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Paper

The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Covenant

Brent Poirier

Abstract

This paper compares the contents of the Wills of Bahá'u'lláh and of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, which Shoghi Effendi terms Their “twin Covenants.” It also examines the Bahá'í Writings which explain “the broad nature of the authority conferred on the Universal House of Justice” and the infallibility which is an inherent part of that authority. Further, it compares the lofty imagery in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh speaking of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as “this sacred and glorious Being, this Branch of Holiness,” with similar beautiful imagery in the Master’s description of Shoghi Effendi, as “the blest and sacred bough.” It examines the Guardian’s writings which demonstrate that although the Guardianship is not expressly mentioned in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, it was always part of His plan of World Order; that this Institution must not be seen as an “innovation” that came into being solely through the instrumentality of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, but rather that Bahá'u'lláh, no less than ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is the Author of this institution. Shoghi Effendi explains that the Guardianship must not be divorced from the plan of world order adumbrated by Bahá'u'lláh Himself in the Most Holy Book, that to do so would be a mutilation of the truth; and that this is also the intention of Shoghi Effendi when writing that “divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh would be mutilated.”

The Beloved’s Will and Testament, so amazing in all its aspects.

Shoghi Effendi¹

Introduction

In November 1921, Shoghi Effendi, great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh and eldest grandson of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, was in his second year of graduate studies at Oxford when he was thunderstruck by news of the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.² When he arrived back in the Holy Land, there was an envelope addressed to him, the ‘Chosen Branch’, from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; it contained His Last Will and Testament.³ In it Shoghi Effendi read for the first time of an institution – Vali Amru’llah, Guardian

¹ Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 50. <http://www.bahai.org/r/788381161> [accessed 1 May 2025].

² See, generally, Riaz Khadem, *Prelude to the Guardianship* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2014), particularly chs 17-18.

³ The text of this 26-page document is available on the official Bahá'í World Centre website <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/will-testament-abdul-baha/> [accessed 1 May 2025].

of the Cause of God – and that he was the Guardian.⁴ This institution was not expressly found elsewhere in the Writings of either Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá. At the age of 24, Shoghi Effendi found himself the Head of the Bahá'í Faith. Shoghi Effendi's wife described the occasion some fifty years later:

It now became the painful duty of Shoghi Effendi to hear what was in it; a few days after his arrival they read it to him. In order to understand even a little of the effect this had on him we must remember that he himself stated on more than one occasion, not only to me, but to others who were present at the table of the Western Pilgrim House, that he had had no foreknowledge of the existence of the Institution of Guardianship, least of all that he was appointed as Guardian.⁵

As we will see below, Shoghi Effendi would describe that remarkable Document as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's 'Covenant', as His 'greatest legacy to posterity', and as 'the Charter of the New World Order'.⁶ It is not the intention of this paper to attempt even a summary description of the full contents of this Document; rather, it will focus on aspects of the Successorship it carried forward.⁷

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh

To understand the significance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament we must first understand something of the Will and Testament of Bahá'u'lláh, which He entitled the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, 'The Book of My Covenant'.⁸ The verse at the very heart of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, which begins with the words 'The Will of the divine Testator',⁹ is His instruction to 'turn, one and all, unto the Most Great Branch ('Abdu'l-Bahá).'¹⁰ Together with additional Documents, Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant explicitly appoints 'Abdu'l-Bahá as His immediate Successor, and The Most Holy Book of

⁴ The Arabic word walīy (valí in the Bahá'í transliteration system) has connotations of helper, friend, protector, legal guardian, ruler, and one who exercises sovereignty over. The governor of the Ottoman province in which Shoghi Effendi was born held the title 'valí'. See, generally, Wehr's *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, (Ithaca: Spoken Language Services, 1976) at p. 1100-1101; and Udo Schaefer, Nicola Towfigh, and Ulrich Gollmer, *Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahá'í Apologetics* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000), footnote 284.

⁵ Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1969) p. 42.

⁶ The Covenant is summarised on the Bahá'í World Centre website: 'This line of succession, referred to as the Covenant, went from Bahá'u'lláh to His Son 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and then from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to His grandson, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice, ordained by Bahá'u'lláh. A Bahá'í accepts the divine authority of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and of these appointed successors.' <https://www.bahai.org/beliefs/bahauallah-covenant> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁷ Adib Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant: A Study Guide to the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Oxford: George Ronald Publishers, 2000) is an extensive treatment of the provisions of the Will and Testament.

⁸ The full text of this document is found on p. 218 of *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* <http://www.bahai.org/r/301774724> [accessed 1 May 2025] and as Tablet no. 32 in *Days of Remembrance*. <http://www.bahai.org/r/124370249> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁹ *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 221. <http://www.bahai.org/r/078110759> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁰ Quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 239. <http://www.bahai.org/r/548855206> [accessed 1 May 2025]. Its contents are summarized by Shoghi Effendi on that same page.

Bahá'u'lláh, briefly described below, appoints 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the infallible Interpreter of the Word of God.¹¹

Bahá'ís believe that Bahá'u'lláh was the Tree of Life mentioned in the Bible.¹² He referred to some of His male children as 'branches' and to the women in His family as 'leaves'. His oldest son's given name was Abbás, and Bahá'u'lláh gave Him the title Ghusn-i-A'zam, 'The Most Great Branch' or 'The Most Mighty Branch'. Several years after the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, the Most Great Branch assumed the title 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and directed the Bahá'ís to use it; it signifies not only 'Servant of the Glory', but more to the point, 'Servant of Bahá'u'lláh'.¹³

At a talk He gave at a Bahá'í home in New York City on December 2, 1912,¹⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá commented on the effect of this Covenant:

As to the most great characteristic of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, a specific teaching not given by any of the Prophets of the past: It is the ordination and appointment of the Centre of the Covenant. By this appointment and provision He has safeguarded and protected the religion of God against differences and schisms, making it impossible for anyone to create a new sect or faction of belief. To ensure unity and agreement He has entered into a Covenant with all the people of the world, including the interpreter and explainer of His teachings, so that no one may interpret or explain the religion of God according to his own view or opinion and thus create a sect founded upon his individual understanding of the divine Words. The Book of the Covenant or Testament of Bahá'u'lláh is the means of preventing such a possibility.¹⁵

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh has maintained the integrity of the community since His passing. Shoghi Effendi referred to it as 'a Covenant of world importance, pre-existent, peerless and unique in the history of all religions'¹⁶ and as 'the supreme gift conferred by Him Who is the Lord of Revelation upon the present and future generations'.¹⁷ It is the first document in religious history

¹¹ For further reading please see Bahá'u'lláh's *The Tablet of the Branch* and *The Book of the Covenant*. These are Tablets 29 and 32 respectively in the compilation *Days of Remembrance*. <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauddin/days-remembrance/> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹² 'And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.' Revelation of St. John, 22:1-2. 'The Tree of Life, of which mention is made in the Bible, is Bahá'u'lláh, and the daughters of the Kingdom are the leaves upon that blessed Tree.' *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 57. <http://www.bahai.org/r/395238909> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹³ For a commentary on the full text of the *Will and Testament* see Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant*. This subject is addressed on pp. 147-148.

¹⁴ Bahá'ís worldwide study this Document in their homes today, in 'Study Circles' coordinated by 'Training Institutes.' The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is the focus of what Bahá'ís call Unit One of Book Eight of the Ruhi sequence. Participation in these study circles held for all age groups is open to anyone, and the materials are available in the USA (see <https://palabrapublications.com/pages/materials-in-development> [accessed 1 May 2025]) and in the United Kingdom (see <https://books.bahai.org.uk/collections/main-sequence-of-ruhi-institute-courses-published> [accessed 1 May 2025]).

¹⁵ Talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá compiled by Howard MacNutt, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. (Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2007) <http://www.bahai.org/r/510080411> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 248. <http://www.bahai.org/r/785406023> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁷ Shoghi Effendi, *This Decisive Hour*, p. 66. <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/shoghi-effendi/decisive-hour/> [accessed 1 May 2025].

establishing the Successorship of a faith in writing.¹⁸ As we will see, the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá further carries forward the Successorship into the future, until the appearance of the next Manifestation of God. In letters to two national spiritual assemblies Shoghi Effendi designated these two Wills 'the Covenants established successively by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá'¹⁹ and 'the twin Covenants of Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá'.²⁰

These Documents, the Wills of Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, address many subjects – personal ethics, loyalty to government, the lofty station of man and the establishment of various institutions in the Bahá'í community and in the world at large, as well as admonitions to unity, the acquisition of divine qualities, the spread of the Faith and the establishment of world peace – but primarily they are Documents of Succession revealed to ensure that the Bahá'í Faith maintains the course set by its Founders.²¹ The Successorship embodied in the two institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice is the primary focus of this paper, along with passages from the Bahá'í Writings about the scope of their authority and infallibility.

The Station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament

Of the more than one hundred volumes comprising the sacred Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Universal House of Justice writes, 'the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is of unique importance.'²² In a passage replete with superlatives, Shoghi Effendi wrote that 'the most signal act' of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry was the promulgation of His Most Holy Book, (Kitáb-i-Aqdas). Likewise, he described the promulgation of the Will as 'the supreme act associated with the mission' of 'Abdu'l-Bahá'.²³

Shoghi Effendi writes that Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy Book was 'the brightest emanation of the mind of Bahá'u'lláh'.²⁴ He used identical words to describe 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament as 'the brightest emanation of His mind',²⁵ and as 'supplementary to no less weighty a Book than the Kitáb-i-Aqdas'.²⁶

¹⁸ This matter is more fully discussed in one of Shoghi Effendi's World Order letters dated March 21, 1930, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh Further Considerations*. <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/shoghi-effendi/world-order-bahaullah/3#523190331> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁹ Postscript by Shoghi Effendi in his own hand, letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Germany and Austria, 30 June 1949, *The Light of Divine Guidance: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of Germany and Austria*, (Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1982) Volume I, p. 154. <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/LDG1/ldg1-99.html> [accessed 1 May 2025]. On p. 156 of that same volume please see the letter written on Shoghi Effendi's behalf dated 3 July 1949 in which he identifies the Master's Will as His Covenant. <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/LDG1/ldg1-100.html> [accessed 1 May 2025].

²⁰ 'This Hour, Crowded with Destiny,' Letter from Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States dated August 18, 1949, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 76. <http://www.bahai.org/r/147153942> [accessed 1 May 2025].

²¹ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 19. <http://www.bahai.org/r/874009616> [accessed 1 May 2025].

²² Universal House of Justice, *The Most Holy Book* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992) Introduction, p. 1.

²³ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 213. <http://www.bahai.org/r/020161556> [accessed 1 May 2025].

²⁴ Ibid., p. 212. <http://www.bahai.org/r/020161556> [accessed 1 May 2025].

²⁵ Ibid., p. 325. <http://www.bahai.org/r/020161556> [accessed 1 May 2025].

²⁶ Ibid., p. 328. <http://www.bahai.org/r/229666135> [accessed 1 May 2025].

Shoghi Effendi described Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i-Aqdas as 'The Charter of His New World Order,'²⁷ and the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as 'the Charter of the New World Order which is at once the glory and the promise of this most great Dispensation.'²⁸ These passages from the Universal House of Justice and Shoghi Effendi help us to better grasp the lofty station of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The Twin Successors

The Universal House of Justice, the Head of the Bahá'í faith today, has written that a religious covenant has two parts – God's part and humanity's – 'a binding agreement between God and man, whereby God requires of man certain behaviour in return for which He guarantees certain blessings.'²⁹

The Covenant of 'Abdu'l-Bahá has two parts – God's and humanity's. God's part of the Covenant of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the clear identification of His Successors, the Guardian of the Cause and the Universal House of Justice, and the promise that they both will be guided by God through Bahá'u'lláh ('The Abhá Beauty') and the Báb ('His Holiness, the Exalted One'):

The sacred and youthful branch, the guardian of the Cause of God as well as the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One (may My life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God.³⁰

This is what an eminent Bahá'í author and former member of the Universal House of Justice described as 'the most momentous' passage of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will.³¹ It is equivalent in the Master's Will to the verse in Bahá'u'lláh's Kitáb-i-'Ahd that begins: 'The Will of the divine Testator is this.' The appointment by 'Abdu'l-Bahá of His Successors, and the promise that they will receive divine guidance, is God's part of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Covenant,³² and it is followed immediately by the believers' part – to obey these successors – as well as a dramatic warning to those who might seek to overturn His Covenant:³³

²⁷ Ibid., p. 213. <http://www.bahai.org/r/973724879> [accessed 1 May 2025].

²⁸ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 144. <http://www.bahai.org/r/481093231> [accessed 1 May 2025].

²⁹ From a letter dated 23 March 1975 written by the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer. <http://www.bahai.org/r/692131020> [accessed 1 May 2025].

³⁰ *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 11. <http://www.bahai.org/r/181898597> [accessed 1 May 2025].

³¹ Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant*, p. 276.

³² The implication of this passage is elaborated in this letter Shoghi Effendi's secretary wrote on his behalf, 'He is assured the guidance of both Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb, as the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly reveals.' From a letter written to an individual believer dated August 20, 1956; Helen Hornby, *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1994), p. 313. <http://www.bahai.org/r/692132059> [accessed 1 May 2025]. This guidance is promised no less emphatically to the Universal House of Justice in the same passage of the Will.

³³ Several paragraphs of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will, not discussed in this paper, are devoted to recounting the deeds of those who broke the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, who sought to supplant 'Abdu'l-Bahá's leadership, to instigate His banishment and even bring about His death. In an extraordinarily magnanimous passage of His Will 'Abdu'l-Bahá forgives them. (*The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 19, <http://www.bahai.org/r/907927208> [accessed 1 May 2025]). He then, as the cited passage from the Will

Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God; whoso disputeth with him hath disputed with God; whoso denieth him hath denied God; whoso disbelieveth in him hath disbelieved in God; whoso deviateth, separateth himself and turneth aside from him hath in truth deviated, separated himself and turned aside from God. May the wrath, the fierce indignation, the vengeance of God rest upon him!³⁴

The believers' part of the Covenant of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is stated again as the closing words of His Will and Testament: 'All must seek guidance and turn unto the Centre of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error.'³⁵ The very last words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the human race³⁶ are to turn to the Guardian of the Cause and the Universal House of Justice. Through both Wills, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have 'appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as their chosen Successors'.³⁷ Though the word 'covenant' has additional meanings, in the following chapter the focus is on the Covenant of Successorship.

The Divine Protection Afforded by the Covenant

The 'twin Covenants of Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá' are the very heart of the successful protection of the integrity of the Bahá'í community³⁸. Though Christianity has three main branches and Islam two, the clear and vigorous language of these two Wills has prevented divisions from developing in the Bahá'í Faith. Shoghi Effendi points out that although some of the 'leading figures' in this Faith's history have attempted to draw a party to themselves – as in every religious age – 'the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh had, far from breaking or bending, gone from strength to strength, from victory to victory.'³⁹

The Bahá'í Writings do not promise that the Covenant will prevent such individuals from arising and attempting to start seditious groups; they promise they will not succeed. From time to time critics have challenged the assertion that the Covenant keeps the Bahá'í community one and undivided, and to prove their assertion, such critics present lists of so-called Bahá'í 'splinter

shows, summons the judgment of God upon those who would oppose His appointed Successors from that day forward.

³⁴ *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 11. <http://www.bahai.org/r/181898597> [accessed 1 May 2025].

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26. <http://www.bahai.org/r/691205948> [accessed 1 May 2025].

³⁶ Just as 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated above that the Kitáb-i-'Ahd is 'a Covenant with all the people of the world,' likewise 'Abdu'l-Bahá' states that His Covenant shelters not only the Bahá'í community, but 'all mankind.' *Ibid.*, p. 3. <http://www.bahai.org/r/367671165> [accessed 1 May 2025].

³⁷ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 19. <http://www.bahai.org/r/874009616> [accessed 1 May 2025].

³⁸ Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*, p. 76. <http://www.bahai.org/r/147153942> [accessed 1 May 2025].

³⁹ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 408-09. <http://www.bahai.org/r/794698685> [accessed 1 May 2025] See also *Challenges to the Covenant* <https://covenantstudy.org/> [accessed 1 May 2025] which is an excellent and authoritative resource on the Bahá'í Covenant. A number of these individuals are discussed in Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant*, throughout the course of the book.

groups'. Such lists unwittingly prove the efficacy of the Covenant, as these groups have one thing in common: in the main, they no longer exist.⁴⁰

The Envelope

To return to Shoghi Effendi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's oldest male descendant, in Haifa in 1921. When he opened the envelope addressed to him, he found Bahá'u'lláh's Will and Testament wrapped within 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will, indicating the identity of purpose of these Documents.⁴¹ The Will was 'signed and sealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá' and was 'entirely written with His own hand'. Referring to the Will's appointment of both of the successors, Shoghi Effendi wrote that the Will 'establishes the institution of the Guardianship as a hereditary office and outlines its essential functions', and 'provides the measures for the election of the International House of Justice, defines its scope and sets forth its relationship' to the institution of Guardianship.⁴² The Will provided that the Guardian was made 'the permanent head of so august a body'⁴³ through these words: 'the guardian of the Cause of God is its sacred head and the distinguished member for life of that body.'⁴⁴

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will directed the Bahá'ís to 'turn unto Shoghi Effendi... as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God... He is the Interpreter of the Word of God.'⁴⁵ Those words endowed the Guardian with what he himself described as 'such power as he may need to reveal the purport and disclose the implications of the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá'.⁴⁶

Bahá'u'lláh Himself had written that the Universal House of Justice was to consult 'regarding those things which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book, and to enforce that which is agreeable to them. God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth, and He, verily, is the Provider, the Omniscient.'⁴⁷ Following upon this, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote in His Will: 'The House of Justice hath power to enact laws that are not expressly recorded in the Book.'⁴⁸

⁴⁰ The Bahá'í writings predict that those few remaining will inevitably pass into oblivion: 'We should feel truly thankful for such futile attempts to undermine our beloved Faith -- attempts that protrude their ugly face from time to time, seem for a while able to create a breach in the ranks of the faithful, recede finally into the obscurity of oblivion, and are thought of no more. Such incidents we should regard as the interpositions of Providence, designed to fortify our faith, to clarify our vision, and to deepen our understanding of the essentials of His Divine Revelation.' Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 3. <http://www.bahai.org/r/061266705> [accessed 1 May 2025]. See also, Ibid. pp. 195-196. <http://www.bahai.org/r/003827870> [accessed 1 May 2025]. See also a blog on the Bahá'í Covenant, particularly an essay available <https://bahai-covenant.blogspot.com/2010/12/covenant-protects-from-schism.html> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁴¹ Extract from a letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated 25 September 1934, *The Light of Divine Guidance*, Vol. I, p. 61. <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/LDG1/ldg1-40.html> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁴² Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 328. <http://www.bahai.org/r/229666135> [accessed 1 May 2025]. The reader is referred to that paragraph to read a summary of the contents of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will, as the broad ambit of that Document is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁴³ *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 150. <http://www.bahai.org/r/788047530> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁴⁴ *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 14. <http://www.bahai.org/r/071420525> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 11. <http://www.bahai.org/r/189137811> [accessed 1 May 2025]. Sometimes translated as 'Expounder' of the Word of God.

⁴⁶ *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 151. <http://www.bahai.org/r/768620532> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁴⁷ *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 68. <http://www.bahai.org/r/723031566> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁴⁸ *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 19. <http://www.bahai.org/r/407994625> [accessed 1 May 2025].

In sum, as Shoghi Effendi wrote, 'the Guardian of the Faith has been made the Interpreter of the Word and the Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings.'⁴⁹ This does not exhaust the responsibilities of either of these institutions, but rather sets forth the primary area of jurisdiction in which the other twin institution does not share. The Guardian of the Faith could not supplement the revealed laws, while the House of Justice was designed to do so; and the House of Justice could not provide authoritative interpretations of the Bahá'í Writings, which was exclusive to the Guardian. The scope set forth in the Bahá'í Writings for each of these institutions is much broader, as discussed below. Just as interpretation of the Word of God did not constitute the bulk of Shoghi Effendi's divinely-guided activities, neither does enacting supplementary legislation primarily comprise the divinely-guided activities of the Universal House of Justice.

Building the Foundation for Election of the Universal House of Justice

Shoghi Effendi then faced the monumental task the Will gave him, together with the Universal House of Justice, of leading the Bahá'í faith. One of the most loyal and capable Bahá'ís, who worked very closely with Shoghi Effendi, wrote:

When he became Guardian, Shoghi Effendi has said, he did not know what he was supposed to do as Guardian, and he searched the Writings for direction as to the course of his work... In his study of the Writings he was able to discern his three primary missions. They would be to establish the administrative order of the Cause, to disseminate the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the world and to build the Bahá'í world centre. The Guardian found mandates in the Writings for each of these undertakings. The Will and Testament of the Master was the charter for building the administrative order.⁵⁰

From the very beginning of his ministry, Shoghi Effendi contemplated calling for the election of the Universal House of Justice, but various considerations prevented it, including the need to develop local and national Bahá'í institutions. During 'Abdu'l-Bahá's lifetime, 'a small number of embryonic consultative groups existed,' but 'there were no uniform procedures governing such features as how they were to be elected, the number of members, or even the title by which they were to be known.'⁵¹ Shoghi Effendi set about establishing the local and national spiritual assemblies, so that when they were 'fully representative of the rank and file of the believers in their respective countries' they would 'provide the spiritual basis for the constitution of so august a body in the Bahá'í world'.⁵²

The Will and Testament was the Charter that guided Shoghi Effendi in the development of these local and national institutions. 'This document builds on the seminal ideas outlined in Bahá'u'lláh's writings and calls into being the institutions comprising the Bahá'í Administrative Order, which is destined to serve as the vehicle for the diffusion of the Faith's values throughout the world and as the nucleus of world order.'⁵³ Shoghi Effendi established a series of worldwide

⁴⁹ *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 149. <http://www.bahai.org/r/694282671> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁵⁰ Leroy Ioas, quoted in Anita Ioas Chapman, *Leroy Ioas, Hand of the Cause of God* (Oxford: George Ronald Publishers, 1998) pp. 166-167.

⁵¹ Janet A. Khan, *Call to Apostleship* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 2016) p. 75.

⁵² Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 7. <http://www.bahai.org/r/162241101> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁵³ Khan, *Call to Apostleship*, pp. 6-7.

plans to implement the guidance in the Will.⁵⁴ Calling to mind that Bahá'u'lláh had ordained that in every city a 'House of Justice' should be established, he directed that in every locale where at least nine adult believers resided, a 'local spiritual assembly' should be elected. He referred to these assemblies as 'the chief sinews of Bahá'í society, as well as the ultimate foundation of its administrative structure', and recounted that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had written of the spirit animating these bodies:

These Spiritual Assemblies are shining lamps and heavenly gardens, from which the fragrances of holiness are diffused over all regions, and the lights of knowledge are shed abroad over all created things. From them the spirit of life streameth in every direction. They, indeed, are the potent sources of the progress of man, at all times and under all conditions.⁵⁵

Then, Shoghi Effendi wrote, in countries 'where the local Bahá'í communities had sufficiently advanced in number and in influence measures were taken for the initiation of National Assemblies, the pivots round which all national undertakings must revolve. Designated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will as the 'Secondary Houses of Justice', they constitute the electoral bodies in the formation of the International House of Justice.⁵⁶

The provisions of the Bahá'í Covenant 'have significance beyond the establishment of the administrative institutions of the Faith. They have, for example, a critical ongoing impact on such things as the preservation of the integrity of the Faith's teachings, the emergence of a creative, organically evolving community, and the establishment of the Most Great Peace in the distant future.'⁵⁷

Love: The Motivating Spirit for the Conduct of Bahá'í Institutions

The Guardian then developed in the hearts of the Bahá'ís a deep sense of love and loyalty to these local and national spiritual assemblies. He built upon what might be termed the earlier charismatic stage of the Bahá'í community's devotion to the Persons of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and suffused that love into the institutional and permanent stage of its life. The following letter on his behalf to the Bahá'ís of India is characteristic guidance from the Guardian:

There are two main principles which the Guardian wishes the friends to always bear in mind and to conscientiously and faithfully follow. First is the principle of unqualified and whole-hearted loyalty to the revealed Word... Next is the principle of complete and immediate obedience to the Assemblies, both local and national. It is the responsibility of these Bahá'í administrative bodies to enable the community to acquire, and increasingly deepen in the

⁵⁴ See 'The Epochs of the Formative Age,' enclosed with a message from the Universal House of Justice dated 5 February 1986, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996) p. 710, Message 451. <http://www.bahai.org/r/318981979> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁵⁵ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 331-332. <http://www.bahai.org/r/327595563> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 332. <http://www.bahai.org/r/106101923> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁵⁷ Khan, *Call to Apostleship*, p. 97.

knowledge and understanding of the Cause. Doctrinal unity and administrative unity, these are the two chief pillars that sustain the edifice of the Cause.⁵⁸

This same love characterises the attitude of the Bahá'ís towards these assemblies today, under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, which wrote to the Bahá'ís of the world at Naw-Rúz in 1974:

The friends are called upon to give their wholehearted support and cooperation to the Local Spiritual Assembly, first by voting for the membership and then by energetically pursuing its plans and programs, by turning to it in time of trouble or difficulty, by praying for its success and taking delight in its rise to influence and honour. This great prize, this gift of God within each community must be cherished, nurtured, loved, assisted, obeyed and prayed for.⁵⁹

The Guardian patiently led the Bahá'ís away from a sterile approach to administration and towards what Bahá'u'lláh had written was the spirit that should animate them,⁶⁰ 'that the world's affairs be administered through the potency of love'.⁶¹ The Universal House of Justice also characterises the Bahá'í Administrative Order as 'the structure of freedom for our Age'.⁶²

Likewise, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had written in His Will that the Bahá'ís must establish love and devotion to God as the basis of order in the world:

Bestirred, without rest, and steadfast to the end, they must raise in every land the triumphal cry 'Ya Bahá'u'l-Abhá' (O Thou the Glory of Glories), must achieve renown in the world wherever they go, must burn brightly even as a candle in every meeting and must kindle the flame of Divine love in every assembly; that the light of truth may rise resplendent in the midmost heart of the world, that throughout the East and throughout the West a vast concourse may gather under the shadow of the Word of God, that the sweet savours of

⁵⁸ From a letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated September 5, 1936, *Messages to the Indian Subcontinent 1923-1957* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995) p. 145. <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/DND/dnd-69.html> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁵⁹ The Universal House of Justice, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986*, p. 264. <http://www.bahai.org/r/314749898> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁶⁰ 'Administrative efficiency and order should always be accompanied by an equal degree of love, of devotion and of spiritual development. Both of them are essential and to attempt to dissociate one from the other is to deaden the body of the Cause. In these days, when the Faith is still in its infancy, great care must be taken lest mere administrative routine stifles the spirit which must feed the body of the Administration itself. That spirit is its propelling force and the motivating power of its very life.' From a letter dated 10 December 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, cited in *The National Spiritual Assembly*, Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 1990. https://bahai-library.com/pdf/compilations/national_spiritual_assembly.pdf [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁶¹ Bahá'u'lláh, cited in *Trustworthiness, A Cardinal Bahá'í Virtue* compiled by the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre, 1990 Revised Edition. <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/compilations/> [accessed 1 May 2025]. For further thoughts on this subject, the reader may wish to consult this blog post, *Shoghi Effendi Created an Extraordinary Love in the Hearts of Those Who Knew Him*. <https://bahai-covenant.blogspot.com/2016/11/shoghi-effendi-love.html> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁶² Letter dated 29 December 1988, *To the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the United States of America*. <http://www.bahai.org/r/377981470> [accessed 1 May 2025].

holiness may be diffused, that faces may shine radiantly, hearts be filled with the Divine spirit and souls be made heavenly.⁶³

Numerical Growth of the Bahá'í Faith Under Shoghi Effendi's Leadership

When Shoghi Effendi began to carry out the provisions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will there were Bahá'ís in 35 countries; by the end of his life, in 1957, this number had increased to 254. During the same 36-year ministry the number of national spiritual assemblies increased from zero to 26, and the number of localities where Bahá'ís resided worldwide increased to 4200.⁶⁴ The number of local spiritual assemblies increased from a literal handful at the beginning of his ministry to 1000 at its conclusion.⁶⁵ After his passing his wife wrote: "That the Cause of God has reached the point where it stands today is due to the self-sacrificing, constant, unsparing, truly herculean labours of its Guardian."⁶⁶ In a 2019 article on religious demographics, Todd Johnson and Peter Crossing note that 'the Bahá'í Faith is the only religion to have grown faster than the general population in every United Nations region over the past 100 years.'⁶⁷

Imagery Describing the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice

Shoghi Effendi used visual and architectural images to describe these two institutions, for instance representing them as 'the twin pillars that support this mighty Administrative Structure'.⁶⁸ He described the institution of the Guardianship as the 'pivot' of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament'⁶⁹ and as the 'head cornerstone' of the Administrative Order of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.⁷⁰ He described the Universal House of Justice as 'the apex of the Bahá'í Administrative Order',⁷¹ as 'that central pivot of the people of Bahá',⁷² and as 'the dome, the final unit crowning the entire edifice.'⁷³

⁶³ *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 10. <http://www.bahai.org/r/834554251> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁶⁴ Cf. *The Ministry of the Custodians 1957-1963* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992) p. 12.

⁶⁵ Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 393.

⁶⁶ Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, *The Passing of Shoghi Effendi* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1958), p. 1.

⁶⁷ Todd M. Johnson and Peter F. Crossing, 'The World by Religion,' *Journal of Religion and Demography*, online publication 6 May 2019. https://brill.com/view/journals/jrd/6/1/article-p1_1.xml [accessed 1 May 2025]. Some current statistics can be found on the official Bahá'í Media web page <https://news.bahai.org/media-information/statistics/> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁶⁸ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 147. <http://www.bahai.org/r/568030410> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁶⁹ Shoghi Effendi, Message dated May 4, 1953, *Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957*, p. 148. <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/MBW/mbw-71.html> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁷⁰ Cablegram dated March 30, 1937, *Messages to America 1932-1946*, p. 8; and Shoghi Effendi, *This Decisive Hour: Messages from Shoghi Effendi to the North American Bahá'ís, 1932 – 1946* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2002), p. 15, para. 27.1. <http://www.bahai.org/r/330613928> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁷¹ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 332. <http://www.bahai.org/r/106101923> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁷² From a letter dated 30 October 1924 to the Spiritual Assembly of Tíhrán, translated from Persian; *The Bahá'í World Vol. XIV*, p. 436; Compilation on Establishment of the Universal House of Justice. <http://www.bahai.org/r/318979454> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁷³ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 330. <http://www.bahai.org/r/327595563> [accessed 1 May 2025].

The Election of the Universal House of Justice

The Will and Testament ‘consists of three sections written at three different times between 1901 and the year of His passing’.⁷⁴ The first section anticipates the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice functioning together: ‘[T]he Guardian of the Cause of God is its sacred head and the distinguished member for life of that body.’⁷⁵ As I have explained, throughout his ministry Shoghi Effendi functioned alone as Head of the Faith. He passed away childless and without a will in 1957, but his dedication to building up the worldwide Administrative Order enabled the Bahá'ís of the world to elect the Universal House of Justice after his passing.⁷⁶ The historian of the Faith Adib Taherzadeh writes:

The Universal House of Justice was instituted in 1963, when members of the national spiritual assemblies, in a prayerful attitude and in an atmosphere of intense spirituality and profound devotion, elected as members of this supreme institution nine souls from among the Bahá'ís of the world. The occasion is considered by the Bahá'ís to be, next to the appointment of Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian of the Faith, the most momentous event in the history of the Formative Age of the Faith.⁷⁷

Elsewhere, Taherzadeh writes, ‘Never before has a Manifestation of God given authority to a council elected by universal suffrage to enact laws and administer the affairs of His religion with the assurance that it will be guided by God in its decisions.’⁷⁸

Soon after the Universal House of Justice was elected it determined that there was no way to appoint another Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi.⁷⁹ As a former member of the Universal House of Justice wrote, ‘Bahá'u'lláh, in His Most Holy Book, had specifically created the Universal House of Justice and confirmed its divine guidance. This and the text of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's Will make it clear that the guidance conferred on each of the “twin pillars” is independent of the guidance conferred on the other, and it had been proven by the Guardian's ministry that one pillar could exist and function by itself.’⁸⁰ Just as Shoghi Effendi functioned as the Head of the Faith without the House of Justice, since its inception the Universal House of Justice has functioned as the Head of the Faith without a Guardian⁸¹. The guarantee of divine guidance in the Will encompasses both situations – whether these institutions function together or severally.

⁷⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *This Decisive Hour*, Glossary, p. 173.

⁷⁵ *The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 14. <http://www.bahai.org/r/071420525> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁷⁶ For observations on Shoghi Effendi not having written a will see Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant*, pp. 354-357. Also see *Observations on Shoghi Effendi Not Having Written a Last Will and Testament*, blog post <https://bahai-covenant.blogspot.com/2009/04/shoghi-effendi-didnt-write-will-and.html> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁷⁷ Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant*, p. 376.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Message from the Universal House of Justice dated 6 October 1963, *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986*, p. 14, Message 5. <http://www.bahai.org/r/849488755> [accessed 1 May 2025]. See also Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant*, ch. 38.

⁸⁰ David Hofman, *A Commentary on the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá*, 4th Edition, Revised, with Epilogue (Oxford: George Ronald, 1982), p. 43.

⁸¹ For a further discussion of the divine guidance the Universal House of Justice receives since it must function without the presence of the Guardian of the Cause please see this blog post <https://bahai-covenant.blogspot.com/2009/03/is-universal-house-of-justice.html> [accessed 1 May 2025].

The second part of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will was written at a time when He wrote: ‘I am now in very great danger and the hope of even an hour’s life is lost to me.’⁸² This part of the Will, apparently written during the childhood of Shoghi Effendi, does not mention the institution of Guardianship. In the event of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s death the Universal House of Justice was to be ‘elected from all countries, that is from those parts in the East and West where the loved ones are to be found, after the manner of the customary elections in Western countries such as those of England’. He continues, ‘It is incumbent upon these members (of the Universal House of Justice) to gather in a certain place and deliberate.’⁸³ That is, in the second part of His Will ‘Abdu’l-Bahá promised that the decisions of this body, which would have been composed of only its elected members during Shoghi Effendi’s childhood, would be ‘the truth and the purpose of God Himself’, and have ‘the same effect as the Text itself.’⁸⁴ This promise likewise applies today, when the Universal House of Justice must function without the Guardian among its membership. The Universal House of Justice has written, ‘Nowhere is it stated that the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice is by virtue of the Guardian’s membership or presence on that body. Indeed, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Shoghi Effendi in his Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh have both explicitly stated that the elected members of the Universal House of Justice in consultation are recipients of unfailing Divine Guidance.’⁸⁵

The Shared Authorship of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

For the purposes of this paper, it is very important to understand that, as the Guardian explains, both Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are equally the Authors of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will – specifically with respect to the institutions brought into being in the Will. Shoghi Effendi implies this joint authorship when he writes of these two Wills as one: ‘the explicit directions of their Book, and the surprisingly emphatic language with which they have clothed the provisions of their Will’⁸⁶.

In the following passage the Guardian uses marvellous imagery to convey that the Will and Testament written by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is inseparable from and was also authored by Bahá’u’lláh, ‘the One Who provided the motivating impulse for its creation’:

The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh had been instituted solely through the direct operation of His Will and purpose. The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, on the other hand, may be regarded as the offspring resulting from that mystic intercourse between Him Who had generated the forces of a God-given Faith and the One Who had been made its sole Interpreter and was recognized as its perfect Exemplar. The creative energies unleashed by the Originator of the Law of God in this age gave birth, through their impact upon the mind

⁸² *The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 19. <http://www.bahai.org/r/985165857> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, For fuller discussion of this subject see The Universal House of Justice, *Election and infallibility of the Universal House of Justice, Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1963-1986*, p. 50; letter dated 9 March 1965 <http://www.bahai.org/r/519655394> [accessed 1 May 2025] in which it states that ‘The second part of the Master’s Will ... should be studied by the friends.’ Also see *Is there provision in the Bahá’í Writings for the Universal House of Justice to function infallibly with only its elected members?* (blogpost <https://bahai-covenant.blogspot.com/2009/03/is-there-provision-in-bahai-writings.html> [accessed 1 May 2025]).

⁸⁵ *The Universal House of Justice: A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing, 2021), para. 59.6. <http://www.bahai.org/r/519655488> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁸⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 21-22. <http://www.bahai.org/r/178590959> [accessed 1 May 2025].

of Him Who had been chosen as its unerring Expounder, to that Instrument, the vast implications of which the present generation, even after the lapse of twenty-three years, is still incapable of fully apprehending.

The Guardian concludes with a sentence stating that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will – ‘this Instrument’ – cannot be ‘divorced’ from Bahá’u’lláh: ‘This Instrument can, if we would correctly appraise it, no more be divorced from the One Who provided the motivating impulse for its creation than from Him Who directly conceived it.’⁸⁷ Understanding his use of the term ‘divorced’ in this context is extremely important. Shoghi Effendi bids us to ‘correctly appraise’ the relationship between ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament and Bahá’u’lláh, ‘the One Who provided the motivating impulse for its creation’, and not to ‘divorce’ that Instrument from Bahá’u’lláh. This striking passage is an important key to another passage the Guardian wrote on the same topic – the passage which begins, ‘Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh would be mutilated...’⁸⁸ In both passages the Guardian is stating the same thing.

As the Universal House of Justice has explained, there was no one Shoghi Effendi could have appointed as successor Guardian in accordance with the provisions of the Will.⁸⁹ Some have understood this circumstance to mean that since there is no living Guardian, a ‘divorce’ has taken place, and the Cause of God has been ‘mutilated’. If we examine the context in which Shoghi Effendi wrote this and compare other passages in which he uses the words ‘divorced’ and ‘mutilated’, we can seek to ‘correctly appraise’ his intent in this one. Simply put, as the next section seeks to demonstrate, in both passages Shoghi Effendi meant that although Bahá’u’lláh did not mention this institution anywhere in His Writings, and it was not formally established until the promulgation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will, the Guardianship must not be viewed as solely a creation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. To see the Will in that way would be to divorce it from Bahá’u’lláh, which would be a mutilation of the true picture of the World Order He conceived. As we read the following passages, we will examine what Shoghi Effendi means by ‘inseparable’ and its opposite ‘divorced’, and also what he communicates with the word ‘mutilated’.

Bahá’u’lláh is the Original Author of the Institution of the Guardianship

As I mentioned at the start of this paper, Shoghi Effendi had no inkling of the institution of the Guardianship before he read the Will, as it had not been explicitly mentioned in any of Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings or in any of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s prior to His Will. This institution can, however, be seen in the implications of the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh. Shoghi Effendi writes that in the Most Holy Book Bahá’u’lláh ‘anticipates by implication the institution of Guardianship’.⁹⁰ He also writes that a careful reading of the Most Holy Book will show that Bahá’u’lláh ‘adumbrated’ the institutions which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá later would ‘formally establish’ in His Will and Testament.⁹¹

The subject of the following paragraph is the institutions ‘Abdu’l-Bahá brought about in His Will and Testament. Shoghi Effendi explains in a letter from February 1929 that the Will of

⁸⁷ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 325. <http://www.bahai.org/r/020161556> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ *The Universal House of Justice: A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice*, para. 58.2. <http://www.bahai.org/r/519655439> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁹⁰ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 214. <http://www.bahai.org/r/795879813> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁹¹ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 157, 146. <http://www.bahai.org/r/337384896> [accessed 1 May 2025].

‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Most Holy Book of Bahá’u’lláh are ‘inseparable parts of one complete unit’ and that ‘the institutions which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ordains in His Will,’ though not outwardly specified in Bahá’u’lláh’s ‘general scheme of Bahá’í Dispensation’ in His Most Holy Book, cannot be ‘divorced’ from that Book:

It would, however, be helpful and instructive to bear in mind certain basic principles with reference to the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, which, together with the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, constitutes the chief depository wherein are enshrined those priceless elements of that Divine Civilization, the establishment of which is the primary mission of the Bahá’í Faith. A study of the provisions of these sacred documents will reveal the close relationship that exists between them, as well as the identity of purpose and method which they inculcate. Far from regarding their specific provisions as incompatible and contradictory in spirit, every fair-minded inquirer will readily admit that they are not only complementary, but that they mutually confirm one another, and are inseparable parts of one complete unit. A comparison of their contents with the rest of Bahá’í sacred Writings will similarly establish the conformity of whatever they contain with the spirit as well as the letter of the authenticated writings and sayings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In fact, he who reads the Aqdas with care and diligence will not find it hard to discover that the Most Holy Book itself anticipates in a number of passages the institutions which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ordains in His Will. By leaving certain matters unspecified and unregulated in His Book of Laws, Bahá’u’lláh seems to have deliberately left a gap in the general scheme of Bahá’í Dispensation, which the unequivocal provisions of the Master’s Will have filled. To attempt to divorce the one from the other, to insinuate that the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh have not been upheld, in their entirety and with absolute integrity, by what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has revealed in His Will, is an unpardonable affront to the unswerving fidelity that has characterized the life and labours of our beloved Master.⁹²

I suggest that when Shoghi Effendi states that one must not ‘divorce’ the ‘institutions which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ordains in His Will’ from ‘the general scheme of Bahá’í Dispensation’ set forth in Bahá’u’lláh’s Most Holy Book, he is in particular referring to the institution of the Guardianship, which is not mentioned in the Most Holy Book. It is another way of saying that to divorce the Guardianship from Bahá’u’lláh’s plan of world order would be to mutilate the truth of the Bahá’í teachings.

There were people who thought that the Bahá’í Faith solely concerned itself with the inner life and had no bearing on institutions such as local and national spiritual assemblies. Shoghi Effendi shows what he means by ‘mutilation of the body of the Cause’ in the same February 1929 letter when he explains that ‘the system of Bahá’í administration’ being established under his leadership during the seven years after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s passing is not an innovation or a departure from the overall purpose of the Faith. Rather, the administration must be seen as part and parcel of the spiritual teachings of the Faith. Observe that he is saying that to ‘dissociate’ (divorce) the spiritual and administrative teachings of the Faith from one another would be to mutilate its truth.

It should be remembered by every follower of the Cause that the system of Bahá’í administration is not an innovation imposed arbitrarily upon the Bahá’ís of the world since the Master’s passing, but derives its authority from the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is specifically prescribed in unnumbered Tablets, and rests in some of its essential features

⁹² Shoghi Effendi, Letter dated February 27, 1929, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 3-4. <http://www.bahai.org/r/476179381> [accessed 1 May 2025].

upon the explicit provisions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. It thus unifies and correlates the principles separately laid down by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and is indissolubly bound with the essential verities of the Faith. To dissociate the administrative principles of the Cause from the purely spiritual and humanitarian teachings would be tantamount to a mutilation of the body of the Cause, a separation that can only result in the disintegration of its component parts, and the extinction of the Faith itself.⁹³

In these two passages, Shoghi Effendi emphasizes the essential harmony of the elements of the Bahá'í Faith as 'inseparable parts of one complete unit' and characterizes their 'divorce' or 'dissociation' from each other as a grievous misunderstanding – as a distortion of the truth, as a 'mutilation of the body of the Cause'.

It may be helpful to see how, in one more passage from his writings, he uses the word 'mutilation' to intend a misapprehension of the Teachings. It shows yet again that by 'mutilation' he means divorcing the inseparable aspects of the Faith from one another – that is, a misunderstanding.

In the foreword to *God Passes By*, his history of the first Bahá'í century, Shoghi Effendi provides an overview of the four component periods of that century:

The century under our review may therefore be considered as falling into four distinct periods... The first period (1844-1853) centres around the gentle, the youthful and irresistible person of the Báb... The second period (1853-1892) derives its inspiration from the august figure of Bahá'u'lláh... The third period (1892-1921) revolves around the vibrant personality of 'Abdu'l-Bahá... The fourth period (1921-1944) is motivated by the forces radiating from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that Charter of Bahá'u'lláh's New World Order, the offspring resulting from the mystic intercourse between Him Who is the Source of the Law of God and the mind of the One Who is the vehicle and interpreter of that Law... These four periods are to be regarded... as the component, the inseparable parts of one stupendous whole.⁹⁴

In a previous paragraph we saw how the Guardian described the Master's Will and Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy Book as 'inseparable parts of one complete unit', and that we must not 'divorce the one from the other'. Now, writing of the four periods of Bahá'í history, he explains that each of these four periods 'revolves around its own theme, boasts of its own heroes, registers its own tragedies, records its own triumphs, and contributes its own share to the execution of one common, immutable Purpose. To isolate any one of them from the others, to dissociate the later manifestations of one universal, all-embracing Revelation from the pristine purpose that animated it in its earliest days, would be tantamount to a mutilation of the structure on which it rests, and to a lamentable perversion of its truth and of its history.'⁹⁵

To 'dissociate' the component elements of the history of the Faith from one another would constitute a divorce which is 'tantamount to a mutilation', a perversion of the truth. By 'mutilation' he means misunderstanding the true relationship between the inseparable aspects of the Faith by isolating them from one another.

⁹³ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 5. <http://www.bahai.org/r/112459415> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁹⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, *Foreword*, p. xv. <http://www.bahai.org/r/085224896> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁹⁵ Ibid.

I will now quote the last sentence of that passage again, to show that what the Guardian means by the word 'mutilation' is to misperceive the relationship between the inseparable elements of the Faith: 'To isolate any one of them from the others, to dissociate the later manifestations of one universal, all-embracing Revelation from the pristine purpose that animated it in its earliest days, would be tantamount to a mutilation of the structure on which it rests, and to a lamentable perversion of its truth and of its history.'

Above, we saw that the Guardian wrote that the 'Instrument' of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá must not be 'divorced' from Bahá'u'lláh. We have also read that to 'dissociate' the 'system of Bahá'í administration' from the 'essential verities of the Faith' would be 'tantamount to a mutilation of the body of the Cause'. And we have read that we must not 'divorce' the 'institutions which 'Abdu'l-Bahá ordains in His Will' from 'the general scheme of Bahá'í Dispensation' Bahá'u'lláh has established in His Most Holy Book. Now we will see that he uses the same linguistic structure when he explicitly states that the institution of the Guardianship must not be divorced from Bahá'u'lláh.

The Guardian writes of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice that 'these twin institutions of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh should be regarded as divine in origin, essential in their functions and complementary in their aim and purpose,' that they are 'inseparable institutions' and that 'they supplement each other's authority and functions, and are permanently and fundamentally united in their aims.'⁹⁶ Then, in an often-misunderstood passage, Shoghi Effendi restates what he has previously said, using the same terminology – that the institution of the Guardianship cannot be divorced from Bahá'u'lláh's plan of World Order: 'Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh would be mutilated.'⁹⁷

The remainder of that paragraph addresses two points: It quotes a tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá which explains the importance of the principle of primogeniture, and it states features of the connection between the institutions of the Universal House of Justice and the Guardianship:

Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh would be mutilated and permanently deprived of that hereditary principle which, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written, has been invariably upheld by the Law of God. 'In all the Divine Dispensations,' He states, in a Tablet addressed to a follower of the Faith in Persia, 'the eldest son hath been given extraordinary distinctions. Even the station of prophethood hath been his birthright.' Without such an institution the integrity of the Faith would be imperilled, and the stability of the entire fabric would be gravely endangered. Its prestige would suffer, the means required to enable it to take a long, uninterrupted view over a series of generations would be completely lacking, and the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its elected representatives would be totally withdrawn.'⁹⁸

'Abdu'l-Bahá's tablet about the hereditary principle is addressing a financial matter – certain assets in the estate of a person who dies without a will are inherited by the eldest son – and from this tablet Shoghi Effendi has elucidated implications which apply to the hereditary Guardianship.'⁹⁹ It

⁹⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 148. <http://www.bahai.org/r/898812393> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ The tablet is quoted in a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual dated 1 July 1996. <http://www.bahai.org/r/802585328> [accessed 1 May 2025].

is interesting to note that in like manner, paragraph 42 of the Most Holy Book, which deals with a financial matter – the disposition of endowments dedicated to charity – likewise has ‘implications for the succession of authority following the passing of Bahá’u’lláh ... and of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’.¹⁰⁰

As to the last part of that paragraph, explaining the relationship between the inseparable institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice, it is similar if not identical in content to this explanation of the same principle by Shoghi Effendi:

It must be also clearly understood by every believer that the institution of Guardianship does not under any circumstances abrogate, or even in the slightest degree detract from, the powers granted to the Universal House of Justice by Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and repeatedly and solemnly confirmed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will. It does not constitute in any manner a contradiction to the Will and Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, nor does it nullify any of His revealed instructions. It enhances the prestige of that exalted assembly, stabilizes its supreme position, safeguards its unity, assures the continuity of its labours, without presuming in the slightest to infringe upon the inviolability of its clearly-defined sphere of jurisdiction.¹⁰¹

The Universal House of Justice has elucidated the contents of these two paragraphs in several important letters.¹⁰²

We will now examine the context in which Shoghi Effendi writes ‘Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship...’. To view this as the Guardian’s prediction that if ever the Cause of God had to function without a living Guardian it would be ‘mutilated’ is, in this writer’s view, not the Guardian’s intent and takes the phrase out of its context. In the very next paragraph of this letter, written in 1934, Shoghi Effendi wrote that the World Order would be ‘paralysed in its action’ if it were to be ‘severed’ from the ‘no less essential institution of the Universal House of Justice’.¹⁰³ At that time, the Guardian was functioning as Head of the Faith without the benefit of a single word from the Universal House of Justice – it would not be brought into being for another thirty years. If ‘divorced’ from the Guardianship is taken to mean functioning without a living Guardian, then ‘severed’ would have to mean functioning without the Universal House of Justice. However, he was, as he wrote those words, functioning without ‘the no less essential institution of the Universal House of Justice’ – and to conclude that he meant that he was at that moment ‘severed’ from the House of Justice is illogical. Further, he would have to be saying that the Cause of God was, in his own words, ‘paralysed in its action’. More important than seeing the illogic of such a deduction, more important than our own observation that during every day of Shoghi Effendi’s ministry the Cause of God was advancing and was not ‘paralysed in its action’, is Shoghi Effendi’s own clear statement later in the same letter that it was not paralysed. Some paragraphs later Shoghi Effendi writes of the ‘vitality’ of the institutions of the ‘vibrant body of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh’ (functioning without the Universal House of Justice) in ‘contrast’ to the ‘fear’ that

¹⁰⁰ Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 196, Note 66. <http://www.bahai.org/r/117765224> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁰¹ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 8. <http://www.bahai.org/r/246797968> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁰² These are found in *The Universal House of Justice: A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice*, particularly letter no. 57 dated 9 March 1965 <http://www.bahai.org/r/519655370> [accessed 1 May 2025], letter no. 58 dated 27 May 1966 <http://www.bahai.org/r/519655437> [accessed 1 May 2025] and letter no. 59 dated 7 December 1969. <http://www.bahai.org/r/519655478> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁰³ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 148. <http://www.bahai.org/r/638026963> [accessed 1 May 2025].

‘paralyses the action’ of the world’s ‘blind and bewildered statesmen’, who were leading ‘the outworn institutions, both religious and secular, of present-day society’.¹⁰⁴

That is, since he contrasts the ‘vitality’ which characterises the institutions inside the Bahá’í Faith with the ‘fear’ that ‘paralyses the action’ of institutions in wider society, he cannot be saying that functioning without the Universal House of Justice would paralyse the action of the Cause of God. Rather, he is asserting that the Faith was neither ‘severed’ from the House of Justice nor ‘paralysed’. He described these twin institutions as ‘inseparable’ some thirty years before the Universal House of Justice came into being. In like manner today, when the Universal House of Justice is Head of the Faith without the active participation of a living Guardian, the Faith is neither ‘divorced’ from the Guardianship nor ‘mutilated’. Shoghi Effendi attaches a different meaning to these terms. He is saying not to divorce the institution of Guardianship from Bahá’u’lláh as its creator; he is also stating that these two institutions cannot be divorced from one another. He told the reader two paragraphs earlier that that is his context – to ‘elaborate certain salient features’ of ‘the nature of the relationships which, on the one hand, bind together these two fundamental organs of the Will of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and connect, on the other, each of them to the Author of the Faith and the Center of His Covenant’.¹⁰⁵

As we now see, Shoghi Effendi means something entirely different by ‘divorced’ when he writes about the Guardianship – he means that the Guardianship is among those institutions of the Administrative Order which were not mentioned in Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings, were brought into being by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will, but which were no less Authored by Bahá’u’lláh.

Mirror Imagery of the Most Mighty Branch and the Chosen Branch

There is a remarkable identity of imagery in the Covenants of Bahá’u’lláh and of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The Will and Testament of each of them directs the faith’s followers to ‘turn’ to the hereditary successor. In ‘The Tablet of the Branch, a tablet which is a ‘harbinger’ of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant,¹⁰⁶ Bahá’u’lláh warns against turning against ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, characterizes Him as a sacred Branch, and directs the followers to abide under the shade of that Branch. This imagery is repeated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Testament with respect to Shoghi Effendi.

The heart of the Will of Bahá’u’lláh is a single term, to ‘turn’ to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: ‘It is incumbent upon the Aghṣán,¹⁰⁷ the Afnan¹⁰⁸ and My Kindred to turn, one and all, their faces towards the Most Mighty Branch.’¹⁰⁹ Likewise, in His Will and Testament, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá directs the Bahá’ís to ‘turn’ to his hereditary successor Shoghi Effendi: ‘After the passing away of this wronged one, it

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 155. <http://www.bahai.org/r/548799335> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 147. <http://www.bahai.org/r/568030410> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁰⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 177, <http://www.bahai.org/r/704761967> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁰⁷ ‘Aghṣán’ (plural of Ghuṣn) is the Arabic word for ‘Branches.’ This term is used by Bahá’u’lláh to designate His male descendants in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Note 66. <http://www.bahai.org/r/117765224> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁰⁸ ‘The term ‘afnán’ means literally small branch, and refers to the relatives of the Báb, both men and women. As the Báb’s only son died while in infancy, the former had no direct descendants. The ‘afnán’ are, therefore, all indirectly related to the Báb.’ (From a letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated 25 September 1934, *The Light of Divine Guidance*, Vol. 1, p. 62. <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/LDG1/lbg1-40.html> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁰⁹ Bahá’u’lláh’s Book of the Covenant, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 221. <http://www.bahai.org/r/078110759> [accessed 1 May 2025].

is incumbent upon the Aghṣán (Branches), the Afnan (Twigs) of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands (pillars of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abhá Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi.¹¹⁰

Speaking of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh warns, 'Whoso turneth towards Him hath turned towards God, and whoso turneth away from Him hath turned away from My beauty, hath repudiated My Proof, and transgressed against Me.'¹¹¹ Likewise, in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá He writes of Shoghi Effendi, 'He that obeyeth him not, hath not obeyed God; he that turneth away from him, hath turned away from God and he that denieth him, hath denied the True One.'¹¹² This is Covenant language. This promise and this threat are essential features of God's Covenant and have proven to be an impregnable bulwark protecting the integrity of the Bahá'í community and keeping it true to the course set for it by Bahá'u'lláh.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote of the exalted station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: 'There hath branched from the Sadratu'l-Muntaha this sacred and glorious Being, this Branch of Holiness.'¹¹³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá used the same imagery in His Will to refer to the exalted position of Shoghi Effendi, 'the sacred and youthful branch' and 'the blest and sacred bough that hath branched out from the Twin Holy Trees'.¹¹⁴

In the Tablet of the Branch, Bahá'u'lláh says of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Well is it with him that hath sought his shelter and abideth beneath His shadow.'¹¹⁵ Likewise in the Will and Testament, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says of Shoghi Effendi, 'Well is it with him that seeketh the shelter of his shade that shadoweth all mankind.'¹¹⁶ The resonance in the spirit and imagery of the Documents of Successorship authored by Bahá'u'lláh and by 'Abdu'l-Bahá setting forth the exalted station of both of these sacred branches is striking.

Shoghi Effendi described 'Abdu'l-Bahá as 'the Centre and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá'í virtue.'¹¹⁷ However, when writing of his own position as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi distinguished his own powers and capacities from those of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

No Guardian of the Faith, I feel it my solemn duty to place on record, can ever claim to be the perfect exemplar of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh or the stainless mirror that reflects His light. Though overshadowed by the unfailing, the unerring protection of Bahá'u'lláh and of

¹¹⁰ *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 11. <http://www.bahai.org/r/189137811> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹¹¹ Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the Branch in *Days of Remembrance*. <http://www.bahai.org/r/137097754> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹¹² *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 24. <http://www.bahai.org/r/691205948> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹¹³ Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the Branch in *Days of Remembrance*. <http://www.bahai.org/r/446103766> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹¹⁴ *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 11 <http://www.bahai.org/r/181898597> [accessed 1 May 2025] and p. 3. <http://www.bahai.org/r/367671165> [accessed 1 May 2025]. For a treatment of the Will and Testament generally see Hofman, *Commentary on the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*. The imagery under discussion is addressed on pp. 12-14. The 'Twin Holy Trees' refers to the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

¹¹⁵ Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the Branch in *Days of Remembrance*. <http://www.bahai.org/r/446103766> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹¹⁶ *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 3. <http://www.bahai.org/r/367671165> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹¹⁷ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 133. <http://www.bahai.org/r/305127046> [accessed 1 May 2025].

the Báb, and however much he may share with 'Abdu'l-Bahá the right and obligation to interpret the Bahá'í teachings, he remains essentially human ... The fact that the Guardian has been specifically endowed with such power as he may need to reveal the purport and disclose the implications of the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not necessarily confer upon him a station co-equal with those Whose words he is called upon to interpret.¹¹⁸

Shoghi Effendi states that 'Abdu'l-Bahá is a 'stainless mirror' reflecting the light of Bahá'u'lláh, but that the Guardian of the Faith is not. In this connection it is interesting to consider a provision of the Will, which may carry an implication about what might be termed the Guardian's 'sinlessness'. In His Will, 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave the Guardian a specific function:

The Guardian of the Cause of God is its sacred head and the distinguished member for life of that body... Should any of the members [of the Universal House of Justice] commit a sin, injurious to the common weal, the Guardian of the Cause of God hath at his own discretion the right to expel him, whereupon the people must elect another one in his stead.¹¹⁹

Shoghi Effendi indicated that the meaning of the word in the Will he translated as 'member for life of that body' is 'irremovable'.¹²⁰ Perhaps since the elected members were theoretically subject to being removed but the Guardian was not, this carries an implication about the Guardian's infallibility – that it rendered him incapable of committing 'a sin injurious to the common weal'. As we will see in the next section, the Guardian's infallibility ensured that his every deed fostered the 'highest interests' of the Bahá'í Faith, which may be another way of saying that the Guardian was protected from committing a sin injurious to the common weal.

The Authority and Infallibility of the Guardian of the Cause

Shoghi Effendi's guidance to a devoted Bahá'í family was that 'your dear family should do all you can to teach the believers the Will and Testament to strengthen their understanding of its important provisions; for all the authority of the administrative bodies, as well as of the Guardian himself, is mainly derived from this tremendous document.'¹²¹ This authority was derived directly from the Manifestations of God for this Day. As we have seen from the earlier section 'The Twin Successors', the Guardian was 'guided directly by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, as the Master states in His Will'.¹²² It is interesting that in the Will the divine guidance is specified to flow through the

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 151. <http://www.bahai.org/r/768620532> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹¹⁹ *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 14. <http://www.bahai.org/r/071420525> [accessed 1 May 2025]. There being no Guardian to perform this function, the Constitution and By-Laws of that Body provide that in such an event the House of Justice may declare a vacancy (see <https://universalhouseofjustice.bahai.org/constitution/constitution-universal-house-justice> [accessed 1 May 2025]).

¹²⁰ Rúhíyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 204.

¹²¹ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated 15 April 1949, *The Light of Divine Guidance*, Volume 2, p. 82. <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/LDG2/ldg2-97.html> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹²² From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 34, no. 89. <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/DG/dg-89.html> [accessed 1 May 2025].

two Manifestations of God, rather than in a general sense from God. As Shoghi Effendi wrote, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are 'presiding... over the destinies of this supreme Dispensation'.¹²³

Among the areas in which the Will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá guarantees that the Guardian of the Cause will receive divine guidance in addition to interpretation of the Word of God, is the protection and well-being of the Faith, as Shoghi Effendi's secretary wrote on his behalf:¹²⁴

The Guardian's infallibility covers interpretation of the Revealed Word and its application. Likewise any instructions he may issue having to do with the protection of the Faith or its wellbeing must be closely obeyed, as he is infallible in the protection of the Faith. He is assured the guidance of both Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb, as the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly reveals.¹²⁵

Further, as the Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf, this promised guidance ensures that all of the Guardian's actions foster 'the growth and highest interests of the Faith':

Just as the National Assembly has full jurisdiction over all its local Assemblies, the Guardian has full jurisdiction over all National Assemblies; he is not required to consult them, if he believes a certain decision is advisable in the interests of the Cause. He is the judge of the wisdom and advisability of the decisions made by these bodies, and not they of the wisdom and advisability of his decisions. A perusal of the Will and Testament makes this principle quite clear.

He is the Guardian of the Cause in the very fullness of that term, and the appointed interpreter of its teachings, and is guided in his decisions to do that which protects it and fosters its growth and highest interests.

He always has the right to step in and countermand the decisions of a national assembly; if he did not possess this right he would be absolutely impotent to protect the Faith, just as the NSA, if it were divested of the right to countermand the decisions of a local assembly, would be incapable of watching over and guiding the national welfare of the Bahá'í Community.

[Postscript in the Guardian's writing:] 'Read and approved, Shoghi.'¹²⁶

The House of Justice has pointed out that the extent of the infallibility bestowed in the Will on the Guardian was coterminous with the scope of his designated responsibilities: 'Thus, while there were indeed limits to his conferred infallibility, it was not confined merely to authoritative

¹²³ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 97. <http://www.bahai.org/r/324035127> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹²⁴ For a statement by the Universal House of Justice on the scope of the divine guidance received by the Guardian please see *The Universal House of Justice: A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice*, para. 86.5. <http://www.bahai.org/r/692132059> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹²⁵ From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, August 20, 1956, cited in Helen Hornby, *Lights of Guidance*, p. 313.

¹²⁶ From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian dated May 13, 1945, *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand*, pp. 55-56. <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/LANZ/lanz-40.html> [accessed 1 May 2025].

interpretation of the Bahá'í Writings but extended to the range of his responsibilities as Guardian and Head of the Faith¹²⁷.

As we will see, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's promise of the guidance of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh applies equally to the Universal House of Justice; and likewise the Guardian states that the decisions of the House of Justice foster the highest interests of the Faith.

Shared Functions of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice

Though the Guardian was designated in the Will as the Interpreter of the Word and the House of Justice as the body to supplement the divine laws, there is not a sharp line of demarcation between the responsibilities of these two institutions – most of the work of leadership of the Faith is common to both institutions, with a smaller area of exclusive responsibility in which the other institution does not share. Shoghi Effendi described this common sphere in broad terms when he wrote that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá had, 'in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as their chosen Successors, destined to apply the principles, promulgate the laws, protect the institutions, adapt loyally and intelligently the Faith to the requirements of progressive society, and consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world.'¹²⁸ Similarly, he wrote, 'Acting in conjunction with each other, these two inseparable institutions administer its affairs, coordinate its activities, promote its interests, execute its laws and defend its subsidiary institutions.'¹²⁹

In the light of such passages, to view the generality of the authority of these two institutions as mutually exclusive is not a tenable position. The Universal House of Justice elaborated further on the functions which it shares in common with the Guardian:

In the Order of Bahá'u'lláh there are certain functions which are reserved to certain institutions, and others which are shared in common, even though they may be more in the special province of one or the other... although after the Master authoritative interpretation was exclusively vested in the Guardian, and although legislation is exclusively the function of the Universal House of Justice, these two Institutions are, in Shoghi Effendi's words, 'complementary in their aim and purpose'. 'Their common, their fundamental object is to ensure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of our Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings.' Whereas the Universal House of Justice cannot undertake any function which exclusively appertained to the Guardian, it must continue to pursue the object which it shares in common with the Guardianship.¹³⁰

'Abdu'l-Bahá says that the body of the House of Justice has the same protection from error, but its individual elected members do not: 'The members of the House of Justice are not essentially

¹²⁷ From a letter dated 18 May 2018 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, *The Universal House of Justice: A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 2021; <http://www.bahai.org/r/207001271> [accessed 1 May 2025]).

¹²⁸ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 19. <http://www.bahai.org/r/874009616> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 147. <http://www.bahai.org/r/898812393> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹³⁰ *The Universal House of Justice: A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice*, para. 58.8. <http://www.bahai.org/r/519655456> [accessed 1 May 2025].

infallible as individuals, but the body of the House of Justice is under the protection and unerring guidance of God.¹³¹

The guarantee that all of the acts of the Guardian foster ‘the highest interests’ of the Bahá'í Faith is not limited to the Guardian; as Shoghi Effendi wrote, ‘Acting in conjunction with each other these two inseparable institutions... promote its interests.’¹³² In His Will, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá described the Universal House of Justice as ‘the House of Justice which God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error’.¹³³ His promise that the Universal House of Justice is the ‘source of all good’ ensures that only good flows from its guidance. This statement that ‘all good’ comes from the Universal House of Justice permeates everything else ‘Abdu'l-Bahá wrote about that Body. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s Will guarantees that they both will be guided by God through Bahá'u'lláh (‘The Abhá Beauty’) and the Báb (‘His Holiness, the Exalted One’):

The sacred and youthful branch, the guardian of the Cause of God as well as the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God.¹³⁴

In my view, Bahá'ís believe that these institutions receive unfailing divine guidance not as a leap of faith, but because we believe ‘Abdu'l-Bahá.

The Authority and Infallibility of the Universal House of Justice

The broad scope of the authority¹³⁵ the Will and Testament gives to the Universal House of Justice is expressed in this verse: ‘Unto this body all things must be referred.’¹³⁶ Shoghi Effendi amplified the meaning of that verse when he wrote of ‘the Universal House of Justice, to which, according to the Master’s explicit instructions, all important and fundamental questions must be referred’.¹³⁷ With this verse ‘Abdu'l-Bahá sets the context for the additional passages in His Will in which He sets forth the scope of the duties of the House of Justice, and the proper attitude of the believers towards that body. He also states that it will enact ‘all ordinances and regulations that are not to be found in the explicit Holy Text’, as well as ‘laws that are not expressly recorded in the Book and bear upon daily transactions’, that ‘all that is not expressly recorded’ in Bahá'u'lláh’s Most Holy Book ‘must be referred to the Universal House of Justice,’ and ‘that which this body,

¹³¹ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, ch. 45. <http://www.bahai.org/r/033451012> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹³² Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 147. <http://www.bahai.org/r/898812393> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹³³ *The Will And Testament of ‘Abdu'l Bahá*, p. 14. <http://www.bahai.org/r/071420525> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹³⁴ *The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 11. <http://www.bahai.org/r/181898597> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹³⁵ For a discussion of the scope of the authority and infallibility of the House of Justice set forth in the Will, see Taherzadeh, *The Child of the Covenant*, ch. 38.

¹³⁶ *The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 14. <http://www.bahai.org/r/071420525> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹³⁷ The full passage reads, ‘Touching the point raised in the Secretary’s letter regarding the nature and scope of the Universal Court of Arbitration, this and other similar matters will have to be explained and elucidated by the Universal House of Justice, to which, according to the Master’s explicit instructions, all important and fundamental questions must be referred. At present the exact implication and full significance of the provisions of the Master’s Will are as yet imperfectly understood, and time will serve to reveal the wisdom and the far-reaching effects of His words.’ Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 47. <http://www.bahai.org/r/969736024> [accessed 1 May 2025].

whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the truth and the purpose of God Himself, and further that it will resolve 'all the difficult problems' and 'all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book. Whatsoever they decide has the same effect as the Text itself.'¹³⁸ The broad scope implicit in referring to it 'all things', 'all important and fundamental questions', is in keeping with the spirit of the last verse of the Will, which sums up the posture which 'Abdu'l-Bahá directs the believers to have towards that body: to wholeheartedly turn to it and seek its guidance.'¹³⁹

Some have taken a limited view of the scope of authority of the Universal House of Justice by focusing solely on passages such as that the body will enact 'laws that are not expressly recorded in the Book and bear upon daily transactions', concluding that the designated sphere of that body encompasses only legislative enactments, and only on matters of secondary importance. This view does not take into account the many other passages from the Writings on that subject. The scope of the authority of the Guardian and of the House of Justice are not a proper matter for individual 'opinions', as 'Abdu'l-Bahá states in His Will.¹⁴⁰ One should see this matter through the eyes of the appointed Interpreters, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated, 'The Blessed Perfection, Bahá'u'lláh, appointed a central authoritative Personage, declaring Him to be the expounder of the Book. This implies that the people in general do not understand the meanings of the Book, but this appointed One does understand.'¹⁴¹

As Shoghi Effendi wrote through his secretary, 'We must never take one sentence in the Teachings and isolate it from the rest.'¹⁴² Likewise, the Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice has written on its behalf, 'While there are explicit passages in the authoritative texts that make reference to the infallibility of the House of Justice in the enactment of legislation, the argument that it is free from error only in this respect is untenable.'¹⁴³ The presumption that the divinely guided role of the Universal House of Justice is limited to matters where the Text is silent is the same as assuming that the Guardian of the Faith was only divinely guided when he was interpreting the Writings.

Although the responsibilities of the Guardian and the promise of divine guidance to him are mostly found in the Will, and also implicitly in the verse of the Most Holy Book about the Interpreter of the Book,¹⁴⁴ there are many passages in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá

¹³⁸ *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 14 (<http://www.bahai.org/r/071420525> [accessed 1 May 2025]), 19 (<http://www.bahai.org/r/985165857> [accessed 1 May 2025]), and p. 20 (<http://www.bahai.org/r/407994625> [accessed 1 May 2025]). Further thoughts are found in the blog post, *The Broad Scope of the Authority of the Universal House of Justice*. <https://bahai-covenant.blogspot.com/2016/07/authority-universal-house-justice.html> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹³⁹ All must seek guidance and turn unto the Center of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error. *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 26. <http://www.bahai.org/r/691205948> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá compiled by Howard MacNutt, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. <http://www.bahai.org/r/495331350> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁴² From a letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated 4 October 1950, *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community*, p. 457. <https://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/UD/ud-627.html> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁴³ From a letter dated 7 April 2008 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the Friends in Iran. *The Universal House of Justice: A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice*, para. 77.2. <http://www.bahai.org/r/692132004> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁴⁴ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, para. 174, p. 82. <http://www.bahai.org/r/692132004> [accessed 1 May 2025].

and the Guardian regarding the scope of the authority and infallibility of the Universal House of Justice. Among these, Bahá'u'lláh states that 'God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth,'¹⁴⁵ which, as the Guardian elaborates, constitutes 'Bahá'u'lláh's incontrovertible assurance' that that body receives infallible guidance not only 'in the enactment of the legislation necessary to supplement the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas' but also 'in the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith', and in its judicial role, in 'any case presented for their consideration'. This passage is one of several in the Bahá'í Writings which specifies that this guidance is directly to the elected membership of the Universal House of Justice and not by virtue of the Guardian's membership on that body; that the elected members, 'and not the body of those who either directly or indirectly elect them, have thus been made the recipients of the divine guidance which is at once the life-blood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation.'¹⁴⁶ Shoghi Effendi wrote that the House of Justice would not only 'supplement' the revealed laws of Bahá'u'lláh, but that it is 'the body designed to ... apply His legislative ordinances'.¹⁴⁷ That is, the Guardian states that the House of Justice supplements the revealed law where the Text is silent, and it applies the revealed law where the Text has spoken. Furthermore, there is additional guidance from the Guardian clarifying that the divinely guided role of the House of Justice includes application of the teachings in general, not only Bahá'u'lláh's legislative ordinances.¹⁴⁸

This is not even a partial summary of the scope of the Universal House of Justice. The authoritative source on this subject is a compilation prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice comprised of passages from Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice.¹⁴⁹ Among the contents of that document is the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice,¹⁵⁰ which codifies and distils the Bahá'í writings specifying the powers and duties of the Universal House of Justice:

The provenance, the authority, the duties, the sphere of action of the Universal House of Justice all derive from the revealed Word of Bahá'u'lláh which, together with the interpretations and expositions of the Centre of the Covenant and of the Guardian of the Cause – who, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is the sole authority in the interpretation of Bahá'í Scripture – constitute the binding terms of reference of the Universal House of Justice and are its bedrock foundation. The authority of these Texts is absolute and immutable until such time as Almighty God shall reveal His new Manifestation to Whom will belong all authority and power.

¹⁴⁵ *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 68. <http://www.bahai.org/r/723031566> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁴⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 153. <http://www.bahai.org/r/384742643> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 144. <http://www.bahai.org/r/642632703> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁴⁸ The Guardian's guidance was that 'these general statements we have in the teachings have to be explained and applied by the House of Justice before we can really appreciate their significance.' From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 21, 1932, Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings on the Subject of Agriculture and Related Subjects, a compilation of the Universal House of Justice; *The Compilation of Compilations, Volume III*.

¹⁴⁹ *The Universal House of Justice: A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice*. <http://www.bahai.org/r/207001271> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁵⁰ A detailed examination of that document is found in Guy Sinclair, *A Study Guide to The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2005).

The House of Justice has provided its guidance on the scope of the Guardian's responsibility and infallibility and shown how it illumines the same scope with respect to the House of Justice:

Thus, while there were indeed limits to his conferred infallibility, it was not confined merely to authoritative interpretation of the Bahá'í Writings but extended to the range of his responsibilities as Guardian and Head of the Faith. 'It is not for individual believers to limit the sphere of the Guardian's authority, or to judge when they have to obey the Guardian and when they are free to reject his judgement. Such an attitude would evidently lead to confusion and to schism,' yet another letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi states. 'These passages about the Guardian's conferred infallibility and authority can also serve to assist believers in understanding the scope of the conferred infallibility and authority of the Universal House of Justice.'¹⁵¹

Taking into account all of the Writings on the subject, we see that 'an understanding of the principles by which we explore the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh depends, too, on an appreciation of the broad nature of the authority conferred on the Universal House of Justice.'¹⁵²

I close with a passage from Shoghi Effendi which states that when the Universal House of Justice comes into being, the truths contained in the Will and Testament will be brought to light:

As to the order and the management of the spiritual affairs of the friends, that which is very important now is the consolidation of the Spiritual Assemblies in every centre, because on these fortified and unshakable foundations, God's Supreme House of Justice shall be erected and firmly established in the days to come. When this most great Edifice shall be reared on such an immovable foundation, God's purpose, wisdom, universal truths, mysteries and realities of the Kingdom, which the mystic revelation of Bahá'u'lláh has deposited within the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, shall gradually be revealed and made manifest.¹⁵³

Author biography

Brent Poirier is an independent researcher. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology and Biology from Loyola-Marymount University and a Juris Doctor from the University of the Pacific with postgraduate studies in International Law at Salzburg University. He was admitted to the California and New Mexico Bar Associations and practised law for more than 40 years. He is the author of several Bahá'í blogs, including on the Bahá'í Faith and the Bahá'í Covenant.

¹⁵¹ From a letter dated 18 May 2018 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, *The Universal House of Justice: A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice*. <http://www.bahai.org/r/692132059> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁵² Letter of March 14, 1996, from the Universal House of Justice, *The Universal House of Justice: A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice*, para. 71.8. <http://www.bahai.org/r/692131127> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁵³ From a letter of Shoghi Effendi dated 19 December 1923, translated from the Persian, quoted in a letter from the Universal House of Justice dated 9 March 1965, *The Universal House of Justice: A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice*, para. 57.14. <http://www.bahai.org/r/736247311> [accessed 1 May 2025].

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Paper

Evidences of Bahá'u'lláh's Theophanic Awakening and Disclosure before His Síyáh-Chál Experience

Bijan Masumian and Adib Masumian

Abstract¹

Bahá'u'lláh's epiphanic experience in the Síyáh-Chál (Black Pit) in 1852 is considered the point when He received "the first intimations of [His] dawning Revelation."² This is often understood to mean that Bahá'u'lláh did not manifest any divine revelation prior to His encounter with the Maid of Heaven in the Síyáh-Chál. The primary purpose of this research is to provide evidence for a claim that, while the Síyáh-Chál was certainly "the birth[place] of the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh,"³ and that the ministry of Bahá'u'lláh thus did indeed commence with His experience in that prison, the awakening of Bahá'u'lláh to His divine station might have gone through multiple stages and that His experience in the Síyáh-Chál could be regarded as the culmination of that process. Evidence supporting this thesis comes from significant experiences throughout Bahá'u'lláh's life, spanning from childhood episodes in the 1820s–1830s through formative events in the 1840s leading up to 1852. This paper draws on the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as well as hagiographical accounts showing how members of Bahá'u'lláh's inner circle recognized His station before the Síyáh-Chál experience. Special attention is given to Táhirih (Qurratu'l-'Ayn), whose writings suggest she recognized Bahá'u'lláh, before His encounter with the Maid of Heaven in the Síyáh-Chál, as a Manifestation of God equal to the Báb and previous Manifestations.

Bábí-Bahá'í Theophanology

Unlike Jewish⁴ and Islamic⁵ sacred texts, which appear to suggest that Moses and Muḥammad were mere mortals, Bábí-Bahá'í theophanology has closer parallels with the Christological notion of Jesus in the Gospel of John as the Logos or the eternal Word of God appearing in the flesh. As such, the

¹ The present authors would like to thank Naeem Nabiliakbar, Omid Ghaemmaghami, Moojan Momen, Anthony A. Lee, and Brent Poirier for their valuable contributions to this paper.

² Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), p. 237.

³ Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í World: 1950–1957* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), p. 124

⁴ Exodus 4:10. Upon learning that He has been chosen to lead the Hebrews out of captivity in Egypt, Moses complains to God that He has a speech impediment, implying that He is not the best choice for the task (let alone worthy of the mantle of Prophethood).

⁵ Qur'án 18:100. God instructs Muḥammad to tell his followers that He (Muḥammad) is a man like others, a mere mortal, appearing to indicate that God could have picked any other man to be the recipient of divine revelation.

scriptures of the Bábí and Bahá'í religions not only presuppose the preexistence of the Manifestations of God (*mazáhir-i-iláhi*), but also affirm that they are always Manifestations, before and after the onset of divine revelation. In fact, Bahá'ís consider these Manifestations to be a distinct level of being—above humans and below the Divine⁶—Who are predestined to act as intermediaries between God and man, insofar as God, in Essence, remains unapproachable and unknowable. Thus, Bahá'í theology can best be described as apophatic⁷ in nature, and redefined as manifestation theology or theophanology (*mazharíyyat*).⁸ Manifestations of God are viewed as the Sadratu'l-Muntahá,⁹ Who represents the furthest extent to which humans can understand God. In other words, these Manifestations are as much God as humans can ever hope to know, whether in this life or in the hereafter.¹⁰ Thus, even before the start of their ministries, while they are not fully manifested, they are conscious of their station. To that effect, we have the following passage from a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá dated 29 Rajab 1304 A.H. (23 April 1887), in which He says:

The Universal Manifestations of God have ever been aware [of their station], even before [the inauguration of] their dispensations [*zubúr*]. They, in truth, are the Dawning-places of divine Knowledge.¹¹

مظاهر کلیّه قبل از ظهور آگاه بوده‌اند
ایشانند مطالع علم الهی.

However, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains in *Some Answered Questions*, the Manifestations have three stations. Their “awakening” refers only to their “corporeal existence”:

From the beginning, that sanctified Reality is undoubtedly aware of the secret of existence, and from childhood the signs of greatness are clearly manifested in Him. How then could He fail, in spite of such bounties and perfections, to be conscious of His own station?

البته حقیقت مقدّسه از بدایت واقف بر سرّ
وجود است و از سنّ طفولیت آثار بزرگواری از
آن ظاهر و واضح است پس چگونه می‌شود که
با وجود این فیوضات و کمالات استشعار
نباشد؟

⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2014), ch. 39.

⁷ Jack McLean, “Prolegomena to a Bahá'í Theology.” *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* 5:1 (Ottawa, ON: Association for Bahá'í Studies North America, 1992), pp. 25–67.

⁸ Juan Cole, “The Concept of Manifestation in the Bahá'í Writings.” Monograph; *Bahá'í Studies*, 9 (Ottawa, ON: Bahá'í Studies Publications, 1982).

⁹ The Sadratu'l-Muntahá (lit., “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” (Shirley Macías, “The Verse of Light, the Sadratu'l-Muntahá (Divine Lote Tree), and the Unfoldment of God's Plan.” Bahá'í Library Online. 1991. http://bahai-library.com/macias_verse_light [accessed 14 January 2018], but it is also a term that appears in the Qur'án (53:10–18, 34:16, 56:28) and holds significance for Muslims. This term has been interpreted in the Bahá'í framework as a reference to the Manifestation of God.

¹⁰ For a lucid explication of this theme, refer to Bahá'u'lláh's Lawḥ-i-Tawḥíd (“Tablet of Divine Unity”). A composite translation, partially authorized (certain passages rendered by the Guardian) and partially provisional (the remaining passages rendered by Adib Masumian), is available online at <https://adibmasumian.com/translations/lawh-i-tawhid/> [accessed 1 May 2025]

¹¹ 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd Ishráq-Khávarí, *Má'idíy-i-Ásmání*, vol. 4 (Tíhrán: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1972), p. 154. Provisional translation by Adib Masumian.

We mentioned the three stations of the Manifestations of God: that of corporeal existence, of individual reality, and of perfect divine manifestation, which can be likened to the sun, its heat, and its light. Other individuals also share the corporeal station and the rational soul—the spirit and mind. Thus the passages that state, “I lay asleep when the breeze of God wafted over Me and roused Me from My slumber”¹² are akin to Christ’s saying, “The flesh is full of sorrow but the spirit is rejoiced”, or again, “I am afflicted”, or “I am at ease”, or “I am troubled”: All these refer to the corporeal station and have no bearing on the individual reality or on the state of manifestation of the divine Reality. Consider, for example, that thousands of vicissitudes may occur to the body of man of which the spirit remains wholly unaware. It is even possible for certain members of the body to be completely impaired and for the essence of the mind to remain unaffected. A garment may sustain a myriad rents and tears and the wearer may yet remain unharmed. Thus, the words of Bahá’u’lláh, “I lay asleep when a breeze wafted over Me and roused Me from My slumber”, refer to the body.¹³

در مظاهر مقدّسه ذکر سه مقام کردیم مقام جسد است و مقام حقیقت شاخصه و مظهریت کامله مثلاً شمس و حرارت و ضیائش و سائر نفوس نیز مقام جسد و مقام نفس ناطقه یعنی مقام روح و عقل دارند. پس در مقاماتی که ذکر میشود من خوابیده بودم و مرور کرد نفحات الهی بر من و بیدار شدم مثل بیان حضرت مسیح است که میفرمایند جسد محزون است و روح مستبشر یا آنکه در مشقّتم یا در راحتم یا در زحمتم اینها همه راجع بمقام جسد است دخیل بآن حقیقت شاخصه ندارد و دخیل بآن مظهریت حقیقت رحمانیه ندارد. مثلاً ملاحظه میکنید که در جسد انسان هزار انقلابات حادث می شود ولیکن روح ابداً از آن خبر ندارد. ممکن در جسد انسان بعضی از اعضا بکلی مختل میشود لکن جوهر عقل باقی و برقرار. صد هزار آفت بلباس وارد میشود لکن بر لباس هیچ خطری نیست. اینکه بیان میفرمایند جمال مبارک که در خواب بودم و نسیم بر من مرور نمود و من را بیدار کرد این راجع بجسد است.

In response to a query by Glenn Shook, in which he had asked whether the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh had realized their stations when they were young, Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf dated 19 November 1945,¹⁴ affirmed that they were indeed aware to some extent, with the caveat that the exact nature of that awareness is inscrutable:

The Manifestations no doubt had some consciousness of their station, but what the nature of that consciousness was we do not know.¹⁵

¹² cf. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, XLI; and Súriy-i-Haykal, ¶192.

¹³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, ch. 39.6.

¹⁴ The present authors are grateful to the late Don Calkins for providing them with this helpful context for the letter written on Shoghi Effendi’s behalf.

¹⁵ Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian* (New Delhi: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1973), p. 43.

Within the above context, Moojan Momen initially proposed three periods for the life of Bahá'u'lláh two of which also composed His ministry:¹⁶

(1) The Pre-revelation Period: Extending from the beginning of Bahá'u'lláh's life up until sometime between late 1852 to early 1853,¹⁷ during which time Bahá'u'lláh had not yet received divine revelation or advanced any theophanic claims.

(2) The Period of Messianic Concealment: Extending from late 1852 or early 1853,¹⁸ when Bahá'u'lláh had a spiritual encounter in the Síyáh-Chál with the Maid of Heaven, to 1863, in which year Bahá'u'lláh announced His station as the Bábí Messiah (“Him Whom God shall make manifest”) to a small audience of close friends and family in the Garden of Ridván. During this period, Bahá'u'lláh was the recipient of divine revelation (*wahy*) but had not yet disclosed to anyone that He was the bearer of a new Cause (*amr*).

(3) The Period of Theophanic Disclosure: Extending from 1863 to 1892, during which time Bahá'u'lláh continued to receive divine revelation, and began to assert His status as the bearer of a new Cause. These assertions gradually became bolder and more frequent with the passage of time—for instance, to the Bábís of Persia from 1866 to 1867, and then to the rest of the world from 1868 to 1872.

In confirmation of the above hypothesis, Momen has claimed more recently¹⁹ that a turning point in Bahá'u'lláh's life—to wit, the changes that occurred in His comportment, speech, and thought, which He describes in the *Lawḥ-i-Bábu'l-'Aṭá* (discussed further below)—began in the Síyáh-Chál when He was about 35 years old, not at any time prior to that (i.e., during His childhood or adolescence). Nosratullah Mohammad Hosseini has also supported this position in his paper (in Persian) on Bahá'u'lláh's “Days of Concealment” (*Ayyám-i-Buṭún*).²⁰ However, this hypothesis presents numerous challenges, which we will discuss below.

A close examination of the first stage (the Pre-revelation Period) of Momen's taxonomy above suggests that, true to ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's explanation that Manifestations are always Manifestations, Bahá'u'lláh's physical reality was in a state of sleep and silence at birth. Then, through a series of developments—beginning in His childhood, and culminating in His Síyáh-Chál experience—

¹⁶ Moojan Momen, “Messianic Concealment and Theophanic Disclosure.” *Bahá'í Studies Review* 20:1, pp. 51–67.

¹⁷ In personal correspondence with the present authors (February 2018), Momen later stated that Bahá'u'lláh and His family would have left Persia for exile to ‘Irāq no later than mid-December 1852. Therefore, His encounter with the Maid of Heaven in the Síyáh-Chál could not have happened in early 1853.

¹⁸ In fact, this period would have started no later than mid-December 1852; refer to the preceding endnote.

¹⁹ Moojan Momen, “Two Episodes in the Life of Bahá'u'lláh in Iran.” *Lights of ‘Irāq*, Book 20 (2019), pp. 138–160.

²⁰ See Nosratullah Mohammad Hosseini, “Ayyám-i-Buṭún va Marāḥil-i-Zuhúr-i-Jamál-i-Aqdas-i-Abhá,” published in *Mahbúb-i-‘Álam*, p. 225, where Mohammad Hosseini associates the timing of the changes in Bahá'u'lláh's speech, comportment, speech, and thought with His imprisonment in the Síyáh-Chál.

Bahá'u'lláh's physical reality awakened to His divine reality over time. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's likening of the human states of sleep and wakefulness to the pre- and post-attunement of the physical realities of the Manifestations to their divine realities appears to confirm this idea:

This is the station of divine revelation. It is not a sensible, but an intelligible reality. It is sanctified from and transcendent above past, present, and future. It is a comparison and an analogy—a metaphor and not a literal truth. It is not the condition that is commonly understood by the human mind when it is said that someone was asleep and then awoke, but signifies a passage from one state to another. For example, sleeping is the state of repose, and wakefulness is the state of motion. Sleeping is the state of silence, and wakefulness is the state of utterance. Sleeping is the state of concealment, and wakefulness is that of manifestation.

Briefly, the Manifestations of God have ever been and will ever be luminous Realities, and no change or alteration ever takes place in Their essence. At most, before Their revelation They are still and silent, like one who is asleep, and after Their revelation They are eloquent and effulgent, like one who is awake.²¹

'Abdu'l-Bahá expands on the above explanation in subsequent chapters of *Some Answered Questions*. For example, He concludes chapter 38 with the following summarization of the three stations of the divine Manifestations, which offers a helpful framework by which we can gain an approximate understanding of the nature of Bahá'u'lláh's "awakening":

... the Manifestations of God have three stations: the physical station, the station of the rational soul, and the station of divine manifestation and heavenly splendour. The corporeal station will inevitably perish. As to the station of the rational soul, despite having a beginning, it has no end and is endowed with everlasting life. But as to that holy Reality of which Christ says "the Father is in the Son", it

این مقام تجلی است این محسوس نیست معقول است و این از زمان ماضی و حال و استقبال مبرّا و منزّه است این تعبیر و تمثیل است مجاز است نه حقیقت و نه حالی است که مفهوم انسانست یعنی خواب بوده بیدار شده بلکه انتقال از حالی بحالی است. مثلاً نوم حال سکونست و بیداری حال حرکت نوم حالت صمت است بیداری حالت نطق نوم حالت خفاست و بیداری حالت ظهور. مثلاً در فارسی و عربی تعبیر میشود که زمین خواب بود بهار آمد بیدار شد یا زمین مرده بود بهار آمد زنده گشت این تعبیر تمثیلی است و تشبیه و تأویل در عالم معانی.

باری مظاهر مقدّسه لم یزل حقایق نورانیّه بوده و هستند تغییر و تبدّلی در ذات آنها حاصل نگردد نهایت آنست که قبل از ظهور چون ساکن و صامت مانند نائمند و بعد از ظهور ناطق و شارق مانند بیدار.

... مظاهر ظهور سه مقام دارند یکی مقام بشریّه است و مقام نفس ناطقه و مقام ظهور ربّانی و جلوه رحمانی. مقام جسدی البتّه متلاشی شود اما مقام نفس ناطقه هرچند اول دارد اما آخر ندارد بلکه مؤیّد بحیات ابدیّه است اما حقیقت مقدّسه که مسیح میفرماید الّا اب فی الابن نه بدایت دارد نه نهایت. بدایت عبارت از مقام اظهار است که میفرماید و در مقام تشبیه سکوت را تعبیر بخواب

²¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, ch. 16.8–10.

has neither beginning nor end: Its “beginning” refers merely to His revelation of His own station. Thus, by way of analogy, He likens His silence to sleep: A man who is silent is like one who is asleep, and when he speaks, it is as though he has awakened. And yet the sleeping and the wakeful man are one and the same person: No change has taken place in his station, his loftiness, sublimity, inner reality, or innate nature. It is merely that the condition of silence has been likened to sleep, and that of manifestation to wakefulness. A man, whether sleeping or awake, is the same man: Sleep is simply one possible state, and wakefulness another. And so it is that the period of silence is compared to sleep, and the period of manifestation and guidance to wakefulness.²²

میفرماید مثل اینکه شخصی خواب بود و چون زبان گشود مثل آنست که بیدار گشت و آن شخص که در خواب است چون بیدار شود باز همان شخص است تفاوتی در مقام و علو و سمو و حقیقت و فطرت او حاصل نگشته مقام سکوت تشبیه بخواب شده و مقام ظهور تعبیر به بیداری گشته. انسان چون خواب باشد یا بیدار همان انسانست آن خواب یک حالتی از حالات است و این بیداری حالتی از حالات. زمان سکوت را تعبیر بخواب میفرماید و ظهور و هدایت را تعبیر به بیداری.

These points are further elaborated on in chapter 39 of *Some Answered Questions*, “The Human and the Divine Stations of the Manifestations.” Additionally, in chapter 58, “The Extent and Limitation of Human Comprehension,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addresses the “awakening” of Bahá’u’lláh and Christ as referring to the “corporeal station of the Manifestations, but Their heavenly station encompasses all things, is aware of all mysteries, is informed of all signs, and rules supreme over all things. And this is equally true both before and after the intimation of Their mission.”²³

The Báb also discusses the immutability of the station of the Manifestations when describing the true (divine) reality of the Bábí Messiah in the Persian Bayán:

Consider thou, in like manner, the advent of Him Whom God shall make manifest. It is through Him that whatever now subsisteth in the contingent world, or shall later become originated, hath come into existence. Whether He be in His home before His manifestation, inscrutable to all—indeed, though He cry out for milk in the cradle ere the onset of outward limitations—He is nevertheless, at that very moment, the same Being Who hath ever been the Helper of all mankind. That which hath been hath proceeded from His former Manifestations, and that which will be shall proceed from His latter Appearances.²⁴

و همین قسم در یوم ظهور مَن یُظْهِرُهُ اللهُ فرض کن که آنچه شیئیت در امکان هست یا بعد متکون می شود، به اوست اگر چه قبل از ظهور در بیت خود لایعْرِفَ باشد بلکه قبل از حدود ظاهریّه در گهواره از برای شیر گریه کند که همان وقت مدد کلّ از او بوده و هست. آنچه که بوده از ظهورات قبل اوست و آنچه می شود از ظهورات بعد اوست.

²² Ibid., ch. 38.8.

²³ Ibid., ch. 58.5.

²⁴ The Báb, *Persian Bayán* 6:4 (see INBA 62:195–6). Provisional translation by Adib Masumian.

In the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, God addresses the Báb with these words:

And We favored Thee during Thy Childhood with the mighty Cause of God, as it had been decreed as such in the Mother Book.²⁵

ولقد منّا عليك في صغرك من امر الله
العلی اذ كان الحكم في ام الكتاب مقضيا

And elsewhere in that work, the Báb Himself asserts:

Verily as a child I was aware of the truth of My own Self, and God is the Almighty, the All-Knowing.²⁶

وانی باذن الله في صغری قد كنت بالحق علی
نفسی علی الحق القوى علیما

Affirming the changelessness of Their divine reality, Bahá'u'lláh Himself states that the Manifestations have special stations even before Their physical birth:

And now concerning thy question about the Manifestations of God. Know thou that, even in the wombs of their mothers, the Manifestations possessed stations—stations which they continue to possess—and that these stations have ever been disclosed according to the exigencies of time and circumstance.²⁷

و این که از مظاهر امر سؤال نمودند ایشان در
بطن امّ دارای مقامات بوده و هستند و به
مقتضیات اوقات و اسباب ظاهر شده.

In the *Lawḥ-i-Mawlúd* ("Tablet of the Birth"), Bahá'u'lláh also equates the advent of His own birth with the appearance of "He Who begetteth not and Who is not begotten"²⁸—in other words, the appearance of the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God on earth, a divine reality that accepts no change in its nature:

This is the Dawn whereat was born He Who begetteth not and Who is not begotten. Well is it with him that immerseth himself beneath the ocean of inner meaning that surgeth within this utterance and discovereth the pearls of knowledge and wisdom that lie hid in the words of God, the King, the Exalted, the Mighty, the Powerful. All glory to him who apprehendeth the truth and is reckoned with them that are endued with discernment!²⁹

و فيه وُلِدَ مَنْ لَمْ يَلِدْ وَ لَمْ يُولَدْ فَطُوبَى لِمَنْ
يَتَغَمَّسُ فِي بَحْرِ الْمَعَانِي مِنْ هَذَا الْبَيَانِ وَ يَصِلُ
إِلَى لَتَائِي الْعِلْمِ وَ الْحِكْمَةِ الَّتِي كُنَزَتْ فِي كَلِمَاتِ
اللَّهِ الْمَلِكِ الْمُتَعَالَى الْمُقْتَدِرِ الْقَدِيرِ فَيَا حَبْدَا
لِمَنْ يَعْرِفُ وَ يَكُونُ مِنَ الْعَارِفِينَ.

²⁵ The Báb, *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, *Súratu's-Síná'*, verse 5 (see Qásim Muḥammad 'Abbás, *al-Áyát al-Shirázíyyah* (Damascus: Dár al-Madá, 2009), p. 95). Provisional translation by Ahang Rabbani. The present authors are grateful to Ismael Velasco for acquainting them with this passage.

²⁶ The Báb, *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, *Súratu'l-Isma'*, verse 34 (see *ibid.*, p. 289). Provisional translation by Ahang Rabbani. The present authors are grateful to Ismael Velasco for acquainting them with this passage.

²⁷ 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd Ishráq-Khávarí, *Má'idíy-i-Ásmání*, vol. 1 (Tíhrán: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), p. 22. Provisional translation by Adib Masumian.

²⁸ Qur'án 112:3. This verse was revealed in response to the Christian claim that Jesus was God in the flesh.

²⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Days of Remembrance* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2017), p. 209.

In this connection, the following interpretation of Qur'án 112:3 (“[God] begets not, nor is He begotten”) by the eminent Bahá'í philosopher, ‘Alí-Murád Dávúdí, is especially enlightening:

So, what does “He Who is not begotten” mean? It means He is not born. The Manifestation of God is not born. He who was born on the night of the 2nd of Muḥarram, 1233 A.H., was Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí Núrí, the son of Mírzá Buzurg Núrí. The Manifestation of God is not born.³⁰

"لم يولد" یعنی چه؟ یعنی زاده نمی‌شود. مظهر امر زاده نمی‌شود، متولد نمی‌شود. آن کسی که در شب دوم محرم سال ۱۲۳۳ هجری قمری متولد شد. آن مظهر امر نبود، او میرزا حسینعلی نوری پسر میرزا بزرگ نوری بود. توجه می‌فرمائید، مظهر امر "لم يولد" است، متولد نمی‌شود.

The difference between what we might call a binary model of theophanic awakening, whereby the variation in each Manifestation's awakening to His own divine reality before and after His encounter with the Holy Spirit is as stark as the flip of a switch, and a gradual model of theophanic awakening like the one proposed in this paper is illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

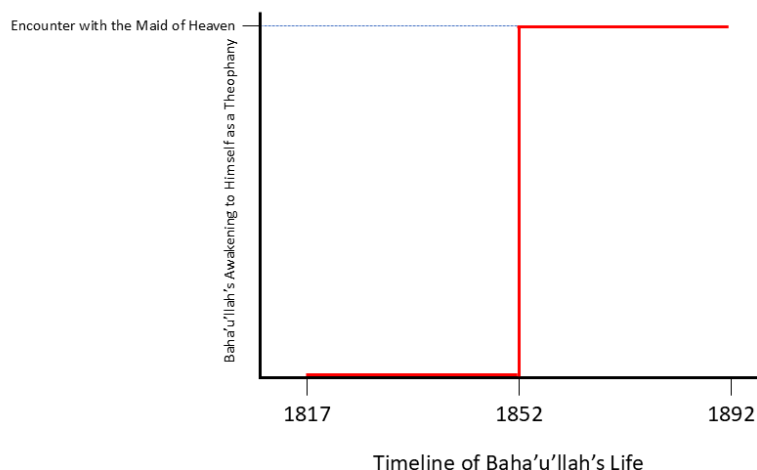


Figure 1. The binary model of theophanic awakening (Source: Authors)

³⁰ ‘Alí-Murád Dávúdí, *Ulúhíyyat va Mazḥaríyyat* (Dundas, ON: Persian Institute for Bahá'í Studies, 1991), p. 26. Translation by Bijan Masumian. For a detailed exegesis (in Persian) of the Bahá'í position on Qur'án 112:3 and Bahá'u'lláh's mention of it in the Lawḥ-i-Mawlúd, see Dávúdí, *Ulúhíyyat*, pp. 25–28.

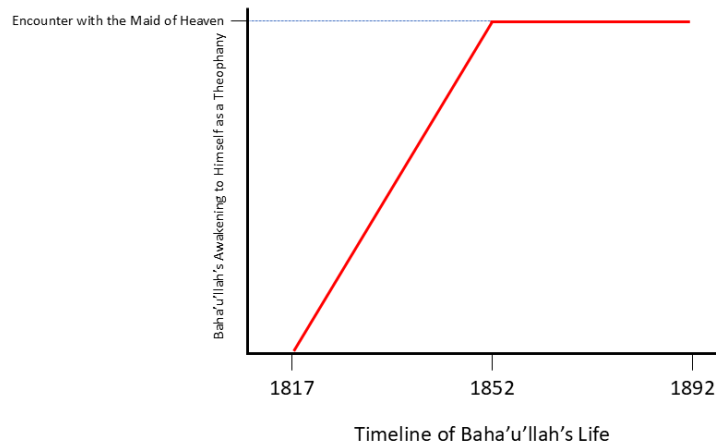


Figure 2. *The gradual model of theophanic awakening* (Source: Authors)

In response to a letter written by Bijan Masumian to the Bahá'í World Center, the Research Department sent a memorandum to the Universal House of Justice which speaks to the question of whether Bahá'u'lláh was aware of His station before His imprisonment in the Síyáh-Chál. Among the points they make in that memorandum, the Research Department cites the aforementioned Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to Varqá in support of the idea that the Manifestations of God are aware of their stations prior to the inaugurations of their dispensations. Perhaps most intriguingly, the Research Department writes that “it may be helpful to think in terms of Bahá'u'lláh's essential powers becoming fully realized during His experience in the Síyáh-Chál.”³¹ This helpful perspective steers us away from speculation on the Manifestations' “consciousness” and “awareness”—speculation that is not only problematic but futile, since Shoghi Effendi has characterized those things as inscrutable to us. Instead, the Research Department's insightful comments reframe the foundation of this discussion by drawing our attention to the Manifestations' “essential powers,” a conceptualization that seems more compatible with the foregoing explanations by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and aligns more closely, as a result, with the metaphor of “awakening” repeatedly employed by Him and advocated for in this paper.

A related point of interest is to be found not in the memorandum itself, but in the cover letter to that memorandum prepared by the Department of the Secretariat, in which that department alludes to “the intimation of [Bahá'u'lláh's] **Mission** in the Síyáh-Chál”³² [emphasis ours]. This phrasing appears to confirm the way in which the present authors have read the term “**Revelation**” in such passages as “the first intimations of Bahá'u'lláh's dawning Revelation amidst the darkness of the Síyáh-Chál of Tíhrán”³³—namely, as a reference to the **dispensation** or **ministry** of Bahá'u'lláh (synonymous with His “Mission”), rather than the point when He began to receive divine revelation.

³¹ Research Department at the Bahá'í World Center, memorandum dated 17 January 2019 and addressed to the Universal House of Justice. Private correspondence with Bijan Masumian, who was copied on this memorandum.

³² Department of the Secretariat at the Bahá'í World Center, cover letter to a 17 January 2019 memorandum addressed to the Universal House of Justice. Private correspondence with Bijan Masumian, the recipient of this cover letter.

³³ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 237.

The interchangeability found in authorized translations of Bahá'í Writings between the terms “Revelation” (as a proper noun) and “Dispensation” would seem to bear out this position, lending support to the argument that there is a distinction to be made between “**revelation**” (*wahy*), which denotes literal revelation from God, and “**Revelation**” (*zuhúr*), which refers to a divinely-ordained dispensation. If correct, this distinction allows for the possibility that Bahá'u'lláh may have received revelation before His incarceration in the Síyáh-Chál. Through the lens of this reading, in which “Revelation” and “revelation” are not mutually exclusive, Shoghi Effendi’s designation of the Síyáh-Chál as the place where Bahá'u'lláh was given “the first intimations of [His] dawning Revelation” need not imply that He received no revelation before He was imprisoned there.

Bahá'u'lláh's Childhood Experiences

There are a number of hagiographical accounts from Bahá'u'lláh's childhood that seem to support the idea that His theophanic awakening went through stages. Below are three such accounts:

Letter to the Relative

There is an undated letter from Bahá'u'lláh in His own hand—which He wrote to one of His relatives when He was a child, and has been authenticated by the Bahá'í World Center—in which He claims to have access to special spiritual capacities, even at a tender age:

He is the Best-Beloved

هو المحبوب

God willing, Thou art abiding in the shade of God's mercy, and reposing beneath the canopy of Divine bounty.

To outward seeming, I am but a child, and lack the ability to read or write. Yet, because this unlettered One cleaveth tenaciously to the Divine Lote-Tree, he readeth without acquired knowledge, and writeth without having learned how to do so. Unto them that are endued with insight, this fact is clear and apparent in the world of inner realities. All else are not, and have never been, aware of this mystery.³⁴

انشاءالله در سایه رحمت رحمانی و قباب
عنایت سبحانی ساکن و مستريح باشيد و بر
حسب ظاهر من كوچكم خط ندارم ولكن
چون اين اُمّی به سدره الهی متمسك است
بی علم می خواند و بی خط می نویسد و این در
عالم باطن نزد اهل بصر مشهود است. اغیار
از این سر آگاه نبوده و نیستند.

³⁴ Published in *Mahbúb-i-‘Álam* (Canada: Intishárát-i-Majalliy-i-‘Andalíb, 1992), p. 183. Provisional translation by Adib Masumian. Abu'l-Qásim Afnán, the author of the article in which this letter appears, notes that Bahá'u'lláh wrote it when He was “six or seven years old” (ibid.) but gives no source for this claim. The authenticity of this letter from Bahá'u'lláh has been confirmed by the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Center in private correspondence with Bijan Masumian, in which they note that “the letter is among the authentic Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and was written in His own handwriting,” and that “the original manuscript of the letter is held in the Archives at the World Centre” (Private correspondence from the Department of the Secretariat at the Bahá'í World Centre to Bijan Masumian dated 25 May 2018). A facsimile of Bahá'u'lláh's letter has been published in *Nafahát-i-Quds* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, n.d.), p. 1. A scan of the letter as it appears in that work is available online here: <http://bit.ly/BahauallahChildhoodLetter> [accessed 1 May 2025]

The Puppet Show

In another episode from His childhood, Bahá'u'lláh describes witnessing an elaborate puppet show at the wedding of one of His brothers. The show demonstrated the pomp, glory, and riches of those in power—namely, the king, the princes, and ministers of the court—and it also included scenes of war and political intrigue. The puppet show probably enthralled most of the children in the audience, who may well have imagined themselves as some of the authority figures in the show. Yet, according to Bahá'u'lláh's own testimony, the experience made a radically different impression on Him. After the show, He approached the puppeteer and asked what was in the box he was carrying. The puppeteer explained that all the characters from the show, with all their pomp and pageantry, were now contained in that box. Bahá'u'lláh's reaction to the puppeteer's response shows His remarkable precociousness:

Ever since that day, all the trappings of the world have seemed in the eyes of this Youth akin to that same spectacle. They have never been, nor will they ever be, of any weight and consequence, be it to the extent of a grain of mustard seed. How greatly I marveled that men should pride themselves upon such vanities, whilst those possessed of insight, ere they witness any evidence of human glory, perceive with certainty the inevitability of its waning. "Never have I looked upon any thing save that I have seen extinction before it; and God, verily, is a sufficient witness!"³⁵

از آن یوم جمیع اسباب دنیا بنظر این غلام مثل
آن دستگاه آمده و می آید و ابداً بقدر خردلی وقر
نداشته و نخواهد داشت بسیار تعجب می نمودم
که ناس بچنین امورات افتخار می نمایند مع آنکه
متبصرین قبل از مشاهده جلال هر ذی جلالی
زوال آن را بعین الیقین ملاحظه می نمایند ما رأیت
شیئاً الا و قد رأیت الزوال قبله و کفی بالله شهیدا

The puppet show demonstrated to Bahá'u'lláh the insignificance of the vanities of the world, as well as the ephemerality of this existence, and indicates to us how markedly different Bahá'u'lláh's thinking and aspirations were from those of other children. Later in His life, we witness how Bahá'u'lláh's renunciation of the privileges of this world leads Him to reject social and political power when, after His father's death, the prime minister Hájí Mírzá Áqásí offers Him a government post, which Bahá'u'lláh declines in favor of devoting Himself to spiritual endeavors.

The Banū Qurayẓih Experience

In an undated Tablet, which will be referred to here as the Lawḥ-i-Bábu'l-‘Aṭā after a phrase which occurs in its opening words (but which has also been called the Lawḥ-i-Banū Qurayẓih by others), Bahá'u'lláh recounts the profound sadness He felt when, as a child, He read Muḥammad-Báqir Majlisí's account of the massacre of the Jewish Banū Qurayẓih tribe by Muslims.³⁶ The account greatly

³⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2002), pp. 165–68.

³⁶ "The Banū Qurayza were one of the three major Jewish tribes in pre-Islamic Medina (Yathrib)... According to the Islamic sources... the Banū Qurayza, under the leadership of Ka'b ibn Asad, struck a nonbelligerency treaty with Muḥammad shortly after his arrival in Medina in 622. When the enemies of the Muslims besieged Medina in 627, the leader of the already-exiled Banū Nadir, Huyyay ibn Akḥṭab, convinced Ka'b to violate

perplexed Bahá'u'lláh at first, but He eventually came to see the wisdom behind the apparent cruelty in the story.³⁷ Bahá'u'lláh then explains how, sometime after this experience, He underwent a transformation that began at the dawn of the second day of Muḥarram of that year and lasted twelve days. The exact year of the experience is not specified in the Tablet. The transformation involved a noticeable change in His demeanor, speech, and thought, and also His attainment to certitude about God's justice, in the face of what at first seemed to Him to be unjust treatment of the Banú Qurayẓih tribe by Muḥammad and His followers. After that experience, He appeals to God—notwithstanding His tender age—to “establish love, fellowship, and unity among all the inhabitants of the earth.” This clearly shows that, even as a child, Bahá'u'lláh was already demonstrating a predisposition to the grand ideals of universal love and world unity that later became the focus of His life and mission. Below is the original text along with a provisional translation of the relevant passages from this Tablet (emphasis ours):³⁸

In My Name, through which the portal of grace
[*bábu'l-‘atā*] hath been opened to all who are in heaven
and on earth

بسمی الّٰدی به فُتِحَ باب العطاء علی من فی
الارض و السماء

The atoms of every contingent being and the realities of
all created things bear witness that this Servant, from
the time of His advent and the moment of His
declaration, hath had no goal but the salvation of
mankind and the quenching of the fire of hatred and
opposition...

ذرات کائنات شاهد و حقایق ممکنات گواه
که این عبد از ظهور و اظهار امر مقصودی
جز نجات عباد و اطفاء نار ضغینه و عناد
نداشته و ندارد...

When I was but a child, this Wronged One read an
account of the invasion of the Banū-Qurayẓih recorded
in a book attributed to the late Mullá Bāqir Majlisí.
From that very moment, I became so perplexed, and
was stricken with such profound grief, that My pen is
powerless to describe it—though what transpired

این مظلوم در طفولیت در کتابی که نسبتش
به مرحوم مغفور ملا باقر مجلسی بوده
غزوة اهل قریظه را مشاهده نمود و از آن
حین مهموم و محزون بود به شأنی که قلم از
ذکرش عاجز اگرچه آنچه واقع شده امرالله

the agreement and negotiate with the enemy. However, Muḥammad was able to undo the new alliance. With the departure of the enemy, Muḥammad attacked the Banū Qurayza for having violated the treaty. Besieged in their forts for nearly a month, they ultimately surrendered unconditionally, placing their fate in the hands of Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh, with whom they had a preexisting alliance. Sa'd turned against them. Trenches were dug and the men, numbering somewhere between four hundred and nine hundred, were marched out, executed, and buried as Muḥammad watched. The women, children, and under-age boys were sold into slavery or distributed as gifts" (Shari Lowin, "Banū Qurayza." *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, pp. 338–39).

³⁷ Refer to two versions of this Tablet: the first published in Fāḍil Mázandarání, *Asráru'l-Áthár*, vol. 2 (Tihrán: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1968), pp. 17–18; the second in 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd Ishráq-Khávarí, *Má'idīy-i-Ásmání*, vol. 7 (Tihrán: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1972), pp. 135–37.

³⁸ In the original passage (taken from *Asráru'l-Áthár*, vol. 2, pp. 17–18), Bahá'u'lláh refers to Himself in the third person, but for the most part this has been changed to the first person in the following provisional translation (with the exception of “this Wronged One”) to sound less stilted.

during that event was the decree of God, and its only purpose was to annihilate the oppressors.

Yet, as I beheld the limitless ocean of [divine] pardon and mercy surging before Me, I would, in those days, implore God—exalted be His glory—to bring about that which would foster love, fellowship, and unity amongst all the peoples of the earth until suddenly, ere the break of dawn on the second day of the month of Muḥarram,³⁹ all My thoughts, My speech, and My demeanor were completely transformed. **So intense was this transformation that I seemed to discern the joyful tidings of My ascension.**

For twelve consecutive days I remained in this transformed state; thereupon were the waves of the ocean of Mine utterance made manifest, and the splendors of the day-star of Mine assurance shone brilliantly, until at last it culminated in the moment of Revelation [*zuhúr*], whereupon I attained unto that which God hath made the source of the joy of all worlds, and the dawning-place of bounty unto all who are in heaven and on earth.

Thereafter, through the agency of the Pen of the Most High, We removed, at Our irresistible and irrevocable bidding, all mention of whatsoever had been the cause of affliction, calamity, and strife, and have revealed only that which will conduce to concord and unity.

In his analysis of this Tablet, Momen has argued that, while what we might call Bahá'u'lláh's "Banú Qurayẓih experience" took place in His childhood, this twelve-day long "transformation" (*inqiláb*) actually took place many years later in 1852 while He was imprisoned in the Síyáh-Chál.⁴⁰ That chronology, however, would present multiple challenges.

For one thing, identifying the Síyáh-Chál as the location of the transformation would mean that Bahá'u'lláh could not have harbored any messianic secret before 1852, which would disqualify all of His Writings prior to His imprisonment from being considered products of divine revelation.

Additionally, if the transformation took place in the Síyáh-Chál, it would also mean that Bahá'u'lláh did not resolve His inner conflict and perplexity over the Banú Qurayẓih episode for decades and did not achieve certitude about God's justice until He was 35 years old. This is highly

بوده و مقصود جز قطع دابر ظالمین نبوده.

ولكن چون دریای عفو و فضل بی کران مشاهده میشد لذا در آن ایام از حقّ جلّ جلاله می طلبید آنچه را که سبب محبت و الفت و اتحاد کلّ من علی الارض بوده تا آنکه بغتاً در دوم ماه مولود قبل از طلوع جمیع اطوار و ذکر و فکر منقلب شد انقلابی که بشارت عروج می داد.

این انقلاب تا دوازده یوم متتابع و متوالی نازل و ظاهر بعد امواج بحر بیان مشهود و تجلیات نیر اطمینان مُشرق و موجود اِلَیْ اَنْ اَنْتَهی الْأُمُرُ اِلَی حَیْن الظُّهُورِ اِذَا فُزْتُ بِمَا جَعَلَهُ اللهُ مَبْدَءَ فَرَجِ الْعَالَمِیْنَ وَ مَشْرِقِ الْعِظَاءِ لِمَنْ فِی السَّمَوَاتِ وَ الْأَرْضِیْنَ.

و بعد از قلم اعلی آنچه سبب زحمت و مشقت و اختلاف بوده بامر مبرم محتوم برداشتیم و آنچه علّت اتفاق و اتحاد نازل و جاری.

³⁹ Literally, "the month of [My] birth" in the original text.

⁴⁰ Moojan Momen, "Two Episodes in the Life of Bahá'u'lláh in Iran." *Lights of 'Irfán*, Book 20 (2019), pp. 153–157.

unlikely, as it would have meant Bahá'u'lláh continued to doubt the legitimacy of Muḥammad and His Revelation for many years, thus making it difficult—if not impossible—for Him to later accept the Báb's claims.

The timing of this transformation ultimately hinges on how we read the all-important “suddenly” (*baghtatan*) which occurs in the Lawḥ-i-Bábu'l-'Aṭá.⁴¹ Such scholars as Moojan Momen and Nosratullah Mohammad Hosseini believe that the word describes not the passage of time culminating in Bahá'u'lláh's transformation, but simply the instantaneity of the transformation itself, which from their perspective could have happened much later in His life. The present authors, on the other hand, are of the opinion that Bahá'u'lláh is using “suddenly” to mean that He underwent this transformation as a child, shortly after reading about the massacre of the Banú Qurayẓih at a tender age.

Nader Saiedi, too, believes that Bahá'u'lláh's twelve-day mystical experience—which resulted in the aforementioned changes in His speech, comportment, and thought—occurred in His childhood after His Banú Qurayẓih experience, not while He was imprisoned in the Sýyáh-Chál:

The tablet [the Lawḥ-i-Bábu'l-'Aṭá] makes it clear that this twelve-day mystical experience occurred during Bahá'u'lláh's childhood. He is speaking of the grief He felt in His childhood on contemplating the severity of the law of the sword in previous dispensations and His desire for that severe law to be annulled. It is in that context that He says that suddenly, after reading the book and becoming saddened by it, He had a profound experience which brought Him the joyful tidings of “heavenly reunion.”⁴²

To reinforce his argument, Saiedi quotes the following passage from a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh:

O contending peoples and kindreds of the earth! Set your faces towards unity, and let the radiance of its light shine upon you. Gather ye together, and for the sake of God resolve to root out whatever is the source of contention amongst you. Then will the effulgence of the world's great Luminary envelop the whole earth, and its inhabitants become the citizens of one city, and the occupants of one and the same throne. This wronged One hath, **ever since the early days of His life**, cherished none other desire but this, and will continue to entertain no wish except this wish [emphasis ours].⁴³

ای احزاب مختلفه باتحاد توجّه نمائید و
بنور اتفاق منور گردید. لوجه الله در مقرّی
حاضر شوید و آنچه سبب اختلاف است از
میان بردارید تا جمیع عالم بانوار نیر اعظم
فائز گردند و در یک مدینه وارد شوند و بر
یک سریر جالس. این مظلوم از اوّل ایّام الی
حین مقصودی جز آنچه ذکر شد نداشته و
ندارد.

⁴¹ Notably, the word *baghtatan* (“suddenly”) is absent from the version of this Tablet published in Ishráq-Khavarí, *Má'idíy-i-Ásmání* 7:135–37, but this is an error. In addition to *baghtatan* being present in the version published in *Asráru'l-Áthár* 2:17–18 (mentioned in the preceding endnote), and also in INBA 81:159, the Research Department has stated that “the original manuscript of this Tablet includes the word *baghtatan*” (Memorandum dated 15 January 2020 and addressed to the Universal House of Justice; private correspondence with Bijan Masumian, who was copied on this memorandum).

⁴² Nader Saiedi, *Logos and Civilization: Spirit, History, and Order in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Bethesda, MD: Cambridge Press of Maryland, 2000), p. 306.

⁴³ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* CXI. Refer to Saiedi, *Logos*, p. 308.

Furthermore, in one of His recently translated talks, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá confirms that Bahá’u’lláh exhibited remarkable qualities even as a child, which suggests that the transformation discussed above had already taken place by that time:

From the beginning of His childhood Bahá’u’lláh was possessed of such astonishing **qualities, signs, and utterances** as to amaze every soul. All the dignitaries of Persia would say: “This youth is wrought of a rare substance”, and everyone, even the enemies and the envious, bore witness to His knowledge, grace, wisdom, understanding, intelligence, and perception [emphasis ours].⁴⁴

جمال مبارک از بدو طفولیت اطوار و آثار و
گفتاری عجیب داشتند که سبب حیرت
عموم بود. و جمیع بزرگان ایران می گفتند این
جوان مادهٔ عجیبی است و کل بفضل و کمال
و عقل و ادراک و ذهن و ذکا شهادت
می دادند، حتی دشمنان و حاسدان معترف.

It is worth noting that the original Persian word translated here as “qualities” is *aṭvār*, which is the same word Bahá’u’lláh uses in the Lawḥ-i-Bábu’l-‘Aṭá when speaking of the change in His “demeanor” (our translation), and that the word rendered here as “utterances” is *guftár*, which is synonymous with Bahá’u’lláh’s usage of *dhikr* in the aforementioned Tablet to describe the similar change in His speech.

Part of Momen’s argument rests on the assumption that the term ‘*uríj*’ (“ascension”) in the passage *inqilábí kih bishárat-i-‘uríj mídád* (Persian: *انقلابی که بشارت عروج می داد*; see the emphasized portion of the Tablet above) from the Lawḥ-i-Bábu’l-‘Aṭá refers to an “elevation of Bahá’u’lláh’s spiritual state” during the twelve-day transformation, which then brought about the changes in His “comportment, speech, and thought.”⁴⁵ Yet, this rather figurative interpretation of the word ‘*uríj*’ would violate a fundamental principle in Bahá’í theophanyology discussed in the preceding pages—that any change in the state of the divine Manifestation would suggest imperfection in their prior state, which is not possible. It might be more accurate to read the word ‘*uríj*’ here as a literal ascension. The present authors believe that, at this point in the Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh is attempting to describe the intense joy He was experiencing as a result of His transformation—a joy so overwhelming that it seemed His soul might sever itself from His body and ascend to the realms above.

Bahá’u’lláh’s Adulthood Experiences

As with His childhood experiences, there are accounts of Bahá’u’lláh’s adult years that indicate His awakening to His station. Both hagiographical and primary sources show that, during these years, Bahá’u’lláh exercised His divine authority to reveal Tablets, including one written possibly as early as 1851 that will be discussed further below.

⁴⁴ Authorized translation published in “Twelve table talks given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in ‘Akká,” a collection available online <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/twelve-table-talks-abdul-baha/4#340852552> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 156.

The “Spiritual Meeting” between the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh (1847)

In March 1847—less than three years after the Báb's declaration, and at a time when Bahá'u'lláh was still a relatively recent Bábí convert—a meeting supposedly took place between Him and the Báb, who was in government custody and being conducted to Tīhrán. There has been a great deal of speculation and divergent opinion around the question of whether this meeting was physical or spiritual in nature. In the aforementioned Tablet to Varqá, Bahá'u'lláh Himself describes this meeting as follows:

He who heralded the light of divine guidance, that is to say the Primal Point [the Báb]—may the souls of all else but Him be sacrificed for His sake—in the days when He was journeying to Mákú, attained to outward seeming the honor of meeting Bahá'u'lláh, albeit this meeting was concealed from all.⁴⁶

حضرت مبشّر، یعنی نقطهٔ اولی – روح ما سواه
فداه – در ایام توجّه به ماکو بر حسب ظاهر
مستوراً عن الكلّ به شرف لقاء فائز و حضرت
قدّوس – علیّه مِنْ كُلِّ بَهَاءٍ أَبْهَاهُ – مکرّر فائز.

The above account appears to suggest that the meeting was physical in nature (“to outward seeming”). However, in a Tablet revealed in ‘Akká in response to a letter by Shaykh Kāẓim Samandar, Bahá'u'lláh speaks of that period, mentioning a letter He had sent to the Báb through Mullá Mihdí Kaní and Mullá Mihdí Khu'í while the Báb was in the village of Kulayn. Following the Báb's perusal of this letter, Bahá'u'lláh describes the Báb's spiritual attraction to Him, as well as a profound desire to meet Him, yet Bahá'u'lláh makes no mention of an actual physical meeting taking place between the two of them:

We, verily, revealed for and sent unto Our Herald that which solaced the eyes of the Books of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. When He received and perused it, the sweet savors of revelation so enraptured Him that He soared, with His all, in Mine atmosphere, and sought to appear before My face. In such wise was He stirred by its words that neither pen and ink nor tongue can ever exhaust it. Unto this beareth witness the Mother Book on the day of His return.⁴⁷

أنا انزلنا لمبشّري ما قرّت به عيون كتب الله
المهيمن القيوم و ارسلنا اليه فلما حضر و قرء
انجذب من نفحات الوحي على شأن طار بكّله في
هوآئى و قصد الحضور امام وجهى قد هزّته
الكلمات بحيث لا ينتهى ذكره بالقلم و المداد و لا
باللسان يشهد بذلك ام الكتاب فى المآب.

⁴⁶ Ishráq-Khávarí, *Má'idíy-i-Ásmání* 4:154. Translation taken from “Indications in the Writings and Historical Records Relative to the Question Whether Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb Met,” a memorandum from the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice; originally published in Persian (*‘Andalib*, vol. V, no. 17, pp. 20–21) and available online in English translation at <http://bahaistudies.net/meeting.html> [accessed 1 May 2025]

⁴⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *Isbráqát va Chand Lawḥ-i-Dígar* (Bombay: Dutt Prashad Press, c. 1892), p. 221. Provisional translation by Adib Masumian.

In His hagiographical narrative of Bábí history, *The Dawn-Breakers*, Nabíl Zarandí quotes Bahá'u'lláh as having stated the following, in 1848, to the leading mullá of the city of Ámul, who had questioned Him regarding the mission of the Báb:

... although We had never met Him face to face, yet We cherished, none the less, a great affection for Him.⁴⁸

اگرچه با حضرت باب ملاقات نکرده ایم ولی
محبت شدیدی به او داریم.
(ترجمه عبدالحمید اشراق خاوری)

Later, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, too, emphatically rejected the notion of a physical meeting between the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh:

[The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh] definitely did not meet.⁴⁹

قطعیاً ملاقات نفرموده اند.

He repeated this assertion in a Tablet to a certain believer in Shíráz by the name of Shukúhí:

The Ancient Beauty—may my life be offered up for His loved ones—did not to outward seeming meet His Holiness, the Exalted One—may my life be a sacrifice unto Him.⁵⁰

جمال قدم روحی لاحبائه الفداء با حضرت اعلی
روحی له الفداء بر حسب ظاهر ملاقات نفرمودند.

Furthermore, on two separate occasions when Mírzá Asadu'lláh Qumí and Aḥmad Yazdání asked 'Abdu'l-Bahá whether the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh had ever met in the flesh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's response in both cases was: "No, they did not meet."⁵¹

Thus, any "meeting" between the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh must have been spiritual in nature. However, the fact remains that, before this "spiritual meeting," the Báb appeared to be sad and agitated, but afterwards He became calm and serene.⁵² The question, then, is why an encounter between a Manifestation (the Báb) who is only halfway through His six-year ministry (1844–50) and one of His followers (Bahá'u'lláh)—outwardly a subordinate in 1847, still five years away from His

⁴⁸ Nabíl, *Dawn-Breakers*, p. 461.

⁴⁹ Nosratullah Mohammad Hosseini, *Haḍrat-i-Báb* (Australia: Century Press, 2016 (2nd ed.)), p. 326. Provisional translation by Adib Masumian. Mohammad Hosseini notes that 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote this note in the margin of page 96 of the original copy of *Kavákibu'd-Durríyyih*, an early history of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths discussed in more detail later in this paper. There is also a precedent for this kind of spiritual meeting in the Bible, where, according to Matthew (17:3), Moses and Elijah appeared before Jesus and some of His apostles. 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to that meeting, too, in *Some Answered Questions*, ch. 71.7.

⁵⁰ Authorized translation of a passage from a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, available online <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/additional-tablets-extracts-talks/333345301/1#375758597> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁵¹ Research Department, "Indications in the Writings and Historical Records Relative to the Question Whether Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb Met."

⁵² Nabíl Zarandí, *The Dawn-Breakers* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1932; trans. Shoghi Effendi), pp. 225–29.

Síyáh-Chál experience—would evoke such peace and tranquility in the heart of the Báb, unless the Báb already knew that this particular Follower was special, and in fact none other than the Promised One of His own dispensation.

Additionally, in the same Tablet to Varqá, Bahá'u'lláh confirms that the Báb also shared the news of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation with two of His most prominent Letters of the Living, Quddús and Mullá Husayn:

The Primal Point hath conferred upon Mullá Husayn and Quddús the titles of “the First Name” and “the Last Name,” and characterized them as “the first to attain” and “the last to arrive.” Unto each of them He [Báb] announced the glad-tidings of this [Bahá'u'lláh's] Revelation.⁵³

ایشان [جناب قدّوس] و حضرت باب اعظم [جناب
ملا حسین] - عَلَیْهِ مِنْ كُلِّ بَهَاءٍ أَبْهَاءُ - را حضرت
نقطه - روح ما سواه فداه - به اسمِ اوّل و آخر
نامیده‌اند، و همچنین به اوّل وارد و آخر نازل تعبیر
فرموده‌اند، و بشارتِ این ظهور را به هر یک داده‌اند.

The Báb Confirms the Bábí Messiah as His Contemporary (1847–48)

Some four to five years before Bahá'u'lláh's Síyáh-Chál experience, the Báb confirms in the Persian Bayán that the Bábí Messiah was alive at the time and would manifest Himself before too long; He exhorts His followers to remain vigilant for a full *váḥid*, or nineteen years, after His own revelation (1844–63), during which time Him Whom God shall make manifest could “appear in any year,”⁵⁴ and firmly establishes the year 1863 as the upper boundary of that range, after which time the Bábís “will have forfeited the fruit of [the Báb's] Revelation unless they accept Him Whom God shall make manifest.”⁵⁵ More specifically, the Báb states in the Arabic Bayán that, in the year nine (1853), the Bábís would “attain unto all good,”⁵⁶ which Muhammad Afnan interprets as a reference to the advent of Him Whom God shall make manifest,⁵⁷ and is the year that essentially marks the inauguration of the Bahá'í dispensation. In the Persian Bayán, the Báb even admonishes His followers not to be a cause of sadness to Him Whom God shall make manifest during His “days of concealment” (*ayyám-i-buṭún*) just because they do not recognize Him.⁵⁸

⁵³ *Má'idīy-i-Ásmání* 4:154. Provisional translation by Adib Masumian.

⁵⁴ *Persian Bayán* 6:3 (see INBA 62:192). Provisional translation by Adib Masumian.

⁵⁵ Ibid. Provisional translation by Adib Masumian.

⁵⁶ *Arabic Bayán* 6:15 (see *al-Áyāt al-Shirāẓīyyah* p. 388). Authorized translation published in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 29. In the *Persian Bayán*, the Báb equates the attainment to all good with recognition of “Him Whom God shall make manifest”; see *Váḥid* 3, Báb 8, in INBA 62:84. Later in that same work, this idea is stated again in slightly different terms; see *Váḥid* 4, Báb 6, in INBA 62:125–26.

⁵⁷ Muhammad Afnan, “Ayyám-i-Buṭún,” published in *Majmú'iy-i-Maqálát*, vol. 1 (Dundas, ON: Persian Institute for Bahá'í Studies, 2013), pp. 409–410.

⁵⁸ *Persian Bayán* 6:15 (see INBA 62:232). Refer to two articles for extensive treatments of Bahá'u'lláh's “days of concealment”: (1) Nosratullah Mohammad Hosseini, “Ayyám-i-Buṭún va Maráḥil-i-Zuhúr-i-Jamál-i-Aqdas-i-Abhá,” published in *Mahbúb-i-Álam* 212–54; and (2) Muhammad Afnan, “Ayyám-i-Buṭún,” published in *Majmú'iy-i-Maqálát* 1:404–43.

Therefore, if the Báb knows as early as 1847–48 that the Messiah will appear no later than 1863, it means the Messiah is already living among them—and if the Báb knows that, then the Messiah knows it, too, just as Jesus knew when John the Baptist was preparing the Jews for Jesus's advent.⁵⁹ By the same token, when the Báb speaks of the “days of concealment” of the Bábí Messiah, that would require the latter not to disclose His messianic secret to the general Bábí community until the appointed time of His advent.

Accounts from Nabíl's Narrative, The Dawn-Breakers (1848–51)

According to Nabíl, in 1848, the same year in which the Persian Bayán was revealed, Bahá'u'lláh “revealed Tablets” at the Conference of Badasht for those present, and also conferred “new names” upon them, every day for 22 days.⁶⁰ These Tablets were chanted by Mírzá Sulaymán Núrí in the presence of all 81 participants. Revealing Tablets and granting titles would seem to be evidence of Bahá'u'lláh's awakening to and disclosure of His divine station. Since Bahá'u'lláh never mentions the appearance of the Maid of Heaven to Him before the Síyáh-Chál experience, the Badasht episode of “revealing Tablets,” though hagiographical, would appear to indicate that Bahá'u'lláh received divine revelation as early as 1848. If that is the case, then Momen's taxonomy would have to be adjusted accordingly. This would also mean that Bahá'u'lláh was receiving divine revelation during the Báb's ministry, which in turn would mean that two independent Manifestations were receiving divine revelation simultaneously—an unprecedented occurrence in the annals of religious history. Additionally, the fact that neither Quddús nor Ṭáhirih opposed Bahá'u'lláh's actions at Badasht suggests that both of them also had foreknowledge of Bahá'u'lláh's station. We will discuss this hypothesis more fully in the section on Ṭáhirih below.

Furthermore, Nabíl writes that, in October 1851—about a year before the Síyáh-Chál experience—Bahá'u'lláh meets with Shaykh Ḥasan Zunúzí in Karbilá and confides His messianic secret in him.⁶¹

The Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha'sha' (1851?)

There is also a very important but relatively unknown⁶² Tablet to which the present authors will refer here as the Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha'sha' (“Tablet of the Effulgent Praise”), provisionally named after

⁵⁹ To clarify, this point is not necessarily evidence of awakening or disclosure, but of the divine reality of the Manifestation being “conscious of His own Station” “from the beginning,” as explained on p. 2 of this article.

⁶⁰ Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers* 293.

⁶¹ Ibid. 32. More specifically, Bahá'u'lláh told Shaykh Ḥasan Zunúzí that he was the return of the Imám Ḥusayn. According to Shí'ih tradition, after the appearance of the Qá'im, the Imám Ḥusayn and his companions, who were martyred in Karbilá, will be the first to return to this earth, along with their enemies. The purpose of this return is for Ḥusayn and his companions to exact vengeance on those who killed them. See Muḥammad ibn Mas'úd 'Ayyáshí, *Tafsír-i-'Ayyáshí* (Qum: Chápkhániy-i-'Ilmíyyih, 1380–81 AH [1961–62 CE]), vol. 2, p. 282.

⁶² A notable exception to this obscurity can be found in an article by Vahid Rafati on Bahá'u'lláh's *Rasḥ-i-'Amá'*, in which Rafati quotes the opening lines of the Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha'sha' as part of his discussion on the term *báḥúttí* (“inaccessibly divine”) as it occurs in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, but does not delve into the Tablet any further beyond his reproduction of that passage. Refer to Vahid Rafati, “Áthár-i-Munzalih az Qalam-i-A'lá dar Írán: Qaṣídiy-i-Rashḥ-i-'Amá'” (*Safíniy-i-'Irján*, Book 2, 1999), p. 77.

its opening words. Fáḍil Mázandarání has asserted that Bahá'u'lláh revealed this Tablet in 1851 for the eminent Bábí, Mullá Shaykh 'Alí Turshízí, surnamed 'Azím.⁶³ In response to questions from Adib Masumian regarding the provenance of this Tablet, the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Center states that the Tablet “is authentic,” noting that “a copy of it is held by the Archives at the Bahá'í World Centre.”⁶⁴ Additionally, they write that, to date, they “have found no further information regarding the exact date of this Tablet, the addressee or the circumstances of how Fáḍil-i-Mázindarán obtained it...”⁶⁵ If Mázandarání's assertion about the date of this Tablet is correct, it means that the Tablet was revealed before the 1852 Bábí massacre (in which 'Azím was killed) and Bahá'u'lláh's experience in the Síyáh-Chál.

In this Tablet, Bahá'u'lláh warns His addressee not to become a cause of disunity, and predicts future calamities that await the Bábís:⁶⁶

They deem themselves to be guided aright and doers of good; but nay, by the Lord of the heavens, they are naught but liars and stirrers of sedition. And now that the brilliance of the morn of faithfulness hath suffused the Invisible Essence, and the darksome night of waywardness overtaken the whole earth, the blackening deeds of those who are dear to us have so stained the pages on which they are written that the very mention of them hath estranged all that is visible and invisible. Gracious God! So grievous is it that the ornaments of sorrow are now manifest upon the divine Countenance. Verily, we are God's, and unto our Lord shall we assuredly return

و یحسبون اَنَّهُم مهتدون و محسنون لا
فورب السَّموات هم کاذبون و مفسدون.
حال که نواریت صبح وفا در هویت غیب
فرو رفته و ظلماتیت لیل عما صحن زمین را
احاطه نموده کدورات احباب چنان بر
صفحه مداد نازل گشته که ذکر آن موجب
کدورت غیب و شهود گشته سبحان الله
بشدتی که طراز حزن از طلعت ظاهر گشته
نَا لله و اَنَا الی رَبِّنا لمقلبون

Say: O people of the Bayán! Were ye to acquire even an ounce of true understanding, and soar awhile in the hallowed firmament of immemorial sovereignty, ye would perceive how flagrantly you have subverted the all-encompassing, the blessed, the pre-eternal Word of God.

بگو ای اهل بیان اگر فی الجمله بشعور
بیائید و قدری متصاعد بسماء قدس
سلطان ازلی شوید ملتفت می شوید که کلمه
جامعه مبارکه ازلیه را چگونه تفریق
نموده اید.

⁶³ Fáḍil Mázandarání, *Tárikh-i-Zuhúr-i-Haqq*, vol. 4 (Hofheim-Langenhain, Germany: Bahá'í-Verlag, 2011), pp. 25–28. For an analysis of this Tablet, refer to Adib Masumian, “The Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha‘sha” (“Tablet of the Effulgent Praise”): A Little-Known but Significant Early Writing of Bahá'u'lláh,” Baha'i Library Online. 2023. https://bahai-library.com/masumian_bahauallah_lawh_hamd-mushasha [accessed 20 September 2024]. For an annotated provisional translation of the Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Musha‘sha itself, see <https://adibmasumian.com/translations/bh00775/> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁶⁴ Research Department at the Bahá'í World Center, memorandum dated 23 July 2018 and addressed to the Universal House of Justice. Private correspondence with Adib Masumian, who was copied on this memorandum.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Provisional translations of all passages from this Tablet are by Adib Masumian. The authenticated original typescript, prepared from a manuscript in the hand of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabín, is taken from the Bahá'í Reference Library, <http://www.bahai.org/r/900469049> [accessed 1 May 2025].

I swear by the righteousness of the Nurturer of all things visible and invisible—He Who is the King of existence and the chief Desire of all humanity—that that which your hands have wrought and your tongues uttered are clear and apparent before Him Whose knowledge nothing escapeth, be it of heaven above or earth below. Its fruit ye will ere long behold, and these very acts ye have perpetrated shall, at the hour of Resurrection, return to haunt you.

بحقّ مربّي غيب و شهود و سلطان وجود و مقصود كه آنچه كسب نموده ایدی و السن شما عند من لا یغزب عن علمه من شیء فی ملكوت السموات و الأرض مبرهن و واضح است و ثمر آن را عنقریب خواهید دید و همین افعال و اعمال شما هنگام رجوع بشما رجعت خواهد نمود.

Bahá'u'lláh then goes on to discuss His own station as a divine Manifestation and identify Himself, by way of allusion, with the Manifestations of the past—all this at least a year before His Síyáh-Chál experience:

Praise be to God, He Who made Bahá to warble the mystery of fidelity...

و الحمد لله الذی قد اغنّ البهآ بالسّرّ الوفاء . .

Praise be to God, He Who made the Light to dwell within the mystery of Bahá, Who called upon him from the inaccessible realm of divine decree and presented him before the countenances of the Theophanic Cloud...

و الحمد لله الذی قد اقام النور فی سرّ البهآ فلقد اشهده من هاهوت الامر بین طلعات العماء . . .

O eternal Dove, O peerless Cockerel, O most glorious Bird, O divine Manifestation, O beauteous splendor! Say: O people of the Book! Wherefore have ye condemned us as infidels, and for what reason have ye refused to recognize us? Are we not the signs of joy? Are we not the chanting of the Lord upon Mount Sinai? Wherefore have ye persecuted us, and for what reason have ye put us to grief?

ان یا حمامة الازلّی و دیک الاحدی و طایر الابهائی و تظهر الالهی و تشعشع الجمالی قل ان یا اهل الكتاب لم تکفروننا بم تجحدوننا السنآ آیات السّرور السنآ تغزّد الرّب فی جبل الطور لم تؤذوننا کیف تحزنوننا

Are we not the hidden retreat of Revelation enshrined in Scripture? Are we not the Countenance of Him Who is the Ever-Living, the Ever-Forgiving? Are we not the Theophanic Cloud of camphor? Are we not clearly reflective of Divine Unity through our manifestation? Wherefore have ye banished us from our land, and for what reason have ye imprisoned us in our homes?

السنآ مستسرّ التّزول فی الرّبور السنآ طلعة حیّ غفور السنآ عمآء الکافور السنآ بیّنات الاحدیة بالظهور کیف تخرجوننا عن دیارنا لم تحبسونا فی بیوتنا

Are we not the Beauty of the All-Glorious enwrapped in gloomy darknesses? Are we not the Beloved mysteriously concealed in the core of Há? Are we not the Friend in the very soul of Bahá intoning melodies of the Day of Resurrection? Are we not the Chanter Who abideth in the divinity of the inmost heart and singeth in the ringing tones of birds? Wherefore have ye repudiated us, slain us, and forsaken us?

... all this was naught but the Dove of Thine eternity warbling within my soul... and the Countenance of Thine Essence emerging within mine inmost heart...

السنا جمال العزّ في ظلمات الدّيجور السنا
المحبوب في كبد الهآء بالسّرّ المستور السنا
الحبيب في قلب البهآء برنآت النّشور السنا
المرثم في لاهوت الفؤاد برنآت الطيور لم
تعرضونا و تقتلوننا و تخذلوننا

... كلّ ذلك ما كان إلّا من تغرّد حمامة
ازليّتک في قلبی . . . و من تظہر طلعة هویتک
في فؤادی

The Writings of Ṭáhirih

As noted above, there are reasons to believe that Ṭáhirih was aware of Bahá'u'lláh's station while He harbored His messianic secret. In that vein, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states clearly that, well before Badasht, Ṭáhirih had discovered that Bahá'u'lláh was destined to be the Manifestation of God Who would succeed the Báb:

Although [Ṭáhirih's] speech was eloquent, yet when she perceived that Bahá'u'lláh was to raise another call and shine forth with another radiance, she became even more enkindled and reached a state that can hardly be described. She forsook all patience and composure and well-nigh rent asunder the veil of concealment. Night and day she would at turns speak forth and cry out, laugh aloud, and weep bitterly.⁶⁷

هرچند نطقش گویا بود ولی چون ملتفت شد که
جمال مبارک را آهنگی دیگر است و جلوه‌ای دیگر
بسیار مشتعل‌تر شد، بدرجه‌ای رسید که وصف
ندارد. صبر و آرامش نماند، نزدیک بود که پرده
کتمان بکلی بدرد. شب و روز نعره می‌زد یا
می‌گفت یا می‌گریست یا می‌خندید.

There are, in fact, a number of writings attributed to Ṭáhirih that appear to indicate her foreknowledge of Bahá'u'lláh's station. We will discuss examples of these writings in some detail below.

Ṭáhirih's Prose

We first have a letter from 1851, which opens with Ṭáhirih addressing Bahá'u'lláh as a "hidden Treasure" and anticipating that His appearance will succeed that of the Báb:

O hidden Treasure, O mentioned Countenance, O
brilliant Star, O effulgent Essence!

ای کنز مخفی و یا وجه مَحکی و یا کوکب درّی و یا
جوهر مضیء

⁶⁷ Authorized translation in "Twelve table talks given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 'Akká," a collection available online <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/twelve-table-talks-abdul-baha/3#344148259> [accessed 1 May 2025]. The authors would like to thank Omid Ghaemmaghani for this reference.

... God willing Thou wilt ere long don the crown of sovereignty, and put on the robe of generosity. If it be Thy wish, Thou wilt emerge as... He [the Báb] hath emerged as that Fountainhead, established on “the seat of truth in the presence of the potent King,”⁶⁸ and Thou shalt, in Thy turn, benefit from such hidden favors as “the human heart hath never conceived.”⁶⁹ May my life be a sacrifice for Thy most noble efforts, and a ransom for Thy most humble Face—for at a time when the smoke of hell-fire had wafted high, and in the midst of that tumult fomented by the fiendish, Thou didst come with the light of the Lord of the worlds, cleaving tenaciously to the firm cord.⁷⁰

... انشاء الله که تاج ولایت ترا بر سر و خلعت کرامت ترا در بر، خواهی در مَقْعَدِ صِدْقِ عِنْدَ مَلِیْکِ مُقْتَدِرِ مُصَدَّرِ آمد و از الطاف نهانیۀ لَا خَطَرَ عَلَی قَلْبِ بَشَرِ خواهی بهره مند گردید. فدای همت والایت پس فدای وجه خضوعیت که در حین تراکم اَبْخِرُهُ سَجِّینَ، و در آن ولولۀ شیاطین، متوسل به حبل المتین به نور رب العالمین آمدمی.

Next is an important prayer with no date which, according to ‘Abdu’l-Ḥusayn Áyatí, commonly known to Bahá’ís as “Ávárih”—the author of a history of the Bábí and Bahá’í Faiths entitled *Kavákibu’-d-Durríyyih* (“the Brilliant Stars”)—is among the rare documents that exist in Ṭáhirih’s own handwriting. This prayer was among the collection of Ṭáhirih’s works preserved by one of her relatives in Qazvín. Ávárih first explains the circumstances attending the discovery of this prayer, and then goes on to discuss its contents—a discussion retained here across several endnotes:⁷¹

... through Mírzá Músá Khán, the Ḥakím-Báshí... we have procured, in Qazvín, one of Ṭáhirih’s writings. This is the document which speaks most clearly to her awareness of [what is truly signified by] such terms as “Bahá,” “Íshán,”⁷² “the Return of Ḥusayn,” and the like—terms to which Ṭáhirih herself alludes

... آیا سندی از او [طاهره] باقی مانده است که دانش و علم او را بر این مسئله راوی و حاکمی باشد؟ بلی، خوشبختانه در قزوین به توسط جناب میرزا موسی خان حکیم باشی – که شاید باز به ذکر خیرش برسیم – مقاله‌ئی از مقالات طاهره را به دست آوردیم که بهترین سند است

⁶⁸ Qur’án 54:55.

⁶⁹ From a hadith attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad by Abú Hurairah and published in *Ṣaḥíḥ Bukhārī*. A nearly identical sentiment was expressed centuries earlier by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:9: “But as it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, **neither have entered into the heart of man**, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” [emphasis ours].

⁷⁰ Fáḍil Mázandarání, *Zuhúru’l-Ḥaqq* 4:33–34. Translation by Adib Masumian.

⁷¹ Words in brackets represent additions by Adib Masumian; all else, including parenthetical remarks, are the words of Ávárih.

⁷² “Íshán” is a gender-neutral third-person singular pronoun in Persian. In this instance, it would be most suitably translated as “he” or “him,” given the context. In his own analysis of this prayer—which appears immediately after it, and features the heading *Tabṣīratun li’l-Mutabaṣṣirín* (“A note for the perceptive”)—Ávárih notes that this is a Bábí locution that was known, even to the courtiers and ‘ulamá of the time, to refer to Mírzá Ḥusayn-‘Alí Núrí (‘Abdu’l-Ḥusayn Áyatí, *Kavákibu’-d-Durríyyih*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Maṭba‘at as-Sa‘adah, 1923), p. 275).

therein—and contains her supplications in behalf of “them that circle round the Twin Points” (meaning the Primal Point and the Abhá Beauty). The noble Ḥakím obtained this document, through the relatives of Ṭáhirih, from among the personal effects of that esteemed woman. Ḥakím has graciously given this document to this servant, and I am indebted to him for it, inasmuch as the writings of that venerated woman—particularly those in her own hand—are extremely rare. Wherever such items are found, they must be regarded as the most significant of historical documents. That applies especially to this document, which features a style that is unique. Indeed, from the very words and phrases it contains, one can discern that this document must have been written by someone like Ṭáhirih. She has, with the tongue of prayer and communion, sung this melody, and placed numerous secrets within it.

Below are portions of this prayer in which Ṭáhirih identifies the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh as “the Twin Points.” In Bábí parlance, this locution refers to the Twin Manifestations, as one of the Báb's titles was also *Ḥaḍrat-i-Nuqtī-i-Úlá* (“the Primal Point”).⁷³

I perceive, O my God, with mine own eyes, that “he” hath appeared sanctified from all else [but Thee], and I behold how he hath become worthy of Thy most great bounty. O my God! That gift which hath been revealed in this day from the fountainhead of Thy power is the mystery of Godhood, and that which deserveth Thy favors is even as divinity itself...

Through “him,” O my God, copious scrolls have been revealed, and from his inner reality numerous verses have proceeded.⁷⁴ ...

بر این که او به اصطلاح بهاء و (ایشان) و رجعت حسین و امثالها آگاه بوده و اشاراتی نموده، و در حق طائفین حول نقطتین (یعنی نقطه اولی و جمال ابهی) دعا فرموده. و این مقاله را جناب حکیم کریم از مخلفات آن مخدّره از دست اقارب او به دست آورده به این بنده عنایت نمودند و مرا رهین مَنّت چه که انشاء و خطّ آن مخدّره بسیار نادر و هر جا یافت شود مهمّ ترین سند تاریخی تواند بود - خصوصاً این مقاله که انشائش هم انشاء مخصوصی است، که از خود عبارات فهمیده می شود که انشاء شخصی مثل طاهره است. و به لسان مناجات این نغمه را سروده؛ رموزی چند را در آن ودیعه نهاده. و هی هذه

...الهی مشاهده می نمایم به عین العیان که (ایشان) مطهر از کلّ ما سوی آمدند * و ملاحظه می فرمایم که قابل عطایت کبری شدند * الهی عطیة نازلّه از مصدر قدرتت الیوم سرّ ربوبیت است * و آنچه قابل عطای الهیّه است آن عین الوهیت است. ...

الهی ورقات چند از نزد (ایشان) در نزول و آیات بیسار از حقیقتشان در ظهور. ...

⁷³ Words in brackets represent additions by Adib Masumian. Following a precedent set by Shoghi Effendi, pronouns and other terms referring to the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are in lowercase when juxtaposed with those that refer to God.

⁷⁴ In his analysis of the prayer, Ávárīh notes that Ṭáhirih's language here indicates that, even at that juncture, she regarded the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh as divinely revealed Tablets and verses (*Kavákibu'd-Durríyyih* 1:275).

O my God! Thou must cast off the veil that obscureth the face immortal and everlasting, and sprinkle the cloud-born drops⁷⁵ from the countenance independent and self-subsisting, so that the people of truth may arise and come together—issuing forth from a single center—and make evident, from the revelation of Thy holy Being, the mystery of summoning men to embrace Thee...

الهی که باید براندازی حجاب را از وجه باقی
دیمومی. و باید بپاشی ذراتِ سحاب را از طلعت
قائم قیومی تا آنکه اهل حقیقت از مرکز واحده
به اجتماع بر آیند. و سرّ دعوت را از اظهار
انّیت خود ابراز فرمایند. ...

This is the radiant sun that casteth its rays from the land of Šádíyyih,⁷⁶ and this is the luminous moon that, with the raiments of oneness, sheddeth from Mount Sinai its most effulgent splendor. Praised, doubly praised be Thou, O my God, for the appearance of the point of Bahá from the land of Qáf!⁷⁷ ...

اینست شمس مضمینّه که از ارض صادیه در
شعشعه و ضیاء. و اینست قمر منیره که به
قُمُص احدیّه در جَبَل طوریه بهاء ابهی [.] الّهی
لك الحمد حمداً علی باظهار نقطة البهاء از ارض
قاف. ...

⁷⁵ This metaphor may have parallels with “the sprinkling of the cloud of unknowing” (*Rashh-i-‘Amā*)—a concept found in Ṭáhirih’s other writings, as well as those of Bahá’u’lláh—which denotes a variety of divine bestowals from God to man through the Manifestation of God. These bestowals could include the sending of a new Manifestation, the revelation of a new Holy Book, and the inauguration of a new religious dispensation.

⁷⁶ In his analysis of the prayer, Áváríh notes that this term (originally, *Arđ-i-Šádíyyih*; literally, “land of the letter Šád”) was coined by Shaykh Aḥmad-i-Aḥsá’í, who used it in one of his explications of a well-known ḥadīth by Abú Labíd al-Makhzúmi (this ḥadīth offers commentary on certain disconnected letters of the Qur’án, one of which includes the letter Šád). Áváríh notes that Ṭáhirih later interpreted *Arđ-i-Šádíyyih* in her own writings as a reference to the dawning-place of Bahá’u’lláh, as evidenced by her figurative usage of the term in this sentence. Áváríh, however, then remarks that he is content to leave it at that, and not speculate any further on what the term may signify, except to discount the notion that it could refer to a physical place like Iṣfáhán—commonly represented in the Bahá’í Writings by a nearly identical locution, *Arđ-i-Šád* (also literally “land of the letter Šád”)—and insist that it is metaphorical in nature, citing Ṭáhirih’s allusion to the similarly mystical “land of Qáf” (discussed further in the next endnote) shortly thereafter as evidence (*Kavákibu’-d-Duríyyih* 1:275–76). One possibility that occurs to the present authors is that *Arđ-i-Šádíyyih* may be a locational metaphor that represents the first letter (Šád) of the Arabic word *šamad* (“eternal”), an attribute associated with God in the Qur’án (112:2). It is worth noting that the word *šamad* may have occupied a prominent place in the collective Bábí consciousness, if one considers the extensive commentary that Quddús wrote on the letter Šád that composes that word—a commentary that Nabíl Zarandí characterized as Quddús’s “eulogy of Bahá’u’lláh” (*Dawn-Breakers*, p. 70), and described as being “thrice as voluminous as the Qur’án itself” (*ibid.*, p. 357) and having “assumed the dimensions of five hundred thousand verses” (*ibid.*, p. 71).

⁷⁷ In his analysis of the prayer, Áváríh notes that this term (originally, *Arđ-i-Qáf*; literally, “land of the letter Qáf”) could mean a number of different things. He first suggests that it could refer to “the waystation of self-subsistence” (*sarmanẓil-i-qayyúmiyyat*), which he notes “must be revealed after the advent of the Qá’im”—the key being that the original word for “self-subsistence” here, *qayyúm*, as well as the word *Qá’im*, which as a proper noun refers to the redeemer of mankind in Shí’ih eschatology (but otherwise means

Protect Thou, O my God, them that circle round the twin points, and make them steadfast in Thy most great Cause, that they may behold the point shining resplendently over their realities...

الهی طائفین حول نقطتین را حفظ فرما و به امر اعظم خود ثابت نما تا آنکه نقطه را مضیء بر حقائق خود مشاهده نمایند. ...

I bear witness unto Thee, O my God, that Thy Cause is being manifested through the temple of the point...

اشهدك يا الهی كه امرت از هیكل نقطه در بروز. ...

Cast Thou, O my God, a glance of Thy favor upon him who is the most captivating, for I am indeed enthralled [by him], that I may witness the mystery of Thine endless bounty, for I am in earnest search of the object of my quest. O my God, Thou Who wilt assist us to victory, Thou Who didst promise the return of Ḥusayn! Keep safe the mystery of Muḥammad from every misfortune, and disclose the day when we shall stand in his presence...⁷⁸

الهی كه نظری از نظرات نهان بر جاذب كه مجذوبیم تا آنكه سر لطف بی پایان را مشاهده نمایم كه طالب مطلوبیم * الهی كه ممدود به نصرت و موعود به كزّت (حسین) سر محمد را از جمیع آفات حفظ فرما و يوم لقاء او را بارز نما...

The third prose writing of Ṭáhirih we will explore here is a passage from a document that is currently preserved at the Bahá'í World Center.⁷⁹ This excerpt will show that Ṭáhirih had not only recognized

“standing” or “independent”), both begin with the letter *Qáf*. To corroborate this notion, Ávárih cites a passage from earlier in this prayer—“O my God! Thou must... sprinkle the cloud-born drops from the countenance independent and self-subsisting...”—observing that the original words translated here as “independent” and “self-subsisting” are *qá'im* and *qayyúm*, respectively. Ávárih secondly suggests that *Arđ-i-Qáf* could be an allusion to a sermon given by the Imám ‘Alí at a mosque in Kúfih, in which he hailed the future appearance of Him Who is the *Qá'im* and the *Qayyúm*. Lastly, Ávárih cites a firsthand account from Muḥammad Muṣṭafá Baghdádí that he describes in “his concise treatise” (which Ávárih does not identify, but probably refers to Baghdádí’s *al-Risálat al-Amrīyya*) to demonstrate that Ṭáhirih often spoke in a way that was laden with mystery, noting that in one particular instance she used the term *Arđ-i-Qáf* to signify the command *qúmú bi amri'lláh* (“Arise ye, by the command of God”), and suggest that this meaning may also be applicable here (*Kavákibu’-d-Durríyyih* 1:276–77). Beyond these possibilities, the present authors wish to observe that there may be a parallel between this term and the mythical Mount Qáf (apparently named after the letter), which in ancient Persian mythology refers to the dwelling-place of the phoenix (*anqá*). Within a decade or so from the composition of this prayer (no later than 1858), Bahá'u'lláh equates, in the first Persian Hidden Word, the word Qáf with the same mythical mountain where the phoenix dwells by inviting man to rise above his mortal dwelling-place (this transient world) and soar unto his true destiny (the attainment of immortality) by remaining faithful to his covenant with God: “O immortal phoenix! dwell not save on the mount of faithfulness. Therein is thy habitation, if on the wings of thy soul thou soarest to the realm of the infinite and seekest to attain thy goal” (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985)), p. 22.

⁷⁸ Áyatí, *Kavákibu’-d-Durríyyih* 1:273–74. Translation by Adib Masumian.

⁷⁹ Muhammad Afnan, “*Áthár-i-Manthúr-i-Ṭáhirih*,” published in *Majmú‘iy-i-Maḡálát* [vol. 1] (Dundas, ON: ‘Andalíb, 2013), p. 272. Another version of this passage with slight variations in wording is published in

Bahá'u'lláh as the Promised One of the Bábí dispensation, but that she had also expressed her love and devotion to Him in writing. In this excerpt, moreover, Ṭáhirih acknowledges Bahá'u'lláh as the return of the Imám Ḥusayn, whose appearance—according to Shí'ih messianic tradition—is expected to follow the coming of the Qá'im. Ṭáhirih also notes that the Báb had expressed His own belief in Bahá'u'lláh, that Bahá'u'lláh was indeed the expected Bábí Messiah, and that He and the Báb were intrinsically one and the same person:

Lo, I bow down in adoration before the Face of Ḥusayn, for verily, He hath returned. I humble myself, moreover, before the Most Great Countenance [the Báb] Who hath believed in Him [Ḥusayn = Jináb-i-Bahá'] and affirmed that He [Ḥusayn = Jináb-i-Bahá'] is the Point Whose advent God promised through His utterance, and recorded through His verse, “We decreed heretofore in the Scriptures that My righteous Servants shall inherit the earth after the appearance of the Remembrance” (Qur’án 21:105).

قَدْ أَسْجُدُ لِطَلْعَةِ الْحُسَيْنِ الَّذِي قَدْ كَرَّ. ثُمَّ
أَخْضَعُ لَوَجْهِ الْأَعْظَمِ الَّذِي قَدْ آمَنَ بِهِ
وَأَسْتَقَرَّ بِأَنَّهُ لَهُوَ النُّقْطَةُ الَّذِي قَدْ وَعَدَهُ
اللَّهُ بِالظَّهْرِ وَسَطَرَهُ اللَّهُ بِالسَّطْرِ ﴿٢٠﴾ وَلَقَدْ
كَتَبْنَا فِي الزُّبُورِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الذِّكْرِ أَنَّ الْأَرْضَ
يَرِثُهَا عِبَادِيَ الصَّالِحُونَ. ﴿٢١﴾

Verily, it hath been revealed in the Bayán that He [Ḥusayn = Jináb-i-Bahá'] is, of a truth, Him Whom God shall make manifest. O my Lord! Can He Who shall be made manifest [Ḥusayn = Jináb-i-Bahá'] be anyone other He Who hath appeared [the Báb]? No, and to this Thy most august and all-compelling Glory beareth me witness, for verily, He hath appeared with proofs, Scriptures, and the splendors of divine decree!⁸⁰

وَلَقَدْ نَزَلَ بِالْبَيَانِ أَنَّهُ لَهُوَ مَنْ يُظْهِرُهُ اللَّهُ. يَا
رَبِّ هَلِ الَّذِي يُظْهِرُ هُوَ قَدْ كَانَ غَيْرَ مَنْ
ظَهَرَ؟ لَا وَعِزَّتِكَ الْأَعَزُّ الْأَفْهَرُ لِأَنَّهُ قَدْ ظَهَرَ
بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالزُّبُرِ.

Ṭáhirih's interpretation of Qur’án 21:105, cited in the above passage, is also highly original. In some Shí'í commentaries on the Qur’án, the locution “My righteous Servants” found in this verse is interpreted to mean the Qá'im and His companions, but here Ṭáhirih appears to suggest that “My righteous Servants” in fact refers to Him Whom God shall make manifest, Who is the return of the Imám Ḥusayn and has appeared after the Báb (“the Remembrance”). Ṭáhirih seems to be implying that Bahá'u'lláh's station is so exalted that the Qur’án uses the plural “Servants” to refer to Him—not unlike how the Bible and the Qur’án, in certain verses, describe God in plural terms.⁸¹

Nosratullah Mohammad Hosseini, *Ḥaḍrat-i-Ṭáhirih* (Dundas, ON: Persian Institute for Bahá'í Studies, 2000), p. 483; see citation in note 24.

⁸⁰ Afnan, “*Áthár*,” p. 272. Provisional translation by Omid Ghaemmaghani.

⁸¹ The authors are indebted to Omid Ghaemmaghani for the reference to the above passage from Ṭáhirih, as well as his translation of the passage and his insightful analysis of it offered here, first shared in private correspondence and eventually fleshed out in “‘The Hand of God is Not Chained Up’: Notes on Two Salient Themes in the Prose Writings of Ṭáhirih Qurratu'l-'Ayn,” published in Fereydon Vahman (ed.), *The Bab and Babi Community of Iran* (Oxford: Oneworld Academic, 2020), pp. 407–421.

It is worth noting here that, in her entry on Ṭáhirih in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Annemarie Schimmel—the influential German Orientalist and scholar who wrote extensively on Islam and Sufism—also confirms that Ṭáhirih considered Bahá'u'lláh the awaited Messiah of the Bábís:

The assassination of [Ṭáhirih's] uncle (her former father-in-law), also an adversary of the Bábís resulted in the first persecution of the adherents of the new faith, and she went to Tehran and stayed as a guest of Bahá'u'lláh, whom she hailed as the awaited leader of the community.⁸²

Ṭáhirih's Poetry

There is no official collection of Ṭáhirih's poetry. In all likelihood, her tumultuous adult life, mostly spent away from home traveling or in captivity, left her with little time or desire to engage in assembling her poetry into an organized collection. Perhaps the best and most reliable existing collections of Ṭáhirih's poetry can be found in the works of Nosratullah Mohammad Hosseini and Ni'matu'lláh Dhuká'í Bayḍá'í.⁸³ However, numerous samples of Ṭáhirih's poetry were left in the hands of her family in Qazvín, which allowed others to study the language and literary styles of her poetry and extrapolate what they learned from those samples to confirm or reject the authenticity of other poems attributed to Ṭáhirih. The excerpts that appear below are all selected from such poems, many of which have already been translated by others. However, where the present authors felt a retranslation of certain words or entire verses was necessary, they have struck through the rendering of the original translator(s) and followed it with their own rendering.

Excerpt 1, Distich Quoted by Bahá'u'lláh in His Lawḥ-i-Sarráj	
Provisional English Translation (by Adib Masumian)	Original Text
Were Bahá to cast off the veil from His Face A myriad Azals would thus appear	گر براندازد بهاء از رخ نقاب صد هزار همچون ازل آید پدید
Source: 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd Ishráq-Khávarí. <i>Má'idíy-i-Ásmání</i> , vol. 7, p. 98.	

Analysis 1: This distich is significant for two reasons:

1. It is the only known verse of Ṭáhirih that is quoted by Bahá'u'lláh Himself as evidence of her high regard for Him and the fact that He was hiding something important.

⁸² Schimmel, Annemarie, "Qurrat al-'Ayn Ṭáhirah." *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (2nd ed., vol. 11, Macmillan Reference USA, 2005, pp. 7574–75). The authors are grateful to Omid Ghaemmaghami for this reference.

⁸³ For Mohammad Hosseini, see *Ḥaḍrat-i-Ṭáhirih*, pp. 345–93; for Dhuká'í Bayḍá'í, refer to *Tadhkariy-i-Shu'aráy-i-Qarn-i-Avval-i-Bahá'í*, vol. 3 (Tíhrán: Mu'assisiy-i-Millíy-i-Maṭbú'át-i-Amrí, 1969), pp. 106–33.

In the *Lawḥ-i-Sarráj* (1864–68), Bahá'u'lláh Himself confirms that Ṭáhirih was aware of His station.⁸⁴ He reproduces a distich from Ṭáhirih that must have been composed after 9 July 1850 (when the Báb was executed) and before Ṭáhirih's own execution in August 1852. The distich compares the stations of Bahá'u'lláh and Mírzá Yaḥyá (Azal), which also means it belongs to a period when the rift between the two brothers was becoming public, at least among some of the Bábís:⁸⁵

That captivating Point, Jináb-i-Ṭá [Ṭáhirih]—upon her be the Glory of God, the Most Glorious—*was with this Servant for a time. She would not barter one moment's meeting with this Youth for the sovereignty of this world and the next, nor for less than an instant did she wish for separation. However, that which hath been pre-ordained came to pass.* How numerous are the verses and poems she produced concerning this wondrous Cause! Among her descriptions of the Most Exalted Countenance is a certain poem that includeth the following distich [*farḍ*]:

Were Bahá to cast off the veil from His Face
A myriad Azals would thus appear

2. Ṭáhirih refers to Bahá'u'lláh as “veiled,” indicating that He had a secret which, if revealed, would make Bábís realize that His greatness far outweighed that of Mírzá Yaḥyá's. The complete text of the poem that includes this distich has yet to be found.⁸⁶

Excerpt 2, from the Poem: <i>Start Shouting!</i>	
English Translation (All Emphasis Ours)	Original Text (All Punctuation, Vowel Markings, and Emphasis Ours)
Angels! Saints! All you holy ones above! ~~My true lover beloved just walked in. Start shouting!~~ Raise your jubilant cries, O celestial concourse! For the advent of our Beloved is now clearly manifest!	هَلْه ای گروهِ عَمَائیان، بکشید هلهله ولا که ظهورِ دلبرِ ما عیان شده فاش و ظاهرو برملا

⁸⁴ Ishráq-Khávarí, *Má'idíy-i-Ásmání* 7:98.

⁸⁵ Composite rendering from the original Persian; the italicized portion is an authorized translation digitally published on the Bahá'í Reference Library, <http://www.bahai.org/r/549040854> [accessed 1 May 2025], while the remainder of the passage—including the distich from Ṭáhirih quoted by Bahá'u'lláh—was rendered provisionally by Adib Masumian.

⁸⁶ In a letter dated 25 May 2018 to Bijan Masumian, the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Center confirmed that “to date, a copy of the complete version of this poem from Ṭáhirih that contains the couplet quoted by Bahá'u'lláh in His Tablet has not been found.”

Fars is set aflame, and Tehran's burning. Fountains of fire are gushing out of the land of Fā [arḍ-i-fā]; rays of light are pouring out of the city of Ṭá [shahr-i-Ṭá] Pure spirit rises from his His place. Start dancing!	فَورَانِ نارِ زِ اَرْضِ فَا، نَوْرَانِ نورِ زِ شَهْرِ طَا ظَهْرَانِ روحِ زِ شَطْرِهَا وَ لَقَدْ عَلَا وَ قَدْ اَعْتَلَا
Moses and Jesus in heaven are stunned, And all the holy ones are lost down here on earth- are wrapt in ecstasy	همه موسیان عمائیش، همه عیسیان سمائیش همه دلبران بقائیش، مُتَوَلَّاهَا مُتَرَمَّلاً
Source	
Amin Banani, Jascha Kessler, Anthony A. Lee. <i>Ṭáhirih: A Portrait in Poetry: Selected Poems of Qurratu'l-'Ayn</i> (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2004), p. 58.	Banani, et al. <i>Ṭáhirih</i>, pp. 56–57.

Analysis 2: According to Vahid Rafati, the Báb uses the term *arḍ-i-fā* as a reference to Iran (which was once known as Fārs), in contradistinction to *madīniy-i-fā*, which refers to the city of Shīrāz.⁸⁷ *Shahr-i-Ṭá*, or “the City of Ṭá,” refers to Ṭihrán, the birthplace of Bahá’u’lláh. In the second hemistich of the first verse, a better translation of the Persian word *dilbar* is actually “beloved,” in that it literally means “one who steals someone’s heart.” Therefore, of all the possible cities in Persia, Ṭáhirih here names the birthplace of Bahá’u’lláh and puts Him on par with past Manifestations (Moses and Jesus).

Excerpt 3, from the Poem: <i>Ṭáhirih's Praise of the Beloved (Bahá'u'lláh)</i>	
English Translation	Original Text (All Vowel Markings Ours)
O Bird of ‘Amá’, begin singing! Pour forth in sparks Your pages of praise!	در تغنی آی ای طیرِ عماء در شرر اندازِ اوراقِ ثناء
From the mysteries of the command of the Eternal Living One, recount the story of the Point of the Mystery of Eternity.	باز گواز نقطه سَرِّ ازل از رموزِ حکیمِ حَیِّ لم یزل

⁸⁷ See the note on the letter “fā” in Vahid Rafati, “Áthár-i-Munzalih,” p. 66.

Usher the mysteries out from behind the veil! Make manifest those concealed secrets of the heart!	آر از پرده برون اسرارها در تظہر آر آن اِضمارها
~~From the Hidden Mystery of placeless powers, make manifest the source of all power!~~ From the concealment of the placeless realm, bring out and firmly establish the hidden secret!	سرّ مکنون از کمونِ لامکان ساز اندر مصدرِ تمکینِ عِنان
Make manifest to all the splendor concealed in the ~~ornaments~~ shades of light through the dawning of the Manifestation!	جلوۀ مستور در اطرازِ نور ساز مشہودش به اشراقِ ظہور
Source	
John Hatcher and Amrollah Hemmat. <i>Adam's Wish: Unknown Poetry of Ṭáhirih</i> (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2008), pp. 59–60.	Hatcher and Hemmat. <i>Adam's Wish</i> , pp. 244–43 (here, Persian page numbers are intentionally given in reverse order, as the pages containing Persian poems read from right to left in the back section of the book).

Analysis 3: In Bábí-Bahá'í parlance, the term “Bird of ‘Amá’”⁸⁸ is a clear reference to the reality of the Manifestation of the age. In this case, Ṭáhirih could mean only the Báb or Bahá'u'lláh. She is inviting the Manifestation of her age to *begin* “singing” (revealing verses). The Báb, of course, had already *begun* to do this, but the Bábí Messiah (Bahá'u'lláh) had not yet done so.

⁸⁸ “‘Amá’ is defined as an extremely thin and subtle cloud, seen and then not seen. For shouldst thou gaze with the utmost care, thou wouldst discern something, but as soon as thou dost look again, it ceaseth to be seen. For this reason, in the usage of mystics who seek after truth, ‘Amá’ signifieth the Universal Reality without individuations as such, for these individuations exist in the mode of uncompounded simplicity and oneness and are not differentiated from the Divine Essence. Thus they are individuated and not individuated. This is the station alluded to by the terms Aḥadíyyih [Absolute Oneness] and ‘Amá’. This is the station of the “Hidden Treasure” mentioned in the Ḥadíth. The divine attributes, therefore, are individuations that exist in the Essence but are not differentiated therefrom. They are seen and then not seen. This, in brief, is what is meant by ‘Amá’” (from a previously untranslated Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; authorized translation published in Bahá'u'lláh, *Call of the Divine Beloved* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2019), pp. 105–6).

Excerpt 4, from the Poem: <i>Ṭáhirih Explains the Signs of the Advent of Bahá'u'lláh</i>	
English Translation (All Emphasis Ours)	Original Text (All Vowel Markings and Emphasis Ours)
O beloved one, no change is there in this divine tradition: One who would seek God must relinquish allegiance to the moon and sun	تغییر مبین ای جان در سنتِ ربّانی از شمس و قمر بگذشت آنکو که به زار آمد
Remove the veil from the <i>Bahá'íyyih</i> face! Your Lord has come with embraces and kisses, with majesty and grandeur!	بردار تو برقع را از روی بهائی حقّت به جلال و فرّ در بوس و کنار آمد
At your feast with God, aid and assistance will arrive with a ~~paradisical~~ celestial melody from the 'Iráqí quarter.	بر خوانِ خداوندت با رنّه طوبائی از رکنِ عراقیه نصرت به نصار آمد
Source	
Hatcher and Hemmat. <i>Adam's Wish: Unknown Poetry of Ṭáhirih</i> , pp. 109–110.	Hatcher and Hemmat. <i>Adam's Wish</i> , pp. 223–21 (here, Persian page numbers are intentionally in reverse order, as the pages containing Persian poems read from right to left in the back section of the book).

Analysis 4: Here, Ṭáhirih begins by invoking the Shaykhí-Bábí belief in God's unchanging method of sending divine messengers to humanity. She begins with Abraham: The reference to the moon and the sun in the second hemistich of the first verse is an allusion to the story of Abraham's gradual enlightenment as told in Qur'án 6:77–80, which in reality is meant to demonstrate how, over time, Abraham nudged the people of His generation towards monotheism. He did this by first pretending to be a worshipper of the stars, then the moon, then the sun, and eventually a believer in God, the Creator of all of those celestial bodies along with the rest of the universe.

In the second verse, Ṭáhirih is inviting Bahá'u'lláh to “remove the veil [i.e., reveal His messianic secret] from the Bahá'íyyih face!” This could not refer to the Báb because He had already removed His veil, so to speak; His movement was already taking Persia by storm when Ṭáhirih wrote this poem.

In the last verse, Ṭáhirih goes so far as to tell the Qá'im that He will be assisted, and that this assistance will come from 'Iráq ("the 'Iráqí quarter"). By 'Iráq, Ṭáhirih could mean either 'Iráq-i-'Ajam—historically a central region in Persia that included Rayy, today's Ṭíhrán, where His Síyáh-Chál experience occurred—or 'Iráq-i-'Arab, which is today's 'Iráq. 'Iráq-i-'Ajam included the birthplace of Bahá'u'lláh, while 'Iráq-i-'Arab was where His public declaration took place in 1863.

Excerpt 5, from the Poem: <i>The Appearance of "Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest"</i>	
English Translation (All Emphasis Ours)	Original Text (All Punctuation, Vowel Markings, and Emphasis Ours)
It is another world, ~~another command~~ another Command is being unfolded Another Revelation is descending from the Sun of Destiny!	عالم دگر و حُکم دگر در ظَهْران است از شمسِ قَدَرِ دگر در نَزْلان است
~~O thou hearer, hearken, and, if you examine with care the world around you,~~ Hearken, O hearer, for if you examine with care this scene, You will recognize clearly revealed the One Who has been concealed.	دریاب آیا سامع، بِنِگَر تو به منظر مشهود بیابی به عیان، آن که نهان است
Far from Celestial Heights the Friend of God has descended Whose name in the Bayán is now manifest in the exaltation honor of light.	یعنی که مُنَزَّل زِ سما گشته حبیبی اسمش به بیان در شَرَفِ نور عیان است
Verily, in this Day the Truth has become revealed! Verily, the light has been ignited by ~~sparks~~ sparks of ecstasy flashing from the Bayán.	الیوم حقیقت به عیان گشت مظهر زهرا به عیان در شررِ شورِ بیان است
Source	
Hatcher and Hemmat. <i>Adam's Wish</i> , pp. 113–15.	Hatcher and Hemmat. <i>Adam's Wish</i> , pp. 221–19 (here, Persian page numbers are intentionally given in reverse order, as the pages containing Persian poems read from right to left in the back section of the book).

Analysis 5: In the first verse, Táhirih mentions a new world, a new command, and a new Revelation. At first, it seems all this could refer to the advent of the Báb. The ensuing verses, however, make it clear that Táhirih was in fact alluding to the Bábí Messiah. In the second verse, she tells the Bábís that, if they pay attention, they will clearly recognize the One who has been concealed. However, since the Báb's Revelation was already manifested, then, assuming that this poem was written after the Báb's execution, it could only refer either to Mírzá Yaḥyá—who would have had a nominal role as the leader of the community at that time—or to Bahá'u'lláh.

Some may argue that Mírzá Yaḥyá might have been intended as the Bábí Messiah here. It is true that the author(s) of the *Nuqṭatu'l-Káf*, an early history of the Bábí religion, make the following emphatic statement:

By He Whom God shall make manifest to come after Him [the Báb] His Holiness Azal is intended, and none but him, because two Points there cannot be at the same time.⁸⁹

However, the present authors have not seen any historical evidence that Mírzá Yaḥyá himself ever actually advanced such a claim,⁹⁰ nor did the Báb confer any such station on Mírzá Yaḥyá in His so-

⁸⁹ *Nuqṭatu'l-Káf* (ed. E.G. Browne, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1910), p. 244, cited in H.M. Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith* (Oxford, England: George Ronald, 1975), p. 73. The authors wish to thank Brent Poirier for this reference. For a fuller discussion of the controversial history of the making of the *Nuqṭatu'l-Káf*, see Balyuzi, *Browne* 71–77, as well as the following two works: (1) William McCants and Kavian Milani, “The History and Provenance of an Early Manuscript of the *Nuqṭat al-kaf* Dated 1268 (1851–52)” (*Iranian Studies* vol. 37, no. 3, September 2004), pp. 431–449, http://bahai-library.com/pdf/m/mccants_milani_nuqtat_al-kaf.pdf [accessed 1 May 2025]; and (2) Kavian Milani, “NOQTAT AL-KĀF” (*Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 28 July 2008), <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/noqtat-al-kaf> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁹⁰ The closest thing to such a claim by Mírzá Yaḥyá that the present authors have seen is a short poem written by him in Ottoman Turkish and mentioned in Necati Alkan, *Dissent and Heterodoxy in the Late Ottoman Empire: Reformers, Babís and Baha'ís* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2010), p. 78, note 3. The original manuscript of this poem is held at the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul (BOA IMMS. 36/1475, no. 26). Dr. Alkan kindly shared with the present authors a facsimile and English translation of the poem, in which Yaḥyá apparently makes oblique claims to some sort of elevated spiritual station, but there is nothing in the overall cryptic wording of the poem to explicitly indicate that he was claiming to be “He Whom God shall make manifest.” In fact, drawing on the analysis of Siyyid Miqdád Nabavi-Razavi (*Tárikh-i-Makṭúm: Niḡábi bih taláshbay-i-fa'álán-i-Azálí dar mukhálifāt ba ḥukúmat-i-Qájár va Tadárúk-i-Inqiláb-i-Mashrúṭih* (Tíhrán: Pardís-i-Dánish, 2014), pp. 24–25)—who has rooted his assertions in certain Writings by the Báb—Abbas Amanat and Fereyduñ Vahman have proposed that, through a combination of *abjad* reckoning, interpretations of esoteric letters and words, and a kind of arithmomancy (divination by means of numbers) used in this poem, along with an enigmatic talisman that precedes it, Mírzá Yaḥyá was actually hinting at 1868 as the year in which a Bábí uprising against the Ottoman government, which he himself would lead, was to take place, after which he would be established as the first Bábí king (Abbas Amanat and Fereyduñ Vahman, *Aṣ Ṭibrán Tá 'Akká* (North Haven, CT: Nashr-i-Ashkar, 2016), pp. 36–42 and 200–04). This shows that, even in cases where Mírzá Yaḥyá was ostensibly making grand spiritual claims, he was really intimating his desire for worldly sovereignty. His communication of this ambition also demonstrates that, even in the Edirne period (when this poem was written), his thinking was limited to the Bábí dispensation; it seems not to have extended to the Bábí messiahship embodied in “He Whom God shall make manifest,” Whose advent would have signaled the end of that dispensation and the beginning of a new one. Furthermore, there are a number of writings by Yaḥyá whose manuscripts have been preserved at the Millet Kütüphanesi library in Istanbul and which read like “tablets” to his followers, laden as they are with pseudo-revelatory language, but even a cursory review of a random sample of these compositions shows that he was not necessarily claiming to be

called “Will and Testament.”⁹¹ In addition, H.M. Balyuzi has observed that the above claim made in the *Nuqṭatu’l-Káfi* for Mírzá Yahyá “flatly contradicted the thesis of his supporters, as quoted by Edward Browne in his Introduction [to the *Nuqṭatu’l-Káfi*].”⁹² Azalís had always insisted that “Him Whom God shall make manifest” would not appear before the expiration of a long period of time, which could extend anywhere from 1511 to 2001 years.⁹³ How, then, can one reconcile the expectation that the Bábí Messiah would not appear until far into the future with the claim that Mírzá Yahyá, supposedly that self-same Messiah, was already living among them?

It is also true that as many as 25 Bábís claimed to be the Bábí Messiah,⁹⁴ but it is not clear how many of them (if any) set forth that claim in such a narrow window of time—that is, after the martyrdom of the Báb on 9 July 1850 to the summer of 1852, when Ṭáhirih was executed.

Excerpt 6, from an Untitled Poem	
English Translation (All Emphasis Ours)	Original Text (All Vowel Markings and Emphasis Ours)
The effulgence of the Abhá Beauty hath pierced the veil of night; behold the souls of His lovers dancing, moth-like, in the light that has flashed from His face!	شمسِ ابھی جلوہ گر گردید و جانِ عاشقان در هوایِ طلعتش چون ذرّہ رقصان آمده

“He Whom God shall make manifest” in these instances. In any case, all these writings by Mírzá Yahyá would have postdated the execution of Ṭahirih by about 15 years, making it even more unlikely that she would have been alluding to him in her poetry or that there was any validity to the claim made by the author(s) of the *Nuqṭatu’l-Káfi*—a work dating to roughly the same time as Ṭáhirih’s death—that Mírzá Yahyá was the one intended by the phrase “He Whom God shall make manifest.”

⁹¹ Published in INBA 64:95–102, where it bears the heading *Vaṣṣiyat-Námiy-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-Nuqṭiy-i-Úlá* (“The Will and Testament of the Primal Point”). This Writing of the Báb should be read in tandem with a memorandum from the Research Department to the Universal House of Justice dated 1 December 2004, which has been published in *Lights of ‘Irḥán*, vol. 8, pp. 387–91 with the title “Designation of Mírzá Yahyá Azal in the Writings of the Báb.” This memorandum is available on the Baha’i Library Online here: https://bahai-library.com/uhj_designation_mirza_yahya.

⁹² Balyuzi, *Browne*, pp. 72–73.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁹⁴ Noted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 125. Drawing on various sources, Denis MacEoin has attempted to identify most of these claimants in *Messiah of Shiraz: Studies in Early and Middle Babism* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 376ff.

Source	
Nabíl Zarandí. <i>The Dawn-Breakers</i> (trans. Shoghi Effendi), p. 286.	John Hatcher and Amrollah Hemmat. <i>The Poetry of Ṭáhirih</i> (Oxford, England: George Ronald, 2002), poem no. 1; see the first page from the back cover of the book (this page is unnumbered).

Analysis 6: The first term that occurs in the original text, *Shams-i-Abhá*, literally means “the Most Luminous Sun.” The sun and its light are, respectively, the antidotes to night and darkness. Thus, Ṭáhirih is referring to a Manifestation Whose appearance will be associated with light (Bahá, or here its elative form, Abhá). She then invokes the imagery of the lover and the beloved, a recurring motif in Persian love poetry, and explains that, like moths, the lovers of Abhá (or Bahá) are dancing in the light that is flashing from the Face of Abhá (or Bahá). The word Abhá is also clearly referring to a personage, not simply the concept of light or glory, because Ṭáhirih says the souls of the lovers of this personage are dancing (out of ecstasy) in the light of His Face. There is no precedent for Ṭáhirih calling the Báb, Mírzá Yaḥyá, or other important Bábí figures of that era by the title Abhá or Bahá, with the sole exception of Bahá’u’lláh.⁹⁵

Excerpt 7, from the Poem: <i>Daybreak</i>	
English Translation (All Emphasis Ours)	Original Text (All Punctuation, Vowel Markings, and Emphasis Ours)
Lovers! O Ye Lovers ye lovers! The face Face of truth Truth [God] has become manifest! Lo, the veils have at last been removed through the power of ~~Rabbu'l-Falaq~~ the Lord of the Dawn!	ای عاشقان ای عاشقان شد آشکارا وجه حق رفع حُجُب گردید هان از قدرتِ رَبِّ الْفَلَقِ

⁹⁵ For a discussion of the motif of the face of the Manifestation as the Face of God and the light of God emanating from the face of the Manifestation, see Stephen Lambden, “The Sinaitic Mysteries: Notes on Moses/Sinai Motifs in Bábí and Bahá’í Scripture” (*Studies in the Bábí & Bahá’í Religions, vol. 5: Studies in Honor of the Late Hasan M. Balyuzi* (ed. Moojan Momen), Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1988), pp. 65–183.

Arise, each one of you! In Bahá the face Face of God can be seen! ~~Look! See how that face Face,~~ ~~bright like sun at daybreak,~~ ~~shines with compassion and delight!~~ Look with tenderness and purity upon that Face shining brightly as the sun at dusk!	خیزید کایندم با بهاء، ظاهر شده وجه خدا بنگر به صد لطف و صفا، آن روی روشن چون شَفَق
The time for rectitude has come! Perversity is in retreat! Indeed, everything you longed for—Law, Order, Justice— has at long last appeared!	آمد زمانِ راستی، کژی شد اندر کاستی آن شد که آن میخواستی، از عدل و قانون و نَسَق
Injustice and inequity have vanished from our midst. Now is the age of charity and munificence. All feebleness and frailty have been replaced with sustenance and power	شد از میان جور و ستم، هنگامِ لطف است و کرم ای دون به جایِ هر سَقَم، شد جانشین قُوت و رَمَق
For though the King of all kings nations has appeared in the manner and custom of a single nation He will, through the mercy of the Eternal One, deliver all the peoples of the world from ~~their burdens and their bondage.~~	گرچه به انظارِ ملل ظاهر شده شاهِ دُول لکن به لطف لم یزل برهاند از ایشان غَلَق
Source	
John Hatcher and Amrollah Hemmat. <i>The Poetry of Tábiri</i>, pp. 45–46.	John Hatcher and Amrollah Hemmat. <i>The Poetry of Tábiri</i>, poem no. 7; see the fourth and fifth pages from the back cover of the book (these pages are unnumbered).

Analysis 7: In the first hemistich, translating the word *Haqq* as “truth” does not seem accurate to the present authors. In Abrahamic religions, there is a precedent for anthropomorphic interpretations of God that allow Him to have a face like humans. A better translation here would perhaps be “the Face

of Truth,” with Truth referring to the Manifestation, Who represents the Godhead on earth, rather than the all-lowercase “face of truth,” which has no theophanic signification. To dispel any doubts about what Ṭáhirih meant in the first hemistich of this poem, she reiterates the same concept in the first hemistich of the second verse when she refers to the “Face of God” having appeared through the person of Bahá.

In the third verse, Ṭáhirih explains that a new era has begun, characterized by rectitude (of conduct), law, order, and justice—things humanity had longed for—and that injustice and inequity have vanished. These are obviously references to future events, as injustice and inequity were still rampant throughout the world at the time of Ṭáhirih and would be well into the future. In the Persian Bayán, the Báb mentions the “Order of Bahá’u’lláh,”⁹⁶ and later Bahá’u’lláh Himself speaks of His coming world order, which He sees as upsetting the world’s equilibrium.⁹⁷ Bahá’u’lláh also states that one of the primary purposes of His appearance is to establish justice in the world.⁹⁸

In the last verse, Ṭáhirih portrays the role of Bahá (Bahá’u’lláh) as the promised Bábí Messiah as equivalent to that of Jesus in the Christian Bible. In the latter, Jesus is called “the King of Kings.”⁹⁹ Hatcher and Hemmat translate the title used by Ṭáhirih, *Sháh-i-duval*, which literally means King of Nations, as King of Kings. Either way, the title evokes the eschatological figure of Jesus or His Return in the person of Bahá (Bahá’u’lláh), Who will eliminate injustice and inequity and replace them with law, order, and justice. Again, these cannot be references to the Báb because Ṭáhirih talks about the appearance of the Face of God in the person of Bahá, and associates that person with the Biblical figure “the King of Kings (or Nations),” Who will bring law, order, and justice to all the people of the world. History shows that neither the Báb nor Jesus were meant to effect these momentous changes during their dispensations.

⁹⁶ *Persian Bayán* 3:16 (see INBA 62:101): طوبى لمن ينظر الى نظم بهاء الله ويشكر ربه فانه يظهر ولا مرد له من عند الله في البيان

Authorized English translation: “Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá’u’lláh and rendereth thanks unto his Lord! For He will assuredly be made manifest. God hath indeed irrevocably ordained it in the Bayán” (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1991), pp. 146–47).

⁹⁷ “The world’s equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind’s ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992) verse 181).

⁹⁸ Bahá’u’lláh asserts that the chief instrument for transforming human society and ensuring world unity is to establish justice in the affairs of humankind. The concept of justice plays a key role in Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings: “The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men. The ocean of divine wisdom surgeth within this exalted word, while the books of the world cannot contain its inner significance” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1988) pp. 66–67).

⁹⁹ See, for instance, 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 1:5, 17:14, and 19:16; etc.

Excerpt 8, from the Poem: <i>Behold the Face of God</i>	
English Translation (All Emphasis Ours)	Original Text (All Punctuation, Vowel Markings, and Emphasis Ours)
O Šabá, go on my behalf and impart to the beloved of Há All that is fitting for the ~~face~~ Face of Bahá	ای صبا بگو از من آن عزیز هائی را این چنین روا باشد طلعتِ بهائی را
The cloud of ~~his mercy~~ the Beloved's tenderness rains down drop by drop, anoints the bodies ~~prostrate~~ ~~from having gazed on the mystery~~ laid low, annihilated in the secret of Há.	ابرِ لطفِ آن محبوب رشحه رشحه می بارد بر هیاکلِ مطروح محوِ سِرِّ هائی را
His ~~reviving~~ breeze blows abundant ~~mercy~~ vitality from 'Iráqí shores ~~Bestowing vitality and solace~~ ~~on the separated and fallen ones.~~ Stirring the bodies of men to movement even as rippling banners	نَـسَمَةُ عراقیش می وزد بسی روحا زنده می نماید او هیکلِ سولایِ لوائی را
O Bábís, followers of the light, all of you come ~~forth~~ out! ~~Come out from behind the veil of grandeur!~~ ~~Behold this one from Fá!~~ From behind the veils of glory behold the beloved Face of Fá.	بابیانِ نوریه، جملگی برون آئید از حجاب های عَزَّ، بنگرید فائی را
From behind the veils of grandeur the ~~face~~ Face of God is suddenly manifest! O, believers, you need no longer heed: "You shall ~~not~~ never see me!"	طلعتِ مُبینِ ناگه، طالع از حجابِ عَزَّ مشنوای عزیز مَن، نطق «لَنْ تَرَانِي» را

Source	
John Hatcher and Amrollah Hemmat. <i>The Poetry of Ṭáhirih</i> , pp. 94–95.	John Hatcher and Amrollah Hemmat. <i>The Poetry of Ṭáhirih</i> , poem no. 24; see the twenty-eighth page from the back cover of the book (this page is unnumbered).

Analysis 8: In the first hemistich, by the Persian phrase ‘*Aẓīẓ-i-Há’i*’—literally, “the Beloved Há”—is meant Bahá’u’lláh,¹⁰⁰ because in the next hemistich, Ṭáhirih also mentions the Face of this personage, as in *Ṭal’at-i-Bahá’i*, which literally means “The Face of Bahá.” Curiously, however, Hatcher and Hemmat have indirectly translated ‘*Aẓīẓ-i-Há’i*’—which is clearly singular, and can only refer to Há (Bahá/Bahá’u’lláh)—as a referent to a plural pronoun by interpreting ‘*Aẓīẓ-i-Há’i*’ to mean “the beloved of Há” (rather than “Beloved”), which would denote the followers of Bahá’u’lláh. The word ‘*aẓīẓ*’ can also mean “glorious” or “mighty” and imply a ruler, just as Joseph is known in Persian literature as ‘*Aẓīẓ-i-Miṣr*’ (“the glorious (or mighty) [ruler] of Egypt”). Since the letter Há can symbolize the Essence of God,¹⁰¹ this reference to Bahá’u’lláh as ‘*Aẓīẓ-i-Há’i*’ might alternatively be translated as “the divine and glorious (or mighty) ruler.” If we interpret ‘*Aẓīẓ-i-Há’i*’ as an allusion to ‘*Aẓīẓ-i-Miṣr*’, it may suggest that Ṭáhirih was gesturing to Bahá’u’lláh as “the divine Joseph” discussed by the Báb in His Qayyúmu’l-Asmá’, a text with which Ṭáhirih would have been intimately familiar as an eminently devoted and well-read Bábí.

Moreover, Hatcher and Hemmat have rendered the passage *Hayákil-i-maṭrúh mahv-i-sirr-i-Há’i*, which occurs in the second hemistich of the second verse, as “anoints the bodies prostrate from having gazed on the mystery of Há.” The present authors believe a more accurate translation would be “anoints the bodies laid low, annihilated by the secret of Há” (as in Bahá, or Bahá’u’lláh).

In the third verse, Ṭáhirih states that the breezes of divine mercy are blowing from ‘Iráq, which as discussed above could refer either to ‘Iráq-i-‘Ajám, meaning Persia, or ‘Iráq-i-‘Arab, meaning present-day ‘Iráq. An observation that should be made about the second hemistich of the third verse is that the typescript provided by Hatcher and Hemmat has the word *sivá’i*, which connotes separation, whereas the version published in Ni‘matu’lláh Dhuká’i Bayḍá’i’s well-known anthology of Bahá’í poetry has this as *livá’i*, which pertains to banners.¹⁰²

In the fourth verse, Ṭáhirih calls on the Bábís to come out and gaze on the Beauty of Fá—here a reference to *arḍ-i-Fá*, which itself refers to Iran (as discussed above), the birthplace of Bahá’u’lláh, and is thus an allusion to Him—and rediscover the Face of the Báb in Bahá’u’lláh, Who at that time

¹⁰⁰ Vahid Rafati reinforces this interpretation in his note on the letter “há” in “Áthár-i-Munzaliḥ,” p. 66.

¹⁰¹ “The letter ‘Há’ has been given several spiritual meanings in the Holy Writings, among which is as a symbol of the Essence of God” (Notes to the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, no. 28).

¹⁰² Refer to Ni‘matu’lláh Dhuká’i Bayḍá’i, *Tadhkariy-i-Shu‘aráy-i-Qarn-i-Avval-i-Bahá’i*, vol. 3 (Tihván: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1969), p. 128. The present authors are grateful to Naeem Nabiliakbar for calling their attention to the discrepancy between the two versions of this poem.

was still “veiled” (in His messianic secret). Here, “Fá” cannot be a reference to the Báb (as would be entailed by *madíniy-i-Fá*, as opposed to *and-i-Fá*) because the Báb had already been manifested by that point and discovered by the Bábís.

In the last verse, Ṭáhirih refers to the sudden appearance of the veiled Beauty of God—a reference to the imminent declaration of Bahá'u'lláh, which she has already discerned—and reminds the Bábís that, at that time, belief in the old pronouncement “Thou shalt never see Me” (Qur’án 7:143) no longer applies. Hence, unlike in the Mosaic dispensation when, in response to Moses’s plea to see God, He told Moses that He would never see Him, the Bábís would, in fact, be able to see the Face (i.e., the perfections) of God in the person of their Messiah (Bahá'u'lláh).¹⁰³

Conclusion

While the Síyáh-Chál should be regarded as the birthplace of the Bahá'í dispensation, both hagiographical accounts and primary sources indicate that the period when Bahá'u'lláh began to receive divine revelation actually predates His encounter with the Maid of Heaven in the Síyáh-Chál, perhaps by several years. The events in the life of Bahá'u'lláh make it abundantly clear that He did not go through a binary model of theophanic awakening, whereby His evident consciousness of His divine nature before and after His encounter with the Holy Spirit was as stark as the flip of a switch (“on” or “off”), but rather an awakening (in reference solely to His “corporeal station”) over time beginning before the Síyáh-Chál. If true, this could also explain the gradual disclosure of His station, beginning with an inner circle of believers and then slowly expanding that circle.

The fact that some of the Báb’s most distinguished early disciples—including Mullá Ḥusayn, Quddús, and, most clearly, Ṭáhirih—had become aware of Bahá'u'lláh’s station before the Síyáh-Chál episode provides additional evidence in support of this thesis. Bahá'u'lláh’s act of revealing Tablets at Badasht (1848), as well as His lofty claims in the *Lawḥ-i-Ḥamd-i-Muṣḥa‘sha‘* (1851?)—in which He seems to identify Himself with the Manifestations of the past—constitute clear evidence, prior to His imprisonment in the Síyáh-Chál, of His earlier awakening to “the period of manifestation and guidance” (see note 22), even during the lifetime and Ministry of the Báb.

¹⁰³ Bahá'u'lláh Himself later affirmed this idea in one of His Writings: “O my Lord, my Master, and the Goal of my Desire! I have heard that Thou hast declared this to be a Day whereon if anyone, with complete sincerity, were to ask but once, ‘Show Thyself to me’, then from the heaven of Divine Utterance he would hear: ‘Look, and thou shalt behold Me!’ From this blessed and exalted utterance the station of this Day is made clear and evident.” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Ad‘iy-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-Maḥbúb* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at as-Sa‘adah, 1920), pp. 366–67; authorized translation available on the Bahá'í Reference Library, <http://www.bahai.org/r/742371889> [accessed 1 May 2025]).

Author Biographies

Bijan Masumian obtained a PhD in Instructional Systems Design and Technology from the University of Texas at Austin. Most of his professional life was spent at Advanced Micro Devices (AMD), where he developed the first Computer-Based Training courses for AMD in the mid-1990s and managed multiple global eLearning platforms for employee development. His research interests are in the areas of Bábí-Bahá'í Studies. He has co-authored books with his wife Farnaz and his son Adib, as well as several Bábí-Bahá'í Studies articles independently and with his son. He has also published in the field of Learning Technologies.

Adib Masumian has contributed articles on several Bahá'í topics to various online and print publications. He is making an ongoing effort to provisionally translate selections from the Persian and Arabic Bahá'í Writings, along with other Persian Bahá'í literature, for the benefit of English speakers. His translation of an iconic account of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks and travels in Europe was published in 2024 under the title 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Europe, 1912–1913. He has been working in the field of eLearning since 2013 and received his MA in Learning Technologies from the University of Texas at Austin in 2015.

Paper

Quddús and the Story of Joseph: A Typological Exploration

Boris Handal

Abstract

The story of Joseph, son of Jacob, as told in the Book of Genesis and the Qur'án, has been widely interpreted as a parable of sacrifice, patience, and divine favour. Its significance has been explored across Judaic, Christian, Islamic, Bábí, and Bahá'í traditions. This paper examines how Quddús, the most outstanding disciple of the Báb, can be meaningfully understood through the lens of Joseph's narrative. In one of His Writings, Bahá'u'lláh likens the figure of Quddús to that of Joseph. Rather than asserting a direct and absolute analogy, this study offers a typological framework for exploring shared motifs, including exile, leadership, trials, and ultimate vindication. A key objective is to provide a structured and reasoned approach to typological figuration, addressing both the possibilities and limits of drawing such comparisons.

Editorial note: This article was revised on 24 Sept 2025; one sentence on pp 5 has been changed from 'In the Bahá'í Faith, Joseph is considered a minor prophet rather than a Manifestation of God.' to 'According to the Guardian, Joseph was one of the "Sent Ones" of the Qur'an, meaning a Manifestation of God.'

Introduction

The connections between Joseph's story and the ministries of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh have been broadly explored.¹ These analyses frame the Joseph narrative as a metanarrative for spiritual

¹ Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini, 'The Commentary on the Sura of Joseph', in *A Most Noble Pattern*, ed. by Todd Lawson and Omid Ghaemmaghami (Oxford: George Ronald, 2012), pp. 6-27.

Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini, 'Qoddus, Moḥammad-'Alī Bārforuši', *Encyclopædia Iranica* (2009), <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/qoddus-mohammad-ali-barforusi> [accessed 1 May 2025].

Jim Stokes, 'Story of Joseph in Five Religious Traditions', *World Order*, 28.3 (Spring 1997), pp. 35-46.

Nader Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart: Understanding the Writings of the Báb* (Ottawa and Waterloo, ON: Association for Bahá'í Studies and Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008).

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Todd Lawson, 'Joseph's Dreams and the Day of the Covenant: Poetics of Quranic Pedagogy in Sura Yūsuf', in *Teachers and Students: Reflections on Learning in Near and Middle Eastern Cultures* (Leiden: Brill, 2024), pp. 403-440.

S. Le Wei, 'Typological Figuration of Mystical Elements in Jesuit Figurists' Re-interpretation of Chinese Classics', in *Encountering China's Past. New Frontiers in Translation Studies*, ed. by L. Qi S. and Tobias

transformation across Abrahamic religions. This paper extends that reasoning to Quddús, examining how his life resonates with aspects of Joseph's journey.

Rather than positioning Quddús as a definitive Joseph-figure, this study uses a typological approach to examine significant shared themes. The paper begins with an overview of Quddús' life and historical significance. It then contextualizes the Súrih of Joseph and its Bahá'í interpretations. Subsequently, the study explores key thematic parallels between Joseph and Quddús, clarifying how these insights serve as an interpretive lens rather than a rigid framework.

Methodology: A Structured Approach to Typological Figuration

The methodology used in the analysis below is typological figuration, where mythical figures and legends are juxtaposed across times and spaces to generate new, shared interpretations of history. It belongs to the field of theological symbolism and allows authors to go beyond a single context, paralleling human and community experiences in dual religious events.²

Typological figuration cannot only portray discrete events but also generate metaphors and unleash human imagination into the realm of divine mysteries. These perspectives project a historical space where the analysis is not focused on the story itself but also the significance of small events, taken at distinct entry points of the narrative and somehow disconnected from the main plot. Such versatility allows the examination of biographies from a horizontal rather than a vertical structure with unexpected caveats and nuisances inviting more profound reflections. The resulting analogies between cases are meant to point out something greater than the events themselves.³

Shoghi Effendi seems to use this methodology when comparing the lives of the Báb and Jesus: "... we cannot fail to discern a remarkable similarity [the Báb's] to the distinguishing features of the career of Jesus Christ".⁴ Parallels between John the Baptist and the Báb have been made by Bahá'u'lláh.⁵

Typological figuration, as applied here, contrasts historical figures to reveal shared archetypal patterns without asserting absolute equivalence. This method emphasizes theological symbolism, where parallels serve to illuminate broader spiritual meanings rather than proving direct historical relationships⁶. This paper follows the following structured framework:

- Theme Selection – Identifying shared motifs (e.g., exile, sacrifice, leadership, divine favor).
- Contextual Validation – Establishing scriptural and historical grounding for each motif.
- Counterpoints – Acknowledging where the analogy does not fully hold and considering alternative comparisons.
- Significance – Discussing how the Joseph-Quddús connection enhances understanding of Quddús' role in Bahá'í history.

(Singapore: Springer, 2022), pp. 145–163, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-0648-0_9 [accessed 1 May 2025].

² Wei, 'Typological Figuration'.

³ Lawson, 'Typological Figuration'.

⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1979), p. 56.

⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Badí'* (Hofheim: Bahá'í-Verlag, 2008), p. 79, provisionally translated by Adib Masumian and Necati Alkan, August 2019. <https://adibmasumian.com/translations/bahauallah-on-john-the-baptist/> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁶ Ibid.; Lawson, 'Typological Figuration'; Lawson, 'Joseph's Dreams'.

Typological analogies, while engaging, often rest on broad similarities that could apply to other figures. Without deeper textual analysis from sacred Writings—beyond this paper's scope—these comparisons remain limited and non-exclusive to Quddús.

About Quddús

Quddús was the last of the eighteen Letters of the Living, a title bestowed by the Báb (1819-1850) on His first disciples. The Báb claimed to be the *Gate of God*, the new Messenger of God hailed as the return of prophet Elijah (Malachi 4:5, King James Version) and John the Baptist (Matthew 16:13–16), and the appearance of the Promised One of Islam, namely, the Qá'im ("He Who shall arise" or "He Who ariseth").⁷ Quddús' encounter with the Báb and immediate conversion was a turning point, marking his life forever.

In a Tablet from the Báb to Quddús, published in the Dawn-Breakers,⁸ he is referred to as the "Eighteenth Temple".⁹ About him, the Báb wrote, "Thou art the first, for there is no first save thee, and the last, for there is no last save thee."¹⁰

The Báb referred to the exalted station of Quddús as "in whom God hath gloried before the Concourse on high by virtue of his absolute detachment...".¹¹ His title, Quddús (in Arabic, "Holy"), was given by Bahá'u'lláh. In a Tablet of Visitation revealed by the Báb in honour of His young disciple, he is referred to as the "beloved of my heart, my king of glory, and my irrevocable purpose, the sovereign Lord of my beginning and end!"¹²

Quddús was chosen to accompany the Báb to Mecca in 1844. He had previously studied in prestigious Islamic schools in Mashhad and Karbilá, gaining extensive theological knowledge, and became known for his piety. Quddús spread the Báb's teachings throughout Iran, leading to the first mass enrolments. He was a significant figure at the historic Conference of Badasht, where the laws of the Báb were openly proclaimed. He actively defended the Faith of the Báb in the midst of severe persecution and opposition.

Quddús is considered the most illustrious of the believers in the Báb and played a significant role in the formation and development of the early Bábí community. Quddús was a dynamic leader, along with his companion Mullá Husayn —the first Letter of the Living, during the battles at the Shaykh Ṭabarsí fort where over five hundred believers were sieged by Persian state forces between October 1848 to May 1849. These violent clashes resulted in the death of hundreds of believers.¹³ Despite being largely outnumbered, the defenders showed extraordinary resilience and faith.

⁷ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 58.

⁸ Nabíl-i-A'zam, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970).

⁹ Stephen Lambden, *Muhammad 'Alí Bārfurushí Quddús*, 2021, <https://hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/4081> [accessed 30 April 2024].

¹⁰ The Báb, *Tablet of Visitation for Quddús*. Provisional translation authorized by the Bahá'í World Centre. This Tablet of Visitation was originally published in Muhammad 'Alí Malik Khusraví, *Tarikh-i-shubadāyi Amr*, I. Ṭihrán, 130 B.E./1973-4, pp. 412-14.

¹¹ The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*. (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), pp. 89-90.

¹² The Báb, *Tablet of Visitation for Quddús*.

¹³ Siyamak Zabihi-Moghaddam. "The Bábí-state Conflict at Shaykh Ṭabarsí." *Iranian Studies*, 35, no. 1-3, (2002), pp. 87-112.

In the battles and violent conflicts that followed, his spirit remained unwavering and rejuvenated. In deadly clashes, Quddús displayed matchless bravery, leaving a testament to his unwavering certainty, leadership, and uncompromising defence of his beliefs. The siege was a momentous and yet dreadful event in the history of the Faith of the Báb. After being deceived by the monarch's representative with an offer of free passage, Quddús was detained, and the fort survivors were massacred at the site. Subsequently, he was subjected to a three-day farcical trial to be finally martyred in his home city of Bárfurúsh on 16 May 1849 at the age of twenty-seven years. After being killed with knives by a fanatic mob in the public square, his body was beheaded and literally torn to pieces, with the shattered limbs subsequently set on fire.¹⁴

Educated personally by the Prophet for a year, Quddús best embodied His attributes and, therefore, can be considered the finest mirror to understand His revelation. Quddús' spiritual transformation sprang from being a motherless country child, from a dispossessed rice farming family to becoming one of the most significant figures in religious history. Essential components of his story are told in the book *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*.¹⁵

Quddús was identified as one of the three messengers accused of imposture mentioned in the Qur'án (36:13, Arberry version), along with the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.¹⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá referred to Quddús as the “*Moon of Guidance*” and the Báb as the “*Sun of Reality*”¹⁷ and identified both of them as the two ‘Witnesses’ of the Latter Days (Revelation 1:1–14) and as the spiritual return of Prophet Muḥammad and the Imam ‘Alí.¹⁸ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá also stated that the Báb and Quddús, “these two Personages—one the founder and the other the promoter—arose and were as two candlesticks, for they illumined the whole world with the light of truth”.¹⁹ However, the Universal House of Justice advises that, “It is apparent that, despite his uniquely high station, Quddús is not regarded as a Manifestation of God”.²⁰

Furthermore, in the Bahá'í Writings and historical sources, Quddús is compared to other sacred figures. For instance, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá likens Quddús to Imám ‘Alí;²¹ in *The Dawn-Breakers*, His *Tafsír-i-Şád* is compared to the *Qur'án*,²² and according to a statement attributed to Bahá'u'lláh, his martyrdom is likened to that of Christ.²³

¹⁴ Boris Handal, *Quddús: The First in Rank* (IngramSparks, 2025).

¹⁵ Nabil-i-A'zam, *The Dawn-Breakers*.

¹⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*; Saiedi, ‘*Concealment and Revelation*’.

¹⁷ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá *Some Answered Questions*. 2nd ed. (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2014). Ch 11, sect. 30.

¹⁸ Ibid.; ‘Alí (c. 600—661 CE), the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muḥammad, was designated as His successor.

¹⁹ Ibid. Ch 11, sect. 29.

²⁰ The Universal House of Justice is the supreme body of the Bahá'í Faith.

The Universal House of Justice. *Letters of Living, Dawn-Breakers, Quddús, Terraces*. Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer dated August 1975. https://bahai-library.com/uhi_letters_Quddús_dawnbreakers [accessed 1 May 2025].

²¹ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, Ch 11, sect. 28.

²² Nabil-i-A'zam, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 357.

²³ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 49-50.

The Súrih of Joseph

In Islam, a whole Súrih (chapter) in the Qur'án is dedicated to Joseph. This chapter is referred to as the "Best of the Stories" (Qur'án 12:3) probably because of its mystical wealth and enchanting narrative. It is also the only self-contained Súrih dedicated to a single prophet, encompassing a beginning and a happy end.

The Báb wrote a commentary on the Súrih of Joseph, also called the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*. The term *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* can be translated as "The Self-Subsisting Lord of All Names".²⁴ This Book was revealed on the eve of the Báb's Declaration to Mullá Husayn on the 23rd of May 1844. The *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* offers a comprehensive and excellent interpretation of the mystical significance of the story of Joseph. In His Writings, the Báb referred to the prophetic figure of *Him Whom God shall make manifest*. Such a designation was given by the Báb to the Promised One to follow Him, namely, Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), a title in Arabic that means the "Glory of God".

In brief, in both the Biblical and Quranic accounts, Jacob, Abraham's grandson, is a patriarch and a prophet (Qur'án 2:102). His son Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers yet rose to become Egypt's most senior magistrate. Later, while buying grain in Egypt for their family, Joseph's brothers recognized him only through a sequence of unexpected events. Joseph ultimately reunited with his father, Jacob, and forgave his brothers. The central theme of the story are Joseph's tests from youth to maturity.

The Tablet of Mubáhilih

The *Tablet of Mubáhilih*, or Tablet of the Confrontation, was revealed in Adrianople at the time when Mírzá Yahyá, Bahá'u'lláh's half-brother, openly rebelled against Him and sought the leadership of the Bábí-Bahá'í community. It was addressed to Mullá Šádiq-i-Khurasání where Bahá'u'lláh compared Quddús to the biblical Joseph.²⁵ The following is a provisional translation from extracts of the *Tablet of Mubáhilih*:

This is a Tablet which hath been expounded from the Preserved Tablet, that it may be a guide and mercy unto all who dwell in the heavens and on earth. And therein hath been mentioned a remnant of My kindred, he who hath endured in the path of his Lord that which caused the company of the well-favoured to tremble. Blessed art thou, O My Name, for the breezes of the fragrances of the garment of the mighty Joseph who hath been known as Muḥammad-‘Alí [Quddús]²⁶, have wafted over thee. He, verily, is the one who hath been called by Our name, Quddús among the Concourse on High, and by Subbúḥ [the most Sanctified One] in the cities of eternity, and by all the names in the kingdom of names. Through him, My sovereignty and My power, My grandeur and My majesty were made manifest, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth. We sprinkled upon him from this Sea that which caused him to be severed from all other than Me, moving him from the west of stillness to the east of exhilaration, until he sacrificed his life in My Path. So was his inner being rejoiced, though the eyes of the favoured ones were made to weep. Blessed art thou that thou didst have the honour of meeting him, and of hearing his melodies, and of

²⁴ Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, p. 130.

²⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *Lanḥ-i-Mubáhilih*. pp. 277-281. <https://www.bahai.org/fa/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/additional-tablets-bahauallah/138668755/1#119537332> [accessed 1 May 2025].

²⁶ Muḥammad ‘Alí is the birth name of Quddús. ‘Alí Muḥammad is the birth name of the Báb.

communing with his wronged and lonely soul. He standeth present before the Throne, and weepeth sore over that which hath been inflicted upon Me by the army of evil ones.²⁷

Joseph's Story in the Bahá'í Writings

Joseph's life is outlined in the book of Genesis (Chapters 37-50) and in the Súrih of Joseph. Joseph is also mentioned *in passing* in John (4:5); Acts (7:9-18); Hebrews (11:21-22) and the Book of Revelation (7:8).

In the Qur'án, Joseph is one of the twenty-five prophets (*nabí*) recorded in that Holy Book. A passage of the Qur'án reads: "Verily Joseph came to you with clear signs before..." (40:34). Joseph is mentioned in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*²⁸ and in several other Writings. According to the Guardian, 'Joseph was one of the "Sent Ones" of the Qur'an, meaning a Manifestation of God'.²⁹ In verse 12:6, the Qur'án asserts Joseph's station:

... It is thus that thy Lord shall choose thee and will teach thee the interpretation of dark sayings, and will perfect his favours on thee and on the family of Jacob, as of old he perfected it on thy fathers Abraham and Isaac; verily thy Lord is Knowing, Wise!

The story of Joseph has plenty of rich metaphors, which have been elaborated in the Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Some of these metaphors relate to the chronology of the account, although some are more mystical with little historical context. Various primary and minor themes appear in the Bahá'í Writings, sometimes with multiple meanings.

Among these major themes are the mystical dimension of places and events, the theme of longing for God, the spiritual significance of the concept of garment and the space of revelation, which intertwine with the figures of the Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and Quddús.

In the Bahá'í Writings, the identified places in the story have mystical meanings in addition to the geography. For instance, Egypt is called "the Egypt of love".³⁰ Egypt plays a central role in the story. Being more than the Pharaonic kingdom, in the Bahá'í Writings, Egypt is also called the "celestial Egypt"³¹ and the "Egypt of the spirit".³² As such, Egypt is where the "Joseph-like beauty of the Friend" resides.³³

Referring to Joseph being sold in Egypt as a child apparently in a bazaar, 'Abdu'l-Bahá exhorts that we should, as persons striving to acquire the spiritual attributes of Joseph, "give our all to buy the Divine Joseph in the market place".³⁴ According to Bahá'u'lláh, "In Egypt he [Joseph] hid his station from

²⁷ Provisional translation authorized by the Bahá'í World Centre. Bahá'u'lláh, *Lamḥ-i-Mubábilih* (Tablet of Confrontation I), in 'Abdu'l-Hamíd Ishráq-Khávari (ed.). *Ma'iydih-i-Ásmání*, 4, pp. 277-81. <https://www.bahai.org/fa/library/authoritative-texts/bahaullah/additional-tablets-bahaullah/138668755/1#119537332> [accessed 1 May 2025].

²⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1989). sect. 28.

²⁹ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, July 30, 1941. Cited in *Lights of Guidance*, sect. 1265.

³⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Call of the Divine Beloved, 'The Seven Valleys'*, sect. 2:17.

³¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gems of Divine Mysteries (Javáhiru'l-Asrár)*. (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2002), sect. 29.

³² 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Light of the World: 76 Selected Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*. (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2021), sect. 70.

³³ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Call of the Divine Beloved, 'The Seven Valleys'*, sect. 2:17.

³⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful*. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), p. 31.

people because he found them heedless and pretenders”³⁵ and “When Joseph—peace be upon him—unveiled his bright countenance in the Egypt of beauty, he set ablaze the souls of a myriad buyers”.³⁶

Jacob had always hoped that he would eventually reunite with Joseph and knew he was alive somewhere. Jacob's longing to meet his lost son is an essential component of the story that Bahá'u'lláh highlighted, particularly in the Seven Valleys: “How many Jacobs will he see, hunting after his Joseph”.³⁷

Another central metaphor revolves around Joseph's garment (Qamīš, in Arabic, representing a robe, coat, tunic, or shirt). In Joseph's story, the fragrance of his garments is the vehicle for his father, who is too distant and blind to recognize him (Qur'án 12:18; Genesis 25-27; 93). According to Lawson “the Qur'án calls a shirt (qamīš) and the Hebrew Bible calls a coat of many colors (kethoneth)”.³⁸ The metaphor has various meanings. For instance, in referring to the incident when Joseph's brothers dipped Joseph's garments in goat blood, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá says that such an evil deed was done “with the blood of vain imaginings”.³⁹

The Bahá'í Writings also explain that the garment metaphor represents recognition of divinity. The metaphor of the garment as a divine vehicle also appears in the New Testament: “People brought all their sick to him [Jesus] and begged him to let the sick just touch the hem of his garment, and all who touched it were healed” (Matthew 14:35). In the Qur'án (12:93), Joseph said to his brothers, “[And now] go and take this garment of mine and lay it over my father's face, and he will recover his sight”, and so it happened. As seen before, when the brothers return from Egypt, Jacob, from a distance, senses the fragrances of Joseph's shirt and says: “You may think I am senile, but I certainly sense the smell of Joseph” (Qur'án 12:94).

The following analysis of the mystical associations among the story of Joseph, Bahá'u'lláh, and the Báb has been done separately. However, some themes apply simultaneously to both Central Figures of the Faith.

The Báb as a Joseph

It is noteworthy that in various instances in Their writings, Bahá'u'lláh⁴⁰ and the Báb⁴¹ identified Themselves as Joseph. The Báb refers to Himself as “the Joseph of Divine Unity” and “the Joseph of the Supreme Origin”.⁴² Likewise, according to Nosratollah Mohammadhosseini, “In the Book of Names (Kitáb al-Asmá'), in the chapter entitled ‘The Name of God, the Bearer of Glad-Tidings’ (Ismu'lláh al-Bashír), the Báb identifies himself as a herald to the Joseph of Bahá' (Yusuf al-Bahá'), namely the Promised One”.⁴³ The same author affirms that “By Joseph, He [the Báb] says, is meant

³⁵ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Makātib-i Abd al-Bahá*, vol. 2. Cairo, 1330/1912. p. 176.

³⁶ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Light of the World*, sect. 70.

³⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *Call of the Divine Beloved*, sect. 2:9.

³⁸ Lawson, ‘Typological Figuration’, p. 232.

³⁹ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Light of the World*, sect. 63.

⁴⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, sect. 29 ; Anton Haddad “*Tablet of Joseph (Lawh-i Yusuf)*, by Bahá'u'lláh (provisional translation).” Untitled 1904 compilation, vol 1 (Bahá'í Board of Counsel, 1904), pp.1-8. https://bahai-library.com/bahauallah_lawh_yusuf/ [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁴¹ Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, p.142 ; Mohammadhosseini, ‘The Commentary on the Surah of Joseph’, p. 10.

⁴² Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, p. 184.

⁴³ Mohammadhosseini, ‘The Commentary on the Surah of Joseph’, p. 19.

the Qá'im (the Báb Himself) and the promised Remnant of God. By Jacob is meant Muḥammad, the Messenger of God, or his descendants who are the Báb's forefathers".⁴⁴

Divine Powers

Some central themes can be drawn from Joseph's story. According to Nader Saiedi, "the Báb interpreted the ultimate meaning of the obeisance of the moon, the sun, and the eleven stars before Joseph as recognition of the Báb by Muḥammad and the [eleven] Imáms".⁴⁵ When Jacob urged Joseph (Qur'án 12:5) not to tell his dream to his brothers to avoid jealousy, accordingly "the Báb should not reveal the whole truth to the people and should be patient with them".⁴⁶ Further, Jacob's observations to his son, "Thus will thy Lord choose thee and teach thee the interpretation of stories" (Qur'án 12:6), infers "that God has chosen the Báb as the recipient of his Revelation".⁴⁷

The Well

According to Nader Saiedi, the Báb sheds new light on many aspects of Joseph's story through His multiple interpretations. "The well stands for the well of Absolute Unity", wrote Nader Saiedi. "It is deep and dark, a place where all differentiations and distinctions are obliterated—the unfathomable realm of utter effacement and nothingness".⁴⁸ Mohammadhosseini wrote that "According to the Báb ... by Zulaykha is meant a person or the people who will turn away from the Báb".⁴⁹ Nader Saiedi adds that in the Writings of the Báb, "The prisoners' dreams [in Joseph's cell] relate to the letters of affirmation and the letters of negation".⁵⁰

The Caravan

Joseph's residence is alluded to as the "celestial Canaan," and it is stated that the brothers, referred to as a caravan of buyers, also came from remote Karbilá, searching for the Promised One, the Báb.⁵¹ The brothers' caravan from Canaan to Egypt, in the Báb's interpretation, is more a mystical journey to recognize the beloved than a mere commercial transaction. They pass through several cities whose ultimate purpose is the recognition of the Promised One veiled in His mysteries.⁵² Further, Mohammadhosseini suggests that "By Joseph's brothers is meant the people who have not already recognized the sublime station of the Báb, and He [the Báb] is trying to introduce Himself to them".⁵³

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Imáms are the descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad. 'Alí, His successor, and eleven of his direct descendants in the direct line of succession constitute the exponents of the Islam Shí'ih religion; Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, p. 149.

⁴⁶ Mohammadhosseini, 'The Commentary on the Surah of Joseph', p. 11.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, p. 119.

⁴⁹ Mohammadhosseini, 'The Commentary on the Surah of Joseph', p. 11.

⁵⁰ Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, p. 156.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., p. 152.

⁵³ Mohammadhosseini, 'The Commentary on the Surah of Joseph', p. 11.

The Pharaoh's Court

About the Pharaoh's disturbing dream, Mohammadhosseini affirms that "the Báb interprets the seven years of abundance as his own Revelation and the advent of the Promised One of the Báb and the years of dryness and famine to the people who will turn away from him".⁵⁴ Furthermore, Bahá'u'lláh has affirmed that the food Joseph stockpiled and provided (Genesis 41:55-56) was spiritual. The Bahá'í Writings explains that the power of Joseph was the power of God⁵⁵ and that his court was the throne where he put his parents (Qur'án 12: 100). In the *Four Valleys* Bahá'u'lláh seems to allude to that throne as a mystical space, "If the mystic knowers be among them that have attained the beauty of the Beloved, this station is the throne of the inmost heart and the secret of divine guidance".⁵⁶

Bahá'u'lláh as Joseph

In the *Lawh-i-Ghulámu'l-Khuld* (Tablet of the Immortal Youth), Bahá'u'lláh associates Himself with the Joseph of the Qur'án,⁵⁷ as the "most noble Angel", the "immortal Youth" that has "come with a mighty cause", "a transcendent cause," "with a mighty spirit," "with an ancient light," and "with enchanting grace".⁵⁸

Joseph's Fragrance

Further, on the significance of the mystical fragrances of Joseph's garment, the Báb wrote, "It behooveth the faithful to inhale the fragrance of sweet savours"⁵⁹ and in turn, Bahá'u'lláh wrote in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, "From My laws the sweet-smelling savor of My garment can be smelled...".⁶⁰ The Blessed Beauty also wrote in the *Four Valleys* about the "musk-scented fragrance of the garment of Há from the Joseph of Bahá", and He added, "verily He seemeth near at hand, though ye may think Him far away".⁶¹

These mystical fragrances represent a metaphor for spiritual reality⁶² with a hidden mystical curative effect. When Jacob recovered his sight after so much crying and missing his sons, according to the Bahá'í Writings, he also recovered his inner eye. According to Bahá'u'lláh, "...until, like Jacob, thou forsake thine outward eyes, thou shalt never open the eye of thine inward being".⁶³

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *Call of the Divine Beloved*, sect. 7.

⁵⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *Days of Remembrance*, *Lawh-i-Ghulámu'l-Khuld* (Tablet of the Immortal Youth). (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2017). sect. 12, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/days-remembrance/> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁵⁸ See Ibid., sect. 6, sect. 3, sect. 4, sect. 5, sect. 6 and sect. 21 respectively.

⁵⁹ Saiedi, *Gate of the Heart*, p. 81.

⁶⁰ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), sect. 4.

⁶¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *The Call of the Divine Beloved*, *The Four Valleys*, sect. 7:33.

⁶² Lawson, 'Typological Figuration', p. 231.

⁶³ Bahá'u'lláh. *The Call of the Divine Beloved*, *The Seven Valleys*, sect. 2:17.

Egypt

Egypt, in the Bahá'í Writings, also represent a place of revelation. Alluding to Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explained that:

Now the Joseph of the celestial Canaan, the ruler of the Egypt of the spirit ... hath rent asunder the veils and emerged resplendent in the midmost heart of the world. But alas, all the buyers have busied themselves with the world of water and clay, have pursued their selfish desires, and have hence been deprived of beholding His Countenance and attaining His presence. Render thou thanks unto God that thou hast been among the buyers who seek that Divine Beauty, and among those who are enamoured by the Mystic Beloved. The glory of God rest upon thee and upon all those who have been enraptured by His Beauty.⁶⁴

The Breaking of the Covenant

An additional central theme refers to Bahá'u'lláh as the victim of His brother Mírzá Yahyá's iniquities. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote, "Since in His commentary on the Súrih of Joseph, the Báb — may my life be offered up for His sake — hath identified Joseph as the Manifest Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh], the true Joseph, and hath referred to Him as "our great and omnipotent Master", then whenever thou readest it, thou wilt but weep and grieve for the wrongs suffered by the Blessed Beauty".⁶⁵

In this regard, Shoghi Effendi has also highlighted that the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* also known as the *Commentary on the Súrih of Joseph* had as a "fundamental purpose...to forecast what the true Joseph (Bahá'u'lláh) would, in a succeeding Dispensation, endure at the hands of one who was at once His arch-enemy and blood brother".⁶⁶ In a Tablet also revealed in Adrianople, according to historian Adib Taherzadeh, Bahá'u'lláh "refers to Himself allegorically as the One who has been thrown into a deep well by reason of the envy of those who had been among His servants, who were created through one word from Him and who have now arisen against their Lord".⁶⁷

Commenting on this violation of the Covenant of God, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote, "The robe of the Joseph of the all-glorious and unseen Kingdom is dyed with blood, the raiment of the Ancient Beauty stained crimson".⁶⁸ In a similar vein, 'Abdu'l-Bahá interprets the narrative of Joseph's being cast into the well as an allegorical reference to the violation of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant during His ministry.

He is the All Glorious!

O thou who hast drunk from the fountain of life: Verily, the caravan of the Kingdom set out into the wilderness of the heavenly Realm and sent forth its search party to find water in a dark and gloomy well. As they lowered the pail they announced, "Joyful tidings: behold, the youth of the Covenant who, falsely accused, was abandoned in this deep well by His brothers and was subsequently sold [into slavery] for a paltry price. Woe, then, unto them

⁶⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Light of the World*, sect. 70.

⁶⁵ Ibid., sect. 465.

⁶⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 23.

⁶⁷ Adib Taherzadeh. *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh: Mazra'ih and Bahjí: 1877–1892*, vol. 4. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987), p. 81.

⁶⁸ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Light of the World*, sect. 414.

for that which they have done, and glory be upon those who acquired Him from His brothers".⁶⁹

Joseph as an Expression of Beauty

Both the Bible (Genesis 39:6) and the Qur'án (12:31) refer to Joseph's physical and spiritual beauty. 'Abdu'l-Bahá described him as having "a face radiant as the sun and a beauty far above the praise and description of such as are endued with understanding".⁷⁰ This concept of spiritual Beauty has passed to the Bahá'í Faith, which refers to Bahá'u'lláh as the "Blessed Beauty" or "Ancient Beauty." In His words, "Naught is seen in My temple but the Temple of God, and in My beauty but His Beauty".⁷¹ Referring to the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá commented:

Such is the case with the holy Manifestations of God. Such in particular is the case with the divine reality of the Most Great Name, the Abhá Beauty. When once He standeth revealed unto the assembled peoples of the world and appeareth with such comeliness, such enchantments — alluring as a Joseph in the Egypt of the spirit — He enslaveth all the lovers on earth.⁷²

Highlighting these mystical associations between the believer and the Beloved within Joseph's story, Bahá'u'lláh wrote:

Cleanse thy heart from every blasphemous whispering and evil allusion thou hast heard in the past, that thou mayest inhale the sweet savours of eternity from the Joseph of faithfulness, gain admittance into the celestial Egypt, and perceive the fragrances of enlightenment.⁷³

In narrating the exile of Bahá'u'lláh and His companions to the prison city of 'Akká on 31 August 1868, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote, "Once they were thrown into a pit, a kind of well, and suffered agonies all through the night"⁷⁴ and that the next day, a believer lamented: "O you who oppress us! Are we Joseph the Prophet that you have thrown us in this well? Remember how He rose out of the well as high as the full moon? We too walk the pathway of God, we too are down here for His sake, and we know that these depths are the heights of the Lord".⁷⁵ Furthermore, on the subject of opposition, Bahá'u'lláh in the Suriy-i-Javád revealed:

Say: O people! Dust fill your mouths, and ashes blind your eyes, for having bartered away the Divine Joseph for the most paltry of prices. Oh, the misery that resteth upon you, ye that are far astray! Have ye imagined in your hearts that ye possess the power to outstrip

⁶⁹ Youness Afroukhteh, *Memories of Nine Years in 'Akká*. Tr. Riaz Masrour (Oxford: George Ronald, 2003), pp. 57.

⁷⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Light of the World*, sect. 70.

⁷¹ Shoghi Effendi. *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974), p. 109.

⁷² 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), p. 64.

⁷³ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, sect. 29.

⁷⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Memorials of the Faithful*, p. 121.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Him and His Cause? Far from it! To this He, Himself, the All-Powerful, the Most Exalted, the Most Great, doth testify.⁷⁶

Interestingly, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá compared the teaching of the Faith “to perfume the senses of the seekers with the fragrance of the robe of the divine Joseph”.⁷⁷

Quddús and Joseph

Quddús’ life contains various personal, immanent, mystical and historical motifs, paralleling Joseph's narrative described in Genesis and in the Qur’án with the life of Quddús. Innumerable mystical motifs can be derived from Joseph's life and applied to Quddús. Some might look chronological, while others appear to have a more open spiritual domain. These motifs seem highly metaphorical as they point to a spiritual significance rather than a discrete event.

Personal Themes

The section below outlines some similarities in (a) their shared provenance and personal development and (b) Quddús’ and Joseph's attributes.

Within the first of the aforementioned two clusters, *their rural origin* is evident. Both Quddús and Joseph came from a countryside background. Joseph was a shepherd (37:2). When the Pharaoh asked his brothers about their occupation, they answered, “We thy servants are shepherds, from our infancy until now, both we and our fathers” (46:34). According to Hushmand Dehghan, Quddús’ father was a poor farmer living in the outskirts of Bárforúsh.⁷⁸

Likewise, it can be said that both experienced similar *family developments*. Both Quddús⁷⁹ and Joseph’s⁸⁰ mothers died when they were very young. Some Bible scholars argue that the *kethoneth* (long coloured garment) represented the birthright of the first born.⁸¹ Reuben had forfeited his birthright, Joseph's oldest brother, because of incest (1 Chronicles 5:1). Hence, his birthright as the oldest brother was forfeited and transferred to Joseph, who became Jacob’s *primogenito* (in Latin, “firstborn”) de facto.⁸² Quddús’ also held the family primogenitary from his father, Áqá Muḥammad Šálih.⁸³

Furthermore, *Quddús’ provenance* can be traced back to Jacob himself through Muḥammad. Abraham had three wives Sarah, Hagar and Keturah. Jacob was born in Sarah, whereas Ishmael came from Hagar. In the Bible, the Jewish and the Arab people are considered descendants of Jacob and Ishmael, respectively (Genesis 25:18). Jacob was named Israel (in Hebrew, God persists or rules) and the patriarch of the twelve Jewish tribes while to Ishmael, God promised that his

⁷⁶ Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*. Tr. Shoghi Effendi. (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1978). Ch3 sect. 4.

⁷⁷ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Light of the World*, sect. 21.

⁷⁸ Hushmand Dehghan, *Ganj-i-Pinhán: Sargozasht va Asare Hazrate Ghodoos* (Luxembourg: Adel, 2016), p. 32.

⁷⁹ Mohammadhosseini, ‘Qoddus, Moḥammad-‘Ali Bārforúši’.

⁸⁰ Frederick M. Strickert, *Rachel weeping: Jews, Christians, and Muslims at the fortress tomb* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007).

⁸¹ William Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1979).

⁸² Years later, Jacob formalized this birthright on one of Joseph’s grandchildren (Genesis 48:17).

⁸³ Fazel Mazandarani, *Taríkh Zubúr al-Haqq (History of the Manifestation of Truth)*, vol 3. Tíhrán. 1944.

people would become a great nation (Genesis 21:13; 17:20), the Arabs. The Qur'án (2:127-129; 14:37) implies that Muḥammad was a descendant of Ishmael and consequently from Abraham. Such a connection is confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.⁸⁴ Interestingly, Quddús's mother came from Muḥammad's lineage,⁸⁵ making Quddús a logical descendant of Abraham, Joseph's grandfather.

It is within the realm of individual attributes where spiritual themes began to emerge to enrich human experience. Both Quddús and Joseph had *noble and magnetic personalities* which were admired by all and crowned by supreme spiritual beauty.⁸⁶ Similarly, the Writings of the Báb and the Qur'án both referred to Joseph and Quddús as angels.⁸⁷ In addition, both Joseph and Quddús were referred to as "youth" in the Qur'án (12:31), and by the Báb respectively.⁸⁸ Joseph and Quddús were of similar age when they arrived in Egypt and Iraq, respectively. Joseph was seventeen when he was sent to Egypt as an enslaved person and Quddús was eighteen when he began his Islamic studies in Iraq, in both cases hundreds of kilometres away (Genesis 42:23).

Fraternal forgiveness is a central component of Joseph's and Quddús' stories. According to the Qur'án story (12:95), Joseph, the second youngest of the twelve brothers, becomes the "big brother", pardoning his sinful brethren. In the same way, Quddús, one of the youngest Letters of the Living, pardoned the people of Bárfurúsh before his martyrdom. Likewise, Joseph blames his brothers' actions on their ignorance (Qur'án 12: 78-81), whereas Quddús, once commiserated with his enemies and prayed to God to turn the Bábís' enemies' ignorance into faith.⁸⁹ Furthermore, Joseph said later to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20). Quddús' last words bear witness to those sentiments, "I have striven to show them the path that leads to their salvation".⁹⁰

Joseph and Quddús taught us about *submitting themselves to the Will of God*. Joseph prayed, "O Originator of the heavens and the earth! You are my Guardian in this world and the Hereafter. Allow me to die as one who submits and join me with the righteous" (Qur'án 12:101). For instance, on the night of 24-25 January 1849, after being shot in his face, Quddús said to the Bábís at Shaykh Ṭabarsí "We should submit to whatever is the will of God. We should stand firm and steadfast in the hour of trial... Though my body be afflicted, my soul is immersed in gladness. My gratitude to God knows no bounds."⁹¹

⁸⁴ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, ch. 4, para. 4.

⁸⁵ Dehghan, *Ganj-i-Pinhán*, p. 32.

⁸⁶ Nabíl-i-A'ẓam, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 183.

Ruhi, Ibrahim (or Kirmání, Shaykh Ibrahim). *Kitáb-i-Quddúsiyyih (Book of Quddús)* also called *Tarikh al-Quddúsí*. Unpublished biography of Quddús. Kerman manuscript, Muharram AH 1339. p. 57.

⁸⁷ Book of Revelation, 4:4; 4:17; 11:16.; Qur'án 12:32.

⁸⁸ Nabíl-i-A'ẓam, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 70. It is noteworthy that the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh referred to themselves as the "Arabian Youth". See: The Báb. *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, pp.41 and 50; Bahá'u'lláh. *Lawh-i-Malláḥul-Quds (Tablet of the Holy Mariner) - Arabic*. https://oceanoflights.org/Baháullah-st-055-1-en/?lang=en&stems=arabian_youth"es=¶Id=para_33 [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁸⁹ Nabíl-i-A'ẓam, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 411.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 411.

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 368.

In addition to the above, the New Testament uses Joseph's account to *illustrate faith and reliance on God*: "It was by faith that Joseph, when he was about to die, said confidently that the people of Israel would leave Egypt. He even commanded them to take his bones with them when they left" (Hebrews 11:22). In Genesis (50:20), after being betrayed by his brothers, Joseph told them, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." Likewise, Quddús was praised by the Báb for "his being wholly devoted to the Will of God".⁹² For them, trials and tribulations catalysed growth and further development.

Both narratives exemplify the *profound humility* inherent in surrendering totally to divine guidance and mercy. About his divine capacity to interpret dreams, Joseph humbly gives glory to God over and over again, saying "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer" (Genesis, 41:16), and "God has shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do" (Genesis 41:28). And in the Qur'án, we found Joseph praying, "Cause me to die in submission to Thee, and join me with the righteous" (12:101). Joseph humbles himself in the sight of the Lord and makes sure that God is the one who gets all the glory. Even when empowered to seek vengeance, Joseph forgives his brothers, epitomizing submission to God's will, he told them, "No blame will there be upon you today" (Qur'án, 12:92).

Quddús' assertion of lacking significance himself, parallels Joseph's humility in attributing glory to God. Referring to himself, Quddús draws parallels to the revered fish of the Israelites while indicating being a descendant of Prophet Muḥammad: "Although, I have no rank or station, but I am no less than the fish of Israelites"⁹³ in the viewpoint of my holy ancestors, may the peace of God be upon them".⁹⁴ His prayers for divine alignment, those that have remained to posterity, mirror Joseph's acknowledgment of God's sovereignty. Furthermore, in Genesis (50:19) Joseph reminds his brothers that no matter how powerful he has become in Egypt, *he is not God*, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?" In turn, Quddús confessed in his communions, "Thy Glory beareth witness, there is no desire for me but Thee, no station but in Thy presence, no companion except Thee, and no place of dwelling but Thine" and "There is none other God but Him, the Most Exalted, the Most Great".⁹⁵

Moreover, Joseph is considered a symbol of *purity* for his virtues and in part for rejecting Zulaykha's advances remaining committed to his chastity. Due to his godliness and inner spirituality, Shoghi Effendi referred to Quddús as "the essence of sanctity and purity".⁹⁶

In general, about one-third of all comparisons were related to shared personal characteristics, whereas the personal attribute cluster emerged strong because of the warmth and humanness of the accounts. Several joint individual qualities were identified which, understandingly, made Joseph and Quddús moral leaders of their times.

⁹² The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, p. 89.

⁹³ Reference to a story in the Qur'án (7:163-166) about a Jewish village that tried to circumvent Sabbath and continue fishing as recorded in the Qur'án. For the sin of working on the day of Sabbath and fishing on that day, they were turned into monkeys. According to the Qur'án, "But We [God] said to them, Be disgraced apes! When they stubbornly persisted in violation" (7:166).

⁹⁴ Dehghan, *Ganj-i-Pinhán*, p. 209.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 175.

⁹⁶ Shoghi Effendi, *Lawḥ-i-Garn-i-Áhibáy-i-Sharq*, Tehran, Naw-Rúz, 101 B.E. p. 31.

Immanent Themes

Through these immanent motifs, Quddús' and Joseph's accounts highlight their (a) stations and (b) spirituality or powers and capacities. They received their various spiritual designations and were worthy of personal attributes and faculties shared by both of them.

In regard to their station, both Quddús and Joseph had clear indications of the *divine authority* conferred upon them. According to the Qur'án (12:15), God sent a revelation to Joseph in Egypt (Qur'án 12:37). In turn, the Báb affirmed that Quddús is a "manifestation of Myself"⁹⁷ and that He has revealed unto him "Mine own essence."⁹⁸

God said in the Qur'án (12:56), "Thus did we empower Joseph over the land ... We shower our mercy upon whomever we will..." About Quddús, the Báb stated: "From time immemorial and throughout eternity thou hast been immeasurably exalted with majesty, and wilt unto everlasting remain in the inaccessible retreats of holiness and beauty".⁹⁹

The *exalted position* of both of them in the eternal Covenant of God has also been highlighted. Qur'án (12:6) affirms that Jacob said to Joseph, "Thus, your Lord will select you, teach you the interpretation of dreams, and grant His favors to you and the family of Jacob, just as He granted His favors to your fathers, Abraham and Isaac. Your Lord is certainly All-knowing and All-wise." In turn, the Báb wrote about Quddús, "Through thee, all beings extol God; through thee, all beings glorify His sanctity; through thee, all beings magnify His oneness; through thee, all beings celebrate His grandeur"¹⁰⁰

Not surprisingly, the Scriptures reveal their *fruitful lives and their impact on humanity*. Jacob described his son as "a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall" (Genesis 49:22). According to Bahá'u'lláh, through Quddús' and Mullá Husayn's lives, "the Most Great Announcement was declared ... God's bounty was bestowed...the suns of knowledge dawned forth, the skies of religion were illumined, the rays of the lights of sciences shone radiantly among various peoples, and the spheres of arts were widened in the world".¹⁰¹

There were also external signs of their *investitures*. Pharaoh gave Joseph a new title, *Zaphenath-Paneah* ("God speaks and he lives") (Genesis 41:45). The Báb gave Quddús exalted titles such as *Ismu'lláhu'l Ákhir* ("The Last Name of God"), Bahá'u'lláh naming him as the "Last Point"¹⁰², 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the "Moon of Guidance"¹⁰³ among several other exalted designations. Likewise, according to Genesis (41:42), "Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck." While in *Shaykh Ṭabarsí*, Quddús received a silk turban and a pencil case from the Báb.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ In Arabic, literally "Maẓhar nafsi" (مظهر نفسي).

Stephen Lambden, *Muḥammad 'Alī Bārfurushī Quddūs*, 2021, <https://hurqalya.ucmerced.edu/node/4081> [accessed 30 April 2024].

⁹⁸ In Arabic, literally "Gud tajalit lih benafsi" (قد تجلّيت له بنفسي).

⁹⁹ The Báb, *Tablet of Visitation for Quddús*.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Ziyárat-Námiy-i-Bábu'l-Báb wa Quddús*. Mss: British Library Or15714.077. Included in list "Bahá'u'lláh's best known Works" prepared by Shoghi Effendi in *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 16, pp. 574-575. The original Arabic version is available in *Bahá'í Reference Library here and the English version here*.

¹⁰² Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 49.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁰⁴ H.M. Balyuzi, *The Báb: The Herald of the Day of Days*. (Oxford: George Ronald, 1973).

This element of *Chosenness* was also present in other privileges. Joseph was favoured by his father Jacob over the other sons and given a “long coat of many colours” (Genesis 37:3), while Quddús was privileged to be the most outstanding believer of the Báb, the one who was specially chosen as His companion to go on pilgrimage to Mecca.

The second group of immanent themes pertains to their divine powers and capacities. Joseph revealed his spiritual gifts through *interpreting dreams and the art of divination* (Qur’án 12: 45-49; Genesis 44:15). Similarly, Quddús’ inner genius lay in interpreting the spiritual meaning of Holy Scriptures, such as his extensive Commentary on the letter S of the *Súrih al-Ikhlás*,¹⁰⁵ a treatise that was three times as long as the actual Qur’án, written during the siege of *Shaykh* Ṭabarsí. Likewise, as Joseph experienced visionary dreams (Qur’án 12: 4), Quddús also had prophetic visions before¹⁰⁶ and after¹⁰⁷ the Revelation of the Báb. Like Joseph, who had *foreseen* the fate of his two cell companions in Egypt and seven years of famine, Quddús foresaw the place and time of his martyrdom, which he associated with a mystical wedding,¹⁰⁸ as well as the circumstances of his burial.¹⁰⁹

Their *inspiration* indeed came from God. According to Genesis (40:8), when the two prisoners asked him to interpret their dreams, Joseph responded, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me." In his writings Quddús also claimed that he was inspired by the Voice of God:

In the Name of the Lord, the All-Compelling, the Unconstrained, the All-Subduing. O thou nightingale who art warbling wondrously from behind the clouds of glory, give thou ear unto this: the highest degree of attraction to the mystery of the Essence for the denizens of the eternal realm is enshrined in the effusions of the mystery of the verse, “*Verih, I am the Truth. No God is there but He.*” The exalted mystery of the verses lieth within this verse. Say then to the faithful who have all gathered by the fire of light: Give ear unto my call, which is raised by the mystery of the verse through the Crimson Tree in the seas of Divine Oneness.¹¹⁰

In brief, the immanent attributes cluster highlighted the spiritual powers with which they were divinely endowed. As per the personal attributes cluster, one-third of the total observations focused on their stations, capacities and roles. In this immanent group analysis, the analogies revealed a broad range of shared supra human faculties enabling them to influence individuals and societies.

¹⁰⁵ *Súrih of the Sincerity*, the 112th chapter of the Qur’án consisting of four verses.

¹⁰⁶ Mírzá Ḥabíbu’lláh Afnán. *The Genesis of the Bábi-Bahá'í Faiths in Shíráz and Fárs*. Tr. Ahang Rabbani. (Leiden: Brill, 2008). https://bahai-library.com/pdf/a/afnan_rabbani_genesis_faiths.pdf [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁰⁷ Dehghan, *Ganj-i-Pinhán*, pp. 60-61.

¹⁰⁸ Nabíl-i-A‘ẓam. *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 413.

¹⁰⁹ E.G. Browne (ed.). *Tarikh-i-Jadíd or New History of Mírzá Ali Muhammad the Bab*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893), <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.83178/page/n157/mode/2up> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹¹⁰ E.G. Browne, “Catalogue and Description of 27 Bábi Manuscripts.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, (1892), p. 486. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25197107> [accessed 1 May 2025] Tr. Javid Atai.

Mystical Themes

The more metaphysical themes shared by Quddús and Joseph derive from various Writings of the Báb, such as the *Kitáb-i-Panj Sha'n* ("The Book of Five Modes or Grades"), and from some of the more mystical works by Bahá'u'lláh such as the *Four Valleys*, the *Seven Valleys* and *Gems of Divine Mystery*.

The *garment motif* is one of the most mystical themes, rich in meaning and significance. Both Joseph (Genesis 37:3) and Quddús had colourful garments.¹¹¹ Similarly, the coloured garment that Jacob gave to Joseph was a sign of his uniqueness (Genesis 37:3). In the *Kitáb-i-Panj Sha'n*, the Báb affirms that during the first four years of His revelation He kept himself in the station of the gates¹¹² but later He removed that garment and emerged as the Promised One, and He gave His previous garment to Quddús.¹¹³

Secondly, the motif of *spiritual concealment* represents the period where Quddús and Joseph's stations were not evident to the people around them. For instance, Quddús' was referred to as a "Hidden Treasure"¹¹⁴ by the Báb to Mullá Husayn. For several years, Quddús stayed in his native Mázindarán somewhat disconnected from the Bábí community but heavily engaged in teaching the new Faith until Mullá Husayn "discovered" him. In a way, his concealment was a kind of protection from the persecution uproar running like wildfire throughout Iran. The Báb wrote referring to Quddús: "Thou art manifest through the manifestation of thy Lord, and art concealed through the concealment of thy Lord".¹¹⁵ Joseph, in turn, piously concealed his station from his brothers because they were heedless¹¹⁶ until the time came up when he disclosed himself fully (Qur'án 12:90). Joseph told his brothers the wisdom of hiding his identity, which was reuniting the family in Egypt, "God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance (Qur'án 45:7). At his act of concealment Joseph said to his brothers, "... it was not you who sent me here, but God" (Genesis 45:8) while Quddús revealed his sacred identity to the people of Bárfurúsh, "I am the regent to the Lord of the Age [the Báb]".¹¹⁷ Furthermore, when Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy grain, they could not recognize him (Qur'án 12:58), but later, he made himself known to his brethren (Qur'án 12: 88-90). In Quddús' story, it is not until his three-day public trial that the non-Bábí society heard from him championing the glory of the Revelation of the Báb, which he represented, and when some people recognized his virtues.

¹¹¹ A photograph of Quddús' shirt and shawl appears in Dehghan, *Ganj-i-Pinhán*, p. 10.

¹¹² The "gates" (874–941 CE) were the last four representatives of the twelfth (and final) of the Prophet Muḥammad's successors (also called Imáms). The twelfth Imám was referred to as the "Lord of the Age". The Báb affirmed that He was the return of the Lord of the Age.

¹¹³ The Báb, *Kitáb-i-Panj Sha'n* (Five Modes). MS facsimile. Tíhrán, 196X? [sic]. Published in digital facsimile. Lansing, Mi., H-Bahai, 2000. <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/bab/M-R/panj/panjshan.htm> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹¹⁴ Nabíl-i-A'zam, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 262.

¹¹⁵ The Báb, Tablet of Visitation for Quddús.

¹¹⁶ Adib Masumian, "A Tablet of Abdu'l-Bahá on the Historical Joseph vs. the Divine Joseph" (provisional translation - with translator's permission), 2022. Tablet originally published in Makátib-i-Haḍrat-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá, vol. 9, p. 176, Cairo, 1330/1912. <https://adibmasumian.com/translations/ab06890/> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹¹⁷ Habib Borjian, "A Mazandarani Account of the Babi Incident at Shaikh Tabarsi", *Iranian Studies*, 39.3 (2006) p. 390.

The third mystical shared motif pertains to the *symbolic nature of geographical spaces*. For instance, Joseph was put into an empty cistern (Qur'án 12:10) while Quddús was placed under house arrest at the home of Muḥammad-Taqí, the leading clergy of Sárí and banned from any contact. According to the Qur'án, some travellers found Joseph in the cistern and carried him to Egypt (Qur'án 12: 14-15), the “Egypt of the hearts”¹¹⁸ as the Báb called it. Whereas Quddús, at Bahá'u'lláh's instructions, was rescued from his confinement in Sárí and taken to Shaykh Ṭabarsí. The Báb referred to Shaykh Ṭabarsí as “hallowed ground” and “holy earth”.¹¹⁹ Also, the Bábís in Shaykh Ṭabarsí considered it as their Karbilá,¹²⁰ their place of sacrifice and love.¹²¹ Both places had a mystical association beyond the physical meaning.

The Qur'án affirms that Joseph raised his parents to *the throne* (‘arsh) beside himself” (12:100). According to some Islamic exegetes, the Qur'án reserves the use of the term ‘arsh for the throne of God signifying Joseph's divine status.¹²² On Quddús' martyrdom, the Báb wrote, “Thou hast ascended through the realm of existence unto a horizon wherein none hath preceded thee, and been seated upon the Throne of Might in the loftiest mansions of Paradise, a station that none, in the compass of God's knowledge, hath surpassed”.¹²³

Finally, an association can be drawn on the mystical notion of *reunion with the Beloved*. Joseph was reunited with his father when Jacob entered Egypt (Qur'án 12:100). It is noteworthy that the Báb once promised Quddús that four years later they will eventually be reunited in martyrdom.¹²⁴

The preceding discussion was drawn mainly from references derived from the Bahá'í Writings on mystical themes shared by both Quddús and Joseph. However, it is valid to say that the mystical vein in their stories is pulsating across the whole analysis. The special meaning attributed to the physical notion of a garment, the act of concealment and disclosure as a sign of divine grace, and the symbolic nature of temporal spaces to create a metanarrative all reveal the limitless possibilities that such rich stories can provide to mind and soul to enrich the spiritual experience from an event that looked, primarily, a physical one.

Opposition Themes

These themes emanate from Quddús' chronology and mostly relate to his sufferings paralleling similar tribulations experienced by Joseph. The events can be loosely grouped into moral and physical injustices.

Both Quddús and Joseph *suffered greatly*. Joseph was betrayed by his brothers, abandoned in a well, and then sold twice into slavery. He was later falsely accused of moral impropriety and put in

¹¹⁸ Todd Lawson, “Interpretation as Revelation: The Qur'án Commentary of the Báb, Sayyid ‘Alí Muḥammad Shirází (1819–1850).” *The Báb and the Bábí Community of Iran*, edited by Fereydun Vahman, (London: OneWorld Academic, 2020), p. 264.

¹¹⁹ Nabíl-i-A‘ẓam, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 431-432.

¹²⁰ Karbilá is renowned as a centre of Islamic Shi‘ih theology and religious pilgrimage. Pilgrims visit and venerate the site of the remains of Imám Ḥusayn (CE 626–680). Imám Ḥusayn, the martyred grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad, was killed violently in Karbilá, and his death represents a symbol of martyrdom and sacrifice.

¹²¹ E. G. Browne, *A Year Amongst the Persians: Impressions as to the Life, Character, & Thought of the People of Persia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 615.

¹²² Lawson, ‘Joseph's Dream’.

¹²³ The Báb, *Tablet of Visitation for Quddús*.

¹²⁴ Nabíl-i-A‘ẓam, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 142-3.

prison for two years (Genesis 41:1). In turn, the Báb said of Quddús' trials and tribulations, "Verily, thy suffering waxed so grievous that the sufferings of all created things were as naught compared to it"¹²⁵. And yet, both of them responded to those troubles with humility, faith and meekness.

Their behaviour attracted jealousy and hatred towards them. Joseph's brethren were jealous of him (Qur'án 12:8). In turn, during Quddús' life in his hometown, Mullá Sa'íd Bárfurúshí entitled the Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá, along with his clergy, were jealous of Quddús because of his knowledge and charisma from a young age. Likewise, Joseph's position was not recognized by his half-brothers, who faced him with opposition (Qur'án 42:6, 8). Calumnies about the figure of Quddús were common among the Muslim population and in current times. He was referred to as a person who "deceives the people", an "apostate"¹²⁶, an "unclean infidel"¹²⁷ and guilty "of heresy"¹²⁸ and of "aiming at the subversion of the Persian Government".¹²⁹

According to the Qur'án, Joseph said that "Satan had induced [estrangement] between me and my brothers" (12:100). The leading *agitator of discord* among the population of Bárfurúsh against Quddús was the "hysterical, the cruel and overbearing Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá",¹³⁰ the "diabolical",¹³¹ "the fanatical, the ferocious and shameless mujtahid of Bárfurúsh".¹³² Furthermore, his behaviour was characterized as immersed in "irreligion, immorality, and worldliness".¹³³ Abbas Amanat, in his book *Resurrection and Renewal*, wrote that "in the days preceding Ṭabarsí, Quddús was recognized by the Bábís as the 'Spirit of the Messiah' who soon would descend in the 'Green Island' [Mázindarán] and destroy the forces of the Antichrist (Dajjál, deceiver)".¹³⁴

False accusations were raised against Joseph, who demonstrated his innocence (Qur'án 12, 26-27). As with Quddús, he was accused of political insurrection against the Shah and heresy. Nevertheless, he cleared himself of all those charges in brilliant defences in front of the Prince-Governor, with some locals pleading, "Don't kill him; he is a fine young fellow, it is a pity to kill him".¹³⁵ Even some of Quddús' enemies recognized their errors and self-doubted the righteousness of their treatment towards him¹³⁶ as it happened in the case of Joseph (Qur'án 12:91).

Both became *victims of prejudice in their own time*. When Joseph's brothers arrived in Egypt, they were discriminated against by the Egyptian officer on the basis of their religious beliefs, even he, who was a high-ranking government figure: "Joseph was served at one table and his brothers at another. The Egyptians who were eating there were served separately because they considered it

¹²⁵ The Báb, *Tablet of Visitation for Quddús*.

¹²⁶ Dehghan, *Ganj-i-Pinhán*, pp. 60-61.

¹²⁷ Borjian, 'A Mazandarani Account of the Babi Incident at Shaikh Tabarsi', p. 390.

¹²⁸ Nabíl-i-A'zam, *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 146-147.

¹²⁹ Muhammad Ali Maulana. *History and Doctrines of the Babi Movement*. (Ohio: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore Inc., 1998), p. 7.

¹³⁰ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 39.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 42.

¹³² Ibid., p. 83.

¹³³ Browne, *Tarikh-i-Jadid*, p. 92.

¹³⁴ Abbás Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Bábí Movement in Iran, 1844–1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 187.

¹³⁵ Borjian, 'A Mazandarani Account of the Babi Incident at Shaikh Tabarsi', pp. 393-394.

¹³⁶ Zabihi-Moghaddam, 'The Bábí-state Conflict at Shaykh Ṭabarsí'.

beneath their dignity to eat with Hebrews" (Genesis 43:32). In his local town, Quddús and his family were considered "impure" (*najis*) for being non-Muslims and therefore personal touching of him or his clothes or any utensil used by him, even attending a mosque, was barred. It is narrated that Áqá Muḥammad Šádiq, half-brother of Quddús, was called a "najis" (impure) at a mosque in Bárfurúsh. Áqá Muḥammad Šádiq is told by the Mulla leading the congregational prayer: "O Bábí, how come you come to the mosque and stand behind me".¹³⁷

Further, the above moral injustices were accompanied by *physical suffering*: exile, imprisonment and torment. Joseph's brothers wanted to kill and did expatriate him (Qur'án 12:9), whereas Quddús was threatened by death and was *exiled* from his town to the village of Píá-kulá. Joseph and Quddús were *cast into prison* though they were innocent (Qur'án 39:20). Joseph was wrongly accused of impropriety and imprisoned with two other people – the first eventually enjoyed freedom and happiness while the other one had an opposite fate (Genesis 41: 1-23). Following the episode of *Shaykh* Ṭabarsí, Quddús was imprisoned in Bárfurúsh also with two people, one of them remained faithful while the second became a traitor.¹³⁸ Furthermore, the Book of Psalms (105: 18) informs that in prison, "They hurt his [Joseph's] feet with fetters; he was laid in irons". Likewise, Quddús was imprisoned in Bárfurúsh and paraded in *fetters and chains* before his martyrdom.¹³⁹

Joseph was betrayed by his half-brothers (Qur'án 12:8-9), being dangerously abandoned in a well, while Quddús was betrayed by the Prince-Governor, the military commander of the government forces, and his allies when they broke a promise of liberty and free passage after the *Shaykh* Ṭabarsí episode. Likewise, Joseph was *sold by his brothers for silver coins* according to Genesis (37:28-29), while Quddús was surrendered to the Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá in return for payment to the Prince-Governor.

Finally, Genesis (23:3) states that "when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore" and then he was thrown into a pit. At Quddús' last sufferings, his garments were taken away from him, and as such, he was paraded publicly to his martyrdom. Although in a different context, Joseph's trials and sufferings from seventeen to thirty years of age mirrors Quddús persecutions and tribulations from twenty-two to twenty-seven years of age culminating in his martyrdom.

In the process of drawing historical parallels between Quddús and Joseph, a method of deconstructing separate chronological accounts and reconstructing a new joint figurative narrative in the light of the Bahá'í Writings, was developed. These analogies exposed their shared moral and physical suffering, humiliation, religious prejudice, betrayal and imprisonment.

Leadership Themes

Joseph' and Quddús' *process of personal growth* during life shows parallel patterns. Whereas Joseph, who was initially a modest shepherd boy, arose from being a slaved person to become the country's

¹³⁷ Fazel Mazandarani, *Tarikh Zubúr al-Haq* (*History of the Manifestation of Truth*), vol 8. Ṭihrán. 1944. p. 823.

¹³⁸ Nabil-i-A'zam, *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 411. Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn. *Vaqa'i-i Mimiyyih*. Persian MS (authored c. 1849). University of Michigan British Manuscript Project 749(4), no. 1. East Lansing, Mi.: H-Bahai, 2001. <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/arabic/vol5/mimiyyih/mimiyyih.htm> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹³⁹ Mírzá Ḥusayn Hamadání. *The New History (Tarikh-i-Jadid) of Mirza Ali-Muhammed the Bab*. Tr E. G. Browne. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893). https://bahai-library.com/hamadani_browne_Tarikh_Jadid [accessed 1 May 2025].

principal treasurer (Qur'án 12:55) in charge of overseeing the whole land of Egypt (Genesis 41:39–44), Quddús also arose from a peasant background to hold the first rank in the Bábi Dispensation, after the Báb.¹⁴⁰

Their *rise to prominence* is also significant. According to Genesis (42:6), Joseph's brothers “bowed themselves bowed before him with their faces to the earth”. Similarly, we have seen how the glory of Quddús has survived across three centuries, reaching the international scene. Representatives of the United Nations,¹⁴¹ the European Union¹⁴² and the governments of the United States,¹⁴³ United Kingdom¹⁴⁴ and Denmark¹⁴⁵ arose to defend the memory of Quddús when his shrine was demolished in 2004. Furthermore, references to him as a holy figure of the Bahá'í Faith have appeared in newspapers in ten countries and in ten languages attracting momentous international attention.

The legacy reflects their awareness of having a mission, and a leadership role and a mission to play. On the one hand, such an *appointment was either conferred or acquired*. For instance, because of his wisdom, Joseph was made proxy king (Qur'án 12: 55-57; Genesis 41:39-44), whereas Quddús acted as the Báb's chief lieutenant while He was kept in captivity. Interestingly, according to the Qur'án (12:21), God established Joseph as second only to the Pharaoh of Egypt, having ruled for eight decades (Genesis 41:46; 50:22) while Quddús was the leader of the *Shaykh* Ṭabarsí fort for eight months.

On the other hand, they were both *messengers of good news and joy*. The Qur'án informs that “when the messenger of good news came [from Egypt] he threw Joseph's shirt over Jacob's face, whereupon he regained his sight” (Qur'án 12:96). The said verse does not mention who the “messenger of good news” was—perhaps one of the brothers, an angel or one of the Egyptian officers who were sent by the Pharaoh with royal carts to fetch Jacob from Canaan (Genesis 45:21). Quddús is also a “messenger of good news” for his people, and once he declared, “... today is not as it was aforetime, and verily I have a great message of joy”.¹⁴⁶

Their *sense of mission* was conspicuous. Quddús has been called the “apostle of Mázindarán” by Gobineau¹⁴⁷ for his teaching initiatives in his native province. Quddús' efforts and activities over the course of two years were focused on creating a community of believers and spreading awareness of the Faith of the Báb's among the local and surrounding populace.¹⁴⁸ According to the history of the Báb written by the French A.L.M. Nicolas, it is stated that Quddús converted 300

¹⁴⁰ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 9.

¹⁴¹ United Nations General Assembly. *Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance*. 16 September 2004.

¹⁴² European Union. *EU Annual Report on Human Rights*. 13 September 2004.

¹⁴³ US State Department. *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom*, 2004.

¹⁴⁴ United Kingdom Parliament. *Bahá'í Holy Sites*—EDM (Early Day Motion) 1145, tabled on 6 May 2004.

¹⁴⁵ Denmark Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. *Third Report from the Foreign Affairs Committee Session 2003–2004 Iran*, May 2004.

¹⁴⁶ E.G. Browne, *Materials for the Study of the Babi Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), p. 210. <https://ia800200.us.archive.org/3/items/materialsforstud00browuoft/materialsforstud00browuoft.pdf> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁴⁷ Geoffrey Nash and Daniel O'Donoghue (eds.) *Comte de Gobineau and Orientalism: Selected Eastern Writings* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 146.

¹⁴⁸ Mohammadhosseini, ‘Qoddus, Moḥammad-‘Ali Bārforuši’.

persons to the new Faith in less than a week.¹⁴⁹ Likewise, Joseph taught the Faith of Abraham in Egypt even when he was imprisoned emphasizing monotheism and the life hereafter (Qur'án 12: 38-41]. Egyptians were polytheistic. The Book of Psalms tells that God “ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt” (Qur'án 81:5).

On the *triumph of the religion*, Joseph announced the ultimate victory by assuring their ultimate return to Canaan (Genesis 50:24-25). Political conditions deteriorated, and the Jewish people were enslaved, living under oppressive conditions. It was Moses' that after 430 years of Hebrew exile in Egypt freed his people so that they could come back to Canaan (Exodus 14: 19-31) through obtaining a great victory over the Pharaoh's armies at the Red Sea crossing. In turn, Quddús appears to have said regarding the eventual spiritual victory of the Cause of the Báb, “we are the rightful sovereign, and the world is under our signet-ring, and all the kings in the East and the West will become humble before us.”¹⁵⁰ As a point of fact, the religion of the Báb evolved into the Bahá'í Faith, encompassing more than 100,000 communities worldwide.¹⁵¹

Christian author Andy Walker, reflecting on the *consequentiality* of Joseph's life events on the fortunes of the people of Israel, wrote, “If Joseph had not been sold into slavery, he would not have made it to Egypt. If Potiphar had not mistreated him, he would not have been imprisoned. If he had not been imprisoned, he would not have met Pharaoh and risen through the ranks ... Joseph served the people of Israel”.¹⁵² Such consequentiality had also its counterpart in the Bábí Faith. According to Shoghi Effendi the historical episode of *Shaykh* Ṭabarsí led by Quddús can be seen as one of the most powerful agencies that shaped the Faith of the Báb “generating the very seeds which, in a later age, were to blossom into world-wide administrative institutions, and which must, in the fullness of time, yield their golden fruit in the shape of a world-redeeming, earth-encircling Order”.¹⁵³ Quddús' actions sent shockwaves domestically and internationally overseas by proclaiming that there is a global religion emerging from its obscurity, with their own Prophet, their Holy Book and their martyrs.

In summary, Joseph and Quddús had a significant and long-lasting impact on their followers, influencing the development of their own religious communities, even after their deaths. In that process, they acted as a role model, dealing with royalty with the same nature that they would relate with the peasant.

Concluding Remarks

A number of points and counterpoints also emerge of these analogies. Many prophetic figures experience exile and betrayal (e.g., Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb). What distinguishes Quddús is the intensity of his trials within the context of early Bábí history. Also, unlike Joseph, Quddús did not achieve worldly power. However, his spiritual leadership within the Bábí community mirrors Joseph's eventual ascendance. Furthermore, the garment symbolism is widely used across religious

¹⁴⁹ A.L.M. Nicolas, *Seyyèd Ali-Mohammed dit le Báb*. (Paris: Dujarric & Co, 1905), p. 296, https://bahai-library.com/nicolas_seyyed_ali_mohammed [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁵⁰ E.G. Browne (ed.). *Kitáb-i Nuqtatu'l-Káfi: Being the Earliest History of the Babís*. (Leiden: Brill, 1910), p. 162, Persian text available in <https://archive.org/details/in.gov.ignca.20700> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁵¹ Douglas Martin, “The Bahá'í Faith in its Second Century”. *The Bahá'í Faith and Islam* (ed. Heshmat Moayyad), proceedings of a symposium, McGill University, 23–25 March 1984, pp. 57-72.

¹⁵² Andy Walker, “The Role of Genesis 37:1-11 in the Joseph Novella.” *Leaven*, 24.4, issue 3, (2016), p. 4. <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol24/iss4/3> [accessed 1 May 2025].

¹⁵³ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 38.

traditions and the strength of the Quddús-Joseph connection lies in its layered meaning within Bábí theology. Finally, while Joseph's forgiveness led to family reconciliation, Quddús' martyrdom ended in tragedy. However, both figures exemplify redemptive suffering.

While the Joseph-Quddús comparison is rich in thematic depth, it is important to recognize some limitations. For instance, other figures in Bábí/Bahá'í history might also fit Josephic themes (e.g., Bahá'u'lláh in exile, the Báb's suffering). Further, the analogy should not be overstated; rather, it serves as an interpretive tool rather than a doctrinal assertion. Differences in historical context and station must be acknowledged. Unlike Joseph, Quddús did not live to see the triumph of his cause. This study offered a nuanced approach to typological figuration, presenting Quddús as a figure whose life reflects key Josephic themes. While the analogy should be seen as an interpretive lens rather than a central thesis, it provides a compelling way to deepen understanding of Quddús' spiritual significance. Future studies might explore how these themes apply to other figures in Bahá'í history, further enriching the discussion on divine archetypes in religious thought.

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Paper

Transcending Partisanship: From Factionalism to Universal Participation

Todd Smith and Michael Sabet

Abstract

Contemporary democratic systems face mounting crises as increasing partisan entrenchment supplants effective governance in favour of adversarial gamesmanship and reduces citizens to passive spectators. This essay examines how factionalism undermines democracy by constraining essential freedoms—to choose suitable candidates, to access reliable information, to deliberate meaningfully, and to flourish collectively. Political parties function as “machines that generate collective passions,” prioritizing electoral victory over truth-seeking and principled deliberation. Partisanship thus tends over time to descend into personal attacks, disinformation campaigns, and polarized alienation that makes genuine democratic participation nearly impossible. Reform measures within partisan systems can, at best, slow this trajectory of partisan politics.

Drawing on Bahá'í teachings and administrative experience, we propose an alternative framework based on universal participation and collaborative truth-seeking. The Bahá'í approach features elections without campaigns or nominations, decision-making through consultation, and multi-level learning processes that integrate grassroots experience with institutional guidance. This system eliminates the us-versus-them mentality inherent in partisan politics, fostering organic relationships between individuals, communities, and institutions working toward common objectives. Through “learning in action”—where all participants contribute to generating knowledge for collective betterment—communities can transcend competitive adversarialism and enable genuine democratic participation. Central to this alternative model is the recognition that noble ends cannot be achieved through unworthy means. Divisive practices cannot therefore succeed in achieving the ideal aspiration of politics: to allow humanity to flourish as one unified yet diverse whole.

Introduction

In Western liberal societies, it has generally been taken for granted that democracy is the best system of governance and that the vitality and justness of any nation depend in large measure on how democratic it is. The cardinal principle of democracy is that the people should be free to rule themselves, either directly by participating in political decision-making or indirectly by electing those who do so on their behalf. In the latter case, those elected to lead have an obligation to exercise the will of the people; they are, first and foremost, accountable to the electorate.

Democracy has been justified on various grounds. On fundamental grounds, it has been viewed as a good in itself, reflecting as a system of governance the general spirit of the Enlightenment, which,

according to Immanuel Kant, consists of “man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity” where “*Immaturity* is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another.”¹ Democracy has similarly been justified on instrumental grounds in that it produces better epistemological and social outcomes than its alternatives. For example, many have considered it to be the best system for enabling truth to prevail since, at its best, it encourages citizens or their representatives to employ reason when making decisions of public import.² And because, in its modern form, it subjects those in power to the rule of law—itsself understood to be an expression of the democratic will of the people—it has been esteemed on both theoretical and empirical grounds to be the system most conducive to protecting human rights.³

Despite these theoretical strengths and historical achievements, the efficacy of democracy as currently practiced has lately been called into question by many thinkers who lament its decline—although they do so with the hope that it can be revitalized before it is too late.⁴ For example, Anne Applebaum warns that we may already be living in the twilight of democracy⁵ and succumbing to growing networks of autocracy worldwide,⁶ while Craig Calhoun, Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, and Charles Taylor note a rise in “sympathy for authoritarianism, antipathy to informed dialogue, and delusion by conspiracy theories.”⁷ In their analysis, “[p]olitical parties are broken, functioning as little more than ideologically polarized fundraising machines.”⁸ More ubiquitous is the degeneration of democracy itself, which takes the form of “declining citizen efficacy, weakening local communities, fraying intergenerational bonds, evaporating small-scale economic opportunity, and eroding social ties that had once knit citizens together across lines of difference and fostered solidarity.”⁹ Calhoun and his colleagues maintain that a thriving democracy must uphold liberty, equality, and solidarity. Yet, over the past 50 years or so, our democracies have increasingly privileged the former to the detriment of the latter two. Accordingly, they have undermined collective commitment to a common good, which is essential for any democracy to thrive.

These thinkers therefore call for a reconceptualization of democracy in view of its strengths, vulnerabilities, and present challenges. But they argue that democracy may not even have a future

¹ Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: “What is Enlightenment?”* (1784)

² For an overview of epistemic arguments for democracy, and critiques of those arguments, see Simone Chambers, *Contemporary Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), chap. 7.

³ See for instance this statement by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/about-democracy-and-human-rights> [accessed 25 June 2025].

⁴ These include Madeleine Albright, Anne Applebaum, David Brooks, Jonah Goldberg, Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, Lee McIntyre, and Timothy Snyder, to name just a few. See Todd Smith and Ben Kelly, ‘Public Discourse and Wilful Incommensurability: A Case for Attentive Free Speech’, *Frontiers in Sociology*, 9 (2024).

⁵ Anne Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism* (New York: Doubleday, 2020), p. 185.

⁶ Anne Applebaum, *Autocracy Inc.: Dictators That Want to Run the World* (New York: Doubleday, 2024).

⁷ Craig Calhoun, Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, and Charles Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022), p. 208.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

without radical social transformation.¹⁰ Such transformation involves cultivating citizen empowerment, building inclusive solidarity, and countering efforts to consolidate permanent power. It requires adopting an experimental mode of action premised on the necessity to think big, appreciate the interconnected nature of our needs and challenges, and rejuvenate commitment to the public good.

This is a daunting agenda, which is complicated by what Michael Karlberg identifies as a fundamental problem: democracy's tethering to competition. Karlberg¹¹ argues that ailments such as the ones these thinkers point to today—particularly the fraying of solidarity—are logical outcomes of this competitive foundation, which has long held hegemonic influence in the world as the primary logic of social organization. This hegemony is reflected in the more realist definition of democracy, crystallized by economist Joseph Schumpeter in the 1930s, that eschews the lofty ideal of rule by the people. For Schumpeter, the great virtue of democracy is not that it enables people to decide political questions. He argues that “the people” are not a veritable collective entity that can form rational, considered opinions on issues. Instead, the crux of democracy is the selection of representatives who will make political decisions, and central to this selection is the struggle for electoral success.¹² Democracy thus casts its central player—the *demos*—in a passive role. This raises a crucial question: must democratic governance necessarily be grounded in competition, or are there alternative frameworks that could enable genuine popular participation?

Proposition

With these considerations in mind, in this paper we examine the specific role that partisanship plays in perpetuating political passivity and degrading democratic discourse more broadly. Drawing on insights from the Bahá'í teachings and community experience, we also maintain that the transformation many seek requires more radical change than most thinkers envision. Such transformation involves moving beyond factionalism, purging the electoral process of ego and divisive elements, and embracing a mode of associating and decision-making that fosters universal participation.

Central to our proposal is the sentiment expressed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that “in this world of being, all things must ever be made new.”¹³ Bahá'ís believe that the “immutable law of change”¹⁴ built into reality at all levels—from the inner workings of stars to complex biological systems to human societies—applies to political systems that have as their basis centuries-old conceptions and that are now clearly demonstrating their fragility in the face of rising global challenges. They also believe that

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 209.

¹¹ Michael Karlberg, ‘Western Liberal Democracy as New World Order?’, *The Bahá'í World* (2006).

¹² Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*, 3rd ed (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950).

¹³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978), p. 23. <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdu-baha/selections-writings-abdu-baha/1#324741256> [accessed 25 June 2025]

¹⁴ In Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991), p.42, it is stated: “Why should these [ideals, institutions, etc.], in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution?” <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/shoghi-effendi/world-order-bahauallah/1#369510938> [accessed 25 June 2025]

humanity need not feel beholden to its current systems, notwithstanding the weight of their legacies or how conducive to human betterment they may have once been. Instead, by drawing upon the strengths of these systems while dispassionately assessing their weaknesses, humanity can transform its institutional structures into a form consistent with the exigencies of the present age.

In this connection, we discuss, first, how partisanship stifles meaningful political engagement; second, the implications of these problems for various freedoms essential to such engagement; and third, some of the dispositions and practices that especially befit a political realm made new. Fundamental to the latter is an approach to learning in which all feel inspired to participate in a process of studying, acting, reflecting, and consulting on matters of relevant social concern.

Problems with Partisanship

From a Bahá'í perspective, partisanship or factionalism—a longstanding taken-for-granted feature of Western liberal democracies—is not inherently democratic. Instead, it undermines the very purpose of democracy. This is not a new idea. David Hume observes, “Factions subvert government, render laws impotent, and beget the fiercest animosities among men of the same nation, who ought to give mutual assistance and protection to each other.”¹⁵ In the same paragraph, Hume refers to factions as “weeds” of the state. Below, we examine the deficiencies of factionalism by considering the functioning of political parties in general and the associated electoral process in particular.

Political Parties

Political parties are claimed to serve several functions. For instance, they serve a pragmatic coordination function in societies where the general public lacks the time or inclination to engage directly in policy deliberations. In effect, the people delegate this responsibility to specialist bodies—political parties—that negotiate policies among themselves and periodically present their policy positions to the public for approval through voting.¹⁶ Yet, even this essentially pragmatic and potentially benevolent view of parties requires us to accept an anaemic version of democracy, where—in line with Schumpeter’s view—the people’s opportunity to “rule” comes only once every few years and is limited to casting a single ballot at election time.

The problems with parties deepen when we consider other functions often ascribed to them. Some argue that parties are uniquely positioned to reveal their competitors’ flaws and hold them accountable. This view assumes that most political actors have a vested interest in disclosing and upholding the truth. While it is understood that some politicians will try to manipulate the truth in their favour, party competition supposedly limits what they can get away with in pursuing their political aspirations. By highlighting the misleading or harmful positions of their opponents, political parties prevent each other from monopolizing power. In so doing, they ostensibly embody John Stuart Mill’s vision for an epistemically progressive society¹⁷—one in which argument plays a vital role in social progress by

¹⁵ David Hume, ‘Of Parties in General, 1742’, in *Perspectives on Political Parties: Classic Readings* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2002), p. 33–36.

¹⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. by Thomas Burger (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), p. 176.

¹⁷ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978).

allowing dissenters to challenge the biases of dominant positions, expose their deficiencies and failings, and thus potentially reveal more fruitful ways of thinking and living.

However, these theoretical ideals typically break down in practice. Such breakdowns validate concerns articulated millennia ago by Plato,¹⁸ who warned that democratic deliberation could be undermined by people's greater allegiance to their competing interests over truth. Indeed, the value Mill places on subjecting all views to scrutiny and criticism is perhaps best represented not by mainstream democratic politics but by the scientific community, which, when functioning well, harnesses this epistemic process to the common pursuit of truth.¹⁹ In a political realm infected by factionalism and partisanship, however, such rigorous examination of ideas frequently devolves into partisan warfare, as has become all too obvious.

Today, we find ourselves in a position of increasing partisan entrenchment exacerbated by the proliferation of disinformation and the willingness of many to pledge loyalty to influential personalities while permitting factional echo chambers to shape their understanding of reality. We have, in many ways, arrived at a state of wilful incommensurability,²⁰ a condition in which people have little interest in considering alternative perspectives for their worth. Worse, many deliberately go out of their way to ruthlessly find fault with competing opinions, revelling in their capacity to undermine and talk past one another. They embrace a disposition of dismissive intransigence and so end up in a state of polarized alienation.²¹

This toxic climate is likewise nourished by the partisan us-or-them mindset that reaches into all spheres of life, descending “into the merciless invasion of personal privacy, the dissemination of calumny, the exaggeration of mistrust, and the misuse of the news media at the hands of vested interests.”²² It also readily descends into violence. And when it does, leaders often call for unity and a return to civility. But such calls ring hollow when the predominant culture is one of boasting, of backbiting, of backlashing—of perpetual spitefulness and discord. The House of Justice observes, “The reaction of those who attempt to protect themselves against such distortions of the system produces secretiveness, concealment of uncomfortable facts, and reciprocal misuse of the media—in all, a perpetuation of disharmony in the social fabric.”²³

¹⁸ Plato outlined some of the pitfalls of democracy some 2500 years ago. In terms of democracy's epistemic potential, he argues that, fundamentally, democracies do not promote the collective search for truth, because “the people” generally are driven by competing short-term interests and long-standing prejudices, rather than devotion to truth. See Plato's *The Republic*, Book VI.

¹⁹ See Jonathan Rauch, *The Constitution of Knowledge: A Defense of Truth* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2021); Stephen Friberg, ‘Revelation as Scientific in its Method: Science, Diversity, Consultation, and Learning in Action’, *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 33.3 (2024), p. 13–44.

²⁰ Smith and Kelly, ‘Public Discourse and Wilful Incommensurability’.

²¹ Ibid.

²² The Universal House of Justice, 18 July 2000, to an individual. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20000718_001/1#556121686 [accessed 25 July 2025]

²³ Ibid.

Karlberg terms this societal condition “normative adversarialism,” which “refers to the assumption that contests are normal and necessary models of social organization.”²⁴ “This assumption,” he notes, “is deeply embedded in the codes of western-liberal cultures”²⁵ and emerges in different yet overlapping arenas. Normative adversarialism underpins the economic realm, the legal realm, the academic realm, and certainly the political realm in which conflict between parties has been normalized as central to the conduct of politics. The result is perpetual, increasing disharmony, with the preeminent goal being party vindication rather than principled deliberation. Rarely (there are exceptions, to be sure) is the party concerned for the whole, let alone for its rivals, let alone for the unvarnished truth. The winner of an election may promise to govern on behalf of everyone, but the logic of partisanship almost inevitably leads to the pursuit of a more self-interested priority: the domination of the party or its leader and, by extension, the recurrent electoral success of its members. Indeed, it is considered a rare act of patriotism for a leader to step aside for the common good.

This condition of normative adversarialism also enfeebls the conscience of the individual party member. Simone Weil argues that a party “is a machine to generate collective passions” and that it is “an organization designed to exert collective pressure upon the minds of all its individual members.”²⁶ She argues that the party provides security for its members, who succumb to its worldview because doing so “is so comfortable! It amounts to having no thoughts at all. Nothing is more comfortable than not having to think.”²⁷ Contrary to the independent investigation of truth, the party member is motivated to cherry-pick, contort, and even fabricate facts in conformity with pre-existing party biases at the expense of rival positions and the rivals themselves. Of diminished concern is understanding a given social reality in all its complexity and devising solutions based on the thoughtful exploration of different perspectives. In this condition, curiosity loses its appeal.²⁸ Granted, a politician’s motivation may be relatively pure and principled. There is nevertheless a powerful compulsion to defer to the partisan agenda. While occasional compromise with the other side is possible, it typically occurs only if the concession ultimately helps to fortify the party machine itself.

The Electoral Process

The culture of partisanship also negatively affects our freedom to vote and the nature of the electoral process more generally. We are often unable to vote for those whom we actually feel are best suited to serve in elected positions. Several interconnected factors contribute to this constraint on our democratic freedom.

²⁴ Michael Karlberg, *Beyond the Culture of Contest: From Adversarialism to Mutualism in an Age of Interdependence* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2004), p. 38.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Simone Weil, *On the Abolition of All Political Parties*, translated by Simon Leys (New York: New York Review Books, 2013), p. 11.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

²⁸ Weil’s critique is borne out by recent research suggesting that, rather than parties changing their platforms to reflect the policy preferences of voters, it is voters who first identify with a party due to pre-existing group loyalties and social identities, and then shape their own views to conform with that of their party. See Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

First, the electorate in the current system “is treated as a mass to be swayed, by rhetoric and various forms of inducement, to support one or other candidate.”²⁹ This situation has become particularly egregious given the enhanced ability of candidates and their devotees to disseminate hyperbole and disinformation over social media and through other means. With such tools now at their disposal, they can manufacture fantasies about reality and mythologies about themselves with increasing impudence.

The electoral process is further corrupted by several additional interconnected factors. Only very few have access to the funds and resources necessary to promote themselves, and only a few of them put themselves forward for election in any case. Parties, interest groups, and funding restrictions invariably limit the choice of candidates, who will tend to represent special interests as much as or more than general ones. Those who stand for election often feel obliged to advance platforms that conform to party ideology, the perceived will of their base, and/or the interests of their funders.

Furthermore, campaigns and the media's coverage of them are frequently suffused with degraded speech designed to over-simplify and magnify the pros and cons of their competing party positions while simultaneously denigrating opposing candidates and exposing their vulnerabilities. In fact, when campaigns begin, each party's immediate inclination is to rush to define opponents and sully their image, coalescing as a party around how to attack them. And if campaigns do not initially find their opponents' Achilles heel, they seek to adjust accordingly, devoting inordinate time, money, and energy (resources that could be spent addressing actual social issues) to strategizing about how to win the fight. To be sure, some draw moral lines stressing the importance of civility, but the rhetoric easily turns vindictive. In place of honest debate on vital issues, the electoral process becomes increasingly overwhelmed by the propagation of spiteful hyperbole, trolling, and contempt.

Ironically, everyone knows this is the case—everyone knows campaigns are not really about truth, much less about learning from one another about the best way to proceed. They know, for example, that candidates get ahead when they are able to deliver the best takedowns during a debate or on social media. Yet, owing to the culture of contest we have adopted, the game is rationalized and thus proceeds, nonetheless.

All told, while campaigns can enthuse and inject fresh energy into a population, given their partisan nature, they also reinforce a sense of disorientation and disillusionment among sizeable numbers of voters, on the one hand, and a rising mob-like recalcitrance, on the other. They help to solidify a culture of cynicism, animosity, and entrenched polarization.

Implications for Freedom

As alluded to above, these problems with partisanship have direct implications for the extent to which we are truly free. Freedom, of course, is a central concern of democratic theory. The Bahá'í Faith similarly espouses its indispensability to any concept of human flourishing. According to the Universal House of Justice, “The idea and the fact of freedom pervade all human concerns in an infinitude of

²⁹ The Universal House of Justice, 18 July 2000, to an individual. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20000718_001/1#556121686 [accessed 25 July 2025]

notions and modes. Freedom is indeed essential to all expressions of human life.”³⁰ Below, we consider some of the freedoms that are compromised by the logic of partisanship. We then turn our attention to how they might be more effectively realized by transcending this logic.

First, we are not as free as we should be to choose whom to vote for during elections. As discussed above, constraints imposed by partisan agendas as well as the limited pool of candidates presented by the different parties restrict our choices. Because the political landscape is primarily shaped by parties jockeying for pre-eminence, voters have little influence over who appears on the ballot with a realistic chance of election—or over the agendas the candidates pursue once elected.

Second, and related to this constraint on candidate choice, we are not as free as we should be to access legitimate, helpful information. The media landscape is now saturated with a morass of conflicting misinformation and disinformation—much of it malicious—making it extraordinarily difficult to discern what is genuinely factual, sincere, and truthful. Like politicians themselves, media sources regularly seek to position themselves in a marketplace that rewards the capture of readers and viewers, not the representation of truth. While some news outlets are more dispassionate than others, many of us find ourselves gravitating toward information and consuming news that gratifies our preconceived notions, some of which are more bigoted than others, but most—if not all—of which hamper understanding.

Third, this information crisis, in turn, undermines our freedom to think clearly, to reason, and to independently investigate the truth, due to the ever-present buzz of disinformation, propaganda, and the glut of duplicitous speech.³¹ We are relentlessly inundated by the whims of demagogues or cult-like leaders, the rancour and reductionisms of certain online minorities or influencers, and/or the artless acquiescence of the perceived majority. We thus find ourselves lulled into settling for and propagating whatever satiates our respective prejudices or preconceived ideas. Here, Plato’s self-interested *demos* finds its mirror in today’s self-interested political actors and media outlets, each of which competes for the people’s votes and attention.

Compounding these cognitive limitations, we are, fourth, not as free as we should be from *amour-propre*—from succumbing to the pull of conceit, egocentrism, and entitlement. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau contends, this state of being sickens society, creating a condition that has become all the more problematic with the conspicuous rise of consumerism, which, the Universal House of Justice notes, acts “as opium to the human soul.”³² Rousseau argues that *to be* and *to appear* have become “two entirely different things, and from this distinction [arises] ostentatious display, deceitful cunning, and all the vices that follow in their wake.”³³ Many rightly argue that recognition is essential to self-worth and the realization of justice.³⁴ But the distortion of self-recognition into *amour-propre* fuels a me-

³⁰ The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 1988, to the Followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the United States of America. <https://www.bahai.org/documents/the-universal-house-of-justice/individual-rights-freedoms> [accessed 25 July 2025]

³¹ Lee McIntyre, *On Disinformation: How to Fight for Truth and Protect Democracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2023).

³² The Universal House of Justice, 2 March 2013, to the Bahá'ís of Iran. https://universalhouseofjustice.bahai.org/involvement-life-society/20130302_001 [accessed 25 June 2025]

³³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, Part Two*, in *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. and trans. by Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 131–188.

³⁴ See, for example, Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

centrism that depletes commitment to the welfare of one's fellow human beings. It thus squelches our potential to realize who we can truly become—to unfold who we truly are.

Beyond these internal constraints, we are, fifth, not as free as we should be to serve according to our consciences—both as individuals and as members of institutions. Leaders in particular often feel bound by the perceived will of the populace—even while they attempt to manipulate it. Frequently, this (distorted) public opinion seeps into the consciences of elected officials, who may then find themselves compromising their moral principles and reshaping their positions in pursuit of winning or retaining political power.

This corruption of individual conscience extends to our collective capacity for deliberation, as we are, sixth, also not as free as we should be to participate meaningfully in discussion and decision-making. Many among us are not genuinely free to explore possibilities together because of the constant partisan appetite to denigrate one another in the pursuit of advancing party agendas. Similarly, we are not as free as we should be to develop solutions that transcend party lines and to implement and test them effectively—to truly solve problems—as decisions are typically second-guessed, criticized, and undermined from the outset. Worse still, in this culture steeped in political conflict, we may even lose the ability to imagine deliberating with one another at all.

These barriers to collective problem-solving create a related constraint. We are, seventh, not as free as we should be to develop our own credibility as individuals and leaders, let alone to establish trust in others as leaders. We habitually remain guarded, wary that our positions or proposals will be undermined, all while stubbornly insisting our opponents' ideas are ill-conceived or otherwise deficient. This defensive posture means we are rarely free to act in unity with our perceived adversaries or to make mutually beneficial progress on addressing pressing social issues.

Finally, owing to these individual and collective limitations, we are, eighth, not as free as we should be to rise above social barriers and flourish—either as individuals or as communities—in harmony with evolving institutions. Instead, our potential is constrained by the deep divisions that characterize contemporary political life. Lacking a shared commitment to truth, the constituents of society are systematically pitted against their own kind: citizen against citizen, group against group, and, on a global scale, state against state. While shared interests can bring about temporary cooperation, conflict remains a constant backdrop that casts doubt on the durability of such unity. In this fractured environment, these constituents are at odds with one another as well, each militating against the others' freedom to blossom as protagonists for the betterment of all. As the Universal House of Justice explains:

...relations among the three corresponding actors in the world at large—the citizen, the body politic, and the institutions of society—reflect the discord that characterizes humanity's turbulent stage of transition. Unwilling to act as interdependent parts of an organic whole, they are locked in a struggle for power which ultimately proves futile.³⁵

This fraught condition is in stark contrast to “the society which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in unnumbered Tablets and talks, depicts—where everyday interactions, as much as the relations of states, are shaped by

³⁵ The Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván* 2012, to the Bahá'ís of the World. https://universalhouseofjustice.bahai.org/ridvan-messages/20120421_001 [accessed 25 June 2025]

consciousness of the oneness of humankind....”³⁶ As discussed below, in this alternative vision of society, everyone is treated as a protagonist who can participate in generating and disseminating knowledge for the advancement of humankind. The community and institutions, moreover, each playing its essential part, are progressively united with the individual in realizing this overarching objective.

Transcending Partisanship

Given these fundamental constraints on freedom, the question becomes: what alternative approaches might enable genuine participation while preserving democracy's core ideals? Drawing on their community's evolving experience, Bahá'ís are learning to put into place a system that promotes unity and universal participation—a pattern of collective functioning the peoples of the world are invited to explore. In a time of mounting global crises, humanity can surely benefit from alternatives to mainstream political systems that—however noble and foresighted their original development—seem increasingly incapable of responding to our collective needs and legitimate aspirations. The Bahá'í community offers its experience with its distinct system as one such model.³⁷ This “system is based upon the ideals of unity, harmony, justice, diversity, and forbearance in the building of a divinely conceived administrative structure through a process of mutual learning and discovery.”³⁸ Central to its approach is “the principle, enshrined in their teachings, that means should be consistent with ends; noble goals cannot be achieved through unworthy means.”³⁹ The ultimate noble goal is the oneness of humanity, a goal that cannot be achieved through the means of partisan adversarialism.

Bahá'ís, in collaboration with like-minded groups and individuals, consequently strive to manifest this oneness in all their collective endeavours and political affairs. While acknowledging the negative trends and disintegrative forces discussed above—forces that seem to call the very possibility of effective governance into question—they also recognize integrative forces at work in all corners of the globe. Accordingly, they are committed “to a vision of a world that, benefitting from humanity's rich cultural diversity, abides no lines of separation.”⁴⁰ They affirm ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s admonition that “[t]hat which is conducive to association and attraction and unity among the sons of men is the means

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Central to a Bahá'í conception of knowledge is the right, and duty, of individuals and groups to independently investigate the truth. From this perspective, any learning can only be offered in a spirit of disinterested generosity, in keeping with Bahá'u'lláh's counsel in *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* as follows:

Consort with all men, O people of Bahá, in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship. If ye be aware of a certain truth, if ye possess a jewel, of which others are deprived, share it with them in a language of utmost kindness and goodwill. If it be accepted, if it fulfill its purpose, your object is attained. If anyone should refuse it, leave him unto himself, and beseech God to guide him.

It will ultimately be up to communities themselves to decide what insights, if any, from the Bahá'í approach to social organization to take up, adopt, or adapt for their own purposes.

³⁸ The Universal House of Justice, 18 July 2000, to an individual. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20000718_001/1#556121686 [accessed 25 June 2025]

³⁹ The Universal House of Justice, 2 March 2013, to the Bahá'ís of Iran. https://universalhouseofjustice.bahai.org/involvement-life-society/20130302_001 [accessed 25 June 2025]

⁴⁰ Ibid.

of the life of the world of humanity, and whatever causeth division, repulsion and remoteness leadeth to the death of humankind.”⁴¹

The implications of the oneness of humanity for social organization are, ultimately, beyond the present understanding of Bahá'ís, who see themselves as labouring on the next step of a path that will unfold well into the future. Nevertheless, they believe that what is required is nothing less than “an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced.”⁴² While the full scope of this change entails far more than democratic reform, Bahá'ís are assured of their own Faith’s “inclination to democratic methods in the administration of its affairs”⁴³—methods that will be integrated into the overall fabric of a more global and unified society. They also believe that every human being is inherently noble, and that striving to promote oneness at every step along the path to constructing a better world honours this nobility. In contrast, factionalism, with its core us-vs-them mentality, hampers our freedom to associate and to flourish individually and collectively. Thus, any system of politics erected to champion human nobility must eschew the factionalist mindset.

Sanctifying the Electoral Process

The system the Bahá'í community is learning to develop is intended to transcend this division and fragmentation, as is evident in its electoral processes. Not only are partisanship and factionalism rejected, but nomination and campaigning are excluded as well: “The Bahá'í electoral system is entirely free from the power and bargaining of parties and factions, and from the manipulations of vested interests,” and thus “[e]ach voter is free to cast his or her ballot for whomever he or she chooses” amongst the adult members of the community.⁴⁴ When electing their local, regional, national, and international institutions, voters are treated as an active force impelled by the motive to choose individuals best suited to serve on these institutions.⁴⁵ At the same time, “the persons elected are passive in the electoral process (except in their role as voters) and accept election as an obligation to serve the community in response to the wish of the electorate.”⁴⁶ Specifically, they are elected within a system in which the spirit of service is preeminent; they have no interest in seeking power, and without nominations or campaigning, there is, in any event, no means for an individual to pursue it.⁴⁷ Additionally, the voter makes her or his selection in complete confidence, resolutely abstaining from any discussion about the merits or shortcomings of this or that person. The electoral process is thus ideally free of any vestige of personal criticism or backbiting.

⁴¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 225.

⁴² Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 43.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 154.

⁴⁴ The Universal House of Justice, 18 July 2000, to an individual. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20000718_001/1#556121686 [accessed 25 June 2025]

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid. In the same letter, the Universal House of Justice states: “In other words, the systems differ in their essential spirit: one is a seeking for power, the other is an acceptance of responsibility for service.”

Certainly, those without experience with the Bahá'í electoral process may reasonably question whether these high ideals can be put into practice. However, the rules prohibiting nominations, campaigning, factions, and personal criticism are not merely procedural features; they reflect deeply rooted norms within the community that are increasingly shaping the culture surrounding elections. For example, while the norm against backbiting may not always be perfectly upheld—especially since Bahá'í communities operate within broader social contexts where criticism of others is often normalized—there remains a shared understanding that a higher standard exists. Combined with the belief that this standard reflects the true nature of each human being and is attainable, this understanding creates a powerful motivating force to transcend such forces of division toward unity and mutual respect.

The freedom to vote in this way is also considered a spiritual privilege and thus implies a number of responsibilities on the part of the elector. Among these is the responsibility to become active in and well-informed about community affairs. Keenly participating in the endeavours of the community enables the elector to learn about, and thus to wisely vote for, those who best exemplify the qualities of leadership suitable for elected service. Preeminent among these qualities are those “of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience.”⁴⁸ All other criteria are either secondary, as in the case of diversity of representation—which the voter should take into account after considering the preeminent qualities of those eligible for election—or irrelevant, as in the case of material or social status.⁴⁹

In short, active participation in the affairs of the community combined with “a heightened awareness of the functions to be performed by the elected body” enables the individual to “properly assess those for whom a vote should be cast.”⁵⁰ In this way, the voter enjoys many freedoms, including the freedom to choose from among all community members of age, freedom from the poison of backbiting, freedom from the limitations of competing reductionisms, and thus the freedom to consult his or her conscience without feeling beholden to any personality or partisan creed. The individual is also free to actively develop her or his organic relationship to the institutions that both serve and govern social life.

Associating and Learning in Action

This organic relationship is fostered through an approach to overcoming the tension between over-centralization and decentralization that has long occupied democratic thought. On this point, thinkers such as Alexis de Tocqueville⁵¹ worry about the dangers of administrative centralization. In his view, history has tended towards greater and greater concentration of such power, thus threatening the township, which he considers the cradle of democracy because its institutions put self-rule within the

⁴⁸ Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration: Selected Messages 1922–1932* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), p. 88.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of the importance of diversity as a consideration when voting in a Bahá'í election, see Arash Abizadeh, ‘How Bahá'í Voters Should Vote’, *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 18.1–4 (2008), p. 77–94.

⁵⁰ The Universal House of Justice, 25 March 2007, to the Bahá'ís of the World. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20070325_001/1 [accessed 25 June 2025]

⁵¹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America*, trans. by Gerald E. Bevan, with an introduction and notes by Isaac Kramnick (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).

reach of the people. At this level, the people are able to organize, legislate, and deliberate over their common interests. He observes that among the pillars of democracy are civil associations, which also operate at the local scale. These voluntary organizations are where we learn to take initiative and pursue common aims. They are where we advance “the science of association,” which, for him, “is the mother science; the progress of all the people depends on the progress of that one.”⁵² Through joining together in collaborative endeavours, we develop a taste for liberty. Such association is actually at the core of liberty.

In their efforts to associate more effectively, Bahá'ís are learning to weave the active participation of everyone into the pattern of community life. One tool to enhance such participation is a space called the reflection meeting, where community members from a small geographic area, known as a “cluster,” gather on a quarterly basis to consult on the effectiveness of their development activities as well as on adjustments to community goals and strategies. For instance, community members might assess how their educational activities are growing in their area, then adjust their approach based on what they've learned. The Universal House of Justice explains that this space enables “planning and implementation to become more responsive to circumstances on the ground” and enables “those engaged in activities at the cluster level ... to reach consensus on the current status of their situation, in light of experience and guidance from the institutions, and to determine their immediate steps forward.”⁵³ Reflecting on learning and decision-making also takes place within even smaller pockets of activity—in neighbourhoods, networks of families, and other local contexts—which have their own grassroots processes of action and reflection that both nourish and derive nourishment from the learning at the cluster level. This reciprocal flow of learning between these levels of activity, in turn, generates a greater sense of responsibility and ownership among those participating in these settings.⁵⁴

The local institutions play a crucial role in nurturing these spaces and in gleaning key insights from them. To this end, they are strengthening their ability to consult about how to best encourage, guide, and support these activities. They also work to foster a unity in diversity of action and reflection aimed at raising capacity among populations within their areas to take charge of their own spiritual, social, and intellectual development.⁵⁵ Similarly, institutions at all levels—from the local to the international—strive to synthesize the knowledge generated at the grassroots level and disseminate it to other pockets of activity to inform their respective endeavours, thus playing a key role in facilitating the flow of learning across populations.⁵⁶ In so doing, they give impetus to an organic process of

⁵² Cited in Steven B Smith, *Political Philosophy*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 211.

⁵³ The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2010, to the Bahá'ís of the World. https://universalhouseofjustice.bahai.org/ridvan-messages/20100421_001 [accessed 25 June 2025]

⁵⁴ The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015, to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20151229_001/1 [accessed 25 June 2025]

⁵⁵ The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2010, to the Bahá'ís of the World. https://universalhouseofjustice.bahai.org/ridvan-messages/20100421_001 [accessed 25 June 2025]

⁵⁶ Todd Smith, ‘Crisis and the Power of an Inclusive Historical Consciousness: Progressing from Delusional Habits to Dynamic Freedom’, *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 30.1–2 (2020), p. 47–113.

growth in which grassroots experience is contextualized within local, regional, national, and global learning processes all guided by a unifying yet evolving conceptual framework.⁵⁷

Taken together, the community thereby discovers how to strike a vital balance between decentralization and centralization and to blend and harmonize the strengths of both the indirect and direct features of democracy. It thus encourages its members to regularly associate, to meaningfully participate in deliberation and decision making, and to develop solidarity with others.

Finally, Bahá'í consultation is a central component of this learning process that upholds unity over division in the search for truth. It is a deliberative approach that presumes several key principles: that the generation of knowledge is something everyone can and should be empowered to engage in; that insights are provisional and fallible no matter their human source, but that they are also potentially viable and worthy of consideration; that different viewpoints offer different takes on reality, some of which overlap and reinforce one another; and that a major objective is to collectively scrutinize the value of these perspectives, weeding out flawed ones while, wherever possible, correlating and harmonizing beneficial ones. Bahá'u'lláh describes the exalted nature of consultation in the following terms: “The Great Being saith: The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.”⁵⁸

The approach to knowledge exemplified by consultation extends throughout the entire process of learning in which the Bahá'í community is engaged—a process that encompasses its ongoing efforts to implement and refine its distinctive system of political self-organization. Because partisanship—indeed any kind of factionalism—is both normatively ruled out and actually excluded, the generation, dissemination, and application of knowledge from the local to the global levels do not suffer the injuries they typically do in mainstream political systems. Knowledge is not siloed within worldview-defined bubbles, not hoarded by self-interested actors, not distorted or cherry-picked to be used as a weapon against others, and not supplanted by self-serving fabrications.

Conclusion: Encouraging Universal Participation

Later in his writings, Tocqueville raises the concern of democratic despotism—a warning that resonates powerfully today. He warns of a condition in which we become more pliant, subject to manipulation, and so languish in a state of political adolescence. Speaking in particular of the relatively recent phenomenon of the administrative state, he worries about its tendency towards paternalism, which can lead to docility and apathy, to anomie and alienation—to a state of fragility that “hinders, compromises, enervates, extinguishes, dazes, and finally reduces each nation to being nothing more than a herd of timid and industrious animals of which government is the shepherd.”⁵⁹ This form of soft despotism is, for him, ultimately the greatest danger of democracy.

⁵⁷ Michael Karlberg and Todd Smith, ‘A Culture of Learning’, in *The World of the Bahá'í Faith*, ed. by Robert Stockman (London: Routledge, 2022).

⁵⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, rev. ed (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), p. 168.

⁵⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), II.iv.6, p. 663.

He goes on to argue that democracy is historically inevitable but also that we have a say in what it looks like. Thinkers like Calhoun et al. say something similar, arguing that the democratic project is never perfected and that its ideals are never fully realized, but it can undergo continual improvement. They consequently suggest an impermanent solution, which involves unremittingly rethinking and rebuilding the social foundations of democracy while cultivating the requisite virtues and culture.⁶⁰ This is a charge for everyone, a call for an inclusive polity. They state: “In times like these, when the democratic crisis is deepest, the task of democracy’s regeneration cannot be left to legislative actions and executive programs. It will take a movement. The people must awaken.”⁶¹

For Bahá’ís, adopting an approach to learning in action is key to our collective awakening. Fundamental to this process is the conviction that every member of the human family is capable of, and responsible for, helping to bring about the betterment of humankind. The Universal House of Justice explains that the Bahá’í community thus strives to continually widen “the circle of participation”⁶² and welcome “the constructive contributions”⁶³ of all. In fact, Bahá’ís and their fellow learners envision themselves as “treading a common path of service,”⁶⁴ the contours of which are shaped and further refined as collective experience is accrued and analysed and the vision of growth correspondingly evolves. The idea is that in order to generate knowledge that continually “beckons to new horizons”⁶⁵ on the journey to realizing humanity’s oneness in all its potential, conditions need to be created in which everyone feels encouraged and empowered to participate “not in the abstract but on the basis of that intimate knowledge which is only acquired by working side by side in the field of service.”⁶⁶ In this way, a culture develops “which promotes a way of thinking, studying, and acting, in which all consider themselves as treading a common path of service—supporting one another and advancing together, respectful of the knowledge that each one possesses at any given moment.”⁶⁷

From a Bahá’í perspective, “therein lie the dynamics of an irrepressible movement.”⁶⁸ Therein lie the freedoms to vote with an untainted conscience, to access relevant information, to reason attentively, to serve according to conscience. Therein lie the freedoms to associate in harmony and

⁶⁰ Calhoun et al., *Degenerations of Democracy*, p. 282–283.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² The Universal House of Justice, 30 December 2021, to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/2011230_001/1 [accessed 25 June 2025]

⁶³ The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2010, to the Bahá’ís of the World. https://universalhouseofjustice.bahai.org/ridvan-messages/20100421_001 [accessed 25 June 2025]

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ The Universal House of Justice, 12 December 2011, to All National Spiritual Assemblies. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20111212_001/1 [accessed 25 June 2025]

⁶⁶ The Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010, to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors. https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20101228_001/20101228_001.pdf?e19067f1 [accessed 25 June 2025]

⁶⁷ The Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2010, to the Bahá’ís of the World. https://universalhouseofjustice.bahai.org/ridvan-messages/20100421_001 [accessed 25 June 2025]

⁶⁸ Ibid.

with purpose, to deliberate productively, to draw inspiration from one another, and to effectively problem solve. Therein, ultimately, lie the freedoms to discover truth, to unfold individual and collective potential, to build society, and thus to flourish as one humanity in all our diversity.

Author Biographies

Todd Smith holds a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto where he focused on developing a consultative epistemology concerning health, illness, and disease. He has since published articles on epistemology, the harmony of science and religion, freedom of speech, and historical consciousness. Todd has worked with a variety of Bahá'í-inspired educational endeavours and has served on both the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada and the Regional Bahá'í Council of Ontario. He was the Coordinator of the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre for seven years, and now serves as Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Association for Bahá'í Studies in North America.

Michael is a Ph.D. candidate in Political Science at the University of Toronto. His research involves putting a Bahá'í framework for governance into dialogue with political philosophy. He is a lawyer by training, having practiced constitutional litigation in Ottawa after clerking at the Supreme Court of Canada. Michael has previously published articles on the relevance of Bahá'í political conceptions and practice for problems in contemporary governance, as well as on a Bahá'í framework for the treatment of animals. Michael resides in Calgary with his wife and two sons, and is the Editor of *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*.

Paper

Some of the Earliest References to Bahá'u'lláh in the West

Jan Teofil Jasion

Abstract

This study outlines the first mention of Bahá'u'lláh in popular media in the West in 1871. Using digital newspaper archives, it traces how letters by Georg David Hardegg and Dr. Thomas Chaplin introduced Bahá'u'lláh's name, under various transliterations, to readers across Europe, North America, and the Pacific. Chaplin's letter in *The Times* proved especially influential, being reprinted in more than forty newspapers as well as several religious journals and encyclopaedias. Where available, information about the editors who were responsible for these publications is shared. These findings show the extent to which an unintended international network helped spread Bahá'u'lláh's name during His lifetime.

Introduction

It is commonly believed that the first reference in the West to Bahá'u'lláh occurred at the World's Parliament of Religions, which was held at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. There Rev. George Alfred Ford (1851-1928) read a paper written by Rev. Henry Harris Jessup (1832-1910)¹, entitled, "The Religious Mission of the English Speaking Nations."² In this paper, filled with Christian missionary zeal, he spends a few words on the Bahá'í Faith and mentions the name of Bahá'u'lláh³. This event became an important element in Bahá'í historiography, and Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith, mentions it in his *God Passes By*⁴. However, lesser known to many scholars is that the first reference to the name of Bahá'u'lláh occurred twenty-two years earlier, as will be shown here.

Thanks to modern technology, a significant portion of the world's newspapers are now available through digital sources. Many leading national libraries have provided access to their newspaper collection on an unprecedented scale. It is no longer necessary to travel from city to city in order to bury oneself in heaps of fragile and crumbling pages, or to squint at barely legible microfilms. Today the results are studies such as this one which peel back the pages of time and reveal the knowledge of events, events that most thought were hidden away in long lost archives. One such event was the imprisonment and exile of Bahá'u'lláh.

Before proceeding a brief note on the methodology is needed. The research was limited to available digital newspaper databases, which are outlined in Appendix 2. It was not universal in scope. Many private and a few state newspaper databases, such as Retronews (France), British Newspaper Archive and the Irish Newspaper Archives, are behind pay walls. Furthermore, there are others, mainly from the Global

¹ Both Ford and Jessup were American Presbyterian missionaries serving in the region of Lebanon and Syria.

² Jessup, Henry H., "The Religious Mission of the English Speaking Nations," in John Henry Barrows, ed., *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's First Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in Connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893*. Volume II (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Co., 1893), pp. 1122-1126.

³ Here the name is given as 'Beha Allah.'

⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2012), pp. 404-405.

South, which are not accessible to independent scholars and scholars outside of America, since they are restricted to institutional subscriptions. Not all national or regional library agencies have the ability to digitize their newspaper collection, mainly due to lack of funds and dedicated staff.

Early Mentions

One of the first writers to come upon the first mentions of Bahá'u'lláh's name was Moojan Momen. In 1981 in his *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions, 1844-1944* he mentions the earliest references to Bahá'u'lláh in the Western press by Thomas Chaplin and Georg Hardegg. Later other writers such as Kurt Asplund⁵ expand the number of newspaper references to Chaplin's letter.

The story begins in the mid- and late 1800s the Persian and Ottoman authorities conspired to obliterate the Bahá'í Faith. Through barbaric pogroms, imprisonment, and exile they tried to remove the Faith from the face of the earth. By exiling Bahá'u'lláh to a remote corner of the Empire, and by harsh and strict control over the movement of people in and out of that prison-city, they attempted to suffocate the news of His very existence.

In 1871 when Bahá'u'lláh was still confined to the city of Acre, the Persian and Ottoman authorities must have felt confident that they had crushed the new Faith. They thought that if they pushed it to the far margins of history the last Remnant of God's newest Faith would disappear. However, these despots and their minions were thwarted in their designs by what some would call a divinely-led plot to ferment an unconscious and uncoordinated conspiracy. First led by two notable Christian missionaries and then put into play by over thirty men and women working diligently and professionally in what are today the following nations: Great Britain, Ireland, Belgium, Sweden, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. These publishers, editors and newspaper proprietors, through the columns of their newspapers, proclaimed the name of Bahá'u'lláh to their readership in thirty-three cities on three continents.

On more than one occasion Bahá'u'lláh indicated His high esteem for these “men of the pen,” as in this highly memorable passage from the *Lawḥ-i-Salmán*⁶:

If any man were to arise to defend, in his writings, the Cause of God against its assailants, such a man, however inconsiderable his share, shall be so honored in the world to come that the Concourse on high would envy his glory. No pen can depict the loftiness of his station, neither can any tongue describe its splendor.

This quotation with the phrase of “any man” extends well beyond the handful of writers found amongst the ranks of his followers, beyond the numerous well-wishers, scholars, and diplomats, to include newspaper owners, publishers and editors. Even those opposed to His teachings and His detractors could be included, for they also assisted in spreading His name, and thus keeping Him out of the shadows.

The articles of 1871 were translated into French, English, German, Spanish, Italian, and Swedish. Though the name of Bahá'u'lláh was given as *‘Bebeyah Allah’* and *‘Bebaon Allah’*, there is no doubt to whom it refers. These were published in two waves during the life of Bahá'u'lláh, in 1871-1874 and in 1883-1884.

The first of the two chief protagonists in this drama were Georg David Hardegg (1812 Ludwigsburg, Württemberg – 1879 Haifa). He was a German radical and later a mystic, who with Christoph Hoffmann had co-founded the German Templer Society [Tempelgesellschaft]. This was a pietist reform movement that sought to renew Christianity through moral living. From 1868 it established model agricultural

⁵ Kurt Asplund, comp., “The Babs of Persia,” *Bahá'í Library Online*, 2000. (Accessed 14 Nov 2025).

⁶ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), CLIV, pp. 330.

colonies in Palestine. In Palestine, there were interchanges between Bahá'ís and Templers. In fact, Bahá'u'lláh wrote a Tablet (letter) to Georg Hardegg around 1872-1873, called *Lawḥ-i-Hartík*⁷.

A letter by Georg Hardegg was published in *Süddeutsche Warte* (Stuttgart) on 20 July 1871, pp. 113-114⁸. It was translated into English and published anonymously in the section, "Masonic Matters" edited by John W. Simons in the *New York Dispatch* on 13 October 1872.⁹ In his letter he states that he met with Abbás Effendi [Abdu'l-Bahá] on 8 June 1871 in Haifa. In this article Hardegg gives Bahá'u'lláh's name as '*Behaon Allah*'. It is not known what the connection is between the German Templers and Freemasonry, a quasi-religious movement. This is the letter as it appeared in the *New York Dispatch*, with scans of passages shown in Figure 1 below the text:

Notice of the History of a Sect Among the Mohammedans in Persia. – (From a letter from a friend at Caifa¹⁰, Syria, to Brother Rob Morris.) – In the city of Caifa, there live certain Persians who support themselves as workmen in metal and wood. They attract attention by their intelligent and open expression of countenance and their Persian garb. They form part of Persian sect whose chief and membership, including women, children and domestics, to the number of about eighty persons, live, confined by the Turkish government at Acre, to the distance of three leagues from Caifa.

An acquaintance having sprung up between me and the Persians, I had formed the impression through these interviews that these people, despite all the obscurity of their spiritual condition, were seekers after truth.

To inform myself more thoroughly, I sought an interview with the chief, *Behaon Allah* (the name being interpreted, signifies "Lightened, or Illuminated by God"), whose family name is *Nouri*, a grand proprietary in Persia. This interview took place June 8, 1871, with the son of Behaon Allah, by name Abbas Effendi, a young man of twenty-seven years, and was brought about by means of a well-informed native of Acre, who acted as interpreter.

I opened the conference by saying to the Effendi that if this interview was calculated to subject him to any inconvenience on the part of the authorities, I would submit the matter to his judgment and renounce it. Upon which he replied that in Persia there is a proverb, "After dark all things are of a color;" that is to say, after so much suffering, his condition could not be made worse. The following is their history, as he stated it to me:

About twenty-three years ago there appeared in Persia a common merchant named *Hadrat el Babe*, who by the perusal of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, displayed all at once an illumination and superior gifts of manner the most striking. He awaited the coming of the Messiah, and soon secured disciples.

The King of Persia demanded of him what were his purpose, Hadrat replied that the king had permitted a discussion between his wise men and himself (Hadrat). This was done, and the wise men could not refute him. Then the king being compelled to engage in war, demanded that Hadrat

⁷ See: Bahá'u'lláh, "Tablet to Hardegg (*Lawḥ-i-Hartík*)," Introduced and translated by Stephen Lambden and Kamran Ekbal, *Lights of Irfan* (Wilmette) vol. 4 (2003), pp. 97-111.

⁸ See a modern translation in Moojan Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), p. 237. It was reprinted in Carolyn Sparey Fox, *Seeking a State of Heaven: The German Templers* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2018), pp. 91-92. The German original version is not available.

⁹ "Notice of the History of a Sect Among the Mohammedans in Persia," *New York Dispatch* (New York City) vol. 27 no. 50 (Oct. 13, 1872), pp. 3. Editor-in-chief: Francis Shubael Smith I (1819 Norwich, Conn. – 1887 Brooklyn, N.Y.).

¹⁰ Currently Haifa, Israel [ed.]

should be imprisoned. The war being over, the king, after victim, died, and his son mounted the throne.

Under these circumstances the sect, having increased in Persia, the new king, to stop its further propagation, put Hadrat to death. In the three days before his death Hadrat predicted this event in the presence of several disciples, one of whom wishing to die with him also suffered death.

But in spite of this, the propagation of the system made progress. Then the king ordered a persecution and a general extermination, in which, in the course of time, 18,000 people were killed by many and most cruel forms of death.

Hadrat el Babe had designated Behaon Allah to continue his work.

About that time it happened that an attempt to assassinate the king was made by means of a pistol shot. The weapon being only charged with soft lead (*plomb leger*), the king was not even wounded, but he believed that Behaon to have been engaged in the matter. Being called before the king he declared that such was not the case, but if he or his friends had desired to kill the king he would find surer means to effect it.

Seeing this state of things, the European ambassadors, especially the Russian, interposed their authority. Behaon was restored to liberty, the ambassadors, however advising him to go to Bagdad under protection of the Sublime Porte.

He did so; but from that time the new light spread also throughout Bagdad. At that time "Pilate and Herod became friends." The Turkish and Persian governments jointly persecuted the sect. The wealth of Behaon at Bagdad was confiscated, and he was sent, together with his friends to Constantinople, then it was thought best to confine them to Adrianople – Romelia or European Turkey seeming to offer better security against the contagion. But in the meantime, also at Adrianople they gained friends by their conduct. Then it was resolved to send them to Acre. The European consuls at Adrianople offered to stop this, but Behaon declared to them that if they thought good to make efforts in his favor they might do so without his solicitation, and independently of him, but for his part he had resolved to follow the will of God. Then he was sent to Acre, while the sect in Persia was left in repose. At the time of my arrival at Caifa, in November, 1868, I found them there.

I hope and believe that the German Emperor, the heir to Charlemagne and of Frederick the Great, will extend and make practical his power in the East in favor of justice and liberty of conscience. The Sublime Porte can refuse him nothing, it appears to me, when it is considered that the new German Empire and its subjects are not hostile to this country.

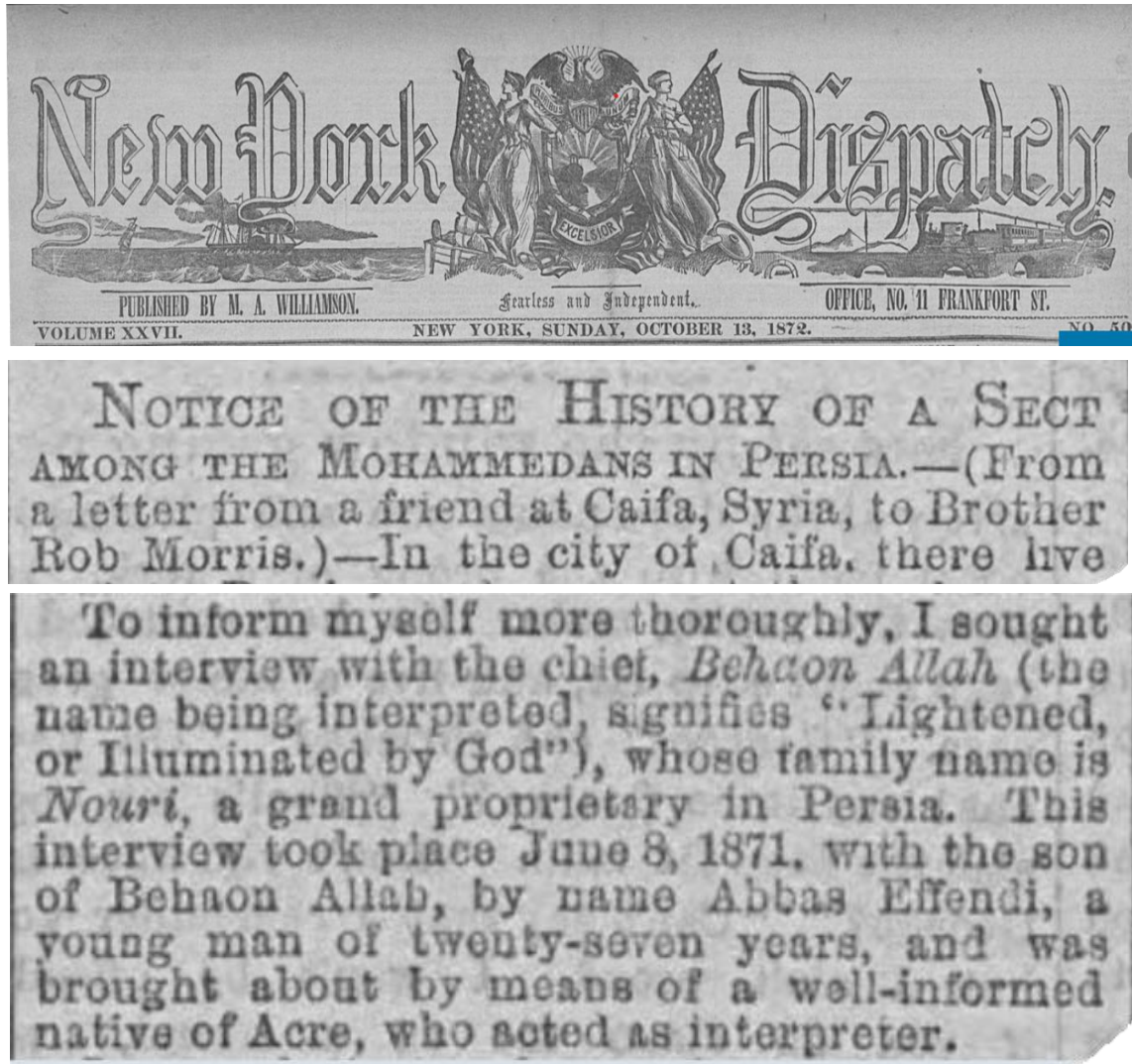


Figure 1. Scans of sections of a letter by Georg Hardegg, originally published in *Süddeutsche Warte* (Stuttgart) on 20 July 1871, here translated into English and published anonymously in the section, "Masonic Matters" edited by John W. Simons in the *New York Dispatch* on 13 October 1872. Source: "Notice of the History of a Sect Among the Mohammedans in Persia," *New York Dispatch* (New York City) vol. 27 no. 50 (13 Oct 1872), p. 3.

The Letter of Dr Thomas Chaplin

Dr Thomas Chaplin, is our second hero. Dr Thomas Chaplin (1830 – 20 Sept 1904, St. Leonards-on-Sea) was chief medical missionary at the Jerusalem Hospital of the London Jews' Society from 1860 to 1885. He was also closely involved with establishing the well-known archaeological society, the Palestine Exploration Fund. He visited Haifa and had a long interview with 'Abdu'l-Bahá and other Bahá'ís.

Dr Chaplin's letter was sent to *The Times* of London, where it was published on 5 October 1871, on page 8 as "The Babs of Persia, by Dr. Thomas Chaplin." *The Times* was considered the most prestigious and reliable newspaper in the world at this time. Its editor was John Thadeus Delane (11 Oct 1817, London – 22 Nov, 1879, Ascot). Though not a major article, and tucked away on page eight, it still made ripples through the consciousness of many editors. This seems to be a metaphysical response to Bahá'u'lláh's apostrophe to the clergy:

O concourse of priests! . . . It behoveth you, in this day, to proclaim aloud the Most Great Name among the nations.¹¹

The full text of Chaplin's remarkable letter is attached at the end of this essay.

The next day, October 6, the article appeared in newspapers in London, Liverpool and Birmingham. This was the first wave of some forty-three newspapers world-wide that carried either the entire letter or at least the portion mentioning the name of Bahá'u'lláh.

These editors in England published the letter by Thomas Chaplin under a variety of titles. Each entry is a story unique unto itself. At first it was published in secular newspapers in England, such as in *The Birmingham Daily Gazette*, which was published and printed by Ralph Harrison under the title "The Babs of Persia."¹² The *Supplement to the Daily Post*, a high quality paper which served not only Liverpool, but also the area of Merseyside and North Wales, placed Chaplin's letter in the supplement.¹³ It was edited by its founder, the former Chief Constable of Liverpool, Michael James Witty (1795-1873). That same day the popular London daily, *The Mail* published the same article.¹⁴ It was published and printed by the well-known printer Francis Goodlake.

The Irish press was quick to follow, with Dublin's *The Daily Express* being the first Irish newspaper to introduce Bahá'u'lláh to the Emerald Isle.¹⁵ This Unionist aligned paper was published and printed by Edward Cosby. The following Saturday, October 7, saw the first headline trying to correlate the new teachings with Christianity in *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, under editorship of Douglas Cox.¹⁶ This theme "A New Quasi Christian Sect in Persia," would feature prominently in several newspapers in Britain and abroad. A second Liverpool paper, *The Liverpool Mercury* also reprinted the article from *The Times*.¹⁷ The *Mercury* was printed and published by Anne Elisa Egerton Smith (d. 1877) and John Maitland.

A few days later more Irish newspapers began to feature Rev. Chaplin's letter. On the 10th it was the well-known *Belfast News-Letter* printed by James Alexander Henderson (1823-1883) that printed the letter.¹⁸ Henderson besides being a well-known newspaperman was an active member of the Presbyterian Church. In the nearby town of Armagh, the article as reprinted the next day, the 11th of October.¹⁹ The proprietor was one J. Heatley. There was one more Irish publication during October and, that was in *The Wexford Independent*, printed and published by John Greene on the 14th.²⁰ Of some interest is that this is the first paper to place the article on its front page.

It took a week before the first religious newspaper reprinted Rev. Chaplin's letter. This was *The English Independent*, a Nonconformist Congregationalist weekly newspaper published by John B. Howatt.²¹ This was a socially and intellectually influential Protestant movement.

¹¹ Bahá'u'lláh, "Lawḥ-i-Aqdas," *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), p. 13.

¹² "The Babs of Persia," *The Birmingham Daily Gazette* (Birmingham) no. 2449 (Oct. 6, 1871), p. 6.

¹³ "The Babs of Persia," *Supplement to the Daily Post* (Liverpool) (Oct. 6, 1871), p. 2.

¹⁴ "The Babs of Persia," *The Mail* (London) no. 1718 (Oct. 6, 1871), p. 2.

¹⁵ "The Babs of Persia," *The Daily Express* (Dublin, Ireland) no. 6422 (Oct. 6, 1871), p. 3.

¹⁶ "A New Quasi Christian Sect in Persia," *Bell's Weekly Messenger* (London) no. 3904 (Oct. 7, 1871), p. 2.

¹⁷ "The Babs of Persia," *The Liverpool Mercury* (Liverpool) no. 7397 (Oct. 7, 1871), p. 7.

¹⁸ "A New Christian Sect," *Belfast News-Letter* (Belfast) no. 55, 144 (Oct. 10, 1871), p. 2.

¹⁹ "A New Christian Sect," *The Ulster Gazette* (Armagh) no. 1417 (Oct. 11, 1871), p. 3.

²⁰ "The Babs of Persia," *The Wexford Independent* (Wexford) vol. 42 no. 4369 (Oct. 14, 1871), p. 1.

²¹ "A letter from Dr. Chaplin," *The English Independent* (London) vol. 5 no. 250 (Oct. 12, 1871), p. 995.

Scotland received the news through the *Banffshire Reporter* out of the small town of Portsoy on Scotland's north-east coast on October 13th. It was printed and published by Thomas Anderson.²²

The English provincial press continued to be active in this endeavour, with two more echoes of this article. In the county of Cornwall on October 13th it appeared in the *The Redruth Times and Camborne Advertiser*,²³ which was printed and published by James Jenkin. Redruth is just 32 miles from Land's End, making it the southernmost publication of Chaplin's letter. In Lancashire, the printer and publisher George Christopher Clark placed the article on page 3 of his *The Lancaster Gazette* on October 21st.²⁴

Even though the British and Irish press dominated the publishing of this news, and would continue to do so, they were not, however exclusive. The first country outside the British Isles to receive the news of the name of Bahá'u'lláh was Spain. The Spanish Catholic publisher Don Luis María de Llauder y de Dalmases (1837-1871), had the article translated and published in his paper *La Conviccion*²⁵ only nine days after it appeared in *The Times*.

The month of October concludes with the news crossing the Atlantic. First appearing in Quebec City in *The Quebec Gazette*²⁶ on the 18th, and then on the 23rd in Hamilton, Ontario in the *Daily Spectator*.²⁷ Three days later it was published in two newspapers in the United States, *Newark Daily Advertiser* in Newark, New Jersey²⁸ and in the *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette*.²⁹

It should be noted that not all the editors who quoted from Dr Chaplin's letter, mentioned the name of Bahá'u'lláh in their summary. A case in point is an article in *The Belfast Weekly News* of 14 Oct. 1871.³⁰

In November four London-based religious magazines published the Chaplin letter. One of which was *The Church Missionary Intelligencer*³¹, published by the Church Missionary Society of the Church of England catering to a readership which would have been mostly clergy and lay supporters of the Church. The Church of England also published the letter in their *The Church of England Magazine*.³²

The official organ of the Primitive Methodist Church, *The Primitive Methodist Magazine*, under the guidance of its publisher Rev. George Lamb (1809 – 1886)³³ also published the letter in November³⁴, as

²² "The Babs of Persia—A New Christian Sect," *Banffshire Reporter* (Portsoy, Scotland) vol. 14 no. 811 (Oct. 13, 1871), p. 4.

²³ "The Babs of Persia," *The Redruth Times and Camborne Advertiser* (Redruth, Cornwall) no. 441 (Oct. 13, 1871), p. 3.

²⁴ "Spread of Christianity," *The Lancaster Gazette* (Lancaster, England) no. 4410 (Oct. 21, 1871), p. 3.

²⁵ "Correspondencias Particulares de La Conviccion," *La Conviccion* (Barcelona) no. 464 (14 Oct. 1871), p. 6358.

²⁶ "A New Christian Sect in Persia," *The Quebec Gazette* (Quebec City) vol. 109 no. 10,845 (Oct. 18, 1871), p. 2.

²⁷ "Bab El Huk," *The Daily Spectator* (Hamilton, Ontario) vol. 24 no. 252 (Oct. 23, 1871), p. 2. This paper was edited by David McCulloch.

²⁸ "Who the Babs Are?" *Newark Daily Advertiser* (Newark, New Jersey) vol. 40 no. 251 (Oct. 26, 1871), p. 1. Editor: Thomas Talmadge Kinney (1821 – 1900), newspaperman and civic leader.

²⁹ "Christian Mussulmen," *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) vol. 87 no. 244 (Oct. 26, 1871), p. 1. The proprietors and editors were: Josiah King; M. P. Reed; Thomas P. Houston; and Henry M. Long.

³⁰ "A New Christian Sect," *The Belfast Weekly News* (Belfast, Ireland) no. 841 (Oct. 14, 1871), p. 6.

³¹ "The Famine in Persia," *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (London) vol. 7, n.s. (Nov. 1871), pp. 327-332.

³² "Persia – The Babs," *The Church of England Magazine* (London) (Nov. 11, 1871), pp. 316-318. No one person can be identified with this journal. On the title page it is noted that this was issued "under the superintendence of clergymen of the English Church." In the imprint it states that it was "Published for the Proprietors by S. D. Ewins."

³³ Lamb was also involved in social movements for the betterment of society. He was a member of the Hull School Board and Hull Charity Organisation Committee. He was also President of the Hull Gospel Temperance Society.

³⁴ "The Babs of Persia," *The Primitive Methodist Magazine* (London) vol. 9 (Nov. 1871), pp. 702-703.

did *The Missing Link Magazine: Bible Work at Home and Abroad*, edited by Ellen Henriette Raynard (1809-1879). This journal was dedicated to spreading the Bible among the working poor women of London³⁵.

In Ireland it appeared in *The Irish Church Advocate and Achill Missionary Herald* (Dublin) on 1 November³⁶. This was the official organ of the Achill Missionary Settlement, which aimed to promote Protestant education among the Catholic population of Achill, an island off the west coast of Ireland. On the same day a newspaper in Cavan, a town north of Dublin, *The Cavan Weekly News and General Advertiser*, under the editorship of John Fegan, placed the article on page 4³⁷.

In the United States three Christian newspapers reprinted the letter, two affiliated with the Methodist Episcopal Church and one with the Congregational Church. The two Methodist papers were *The Buffalo Christian Advocate*³⁸, under editorship of John E. Robie and Allen R. Ripley and *The Christian Advocate*³⁹ from New Orleans published by Robert J. Harp (1829-1914) for the Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana Conferences Methodist Episcopal Church South. The Congregationalist paper was *The Christian Mirror*⁴⁰ from Portland, Maine. It was published by Arthur Shirley (1822-1899) and was affiliated with the Maine Missionary Society. Other newspapers published articles based on Chaplin's letter such as the *North Georgian Citizen* from Dalton, Georgia⁴¹, and *The Appleton Post*⁴² from the small town of Appleton, Wisconsin, with a population then of only 4500.

The name of Bahá'u'lláh continued to be spread in Europe. The official gazette of the Kingdom of Belgium, *Le Moniteur Belge, Journal officiel*⁴³ published a French translation of Chaplin's letter on 21 November. A German translation was published in the *Süddeutsche Warte*⁴⁴ in Stuttgart Württemberg on 30 November. On 4 December, only a few months after the terrible fratricide known as the Paris Commune, the French government's official journal, the *Journal officiel de la République Française*, published an article based on Chaplin's letter and proclaiming the name of Bahá'u'lláh⁴⁵. Official journals in Italy also published articles based on Chaplin's letter. First was the official journal of the Kingdom of Italy, the *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia* on 11 December⁴⁶, and then it was the provincial journal from Friuli,

³⁵ "The Babs of Persia," *The Missing Link Magazine: Bible Work at Home and Abroad* (London) vol. 7 (Nov. 1, 1871), pp. 342-346. Ellen Raynard, besides being an exponent of Bible teaching, was also a pioneer in the field of home nursing. She trained over eighty 'Bible women' in home nursing for work among the poor.

³⁶ "Missionary Enterprise," *The Irish Church Advocate and Achill Missionary Herald* (Dublin) vol. 37 no. 412 (Nov. 1, 1871), p. 171. It was edited by Rev. Edward Nangle (1799 Athboy, Ireland – 1883 Dublin), Irish missionary to the island of Achill.

³⁷ "Missionary Enterprise," *The Cavan Weekly News and General Advertiser* (Cavan) vol. 7 no. 48 (Nov. 10, 1871), p. 4.

³⁸ "Remarkable Movements Among the Mohammedans," *The Buffalo Christian Advocate* (Buffalo, New York) vol. 27, no. 1137 (Nov. 9, 1871), p. 2.

³⁹ "Remarkable Movements Among Mohammedans" *The Christian Advocate* (New Orleans) vol. 17 no. 45 (Nov. 23, 1871), p. 1

⁴⁰ "Mohammedans," *The Christian Mirror* (Portland, Maine) no. 16 (Nov. 28, 1871), p. 1.

⁴¹ "An Attempt to Reconcile Christianity with Islamism," *North Georgia Citizen* (Dalton, Georgia) vol. 4 no. 45 (Nov. 9, 1871), p. 1. The publisher was J. T. Whitman.

⁴² "Remarkable Movements Among the Mohammedans," *The Appleton Post* (Appleton, Wisconsin) vol. 12 no. 49 (Nov. 16, 1871), p. 1. The proprietors were A. J. Reid and G. M. Miller.

⁴³ "Les Babs de la Perse," *Le Moniteur Belge, Journal officiel* (Bruxelles) no. 525 (21 Nov. 1871), p. 3152-3153.

⁴⁴ *Süddeutsche Warte* (Stuttgart) (30 Nov. 1871), pp. 191-192; publisher and editor Georg David Hardegg (1812-1879 Haifa). See Moojan Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), p. 238.

⁴⁵ "Les Babs de la Perse," *Journal officiel de la République Française* (Versailles) no. 336 (4 déc. 1871), p. 4769-4770. Rédacteur en chef/directeur de la presse: Charles-Edmond Villetard de Prunières (1828 – 1889).

⁴⁶ "Un medico inglese, il signor Tommaso Chaplin," *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia* (Roma) n. 338 (11 Dec. 1871), p. 1.

the *Giornale di Udine* on 15 December⁴⁷. The editor was Pacifico Valussi (1866-?). Other Italian papers have not yet been located. Back in London, the official journal of the Society for the Promulgation of the Gospel, *The Colonial Church Chronicle, and Missionary Journal* published it in their December issue⁴⁸. The last known article published in 1871 came from a paper called *Idaho World* published in Idaho City, Territory of Idaho, in the American Far West. At this time this mining town had a population of about 1500. The editor was George Ainslie (1839-1913)⁴⁹.

Early in 1872, the London-based monthly journal, *The Sunday Magazine* published the letter. The editor was Thomas Guthrie (1803 Brechin, Scotland – 1873 St Leonards-on-the-Sea, England), a well-known Scottish divine and philanthropist, moderator of the Free Church of Scotland, and founder and director of “The Ragged Schools” for poor street children⁵⁰.

New Zealand was introduced to the name of Bahá'u'lláh on 3 January 1872 when the Christchurch paper *The Press* published Chaplin's letter⁵¹. *The Press* was printed and published by William Henry Smith and edited by Joseph Colborne-Veel (1831-1895). Christchurch was located on South Island's east coast. The newspaper would have been sent by mail-coach to Hokitika, another mining town, on the other side of the Southern Alps, where it was printed in the *The West Coast Times* by Joseph Phillip (d. 1884) and edited by Henry (Cohen/Charles) Pirani (1818-1894) on 9 January⁵².

For 1872 there seems to be no logical explanation for the geographical spread of the newspaper articles which mentioned Bahá'u'lláh's name. After New Zealand, it appears in Philadelphia in February, on 9 March in Sydney, Australia, on the 14th in Stockholm, Sweden and in August and September in New York City.

Here are the details, first Philadelphia. At this time this city known as the “City of Brotherly Love,” was one of the main centres for religious publishing in America. The United Presbyterian *The Evangelical Repository and United Presbyterian Review*, edited by Joseph T. Cooper and W. W. Barr published the article in its February issue⁵³. On 9 March it was discovered in a newspaper published in Sydney, in the Colony of New South Wales. It was in the ultra-Protestant *The Protestant Standard*, published by William Carvosso Wearne (1836 – 1904)⁵⁴.

The next week an article appeared in the Baptist-oriented journal *Vecko-Posten* from Stockholm, Sweden⁵⁵. The editor and publisher was Magnus Adolf Gottlob Drake (1833-1906), a Swedish Baptist minister. The last two articles based on Chaplin's letter for 1872 were published in New York City in *The Independent* on 1 August⁵⁶ and the *New Jerusalem Messenger* 4 September⁵⁷. The latter was a Swedenborgian newspaper under the editorship of John Light Jewett (1809-1873).

⁴⁷ “Nuova sette religiosa,” *Giornale di Udine* (Udine) A. 6 no. 298 (15 Dec. 1871), p. 2.

⁴⁸ “Review: The Revival of Christianity in Syria,” *The Colonial Church Chronicle, and Missionary Journal* (London) (Dec. 1871), p. 481-485.

⁴⁹ “Who the Babs Are,” *Idaho World* (Idaho City) (Dec. 21, 1871), p. 4.

⁵⁰ “The Babs of Persia,” *The Sunday Magazine* (London) vol. 8 (1872), pp. 157-158.

⁵¹ “The Babs of Persia,” *The Press* (Christchurch, New Zealand) vol. 19 no. 2707 (Jan. 3, 1872), p. 3.

⁵² “The Babs of Persia,” *The West Coast Times* (Hokitika, New Zealand) no. 1958 (Jan. 9, 1872), p. 4.

⁵³ “Remarkable Movements Among Mohammedans in Persia, etc,” *The Evangelical Repository and United Presbyterian Review* (Philadelphia) vol. 10 no. 9 (Feb. 1872), pp. 578-579.

⁵⁴ “Syria: Three Thousand Mahometans Seeking the Light,” *The Protestant Standard* (Sydney) vol. 3 no. 46 (March 9, 1872), p. 3.

⁵⁵ “Babernas sekt i Persien,” *Vecko-Posten* (Stockholm) nr 11 (14 March 1872), p. 3.

⁵⁶ “Missions,” *The Independent* (New York City) vol. 24 no. 1235 (Aug. 1, 1872), p. 4. Editor, publisher and proprietor was Henry Chandler Bowen (1813 – 1896).

⁵⁷ “Babism,” *New Jerusalem Messenger* (New York City) vol. 16 no. 2 (Jan. 13, 1872), p. 22.

Several years later in 1878, the Society of Friends, better known as the Quakers, published an article based on Dr Chaplin's letter in their *Friends' Review*⁵⁸. The Philadelphia-based paper was edited by James Evans Rhoads (1828 Marple, Pennsylvania – 1895 Philadelphia), an American Quaker publisher and educator, and president of Bryn Mawr College.

This was the last known publication in a newspaper of Chaplin's letter prior to the small outbreak in 1883. No reviews or commentaries about his letter have been discovered.

Resurgence of 1883

In 1883 for reasons not yet understood there was a resurgence of interest in the Chaplin article and a small flurry of publications reprinted the portions of the major article mentioning the name “Beheyah Allah” [Bahá'u'lláh]. It began in Boston with a short article in *The Boston Sunday Budget* on 29 April 1883. The next month in London with *The South London Press* on 19 May⁵⁹, and on the same day it appeared in *The Sunny South* in Atlanta, Georgia⁶⁰. From Georgia we go north to Ontario, where other articles appeared in Markdale in the *Markdale Standard* on 31 May⁶¹, in Bradford on 9 June in *The Daily Expositor*⁶², on the 15 June in *The Weekly Expositor*⁶³, the last one discovered was in Richmond Hill's *The Liberal* also on 15 June⁶⁴.

It was not only newspapers that proclaimed Bahá'u'lláh's name during His lifetime. There were also reference works. It seems that these were also based on the Chaplin letter. They were published in England, the United States and Italy. In 1873 two appeared, *Haydn's Dictionary of Dates and Universal Information Relating to All Ages and Nations*, from London⁶⁵ and the *Supplimento Perenne alla Nuova Enciclopedia Popolare Italiana. Ossia rivista Annuale, 1871-1872* from Turin⁶⁶. A further six editions of *Haydn's Dictionary* were published in London and New York City⁶⁷ during Bahá'u'lláh's lifetime, all carrying the same article. This survey ends with the Italian *Nuova Enciclopedia Italiana*, published in Turin in 1883⁶⁸.

A brief summary indicates that sixteen of the papers were associated with a religious body or association. Several others were strongly aligned to the religious convictions of their editors. All of this

⁵⁸ “The Babs of Persia,” *Friends' Review* (Philadelphia) vol. 31 (26 Jan. 1878), p. 382-383.

⁵⁹ “The followers of El-Bab...,” *The South London Press* (London) vol. 37 no. 1026 (May 19, 1883), p. 14, col. 3. Printed and published by James Henderson (1823 Laurencekirk, Scotland – 1906 Worthing, England), a pioneering English publisher.

⁶⁰ “The followers of El-Bab...,” *The Sunny South* (Atlanta, Georgia) vol. 9 no. 401 (May 19, 1883), p. 20.
Editors and proprietors: John H. Seals (1833-1909) and William H. Seals.

⁶¹ “The followers of El-Bab...,” *Markdale Standard* (Markdale, Ontario) vol. 3 no. 38 (May 31, 1883), p. 2, col. 3.
Editor and proprietor: Charles W. Rutledge.

⁶² “Historical Items: “The followers of El-Bab...,” *The Daily Expositor* (Brantford, Ontario) vol. 10 no. 364 (June 9, 1883), p. 2.

⁶³ “Historical Items: “The followers of El-Bab...,” *The Weekly Expositor* (Brantford, Ontario) vol. 33 no. 13 (June 15, 1883), p. 1.

⁶⁴ “The followers of El-Bab...,” *The Liberal* (Richmond Hill, Ontario) vol. 5 no. 50 (June 15, 1883), p. 2. Editor and proprietor: J. A. Sturgeon Stewart.

⁶⁵ Vincent, Benjamin (1818 – 1899), ed., *Haydn's Dictionary of Dates and Universal Information Relating to All Ages and Nations*. – 14th ed. – London: E. Moxon, Son & Co., 1873. “Babysm,” p. 61.

⁶⁶ *Supplimento Perenne alla Nuova Enciclopedia Popolare Italiana. Ossia rivista Annuale, 1871-1872*. Torino: Unione Tipografica-Editrice Torinese, 1873. “Persia,” pp. 618-619. Director: Francesco di Mauro di Palvica.

⁶⁷ Vincent, Benjamin (1818 – 1899), ed., *Haydn's Dictionary of Dates and Universal Information relating to all ages and nations*. – American ed. – New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1874. “Babysm,” p. 61.

⁶⁸ *Nuova Enciclopedia Italiana. Vol. 17. 6. ed.* Torino: Union Tipographico-Editrice, 1884. “Persia,” p. 91-92. Editor: Gerolamo Boccardo (1829-1904).

is to be expected considering that the author was a Christian medical missionary. However, what was not expected in the collection were the four official government gazettes from France, Belgium and Italy. The other observation is that the newspapers tend to originate both from fairly well known and prosperous cities, and from small rural villages and mining towns.

The last known article in a newspaper influenced by Chaplin's letter was from 15 June 1883. The references in the three encyclopaedias go further, but here the research is incomplete. As more library collections are digitized and made available, and improvements made in the OCR systems, other articles based on by Dr Chaplin and Rev. Hardegg letters may come to light.

This is but one chapter, albeit an important one, indicating how religious sensitivity and truth, born out of centuries of appeals to the natural goodness of man, once ignited, percolate through the dross of material civilization. The spread of Bahá'u'lláh's name occurred even though, outwardly the editors were unaware of the significance of their work. From this meagre number it is evident that thousands exercised their free will and did not participate in this dynamic development. Further studies in Bahá'í proto-history may illustrate other world-enriching events.

Two questions will always remain. Why? Here it is possible that the only answer lies in Rudolf Otto's *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*,⁶⁹ where the question becomes the answer. And what was the effect on the readers who read *The Name* after a wait of almost 2000 years? A question tempting to ask, even though it is unanswerable.

Author Biography

Jan Teofil Jasion is a librarian, editor, journalist and author. Born in Toronto, he studied at the University of Windsor, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Jagiellonian University and Loughborough University. As a librarian he worked in public, university and government libraries in Labrador City, Fredericton, and Ottawa in Canada and in Cardiff, Wales and Bolton, England, as well as service at the Bahá'í International Library in Haifa. He worked as an editor and journalist in Poland for the Polish Press Agency and the University of Warsaw Philosophy Department.

Note and Acknowledgment

This work was based in part on the research done by many others including: Steve Kolins, Kurt Asplund, Moojan Momen, and others.

⁶⁹ Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923).

Appendix 1

THE BABS OF PERSIA⁷⁰

To the Editor of the Times

Sir.—Notices of the rise of a new quasi Christian sect in Persia have, I believe, appeared from time to time in English newspapers. Little, however, appears to be known upon the subject in this country, and the following information may therefore be acceptable to many of your readers. Of all the followers of Mahomet the Metawely of Persia⁷¹ are among the most bigoted and fanatical. Not only will they not eat or drink with Christians, but they dash to pieces any vessel belonging to them out of which a Christian has drunk, gather their garments round them as they pass a Christian in the street lest they should be contaminated by contact with him, and should any Christian book be in their way they remove it with tongs rather than defile themselves by touching it. About 30 years ago some intelligent and thoughtful members of the sect, of good position and education, were led by this very excess of bigotry to inquire into the reason of it, and, having procured from some Christians copies of the New Testament in the Arabic language, devoted themselves to its careful study. The result of their investigation was that they became convinced of its truth, accepted it as the Word of God, and embraced its doctrines. They did not, however, abandon their faith in Mahomet as a prophet of God, and the Koran as a divinely inspired book, but believed themselves able to reconcile the hitherto antagonistic creeds of Islam and Christianity. Their doctrine, which received the name of Bab el Huk (door of truth), spread rapidly, and in the course of a few years was professed by 200,000 persons. A persecution now arose, during which 20,000 adherents of the new doctrine were slain, and its founder, known as Beheyah Allah, took refuge with a small band of friends in Bagdad. Here he continued to hold communication with his followers in Persia, and exercised so much influence that the Government of that country requested the sultan of Turkey to remove him from such dangerous proximity to some place where he could less easily be communicated with. He was accordingly sent to Edernay, and subsequently to another fortress where he now is. In the spring of the present year I had an opportunity of visiting the Babs in their place of confinement. Beheyah Allah himself does not readily concede an interview to strangers, and receives only such as are desirous of obtaining from him instruction in religious truth. We were received by his son, who is apparently about 30 years of age, and has a fine intellectual countenance, with black hair and beard, and that sallow, melancholic look which distinguishes nearly all Persians of the intelligent and religious class. He was dressed in a robe of white flannel, with a cap of the same material, and a small white turban. Over his shoulders was thrown a brown cloth abbai. He appeared pleased to see us, but objected to answer questions respecting the origin and history of the sect. 'Let us speak of things spiritual,' he said, 'what you are now asking me is of no importance.' But on our telling him that people in England would naturally be curious to know in what way so remarkable a religious movement had arisen, and who were the originators of it, he gave us the information here detailed. He had a remarkably earnest, almost solemn manner, spoke excellent Arabic fluently, and showed a minute and accurate knowledge of the Old and New Testaments, as well as an acquaintance with the history of religious thought in Europe. Our interview lasted two hours, during the whole of which time an animated conversation was maintained. Like a true Oriental, he seldom gave a direct answer to a question upon any point of doctrine, but replied by another question, or by an illustration, his object throughout apparently being to convince his questioners of what he considered to be truth. He seemed to speak as one conscious of possessing

⁷⁰ Reprinted in Moojan Momen, *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions: Some Contemporary Western Accounts* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), p. 210-212.

⁷¹ Refers to the Twelver Shi'a Muslim population of Persia [ed.]

superior light—as a great teacher might speak to his disciples. 'Why,' he inquired, 'did not the Jews, who at the time of our Lord's advent were in expectation of their Messiah, believe on him?' And, assenting to our reply that it was because they misunderstood the Scriptures, he asked whether it might not be the case that Christians in like manner now misunderstood the Scripture—the inference (not expressed) being that his father was sent by God to teach the true doctrine. We did not obtain from him a clear statement of the views of the sect with reference to his father's character and office, but a very intelligent convert subsequently informed us that he was (at least by some) believed to be the angel spoken of in the first verse of the 18th chapter of Revelation. The fundamental doctrines of the sect we ascertained to be—1. That Christ is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. 2. That he died and rose again. 3. That justification is by faith in him. 4. That the new birth is necessary to salvation and good works as an evidence of it. 5. That the Holy Spirit operating upon the heart produces this new birth. They have no priests and no baptism. Circumcision is practised among them, but is not essential. They have several works written by Beheyah and other members of the sect, but it does not appear that these are regarded as authoritative. They believe that Christ will return, but spiritually. Beheyah Allah is said to have arrived at the truth solely by study of the Word of God. It is believed that he has at present 70,000 or 80,000 followers in Persia, but not openly professed. When persecuted they do not fight or resist, but are ready to die for their opinions. Between 70 and 80 share the exile and imprisonment of their leader. They are allowed considerable liberty within the walls of the city, Beheyah alone being confined to his house. They are allowed about 5d. a day per man by the Turkish Government. It is 15 years since they left their native country and between two and three since they were brought to their present place of confinement. This remarkable movement and its history are suggestive of many reflections. In its religious, social, and political aspects it is full of interest, and it seems surprising that public attention has not been earlier drawn to it. Some may be disposed to ask whether England, Bible-loving and freedom-loving as it is her boast to be, has no voice to raise in behalf of men whom she, by her Bibles, has, probably, been the unconscious means of enlightening, and whose enlightenment appears to be their only crime. From all that I could learn, these people lead pure and harmless lives, and hold no political opinions which could render them dangerous. But the subject has a wider interest than that involved in the fate of these individuals. A question as great as any that have ever agitated the world is beginning to press for settlement—namely, whether the progress or enlightenment, and, in particular, of Christian enlightenment among Mahomedan races is to be stopped by the rude hand of persecution and massacre. It is not in Persia alone that this question is presenting itself.

Your obedient servant,
THOMAS CHAPLIN, M.D.
16 Lincoln's-inn-fields.

Appendix 2

Newspaper databases consulted:

BanQ— Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (Canada). Available: <https://www.banq.qc.ca>

Biblioteca Nacional de España (Spain). Available: <https://www.bne.es>

British Newspaper Archive (United Kingdom). Available: <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>

Chronicling America (United States). Available: <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>

GenealogyBank (United States). Available: <https://www.genealogybank.com>

Google Books (Global). Available: <https://books.google.com>

HathiTrust (United States). Available: <https://www.hathitrust.org>

Internet Archive (Global). Available: <http://archive.org>

KBR – Royal Library of Belgium (Belgium). Available: <https://www.kbr.be>

NewspaperArchive (United States). Available: <https://newspaperarchive.com>

Newspapers.com (United States). Available: <https://www.newspapers.com>

Papers Past (New Zealand). Available: <https://paperspast.natlib.gov.nz>

Retronews (France). Available: <https://www.retronews.fr>

Svenska tidningar (Sweden). Available: <https://www.kb.se/eng.html>

Trove (Australia). Available: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/>

Paper

Science and Religion: how can the Bahá'í Faith contribute to the existing discourse?

Warren Houghton

Abstract

If we are to contribute to the extensive public discourse concerning the relationship between science and religion, we must first understand that discourse. This article offers an overview, looking at how perceptions of the history of the relationship effect the current discourse, the development of conflict, the growth of participation in a constructive discourse, and sociological studies to understand public attitudes. Some of the new and different contributions offered by the Bahá'í teachings are described, including discussion of the timing of the Bahá'í revelation, its explicit messages about science when these could be understood, explicit teaching about interpretations of scripture, a practical description of spirituality, an emphasis on diversity and the independent investigation of truth, and what is meant by harmony. A case is then presented that a much better public understanding of the methods and philosophy of science is necessary to enable the achievement of harmony in practice.

Introduction

The future prosperity of mankind depends on both science and religion. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states emphatically that we need both and that they depend on each other, that religion without science leads into "*the quagmire of superstition*" and that science without religion leads into "*the despairing slough of materialism*".¹ Both problems are evident in the world today. To bring about harmony we need a thorough understanding of the different components of existing public discourse that has led to this divergence.

A brief outline summary of the entangled² histories of science and religion over the last two or three millennia provides an essential framework for the discussion that follows. The relationship has been one of neither constant conflict nor constant harmony but something much more complex. However, whatever the reality, it is how that history is perceived now that impacts the current relationship. Although rejected by modern historians, there is a popular perception that there has always been conflict between religion and science, and this negatively influences the current discourse. A description of the emergence of that conflict thesis leads into examples of the development of scientism (metaphysical naturalism), and the rise of fundamentalism in the Christian world. More constructively, there has been a significant expansion in the positive discourse involving prominent scientists and theologians, and the emergence of many

¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, no. 44, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdu-baha/paris-talks/5#885299221> [accessed 18 December 2025]

² Nicholas Spencer, *Magisteria: The Entangled Histories of Science and Religion*, (London: Oneworld Publications, 2023)

organisations dedicated to its progress. The thoughts of specialist scholars are important, but we also need to understand public perceptions. Beyond simplistic surveys, a more nuanced understanding of people's attitudes is now becoming available through academic networks for the sociological study of science and religion. The findings of some large scale and academically rigorous studies may help us to formulate strategies that will lead towards harmony in practice.

The Bahá'í teachings offer much that is new. Coming after the scientific and industrial revolutions, the Bahá'í writings talk explicitly about science³ in a way that previous Manifestations could not. As will be shown, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá repeatedly tell us that scripture uses material concepts to describe the spiritual, and that we must not interpret scripture in a way that conflicts with reason. The absence of a separate classes of priests or theologians and an emphasis on independent investigation may lead to better education for the majority. Recognition of the importance of diversity of input to scientific research has increased over recent decades. Bahá'ís would applaud this, emphasise the value of consultation, and argue that spiritual qualities are essential to good science. Equally obvious to Bahá'ís is the answer to the question of what the practice of science should serve. We cannot pretend that there are no difficult issues however. The subject of human evolution, a cause of conflict particularly in Christian and Islamic worlds, has presented some difficulties within the Bahá'í community.

To achieve harmony, to enable science to work in partnership with religion for the betterment of the world, Bahá'ís will need to demonstrate knowledgeable support of science, requiring universal education, not in the details of current theories but in how science works. This will enable informed choices and the ability to explain why religion needs science and science needs religion.

An Extremely Brief History

Science and religion did not exist in the same form in the past as we think of them now; they occupied quite different territories of human thought.⁴ The philosophy of Ancient Greece, for example, while important for the development of modern science, differed from the modern natural sciences in terms of its motivation, its methods, and the range of questions addressed. Its practice was more about preparing the mind than acquiring knowledge for its own sake.⁵

Science and religion can be referred to as two bodies of knowledge, but this does not necessarily mean two bodies of the same type of knowledge. While many may explain their religion in terms of a set of beliefs, others may think much more in terms of a way of life or a state of mind.⁶ As ways of thinking have changed, so has the usage of words. In the past, the Latin *scientia* was more generally used for any systematic body of knowledge, and the Arabic *ilm* has also referred to knowledge in a wider sense than modern natural sciences. It is important to recognise that

³ There are a very large number of explicit and often extended references to science in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writing and talks, including from *Paris Talks*, no. 44, or "*Among other principles of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings was the harmony of science and religion. Religion must stand the analysis of reason.*" in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 9 June 1912, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdu-baha/promulgation-universal-peace/13#980687897> [accessed 18 December 2025]. An electronic search of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writing and talks in the Bahá'í Reference Library (<https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdu-baha/> [accessed 18 December 2025]) yields 258 results for the word science and 160 results for the word scientific.

⁴ Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015)

⁵ Ibid, pp. 26-33.

⁶ Moojan Momen, *Understanding Religion* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2009), Ch. 1; Peter Harrison, *'Religion' and the religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

science and religion are not two simply defined homogeneous categories. Both are human activities and there have always been many competing opinions expressed within each.

Ancient Greek philosophy, including astronomy, medicine, and mathematics, building on learning from Egypt, Babylonia and India, developed alongside a belief in a pantheon of gods. While monotheistic Christianity supplanted the pantheons of Greek and Roman gods, it was greatly influenced by Greek philosophy, which provided intellectual tools for apologetics and biblical exegeses. However, the splitting of the Roman Empire and the ensuing political and social instability led to Western Europe losing contact with much of Greek natural philosophy and mathematical sciences.

From the 8th century onwards, Neo-Platonism, and later the works of Aristotle, had a profound impact of the thinking of many Islamic polymaths who, building on extensive translations into Arabic of numerous texts drawn from other parts of the world, laid essential foundations for many branches of the natural sciences⁷ and the development of scientific methods. Contact between Christian and Islamic worlds led to a second translation movement, starting in the 10th century, first from Arabic to Latin and later from Greek to Latin. Commentaries on Plato and Aristotle, written by Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) were used extensively,⁸ having a profound effect on Christian theology and natural philosophy. By the start of the 13th century, the medieval universities of the Latin West were becoming established, and were now able to build on the scientific advances of the Islamic world, facilitated by the advocacy of methodological naturalism (as opposed to metaphysical naturalism) of 12th century philosopher theologians, such as William of Conch,⁹ who, while affirming God as ultimate cause, saw God as working through natural laws which should be investigated rather than resorting to an assumption of miracles.

With the work of Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), and Rene Descartes (1596-1650), among others, the natural sciences, mainly physics at that stage, started to separate from philosophy. This was not an instant process. Isaac Newton (1643-1727) would have called himself a mathematician or a natural philosopher but he would not have described himself as a scientist, an appellation first coined in 1833. Before the Enlightenment, none of these natural philosophers would have regarded science as something to be studied separately from religion. While there was open disagreement about how to read the “two books,” God’s words and God’s works (interpreting scripture in the face of reason and observation of the material world), the idea of a general conflict between scientists and religious authorities was not yet evident.

During the Enlightenment,¹⁰ with its confidence in human reasoning, major developments in the natural sciences were accompanied by scientific analysis of religion and questioning of religious orthodoxies by non-conformist movements, focused on religious practice. This was also the time of Robert Boyle (1627-1691) seeing scientific research as a form of worship, and the natural theology of John Ray (1626-1725) and William Paley (1743-1805),¹¹ seeing the wonders of nature as evidence of the divine.

⁷ David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science*, 2nd Ed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), Ch. 8

⁸ Edward Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Ch. 2

⁹ Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science*, pp. 210-214

¹⁰ Harrison, *‘Religion’ and the religions in the English Enlightenment*

¹¹ John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion, Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), which contains multiple references to Boyle, Ray and Paley.

The Emergence of the Conflict Thesis

As the practice of the natural sciences separated further from religious institutions in the 19th century, the nature of the discourse changed. Auguste Comte's (1798-1857) positivism,¹² Karl Marx's (1818-1851) dialectical materialism,¹³ and Sigmund Freud's (1858-1898) dismissal of religion as illusion¹⁴ all played a part in creating the view that faith was incompatible with rational science. Both to support this view and to assert independence from ecclesiastical authority, it became desirable to write history to show that religion had always impeded science. Two books published in America, *A History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*¹⁵ (1874) by John William Draper and *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*¹⁶ (1896) by Andrew Dickson White, were widely read, very influential, and are regarded as the foundation of the conflict thesis. Modern historians of science reject this conflict thesis, subscribing to a complexity thesis as argued for in 1991 by John Hedley Brooke,¹⁷ but the conflict thesis lives on in public perceptions.

Galileo's trial is a good example of how the conflict thesis has been established in many people's minds through a distorted description of actual events. In popular versions, Galileo was persecuted by an obscurantist Roman Catholic church for espousing the Copernican heliocentric model of the solar system, in opposition to the previously accepted geocentric model, in his *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* (1632)¹⁸. However, we should note that Copernicus's work, *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*, had gone uncensored and was widely read¹⁹ from its publication in 1543 until 1616. Pope Urban VIII had, as Cardinal Barberini, been Galileo's supporter and protector for many years, and Galileo had discussed with him the book he planned before publication. We should ask why the Pope felt stabbed in the back by an old friend. After his trial in 1633, Galileo went to stay with an old friend, the Archbishop of Siena, for six months, before returning to house arrest in his own mansion. Over the next five years he published his final and probably most useful contribution to science, *The Discourses and Mathematical Demonstrations Relating to Two New Sciences*.²⁰ The Catholic Church did find Galileo "vehemently suspect of heresy", and it did pronounce on scientific theories in its desire to assert its authority, but the context was more complex than commonly portrayed.²¹

¹² Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, 1848, Trans. John Henry Bridges, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/53799> [accessed 18 December 2025]

¹³ Karl Marx, *Capital* [1867–1894], reprint (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2013)

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, [1927], reprint (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2015)

¹⁵ John William Draper, *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science*, (Project Gutenberg, 1874), <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1185> [accessed 18 December 2025]

¹⁶ Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (Project Gutenberg, 1896), <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/505> [accessed 18 December 2025]

¹⁷ Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion, Some Historical Perspectives*

¹⁸ Galileo Galilei, *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*, Trans. Stillman Drake (New York NY: Modern Library, 2001)

¹⁹ Owen Gingerich, *The Book Nobody Read: In Pursuit of the Revolutions of Nicholas Copernicus* (London: Heinemann, 2004). The title is intentionally ironic.

²⁰ Galileo Galilei, *The Discourses and Mathematical Demonstrations Relating to Two New Sciences*, Trans. Henry Crew and Alfonso de Salvio (New York NY: The MacMillan Co., 1914)

²¹ J.L. Heilbron, *Galileo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

Opposing Fundamentalisms

Building on the positivism of August Comte, the belief that science can answer every meaningful question we could ask was further developed by the Logical Positivists of the Vienna and Berlin circles in the opening decades of the twentieth century. Central to this was the verification principle, expressible as: a statement can have meaning only if it is either true by virtue of its own meaning or logical form, a tautology, or if a means can be identified of verifying it empirically, by sense experience. The principles of Logical Positivism were expressed with great clarity by A J Ayer in 1936. He declared that all metaphysical thought was nonsense, that the argument from religious experience is “altogether fallacious”,²² and he denied normative morality, arguing that the sentence “*Stealing money is wrong*,” is simply a statement of feeling “*which has no factual meaning*”.²³ His explicit statement of the position known as scientism (or metaphysical naturalism) could not be expressed more clearly:

There is no field of experience which cannot, in principle, be brought under some form of scientific law, and no type of speculative knowledge about the world which is, in principle, beyond the power of science to give²⁴.

Logical Positivism is now regarded by philosophers as superseded, and A J Ayer himself agreed that much of it was false in a 1977 televised interview.²⁵ However, scientific materialism and reductionism retain widespread support.²⁶

Conversely, within Christianity, modern fundamentalism originated largely in the USA, a key stage being the publication of *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*²⁷ between 1910 and 1915 by the Testimony Publishing Company of Chicago. In reacting against historical or “higher” criticism of scripture and what was seen as excessively liberal thinking, this movement led to a greater emphasis on a literal interpretation of the Bible.

The Recent Constructive Discourse

From the middle of the twentieth century, there has been a very significant growth of constructive discourse, often involving writers with significant academic qualifications in both science and religion. Ian Barbour (1923-2013) published *Issues in Science and Religion*²⁸ in 1966, described by the John Templeton Foundation as a book that “*has been credited with literally creating the contemporary field of science and religion*.”²⁹ The John Templeton Foundation itself, formed in 1987, has played a major role through the financial support it has given to enabling scholarly contributions to the

²² A J Ayer, *Language Truth and Logic*, [1936], reprinted (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2001), pp. 126

²³ Ibid. p. 110

²⁴ Ibid. p. 32

²⁵ *Logical Positivism & its Legacy – A. J. Ayer & Bryan Magee* (YouTube video, uploaded by *Philosophy Overdose*, 5 Apr. 2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBSUMC3CqGg> [accessed 18 Dec 2025]

²⁶ See reference to Paul Lample’s analysis in conclusion.

²⁷ Reuben Archer Torrey and Alan C. Dixon (eds), *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Company, 1910–15)

²⁸ Ian Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966)

²⁹ Biography from John Templeton Foundation (1999) Ian Graeme Barbour, Online NewsHour, https://web.archive.org/web/20080122050215/https://www.pbs.org/newshour/forum/june99/barbour_bio.html [accessed 18 December 2025]

discourse.³⁰ The UK discourse has inevitably been dominated by Christian writers. However, Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes of a “Great Partnership”,³¹ inspired by the writings of Ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126-1198), Muslim Professor of Physics and Astronomy Nidhal Guessoum argues that evolutionary theory does not contradict core Muslim beliefs,³² and the Dalai Lama describes the biannual meetings he hosts to bring together scientists from various disciplines:

My confidence in venturing into science lies in my basic belief that as in science so in Buddhism, understanding the nature of reality is pursued by means of critical investigation: if scientific analysis were conclusively to demonstrate certain claims in Buddhism to be false, then we must accept the findings of science and abandon those claims.³³

Over recent decades an increasing number of organisations have fostered this constructive discourse. In Western Europe and North America, this started as a dialogue between Christianity and science but has started to broaden to include other faiths. *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*³⁴ has been published since 1966, and the (Christian) Science and Religion Forum³⁵ was formed in 1975. Links to many other organisations can be found on the website of the *Interdisciplinary Encyclopaedia of Religion and Science*,³⁶ edited by the Advanced School for Interdisciplinary Research in the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, founded in 2003. The Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion at the University of Oxford was formed in 1985.³⁷ The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion at the University of Cambridge, formed in 2006, runs many courses and conferences and has released a large number of high-quality lectures on YouTube.³⁸ The International Society for Science and Religion established in 2002, boasts that, in addition to atheists, its membership includes “representatives from a variety of faith traditions including Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam in addition to Christianity”.³⁹ (No Bahá'í membership is mentioned yet.) The growth of this constructive discourse is extremely encouraging, but much of the discourse in the above organisations remains academic. The loud voices of conflict have reached much of society, but this more complex discourse is not so widely heard.

³⁰ The Templeton Prize, *TempletonPrize.org*, <https://www.templetonprize.org/> [accessed 18 Dec 2025]

³¹ Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2011)

³² Nidhal Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011)

³³ The Dalai Lama, *The Universe in a Single Atom: How Science and Spirituality Can Serve Our World* (London: Abacus, 2006)

³⁴ *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, <https://www.zygonjournal.org/> [accessed 18 Dec 2025]

³⁵ Science and Religion Forum, <https://www.srforum.org/> [accessed 18 Dec 2025]

³⁶ INTERS, <https://inters.org/> [accessed 18 Dec 2025]

³⁷ Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion, <https://www.ianramseycentre.ox.ac.uk/> [accessed 18 Dec 2025]

³⁸ Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, <https://www.faraday.cam.ac.uk/> [accessed 18 Dec 2025]

³⁹ International Society for Science and Religion, <https://www.issr.org.uk/> [accessed 18 Dec 2025]

Sociological studies of the current relationship

A 2022 UK survey,⁴⁰ carried out for Christian think tank THEOS, reported that approximately one third of the adult UK population agreed with the statement “science has disproved religion”. A little over a third of the population disagreed, leaving nearly a third apparently unsure. The 2019 British Social Attitudes Survey reported 52% as having no religion and reports a “*significant strengthening of public support for science as a way of understanding and interpreting the world*”.⁴¹ The 2021 UK national census gave a different figure, reporting 37% self-identified as having no religion. Globally, the Wellcome Global Monitor 2018⁴² reports that among people with a religious affiliation, more would agree with religious teachings than with science⁴³, and that perception of conflict was greatest in the North America and Southern Europe, the regions with the lowest rates of religious affiliation. These numbers lack consistency and do not explain the responses.

We need to know how those religious people who reject the results of science regard their own scripture and what they understand scientific processes to be. We need to ask more searching questions about what both religious adherents and religion rejecting scientists understand of the philosophy of science and the wide range of religious beliefs, and what they understand religious faith to be. Exploring how people perceive the relationships between sciences and religions is the subject of academic sociological studies, as supported through organisations such as the Network for the Sociological Study of Science and Religion (NSSSR), established in 2011 to “*promote empirical research on the relationship between science and religion. While historians, theologians, and philosophers have done impressive work on this topic, we believe that sociology, with its distinctive theoretical frameworks and methodological tools, has much to add to this important area of inquiry*”.⁴⁴ Membership of this network currently consists mostly of academics from American universities. Overlapping with the NSSSR, but with a wider international membership and projects starting in 2020, is the International Research Network for the Study of Science and Belief in Society.⁴⁵

Three major studies, led by Professor Elaine Ecklund at Rice University, Texas, have investigated:

1. Views of 1700 natural and social scientists in American universities⁴⁶
2. How more than 10,000 religious Americans view science⁴⁷

⁴⁰ The Nones: Who are they and what do they believe?, *Theos Think Tank*, <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/research/2022/10/31/the-nones-who-are-they-and-what-do-they-believe> [accessed 18 Dec 2025]

⁴¹ British Social Attitudes 36: Key findings from the 2019 survey, *NatCen Social Research*, https://bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39363/bsa_36.pdf [accessed 18 Dec 2025]

⁴² Wellcome Global Monitor 2018, *Wellcome Trust*, <https://wellcome.org/reports/wellcome-global-monitor/2018> [accessed 18 Dec 2025]

⁴³ Ibid. Ch. 4

⁴⁴ Network for the Sociological Study of Science and Religion, *NSSSR*, <https://www.nsssr.org/> [accessed 18 Dec 2025].

⁴⁵ International Research Network for the Study of Science and Belief in Society, <https://scienceandbeliefinsociety.org/> [accessed 18 Dec 2025]

⁴⁶ Elaine Howard Ecklund and Christopher P. Scheitle, *What Scientists Really Think* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

⁴⁷ Elaine Howard Ecklund and Christopher P. Scheitle, *Religion vs. Science, What Religious People Really Think* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018)

3. How more than 20,000 scientists in university physics and biology departments in 8 different regions in the world engage with religion⁴⁸

In all three, detailed questionnaires were supplemented by hundreds of one to one interviews.

The first two of these studies, restricted to the USA, dispels many conflict myths while nevertheless demonstrating a significant gap in understanding between religious people and scientists. What follows here is a summary of some of the study conclusions. Sciences, particularly related to evolution, can be taboo or rarely discussed topics in churches and even though congregations may include many scientists the majority may be unaware of them. Similarly, religion is rarely discussed within the scientific workplace. Where scientists are not religious this can be linked to having been brought up in a household where they have had no experience of religion, or in a religious environment that discouraged asking questions. Where scientists are religious, they tend to have thought deeply about their religion and often emphasise what they see as core principles and retaining a questioning approach. Religious people seem to trust science as much as non-religious people, but public trust in *scientists* as a people group is eroding. For some groups, the belief that all scientists are loud anti-religious atheists is a part of their distrust. Where conflict is most visible, is related to creationism and topics around reproductive genetic technologies, such as vitro fertilisation and human embryonic stem-cell research, seen as “playing God.” Attitudes are not necessarily a straightforward matter of literal interpretation of scripture versus the current thinking of evolutionary biologists. Religious people can be reacting to a broader perception of science as leaving no place for God.

And we show too that most Americans are surprisingly flexible in their views of creation and evolution. Often, details such as the age of the earth are not that important to them. What is most important are the theological implications – that the broad narrative of life’s origins and development leaves room for an active God and respects the scaredness of humanity.⁴⁹

Data from the third survey, with responses from scientists in the USA, UK, France, Italy, Turkey, India, Taiwan and Hong Kong, shows that discourses in different parts of the world have some significant differences and some common features. Scientists engaged as academics in leading research universities are, on average, less likely to describe themselves as religious than the general population, except in Hong Kong and Taiwan where this trend is reversed. The most visible conflict is in the USA and the UK, France is the most secular, positive papal recognition of evolutionary theory probably accounts for less conflict in strongly Catholic Italy, and science and religion seem to more intimately entwined in India. The situation in Turkey may be changing as it becomes less secular.

Both the first and third studies show that there are many scientists working in leading research universities who consider themselves to be religious but keep their religion quiet, feeling, with some justification, that colleagues will suspect that their religious beliefs will make them biased and unable to follow scientific evidence objectively. Many scientists assume that there are fewer colleagues who are religious than there actually are. The most common non-conflict view

⁴⁸ Elaine Howard Ecklund et al., *Secularity and Science: What Scientists Around the World Really Think About Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019)

⁴⁹ Ecklund and Scheitle, *Religion vs. Science, What Religious People Really Think*, p. 7

expressed by religious scientists is that of non-overlapping magisteria (NOMA).⁵⁰ This can be seen as simple independence in which religion and science are treated as separate compartmentalised parts of a person's life.

*Science and Religion Exploring the Spectrum: A MultiCountry Study on Public Perceptions of Evolution, Religion and Science*⁵¹ was a multidisciplinary project headed by Prof. Fern Elsdon-Baker at the University of Birmingham,⁵² concluding in 2023. This work draws attention to the background assumptions of those who write survey questionnaires. If questions are framed with an assumption of conflict, this can manufacture a perception of more conflict than really exists. People questioned have not necessarily studied theories of evolution and their responses often reflect choices of social identity rather than independent analysis. We need to regard the headline figures from simple questionnaire-based surveys with caution: people's views are probably rather less entrenched than suggested. There certainly is conflict, but while we know the thoughts of those who write and speak vehemently on one side or the other, the views of the quieter majority are less clear and often more flexible. There is one overriding conclusion: in conversations with people about science and religion, we should not make assumptions about what they understand, what they believe, or why they believe what they believe.

Explicit References to Science in Bahá'í Teaching

The advent of the Bahá'í revelation in the middle of the nineteenth century coincides with a growth in the technical applications of science, particularly the development of a global communications. It was now possible for mankind to understand Bahá'u'lláh talking about a global community,⁵³ and to understand references to science⁵⁴ in a way that would have been previously incomprehensible. While the need to reconcile revelation and reason has been expressed many times in the past by influential thinkers such as St Augustine, Thomas Aquinas,⁵⁵ Ibn Rushd (Averroes), and Maimonides,⁵⁶ these have not been central figures. However, the harmony of science and religion, framed in a modern sense, is explicitly taught by the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith.

The current constructive discourse about science and religion is concerned with describing the relationship, implying that the relationship can and should be a positive one. The Bahá'í Faith goes further. It explicitly states that the relationship must become one of harmony, and that this is essential for the future prosperity of humankind. Bahá'ís are therefore required to support efforts to achieve that harmony. We need to clarify what we mean when we talk of science and religion

⁵⁰ The term magisteria derives from the Latin for teacher, magister, so NOMA means non-overlapping teaching.

⁵¹ Science and Religion: Exploring the Spectrum 2 the Global Perspective (SRES2), *University of Birmingham Research Projects*, <https://research.birmingham.ac.uk/en/projects/science-and-religion-exploring-the-spectrum-2-the-global-perspect> [accessed 18 Dec 2025]

⁵² Fern Elsdon-Baker and Bernard Lightman, Ed, *Identity in a Secular Age: Science, Religion and Public Perceptions* (Pittsburg PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020)

⁵³ "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens", *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/tablets-bahauallah/5#403173768> [accessed 18 December 2025]

⁵⁴ See footnote 3.

⁵⁵ F.C. Coppleston, *Aquinas: An Introduction to the Life and Work of the Great Medieval Thinker* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1991)

⁵⁶ Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2010), p. 268

being in harmony. It does not mean that they should be seen as the same thing. As Farzam Arbab writes: “*Religion and science are clearly not the same, or it would be absurd to talk about harmony between them*”.⁵⁷ Consider one analogy suggested by the word harmony, that of two singers singing in harmony. This does not mean singing the same notes, nor of course does it mean singing two unrelated tunes. It means two singers listening to each other, and singing notes that complement each other.

We should not underestimate the size of our task. A very poor public understanding of how science works presents a major challenge. Even those who have worked for whole careers in the field can have a surprisingly weak grasp of the history and philosophy of science in general. As Farzam Arbab points out:

Widely held perceptions of science are based on notions that have, in recent decades, been proven either wrong or extremely inadequate. These notions are held not only by the majority of the world's peoples, who see the magical results of scientific progress, but also by those who are engaged in narrow scientific activity without feeling the necessity to reflect in any depth on the nature of science and its offspring, modern technology.⁵⁸

If degree programs in the natural sciences include little of the history and philosophy of science, this is not surprising. Scientists can dismiss philosophy if they are aware only of the ideas of past philosophers that have been superseded by modern science, or know little of recent developments in the philosophy of science. Still less do those who are not practising scientists understand how science is carried out.

It is sometimes asserted that science is based on proof, while religion is not, but we need to question the nature of that proof and understand the differences between deduction, induction, and abduction (inference to the best explanation). Although deduction is used to make predictions, no scientific theory is proved by deduction. All scientific theories are provisional, open to revision in the face of new evidence. It may be better to think in terms of scientific consensus and the process by which it is reached, how hypotheses become theories accepted by the majority of a scientific community after repeated empirical studies, discussion and challenge at conferences, and reviews of multiple peer reviewed academic papers.

Reading Scripture as Science, and Understanding the Spiritual Through Metaphor

A common perception is that religious believers consider their revealed scripture as providing explanations, particularly of creation, that are to be taken literally as equivalent to historical and scientific accounts. This perception has considerable implications for how religious scientists are perceived by colleagues in the workplace, and is reinforced by religious believers who loudly and vehemently express these views. Such accounts in scripture often differ from the empirical evidence-based explanations provided by modern science. Believers in scientific processes can regard those creation stories as simply meaningless and reject the rest of scripture by association. Around 400 CE, when Christians were trying to spread the teachings of Jesus, the Manifestation of God for that age, one of the most influential Christian theologians, Bishop Augustine of Hippo (354-430), expressed his frustration at this same problem:

⁵⁷ Farzam Arbab, *Knowledge and Civilization: Implications for the Community and the Individual*, Bahá'í World Vol. 26 (1997-1998), https://bahai-library.com/arbab_knowledge_civilization_implications [accessed 18 December 2025]

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Now it is quite disgraceful and disastrous, something to be on one's guard against at all costs, that they should ever hear Christians spouting what they claim our Christian literature has to say on these topics, and talking such nonsense that they can scarcely contain their laughter when they see them *toto caelo* (by the whole heaven), as the saying goes, wide of the mark. And what is so vexing is not that misguided people should be laughed at, as that our authors should be assumed by outsiders to have held such views and to the great detriment of those about whose salvation we are so concerned, should be written off and consigned to the waste paper basket as so many ignoramuses.⁵⁹

In his many attempts to interpret the Book of Genesis, Augustine, educated in Neo-Platonic philosophy, did not necessarily interpret the bible literally in the modern sense of the word. He argued that it should be interpreted allegorically in a way that agreed with current reason and observation of the world. He did not see creation as necessarily taking place over six twenty-four-hour periods or ages.

There are many more examples of prominent philosopher theologians, over the last two millennia, who have also interpreted scripture allegorically so as not to contradict reason. For example, the sentiment expressed by the Catholic historian Cardinal Baronius (1538-1607) and quoted in an open letter by Galileo: "*The intention of the Holy Ghost is to teach us how one goes to heaven, not how heaven goes*",⁶⁰ reflects very concisely a continuing Augustinian influence shared by many theologians of the time.

However, many do read passages in scripture as scientific statements, not only in the bible. Nidhal Guessoum,⁶¹ describes and critiques an increasingly popular practice in Islam of Qur'anic *I'jaz 'ilmiy* (miraculous scientific content). For example, he quotes an article claiming that the speed of light was given in a Qur'anic verse rendered as "*God rules the cosmic affair from the heavens to the earth. Then this affair travels to Him in one day, where the measure is one thousand years of your reckoning.*" (Q 32:5), and he then describes the full argument and its many flaws in detail. If Bahá'ís also point to phrases in scripture as material scientific statements, this can perpetuate similar difficulties.

Religious scripture and modern scientific papers are very different types of writing. Scientists try to avoid any ambiguity in their writing. Scriptural writing takes many forms. Some passages, such as those telling us how we should behave, are meant to be taken literally, but it is pointed out many times, by both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that some passages have many meanings, challenging the reader to seek deeper spiritual meanings. Bahá'u'lláh writes:

It is evident unto thee that the Birds of Heaven and Doves of Eternity speak a twofold language. One language, the outward language, is devoid of allusions, is unconcealed and unveiled; that it may be a guiding lamp and a beaconing light whereby wayfarers may attain the heights of holiness, and seekers may advance into the realm of eternal reunion. Such are the unveiled traditions and the evident verses already mentioned. The other language is veiled and concealed ... In such utterances, the literal meaning, as generally understood by the people, is not what hath been intended. Thus it is recorded: "Every knowledge

⁵⁹ De Genesi ad litteram 1.19.39, translation quoted in Gavin Ortlund, *Retrieving Augustine's Doctrine of Creation* (Lisle IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), p. 76.

⁶⁰ A translation of the open letter Galileo wrote to the Grand Duchess Christina in 1615 can be found here: <https://inters.org/Galilei-Madame-Christina-Lorraine> [accessed 18 December 2025], see footnote (8)

⁶¹ Nidhal Guessoum, *Islam's Quantum Question: Reconciling Muslim Tradition and Modern Science* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2011), Ch. 5.

hath seventy meanings, of which one only is known amongst the people.” ... He also saith: “We speak one word, and by it we intend one and seventy meanings; each one of these meanings we can explain.”⁶²

Earlier in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Bahá'u'lláh, repeatedly points out the error in interpreting prophecy literally, not just in that we get the material sense wrong, but in that we miss the spiritual meaning.⁶³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that we cannot explain spiritual realities except by using material (sensible) analogies:

Thus, when you wish to express the reality of the spirit and its conditions and degrees, you are obliged to describe them in terms of sensible things, since outwardly there exists nothing but the sensible.⁶⁴

In His talks and letters, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained spiritual realities using material analogies that would have made sense to His audience at that time, analogies that may not have been appropriate for a different audience at a different time. What He did repeat many times was that religion must not contradict science. It is easy to take one phrase out of context. If we find a phrase that appears to make or confirm a scientific concept, we should look at the context, both in the whole passage that it is part of and the audience to whom it is addressed, and ask ourselves if the point being made is a spiritual rather than a material one. Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá give us many allegorical interpretations of Biblical and Qur’anic writing, pointing to spiritual rather than material meanings.⁶⁵ We cannot expect to be respected if we join the discourse with other faiths arguing for allegorical readings of their scripture but insisting on a literal interpretation of ours.

We need the material world to provide metaphors for thinking about the spiritual world and, by providing new ways of thinking about the material world, the natural sciences give us new analogies for thinking about the spiritual. Our understandings of both worlds are works in progress and we cannot justify being dogmatic about our current theories in either domain. Central to Bahá'í teaching is the concept that humanity is constantly being guided in its progress by successive Manifestations of God, each explaining new principles needed at the time they live, and our understandings of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings will develop as we study and learn from our efforts to put them into practice. For Bahá'ís, it is relatively easy to accept that religious understanding must change just as scientific theories change, while followers of previous Manifestations may have to attempt to reconcile an ever-changing science with scripture that can be seen as the unchanging last word revealed millennia in the past.

⁶² Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, penultimate page (The number seventy is used many times in Christian and Islamic writing, not as an exact number but generally meaning many)

⁶³ Much of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* is an extended lesson in the interpretation of scripture. For example, the quote “Immediately after the oppression of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the earth shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven ...”, p. 16 (available: <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/kitab-i-iqan/2#663902635> [accessed 18 December 2025]), is followed by many pages explaining different spiritual meanings of the words oppression, sun, light, moon, and stars.

⁶⁴ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, no. 16

⁶⁵ See e.g. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, no. 21

Independent Investigation of Truth

Augustine of Hippo was willing to search for spiritual allegorical meanings in biblical text. His Christian mother Monica had offered a relatively simple understanding of scripture that led to the questioning young Augustine abandoning Christianity as contrary to reason, but he later came to appreciate that he could see meaningful spiritual reality in allegorical readings of the bible after hearing St Ambrose of Milan (c339 - 397) preach.⁶⁶ He returned to Christianity and became one of its most influential theologians. However, his work and that of other theologians led to different approaches to scripture: a sophisticated philosophical understanding for a highly educated theologian class and a simpler more literal understanding to provide guidance for the majority. This division was apparent for many centuries, with a small theologian class based in monasteries and later in universities, and a majority who, even if they were literate in their own language, could not read the bible, available only in Latin.

Islamic polymath, Ibn Rushd (Averroes, 1126-1198), proposed three levels of sophistication in interpreting the Quran: a simple literal reading for the less educated majority, a more dialectical reading to underpin jurisprudence and the most sophisticated demonstrative understanding for philosophers.⁶⁷ This division between a sophisticated understanding for the highly educated and a simple understanding of religion for the masses may appear to be less relevant in a modern world of near universal literacy and greater access to higher education. However, it is still present to a degree where there is a separate clergy and a minority qualified as theologians, and where informed discussion takes place in exclusively academic settings. However, the Bahá'í Faith has no separate clergy or theologians with authority to impose interpretations of scripture on individual Bahá'ís. Even the Universal House of Justice, the international governing council of the Bahá'ís, “*will not engage in interpreting the Holy Writings*”.⁶⁸ All Bahá'ís are expected to study the writings for themselves and engage in independent investigation of the truth.⁶⁹ However, a lot of the current discourse that we wish to be part of is very academic, sometimes exclusively so, and, while it remains very important for scholars to critique each other's work, we do need to see boundaries between the learned and not learned as a part of an old-world order that we must avoid retaining.

From the scientific revolution up to the middle of the twentieth century, scientific investigation in Europe and North America was dominated by white men of social status and often presented as a value free search for knowledge. In the twentieth century it became increasingly clear that medical and other human sciences in particular were seriously compromised by assumptions and values that were so deeply embedded as to be invisible to practitioners. Feminist philosophers of science⁷⁰ have contributed to pointing out these problems and the solution. Science is a human social activity and people's values should be recognised as inevitable and important. If we include a widely diverse range of people from the start in scientific projects, all those different values and

⁶⁶ Henry Chadwick, *Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

⁶⁷ Ibn Rushd (Averroes), *Kitab fasl al-maqal* (On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy), 575 AH, 1179 CE

⁶⁸ The Universal House of Justice's Power of Elucidation, letter written on behalf of the UHJ, 25 Oct 1984, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/muhj-1963-1986/> [accessed 18 December 2025]

⁶⁹ Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, The Independent Investigation of Truth, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauddin/bahai-sacred-writings/4#334602164> [accessed 18 December 2025]

⁷⁰ For example, see Helen E. Longino, *Science as Social Knowledge* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990)

background assumptions can be subjected to consultative processes that can lead to some degree of objectivity. We are seeing this principle applied, with more women and often a considerable diversity of ethnic origins in the scientific workplace, but there is still a long way to go, and it can be a mistake to confuse diversity of ethnicity with diversity of thought.

Spirituality in Science, and What Science Should Serve

Ecklund's work, described above, reveals almost 50% of US scientists identifying themselves as religious. Some describe their faith as influencing how they work with others, what they choose to research, and how they reflect on the consequences of their research. Beyond this, they do not generally see their faith as affecting how they do their scientific research. The study also reveals scientists who do not subscribe to an organised religion nevertheless expressing some form of spirituality. Description of this spirituality can be vague, often described in terms of a sense of awe and wonder or a connection to something more than the immediate material world. For the theist it must centre around the idea of a connection to God but, if God is unknowable, a precise definition of that connection must always contain an element of mystery. This leaves unclear the question of how spirituality might be of value to the pursuit of science, and there are scientists who will be very definite in their view that it is of no value whatsoever.

The Bahá'í teachings offer a practical way of thinking about spirituality. As well as the inward derivation of inspiration and strength from connecting with God through prayer, meditation and fasting, spirituality is spoken about in terms of spiritual qualities or virtues. Discussion of science and its methods can treat science in a detached and abstract way, but it is first and foremost a human social activity and its practice is therefore vulnerable to all human weaknesses. Of course, science should be the pursuit of truth, but a human scientist has bills to pay, a job to keep, dependents to support, and a career and reputation to build. As well as a sense of wonder, curiosity, perseverance and enthusiasm, scientists need detachment and integrity to value truth over personal advancement. Junior scientists need courage to disagree with illustrious senior scientists, who in turn need humility to admit that they might be wrong. However good their intentions, scientists can be put under intolerable pressures to compromise these virtues. It is equally important therefore that those with power over scientists' careers come to share the same spiritual qualities. We will need patience and perseverance to bring this about.

It can be suggested that science should be a pursuit of knowledge serving no master other than truth. It may well be true that much scientific investigation in the past has been motivated purely by curiosity, but much has always been carried out for practical purposes as well. In Ancient Greece, astronomy was driven by a need to create a calendar for the timing of agricultural processes and religious festivals, and to underpin astrology. For many centuries, in the Christian world, philosophy was regarded as the handmaiden of religion. Virtually all science now relies on funding from government or commercial sources, and so scientists serve many masters, including the military. The idea that science can be a totally free, curiosity driven search for knowledge with no master is not tenable. Bahá'u'lláh tells us that work, including science, should be carried out in a spirit of service to the whole of humanity:

It is permissible to study sciences and arts, but such sciences as are useful and would redound to the progress and advancement of the people. . . . It is enjoined upon every one of you

to engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like. We have graciously exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship unto God, the True One.⁷¹

That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race.⁷²

Evolution

We cannot avoid the issue of the many understandings and conflicting views of evolution. This can be presented simplistically as Young Earth creationism versus an atheistic presentation of the neo-Darwinian Modern Synthesis, but the issue is far more complicated than this. That evolution has occurred is often conflated with theories about the mechanisms by which it has occurred. There are many different versions of creationism and there are many misunderstandings and misrepresentations of the history and implications of biological theories of evolution.

Creationism in its current more publicly assertive form, or creation science as it came to be presented by proponents, may have seemed largely a USA phenomenon in the 1960s, but it has spread throughout much of the Christian and Islamic worlds.⁷³ Adopting an anti-evolutionist position is not necessarily an epistemic decision, but can be about choosing a social group to join or remain part of, a matter of social identity. It may also be a reaction to the way the biological theory is often presented. If those who value their religious belief and practice are told that science has no place for God, it can be no surprise if they then reject science. There are a great many religious people nevertheless who are also prominent biologists, such as Francis Collins,⁷⁴ head of the Human Genome Project and vocal Christian. And we should not assume that all atheists assume conflict: atheist philosopher Michael Ruse, for example, argues that biological theories of evolution can be compatible with religion.⁷⁵

The Bahá'í community is not exempt from difficulty over evolution. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's discussion of evolution in *Some Answered Questions*⁷⁶ has been interpreted by some Bahá'í writers⁷⁷ as arguing for a kind of parallel evolution that proposes a separate line of biological evolution for the human species parallel to the animal kingdom since the beginning of life on earth. Rejecting evidence for a common ancestor shared between humans and apes would put us directly in opposition to the overwhelming consensus of current evolutionary biologists. Courosh Mehanian and Stephen R. Friberg⁷⁸ make a valuable contribution to resolving this conflict, and of enormous importance now

⁷¹ Bahá'u'lláh, Bishárát (Glad-Tidings), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/tablets-bahauallah/2#118530370> [accessed 18 December 2025]

⁷² Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd (Tablet of Maqṣúd), *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/tablets-bahauallah/5#431422730> [accessed 18 December 2025]

⁷³ Ronald L. Numbers, *Galileo Goes to Jail and other myths about science and religion*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), Ch. 24.

⁷⁴ Francis Collins, *The Language of God* (New York NY: Simon & Schuster Ltd, 2006)

⁷⁵ Michael Ruse, *Can a Darwinian be a Christian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

⁷⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, foreword to 2014 edition, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdu-baha/some-answered-questions/2#552304545> [accessed 18 December 2025]

⁷⁷ For example: Bryan Donaldson, *On the Originality of Species: The Convergence of Evolutionary Science and Bahá'í Teachings* (Independently Published, 2023)

⁷⁸ Courosh Mehanian and Stephen Friberg (2003) "Religion and Evolution Reconciled: 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Comments on Evolution." *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 13(1–4), pp. 55–93. https://bahai-library.com/mehanian_friberg_religion_evolution [accessed 18 December 2025]

is the foreword to the 2014 edition of *Some Answered Questions*, in which the Universal House of Justice reminds us that:

...the attentive reader should consider any chapter within the context of the entire book, and the book within the larger context of the entire body of the Bahá'í Teachings... that Bahá'ís strive to reconcile their understanding of the statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá with established scientific perspectives, and therefore it is not necessary to conclude that these passages describe conceptions rejected by science.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's comments were made when, although it was widely accepted that evolution had occurred, natural selection had been almost universally rejected by the scientific community,⁷⁹ to be resurrected decades later when finally combined with genetics as part of the neo-Darwinian Modern Synthesis around 1940. Public concepts of evolution were very different then from the process of evolution as understood now. We also need to consider the context, such as who He is referring to when he speaks of "*Certain European philosophers*", possibly a reference to the 19th century German materialists, such as Ludwig Büchner. As ever, we should look for the spiritual rather than the material meaning of the Master's comments, an interpretation consistent with:

The reality of man is his thought, not his material body. The thought force and the animal force are partners. Although man is part of the animal creation, he possesses a power of thought superior to all other created beings.⁸⁰

Steps Towards Harmony

Shoghi Effendi described the Bahá'í Faith as "*scientific in its method*"⁸¹. Religion needs science, not only to ensure that it is "*shorn of its superstitions, traditions, and unintelligent dogmas*",⁸² but to provide the systematic evidence-based knowledge of possible choices and their consequences for decision making, and the tools to implement those decisions. For example, if we consider ecological efforts to repair the damage to our planet caused by materialism and ignorance, we see that success is only achieved by combining love with knowledge, a combination demonstrated, for example, in the forestry work of Richard St. Barbe Baker⁸³ and the farming practices sponsored by 'Abdu'l-Bahá at 'Adasíyyih.⁸⁴

In relating a Bahá'í relationship between science and religion to the possibilities recognised within the current public discourse, Stephen Jay Gould's nuanced version of NOMA may be a starting point, being clear that science and religion are different but understanding that only a dialogue between the two can answer our deepest questions:

⁷⁹ Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea*, 25th anniversary edn (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2009)

⁸⁰ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, no. 2

⁸¹ Shoghi Effendi, Letter to the High Commissioner for Palestine, June 1933, https://bahai-library.com/writings/shoghi-effendi/uncompiled_letters/1930s/1933-06-XX_The_World_Religion.html [accessed 18 December 2025]

⁸² 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, no. 44

⁸³ Paul Hanley, *Man of the Trees: Richard St. Barbe Baker, the First Global Conservationist* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2018)

⁸⁴ Paul Hanley, *'Adasíyyih, The Story of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Model Farming Community* (Evanston IL: Bahá'í Publishing, 2018)

The resolution might remain entirely neat and clean if the non-overlapping magisteria of science and religion stood far apart, separated by an extensive no-man's-land. But, in fact the two magisteria bump right up against each other, interdigitating in wondrously complicated ways along their joint border. Many of our deepest questions call upon aspects of both magisteria for different parts of a full answer – and the sorting of legitimate domains can become quite complex and difficult.⁸⁵

We want to go further though. If religious scientists adopt a simple form of NOMA to avoid their scientific objectivity being questioned, they effectively leave their faith outside the lab. To remain a complete person, a Bahá'í scientist must remain fully a Bahá'í inside the lab, confidently asserting that their faith does not conflict with following the evidence nor bias them towards theories found in revelation. They can point to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words:

... If religion does not agree with science, it is superstition and ignorance; for God has endowed man with reason in order that he may perceive reality. The foundations of religion are reasonable. God has created us with intelligence to perceive them. If they are opposed to science and reason, how could they be believed and followed?⁸⁶

They can then demonstrate by their actions that the spiritual qualities emphasised by their Faith make them better scientists.

The understandings and actions of those who do not work as scientists are equally important. Not all need to study current scientific theories in depth, and only a few will want to specialise in studying the philosophical literature in detail, but everyone needs an education that prepares them to contribute to decision making that is informed by scientific knowledge. Confronted by conflicting statements, they need to know who and what to trust. They need to know how science works, to have some understanding of the history and philosophy of science, what scientific proof is and is not, how scientific communities work and how a scientific consensus is reached or changed.

Science also needs support against attacks from directions other than religion. When a developing scientific consensus shows that the actions of wealthy and powerful materialistic interests are damaging to the world, deliberate measures, including highly effective manipulation of media, have been used to cast doubt on this scientific consensus.⁸⁷ The only solution is a combination of the universal application of spiritual values, particularly those of truthfulness and justice, and a good public understanding of how science works that enables people to understand, for example, the difference between an articulate person in the media and authoritative report underpinned by research.⁸⁸

Support for science cannot be a slavish acceptance however. We know that all scientific investigation is human and fallible. Just as scientific theories about the world have changed, so have the philosophy and methods of science. Both theories and the methods used to develop them will change in the future. Scientists can sometimes deny the existence of that which they cannot

⁸⁵ Stephen Jay Gould, *Leonardo's Mountain of Clams and the Diet of Worms: Essays on Natural History* (New York NY: Harmony Books, 1998), p. 274

⁸⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 19 May 1912, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/promulgation-universal-peace/9#869824053> [accessed 18 December 2025]

⁸⁷ Naomi Oreskes and Eric Conway, *Merchants of Doubt* (New York NY: Bloomsbury, 2010)

⁸⁸ Such as reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

observe and measure, but there are many phenomena now recognised, radio waves for example, that we once had no way of detecting. Scientists are right to be sceptical and demand evidence, but they should also remain open to the possibility of the reality of phenomena that they cannot detect, and understand that science cannot answer all human questions.

Another attack on science, a relativism associated with post modernism, involves the denial of any absolute truth. Such arguments were loud during what were known as the science wars⁸⁹ in the 1990s, when some sociologists dismissed scientific theories as socially constructed to obtain power. The response of most scientists is that their theories, backed by empirical evidence, are constrained to some degree of correspondence to objectively real properties of the world. We also see moral relativism in the idea that everyone is entitled to their own truth, a repeat of the rejection of normative values expressed in the logical positivism of A J Ayer. The philosophical problem may be one of having difficulty with the idea that there may be a reality that will always be beyond our understanding. If you deny that reality you deny that there is something you cannot understand. But Bahá'ís have accepted this limitation, believing in a reality that is utterly beyond any human understanding but nevertheless makes spiritual values normative. This is the common starting point for both science and religion, a belief in the ontological reality of both God and His creation, and our fallibility in understanding both.

Conclusion

I have attempted to indicate in broad terms the nature of the public discourse about science and religion and its participants. This short article could not dig deeply into the more academic content of that discourse, necessary if we want to take part. Much of that content is to be found in the works cited, and important recent Bahá'í contributions include papers by Paul Lample⁹⁰ and Todd Smith.⁹¹ Paul Lample analyses the nature and consequences of scientific materialism and relativism, explaining the limitations of reductionism, particularly in understanding human consciousness, and describes the partially successful responses of many philosophers before setting out solutions offered by the Bahá'í understanding of religion. Todd Smith also considers philosophical discussions of the current human malaise before exploring many ways in which science and religion supplement, correspond to, and cultivate each other.

While not everyone will wish to delve deeply into theological and philosophical study, if we wish to bring about the harmony of science and religion as they are practised, it is essential for everyone to have access to a much better understanding of science than is common now. Bahá'ís, who have the valuable insights discussed, should read passages in the writings that appear to relate to material scientific issues *within the larger context of the entire body of the Bahá'í Teachings*,⁹² and then work to be able to bring the constructive discourse out from the academic world and to explain the concepts discussed here simply to anyone. This requires enough of history to counter the conflict thesis, and enough of scientific methods and proof, and how scientific communities work,

⁸⁹ Keith Parson (ed.), *The Science Wars: Debating Scientific Knowledge and Technology* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003)

⁹⁰ Paul Lample (2016) 'In Pursuit of Harmony between Science and Religion', *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 26(4), pp. 23-58, https://bahai-library.com/lample_harmony_science_religion [accessed 18 December 2025]

⁹¹ Todd Smith (2019) 'Science and Religion in Dynamic Interplay', *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, 29(4), pp. 11-49, https://bahai-library.com/smith_science_religion_interplay [accessed 18 December 2025]

⁹² Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, foreword to 2014 edition, <https://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/some-answered-questions/2#715040199> [accessed 18 December 2025]

to be able to assess the reliability of science related statements in the media. This can be supported by Bahá'í scientists, who should feel confident to express their faith in the workplace. It is also important to understand the many different beliefs and attitudes that people may bring to conversations to avoid making unhelpful assumptions. In joining any conversation, we can find that the assumptions determining the existing framework of that conversation can make it difficult to inject different approaches. If we understand that conversation and what is different about what we have to say, we are in a better position to identify and point out where we think those assumptions are unhelpful and to reframe the conversation.

Author Biography

Warren Houghton is married and lives in Devon, UK. He holds a degree in Natural Sciences (Physics) from the University of Cambridge, a PGCE from Lancaster, a MSc in telecommunications from University College London, and a PhD in signal analysis using optical techniques from the University of Plymouth. He has been retired for a few years after a career teaching Electronic Engineering and Physics in both Secondary and Higher Education. Part of a very small Bahá'í community, he is much involved in local interfaith activity and pursues an interest in the history and philosophy of science.

Provisional Translation

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

Aaron J.R. Ferguson

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 انْطَقْنَا النَّبِيلَ قَبْلَ عَلِيٍّ فِي صَغَرِهِ لِيُشْهَدَنَّ
النَّاسَ قُدْرَتِي وَ سُلْطَنَتِي ثُمَّ عَظَمَتِي وَ كِبَرِيَّائِي.
وَلَكِنْ أَحِبَّائِي الْجَهْلَاءُ اتَّخَذُوهُ شَرِيكًا لِنَفْسِي وَ
فَسَدُوا فِي الْبِلَادِ وَ كَانُوا مِنَ الْمَفْسِدِينَ مَلَا حَظَّهُ
نَمَا كِه چِه قَدْر نَاس جَاهِلَنْد 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 فَيُوضَاتِ الْأَمْرَ 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 aṣ-Makátib-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]

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ For example, cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Muntakhabátí aṣ-Makátib-i Ḥaḍrat-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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Provisional Translation

Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet on the Simple Reality (Lawḥ-i-Basíṭu'l-Ḥaqqíqih): A Fresh Provisional Translation and Exegetical Introduction

Joshua D.T. Hall

Abstract

The following article serves as an analytic introduction to a provisional translation of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet on the Simple Reality (Lawḥ-i-Basíṭu'l-Ḥaqqíqih), seeking to engage constructively with the work of Dr. Vahid Ra'fati and Dr. Moojan Momen. It delineates Bahá'u'lláh's charitable exegesis of a statement by Mullá Ṣadrá, an eminent 17th-century Persian philosopher, a dictum with pantheistic implications and roots in Neoplatonism: "The Simple Reality is all things." The article proposes that Bahá'u'lláh interprets the dictum in a manner that carefully precludes pantheism and monism through one core exegesis and three auxiliary interpretations that logically cohere with the first. To this end, the article discusses the history of the doctrine of divine simplicity in philosophical theology—the notion that God is wholly without parts and an absolute unity—and outlines the relevant ideas of Avicenna (c.980-1037) that form the intellectual background of Mullá Ṣadrá's distinctive ontology and theology. The introduction concludes that insofar as Bahá'u'lláh interprets the dictum of Mullá Ṣadrá according to what He conceives to be the correct articulation of the God-world relationship, the Tablet provides further insights into specifically Bahá'í metaphysical theology as a definite and coherent body of principles and teachings.

Introduction to the Tablet on the Simple Reality (Lawḥ-i-Basíṭu'l-Ḥaqqíqih)

Bahá'u'lláh composed the Lawḥ-i-Basíṭu'l-Ḥaqqíqih or the Tablet on the Simple Reality, as Vahid Rafati has noted, sometime during the 'Akká period¹ in response to a request of an inquirer, addressed as Ḥusayn, for an elucidation of a metaphysical dictum of the Persian philosopher Mullá Ṣadrá (1571-1636): "the Simple Reality is all things."² This inquirer had ventured to ask Bahá'u'lláh

¹ Dr. Rafati has determined that Tablet must have been revealed sometime before July of 1881 while Dr. Momen, on the basis of an account from Ustád 'Alí Akbar Banná, has noted that it must have been even before 1878

Vahid Rafati, 'Ráhnámá'í baráy-i-Muṭálib-i-Basíṭu'l-Ḥaqqíqih', in *Safíniy-i-'Irḥán*, 5 (Darmstadt: 'Aṣr-i-Jadíd, 2002), p. 28; Moojan Momen, 'Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality (Lawḥ Basít al-Ḥaqqíqa): A Provisional Translation', *Lights of 'Irḥán*, 11 (2010), p. 211.

² Mullá Ṣadrá discusses this in his work titled *al-Hikmatu'l-Muta'álibiyyih fí'l-Asfári'l-'Aqlíyyati'l-Arba'ih*, in the first *safar*, second *juṣ'*, and thirty-eighth *faṣl*. The dictum may be found in James Winston Morris, *The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mullá Ṣadrá* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), pt. 1, sect. 2, p. 98.

on behalf of one of the disciples of the then-contemporary philosopher Hádí Sabzivári, whom Bahá'u'lláh refers to as “the Philosopher of Sabzivár” in the latter half of the Tablet.³

In the context of Mullá Šadrá's work, the Simple Reality refers to God, for the term “simple” or *basît* is here used in the technical, philosophical meaning of “not composed of parts” or incomposite, which explains its being rendered as “uncompounded” in previous Bahá'í literature. It thus, on its face, entails a pantheistic metaphysics, insofar as in the tradition of Islamic philosophy (*falsafih*) the Godhead is generally thought to be “simple” or incomposite (*basît*)—an utter unity void of composition, parts of any kind, diverse aspects, or multiplicity of attributes—and thus affirmed as the *Simple Reality*.

Engaging with the scholarship of Drs. Vahid Rafati and Moojan Momen, and based on a fresh provisional translation, the introduction below offers a metaphysical analysis of Bahá'u'lláh's explanation. After outlining the philosophical background provided Mullá Šadrá's thought, it argues that Bahá'u'lláh puts forward a primary or overarching interpretation of the dictum, which then frames three auxiliary interpretations that comment on the stations of the divine unity (*tawhíd*). In turn, each of Bahá'u'lláh's interpretations coheres with the others, carefully precludes a pantheistic reading of Mullá Šadrá's statement, and conforms to the tenor of Bahá'í metaphysics—with its insistence on the wholly transcendent yet all-encompassing reality of God.

Two previous attempts at a translation have been made, the first being Aleksandr Tumanski's rendering into Russian, published in 1899, and the second Dr. Moojan Momen's translation of it into English. Here a new provisional translation of the Tablet is given, providing a fresh analysis of the theological and philosophical content in order to advance critical understanding of it from the time Dr. Momen's translation was published in 2010.⁴

Divine Simplicity

Theistic philosophers throughout history have long argued for the absolute unity and incomposite nature of God as the supreme reality on which all other things depend. Since whatever is composed of parts depends upon those parts in order to exist, and upon some cause to make those parts cohere, God, who is utterly independent in His existence, must be an immaterial, incomposite existent. Aristotle (384-322 BC) in the classical period of Greek philosophy, and Plotinus (204/5-270) in the late antique expression of Platonism—as well as Maimonides (1138-1204), St. Thomas (1225-1274), and Avicenna (980-1037) within the philosophical schools of Judaism, Catholicism, and Islam respectively—all accordingly emphasized simplicity as one of the cardinal attributes of that ultimate and divine reality on which all others depend.⁵ Plotinus, in particular, obviously inspired Mullá Šadrá's phrasing,⁶ even while Avicenna, a fellow Muslim, provided many elements of the conceptual and terminological apparatus Mullá Šadrá used to frame his own philosophy.

³ Rafati, ‘Ráhnámá’í baráy-i-Muṭálibíy-i-Basíṭu’l-Ḥaqíqih’, p. 29.

⁴ The original Persian and Arabic text may be found in *Iqtidárát*, pp. 105-116, and is listed in the Phelps Inventory under the code BH00409. See also full text at <https://www.bahai.org/fa/library/authoritative-texts/bahauallah/additional-tablets-bahauallah/138668276/1#198531165> [accessed 1 December 2025]

⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book 12, ch. 7; Plotinus, *Enneads*, ennead 5, ch. 2, article 1; Avicenna, *Dáníshnámih*, “Metaphysics,” ch. 21; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, “Prima Pars,” question 3; Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Book 1, chs 51, 53, 57.

⁶ In the *Enneads*, 5.2.1, Plotinus states that the One—the ultimate and simple principle from which all else proceeds—is all things, but not any one of them.

God is thus the “Simple Reality,” and it is with that general understanding that Mullá Šadrá used the expression in his own philosophy. To this day, *simplicity* is often regarded as an essential attribute of God by theologians in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, and is considered an irreformable teaching in the Catholic Church.

Beyond theistic philosophers, Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and the Báb Themselves affirmed divine simplicity in Their writings. Bahá'u'lláh, for example, states that God “hath, throughout eternity, been one in His Essence, one in His attributes, one in His works.”⁷ In another place, He affirms that God’s unity precludes His having discrete attributes, distinct from His essence, that could act as parts within Him: “. . . the multiplicity of various names and attributes shall never be joined unto His essence, for His attributes are verily His essence itself.”⁸ Similarly, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes that the Divine reality “admits of no division, for division and multiplicity are among the characteristics of created and hence contingent things, and not accidents impinging upon the Necessary Being.”⁹ Likewise, the Báb states that “the Eternal Essence hath no peer, and within Him there are no discrete attributes or distinct aspects, for otherwise a condition of having parts, of cohesion of different elements, of alteration, and of division would be necessitated.”¹⁰

Consequently, the Simple Reality, both for philosophers of the past and for the Central Figures Themselves, describes the reality of God. Consequently, Mullá Šadrá’s dictum—“the Simple Reality is all things”—initially seems to assert that God, as the Simple Reality, is one with, or identical to, the things of the created world; in other words, it seems to support pantheism or monism. In the course of the Tablet, however, Bahá'u'lláh interprets the statement in a way that precludes any pantheistic reading. To do so, He provides one central and three auxiliary interpretations, according to which Mullá Šadrá’s dictum does not in fact deny that God is intrinsically distinct from the realm of His creation. God’s transcendence is a matter Bahá'u'lláh continually emphasized throughout His Writings, and it is accordingly an important feature of Bahá'í theology. In the course of the Tablet Bahá'u'lláh thus states decisively that “God Himself hath ever been, and shall forever remain, sanctified from ascent, descent, and limitation, connection to, and association with all other things. All other things, in contrast, abide in the sphere of their specific limitations.”

In order to understand Bahá'u'lláh’s explanations fully, however, we must first consider the philosophical background of Mullá Šadrá’s dictum itself—namely, its identification of God as the Simple Reality, some important implications of divine simplicity, and what it has entailed for philosophers in the tradition of classical theism and for Bahá'u'lláh Himself. In the context of the Islamic intellectual world and of Mullá Šadrá’s work, these critical implications of divine simplicity may be discerned by investigating the metaphysical system of the preeminent 11th century Muslim philosopher Avicenna, who influenced all subsequent philosophers in the Islamic world, as well as the scholastic tradition in Europe, and whose framing of philosophical discourse especially influenced thinkers in the *Šhí‘ih* community such as Mullá Šadrá. We will thus consider how Avicenna argues for and explains divine simplicity to see how Mullá Šadrá himself conceived of it, and then analyze Bahá'u'lláh’s exegesis of the dictum in light of this background.

⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), XCIV

⁸ Bahá'u'lláh, *Má'idíy-i-Ásmání*, vol. 4 (Iran: Mu'assasiy-i-Milliy-i-Maṭbū'āt-i-Amrí, 129 B.E.), 321. Provisional translations.

⁹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 2014) ch. 27.2.

¹⁰ The Báb, ‘Tawqí‘-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-Rabb-i-A‘lá dar Javáb-i-Su‘álát-i-Mírzá Sa‘íd-i-Ardistání’, in *Safíniy-i-Trján*, 5 (Darmstadt: ‘Aṣr-i-Jadíd, 2002), p. 15. Provisional translation.

Avicenna argued that God is the ultimate reality, which exists necessarily of itself, in a self-subsistent way, without dependence on any cause. God is thus “the Necessarily Existent” or *Vájibu'l-Vujúd*—a term Bahá'u'lláh uses in the Tablet and which is employed routinely by Mullá Šadrá. Specifically, Avicenna argued that in God, who is absolute unity, there is no distinction even between essence and existence, and that He is thus His own existence and cannot *not* exist. He exists, therefore, necessarily and is simple in the most fundamental way possible. Central to Avicenna's argument for, and conception of, God is accordingly the basic distinction to be made between *essence* on the one hand and *existence* on the other. For Avicenna, the essence of a thing is that reality which is particular to it, and by virtue of which it is *what* it is. It is this essence of a thing that is conveyed by its definition, which for Avicenna would describe something as belonging to a particular genus and a species within that genus. For example, the essence of a triangle is to be a plane figure (its genus) of three sides (its species). The existence of a thing, conversely, is not what it is, but rather the fact *that* it is, the fact that its essence has been instantiated into actual being, or joined to an act of existence as received by an external cause.

It is through this distinction of essence and existence that Avicenna described the condition of contingent beings. A contingent being is something that, when considered in itself, can either exist or not exist. For it to exist in actuality, it must derive its existence from a cause. For Avicenna, any contingent being thus depends on (is *contingent* on) a cause to exist in actuality because it does not have existence in itself—its own essence is not its existence—and it thus must rely on something additional to itself in order to receive existence and to be actually, and not merely possibly, existent. Similarly, a contingent being continues to depend on a cause in order to be sustained in existence, such as when something continues to exist through the cohesion of its parts, or the continuing activity of an effective agent, such as when flame emanates heat or a foundation supports the integrity of a house. In other words, a contingent being is a created thing, and a composite of essence and existence, which function as metaphysical “parts.”

Avicenna's argument for the existence of God proceeds from the premise that any contingent being requires a cause to exist, and concludes that the causal sequence of contingent beings must itself terminate in a cause that is not contingently existent. The sequence of causes therefore terminates in something that is necessarily existent in itself—a cause in which there is no distinction between essence and existence, which thus has no need to derive its existence from another. For Avicenna, this simple and necessarily existent reality is none other than God Himself. God does not need to receive His existence from anything else, because He of Himself, in His own essence, is the fullness of His existence in perfect unity and simplicity.

What is vital here is that, under Avicenna's analysis, no contingent being is wholly simple, because every contingent being is a composite of essence and existence. God alone, in being His existence itself, does not have an essence distinct from His existence; His essence simply is His existence, and as such He is self-subsistent and therefore independent of all other reality, while also being its source. After demonstrating the reality of the Necessarily Existent in the metaphysical portion of his philosophical compendium *ash-Shihfá*, Avicenna proceeds to deduce the other attributes of the Necessarily Existent, and concludes that, in addition to His absolute simplicity, God must be single and unique, eternal, perfect, wholly good, and even immaterial—and thus of the nature of supreme intellect. Relevant to our discussion here is that this is the basic idea of God and His simplicity that was generally operative for Mullá Šadrá when he developed his own philosophical system, since he accepts that God alone is the Necessarily Existent. This conception of God is thus relevant to our understanding of what Bahá'u'lláh means when He affirms God's necessity and simplicity in The Tablet of the Simple Reality.

Significantly, in accordance with divine simplicity, Avicenna insisted that none of the divine attributes are properties that are distinct and separate in the Godhead itself. Rather, each one is only a logical concomitant of one reality, necessary or independent existence itself.¹¹ It is thus that God must be recognized as fundamentally simple and one in Himself: He has no parts of any kind, no essence as distinct from His existence, and no attributes that function as separable properties within Him. God must be radically and absolutely simple because if He was not, He would not exist necessarily of Himself, but because of the cohesion of discrete parts, the combination of separate attributes, or the joining of essence with existence through a cause. Consequently, whatever attribute is proper to Him must be identical to His essence, which in turn is identical to His existence; thus, all of His proper attributes are identical to one another, in all being identical to His essence.¹²

We now see how such terms as the *Simple Reality* and the *Necessarily Existent* or *Necessary Being* were thus used by Mullá Şadrá to refer to God, just as they are employed in the Writings, as part of the post-Avicennan intellectual heritage of the Islamic world. The Central Figures Themselves have emphasized or affirmed the doctrine of divine simplicity and the identity of God's attributes and His essence, and even His essence with His existence. The Báb, for instance, not only states that God's ostensibly diverse attributes, such as knowledge and power, are one with and identical to His essence (and thus to one another), but that this is also true of His *life*, His existence: "God's knowledge is His essence; His *life* is His essence; His power is His essence."¹³ Similarly, Bahá'u'lláh—in addition to the affirmation quoted earlier¹⁴—speaks of God's existence, in the *Lawḥ-i-'Abdu'l-Vahháb*, as being absolute and essential to Him, insofar as essential or absolute existence is not preceded by a cause, and such existence is limited to God.¹⁵ These points, in addition to the Central Figures' general support of divine simplicity, demonstrate Bahá'u'lláh's affirmation of God as the kind of ultimate reality that Avicenna, as well as other classical theists, have described. Likewise, 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirms the absolute unity of God, and the identify of His attributes and His essence, in *Some Answered Questions*. There He states that the Divine reality "admits of no division, for division and multiplicity are among the characteristics of created and hence contingent things, and not accidents impinging upon the Necessary Being."¹⁶ He states, in

¹¹ For example, since God exists necessarily, He can have neither beginning nor end, and is thus eternal; since God has no parts whatsoever, He cannot be a composite of actuality and potentiality, and is therefore wholly actual; since any change involves the actualization of a potential, and there is no potential in God, He cannot change, etc. Nonetheless, God's eternity, actuality, and immutability are simply different descriptions of His one and undivided essence, which is absolute existence. They are not separate properties in God, but rather concomitants of necessary and absolute existence.

¹² In book 8, chapter 1 of the metaphysical part of *ash-Shifá*, Avicenna presents an argument for God's existence, as summarized above; in book 8, chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 he deduces God's attributes from His necessary existence; in book 1, chapter 5 he argues for the distinction of essence and existence; and in book 1, chapters 6 and 7 he analyses, in a preliminary fashion, the nature of the Necessarily Existent.

¹³ The Báb, 'Tawqí'-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-Rabb-i-A'lá dar Javáb-i-Su'álát-i-Mírzá Sa'íd-i-Ardistání', p. 15.

¹⁴ "...the multiplicity of various names and attributes shall never be joined unto His essence, for His attributes are verily His essence itself" Bahá'u'lláh, *Má'idíy-i-Ásmání*, vol. 4 (Tíhrān: Mu'assasiy-i-Millíy-i-Maṭbū'āt-i-Amrí, 129 B.E.). Provisional translation.

¹⁵ Bahá'u'lláh, *Majmú'iy-i-Alváḥ-i-Mubárakib (Cháp-i-Miṣr)* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978), p. 165.

¹⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, ch. 27.2.

addition: “the essential names and attributes of God are identical with His Essence, and His Essence is sanctified above all understanding.”¹⁷

Nonetheless, although Avicenna may have framed these metaphysical terms or ideas, certain notions, alluded to by Bahá'u'lláh, are distinctive of Mullá Šadrá's thought. Mullá Šadrá distinguished himself from Avicenna by positing the primacy of existence or being (*aṣálatu'l-wujúd*) over essence—and not their relative parity in contingent beings—and he presented the concomitant idea of the world as a constant flux or flow of being that is modulated or graded by various kinds of degree, with intensity and debilitation (*shiddat* and *da'f*) as the most important. Mullá Šadrá thus argued that as contingent beings proceed from God, the existence of those beings is of progressively weaker *intensity*. Accordingly, all beings are vortices, exhibiting more or less existential intensity and perfection, in the surging plenum of existence.¹⁸ God alone, as the necessary being, possesses, and is, an existence of infinite intensity and perfection, without any debilitation or privation whatsoever, Who operates as the limit case in the scale of being.

Avicenna, in contrast, does not speak of the *existence* of a contingent being as less “potent” or “intense,” just as derivative proximally from its immediate cause and ultimately from God; the term *existence* thus differs in sense by virtue of the relative contingency, priority and posteriority in causal relation, and contrasting perfection and nobility, of different beings—but not because existence constitutes a scale exhibiting diverse degrees of intensity or debilitation—with God's as intensity's limit case—throughout an interpenetrating flux of being. In addition, for Avicenna the essence remains the “reality particular to a thing”—a description God alone, in being pure existence, transcends—while for Mullá Šadrá, it is by reason of a contingent being's having a certain degree of privation or debilitation of existence that, when considered by the mind, an idea of its having an essence—which is ultimately notional—is produced. Yet simplicity for Mullá Šadrá, as for Avicenna, retains its theological centrality: God alone, as the Necessary Being, possesses, and is, an existence of infinite intensity and perfection, without any debilitation or privation whatsoever, and uncorrelated with any essence. Since He is pure and absolute existence, without any privation or relations of dependence, He is wholly simple being and thus the “simple reality.” Mullá Šadrá himself, as Rizvi notes, denies pantheism or the identity of contingent beings with God, for God has no privation of existence whatsoever. Thus, for Mullá Šadrá, insofar as any created thing is defined by an essence and is something distinct from absolute and necessary existence, it is distinct from the Godhead.¹⁹ God, as the Necessarily Existent and the Simple Reality, is pure existence itself at its most perfect, without any privation, Who bestows being onto all other things.²⁰

¹⁷ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, ch. 37.7.

¹⁸ Sajjad H. Rizvi, *Mullá Šadrá and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 102-3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁰ Although Mullá Šadrá is no pantheist, his giving primacy to existence over essence—the latter having a merely notional reality—and his making God the limit case in the scale of being, could result in a less robust conception of divine transcendence than what is seen in Avicenna. Avicenna more empathically stresses the ontological gulf between God and His creatures, and he articulates this disparity through the essence-existence distinction: God is the sole reality that, transcending essence, is a pure act of existence. Bahá'u'lláh treats Mullá Šadrá charitably, notes that he did not really espouse pantheism, and endorses what it is the correct interpretation of “the Simple Reality is all things.” In general terms, however, I suspect Bahá'u'lláh's teaching tends more readily to affirm the Avicennan approach, given how much Bahá'u'lláh stresses God's transcendence, as we will see further on in this introduction.

With these metaphysical principles outlined, we can understand Bahá'u'lláh's main and three auxiliary interpretations of the dictum "the Simple Reality is all things." The concern is that, according to the outward meaning of the statement, God is identical to all other things. Under this interpretation, God is like a white light which, in refraction, itself takes on the incidental qualities of color, and becomes dispersed in their multiplicity. Bahá'u'lláh clearly rejects this pantheistic reading—a reading that would itself misrepresent the nuance of Mullá Šadrá's theology and the intent behind his statement. Instead, Bahá'u'lláh states that in the phrase "the Simple Reality is all things," the "all" means *the possessor*—and one without parts or division—while "things" in turn signifies "the perfections of existence *qua* existence." Bahá'u'lláh states:

Know that the meaning of 'things' in this connection is nothing else but existence and the perfections of existence *qua* existence, while the meaning of 'all' is the possessor thereof. This 'all' admitteth of no division and of no parts. Thus, the Simple Reality, because it is simple in all aspects, is the possessor and totality of all limitless perfections, as it hath been said, 'there is no limit to His handiwork.'

According to Bahá'u'lláh, the dictum thus translates to: "God, the simple reality, is the possessor, in a simple manner, of existence and the perfections of existence *qua* existence." What, then, are the perfections of existence *qua* existence, existence insofar as it is existence? The perfections of existence, insofar as it is existence, may be understood as those attributes that can be deduced from the fullness of necessary existence itself, not as distinct from it, but as logical concomitants to it. That is, it could refer to attributes that are entailed by necessary or absolute existence itself—existence *qua* or *as* existence and not particularized by any finite essence. Thus, whatever perfection follows from necessary existence—such as simplicity, unity, pure actuality, immateriality, self-subsistent being, eternity, immutability, supreme causal power, and so on—is the possession of God (and, as explained before, identical to God's essence). That is, just as Avicenna reasoned, God possesses all the logical and concomitant properties of necessary existence, which are considered to be divine attributes. In contrast, the perfections of existence *qua* the essence of some particular being, such as the perfections of a tree or man or triangle, are not identical to God's essence, and such attributes entail the finitude displayed by such dependent realities. Thus, the perfections of existence *qua* existence point to the concomitants of God's infinite being and to His pure, unconditioned, and absolute existence.

The perfections of existence *qua* existence, in addition, could refer to what Scholastic philosophers called the "transcendentals of being," properties that, transcending the Aristotelian ten categories, include truth, goodness, unity, and sometimes beauty. Although a detailed explanation of the transcendentals is outside the scope of this analysis, the transcendentals have been construed as those logical concomitants or co-extensions of existence that are "convertible" with being: anything, insofar as it exists, is true since it has reality; any existent, in being individual, has unity; goodness, since it is the actuality or perfection of existence, is proper to anything insofar as it exists; and lastly, beauty may be seen kind of gestalt property attendant to truth, goodness, and unity in their apprehension as excellent by the perceiver. Therefore, although created things manifest truth, goodness, unity, and beauty (the perfections of existence *qua* existence) in various degrees of limitation—as circumscribed by their finite modes of essence—God, as infinite and necessary existence itself, is maximally true, good, one, and beautiful. He is thus the possessor and totality of all *limitless* perfections.

An additional, though related, sense and profounder meaning may be gleaned from Bahá'u'lláh's explanation, one that could likewise be something of a point of commonality with

Bahá'í metaphysics and Mullá Šadrá's philosophy. God, as the ultimate source of all things, encompasses the powers and perfections of all created things, and contains these perfections within Himself as their cause. Indeed, according to an influential principle in Medieval philosophy known as *proportionate causality*, since nothing comes from nothing, an effect in some sense must pre-exist or be contained within its cause—either in the same way (as when a fire, being hot, heats the air around it), or in a superior form (as when an artist fashions a work and makes it reflect his or her sensibility). Thus, while God must contain, as their cause, the perfections of all created things, in Him these perfections are neither multiple nor entail any connection with finitude or contingency. Instead, these perfections are one and simple, as contained in a higher and supremely excellent way within His absolute existence and unity. Bahá'u'lláh thus states that God is the possessor and totality of all limitless perfections “in a simple manner.”

The phrase “in a simple manner” emphasizes the central point that God possesses all perfections, but in complete oneness, and not by exhibiting these perfections as discrete properties and multiple attributes adhering within His essence. Consequently, the perfections of being, multiple and limited in finite creatures, are one, simple, and infinite in God (infinity as here applied to Him thus refers not to Him *numerically*, but *qualitatively* by virtue of His maximal perfection). He is Himself transcendent and indivisible being, unlimited and inexhaustible existence. As infinite existence, God is superlatively perfect and all-encompassing. Lacking nothing, needing nothing, limited by no finite mode, God can act as the infinite and inexhaustible source of all finite beings, since He—as absolute and pure existence itself—enjoys a superfluity of reality. Everything that is created and sustained in being owes that finite being to Him as an overflow or emanation of His undiminishable existence. By Him, therefore, are all things held in being, even as it is by Him that anything is actualized in being and perfection, such that all finite things, in their deficient being and perfection, point to Him who is all-sufficient being and all-sufficing perfection.

God is thus *all things* in the nonliteral sense of having in Himself the fullness and perfection of infinite existence, so as to be the source of all finite things, the cause of their actuality in being—while still transcending those contingent beings and their imperfections. To use an analogy, God is like the *source* of pure white light that, not being itself refracted, contains in a higher and simple way all the various colours as their ultimate source, without ever becoming any one of them or constituted by them. To say that the cause thus encompasses its effect—and the divine cause His creatures—far from entailing their identity, in fact serves to emphasize the distinction, superiority, and greater perfection of the cause and its perfection in relation to whatever depends upon it.

Thomas Aquinas, who like Mullá Šadrá was influenced by Avicenna's thought, eloquently expresses and clarifies the idea that God is His own existence, and contains all perfections in a simple and united way, while remaining distinct from contingent beings, in his treatise *De Esse et Essentia* (*Essence and Existence*). He writes (*italics mine*):

Even though we say that God is existence alone we do not fall into the error of those who said that God is that universal existence by which everything formally exists. The existence which is God is of such a kind that no addition can be made to it, whence through its purity it is distinct from every other existence . . . Similarly, although God is existence alone, the remaining perfections and nobilities are not lacking in him. On the contrary, he has all the perfections that exist in every genus, and for this reason he is called perfect without qualification . . . *But God has these perfections in a more excellent way than all other things have them because in him they are one, while in other things they are diverse.* And this is because all these perfections pertain to God according to his simple existence, just as, if someone through

one quality could effect the operations of all qualities, such a person would have in that one quality all the qualities, so too does God in his very existence have all the perfections.²¹

More importantly, however, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, especially in *Some Answered Questions*, often speaks of the higher levels of reality as encompassing the lower levels, and thus containing (“in a higher way” as Aquinas would say) their perfections while surpassing them in the perfection of being. Since God is the ultimate reality and the source of all things, He encompasses them by being absolute perfection itself and the cause of their perfections, while remaining utterly sanctified from them in their limitations and imperfections. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá thus states: “... the divine Essence is an all-encompassing reality, and all created things are encompassed. The all-encompassing must assuredly be greater than that which is encompassed, and thus the latter can in no wise discover the former or comprehend its reality.”²²

The above, then, is what I take to be the core of Bahá'u'lláh's interpretation of “the Simple Reality is all things,” and the justification for His claim that this dictum does not imply pantheism. Indeed, Bahá'u'lláh pointedly refers to this fact when He quotes the rest of the statement itself: “The Simple Reality is all things, but not any one of them.” He accordingly stresses, as we quoted before, “God Himself hath ever been, and shall forever remain, sanctified from ascent, descent, and limitation, connection to, and association with, all other things. All other things, in contrast, abide in the sphere of their specific limitations.”

Bahá'u'lláh's Three Auxiliary Interpretations

What follows in the *Tablet of the Simple Reality* are what I call Bahá'u'lláh's three auxiliary interpretations. They are auxiliary because, though they more generally touch on the meanings or stations of *tawhíd* (divine oneness or simplicity), they are relevant to, and elaborate on, “the Simple Reality is all things.” Bahá'u'lláh couches these interpretations as discussions of different stations of *tawhíd*, entailing both that God is without likeness and that in Him there is no multiplicity—that He is simple and absolutely one.

The first station of *tawhíd* is *tawhíd-i-vujúdí*, or *ontological oneness*. This is connected with, or an expression of, the doctrine of the unity of being (*vahdatu'l-vujúd*), popular among Sufis, who often construed the doctrine as meaning that God is the only real existent and that, consequently, whatever *is* must be God. Bahá'u'lláh's interpretation of ontological oneness is that created things, when considered in themselves, do have existence, and that they are distinct from God. But God is alone and the only real existent in the qualified sense that, compared to Him, nothing else really exists. This is because God is His own pure and absolute being, necessary and self-subsistent. Compared to this, the contingent existence of created things is as nothing, because their existence is derivative from external causes and is thus conditional, contingent, and incidental to their essences, and thus radically imperfect. Nonetheless, considered in themselves, contingent beings do exist and cannot be collapsed or dissolved into the divine sphere of being. In *Some Answered Questions*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá clarifies this point succinctly in the short chapter titled “The Reality of the World of Being,” where He states (*italics mine*) that the notion of the sophists “that all existence is illusory” is “false, for although the existence of things is an illusion *compared* to the existence of God, yet in the contingent would it is established proven and undeniable.”²³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

²¹ Thomas Aquinas, *De Esse et Essentia*, ch. 5.2. Trans. by Robert T. Miller.

²² ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, ch. 37.2.

²³ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, ch. 79.2.

compares the comparative nonexistence of creatures to God to the nonbeing of the mineral as compared with the human being. This analogy, entailing as it does only the comparative deficiency of the mineral and preserving its essential distinction from the human being, serves to underline the non-pantheistic ramifications of ontological oneness as understood by Bahá'í metaphysics.

The second station of *tawhíd* discussed by Bahá'u'lláh is *phenomenological oneness*, or *tawhíd-i-shubhídí*. This refers not to the claim that God is the sole existent, but rather to the subjective experience of God as one with the world or immanent in and through all things. Because this kind of *tawhíd* relates to the mystic's experience of oneness with God and nearness to Him, it is phenomenological and not ontological—it has to do with the experience of being and not with existence as distinct from human experience. Bahá'u'lláh explains that since each thing is a “sign” of God—for each thing, in having contingent existence, points to the absolute existence of God as its Creator—God is revealed in the creation, and His effulgence, His light, and His glory can be discerned in the created order of the world.²⁴ It is the experience of this effulgence which creates the perception of phenomenological oneness. Nonetheless, this sense of oneness is at the level of phenomenology or subjective experience; God in Himself remains entirely distinct from His creation at the level of ontology.

The third interpretation of *tawhíd* relates to the Manifestation of God in His spiritual reality as the Word, the Primal Will, or First Intellect—the first being in the emanation of existence from God, *through* which God creates all lower levels of being.²⁵ Bahá'u'lláh states that positive assertions and adjectives, as made by human beings, do not literally apply to the Godhead, so far does He transcend human comprehension and conceptualization. This does not rule out, however, that we can attain to negative knowledge of God, or correctly know what He is *not*. We can, for example, know that He is not contingently existent, composite, deficient, one with or within the world, and so forth. But our positive descriptions of His knowledge, power, and wisdom cannot literally or univocally apply to Him, since our ideas of such things are acquired through our experience of the created world, and do not constitute a direct apprehension of God in His essence and existence. This is why divine simplicity, the fact that God is absolute unity and that His attributes are one with His essence and existence and hence with one another, is so difficult to grasp. It is also why human praise of God more immediately refers to the Manifestation, Who is the instrument of God's creative act and the channel of His universal grace—He manifests God and hence is the medium of God's immanent bestowal of being to the world.

Accordingly, Bahá'u'lláh says that “the Simple Reality is all things” could be understood as referring to the reality of the Manifestation as the instrumental creator and sustainer of the cosmos, Who possesses, in His reality, all perfections in a simple manner, and encompasses created beings through being their instrumental cause. Bahá'u'lláh, however, expresses an important qualification: He says that the Manifestation is simple in a relative way, and not in an absolute way as the Godhead is. I think we can understand this as expressive of the fact that the Manifestation is simple in having no physical parts or materiality,²⁶ but does have an essence distinct from His existence, insofar as He, too, derives His existence from the transcendent Godhead. Consequently, the

²⁴ In this connection, Vahid Rafati writes (as I translate his Persian): “The meaning of *phenomenological oneness* is that all existing things share in one condition, and are in perfect unity, insofar as they all relate of the effulgence of the Divine Essence, and insofar as there is nothing in creation whose existence does not point to the splendors of God and give evidence of His universal emanation of existence onto all things”, Rafati, *Ráhnámá'í baráy-i-Muṭálib-i-Basīṭu'l-Ḥaqíqih*, p. 30.

²⁵ As 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains in *Some Answered Questions*, ch. 53.

²⁶ I am, of course, referring to the Manifestation wholly in His spiritual station.

Manifestation has the minimal metaphysical “parts” of essence and existence. This, at least, would make sense of Bahá'u'lláh's statement here.

From the basis of the above discussion, we can see how Bahá'u'lláh unfolds a total and self-cohering explanation of Mullá Šadrá's dictum. Bahá'u'lláh states that the correct understanding of the doctrine of ontological oneness is that God can be thought of as the sole reality merely under a highly qualified sense: God alone exists not because all other things are identical to Him, but because, compared to Him, they can be “thought of” as nonexistent, “notwithstanding that other things have existed and continue to exist.” Accordingly, created things remain distinct from God, and are not permeated by or subsumed in Him. It is merely that their contingent existence is so infinitely inferior to the necessary existence of God that, when compared to their Creator Who Himself is the uncreated, they themselves must appear as nothingness, such is their imperfection. This is the correct understanding of ontological oneness, as interpreted by Bahá'u'lláh: Far from blurring the distinction between God and His creatures, it emphasizes that distinction and casts it into stark relief. This is because this version of ontological oneness entails that contingent beings are so different from God that the very way they *exist* is different from the manner of God's existence; He exists necessarily and unconditionally, while they exist contingently and conditionally.

Nonetheless, insofar as these created things have any instantiation in being at all, they have that being from God and hence are “signs” of Him. God creates the world and sustains it in being, and therefore within it may be discerned the operation of His continually creative act in all things. If, upon discerning the sustaining power of God's grace operative throughout all existence, the mystic should see in all things nothing but God—as an overwhelming radiance shining through the transparent and diaphanous being of the creatures—this would not contradict the unqualified ontological fact that God utterly transcends His creation and that the distinction between the divine and created orders cannot be dissolved through an essential or substantive union. The experience of such unity between the creature and the divine would rather reflect the mystic's phenomenological apprehension.

Both of these stations of *tanhíd* as presented by Bahá'u'lláh integrally relate to His interpretation of “the Simple Reality of all things.” If God, under ontological oneness, is the only real existent, then He, the Simple Reality, just is “all things.” Yet this proposition is to be understood in accordance with Bahá'u'lláh first interpretation, which states that “things” refers to all the perfections proper to independent existence; God has all perfections not as discrete attributes, but in the complete unity of His being, which in its infinity and perfection can act as the all-encompassing cause of all finite and imperfect beings. Since God is one or unique at the level of being, the term *ontological oneness* is used. Since He is the supremely real, there is a sense in which He is the only reality or encompasses, by virtue of His superlative perfection and infinite being, all other reality. But this affirmation, far from entailing monism under Bahá'u'lláh's interpretation, in fact confirms the distinction between Him and His creatures, insofar as both He and 'Abdu'l-Bahá qualify ontological oneness by saying that created things do have a mode of actual existence.

With regard to phenomenological oneness, if everything with positive existence is a “sign” of God, since He is the Creator of all existents, then He is “all things”—or all perfections of existence—insofar as He can be known as revealed in His creation on account of being the supreme source of existence and perfections, even though He is definitely not identical to the world or one with it. What is critical here is that both stations of *tanhíd* as interpreted by Bahá'u'lláh exclude an actually pantheistic or monistic understanding of “the Simple Reality is all things.” Similarly, ontological oneness and phenomenological oneness are logically compatible, and not at all contradictory, when Bahá'u'lláh subtly qualifies the sense of ontological oneness in a manner

that both affirms the transcendence of the Deity and denies the dissolution of created things within Him, and when He assures us, under the discussion of phenomenological oneness, that created things are signs of God but not God Himself.²⁷

Lastly, in respect to the third of the auxiliary interpretations, Bahá'u'lláh's statement that the dictum applies to the intermediary reality of the Manifestation—Who in His divine station as the Primal Will acts as the instrumental cause on which the material world depends—not only preserves the transcendence of the absolute Deity but also reiterates the point that a cause, in this case the Primal Will, must contain within itself the perfections of its effects, even if in a higher, more excellent, and simple way. This interpretation not only has legitimacy within the sphere of Bahá'í metaphysics. In Mullá Şadra's thought an analog to the Primal Will, “deployable being” or *vujúd-i-munbasit*, operates as the first emanation of the Necessarily Existent and functions as an intermediate and simple hypostasis from which the rest of creation proceeds.²⁸ In the last interpretation, Bahá'u'lláh thus resolves the apparent pantheism of the “Simple Reality is all things” in favor of radical transcendence by stating that the statement refers, not to God's essence, but rather to the first emanation intermediate between Him and the world—and He does this in a way that applies for both Bahá'í and Şadrian metaphysics.

These, then, are Bahá'u'lláh's three interpretations of *tanhíd*, and they fit seamlessly with His first explanation of the “Simple Reality is all things.” Upon providing these understandings, Bahá'u'lláh closes the metaphysical section of the Tablet and transitions into a short discussion of the history of philosophy, and then into an important assertion that philosophical understandings of God must be paired with a recognition of the Manifestation for this day in order to be worthwhile. The Tablet is concluded with a passionate supplication revealed in Arabic, in contrast to the mainly Persian antecedent text.

Theism and Pantheism

The analysis above naturally represents my own understanding of the concepts—implicit and explicit, philosophical and theological—affirmed by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Lawḥ-i-Basítu'l-Ḥaqqíqih*. The reader may have noticed that the reading presented above differs from the one offered by Dr. Momen in his 2010 introduction to his provisional translation of the text. As his is notably the first piece of major scholarship on the subject in English, it would be worthwhile to address these differences through an alternative point of view.

Dr. Momen writes that Bahá'u'lláh's objective in the *Lawḥ-i-Basítu'l-Ḥaqqíqih* is to reconcile the positions of those who supported theism and of those who supported monism or pantheism, the latter represented by the view of unity of being or ontological oneness, and the former by the view of phenomenological oneness. Dr. Momen writes:

In brief it may be said that those who supported the position of *Wahdat al-Wujúd* maintained that Being is one—it is that which exists. Since existence is also one of the essential attributes of God, then it may be said that all things are subsumed in the one Absolute Reality that we call God. This one Reality has different aspects according to the way that it is viewed.

Those who held to the opposing position of *Wahdat ash-Shubúd* maintained that God is beyond any conceptualizations that can be made of Him; he is *wará' al-wará thumma wará' al-*

²⁷ Rafati thus notes that “the Simple reality is all things” is correct when considered under either one of the two kinds of *tanhíd*. Rafati, ‘Ráhnámá’i baráy-i-Muṭá’lî-y-i-Basítu'l-Ḥaqqíqih’, p. 30.

²⁸ Rizvi, *Mullá Şadrá and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being*, p. 128.

wará thumma wará' al-wará (beyond the beyond, then beyond the beyond, and again beyond the beyond). Hence the mystics' experience of unity or union or any apprehension of God through mystical experience is subjective only and has no objective validity. The unity that mystics claim with God is only an appearance and has no substance.²⁹

Later on, Dr. Momen writes on what he thinks Bahá'u'lláh's method was in correctly determining the meaning of "the Simple Reality is all things" and choosing between the two views outlined above:

Bahá'u'lláh first explains the nature of the division among Muslims over Mullá Šadrá's dictum and the associated concepts. He brings forward verses from the Qur'an in support of both positions. For those who follow Mullá Šadrá's position, which he here calls *Tawhíd-i-Wujúdi* (existential oneness), Bahá'u'lláh quotes the Qur'anic verse "All things perish save [His] face" (28:8, cf. 55:27) and interprets this to support the position of those who assert that the only reality is the Divine Reality. For those who opposed Mullá Šadrá's position, which he here calls *Tawhíd-i-Shubúdí* (oneness in appearance only), Bahá'u'lláh quotes the Qur'anic verse "We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and in themselves." (41:53) This he interprets as saying that any evidence of union between the Divinity and creation is only the result of the fact that the signs of God are apparent in all things.

Having defined the two sides of the conflict, Bahá'u'lláh asserts that those who have attacked Mullá Šadrá's position have looked only at the literal meaning of his words rather than the underlying meaning. He then goes on to give an interpretation of Mullá Šadrá's dictum in terms of the concept of the Manifestation of God.³⁰

In essence, then, Dr. Momen suggests that Bahá'u'lláh presents evidence for both positions, what I have translated as *ontological oneness* (*tawhíd-i-wujúdi*) and *phenomenological oneness* (*tawhíd-i-shubúdí*), and then asserts that both can be considered true when applied to the reality of the Manifestation.

An alternative reading from this has been presented in the introduction above. According to this alternative reading, Bahá'u'lláh frames his whole exegesis of the dictum through his first interpretation, and the other interpretations, headed as stations of divine unity, merely function as continuing stages in the unfolding of Bahá'u'lláh's complete explanation. Bahá'u'lláh does not need to reconcile ontological oneness and phenomenological oneness in terms of a third perspective—that of the Manifestation of God—because He already declines a pantheistic understanding of Mullá Šadrá's dictum in the Tablet's first paragraph, and then proceeds to articulate a fully theistic and non-monistic reading of the term ontological oneness in subsequent paragraphs, a reading that logically coheres with both His presentation of phenomenological oneness and His explanation of how the dictum could also refer to the Manifestation of God. Accordingly, Bahá'u'lláh only mentions the limited readings of others critical of Mullá Šadrá, who merely looked on the outward meaning of his words, *after* and not before He mentions the applicability of the idea of the Manifestation of God. This sequence illustrates that the discussion of the Manifestation is not the focal point that resolves previously considered and contradicting theories, but is rather but another aspect of Bahá'u'lláh's multi-staged and self-cohering exegesis.

²⁹ Momen, 'Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of the Uncompounded Reality (Lawḥ Basít al-Ḥaqíqa): A Provisional Translation', p. 204

³⁰ Ibid. pp. 209

Created things are not subsumed within God's existence under Bahá'u'lláh's interpretation of *ontological oneness*. They do exist as distinct from Him, yet while their existence is contingent and dependent, His is necessary, independent, and absolute. Thus, it is merely as though they are nothing when compared to Him, and thus may be "thought of" as nonexistent, "notwithstanding that other things have existed and continue to exist." As 'Abdu'l-Bahá likewise stressed, they remain distinct things and do have existence in their own right, however deficient it may be. But this very point—that created things are not subsumed in God so as to be in any way one with Him—is emphasized in the beginning of the Tablet: "Here, the philosopher's intent was not that the Necessarily Existent hath permeated or become divided among limitless entities. Exalted is He above that!" This assertion is not contradicted in the discussion of ontological oneness, since Bahá'u'lláh is careful to note that created things are nonexistent only when compared to God—a statement that in fact emphasizes God's transcendence—and does not imply that they are in any sense identical to Him. Thereafter, when Bahá'u'lláh speaks of phenomenological oneness—which entails that God is present in creation to the degree that things point to their Creator, not that He permeates the created order like an ethereal substance—it can be presented as logically complementary to ontological oneness, since the latter has already been cleared of any pantheistic content.

Thus, before Bahá'u'lláh addresses the question of how "the Simple Reality is all things" relates to the Manifestation of God, He Himself has apparently dismissed monism and pantheism, and has explained that the dictum does not entail any monistic doctrine. Therefore, Bahá'u'lláh does not seem to be giving evidence for two perspectives, monism and theism, that are logically contradictory, and then reconciling them in reference to a third perspective. Instead, Bahá'u'lláh's account of the two "stations" of *tawhíd*, ontological and phenomenological, are already logically compatible with each other and with His first and primary interpretation of the dictum—an interpretation, as we have seen, that self-consciously precludes pantheism. By the time we reach the third auxiliary interpretation of "the Simple Reality is all things," which relates it to the Manifestation of God, there is nothing to reconcile, since each of Bahá'u'lláh's various explanations is logically compatible with the others. In addition, the Bahá'í notion of the Manifestation can be seen as correlating with the Ṣadrīan idea of the Perfect Man, whose spiritual reality is simple in comparison to beings below him in the hierarchy of existence.³¹ Thus Bahá'u'lláh, even in this interpretation, can still be read as providing a charitable exegesis of Mullá Ṣadrá, and not as reconciling non-Bahá'í theories through an exclusively Bahá'í perspective.

Furthermore, Bahá'u'lláh suggests that there are, in fact, incorrect ways of understanding "the Simple Reality is all things," and the context implies that these are pantheistic or monistic readings. For example, Bahá'u'lláh states:

Indeed, this saying of the philosopher admitteth of praiseworthy interpretations, as well as limited ones. Both kinds of interpretation have been and are extant. Some mature thinkers, in the interest of protecting the Cause of God, have refuted it in its outward meaning. Notwithstanding, this imprisoned Servant only desireth to make mention of the good.

Bahá'u'lláh underscores that there *are* limited interpretations of Mullá Ṣadrá's statement, and that "mature thinkers" (perhaps *Shaykh* Aḥmad and others, as Dr. Momen pointed out in his own introduction) have refuted its outward, or pantheistic, meaning. Bahá'u'lláh evidently regards the

³¹ Rizvi, *Mullá Ṣadrá and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being*, pp. 129-30.

non-pantheistic reading of Mullá Šadrá's dictum as the correct and most charitable one possible. In this spirit, He remarks:

. . . the objections of some to the statement of the philosopher are without foundation, for they had not understood his intent. In truth, one cannot be content with merely considering the outward meaning of a person's statements and repudiating them, except in respect to those people who are openly blasphemous—the words of such people are not deserving of figurative interpretation.

In this context, it seems that the openly blasphemous people are those who actually believe and assert that there is no real distinction between God and His creatures—that He is somehow constitutive of the beings of the natural world, and that anyone can attain substantive union with Him. This understanding of what Bahá'u'lláh is expressing here would accord well with His statements in other places, where He emphatically and decisively rejects any monism and pantheism. As translated by Shoghi Effendi in *Gleanings*, Bahá'u'lláh states:

Regard thou the one true God as One Who is apart from, and immeasurably exalted above, all created things. The whole universe reflecteth His glory, while He is Himself independent of, and transcendeth His creatures. This is the true meaning of Divine unity. . . All existence is dependent upon Him, and from Him is derived the source of the sustenance of all things. This is what is meant by Divine unity; this is its fundamental principle.

Some, deluded by their idle fancies, have conceived all created things as associates and partners of God, and imagined themselves to be the exponents of His unity. By Him Who is the one true God! Such men have been, and will continue to remain, the victims of blind imitation, and are to be numbered with them that have restricted and limited the conception of God.³²

Consequently, it does not seem that Bahá'u'lláh entertains the opposite view at any place in the *Lawḥ-i-Basíṭu'l-Ḥaqqíqih*—that God is somehow one with His creation—and thus He need not reconcile monism with theism.

Since Bahá'u'lláh's first interpretation of "the Simple Reality is all things" denies that it has pantheistic content, and since His subsequent discussion need not entail any support of monism, I propose that one can understand Bahá'u'lláh's statements in *Tablet* as fully consistent in their metaphysical claims. In short, my reading differs from Dr. Momen's in proposing that there is no reconciliation of monism or pantheism with theism in the *Lawḥ-i-Basíṭu'l-Ḥaqqíqih*; instead, there is a straightforward insistence on theism and rejection of monism, and this—or so I suggest—is in fact the central concern of the text, as it unfolds, in four stages, an explanation of the dictum in which the overarching exegesis of it remains that God is the possessor of the perfections of existence *qua* existence. If this reading is accurate, it would accord with Bahá'u'lláh's many statements in other places where He stresses the absolute transcendence of God. While Bahá'u'lláh may not be reconciling monism as such with theism in the *Tablet*, Dr. Momen quite rightly takes note of the mildness of Bahá'u'lláh's reconciliatory approach in this work. This is evidenced by the fact that Bahá'u'lláh, instead of merely saying that Mullá Šadrá's dictum and the Sufis' concept of *ontological oneness* are wholly false, instead preserves their terminology while interpreting their positions in a way that is in accord with His own teachings. This method is common in Bahá'u'lláh

³² Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings*, LXXXIV

writings, and indicates that He not only intends to clarify theological matters but also to establish unity and fellowship among formerly divided people.

The Tablet on the Simple Reality (Lawḥ-i-Basīṭu'l-Ḥaqíqih): Provisional Translation

As to what the inquirer hath asked about the statement of the philosophers, “the Simple Reality is all things,” reply thou: Know that the meaning of ‘things’ in this connection is nothing else but existence and the perfections of existence qua existence, while the meaning of ‘all’ is the possessor thereof. This ‘all’ admitteth of no division and no parts. Thus, the Simple Reality, since It is simple in all aspects, is the possessor and totality of all limitless perfections, just as it hath been said, “there is no limit to His handiwork.”

To continue in the Persian tongue,³³ the intended meaning of the philosopher in the above passage regarding ‘things’ is the perfections of existence qua existence, and his intent as to ‘all’ is a possessor—that is, the One Who, in a simple manner, is the possessor and totality of all limitless perfections. This philosopher hath put forth similar statements on the themes of Divine simplicity and on the ‘potency’ and ‘intensity’ of existence. Here, his intent was not that the Necessarily Existent hath permeated or become divided among limitless entities. Exalted is He above such ascriptions! Rather, it is as the philosophers have stated: “The Simple Reality is all things, and not any single one of them,” and in another place, “The light of the Simple Reality can be perceived in all things.”

This perception is conditioned by the vision of the seer. Discerning eyes behold, in all things, the signs of the One God, for in all things are the Divine names manifest, while God Himself hath ever been, and shall forever remain, sanctified from ascent, descent, and limitation, connection to, and association with, all other things. All other things, in contrast, abide in the sphere of their specific limitations. It hath thus been said, “Since the existence of the Necessarily Existent is of the utmost perfection in power and intensity, were it permissible, it would permeate and interpenetrate infinite beings, but this being impossible, it is not thus dispersed.” This statement hath many implications, but if the intent of the philosophers were to be explained at length, it would result in tedium. Since the hearts of the righteous are refined and subtle in their understanding, the Pen of thy Lord, the Unconstrained, hath sufficed itself with brevity.

Two stations regarding divine oneness may be considered. The first is *ontological oneness*, which negateth all things with *lá* and affirmeth God with *illá*.³⁴ That is, all things except God are regarded as nonexistent, meaning that all things have been and shall remain sheer nothingness when compared to the revelation of His glory and the very mention of His name: “All things shall perish save His face.” Compared to His existence, none is worthy of existing, and the term *existence* is thus not applicable to anyone. In this connection hath it been said, “God was and nothing abided with Him, and He is now even as He was,” notwithstanding that other things have existed and continue to exist. This signifieth that,

³³ Here, Bahá'u'lláh switches to Persian from Arabic, and largely reiterates the same point.

³⁴ A reference to the Islamic credo “There is no god but God.” *Lá* signifies the ‘no,’ while *illá* signifies the ‘but’. Consequently, *lá* refers to the negation of the existence of all things other than God, whereas *illá* affirms His unitary existence.

in His court, nothing hath existence. According to ontological oneness, all things perish while the face of God, that is the Godhead itself, is everlasting and enduring.³⁵

The second station of divine oneness is *phenomenological oneness*. According to this station, in everything the signs of the One God, the evidences of the Eternal, and the effulgences of the light of divine Unity are apparent. Thus hath it been sent down in the Book: "We shall show them our signs in the world and in their souls."³⁶ In this connection, in everything are the splendors of the signs of the Simple Reality clear and evident. The intention of the philosopher was not, however, that God permeateth the limitless beings in existence. Exalted is He, and again exalted is He, above being incarnate in anything whatsoever, or bound by any limitation, or joined to anything in creation. He hath ever been sanctified from and transcendent above all else besides Himself. We testify that He is one in His essence and one is His attributes, and that all lie in the grasp of His power, which is supreme over the worlds.

In another sense, whatever is mentioned referreth to the Primal Word, for the Godhead itself is unseen, inaccessible, and incomprehensible. In this connection, He hath been and continueth to be sanctified from all mention and designation, and transcendeth whatever the people of creation can conceive. "The path is barred, and seeking rejected." Thus, whatever eloquent praises and lofty descriptions proceed from the tongue or flow from the pen apply to the Most Exalted Word, the Supreme Pen, the Primal Apex, the True Homeland, the Dayspring of the Manifestation of the All-Merciful. He it is Who is the locus of unity and the manifestation of the light of singleness and transcendence. In this sense, all the excellent titles and exalted attributes of deity refer to Him; to none else beyond Him do they apply, even as it hath been said: "He is sanctified from all mention." And He Who is the seat of the light of divine oneness, though He be outwardly designated by a name or constrained by certain limitations, is inwardly a simple reality sanctified from limitations.³⁷ The simplicity of this Being, however, is relative—it is not simple in all aspects.

In this connection, the meaning of the statement is that the Primal Word³⁸ and Dayspring of the light of Divine unity is the sustaining creator of all things and the possessor of innumerable perfections. In this station, there are truths pertaining to the Word that are concealed in the treasuries of inviolability and inscribed in the preserved tablet. To explicate this matter is not seemly at this time, though God may yet reveal in the future—He is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed. Otherwise, the objections of some to the statement of the philosopher are without foundation, for they had not understood his intent. Indeed, one cannot be content to consider only the outward meaning of a person's statements and then arise to scorn them, except in respect to those people who are openly blasphemous. The words of such people are not deserving of figurative interpretation.

³⁵ Alluding to Qur'án, 28:88.

³⁶ Qur'án, 41:53.

³⁷ Under the *station of limitation* or *distinction*, the Manifestations of God are particular human beings with attendant limitations. Under the *station of unity*, They are one and sanctified from such limitations. See Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* (trans. by Shoghi Effendi) (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1989), part two, paras 193-196.

³⁸ *Dhikr-i-Awwal*. Rafati's interpretation of this locution as *the Primal Word*, or the spiritual reality of the Manifestation, is amply supported by context. Rafati, 'Ráhnámá'í baráy-i-Muṭáli'iy-i-Basīṭu'l-Ḥaqíqih', p. 30.

The philosophers have been and still are of different persuasions, though some of their positions have been gleaned from the books of the prophets. The first to study philosophy was Idrís; he thus hath this name.³⁹ He hath also been referred to as Hermes, for in every language he hath been given a particular name. In every branch of philosophy he issued decisive statements. After him, Apollonius derived branches of knowledge from the Hermetic Tablets, and it is from him that most of the philosophers derived the scientific and philosophical disciplines.

Indeed, this saying of the philosopher⁴⁰ admitteth of praiseworthy interpretations, as well as limited ones. Both kinds of interpretation have been and are extant. Certain mature thinkers, in the interest of protecting the Cause of God, have refuted it in its outward meaning, yet this imprisoned Servant only desireth to make mention of the good. This day, otherwise, is not the day when one should be occupied with comprehending such utterances, for knowledge of this statement and the like thereof hath not enriched humankind, nor shall it.

To illustrate: if the philosopher who expressed that proposition were alive today, along with those who supported his belief and those who refuted it, they would all occupy the same station. For whoever among them, after the call of the Lord of all names was raised from the right hand of the luminous spot, attained to the word “Yea!” would be accepted and praiseworthy, and those who denied His call would be rejected. How many souls have regarded themselves as occupying the apex of insight into the realities of things and mystic knowledge, to such an extent that they fancied that what proceeded from their mouths was the very balance by which every statement should be weighed, and the very astrolabe by which the measure of the beginning and the end ought to be determined. Nonetheless, in the days of the springtime of the All-Merciful, when the winds of tests were blowing, We found none among them disposed to accept or possessed of constancy. Should one be well versed in every branch of knowledge, yet hesitate in affirming “Yea, verily!”—such a one would be unworthy of mention before God and accounted as the most ignorant of people, for the purpose of learning hath ever been the recognition of God. Whoso remaineth deprived of this sublime, this holy adornment will be reckoned with the dead in the tablets of God.

O Ĥusayn! This Wronged One declareth that words must needs be paired with deeds; words without deeds are even as honeyless bees and fruitless trees. Consider the Philosopher of Sabzivár. In one of his poems there is a verse to the effect that there is no Moses, otherwise the whispering voice of “I verily am God” could be heard from every bush. When only words were required, he wrote thus, his intent being that the mystic who hath attained to the knowledge of God ascendeth to such a station that his eyes are filled with the luminous vision of Divine glory, and his ears with hearing the voice of God ringing forth from all things. That philosopher hath no objection to these themes, as is clear from what he hath written. These are his words, but in respect to action, it is evident that he hath not at all heard the voice of the Burning Bush, which at the highest spot crieth out amid all mankind, explicitly and without equivocation, and with the loudest summons calleth forth all men. For had he heard, he would have risen to proclaim its truth. Now, it must be concluded either that the words which issued from his lips were not sincere, or that, out of

³⁹ The name *Idrís* is similar to the word for “to study” in Arabic, being *darasa*.

⁴⁰ Bahá'u'lláh seems to be referring back to Mulla Šadrá and “the Simple Reality is all things.”

fear of disrepute and love of fame, he hath been deprived of this august station and of affirming its veracity. In sum, either he knew the truth and concealed it, or he recognized and subsequently denied it.

How many indeed are the souls who have spent the whole of their lives striving to validate their own speculations, and remained bereft when the splendor of God shone from the horizon of the name *the Self-Subsisting*. Authority is in the hand of God. He giveth to, or withholdeth from, whomsoever He willeth whatsoever He willeth. He is to be praised in His command, obeyed in His decree. There is no God but Him; He is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

In these days, the following was revealed in one of the Tablets: How many a man of the turban hath been kept back from recognizing God and opposed Him, yet how many a veiled handmaiden hath recognized Him, accepted Him, and proclaimed: "Praise to Thee, O God of the worlds!" Thus have We made the most exalted to become the most wretched, and the most wretched to become the most exalted. Thy Lord is sovereign to do as He willeth.

O Husayn! Say to the one who hath raised these queries: Turn aside from the puddle, for the Most Great Ocean is surging outstretched before thee. Draw nigh unto it, then drink therefrom in the name of thy Lord, the All-Knowing, the All-Informed. By My life! He shall enable thee to attain to a station whereat thou wilt see naught in the world but the effulgence of the Ancient of Days, and wilt hear [melodies] from the Sadratu'l-Muntahá, which hath been upraised upon the knowledge that there is no God but Him, the Omnipotent, the Almighty, the All-Powerful.

This is the day wherein it behoveth every soul, when he heareth the Divine summons from the Dayspring of creation, to renounce the world, arise, and exclaim "Yea, O Thou Who art the Object of my desire!" and then "Here am I, O Beloved of the worlds!" Say: O questioner! Were the intoxication of the wine of utterance of thy Lord, the All-Merciful, to overcome thee, and wert thou to recognize what wisdom and elucidating knowledge lie therein, thou wouldst forsake the world and rise to assist that Wronged One in exile. Thou wouldst exclaim, "Glory unto Him Who hath made the fluid to appear as solid, the outstretched as constrained, and the concealed as manifest—He Who, when one seeth Him outwardly, is beheld as only a man amidst the people of oppression, and yet Who, when one considereth His inward reality, is regarded as supreme over all in the heavens and on earth!" Give ear unto that which the Fire proclaimeth from the luminous Sadratu'l-Muntahá on the crimson spot: "O people! Hasten ye, with your hearts, toward the Beloved." Thus hath the matter been decreed by, and the command been issued from, the Almighty and Ever-Faithful God.

O inquirer! Mention of thee hath been made before the Divine countenance in this conspicuous prison. This Tablet hath therefore been revealed for thee from a horizon wherefrom dawneth the daystar of the bounties of thy Lord, the Almighty, the All-Praised. Recognize its worth and appreciate its value; this is best for thee, couldst thou but know it. We beseech Him to aid thee to serve His Cause and to make mention of His name, and to ordain for thee that which is best for thee in this world and in the world to come. He it is Who answereth the prayers of those who call upon Him, the Most Merciful of all who show mercy.

O servant! When thou art enraptured by the breezes of the allusions of the Lord of all names and seek to be illumined with the radiance of His Countenance, which hath shone forth from the dayspring of eternity, turn thy face to the Most Exalted Horizon and say:

O Creator of the heavens and Lord of all names! I beseech Thee by Thy name—whereby the gates leading unto Thy presence have been opened unto Thy creatures and the daystar of Thy providence hath shone its light on all in Thy kingdom—to make me steadfast in my love for Thee, detached from all save Thee and ready to serve Thee, and to fix my gaze upon Thy face and unloose my tongue to celebrate Thy praise.

O Lord! Aid and assist me in the days of Thy Manifestation and the Dayspring of Thy Cause, such that, through the help of Thy grace and tender mercy, I might rend all obstructions asunder and, with the fire of Thy love, set every veil ablaze.

O Lord! Thou art mighty, while I am weak and feeble; possessed of all wealth art Thou, while I am poor and indigent. Thus do I implore Thee by the ocean of Thy loving kindness to grant that I not be shut out from the dispensation of Thy grace and merciful bestowal. All things testify to Thy majesty and to Thy glory, to Thy power and to Thy might. Take me by the hand in the hand of Thy will, and deliver me through Thy sovereign authority. Ordain for me, then, what Thou hast ordained for Thy chosen ones, who have turned toward Thee, been faithful to Thy Covenant and Testament, soared in the firmament of Thy will, and uttered Thy praise among Thy people. Thou art the All-Powerful, the Help in Peril, the Most Exalted, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful.

Author Biography

Born in Missoula, Montana, Joshua D.T. Hall received a BA in Central & Southwest Asia Studies and English Literature at the University of Montana, and went on to read for an MPhil in Islamic Studies and History at the University of Oxford under the Ertegun Graduate Scholarship. Now pursuing a doctorate, his interests include medieval and early modern Persian poetry focusing on Hafez; literary translation; Islamic philosophy with particular stress on Avicenna; and the Bahá'í Faith. He has published “Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna” in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* (2022), exploring the Bahá'í reception of Avicenna's metaphysical theology. Joshua plans to apply an interdisciplinary approach to Persian poetry, analysing how Persian thinkers' creative and aesthetic contributions engage with Avicennian rationalist heritage and its interaction with Sufism, and kalām in late-medieval Iran.

Book Review

‘Adasiyyih: The Story of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Model Farming Community (Paul Hanley)

Arthur Dahl

‘Adasiyyih: The Story of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Model Farming Community¹

Author: Paul Hanley

Publisher: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Evanston IL, 2024, 336 pages

In *‘Adasiyyih: The Story of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Model Farming Community*, Paul Hanley, who has long been a leading exponent of the Bahá'í interest in agriculture, has done much more than just tell the story of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s model farming community, ‘Adasiyyih, in the first half of the 20th century. He provides a panorama of the interest of the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith in agriculture and their love of nature from the beginning to today.

The first part of the book explores the life experiences of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and their teachings and roles in agriculture and rural development, before expanding on the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the perfect example, whether it be in providing for the Holy Family in their exile and imprisonment, facilitating the last years in the life of Bahá'u'lláh, establishing the World Centre of the Faith in the Holy Land, and guiding the development of Bahá'í communities around the world. It contains many details of Their personal lives and the guidance and encouragement that They provided to many rural communities and villages. It also shares vignettes of the many simple, rural people whose extraordinary exploits embellished the early history of the Faith.

Among the themes developed in the book, there is the central role of agriculture as the fundamental basis of community in a new global order characterized by peace, justice, equity, and sustainability. Another topic is the role of food, both for health and social cohesion. Hanley also elaborates on the importance of beauty, and the aesthetic branches of agriculture, such as landscape architecture, horticulture, floriculture, and arboriculture.

Despite being a prisoner, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá created the Ridvan garden near Akka from 1875 as a paradise of nature for Bahá'u'lláh in his last years. We come to know the devoted gardeners who maintained and embellished the gardens that provided beauty and relaxation, creating a spiritual atmosphere for residents and pilgrims, as well as the villages in Iran from whence many originated. Some Bahá'ís were gradually able to acquire farm land in Palestine and began raising food, which provided for the needs of the resident Bahá'ís and visitors. We are shown how the efforts to beautify the holy places continued after the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá under the guidance of the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, and then the Universal House of Justice.

We learn a lot about the life and qualities of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from His childhood to His ability to find the provisions needed by the family and companions under many trying conditions, His ability to relate to and meet the needs of the poor as well as those highly placed, and the many

¹ This book review was originally published by the International Environment Forum on 13 May 2024, available here: https://iefworld.org/Dahl2024f_Adasiyyih [accessed 15 June 2025]

obstacles and threats that He overcame throughout His life. The book is as much a biography revealing some lesser known dimensions of His extraordinary capacities as it is an exposition on agricultural techniques. As a master gardener, He created places of beauty both for peaceful refuge and to receive pilgrims and other visitors. The book also places significant writings of Bahá'u'lláh, such as the *Tablet of the World* and the *Tablet of Carmel*, in their local and global contexts.

The latter part of the book describes in detail the development of 'Adasiyyih and other villages with Bahá'ís in the Holy Land, despite their difficult socio-political contexts, religious and ethnic prejudices, a harsh landscape, degraded land and extreme climate. Some villages were considered endowments for the Bahá'í Holy Places at the World Center, while generating food and income for the Bahá'í community. Two were farmed by the faithful brother and half-brother of Bahá'u'lláh and their families. This included the farms adjacent to the Garden of Ridvan which became the site for the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

After two earlier failures, 'Abdu'l-Bahá invited some farmers of Zoroastrian background from near Yazd in Iran to settle at 'Adasiyyih and, with great effort, turn this most desolate site into a model of modern agriculture. He provided technical advice, planting materials, and guidance on building a community applying spiritual principles both to its own organisation and to its relations with those around it. The process is described in detail to illustrate all the dimensions of such a process of transformation. He personally visited on four occasions, winning the support of the authorities and providing advice and encouragement. During the war, when famine threatened, grain stored at His request was used to feed the starving population of Haifa and vicinity, and even the British troops on their arrival. The villagers built a Bahá'í centre, organized a school for boys and girls, held literacy classes, provided farming guidance, allocated land equitably, established irrigation, drained a malaria-infested swamp, all providing for the needs of what became a model village attracting national and international attention.

For those particularly interested in agriculture, there are details of the regenerative farming techniques used, the diverse crops planted, the reliance on local methods rather than imports, and the development of the local capacity to manage and improve food production without depending on any guidance from outside. These included soil and water management, crop rotation and diversification, and animal husbandry. Equal attention is shown to the social and spiritual dimensions of building a vibrant community that is self-reliant. A local spiritual assembly was elected in 1924 to direct community affairs.

Unfortunately, the village was located on the border of what became a war zone and then the frontier between the Kingdom of Jordan and the state of Israel, and the turmoil of that process and land reform in Jordan led to the end of the Bahá'í community in 'Adasiyyih, whose members were guided to other destinations and forms of service.

The final chapter draws lessons from this experience for communities of today that face many challenges similar to those of a hundred years ago. The advice of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on transforming food and agriculture for sustainability through agroecology mirrors the lessons learned and the example that the early Bahá'ís set, lacking only the spiritual dimension that is the real foundation for such a fundamental transformation. Readers will come away with a deeper appreciation of agriculture and its role in our spiritual, social and economic transformation as we lay the foundations for an ever-advancing civilisation.

Author Biography

Environmental scientist Dr. Arthur Lyon Dahl is President of the International Environment Forum and a retired Deputy Assistant Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme in Nairobi, providing early warning of environmental problems. He pioneered for 11 years in the Pacific Islands as ecological adviser to all the island countries, represented the Baha'i International Community at the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, contributed to numerous UN conferences on sustainable development and climate change, and participated in research on values-based education. Most recently he has addressed challenges of global environmental governance.