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An Introduction to the Bahá'í Religiolect

Adib Masumian *MA BS*

Abstract

Religious dialects like Judeo-Arabic and Christianese have become popular topics of study in recent years. First proposed in the world of academia, the mass media – including public radio stations like PRI (Public Radio International) – have now begun to cover these 'religiolects' in their programmes. The purpose of this paper is to offer an introductory look at the religiolect of the Bahá'í Faith, a relatively recent religion founded in 19th century Persia (present-day Iran). To that end, we will explore the origins of the Bahá'í religiolect; examine the most essential loanwords of the religiolect; discuss some of the phraseology, both contemporary and historical, which composes the religiolect; and review especially extensive efforts to codify the religiolect. In striving to achieve the aforementioned goals, it is hoped that this paper will serve as a stepping-stone that others may use in their endeavours to further a greater understanding of the Bahá'í religiolect.

Keywords

Religiolect
religious terminology
religious parlance
religious vocabulary
religious dialect
cryptolect

Religiolects Defined

Benjamin Hary, Director at New York University Tel Aviv, defines a religiolect – a term he coined,[1] apparently a portmanteau of 'religious' (or 'religion') and 'dialect' – as '...a language variety with its own history and development, which is used by a religious community'.[2] Research seems to show that religiolects range from formal languages, such as the Judeo-Arabic languages,[3] to parlances used within the religious context of their parent languages, such as the relationship between Christianese and English.[4] The Judeo-Arabic languages draw on a specialized kind of Hebrew and Arabic vocabulary with religious undertones. Thus, the Judeo-Arabic languages are largely unintelligible to those who speak either Hebrew or Arabic exclusively. Christianese, on the other hand, refers to a set of English words and phrases that take on special meanings when used in a culturally Christian context.

As we will see below, the Bahá'í religiolect lies somewhere between these two ends of the linguistic spectrum. While perhaps not completely inscrutable to those unfamiliar with this religiolect, the words that compose it are numerous and opaque enough so that it merits study as a special kind of parlance. It is a parlance, in fact, which transcends the lexicon of any one language; it is a kind of supraparlance that cuts across those languages into which an adequate number of Bahá'í texts have been translated. In his writings, Bahá'u'lláh calls for the implementation of a universal auxiliary language:

> It is incumbent upon all nations to appoint some men of understanding and erudition to convene a gathering and through joint consultation choose one

> language from among the varied existing languages, or create a new one, to be taught to the children in all the schools of the world.[5]

Though it may be a stretch to relate religiolect with the adoption of a universal language, one could argue that, on a limited level, this ideal has already been realized for the Bahá'í community through the presence of this supraparlance, insofar as it offers a religious universal auxiliary language to the members of that community worldwide. As we will see below, however, there are differences in the Bahá'í religiolect as it is spoken by English speakers, Persian speakers and speakers of other languages. The primary focus of this paper, however, is to evaluate the Bahá'í religiolect within the context of the English language.

The Roots of the Bahá'í Religiolect

There is abundant evidence recorded in the literature of the Bahá'í Faith – a religion only some 170 years old – which demonstrates that it has a religiolect all its own. Take the following sentence, for instance:

> The Blessed Beauty, a Manifestation of God, was born in the Cradle of the Faith.

This sentence is written entirely in English, but the terms that compose it – 'Blessed Beauty', a title of Bahá'u'lláh, the prophet-founder of the Bahá'í Faith; 'Manifestation of God', a term applied to certain prophetic figures who founded independent religions; and 'Cradle of the Faith', a reference to Iran – are all distinctly Bahá'í terms with special meanings that are not obvious to those unfamiliar with Bahá'í parlance. We will explore the above terms and others like them later on. For the most part, the origins of the vocabulary that constitutes the Bahá'í religiolect can ultimately be traced back to the Bahá'í scriptures themselves. While usage of certain terms (typically more esoteric) has not persisted, there are many other words and phrases that are still used by Bahá'ís today. Virtually all of the Bahá'í scriptures were originally written in Persian and Arabic – and while a considerable number of those scriptures have now been translated into many languages, there are certain Bahá'í terms that have been retained in those various target languages as loanwords that are invoked in their original language, regardless of the speaker's mother tongue.

Loanwords in the Bahá'í Religiolect

Perhaps the most essential example of such loanwords is the Arabic Bahá'í greeting, 'Alláh-u-Abhá' ('God is the Most Glorious').[6] This salutation was actually conceived by the Báb,[7] who founded the Bábí religion, the short-lived messianic precursor to the Bahá'í Faith. After Bahá'u'lláh founded the Bahá'í Faith, he affirmed the spiritual potency and significance of that phrase and enjoined its use upon Bahá'ís. In an explication of the phrase Alláh-u-Abhá, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the eldest son of Bahá'u'lláh and his eventual successor as leader of the Bahá'í Faith, said:

> ...in this day, the call raised by the Concourse on High is 'Alláh-u-Abhá', and the soul of this servant ['Abdu'l-Bahá] is stirred thereby...this salutation,

> 'Alláh-u-Abhá', is a clarion that pealeth out the lordship of the divine Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh], and produceth an effect upon the very heart of creation.[8]

Elsewhere in that same address, 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirmed that the object of this greeting – as well as other, similar salutations unique to the Bábí religion – is none other than Bahá'u'lláh.[9] Shoghi Effendi, the great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh and Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, also went on to reinforce this interpretation of Alláh-u-Abhá in English letters written on his behalf.[10] It is evident, therefore, that the Bahá'í greeting itself – the most fundamental element of Bahá'í parlance – is actually a testimony to Bahá'u'lláh's station and an affirmation of the truth of his message.

Beyond the above, Alláh-u-Abhá is the focus of every Bahá'í's daily *dhikr*, a meditative repetition of a word or phrase. Bahá'u'lláh enjoined the repetition of 'Alláh-u-Abhá' 95 times once a day upon every Bahá'í, a practice rooted in Sufism.[11] The phrase is also a common refrain in Bahá'í songs composed in various languages. The chief significance of this phrase certainly lies in its latter part, 'Abhá', which means 'most glorious'. This word is derived from the Arabic triliteral root B-H-W, and the many derivatives of that root – including Bahá', which means 'glory' or 'splendour', and is known to Bahá'ís as 'the Greatest Name' – are ubiquitous in Bahá'í history and culture. Indeed, one need look no further than the very name of the religion and the title of its founder for proof of this.

In that vein, there is another important Arabic phrase that merits discussion, and that is the invocation 'Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá' ('O Thou the Glory of Glories', or more literally, 'O Thou Glory of the All-Glorious').[12] This phrase is found repeatedly throughout the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The following is one example from his Will and Testament:

> It behooveth them [the Bahá'ís] not to rest for a moment, neither to seek repose. They must disperse themselves in every land, pass by every clime, and travel throughout all regions. Bestirred, without rest, and steadfast to the end, they must raise in every land the triumphal cry 'Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá!'...[13]

The connotation of joy associated with Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá has also found expression in other ways. It is not uncommon, for instance, to hear Western Bahá'ís – particularly those of Christian background – invoke Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá at moments of elation, similar to how one might say 'Hallelujah' when one feels particularly glad or moved. In addition, there is also a precedent for invoking Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá in times of trouble or distress. Below is another passage from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to that effect:

> Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá!...I have renounced the world and the peoples thereof, and am heartbroken and sorely afflicted because of the unfaithful. In the cage of this world I flutter even as a frightened bird, and yearn every day to take my flight unto Thy Kingdom. Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá! Make me to drink of the cup of sacrifice, and set me free. Relieve me from these woes and trials, from these afflictions and troubles.[14]

Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá also holds a special place in Bahá'í iconography through a calligraphic rendering of the invocation that was produced by Mírzá

Figure 1: Mishkín-Qalám's iconic calligraphic rendering of the invocation Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá Image produced by 'Parsa' of the Wikipedia community.

Ḥusayn-i-Iṣfahání (familiarly known as Mishkín-Qalám[15]), an early Bahá'í and one of Bahá'u'lláh's contemporaries. This iconic rendering of Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá, pictured above, is typically framed and displayed prominently in Bahá'í homes and centres all across the world.

Apart from Alláh-u-Abhá and Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá, there are other loanwords used in the Bahá'í religiolect. Ayyám-i-Há ('the Days of Há' – literally 'the Days of H'), the intercalary days of the Bahá'í calendar that precede the Bahá'í month of fasting; Naw-Rúz ('New Day'), the Persian New Year; and Riḍván ('Paradise'), the festival commemorating Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of his mission, are all Bahá'í holy days. Ḥuqúqu'lláh ('The Right of God') refers to a voluntary tax paid by Bahá'ís to the Universal House of Justice – the international governing body of the Bahá'í Faith – for the promotion of their religion, donation to charities and social and economic development projects and so on. The original titles of certain significant Bahá'í scriptures, such as Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i-Aqdas ('The Most Holy Book') and Kitáb-i-Íqán ('The Book of Certitude'), are also well known to Bahá'ís around the world, and may be said to figure into their vocabulary as loanwords. As the former contains the bulk of Bahá'í law, and the latter is the religion's primary theological work, these books stand out as preeminent in the extensive corpus of Bahá'u'lláh's writings. In addition, the fact that leading Bahá'í figures and institutions, such as Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, have repeatedly referred to these books by their original titles throughout their own communications to the Bahá'í world – as well as the fact that, whenever published, these original titles invariably appear on their front covers, throughout their front matter and in other prominent places (a practice not observed with the publication of other Bahá'í sacred texts in English) – have added to the prevalence of their use in Bahá'í culture.

Other loanwords – used by the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá to represent religious ideas by way of metaphor – are not employed by the community as actively as the above terms and, apart from more scholarly discussions, their occurrence is generally limited to the translations of

certain Bahá'í scriptures. Sadratu'l-Muntahá ('The [Lote-]tree beyond which there is no passing') refers to 'a tree which, in ancient times, the Arabs planted to mark the end of the road',[16] but it is also a term that appears in the Qur'án[17] and holds significance for Muslims. This term has been interpreted in the Bahá'í framework as a reference to the Manifestation of God, a phrase discussed further below. 'Urvatu'l-Vuthqá ('The sure handle') is another term used in the Qur'án, where it signifies a monotheistic belief in God[18] – but in a Bahá'í context, it refers more specifically to the Covenant of God,[19] a phrase discussed further below. Kawthar and Salsabíl are both proper names of rivers (or other bodies of water) in the Islamic depiction of paradise.[20] In Bahá'í parlance, these terms represent a means of transmission from God to humanity, through which man can acquire a range of divine virtues (knowledge of God, renunciation, detachment, etc.). Afnán ('twigs') is a term that refers to the maternal relatives of the Báb, and Aghṣán ('branches') refers to the male descendants of Bahá'u'lláh. The Qá'im ('the one who arises') and the Mihdí[21] ('the one who is guided') are world-redeeming saviours in Islamic eschatology – the former a distinctly Shí'ih term, while the latter transcends sectarian divides. Bahá'ís believe that both of these titles refer to the Báb.

Contemporary Phraseology

With a better understanding of the roots of the Bahá'í religiolect, we can begin to explore some of its distinctive phraseology that Bahá'ís use today.

The Repurposing of Ordinary Words and Phrases

In addition to its neologisms, the Bahá'í religiolect includes a variety of pre-existing words that have taken on new meanings.

One of the most fundamental of these is the word Manifestation, a term Bahá'ís often use as shorthand to refer to a Manifestation of God. As mentioned above, this term is applied to certain prophets and founders of world religions, such as Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus Christ, Muḥammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. At first glance, the term may give the impression that Bahá'ís believe these individuals were the literal incarnations of God on earth, which is not the case. Rather, they believe these prophets were 'the manifestations of the names and attributes of God'[22] – in other words, the perfect mirrors of those virtues that have been associated with God throughout the ages, such as kindness, patience, steadfastness, etc. To elaborate, Bahá'ís believe that God Himself is unknowable to humanity because humans do not have the capacity to comprehend their creator. For this reason, they believe that God has instead graciously designated certain individuals throughout history to be the perfect mirrors of His attributes, and has invested them therewith. Being human, these 'mirrors' are infinitely more accessible to their fellow men than the transcendent, unfathomable entity that created them. Viewed in this light, we see that the term is in reality not a misnomer, because what is meant by a Manifestation of God is a specially chosen kind of deputy who manifests God to the limited degree to which a person can recognize and know him. Thus, for a human bound by their innately finite capacities, the Manifestation of God is as much "God" as they will ever be able to comprehend.

A word that features prominently in discussions of the Bahá'í writings is tablet.[23] Put simply, a tablet is a letter written by the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh

or 'Abdu'l-Bahá and addressed to a specific audience, usually a single person. These tablets, which have always been entitled retrospectively, are sometimes known by the name of their addressee. Examples of this include the Báb's tablet to Muḥammad Sháh, Bahá'u'lláh's tablet to Mánikchí Ṣáḥib and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's tablet to Auguste Forel. Other tablets have been entitled in accordance with their content or overall message, such as Bahá'u'lláh's *Tablet of the World* or 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Tablets of the Divine Plan*. Because prayers and tablets both constitute types of Bahá'í writings, it is not uncommon to see Bahá'ís use these words interchangeably. The two words, however, do not mean the same thing. While a tablet typically refers to a letter from one of the aforementioned 'Central Figures'[24] to one or more of their contemporaries, a prayer is an earnest, heartfelt supplication to God. In other words, the former is epistolary in nature, while the latter is decidedly devotional. Furthermore, the composition of prayers is not exclusive to the Central Figures. Shoghi Effendi, for instance, composed many prayers in Persian and Arabic.[25] Indeed, Shoghi Effendi has even stated that it is permissible for any Bahá'í to compose his or her own prayers when he or she feels moved to do so, with the caveat that it would be preferable to use the ones written by the Central Figures because of the special power with which they have been endowed.[26] In reality, if we examine the provenance of Bahá'í texts, we will find that, more often than not, prayers constitute smaller parts of tablets – that is, in the Bahá'í writings, prayers actually tend to be features of tablets. The fact that the two generally appear together as one cohesive unit originally may well add to the confusion that sometimes attends these two categories of Bahá'í writings.

One word which is especially integral to understanding the relationship between God and humanity in the Bahá'í framework is covenant. This word, of course, has a special meaning in the Abrahamic religious tradition, but a treatment of that subject lies beyond the scope of this paper. In Bahá'í nomenclature, there are technically two kinds of covenant: the 'Lesser Covenant' and the 'Greater Covenant'. The former refers to a pact that a Manifestation of God makes with his followers, exhorting them to accept and abide by a designated successor who will continue to lead the religion after his passing. The purpose of this pact is to establish a chain of unbreakable succession throughout the lifetime of a religion. In the case of the Bahá'í Faith, the Lesser Covenant was established by Bahá'u'lláh in his *Book of the Covenant* (*Kitáb-i-'Ahd*), and extended by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in his Will and Testament. The Greater Covenant, on the other hand, takes a much wider perspective; it is an overarching kind of pact 'which every Manifestation of God makes with His followers, promising that in the fullness of time a new Manifestation will be sent, and taking from them the undertaking to accept Him when this occurs'.[27] This belief has ramifications across religions, not merely within them, and it is an essential aspect of what Bahá'ís call 'progressive revelation' – the idea that God has always sent His Manifestations to humanity, at different times and in different places, proclaiming missions and bearing messages commensurate with the maturity and capacity of the peoples who received them. This divine guidance is guaranteed to be continuous, and in fact unending. There are, moreover, many tablets from Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá in which they praise the addressee for his or her 'firmness in the covenant'. Here, 'firmness' signi-

fies a steadfast belief, and 'the covenant' in this sense is essentially synonymous with the Bahá'í Faith itself, since Bahá'ís regard the founding of their religion as marking the present stage of the Greater Covenant.

Two terms that feature prominently in the Bahá'í religiolect are the Faith and the Cause, which are both used as references to the Bahá'í religion itself.[28] They appear to be contractions of 'the Faith of God' and 'the Cause of God', respectively – both phrases that appear throughout the writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In contemporary usage, it is very common to hear Bahá'ís talk about 'teaching the Faith', or articulating the tenets of their religion in some capacity (as part of a presentation, during conversation, etc.). This is a major aspect of Bahá'í life that will be discussed in more detail in the section on institutional terminology below. Furthermore, 'the Faith' and 'the Cause' have become parts of longer locutions. The aforementioned 'Cradle of the Faith' refers to present-day Iran, inasmuch as it is the birthplace of both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, and the place to which the ultimate origins of the religions they founded can be traced. There is also 'friends of the Faith',[29] a term that refers to those who enjoy a cordial relationship with Bahá'ís or have a favourable opinion of their religion, but do not identify as Bahá'ís themselves. In addition, we have 'the Hands of the Cause of God' (or simply 'Hands' for short), a now discontinued institution comprising individuals distinguished for their service to the religion in the areas of community safeguarding and advancement.

The last term we will explore in this section is pioneer. Pioneers are Bahá'ís who have migrated to another city or country to help promote the Bahá'í Faith. Unlike missionaries – whose religious work is vocational and sponsored by a church or other religious organization – pioneers are not necessarily employed in a capacity relevant to their religious affiliation, and they do not receive any kind of stipend from the Bahá'í institutions. The bulk of their day-to-day teaching efforts, therefore, tends to manifest itself during conversation, in the invitations they extend to their friends and colleagues to attend Bahá'í gatherings and so on. Pioneers have existed since the time of Bahá'u'lláh, when Persian Bahá'ís emigrated to India, Myanmar and other countries to promote their religion in those lands. Many Bahá'ís who pioneered to countries where Bahá'í communities did not exist during the 'Ten Year Crusade', an initiative launched by Shoghi Effendi in 1953 that was designed to spread the message of the Bahá'í Faith across the world, were given the title 'Knight of Bahá'u'lláh'. Those Bahá'ís who relocate to another state or province within their country of residence – or, on a smaller scale, even to another county or city within that state or province – are known as 'homefront pioneers'.

Locutions Rooted in Primary Bahá'í Texts

There are several locutions Bahá'ís use today that originated in the primary Bahá'í texts. These include the titles by which the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi are known to Bahá'ís. To begin, it may be immediately obvious to the reader that the 'names' most commonly used to refer to each of the Central Figures are actually titles themselves. Beyond those titles, the Báb has been called 'the Exalted One' (also 'the Most Exalted One'),[30] and is perhaps most commonly known as 'the Primal Point' – an appellation he gave himself; this has been reused by the succeeding generations of Bahá'í leaders and institutions. Bahá'u'lláh is also known by many

titles, including 'the Blessed Beauty' (probably the most common choice in contemporary usage), 'the Ancient Beauty', 'the Ancient King' and others. While he did style himself with some of these titles – such as the latter two in the list just mentioned – others, like the first in that list, were used of him by his son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, or by some other eminent Bahá'í. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, for that matter, is also known by multiple titles. These include 'the Perfect Exemplar', conferred on him by Shoghi Effendi; the Centre of the Covenant, which has its conceptual origins in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and was used repeatedly by 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself; the Mystery of God, conceived by Bahá'u'lláh; and, most commonly, the Master,[31] a title used of him by virtually all of his Bahá'í contemporaries – including Bahá'u'lláh.[32] Lastly, we have Shoghi Effendi, who is really known only by one title – the Guardian. One of the measures 'Abdu'l-Bahá took to ensure the continuity of the Lesser Covenant was to establish the office of a 'guardianship' in his Will and Testament. In this vital document, 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly indicated that, upon his passing, Shoghi Effendi would assume the role of 'Guardian of the Cause of God', and would immediately succeed him as the leader of the Bahá'í world. It is for this reason that he is often called by the abbreviated title of 'the Guardian'.

A phenomenon that should not go unnoticed is the colloquialization of certain distinctly Bahá'í terms. A prime example is the abbreviation of the greeting 'Alláh-u-Abhá' to just 'Abhá'. This usage seems to be popular chiefly among Iranian Bahá'ís, and it may in fact be exclusive to them. Since, however, Iranians have a considerable presence in most Bahá'í communities across the world, it is difficult to overlook behaviours and practices associated with their culture that are sometimes carried over into general Bahá'í culture.[33] Here are two examples of 'Abhá' in action, both taken from exchanges on Facebook Messenger:

Interestingly, use of Abhá has generated backlash from other Iranian Bahá'ís. Indeed, there is even an anonymous[35] brief essay written in Persian – apparently untitled, but featuring the incipit 'Why is it not permissible for us to use Abhá instead of Alláh-u-Abhá?'[36] – which has recently been making its rounds on Facebook and other media.[37] To summarize, the essay asserts that usage of 'Abhá' by itself is improper, and actually incomplete, in two ways. The first is that Abhá alone is grammatically incomplete; it is a descriptor that is not describing anything. The second is that Abhá alone is spiritually incomplete. While 'Alláh-u-Abhá' is clearly an affirmation of

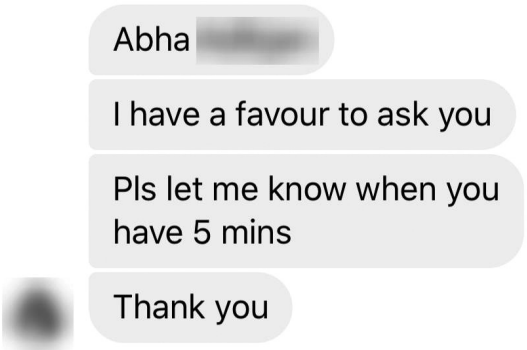

Figure 2: Usage of 'Abhá' by an Iranian Bahá'í as part of informal conversation.

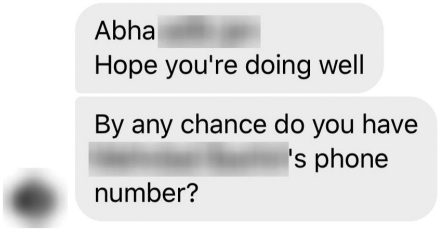

Figure 3: Similar usage of 'Abhá' by another Iranian Bahá'í.[34]

Bahá'u'lláh's station as a Manifestation of God, the word 'Abhá' – unaccompanied by the name of God, Whom it describes – is stripped of its spiritual significance.

Institutional Terminology

Over the past century, the Bahá'í religiolect has been further expanded through Shoghi Effendi's and the Bahá'í World Centre's[38] use of new terminology that is not found in the primary Bahá'í texts. This set of words will be referred to here as institutional terminology, so named because these words constitute a distinctive phraseology that is often employed in the messages of Shoghi Effendi, as well as those of the institutions which succeeded him and now make up the Bahá'í World Centre, such as the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Centre. Other institutions, such as National Spiritual Assemblies, often use this same terminology in their communications as well.

According to Bahá'í theology, God wished to be made known, therefore He brought humanity into existence and has dispatched His Manifestations over time to serve as channels for recognizing Him.[39] In promulgating their faith, Bahá'ís are extending an invitation to adhere to a moral framework which they believe is ideally suited to humanity's present needs, and participate in carrying forward the ever-advancing civilization that has been envisioned in their writings. It follows, then, that the heads of the Bahá'í Faith going back to Bahá'u'lláh himself have stressed the vital importance of sharing the Bahá'í Faith with others – whether directly or simply by example – in a way that is tactful, commensurate with the listener's level of receptivity and free of coercion or other methods one might use to pressure others to convert.

This sort of mass promulgation can most effectively be executed through an organized and clearly defined approach – and this brings us to the concept of the plan, arguably the bedrock upon which all other Bahá'í institutional terminology rests. The Bahá'í Administrative Order, which really began to develop with Shoghi Effendi's accession to the Guardianship in 1921, has played a central role in facilitating the spread of the Bahá'í Faith on a global scale. Ever since that time, the blueprints that have charted a course for these efforts have been 'plans', which Smith defines as 'organized campaigns to fulfil specific goals'[40] – among them typically the expansion of the Faith into new territories – for a fixed number of years. Smith then continues:

> The 'charter' for much of this activity is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Tablets of the Divine Plan* (1916–17), addressed to the American and Canadian Bahá'ís, in which he called for a systematic endeavour to teach the [Bahá'í] Faith throughout the world...[41]

Smith then goes on to list a series of national and international plans that have been launched since the 1920s.[42] Some of the words and phrases that compose institutional terminology have existed since the time of Shoghi Effendi. Examples of such terms include expansion and consolidation. Put simply, expansion refers to efforts to promote the Bahá'í Faith by sharing it with others. Consolidation is the next step, and arguably the logical corollary, to expansion. Those who have become Bahá'ís through expansion efforts are invited to participate in Bahá'í community life, and increase their knowledge of the religion's beliefs and principles. As they become more integrated into their local communities, and their abilities are enhanced through the acquisition of new knowledge (both acts of consolidation), these Bahá'ís become empowered to assist with ongoing expansion and consolidation efforts. In this way, the process of expansion and consolidation constitutes a self-subsisting cycle that facilitates the religion's perpetual growth at the grassroots level.

The bulk of institutional terminology chiefly in use today, however, has only been developing for about the past twenty years through the directives of the Universal House of Justice. With their inauguration of the Four Year Plan (1996–2000), the Universal House of Justice laid the theoretical groundwork for achieving 'a significant advance in the process of entry by troops [an influx of new converts]'.[43] In their Four Year Plan message to the Bahá'ís of the world, training institutes – systems designed to 'assist individuals to deepen their understanding of the Bahá'í teachings, and to gain the spiritual insights and practical skills they need to carry out the work of the community'[44] – are identified as the main instrument to be used to accelerate this growth on a global scale. The following excerpt from that message encapsulates this vision well:

> The next four years will represent an extraordinary period in the history of our Faith, a turning point of epochal magnitude. What the friends [Bahá'ís] throughout the world are now being asked to do is to commit themselves, their material resources, their abilities and their time to the development of a network of training institutes on a scale never before attempted. These centres of Bahá'í learning will have as their goal one very practical outcome, namely, the raising up of large numbers of believers who are trained to foster and facilitate the process of entry by troops with efficiency and love.[45]

In a document they prepared for the Universal House of Justice in February 2000, entitled 'Training Institutes and Systematic Growth', the International Teaching Centre noted the extraordinary success of the curriculum developed by the Ruhi Institute, which consists of a sequence of courses (often called the Ruhi sequence) designed to help Bahá'ís learn more about the principles and history of their Faith. Reports of this success soon led the Universal House of Justice to endorse the Ruhi Institute's sequence of courses as the primary method of systematic training to be implemented by Bahá'í communities throughout the world. The main goal of these courses is to help Bahá'ís become more effective teachers of their religion, such that they will be better equipped to assist with the twin processes of expansion and consolidation. In facilitating this training, Bahá'í communities are building capacity – a term that has its origins in social theory, but which has

been used repeatedly in communications from Bahá'í institutions to denote an increase in the number of human resources at a Bahá'í community's disposal. In periodically-held reflection meetings (or reflection gatherings), Bahá'ís residing within the boundaries of a cluster (a geographic area that constitutes an 'intercommunity partnership'[46]) come together to evaluate what has taken place during their previous intensive programme of growth, or IPG, and discuss how they might proceed with their efforts to build additional capacity in the next IPG. These IPGs consist of two phases: an expansion phase and a consolidation phase (see the above for a discussion of expansion and consolidation).

Subsequent messages from the Universal House of Justice discuss the execution of a number of core activities, which have accompanied the spread and development of training institutes and are typically employed in consolidation efforts.[47] It is generally accepted that there are four of these core activities: (1) devotionals, gatherings where people recite and reflect on passages from religious holy books (not necessarily just Bahá'í texts); (2) study circles, tutor-led group studies of the Ruhi books, designed with the aim that participants will be able to serve as tutors of their own study circles once they have reached an advanced stage in the sequence; (3) children's classes, which offer spiritual and moral education to children; and (4) junior youth groups (more formally, the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Programme, or JYSEP), where those in early adolescence are guided by one or more animators (group facilitators) through a series of special books and activities designed to help participants engage in artistic expression, render service to their local communities and forge a strong moral identity. The classification of the age groups just mentioned is more or less arbitrary, but it is generally considered that in Bahá'í nomenclature, youth are those between the ages of fifteen and thirty; junior youth are those between eleven and fifteen; and children are ten or younger.

For the most part, these terms have not been codified in any authoritative way; there is no officially sanctioned pamphlet or other resource, for instance, which prescribes fixed definitions for them. Rather, the nature of this terminology, which typically appears in the context of institutional communications, seems to lend itself to reflection and subsequent application in order for their full implications to be discovered. This would mean that institutional terminology has been (and is still being) developed and employed in a way that, in most cases, eludes objective definition.[48] Instead, one is left to arrive at approximations of meaning through the subjective conclusions one draws from individual or group study of institutional communications, as well as from one's personal experience in the field of action. (Indeed, even the present author's attempts to define these terms in the preceding pages are mostly personal inferences themselves.)

The foregoing list of institutional terminology is by no means exhaustive. This particular set of words includes many other special terms, offices of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, and acronyms, but to delve any deeper into this subject would lie beyond the scope of this paper. For those who wish to study this terminology further, it is recommended that they consult two books that feature collections of messages from the Universal House of Justice (as well as other pertinent documents) concerning recent plans:

(1) *Turning Point: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice and Supplementary Material (1996–2006)*; and (2) *Framework for Action: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice and Supplementary Material (2006–2016)*. Also recommended is a document recently prepared by the International Teaching Centre, *Training Institutes: Attaining a Higher Level of Functioning*,[49] which offers an in-depth analysis of messages from the World Centre about the Ruhi sequence, the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Programme, the programme for the spiritual education of children, and the processes involved in developing institutional capacity.

Historical Phraseology

Earlier in this paper, reference was made to phraseology in the Bahá'í religiolect that has not survived, referred to here as historical phraseology. It would be of historical interest to explore this phraseology, if only on a cursory level, now that we have discussed the more contemporary aspects of the religiolect. There are a number of terms in the Bahá'í religiolect that were formerly used to refer to women. Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá often used the word 'leaf' (waraqa) in this sense.[50] Indeed, 'the Greatest Holy Leaf' – the sister of 'Abdu'l-Bahá – is well known to and greatly revered by Bahá'ís. Other, more conventional but now archaic words – such as 'handmaid', 'handmaiden', and 'maidservant' (all three usually either ama or kaníz) – have also been used in the Bahá'í writings to this effect. Another term that is used to refer exclusively to Bahá'í women is 'handmaids of the Merciful' (imá' al-raḥmán), also translated as 'maidservants of the Merciful'. 'Abdu'l-Bahá often used this term in his tablets to refer to female Bahá'ís, as did Shoghi Effendi in his letters to the Bahá'ís of the Middle East. Like the previous terms, this one is not used in contemporary English Bahá'í parlance, but it is still used occasionally by Persian-speaking Bahá'í authors in their works.

The remainder of the discussion in this section will focus on some of the more esoteric aspects of historical Bahá'í phraseology that were intentionally cryptic. A general consensus among Bahá'í scholars indicates that this opaque language was designed to protect a fledgling community of persecuted Bahá'ís during the early days of their religion. Abu'l-Qásim Afnán has observed that it was intended to protect the identities of the addressees of tablets in the event that they fell into the hands of malicious people outside the Bahá'í community.[51] Furthermore, throughout his *Asráru'l-Áthár* ('The Mysteries of the Writings'), the eminent Bahá'í scholar and lexicographer, Fáḍil Mázandaráni, repeatedly used the word *stewart ramz* ('code') to characterize this language. It is, therefore, a sort of cryptolect that should be regarded as a historically vital component of the larger Bahá'í religiolect.

One can hardly explore this dimension of the Bahá'í religiolect without encountering the Abjad numeral system. A brief definition of this system is included in the glossary of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas:

> The ancient Arabic system of allocating a numerical value to letters of the alphabet, so that numbers may be represented by letters and vice versa. Thus every word has both a literal meaning and a numerical value.[52]

The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh would often employ the Abjad system in their writings to conceal identities, particularly those of their followers, by converting

their real names to other names that have the same numerical value in the Abjad system. The name Muḥammad, for instance, would often be converted to Nabíl, both of which have a numerical value of 92. There are, however, several tablets from Bahá'u'lláh that actually contain coded references to himself (when read from right to left). One example is the number 152, the discrete Abjad equivalent of 'Bahá', which appears at the end of some of his tablets.[53] The number 669, which discretely equates to 'Bahá'u'lláh', is used in many of his written benedictions in the literal Arabic sense of 'glory of God'; for instance, 'O Faḍlu'lláh! Upon thee be 669...'[54]

In his tablets, Bahá'u'lláh would occasionally recast the names of his followers as prepositional phrases. One example involves a certain believer named Muḥammad-ʿAlí. In one of his tablets to him, Bahá'u'lláh recasts this believer's name as Muḥammad qabl-i-ʿAlí ('Muḥammad before ʿAlí').[55] Another example – one with an added layer of complexity – can be found in a tablet of Bahá'u'lláh entitled 'Riḍvánu'l-ʿAdl' ('The Paradise of Justice').[56] This tablet was addressed to a Bahá'í named Muḥammad-Riḍá Shahmírzádí, and at one point in the tablet, Bahá'u'lláh refers to this believer with the phrase 'Riḍá baʿd-i-Nabíl' ('Riḍá after Nabíl'). Here, Bahá'u'lláh has employed two strategies to conceal the identity of the recipient. He started by converting the first part of the believer's compound first name (Muḥammad-Riḍá), Muḥammad, to a numerically-equivalent counterpart, Nabíl, resulting in the new compound name of Nabíl-Riḍá. He then took this new name and recast it as the prepositional phrase 'Riḍá after Nabíl'. There were also instances where Bahá'u'lláh alluded to the Báb in his tablets (after the latter's execution) with the same level of complexity, referring to him as 'Alí qabl-i-Nabíl' ('ʿAlí before Nabíl').[57]

The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh would also refer to certain cities and provinces by using the phrase 'land of', followed by individual letters that compose the place's name. For instance, when referring to Ṭihrán, Bahá'u'lláh would often write Arḍ-i-Ṭá ('The Land of Ṭá'). Interestingly, the use of these codenames was not limited to the names of Persian cities. While 'Abdu'l-Bahá was visiting Beirut, Bahá'u'lláh wrote him a tablet known as the 'Tablet of the Land of Bá'. The following table lays out some of the more commonly encountered appellations in this vein:

Fáḍil Mázandaráni has noted the multivalence of these locational codenames – observing, for instance, that while Arḍ-i-Bá can refer to Beirut, it can also refer to the Iranian city of Bárfurúsh (now known as Bábul), the birthplace of an eminent Bábí figure known as Quddús.[58]

The last feature of historical phraseology that will be mentioned here is another kind of written encryption technique, in which the names of people and cities would be reduced to certain constituent letters. For instance, in some of his unpublished tablets to the eminent Bahá'í merchant, ʿAzízu'lláh Jadhdháb, Bahá'u'lláh would refer to this man with the phrase ʿayn qabl-i-zih ('the letter ʿayn before the letter zih'). In cases like these, Bahá'u'lláh has actually combined different encryption techniques; he not only reduced the recipient's first name (ʿAzízu'lláh) to the first two letters that compose it (ʿayn and zih), but he also recast those two letters as a prepositional phrase. Bahá'u'lláh also applied this 'reduction technique' to the names of places, a strategy that necessarily has some overlap with the aforementioned strategy of using codenames. Table 1 already includes

Translation of the Signifier	Translation of the Signified
The Land of Bá	Beirut
The Land of Káf	Káshán
The Land of Káf and Rá	Kirmán
The Land of Khá	Khurásán
The Land of Mím	Mázandarán
The Land of Ṣád	Iṣfahán
The Land of Shín	Shíráz
The Land of Tá	Tabríz
The Land of Ṭá	Ṭihrán
The Land of Yá	Yazd
The Land of Zá	Zanján

Table 1: Examples of codenames used in Bahá'í texts and the places they typically represent.

one such example ('the Land of Káf and Rá', meaning Kirmán). Another example involves a tablet Bahá'u'lláh addressed to the Bahá'ís of the small town of Zavárih, which begins with these words: 'O ye loved ones of the All-Merciful in Zá and Rá...'[59]

Attempts to Define Terminology used in Bahá'í Scripture

Over the past several decades, there have been formal attempts to produce reference materials that define words and phrases used in the Bahá'í writings. The most serious and comprehensive of these endeavours have been undertaken in Persian, which is unsurprising considering that is the language in which much of the religion's primary texts were written, and in which early Bahá'í scholarship inevitably first developed. A distinguishing feature of these Persian-language dictionaries is their inclusion of Arabic terms that occur in Bahá'í scripture – no doubt helpful to the reader of Persian seeking to grasp the meaning of Bahá'í scripture written in that language that also draws on Arabic vocabulary, or even the Arabic Bahá'í writings themselves.

Perhaps the first truly large-scale attempt at such an endeavour in any language was conducted by the aforementioned Fáḍil Mázandarání when he wrote *Asráru'l-Áthár*.[60] This work spans several volumes, only some of which have been published, and it is essentially a dictionary of terms that appear in the Bahá'í writings or stem from other religious traditions that bear some relevance to the Bahá'í Faith. The work features entries of various terms, laid out in alphabetical order, complete with definitions of those terms and examples of their usage derived from scripture. Mázandarání apparently completed *Asráru'l-Áthár* sometime between 1955 and 1956, but the work did not appear in print during his lifetime.[61] About a decade after his death, the Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Iran finally began to publish Mázandarání's manuscript – a process that lasted from 1967 to 1972.

There is also an important set of Persian-language works in this vein, which will be referred to here as the *Lughat* ('Words') series. In 1970, the Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Tehran published a glossary of Bahá'í terms entitled *Dou-Hizár Lughat* ('Two-thousand Words').[62] This book exclusively

features brief definitions of Arabic terms that appear in the Bahá'í writings, all of which have been vocalized for the benefit of the Persian reader. Four years later, in 1974, an expanded version of this work – entitled *Shish-Hizár Lughat* ('Six-thousand Words') – was published by the Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Iran.[63] An interesting feature of this book – one that was absent in its precursor – is the list of dictionaries and other sources that the compilers consulted in preparing it, which appears at the end of the work. Among them is listed the aforementioned *Asráru'l-Áthár*.

More than a decade afterwards, in 1986, the work was expanded to its largest iteration yet,[64] *Núzdah-Hizár Lughat* ('Nineteen-thousand Words'),[65] published by the University of Toronto Press. In their helpful introduction to the work, the publishers note that, in a sense, the production of *Núzdah-Hizár Lughat* was some 30 years in the making. This effectively means that initial work on the Lughat series would have begun in the 1950s. In addition, they make explicit reference to the iterations that preceded *Núzdah-Hizár Lughat* (both of which were reprinted at least once), and note that *Núzdah-Hizár Lughat* itself took eight years to prepare (1978–1986). The scope of this work was expanded to include terms outside of exclusively Bahá'í language, such as the names of historical figures, places and so on – but the publishers did note that even these terms still appear in the Bahá'í writings, and therefore bear some relevance to the religion. Thus, unlike its two precursors, the entries in this work are not limited to Arabic terms (though it is still the primary focus), but Persian entries are still not included.[66] This is apparently because the purpose of this work, like those which preceded it, was to acquaint the Persian Bahá'í reader with non-Persian Bahá'í terminology. Apart from the greater number of entries, the definitions featured in this work are, generally, also much more comprehensive than those of the iterations that came before it.

There have also been notable attempts along these lines in English. It seems the first serious effort to define Persian and Arabic Bahá'í and Bahá'í-related terms in a proper book was carried out by Marzieh Gail, the eminent Bahá'í author and translator, with the publication of her *Bahá'í Glossary* in 1955.[67] The book was rather small, spanning just under 60 pages, but it no doubt served as an immensely useful reference work for English-speaking Bahá'ís. The main body of the book was broken up into three columns: the entry (which would be transliterated into the Latin alphabet, if Persian or Arabic; there were some English entries) on the left; the phonetic pronunciation, where applicable (again, represented with Latin characters) in the middle; and the definition on the right. The entries are diverse, in that they include many proper names, the names of the months that make up the Bahá'í calendar (all Arabic) and so on. Several of the definitions are corroborated by passages from the Bahá'í writings or other literature, the sources being explicitly cited in-line. The introductory pages of Gail's *Bahá'í Glossary* feature some of her own helpful remarks on the subject of transliteration, as well as a table that lays out each letter of the Persian alphabet and its corresponding transliteration, pronunciation, and numerical value (according to the aforementioned Abjad numeral system). A reference work of this kind probably served as a useful companion to the reader in his or her study of the well-known English-language Bahá'í histories of the time – such as Shoghi Effendi's *God Passes By* and his translation of Nabíl-i-Zarandí's

narrative, which he entitled *The Dawn-Breakers* – as they make frequent allusions to Persian and Arabic terms and names.

A more recent attempt in this vein was conducted by Jonah Winters in 2010, with the digital publication of his *Glossary of Bahá'í Terms*.[68] It is a bit smaller than Gail's *Bahá'í Glossary* – but unlike Gail's work, this glossary features a preponderance of English Bahá'í vocabulary, rather than one of Persian or Arabic entries. In addition, the bulk of Gail's book consists of terms, names of historical figures, and so on which are not necessarily particular to Bahá'í parlance (for instance, Persian titles like páshá and mírzá), whereas Winters's glossary was prepared with a greater view to defining terms that are uniquely Bahá'í. Because the work was prepared digitally, Winters's glossary is an especially rich resource in that hyperlinks are embedded throughout, which point the reader to all sorts of useful reference materials to corroborate the definitions he has provided.

Conclusion

The foregoing pages are intended to offer an introductory look at the features of the Bahá'í religiolect. The above study, however, should by no means be misconstrued as an exhaustive attempt to codify the Bahá'í religiolect, or as anything more than a cursory survey of an elaborate language stemming from a rich religious tradition. To capture befittingly the plethora of terminology, the depth of meaning and the subtlety of nuance inherent to the Bahá'í religiolect, further study by future scholars will undoubtedly be required. It would likely prove enlightening, for instance, for future researchers to evaluate the Bahá'í religiolect within the framework of those languages other than English (an admitted limitation of the present study) into which an adequate number of Bahá'í texts have been translated. For the time being, however, it is hoped that the reader will be content with this foray into the features of the Bahá'í religiolect.

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Contributor details

Adib Masumian has an MA in Learning Technologies and a BS in Corporate Communication, both from the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of *Debunking the Myths: Conspiracy Theories on the Genesis and Mission of the Bahá'í Faith* (Lulu Publishing, 2009), which is also available online for free in both English and Persian, and has previously published in the Bahá'í Studies Review. See also https://adibmasumian.com

E-mail: adibmasumian@gmail.com

Endnotes

1. Benjamin Hary, *Multiglossia in Judeo-Arabic*, Leiden & New York: E.J. Brill, 1992.
2. Benjamin Hary, *Religiolect,* Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2011, 45.
3. Patrick Cox, 'Arabic has a Jewish dialect, and these women speak it', Public Radio International, The World in Words. 16 March 2017. Available online: https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-03-15/arabic-has-jewish-dialect-and-these-women-speak-it. (Last accessed 20 May 2017.)
4. Patrick Cox, '"What a total God shot!" Understand that? Then you speak Christianese', Public Radio International, The World in Words. 29 March 2017. Available online: https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-03-28/what-total-god-shot-understand-then-you-speak-christianese. (Last accessed 20 May 2017.)
5. Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978, 165–166.
6. A minor orthographical note: Instead of using hyphens, most Bahá'ís use apostrophes on either side of the 'u' in Alláh-u-Abhá when writing out the word in a Latin-based script, despite the precedent established by Shoghi Effendi for using the former. Bahá'ís probably do this in the manner of writing the name Bahá'u'lláh, which clearly does use apostrophes, without realizing that the a postrophes in this transliteration of Bahá'u'lláh's name serve a purpose that does not apply to Alláh-u-Abhá. The first apostrophe in Bahá'u'lláh's name represents a standalone hamza, an Arabic character; the second indicates that the initial A in Alláh, an alif waṣla in the original Arabic, has been elided by the morphological marker 'u' that represents the nominative conjugation of 'Baha' in the compound name 'Bahá'u'lláh'. The phrase 'Alláh-u-Abhá', on the other hand, does not have any standalone hamzas, nor does it include any elisions. For that reason, it does not make orthographical sense to write out the phrase as 'Alláh'u'Abhá'.
7. Stephen Lambden, 'The Word Bahā: Quintessence of the Greatest Name', *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 3(1), note 31 (DOI: BSR.3.1.19). Available online here: http://bahai-library.com/lambden_quintessence_greatest_name.
8. From a Persian discourse by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in Fáḍil Mázandarání, *Amr va Khalq*, vol. 3, Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1986, 76–77. Provisional translation by the present author.
9. *Ibid* 74–75.
10. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand, 26 December 1941. Published in *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, 1923–1957* (Sydney, Australia: National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia, 1970), 41.
11. Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992, para. 18.
12. This invocation has been the subject of extensive commentary and scholarship. For example, see Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl Gulpáygání, 'Elucidation of the Meaning of The Greatest Name' (https://bahai-library.com/gulpaygani_elucidation_greatest_name); Abu'l-Qásim Faydí, 'Explanation of the Symbol of the Greatest Name' (https://bahai-library.com/faizi_symbol_greatest_name); Stephen Lambden, 'The Word Bahā: Quintessence of the Greatest Name' (http://bahai-library.com/lambden_quintessence_greatest_name), and 'Greatest Name, The (al-Ism al-A`zam)' (https://bahai-library.com/lambden_encyclopedia_greatest_name).
13. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), 10.
14. The words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as translated by Shoghi Effendi and quoted in *The Promised Day is Come* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980, 15.
15. Pen of Musk.
16. Shirley Macias, *The Verse of Light, the Sadratu'l-Muntahā (Divine Lote Tree), and the Unfoldment of God's Plan,* Bahá'í Library Online, 1991. Available online: http://bahai-library.com/macias_verse_light. (Last accessed 26 May 2017.)
17. Qur'án 53:10–18, 34:16, 56:28. (Last accessed 26 May 2017.)
18. Qur'án 2:256 offers the clearest example of this. The term is also used in Qur'án 31:22.

19. In one of his letters 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes, 'Know thou that the "Sure Handle" ['Urvatu'l-Vuthqá] mentioned from the foundation of the world in the Books, the Tablets and the Scriptures of old is naught else but the Covenant and the Testament'. Quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979, 238.

20. When not rendered in loanword form, these two terms are often translated as 'living waters', 'soft-flowing waters' or similar phrases.

21. Alternatively, 'Mahdí' – a spelling based on the Arabic pronunciation of the word, rather than Persian. Generally speaking, the Persian variants of Arabic words and phrases are used most commonly in Bahá'í orthography.

22. Moojan Momen, 'Mazhar-e Elahi', *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2016. Available online here: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/mazhar-e-elahi. (Last accessed 28 May 2017.)

23. Occasionally, other words – such as 'epistle' – are used synonymously with 'tablet'. Both of these locutions are often used to render the same Arabic word (*lawḥ*) into English.

24. A Bahá'í locution conceived by Shoghi Effendi that refers to the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá collectively.

25. There is, for example, a collection of Shoghi Effendi's prayers published under the title *Majmú'iy-i-Munáját: Ḥaḍrat-i-Valíyy-i-Amru'lláh* (*A Collection of Prayers by the Guardian [Shoghi Effendi]*) (Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1995 [2nd ed.]).The full contents of this collection are available in Persian online here: http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/se/PSE/.

26. Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny: The Messages From The Guardian Of The Bahá'í Faith To The Bahá'í Community Of The British Isles,* London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981, 154.

27. The Universal House of Justice, 23 March 1975, *The Covenant*, originally published in *Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1, Mona Vale, New South Wales: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 199). Available online here: https://bahai-library.com/pdf/compilations/covenant.pdf.

28. In fact, because of their belief in progressive revelation, Bahá'ís contend that there has only ever been, and will only ever be, one religion – 'the Faith of God' – which has been revealed to humanity in different stages. Interpreted in this light, Christianity, Islam, and the other world religions are actually just names that represent different stages of a single religion's evolution. This belief is encapsulated in the following declaration from Bahá'u'lláh: 'This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future' (*Aqdas* 27–28). Because, however, the Bahá'í Faith represents the current stage in that trajectory of religious progression, it is convenient for Bahá'ís to use 'the Faith' or 'the Cause' to refer to their own religion in shorthand.

29. Not to be confused with 'the friends,' an expression used in Bahá'í parlance to refer to Bahá'ís collectively.

30. Originally Ḥaḍrat-i-A'lá, the term most Persian-speaking Bahá'ís use to refer to the Báb.

31. Originally Sarkár Áqá.

32. cf. Youness Afroukhteh, *Memories of Nine Years in 'Akká* (trans. Riaz Masrour), Oxford: George Ronald, 2003, 36, and Adib Taherzadeh, *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh,* Oxford: George Ronald, 1992, 138.

33. The arrangement of a *haft sín* during Naw-Rúz is an excellent example. While Naw-Rúz is considered a holy day for Bahá'ís, it is originally an ancient Persian celebration, and the rituals traditionally associated with it – including the arrangement of a *haft sín* – have not been retained as sacred practices in the Bahá'í framework. It is, therefore, a cultural tradition that many Iranian Bahá'ís continue to practice in their observance of a holiday that holds a dual significance (religious and cultural) for them. This duality, in fact, often manifests itself in the items Iranian Bahá'ís include in their *haft sín*. While many Iranians will display the *Díván* of Ḥáfiẓ, Iranian Bahá'ís will often opt for a book of Bahá'í prayers, the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, or some other Bahá'í text.

34. From a private Facebook Messenger communication dated 23 February 2017.

35. Evidently written by a Bahá'í, given the content and tone of the essay.

36. Translation of the incipit by the present author.

37. A side-by-side translation of this essay, produced by the present author, is available online here: http://bit.ly/EssayOnAllahuAbha.

38. The Bahá'í World Centre refers to the spiritual and administrative Centre of the religion. The Centre's chief operations are conducted in Haifa, Israel, but they also possess property – such as buildings associated with Bahá'í history and similarly special sites – in 'Akka (Acre), Mazra'ih, and other places in northern Israel, many of which Bahá'ís visit during pilgrimage.

39. Refer to *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 174–176, note 23.

40. Smith, *Concise Encyclopedia*, 271.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid* 271–272. Another helpful summary of these plans can be found in the preface to *Turning Point: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice and Supplementary Materials, 1996–2006*, West Palm Beach, Fla.: Palabra Publications, 2006, see v–vii.

43. Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván 1996 (Four Year Plan): Bahá'í Era 153* (Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 1996), para. 17. Available online: http://bahai-library.com/uhj_ridvan_1996. (Last accessed 3 July 2017.)

44. Bahai.org. 'The Training Institute | What Bahá'ís Do'. Available online: http://www.bahai.org/action/response-call-bahaullah/training-institute. (Last accessed 3 July 2017.)

45. Universal House of Justice, *Four Year Plan*, para. 29.

46. National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, *Five Year Plan, 2001–2006* (n.p., n.d. [2001?]), 6. Available online: https://bahai-library.com/nsa_five_year_plan. (Last accessed 4 July 2017.) For more on clusters, refer to a letter from the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States addressed to all Local Spiritual Assemblies in that country, dated 19 July 2001.

47. It is worth noting that participation in the core activities is not exclusive to Bahá'ís. Much to the contrary, Bahá'ís are actually encouraged to invite people of all religious persuasions (as well as those who do not identify with any religion) to these activities. The Universal House of Justice themselves highlighted the outward-facing nature of these activities in their Riḍván 2002 message to the Bahá'ís of the world: 'These core activities, which at the outset were devised principally to benefit the believers themselves, are naturally becoming portals for entry by troops.' Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván 2002: Bahá'í Era 159*, para. 4. Available online: http://bahai-library.com/uhj_ridvan_2002). (Last accessed 4 July 2017.)

48. There have, however, been unofficial efforts to codify institutional terminology. For example, see Susan Gammage's *Bahá'í Glossary*, available online here: https://susangammage.com/a-bahai-glossary.

49. Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Centre, 2017. Available online here: https://bahai-library.com/pdf/uhj/uhj_training_institutes.pdf.

50. Examples include Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh* 255, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament*, 18.

51. Abu'l-Qásim Afnán, *Chahár Risáliy-i Táríkhí dar báriy-i Ṭáhirih Qurratu'l-ʿAyn,* Darmstadt, Germany: ʿAṣr-i-Jadíd, 1999 [2nd ed.], 64n.

52. *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* 252. For more detailed information, refer to Smith, *Concise Encyclopedia* 21, and G. Krotkoff, "ABJAD," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/2, 221–222. Available online at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abjad. (Last accessed 19 August 2017.)

53. In this numerical representation of his title, Bahá'u'lláh has not included the additional value of 1 associated with the isolated *hamza* at the end of the word 'Bahá'.

54. *Laʾáliʾu'l-Ḥikmat*, vol. 1, Brasilia, Brazil: Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Brazil, 1986, 143. Provisional translation of this excerpt by the present author.

55. Bahá'u'lláh, *Muntakhabátí az Áthár-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-Bahá'u'lláh,* Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 2006 [2nd ed.]), 196, #140. Shoghi Effendi's translation of this tablet has been published in Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990, 305, CXL.

56. A complete provisional English translation of this tablet is available online here: https://adibmasumian.com/translations/lawh-i-ridvanul-adl/. For more on this tablet, refer to Christopher Buck and Adib Masumian, 'Bahá'u'lláh's "Paradise of Justice"', *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 20(1), 97–134. https://doi.org/10.1386/bsr.20.1.97_7.

57. For example, refer to Bahá'u'lláh, *Muntakhabátí* 57, #33. Shoghi Effendi's translation of this tablet has been published in Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 77, XXXIII.

58. Fáḍil Mázandaráni, *Asráru'l-Áthár*, vol. 2, Ṭihrán, Iran: Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Iran, 1967, 5.

59. Mázandaráni, *Asrár*, vol. 4 70. Provisional translation of this excerpt by the present author.

60 The published volumes of *Asráru'l-Áthár* are available online here: http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/authors/mazandarani/asrar.htm.

61. Mázandaráni, *Asrár*, vol. 1 j–d [ﺝ–ﺩ].

62. More precisely, the book has entries on 2,150 terms. *Dou-Hizár Lughat*, p. 3. This work is now out of print, but the full text is available online here: https://adibmasumian.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/2000-words.pdf.

63. More precisely, the book has entries on 6,400 terms. *Shish-Hizár Lughat*, first page of introduction (unnumbered). This work is now out of print, but the full text is available online here: https://adibmasumian.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/6000-words.pdf.

64. In fact, *Núzdah-Hizár Lughat* was eventually succeeded by a much more comprehensive work, entitled *Ríyáḍu'l-Lughat*. This work was named after Riaz Ghadimi, the Bahá'í scholar who spearheaded the preparation of *Dou-Hizár Lughat*, *Shish-Hizár Lughat*, and *Núzdah-Hizár Lughat*. The scope of *Ríyáḍu'l-Lughat*, however, is so broad that it extends far beyond terms used in the Bahá'í writings (though those terms are certainly included as entries). For that reason, *Ríyáḍu'l-Lughat* is considered beyond the scope of our discussion here, and *Núzdah-Hizár Lughat* is treated as the culmination of the *Lughat* series.

65. This work is also less commonly known by its formal title, *Farhang-i Lughát-i Muntakhabih* (English title: *An Arabic Persian Dictionary of Selected Words*). This work is now out of print, but the full text is available online here: https://adibmasumian.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/19000-words.pdf.

66. For instance, in their introduction to the book, the publishers state explicitly that there are no entries for words that start with the letters P (ﭖ), G (ﮒ), ZH (ﮊ), or CH (ﭺ). These letters are part of the Persian alphabet; standard Arabic does not have them.

67. Marzieh Gail, *Bahá'í Glossary: A Glossary of Persian and Arabic Words Appearing in the Bahá'í Writings*, Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955. Available online here: https://bahai-library.com/pdf/g/gail_bahai_glossary_original.pdf.

68. Available online here: https://bahai-library.com/winters_bahai_glossary.