in any articulation of the nature of Baha'u'llah's station as divine Manifestation – be it, for instance, a view that he is 'God' or a 'Mirror' of God (as both positions, not dissimilar to early Christian discussions on the complex nature of Christ, were held among early believers) – as long as this variety does not lead to the creation of enmity and factions.<sup>63</sup> It is this relativity in which I feel wholeheartedly at home,

because it does not obliterate Truth (as exclusivist absolutists may prefer to intimate), but instead saves faith from fundamentalism and fanaticism.<sup>64</sup> For Baha'is, this means, that this liberating plurivocity, as we may freely let it appear in ourselves, must become a *social* reality – literally naming the precondition to any peace within and between religions and, beyond that, of humanity. This relativity of beliefs in faith is a religious and a social practice.<sup>65</sup>

## VII. My Faith in Baha'u'llah is Not Only of Light, But Also of Fire

Faith is not a mapping of the sphere of thought. Although the medium of thought with its necessary scepticism and questioning is a firm implication of apophatic faith, its reality feels more like a strike of fate (*Fügung*). Besides the metaphysical episode of light, I was also visited, in a mystical episode, by fire.<sup>66</sup> The intuitive framework in which I could find an anchor for the interpretation of its significance was the fire on Sinai (Ex 3).<sup>67</sup> Not that I ever intended to compare myself with Moses, but I knew that this experience of fire was of a nature that in its articulation could not do less than approximate the strange language attributed to the Sinai experience: the living fire, the danger of closeness, the universal insistence, the refuge of the tent spanning the stars, the impossibility to stand (through) it, the painful joy of holiness, the inaccessible presence.

Incidentally, but much later, one of my assignments at the university was to visit all the scriptural passages of the Old Testament (Hebrew and Greek) related to the 'glory' of God – the *kabod* and *doxa* that so prominently feature in the Sinai events; that represented the presence of God in the tent of covenant and in the temple; that mysteriously meandered as *shekinah* through history with the Israelites and the exile; and that articulate the mystical experiences of awakening and assignment of the great prophets like Isaiah and Ezekiel.<sup>68</sup> The *kabod* YHWH became, for me, an expression of the holy nearness, the transcendence-immanence of the unnamable and inaccessible divine Reality and the mystery of its revealing closeness that I experienced. As Gilles Quispel has demonstrated, the remembrance of the Glory of God profoundly influenced the Jewish, Gnostic, Christian and Islamic thoughts on divine presence in form of the Original Man, the Anthropos, the Messiah, and numerous other forms and accounts of God's presence in the world and in the human sphere.<sup>69</sup> It amounts to the radical assumption of a self-identification of the unnamable God with a human (or humanly recognizable) 'form'.<sup>70</sup> It also became the background for the Johannine declaration that the Logos-in-the-flesh is the appearance of the Glory of God (Jo 1:14). And it became the desire of eschatological expectations of the final coming of the presence of God (Rev 21).<sup>71</sup>

Assuming for a moment that one of the most fruitful accounts of the unity of religions could be their shared apophaticism – as Michael Sells had proposed<sup>72</sup> – it came not as a surprise to me that the very name of Baha'u'llah means *kadod* YHWH and *doxa tou theou*, and that he relates his name to the reality of Sinai and Christ in precisely this sense: as the manifestation of divine Reality, as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* in human form, as living apophysis in the human temple (*haykal*).<sup>73</sup> My faith in Baha'u'llah is the faith in this *baha'* Allah.

### VIII. The Relation Between Light and Fire is Not a Simple One

It amounts to the contrast between thought and faith, reason and revelation, philosophy and theosophy (*hikmat-I illahi*). In a sense, I feel like having gone through the intellectual and existential shifts of both al-Ghazali and the slightly younger Suhrawardi in the twelfth century C.E. Both of them were embarking on a critical journey through Greek philosophy and both experienced the tension of this adventure of thought (*hikmat*) with their Qur'anic faith in revelation (*wahy*). It is the tension between the potency of the human mind to embrace and penetrate an infinite universe and the powerlessness of a trust in the otherness of inaccessible ground to which only its self-revelation can liberate. Both of them worked their way through a radical critique of the imaginations of the human mind in search for a foundation, but with contrary outcome: al-Ghazali became confirmed in the absolute surrender to revelation; Suhrawardi became convinced of a process of open-ended (sensitivity to) wisdom (philosophy) mediated by (the divine) poetry of the Persian mystics in which he saw enshrined the mystical experience of revelation.<sup>74</sup>

At a certain point of my own philosophical journey, I had settled for the relativistic, but nevertheless rational categories of Whitehead. But I also had listened to the critique of this whole endeavour by poststructuralist accounts, of the hidden caveats of all of our mental unifications.<sup>75</sup> A consciousness began to press itself on me: of spiritual emptiness. I don't mean nihilistic woundedness, but rather apophatic irrelevance – something like Thomas Aquinas' big pile of straw.<sup>76</sup> It was to be expected, I will add (but expectation and experience differ).<sup>77</sup> This is, if I was forced to describe it, a spiritual state in which not only any thought evaporates in the expansion of its own lightness, but in which any content of revelation, especially if it was set up to exclude everything divergent from it in its definition of truth and by its dogmatic stances, was irretrievably lost to my mind. I was, and am, left with living Whitehead's insight that ultimate truth does never appear to us in 'dogmatic statements of the obvious', but only in form of 'tentative formulations of the ultimate'<sup>78</sup> – or only beyond any formulations at all.

This light visits – as Gregory of Nyssa, the great Eastern Christian theologian of the fourth century C.E., has so brilliantly acknowledged – as thick darkness.<sup>79</sup> Like Moses' approach of the Sinaitic Glory of God (Ex 20, 23 & 24), it seems to be an encounter with fire, a fire that burns everything away until nothing remains. It was at this point in the philosophical time and the theological space of my own cosmos of discourse that Baha'u'llah's words spoke to me as if all was new. '*In thy soul of love build thou a fire. And burn all thoughts and words entire*'.<sup>80</sup> While they did not remove the perplexities of the apophatic silence of Reality – rather propelling its unfathomable and nameless incommensurability – they (prepared by my philosophical encountering of polyphilia, the love of the manifold)<sup>81</sup> threw me back into *its* manifestations and the care for *this* world. While this metanoetic renewal did not remove my philosophical queries, it renewed my interest in the practice of *religious*, and religiously *diverse*, thought.<sup>82</sup> While it did not remove my scepticism regarding the parochial implications of any potential (concept of) revelation – especially when it begins to be defined dogmatically, discriminating one truth over another and condemning all others<sup>83</sup> – it transformed them into visions of their tentative unity in nothingness. In

light of the unknowable, I ponder, revelations are true *in their own way*: the Buddha as Buddha and Christ as Christ and Baha'u'llah as Baha'u'llah – they all name indispensable aspects of *baha'* (*kabod, doxa, glory*) in lighting a fire of which they are equally as nothing.<sup>84</sup>

Sure, some sojourners may wonder why this mystical nothingness should not, in the end (in its own logic), re-distribute salvation or liberation among the whole network of creatures through which Reality seems to speak of its silence as a promise.<sup>85</sup> I wonder myself.<sup>86</sup> Why should we need to hold fast to assumptions of *human* manifestations of this Reality: the Logos incarnate, the Muhammadan light (*nur muhammadiyah*), the hidden divine majesty in the manifest Krishna of the *Bhagavat Gita*, the presence of the *dharmakaya* in prince Siddhartha, the Gate (*bab*) of the Qa'im<sup>87</sup> in the Bab, the *baha'* of God in Baha'u'llah? Is this a relapse into primitivism, a witness to the inability to sustain infinite multiplicity instead of imperial unity? Is this an urge for security, of the preference of one voice over all others? Is it maybe age: when adventure turns into the craving for advent? I think not; no, neither of those.

The perhaps best approximation I can think of currently came to me through the great Persian poet Jalalud-Din Rumi. In his *Masnawi*, he explains that mystical experience and its mental and spiritual explorations will only under *one* condition not come under the spell of the hubris of (our) unification (with ultimate reality) like a pantheistic 'unity of being' (*wahdat-al wujud*) or the hubris of spiritual exceptionalism, by which one feels to be like God among creatures, *if* we insert a *third element* between Reality (the unknowable Godhead) and appearance (the creation): the prophet! It subjects the seeker of Truth to both mediation *and* hindrance: the mediation of otherness hinders a confusion of immediacy of Self with divinity ('I am God'). And this hindrance, in its own turn, mediates a subjection to a voice that disturbs simplicity of spiritual hubris in the midst of our ecstatic paroxysms.<sup>88</sup> The figure of the prophet only confirms that the Glory of God mediates *and* hinders the knowledge of, and unity with, ultimate Reality. It appears in a cloud. It is the fire that burns our imaginations of light away. Prophets are the thick darkness of mystical unity, in which the world of creation and ultimate Reality are united in utmost difference of otherness. All prophets (in differentiation from many philosophers), teaches Abdu'l Baha, know of this three-partite symbolism of unity in difference.<sup>89</sup> It is central to Baha'i identity. It is visible in the ringstone symbol formed from the first two letters of the word *baha'*.<sup>90</sup>

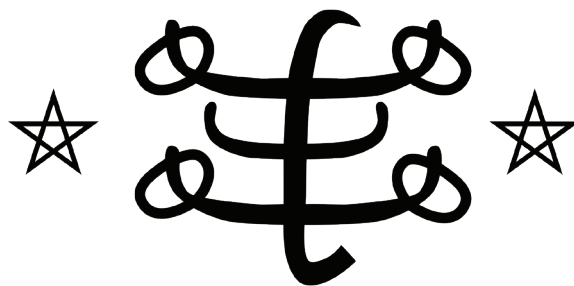


Figure 1: Ringstone Symbol of the Greatest Name.

Some other contemporaries may ask whether my philosophical and theological inquiries of the past do not, must not, interfere with this new horizon. After all, having (in an earlier life) studied and taught theology at a Catholic institution, having written on the mutability of God and the Trinity,<sup>91</sup> and having thought within the parameters of divine incarnation and the sacramentality of the flesh: doesn't all that seem to be forced to be left behind by declaring my faith in Baha'u'llah? Doesn't the Baha'i Faith decline to hold the doctrine of the Trinity to be originally Christian?<sup>92</sup> And doesn't it deny both an acceptance of the mutability of God as anthropomorphism and that God is not beyond any attribute?<sup>93</sup> And doesn't it reject the possibility of the incarnation (*hulul*) of the inaccessible Reality of the divine?<sup>94</sup>

This may all be true. Yet, a closer look may reveal that this might be a question of a more careful consideration of these beliefs since their terminology, after centuries of discussion on these matters, is by no means as simple as one might assume by taking refuge in apodictic affirmation or negations.<sup>95</sup> I feel not that I must backtrack on anything I thought in these areas,<sup>96</sup> especially after their intersections with process thought (in a more recent phase of my life).<sup>97</sup> To the contrary, given that all beliefs are relative and only true on their own terms,<sup>98</sup> but always limited beyond their specific conditions, all such doctrines will have their worth in certain contexts and will be unintelligible in others.

In the wider context of the relative nothingness of *all* beliefs in the fire of the Reality Beyond, it is the *limitations* unearthed by contrasting these doctrines that will yield the most satisfying intellectual results for their understanding in a Baha'i context. How, for instance, Trinity as a symbol of mutual relationality (as Whitehead uses it)<sup>99</sup> relates to the Buddhist mutual co-arising (*pratitya-samutpada*),<sup>100</sup> harbours truths of importance as they may well contribute to an articulation of the unity of religions from a Baha'i perspective. How incarnation relates to the mutual otherness of the divine and the created<sup>101</sup> (if one follows the Jewish thinker Levinas<sup>102</sup> or process theology<sup>103</sup>) and how both contrast to *samsara* and *nirvana* will be of eminent importance in developing the emptiness of all concepts in light of ultimate Reality and their elucidative power with regard to the notion of its manifestations.<sup>104</sup> Paradoxically, the *utmost* apophatic move of Baha'i revelation, of *completely* removing the divine Reality from the plane of existence,<sup>105</sup> turns itself into an *affirmation* of its manifestations<sup>106</sup> to which we, then, must refer *all* ultimate (divine) attributions.<sup>107</sup> This Baha'i relativism makes the mutual incompleteness of, for instance, Islamic compassion (*ar-rahman*) and Buddhist compassion (*karuna*) intelligible.<sup>108</sup> And it highlights the meaningfulness of the paradox of the non-difference of detachment and divine co-suffering<sup>109</sup> – as it demonstrates itself in Baha'u'llah's verses on his own state as the Wronged One<sup>110</sup> – accessible. Not giving up the past, but envisioning the renewal of mutually incomplete views on the unknowable Reality, is the direction I see my faith in Baha'u'llah leading me.

## IX. I Was Never Institutionalized (and Intend Never to be)

This formulation blurs hints to an asylum with that of a religious institution. I was never totally convinced that socialization into any community as such, and especially in terms of religion, is a good thing. In fact, although I



was surrounded by certain religious contexts, I could never subject myself to them for the good of an institution (as it becomes a reiteration in abstraction of lived and embodied community). Some may feel that this is a problem – and I encounter such mindsets regularly – but I think of it as advantage: I cannot *think* or *feel* that any human institution (even if it understands itself somehow as being more than human) can create, or even mediate, salvation or liberation or lasting peace or universal harmony.<sup>111</sup> The tension between (embodied) thought and (reiterated) social organization becomes even more pressing if one, as I did, could only think – admittedly in an organized manner – that which I wanted to (learn to) think about the universe and the divine in the setting of organized religions, even if it is only the setting of a university.<sup>112</sup> I identify this urge for *total* organization with the Buddha's *thana*, the attachment to desires, especially the desires for total control, power and security in a world of suffering (*dukkha*), impermanence (*anicca*), and powerlessness in the perceived chaos of chance and change (*anatta*). It makes human social and religious organization the opposite of what religion wants to be. Liberation (*nirvana*), I agree, means to let go of this (*dukkha nirodha*). Instead, with Deleuze and Whitehead, I continue to think of the world as 'chaosmos',<sup>113</sup> as a body of incompleteness, novelty and the life of the spirit the embodiments of which are detachment and compassion,<sup>114</sup> apophatic and polyphilic love,<sup>115</sup> not control, incarnations of the Open, not a closed totality.<sup>116</sup>

Organization is only as good as what it leaves behind when it makes itself superfluous. Even the organization of thought must be overcome (by apophasis) – as the Buddha and Baha'u'llah agree<sup>117</sup> – as well as organization of salvation and liberation (by polyphilia), as the reality of humanity is (beyond) thought (in the spirit),<sup>118</sup> not (in) organization. Yet, as thought – always pointing beyond itself<sup>119</sup> – is our reality, and as its highest incarnation, according to Baha'u'llah, conveys the insight of the inconceivability of Reality,<sup>120</sup> it follows for me *not* that we are simply reflected back onto social organization (of religion) *instead* of thinking (and loving) the unthinkable.<sup>121</sup> Rather in its spiritualization, organization must itself become nothing in light of the excess of the spirit it expresses.<sup>122</sup> And the Most Great Spirit, instead of aiming at organization, has as its temple (*haykal*) the manifestations of Herself as pure life in all we organize.<sup>123</sup>

I am not so naïve to believe that a person can survive without character and per analogy that a collective can survive without a collective 'character'.<sup>124</sup> And I am also not so naïve to believe that any organization by humanity can ever be perfect, either. Yet, in a cosmological context, Whitehead speaks of the 'entirely living nexus'<sup>125</sup> that any higher organism carries and safeguards (if organization was to be meaningful and of advantage to higher forms of life) and that any advanced civilization must foster by 'exhibiting the five qualities of Truth, Beauty, Adventure, Art, Peace'<sup>126</sup> the lively 'incompleteness of' which 'relates to the notion of Transcendence, the feeling essential for Adventure, Zest, and Peace'.<sup>127</sup> Shoghi Effendi admonishes us that it is the Spirit of Baha'u'llah that organization must strive to embody, harbour, creatively respond to and release for the justification of its existence; and for Baha'u'llah this spirit is never one of rigid repetition<sup>128</sup> – and (as visible in his critique of clerical hierarchies and Sufi community organization alike) he despises any ritualism and legalism for

his 'mystic community'<sup>129</sup> – but of equality and justice, always bestowed from the 'heaven of divine wisdom with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion'.<sup>130</sup> I believe therefore that any mandatory 'character' (necessary for the existence of any society) can become all the more perfect the more it centres not around petrifying rules, but instead on a *loyalty* to the *pure* life it is granted and trusted to manifest<sup>131</sup> – something Baha'u'llah seems to have intended to be expressed by the oscillation between Houses of Worship (*mashriqu' l-adhkar*) and Houses of Justice.<sup>132</sup>

Baha'u'llah has called this loyalty 'covenant'.<sup>133</sup> In Islamic tradition, it was spoken between God and humanity in the mythical realm, the realm that Henri Corbin named the reality of the (embodiment of the) spiritual or symbolic or imaginative.<sup>134</sup> Baha'u'llah, at one point (in *The Long Healing Prayer*), somewhat like Karl Barth,<sup>135</sup> situated this covenant even before creation: as the condition of creation, as the 'Yea' of God, spoken of God to Godself as the initiation of the movement of self-manifestation.<sup>136</sup> We might think of such covenants as remembered in the Hebrew Bible in a history of salvation in the past and as anticipated promise for an eschatological future; we might connect it with the sacrifice of Christ as place of a new covenant; or we might find it in the vow of the *bodhisattva* in Mahayana Buddhism. As it is of utmost importance to Baha'is, I think of the covenant as the personal and collective participation in the mysterious divine self-affirmation of *pure life* to which any analysis of the human predicament will be enabled to react with faith instead of structures, or only structures wherein we begin to perceive form and emptiness without difference.

Have ye forgotten that true and radiant morn, when in those hallowed and blessed surroundings ye were all gathered in My presence beneath the shade of the tree of life, which is planted in the all-glorious paradise? Awe-struck ye listened as I gave utterance to these three most holy words: O friends! Prefer not your will to Mine, never desire that which I have not desired for you, and approach Me not with lifeless hearts, defiled with worldly desires and cravings. Would ye but sanctify your souls, ye would at this present hour recall that place and those surroundings, and the truth of My utterance should be made evident unto all of you.<sup>137</sup>

It is, as with Baha'u'llah, confirmation of the 'choice wine' in the Law.<sup>138</sup> it is about the spirit of life, not a dead letter.<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, as the poststructuralist analysis has demonstrated, the Law will remain, all-pervasive, ambivalent as to our ability to further or hinder liberation to pure life.<sup>140</sup> Accepting with Judith Butler that giving any account of ourselves<sup>141</sup> is always a process of organization, as much a process of hiding as it is of revealing, of oppressing as much as of constructing novel existences, Baha'u'llah's insistence on certain forms of structure, of Law, and commandments, seems to me, then, not to be a relapse into barbarism, but *a refusal to hide the limitations of finality, that is, its incompleteness and becoming*.<sup>142</sup> Not only does such finality shed light on the impossibility to know the incomprehensible divine (and with it our own nature),<sup>143</sup> but it reminds us that to generate and harbour pure life will never happen without organization of thought and social structures.<sup>144</sup>

Here we encounter the paradox of universal openness, as it must be contrasted with limitations of finitude. It was Whitehead's (maybe at first

glance counterintuitive) insight in this regard that only the *interference* of infinity with finitude creates value, importance and relevance, of life – barred from mere infinity.<sup>145</sup> To observe revealed Law or precepts – as Baha’i share to care about with the Abrahamic traditions, Persian religions and Dharmic traditions – is, if it is lived *in the spirit* of a pre-eternal covenant, only a sign of the nothingness of love and its realization against pride, hate and ignorance.<sup>146</sup> Yet, different from some of these traditions, the precepts of the Baha’i Faith and the Law are themselves *impermanent*.<sup>147</sup> They are part of the contingent development of our human self-understanding, history and the development of a universal consciousness of interconnectedness among humanity and the cosmos, or even the infinite worlds of God. Since for Baha’is everything except the unknowable essence of God is contingent (created),<sup>148</sup> yet the worlds of God are infinite in number and unbounded by temporal beginnings and endings,<sup>149</sup> every Manifestation of the Divine Will is, as its contemporary precepts, contingent, too.<sup>150</sup> The ‘*greatest Law in the vast universe of God*’ – says ‘Abdu’l-Baha – is ‘*love*’.<sup>151</sup> And this love, this ‘*most great law*’, is ‘*the spirit of life*’,<sup>152</sup> which cannot (without loss) be organized.

How to live with this structural contingency, consciously, with the loyalty it deserves and is bound to, is the problem every religion, spiritual movement and ideology that wishes to inform the character of persons and societies faces earlier or later.<sup>153</sup> A point in case is Sarah Farmer.<sup>154</sup> She raised the first peace flag in modern history at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Green Acre, Maine. Her yearly summer camp was for more than a decade rehearsing the spirit of the first Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893. Following her rule that all religious movements should not come together in a spirit of criticism (of one another), but in pursuing a constructive presentation of their own substance, leaving the connections to be made by the participants themselves, she created one of the liveliest resorts of interreligious encounters and comparative studies in religions in the West, attracting the like of Transcendentalists, Swami Vivekananda and T. D. Suzuki. It was the symbol of *non-organized* encounters of religions in the spirit of universal religious amity.

Of course, such a constellation was not without internal tensions. For instance, what to do with exclusivists? Must exclusivism be excluded from this endeavour of communion across religious convictions? Is any form of adherence to organized religion per se a betrayal of openness? Is the assumption that all religions are, in principle, one unavoidably limiting this project? Sarah Farmer answered with her own transformation: after a sea journey to Acre in Ottoman Syria in 1900, visiting ‘Abdu’l-Baha, she came back a Baha’i – renaming Greenacre ‘Green Acre’. All of the just raised questions came alive. Tensions arose over the control of Green Acre in the turmoil of which Sarah Farmer was committed to an asylum. ‘Abdu’l-Baha, in his visit to Green Acre in 1912,<sup>155</sup> for which Sarah was allowed to leave the sanatorium (accompanied by her doctor), vehemently refused to accept the diagnosis of her alleged mental illness, but her final escape from the sanatorium ended soon with her death.<sup>156</sup>

Here is the question: is the submission to the divine ‘Yea!’, if it expresses itself through a particular, contingent and impermanent, manifestation in one particular religion or community – even if this religion is as universalistic and inter-religious as the Baha’i Faith – a betrayal of the commitment to interreligious openness and the perpetual spiritual journey

such openness seems to imply? Every person and community must answer this question for themselves. For me, the criterion for answering this question became my commitment to the Whiteheadian principle that infinity can only be important and meaningful in its *interaction* with finitude,<sup>157</sup> which is the (divine) process by which (any) value is created and realized.<sup>158</sup> Yes, this move has a strikingly contingent and relativistic side to it, and consciously so. It implies, however, also that openness without any such commitment equals some new kind of exclusivism, the exclusivism that excludes everything in particular for the embrace of the universal in abstraction, which is the nucleus for imperialism, prejudice and universalistic neutralization of, and blindness to, diversity and suppression of minorities alike.<sup>159</sup> On the other hand, if the unknowable Reality can only be known and experienced in its manifestations, this reasoning inherently must accept their manifest contingency, too. In difference from the exclusivism of abstract universalism, this commitment knows of its limitations and the mutual incompleteness of its incarnations in different systems of thought and belief, social structure and religious organization. Yet, these differences are not any more meant to alienate, but to contribute to '*the Garden of Reality*',<sup>160</sup> to ever-new modes of novelty, adventures and education of a peace-to-come.

## X. In the End, Some Differences Between St. Augustine's Conversion and My Declaration Arise

First of all, I don't think of my declaration as either a confession of sin or a traumatic event of conversion from the bad or wrong or ignorant to the good or right or the true. It is rather an 'event' in the sense of Whitehead: collecting one's past in unexpected ways; listening to the call of what the past unites and what the unprecedented voice propels beyond itself into new syntheses.<sup>161</sup> It is a metanoetic turn of/beyond mind-heart.

St. Augustine's move is in interesting ways contrary to mine: his was a turn *from* the maybe first self-consciously universal prophet Mani, who understood himself as the heir of Zoroaster, Christ and the Buddha,<sup>162</sup> to the unique, only, and final manifestation of the divine Word in Jesus. My move seems to be going into the opposite direction: *from* the exclusive representation of the divine Word *to* a cyclical one of which Baha'u'llah is the most current expression, but embedded in a cosmology of infinite worlds without beginning and end. Included in this difference is another one: St. Augustine maintained *continuity* between both religions insofar as he substituted the Manichaean dualistic principle of evil with the no less realistic bracket of original sin. For the Baha'i Faith – as for Judaism and Islam – there exists neither a counter-principle of evil as in Manichaeism,<sup>163</sup> nor are we imprisoned by the inevitability of original sin as in St. Augustine's Christianity.<sup>164</sup> In this sense, my move toward a 'universal manifestation' is in any imaginable way divorced from such an Augustinian continuity and, hence, from a recurrence of Mani's dualism. Further, contrary to St. Augustine's *discontinuity* that made him to disavow Mani when embracing Christ, my move equals a letting-go of the Christian exclusivism of incarnation by embracing the continuity of a history of manifestations of the divine Word (and their sacrifice). This move is not an abandonment of any manifestation of religious truth and divine reality, but rather an affirmation of their uniqueness in a world without beginning and end.

I feel at home in the synthesis such a faith in Baha'u'llah engenders as it grants my limited ability to perceive the potentials of the present, and to imagine the future, unity of religions.<sup>165</sup> It is an uneasy synthesis, of course, one of mutual limitations and corrections, relative truths and ultimate silence before the Reality (*al-haqq*) of the All. Nevertheless, this synthesis is no more nor less syncretistic than that of any collective religious identity, which always collects and recreates itself from a specific, but complex religious inheritance. In the final analysis, my faith in Baha'u'llah includes the hope that we might, in the near future, begin to see all expressions of religious thought, worship and liberation as being connected in one trans-religious process.<sup>166</sup> May we, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith has so eloquently envisioned, become 'members of the total corporate religious complex of mankind, composed of different but no longer separated communities'.<sup>167</sup> In that, I will yield my final word to Baha'u'llah:

That the divers communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief, should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is, in this Day, of the essence of the Faith of God and His Religion. These principles and laws, these firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source, and are rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated.<sup>168</sup>

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