

Provisional Translation

Bahá'u'lláh's Warning to Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí in a Tablet to Siyyid Mihdíy-i-Dahájí: Provisional Translation and Commentary

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Abstract¹

This article presents a provisional translation of a brief but notable Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh written to Siyyid Mihdíy-i-Dahájí, concerning the station of Bahá'u'lláh's son Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí (entitled by Him 'the Greater Branch'), in which He issues a stark warning regarding the possibility of His son straying from His Cause. Through close textual and historical examination, the article considers the significance of this Tablet in light of the broader themes of the nature of spiritual authority and succession in the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh's admonitions to remain firm in His Covenant and Testament, and His aims to prevent schism.

Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to Siyyid Mihdíy-i-Dahájí concerning Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí

Introduced here is a composite translation, partially authorized and partially provisional, of a brief Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh revealed in a mix of Arabic and Persian. Notably, it features an extract that became incorporated into the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and was discussed by Shoghi Effendi in *God Passes By*.² In addition to the authorized translated extracts, a provisional translation of the remainder of the Tablet is introduced for the first time with commentary and reflection on notable themes, including Bahá'u'lláh's early response to the possibility of dissent, His admonitions to hold fast to His Cause, His designs to prevent schism in the Faith, and the nature of spiritual authority.

This undated Tablet (likely from the Edirne period) was written to a prominent early Bahá'í teacher, Siyyid Mihdíy-i-Dahájí (biographical details below), concerning events related to the status of one of Bahá'u'lláh's son, Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí (entitled by Him 'the Greater Branch'), and certain turmoil he had stirred up among the believers of Qazvín. These events prompted a warning and rebuke issued by Bahá'u'lláh to His son and other believers about deviating from His Cause and attributing partners to the Manifestation.

¹ The author would like to thank Adib Masumian for helpful comments on the provisional translation of this Tablet.

² 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), para. 4; Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), p. 251.

The text of this Tablet is published in *Ma'idíy-i-Ásmání* (Ishráq-Khávarí),³ and in *Asráru'l-Áthár* (Mázandarání).⁴ A wealth of additional historical context may be found *Tarikh-i Zubur Al-Haqq*.⁵ The full text is also accessible online at [Bahá'í Reference Library](#), and [Ocean of Lights](#). The Tablet is catalogued as 'BH06114' in Steven Phelps' *Partial Inventory of the Bahá'í Writings*. According to the Inventory, a publicly available original manuscript of this Tablet has not been identified.⁶

Provisional Translation of the Tablet⁷

A Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to Siyyid Mihdíy-i-Dahájí, provisional translation from the Arabic and Persian by Aaron JR Ferguson:

Write to Jináb-i-Mihdí:⁸

بنویس بجناب مهدی

Verily, We made Nabil-before-'Alí [e.g. Muḥammad-'Alí]⁹ speak in his youth¹⁰ that the people may witness My Power and My Sovereignty, as much as My Grandeur and My Greatness. My foolish loved ones have regarded him even as my partner, have kindled sedition in

اَنَا انطقنا النَّبِيلَ قَبْلَ عَلِيٍّ فِي صَغَرِهِ لِيَشْهَدَنَّ
النَّاسَ قُدْرَتِي وَ سُلْطَنَتِي ثُمَّ عَظَمَتِي وَ كِبَرِيَانِي.
وَلَكِنْ أَحِبَّائِي الْجَهْلَاءُ اتَّخَذُوهُ شَرِيكًا لِنَفْسِي وَ
فَسَدُوا فِي الْبِلَادِ وَ كَانُوا مِنَ الْمَفْسِدِينَ مَلَا حَظَّهُ
نَمَا كِه چِه قَدْر نَاس جَاهِلَنَد نَفُوسِي كِه تَلَقَّاء

³ 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd Ishráq-Khávarí, *Má'idíy-i-Ásmání*, vol. 4 (Tíhrán: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1972), p. 361; *ibid.* vol. 8, p. 40

⁴ Fāḍil Mázandarání, *Asráru'l-Áthár*, vol. 5 (Tíhrán: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1968), p. 100

⁵ Fāḍil Mázandarání, *Tárikh-i Zubur Al-Haqq*, vol. 5. (Tíhrán: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1968-1973)

⁶ Stephen Phelps, *Partial Inventory of the Bahá'í Writings* version 5, BH06114 (unpublished database)

⁷ Composite translation from the Arabic and Persian, partially authorized (including passages from the Will and Testament and from God Passes By as indicated, and the remainder provisionally translated by Aaron JR Ferguson.

⁸ The command "Write to..." preserves in the text Bahá'u'lláh's command to His amanuensis (secretary) to begin transcribing in response to His Revelation, similar to the divine commands "Say:" found elsewhere in the Writings (and this Tablet) and in the Qur'án.

⁹ Bahá'u'lláh addressed a number of individuals in this format of Nabil- or Muḥammad-before-'Alí. This was, for instance a format of referring to His Holiness Quddús (cf. *Payk-i-Rastán*, p. 6 for example). This pattern was original to the Báb, who had invested great significance in His given name being "Alí-Muḥammad", and being mirrored in that of His pre-eminent disciple's (Quddús) given name, 'Muḥammad-'Alí' (cf. Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, p. 285). In fact, the pattern reflects eschatological significance as the tradition (hadíth) collected by Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-'Arabi, cited in *the Dawn-Breakers*, attests ("In His name, the name of the Guardian [Alí] precedeth that of the Prophet [Muhammad]", p. 50). Bahá'u'lláh made use of this pattern in numerous instances recognizing individuals whom He communed with in letters, and referring to them in this way when their names followed this convention. Here He addresses His son using this pattern, having given him the name Muḥammad-'Alí. Nabil and Muḥammad are interchangeable in the Babi-Bahá'í Writings on the basis of their abjad (numerological) equivalency (both equalling 92).

Vahid Rafati, *Payk-i-Rástán* (Messenger of the True Ones), (Darmstadt: 'Asr-i-Jadíd, 2005)

Nader Saiedi. *Gate of the Heart: Understanding the Writings of the Báb* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008)

Nabíl-i-A'zam Zarandí, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabíl's Narrative*, trans. Shoghi Effendi (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1932)

¹⁰ Here ('speak') Bahá'u'lláh refers to the episode in the Edirne period (1863-1868) where Muḥammad-'Alí made pretensions to divine revelation, more details provided below.

the land and they verily are of the mischief-makers.¹¹ Observe how ignorant the people are! Even souls who had stood before the Divine Presence, nevertheless, went and spread such talk.

حضور بوده‌اند مع‌ذلك رفته‌اند و چنین سخنها انتشار داده‌اند.

Say: He [Muḥammad-'Alí], verily, is but one of My servants whom We created by My Power.¹² And We gave him speech so that he may praise My Essence among all the worlds. Should he for a moment pass out¹³ from under the shadow of the Cause, he surely shall be brought to naught.¹⁴

قل انه عبد من عبادى قد خلقناه بقدرتى و انطقناه لثناء نفسى بين العالمين. و اگر آنى از ظلّ امر منحرف شود معدوم صرف خواهد بود.

Say: O people! Truly, all save Me is but the creation of My Word. Verily, he and his like [e.g. the Aghṣán] are among those whom God hath made to spring forth from this Tree [e.g. the Manifestation]. They are the rain-clouds of mercy [ṣahā'ib al-rahmah], cloud-wisps of grace [ghamā'im al-faḍl], lamps of guidance [sirāj al-hidāyah], and My proofs [adillā] amidst all mankind, should they remain steadfast in My Cause. And indeed thy Lord hath taken no partner unto Himself, and no resemblance nor counselor, no parallel nor rival, no match nor likeness. Thus hath the verdict shone forth and the matter been decreed from God, the Most High, the Most Mighty.

قل يا قوم انّ ما سوائى قد خلق بقولى انه و امثاله من الذين انبتهم الله من هذا الشجرة هم سحائب الرحمة و غمام الفضل و سرج الهداية و ادلائى بين البرية ان يكونن ثابتاً على امرى و ان ربك ما اتخذ لنفسه شريكاً و لا شبيهاً و لا وزيراً و لا نظيراً و لا ندّاً و لا ضدّاً و لا مثلاً كذلك اشرق الحكم و قضى الامر من لدى الله العلى العظيم

Background and Annotated Commentary

About Siyyid Mihdíy-i-Dahájí

The addressee of this Tablet, Siyyid Mihdíy-i-Dahájí was a prominent believer and noted teacher of the Faith in the time of Bahá'u'lláh, upon whom He had bestowed the title *Ismu'lláhu'l-Mihdí*,

¹¹ This passage ("My foolish..." through "mischief-makers") is also quoted and authorized translation available in the *Will and Testament* of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, para. 4. The translation here mirrors that authorized translation.

¹² The portion "He, verily, is but one of My servants..." and "Should he for a moment pass out from under the shadow of the Cause, he surely shall be brought to naught" is drawn from the authorized translation found in the *Will and Testament* and included by Shoghi Effendi and included in *God Passes By*.

¹³ 'Pass out' ('منحرف شود') also can be taken as 'to deviate', or as 'aberrance/perversion/distortion', and in religious contexts can refer to apostasizing.

¹⁴ 'Be brought to naught' (معدوم صرف خواهد بود) can also be taken as 'shall become utterly extinct' or 'consigned to oblivion'.

'The Name of God, Mihdí, [e.g. he who is guided]'.¹⁵ Siyyid Mihdí-i-Dahájí, besides being addressed according to the name *Ismulláhu'l-Mihdí*, was also addressed as Jináb Aqá Siyyid Mihdí or simply Jináb-i-Mihdí, as for example in the Súriy-i-'Ibád or in the Tablet reviewed here. Further details of his life are provided in 'The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh' vol. 2 and 4.¹⁶

Mihdí was the recipient of a number of Tablets from Bahá'u'lláh. Among the best known is the *Láwḥ-i-Siyyid-i-Mihdí-i-Dahájí*, which is included in the collection "Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas".¹⁷ Others include: Súriy-i-'Ibád (Surih of the Servants) revealed (c. 1864) during Mihdí's custodianship of the 'Most Great House' in Baghdad¹⁸, and a variety of shorter communications, including this tablet.

Unfortunately, Mihdí-i-Dahájí, despite the warning in this Tablet, went on to disobey Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant after the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, and became a partisan of Muḥammad-'Alí.¹⁹

Historical Context

Historical and contextual details on this tablet have been discussed in prior works, including Adib Taherzadeh's Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh series:

In a Tablet addressed to the Ismulláh, Siyyid Mihdí-i-Dahájí, Bahá'u'lláh rebukes some of the believers for having foolishly designated His son as a partner with Him in Divine Revelation. Referring to Muḥammad-'Alí by name, Bahá'u'lláh in this Tablet states that 'He, verily, is but one of My servants...Should he for a moment pass out from under the shadow of the Cause, he surely shall be brought to naught'.²⁰

The events of this disturbance in Qazvín deserve a brief recount. In the Edirne period, Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí, then a youth, claimed to receive divine revelation and composed Arabic verses proclaiming himself a revealer of God's word. He secretly dispatched these writings to Qazvín, where a small group of followers supported his claims, causing a serious division among the believers there. Due to the controversy that erupted, a believer, Hájí Muḥammad-Ibráhím-i-Qazvíní (known as "Khalíl") later sought clarification from Bahá'u'lláh regarding His and His sons' spiritual stations (cf. the *Lawḥ-i-Khalíl*). Bahá'u'lláh responded by rebuking Muḥammad-'Alí's

¹⁵ A recurring theophoric naming convention that included a variety of early believers such as Ismulláhu'l-Aṣḍaq, who was also later posthumously named as an "Ayádi-i Amr Alláh" (Hand of the Cause of God). Others included Ismulláhu'l-Jamál, Ismulláhu'l-Munib, and more. In the Babi Dispensation, this theophoric convention had previously been applied to Quddus (Ismulláhu'l-Akhar - the 'Last Name of God'). Cf. Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, p. 172; Nabil-i-A'ẓam, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 588

¹⁶ Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 2 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1977) pp. 118-119, 261, 272-276; *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 4 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1988) p. 236.

¹⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, transl. by Habib Taherzadeh (Bahá'í Publishing Trust; 1988). <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/tablets-bahaullah/6#454247553> [accessed 4 December 2025]

¹⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, *Súriy-i-'Ibád* (Surih of the Servants). <https://www.bahai.org/fa/library/authoritative-texts/search#q=%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D9%91%D8%A8%DB%8C%D9%84%20%D9%82%D8%A8%D9%84> [accessed 4 December 2025]

¹⁹ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 319.

²⁰ Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 2, p. 261

pretensions, affirming His own Station, clarifying the position of His sons, and ending the confusion through the Lawḥ-i-Khalíl and related Tablets.²¹

This Tablet to Jinábi-i-Mihdí was among those issued in response to these events. Further details are recounted by the hand of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His second 'Tablet of the Thousand Verses' (*Lawḥ-i-Hizār Bayti* II)²², where He describes the episode of Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí and his associates spreading abroad the claims of revelation and calling his words 'divine verses'. The turmoil this act provoked in Qazvín is discussed, which necessitated Bahá'u'lláh's response, and as a result this 'radiant Tablet' (referring to this Tablet to Mihdí) was sent forth and the above warning against Muḥammad-'Alí was issued.²³ Although the exact date of this Tablet is not apparent, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that it was issued in response to these events suggests it is likely contemporary to the Lawḥ-i-Khalíl. A number of other tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá also feature this same quote and related reflections on the Covenant.²⁴

An additional Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh where a similar warning is issued regarding Muḥammad-'Alí

Alongside the notable passage warning of 'passing out' from the shadow of the Cause, Shoghi Effendi also included an excerpt from another tablet where a similar warning is issued. This excerpt is reproduced below along with the original Arabic and a provisional translation of the preceding line in which we find the same convention referring to 'Muḥammad-before-'Alí':

The one who has been named 'Muḥammad-before-'Alí' and whom God has associated with His own Self is but a leaf of the leaves of this Tree.²⁵

اِنَّ الَّذِي سَمِيَ بِمُحَمَّدٍ قَبْلَ عَلِيٍّ وَنَسَبَهُ اللهُ اِلَى نَفْسِهِ
اَنَّهُ لَوْرَقَةٌ مِنْ اوراقِ تِلْكَ الشَّجَرَةِ تَاللهُ الْحَقُّ لَوْ
نَاخِذُ عَنْهُ

By God, the True One! Were We, for a single instant, to withhold from him [Muḥammad-'Alí] the outpourings of Our Cause, he would wither, and would fall upon the dust.²⁶

فِي اَقَلِّ مِنَ الْحَيْنِ فَيَوْضَاتِ الْأَمْرِ لِيَصْفَرَ وَيَسْقُطَ
عَلَى التُّرَابِ²⁷

²¹ A concise summary may be found in Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 2, pp. 260). A full description of the events that arose may be found in Mázandarání, *Tárikh-i Zubur Al-Haqq*, vol. 5, p. 146ff, which even includes passages of Muḥammad-'Alí's own renunciation of any parity with his Father.

²² 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Lawḥ-i-Hizār Bayti* II, *Muntakhabátí az Makátib-i Haḍrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 4, pp. 232-259, <https://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA4/swa4-235.html> [Accessed 4 December 2025]

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ For example, cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Muntakhabátí az Makátib-i Haḍrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 6, no. 407 and 409;

²⁵ Provisional translation from the Arabic by Aaron JR Ferguson.

²⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 251

²⁷ This tablet is given the identifier 'BH00941' in the Phelps Partial Inventory database https://bahai-library.com/phelps_loom_reality [accessed 4 December 2025]. Published in Mázandarání, *Tarikh Zubur al-Haqq*, vol. 5 (n.p., n.d.). p. 155; the full tablet is also accessible at Bahá'í Reference Library.

Bahá'u'lláh's Expositions on the Station of the Aghşán

It is well-known that Bahá'u'lláh conferred unique titles upon His descendents. His male descendents were known by a varying appellation of the Arabic word 'Ghuşn' (Branch, غصن), and collectively known as 'Aghşán' (Branches, اغصان). These titles are rooted in the symbolism of the Manifestation of God as the 'Divine Lote Tree', the Tree being a favored symbol of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh for the Manifestations. The idea of 'Branches' (His sons) and 'Leaves' (daughters) of the Divine Tree are natural extensions of this potent metaphor.

When properly considered, this symbolism and unique spiritual roles indicated by these titles are an inextricable part of Bahá'í 'religiolect',²⁸ and essential in certain cases for understanding Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. Bahá'u'lláh's passage of authority to Abdu'l-Bahá in the Kitáb-i-Ahd would not be understood, for instance, without knowing that Abdu'l-Bahá is referred by Him with the designated title Ghuşn-i-A'zam' (Most Mighty Branch) and his half-brother by Ghuşn-i-Akbar (Greater Branch). Likewise, these titles are frequently used in references to His family members in numerous Tablets, especially from the late Edirne period onwards, when these titles were first used. The most well-known forms consist of those universally recognized titles bestowed on certain of His sons, namely Ghuşnu'lláhu'l A'zam (The Most Mighty Branch of God, 'Abdu'l-Bahá), Ghuşnu'lláhu'l Akbar (The Greater Branch of God, Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí), and Ghuşnu'lláhu'l-Aṭhar or Ghuşn-i-Aṭhar (Mírzá Mihdí). The term 'Branch of God' Ghuşnu'lláh was also used in certain instances. 'Abdu'l-Bahá later added Ghuşn-i-Mumtáz' ('the Choice Branch') as an appellation for His grandson, Shoghi Effendi, when He designated him as 'Guardian of the Cause of God'.

The events in the Edirne period (1863-1868) offered Bahá'u'lláh an early opportunity to clarify for the believers the spiritual station and authority envisioned by Him for His sons as they entered maturity. On the one hand, they attained greater prominence in the community through visible direct service to Bahá'u'lláh and via written works (for instance, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had already composed his celebrated 'Commentary on Hadith of the Hidden Treasure' by then). On the other hand, the confusion that arose due to Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí's actions in this time provoked lack of clarity regarding their spiritual station. This is what precipitated Bahá'u'lláh's response and provides us greater insight into the station intended for His sons.

From the Tablets discussed here, a few significant characteristics are worth considering. Firstly, let us consider the attributes and descriptions in this Tablet to Jináb-i-Mihdí. Bahá'u'lláh makes it clear that:

- their reality is subsidiary to and dependent on God and relationship and association to the Divine Tree ('[they] are among those whom God hath made to spring forth from this Tree').
- He describes them in several lofty and exalted terms: clouds of mercy (*rahmah*) and grace (*fadh*l), as 'lamps of guidance' (*siráj al-bidáyah*), and His proofs among mankind.²⁹

²⁸ Masumian, Adib, 'An Introduction to the Bahá'í Religiolect', *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 21 (2015), pp. 101–120.

²⁹ These concepts have a rich prehistory in the Islamic Revelation meriting deep study. They parallel certain Quranic descriptions of the Imams, becoming all-important components in Shi'í 'Imamology' (cf. for example, *proofs* (*adillá*) - although the usual term for Imáms is *hujjah*) and central to their status as the rightful successors of the Prophet Muḥammad. Confer for instance, Q28:5 "to make them leaders [immatan – أئمة], as well as successors"; Q2:124 "And also (Imams) from my offspring!"; Q21:73 "And

- He conditions this on remaining firm in His Cause.
- The warning He issues regarding Muḥammad-'Alí makes it clear that deviation from the Cause would result in complete oblivion.

Finally, despite their clearly exalted station, Bahá'u'lláh makes it evident that He has taken no partner or peer in Revelation. Their high rank is purely subjugated to and entirely dependent on association with Him.

The Tablet to Khalíl mirrors a number of these descriptions and affirmations. He reiterates that so long as they observe the ordinances of God, do not deviate from the Faith, and contend not in the Cause of God, then they may be regarded as leaves (*awráq*) and fruits (*athmár*) of the Tree of Unity (the Manifestation). He uses imagery of rainclouds and mists of grace, and refers to them as 'His mercy (*raḥmatih*) unto all worlds', phrasings similar to the Tablet to Mihdí. His description extends further, however, in several critical ways:

- He describes them as the signs of God amongst the people
- Whoever turns away from them has turned away from the path of God.
- He calls them the 'kindred of God' and His *Ahl al-Bayt* (the People of the Household, an Islamic term for the family of the Prophet).³⁰

One final difference is that in the Tablet to Khalíl Bahá'u'lláh makes a specific statement about one of His sons above and beyond the others:

You asked about My sons.... And one of them will be manifested through the power of the true Faith [بفطرة, *bi'l-fitrah*, e.g. innate nature], and God will cause signs of His might to flow from his tongue. He is among those that God hath singled out [or 'specially chosen' or 'exclusively elected' - اختصه, *ikhtaṣṣahu*³¹] for His Cause. There is no God but Him.³²

وَأَمَّا مَا سَأَلْتُ عَنْ ابْنِي ... وَالَّذِي مِنْهُمْ يَظْهَرُ
بِالْفِطْرَةِ وَيَجْرِي اللَّهُ مِنْ لِسَانِهِ آيَاتُ قُدْرَتِهِ وَهُوَ مَمَّنْ
اخْتَصَّهُ اللَّهُ عَلَى أَمْرِهِ

We made them Imams, guiding [*bidayah*] by our Command and We inspired them to do good deeds, to establish prayers, and to give the zakat, and they served Us."

³⁰ This designation as His *Ahl al-Bayt* is particularly important in considering the nature of the spiritual rank of the Aghṣán; it is recognizable to anyone well-studied in the history of Shi'í Islam. According to Shi'í thought, the rightful successors of the Prophet Muḥammad were His *Ahl u'l-Bayt*, the lineal descendants of the Prophet designated as Imams and the centres of spiritual authority and charisma (*walayah*). The Imams were the focal point of spiritual authority (*walayah*), and spiritual/inner esoteric interpretation (*ta'wíl*), centred in the person of the Imam who is the pole or pivot of spiritual guidance and the direct inheritor and successor of the Prophet (*wasí*) and His vicegerent (*khalifa*), Who is Himself God's Vicegerent. In famous Hadith such as the *Hadith al-Thaqalayn* Muḥammad is reported to have said: "I have left among you two weighty matters... the Book of God... and the *Ahl al-Bayt*". They are also referenced directly in the Qur'án.

³¹ This concept of *ikhtaṣṣa* (اختص) and the close synonym *iṣṭafá* (اصطفى) are of signal importance in the Quranic context (cf. Q3:33). Bahá'u'lláh's final designation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as His immediate successor in the Kitáb-i-'Ahd draws on this same concept: "We have chosen [اصطفينا] 'the Greater' after 'the Most Great', as decreed by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed."

³² Newly translated excerpts from Bahá'u'lláh, from 'Tablet to Khalíl' (Phelps Inventory: BH00431), <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/additional-tablets-extracts-from-tablets-revealed-bahauallah/776100663/1#635376331> [accessed 4 December 2025]

He then counsels Khalíl to not disclose such distinctions to anyone but those who are worthy.

Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí's Violation of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Commentary on this Tablet Jináb-i-Mihdí in the Will and Testament

Tragically, despite Bahá'u'lláh's warning against straying from the Cause, Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí went on to violate Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant by turning against his half-brother, Bahá'u'lláh's chosen successor.³³ For over 20 years Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí waged a campaign of attack against 'Abdu'l-Bahá.³⁴ In His Will and Testament, 'Abdu'l-Bahá finally unveiled the true extent of his brother's subversive conduct for the believers.³⁵ In commenting on these matters, He refers to this exact warning of Bahá'u'lláh to Muḥammad-'Alí found in the above Tablet to Mihdí-i-Dahají:

O ye that stand fast and firm in the Covenant! The Centre of Sedition, the Prime Mover of mischief, Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí, *hath passed out from under the shadow of the Cause*, hath broken the Covenant, hath falsified the Holy Text, hath inflicted a grievous loss upon the true Faith of God, hath scattered His people, hath with bitter rancour endeavoured to hurt 'Abdu'l-Bahá and hath assailed with the utmost enmity this servant of the Sacred Threshold.³⁶

'Abdu'l-Bahá continues, directly quoting from the same Tablet: "He [Bahá'u'lláh] said: "Should he for a moment pass out from under the shadow of the Cause, he surely shall be brought to naught." and "My foolish loved ones have regarded him even as my partner, have kindled sedition in the land and they verily are of the mischief-makers". As mentioned, He had earlier referenced this

³³ Bahá'u'lláh had ordained in His final and 'Greatest of Tablets', the *Kitáb-i-'Abdí* (Book of My Covenant), and certain passages of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, that the believers turn to 'Abdu'l-Bahá as Head of the Faith after His passing and refer to Him for understanding of the Book. A recent analysis of this passage of authority can be found in Ghaemmaghami, Omid and Shahn Vafai, *Exploring the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Laws and Teachings of the Bahá'í Faith* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2025), pp. 165–189. For a recent general overview of the concept of Covenant-Breaking, see Heller, Wendy M., 'The Covenant and Covenant-Breaking', in *The World of the Bahá'í Faith*, ed. by Robert H. Stockman (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 893-932.

Kitáb-i-'Abd (Book of My Covenant), in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, trans.

Habib Taherzadeh et al. (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978)

Kitáb-i-Aqdas (The Most Holy Book), trans. Bahá'í World Centre (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992)

³⁴ Many of these events and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's response to them are detailed in Shoghi Effendi's *God Passes By* and a variety of other texts. See also:

Afroukhteh, Youness Khan, *Memories of Nine Years in 'Akká* (trans. Riaz Masrour) (Oxford: George Ronald, 1952/2003).

Rabbani, Ahang and Fananapazir, Khazeh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's First Thousand-Verse Tablet: History and Provisional Translation', *Bahá'í Studies Review*, 16 (2010), pp. 107–133.

Alkan, Necati, "Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abbás', in *The World of the Bahá'í Faith*, ed. Robert H. Stockman (London: Routledge, 2022).

³⁵ Additional details of His half-brother's violation of the Covenant may be found in Momen, Moojan, 'The Covenant, and Covenant-breaker', *The Bahá'í Encyclopedia* (1995)

³⁶ *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, para. 4. For broader reflections on the Will and Testament, cf. Brent Poirier's recent article "The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Covenant". *Bahá'í Studies Review* (2025), 22: e20250506.

Tablet privately in 1897, in His second 'Tablet of the Thousand Verses' (*Lamḥ-i-Hizār Bayti II*)³⁷ and other communications to individuals. The Will and Testament was written some years later, in the years between 1903 and 1908, but only unveiled upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing in 1921. Finally the full scope of his half-brother's deeds was revealed to the community.³⁸

Despite facing years of attacks from His half-brother, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had followed His Father's conduct of concealing and overlooking the subversiveness and faults of those who turned against the Faith. Only in the end did they reveal these matters and cast out the perpetrators, after it became unmistakable to any onlooker that there was no hope or possibility of reform.³⁹ In manifesting such forbearance in the face of denial and betrayal of those close to them, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's long-suffering at the hands of their own half-brothers teaches a powerful lesson regarding the fundamental truth that, as Bahá'u'lláh declares:

In all ages there have been and will be the righteous and the wicked... in every era there have been and will be the sincere and the false ones! Take heed, O ye possessors of insight! Pure hearts, illumined eyes and consecrated souls must under all circumstances gaze toward the horizon of the Cause, not toward the workings and sayings of pretenders and liars.⁴⁰

در جميع اعصار اخيار و اشرار بوده و خواهند بود... كه صادق و كاذب در هر عصرى بوده و خواهد بود ان اعتباروا يا اولى الابصار قلوب طاهره و ابصار منيره و نفوس زكيه بايد در جميع احيان بافق امر ناظر باشند نه باعمال و اقوال مدعيان و كاذبان.

This fundamental repetition of the perennial spiritual drama of those who affirm and those who deny can be seen to have again played out in this era in the opposition of the half-brothers of both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In contemplating why those close to the Prophets and Holy Ones rise against them, we may also ask the same question regarding the fierce jealousy of the brothers of Joseph, of the betrayal of Judas Iscariot, once beloved companion and disciple of Christ, or of the companions of Muḥammad who turned against His appointment of Imam 'Alī as 'Commander of the Faithful' and as 'Master' / 'Guardian' (*mawla*) and Legatee/Successor (*waṣiyy*) of the Muslim community.⁴¹

In His Will and Testament, 'Abdu'l-Bahá continues by interpreting the meaning of concept of "passing out" or deviating, even for one instant, from the shadow of the Cause, referred to in this

³⁷ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Lamḥ-i-Hizār Bayti II*, *Muntakhabātī az Makātīb-i Ḥaḍrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, vol. 4, pp. 232-259, <https://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA4/swa4-235.html> [accessed 4 December 2025]

³⁸ Although it was the Will and Testament that laid this out in most explicit terms, many earlier events (such as Badi'u'llah's letter distributed to the American Baha'i community, and other such communications) had intimated that there were challenges to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's leadership throughout His ministry.

³⁹ Bahá'u'lláh had for instance, long tolerated the despicable acts of His own half-brother, Mirza Yahya Azal, only fully rebuking Him after over a decade of misdeeds and irredeemable conduct.

⁴⁰ From an unnamed Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh ('BH02884' in the Partial Inventory), provisional translation from the Persian by Aaron JR Ferguson. <https://www.bahai.org/fa/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/additional-tablets-bahauallah/138668726/1#447292027> [accessed 4 December 2025]

⁴¹ Moojan Momen's *An Introduction to Shi'ī Islam, The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism*, remains a valuable resource for foundational introduction to these topics. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985)

Tablet to Mihdíy-i-Dahají. His interpretation reflects on the nature of this perennial pattern in religious history, of affirmation or denial:

Reflect! What stress He [Bahá'u'lláh] layeth upon one moment's deviation: That is, were he to incline a hair's breadth to the right or to the left, his deviation would be clearly established and his utter nothingness made manifest. And now ye are witnessing how the wrath of God hath from all sides afflicted him and how day by day he is speeding towards destruction. Ere long will ye behold him and his associates, outwardly and inwardly, condemned to utter ruin. What deviation can be greater than breaking the Covenant of God!⁴²

'Abdu'l-Bahá finally goes on to illustrate that merely being the firstborn Son or an Aghṣán had not and never was the sole criterion behind the principle of succession in the Faith. Rather, it is the concentration of high spiritual values that truly earns one designation as 'successor' of the Cause (in this case, the Institution of the Guardianship of the Cause of God):

He that is appointed [e.g. by the Guardian] must manifest in himself detachment from all worldly things, must be the essence of purity, must show in himself the fear of God, knowledge, wisdom and learning. Thus, should the first-born of the Guardian of the Cause of God not manifest in himself the truth of the words "The child is the secret essence of its sire", that is, should he not inherit of the spiritual within him (the Guardian of the Cause of God) and his glorious lineage not be matched with a goodly character, then must he (the Guardian of the Cause of God) choose another branch to succeed him.⁴³

In this light, could there be any stronger indicator than deviation from the Cause of having failed to rise to the rank Bahá'u'lláh had otherwise provided for Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí, a deviation explicitly warned against by the Supreme Pen?

Conclusion

In clarifying this matter and in demonstrating Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic warning against Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí deviating, even just for a moment, from the shadow of the Cause, 'Abdu'l-Bahá provides a firm foundation for understanding the nature of appointed succession in the Faith as well as the nature of ranks and spiritual stations. Drawing on the critical passages of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings that demonstrate the general spiritual rank intended for His sons, we see that an exalted role was envisioned for them. Although beyond the scope of this paper, a full investigation of the status envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh for His sons would only further reinforce this. This all, however, provided they remain firm in His Covenant. Bahá'u'lláh extended this regard for the high spiritual station of His sons throughout the remainder of His life until His Ascension in 1892, enshrining respect for His sons in the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, while also denying them rights to the property of others, and finally, obliging them to turn, one and all, to His designated successor. He had, as evidenced in the Tablets reviewed here, warned Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí directly against the possibility of deviating from His Cause. Likewise, in such instances as the Lawḥ-i-Khalíl, He made various allusions to the specially designated role He intended for one of His sons. In the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, His Testament, He revealed as His successor His eldest son 'Abdu'l-Bahá, confirming the latter's attainment of the high spiritual qualities necessary to guide the Faith after His passing. This same

⁴² *Will And Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, para. 5

⁴³ *Ibid.*, para. 18

principle was mirrored by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His eventual designation of Shoghi Effendi as His successor and explicating the essence of the requisite qualities.

Ultimately, these matters are a reflection both of the perennial dialectic of affirmation and opposition faced by the Prophets and Holy Ones of every era, but also of the divine drama all human souls must undertake in their own heart. As indicated in the opening paragraph of Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i-Aqdas, every soul must choose the path of recognition, affirmation, and adherence to the Manifestation's commands, or choose the path of denial and heedlessness. As these Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh demonstrate, Bahá'u'lláh prepared an exalted role in His Faith for His progeny. However, this depended on firm and unwavering adherence to the Cause to attain the potentialities inherent to that spiritual station, lest they squander that and 'be brought to naught'.

Author Biography

Aaron John Robarts Ferguson is an interdisciplinary researcher, writer, epidemiologist, and Bahá'í. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Anthropology and History and a Masters in Epidemiology. His professional research focuses on applied social epidemiology topics including healthcare access, youth and adolescent health disparities, health impacts of immigration, spatial epidemiology, and substance use. His other scholarly interests include a variety of topics in history, religion, and philosophy. He studies Persian and Arabic in his free time, producing provisional translations of the Bahá'í Writings as he explores the depths of the Ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. His other writings and essays, commentaries, and translations on topics both spiritual and philosophical may be found at <https://www.lampofsearch.com/>, a personal media project promoting exploration of the Bahá'í Revelation.

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