

# BAHA'I STUDIES REVIEW

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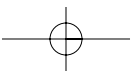
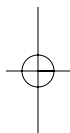
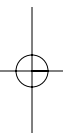
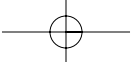
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## Midhat Pasha and 'Abdu'l-Baha in 'Akka: The Historical Background of the Tablet of the Land of Bā<sup>1</sup>

NECATI ALKAN

### **Abstract**

*In God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi mentions various distinguished political and other figures who met 'Abdu'l-Baha. Among them were several Ottoman officials who were friendly towards Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha. One of them was the outstanding liberal Ottoman statesman Midhat Pasha, who, as the governor general (vâli) of Ottoman Syria, invited 'Abdu'l-Baha ('Abbas Effendi) to Beirut. To date, there have been only very few references to this meeting between these two figures. On the occasion of 'Abdu'l-Baha's visit to Beirut, Baha'u'llah revealed the Lawḥ-i Arḍ-i Bā, the Tablet of the Land of Bā (Beirut), in honour of his son. Hitherto, the circumstances and exact date of this remained unclear.

The object of this paper is to present the background of this episode in Baha'i history in the light of a manuscript by the eminent Baha'i Haji Mirza Haydar 'Ali Isfahani that has surfaced recently. His previously unknown account of the visit of Midhat Pasha to 'Akka, during which Midhat Pasha met 'Abdu'l-Baha prior to the latter's visit to Beirut, provides new information on the circumstances surrounding the revelation of the Tablet of the Land of Bā. With the help of other sources we are also able to determine when this episode took place. Before this discussion, the life and activities of Midhat Pasha are briefly outlined. An annotated translation of Mirza Haydar 'Ali's account is appended to this article.

### **Midhat Pasha and his governorship in Syria**

Midhat Pasha (1822–1884),<sup>2</sup> whose real name was Ahmed Şefik, was a highly capable and outstanding official of the 19th century Ottoman Empire. During his childhood he studied and memorized the Qur'an and therefore earned the title *hâfiz*; later he learned Arabic, Persian and French.<sup>3</sup> From his adolescence on, Ahmed Şefik was engaged in official work in Istanbul,

<sup>1</sup> This paper was read in the absence of the author at the Religious Studies Seminar of the Association for Baha'i Studies (English-Speaking Europe), Newcastle (UK), 10–12 December 2004. I thank the participants for their comments.

<sup>2</sup> Franz Babinger, 'Midhat Pāshā', in: *Enzyklopädie des Islam*, vols. 1–4 and supplement (Brill: Leiden, 1913) 3:555–57; M. Tayyib Gökbilgin, 'Midhat Paşa', in: *Islam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1960) 8:270–82; Roderic H. Davison, 'Midhat Pāshā', in: *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1991) 6:1031–35. These three articles list extensive primary and secondary literature on Midhat Pasha. An interesting novel about Midhat Pasha's private life and political activities based on historical sources is Hıfzı Topuz, *Taif'le Ölüm* (Death in Taif), (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1999). There are recent academic articles about him that are too many to be listed here.

<sup>3</sup> Midhat Pasha also wrote a short commentary on the Quranic 'Basmala', i.e. *Bismi'llāhi'r-raḥmāni'r-raḥīm* ('In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful'), and on the first chapter, the *Sūrat al-Fātiha*; see Şehbenderzāde Filibeli Ahmed Hilmi, 'Midhat Paşa Merhûmun Besmele ve Fātiha Tefsiri', *Hikmet*

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Bulgaria and other places. He served as secretary in the *Divân-ı Hümâyün* (Imperial Chancery of State), where he received the nom de plume 'Midhat' (laudable action, encomium); he was employed in the *Sadâret Mektubî Kalemi* (Office of Letters of the Grand Vizier), and at the governorate in Damascus and Sayda, to mention only a few of his posts. From 1854 to 1857 Midhat had the difficult task of maintaining order in Rumelia (European Turkey), where Bulgarian rebels and brigands were opposing the authorities. After the successful completion of this duty, Midhat toured Europe for six months. In 1859 he headed the inquiry regarding the Kuleli uprising in Istanbul, which was organized by reactionary forces aimed at deposing the reform-minded Sultan Abdülmecid (r. 1839–1861). Midhat was appointed *vâli* (governor general) of Niş (in present-day Serbia) in the year 1861, and, owing to his successful reforms, Sultan Abdülaziz (r. 1861–1876) made him *vâli* of the Tuna province, which comprised modern Bulgaria. This province was created in 1864 as a 'pilot project', and Midhat had the task of inaugurating a general reform programme (*nizâmnâme*) for the Ottoman administration, based on experiences there. He established local councils in towns and villages for the pursuit of public works, science and education; laid the foundation of the still extant Bank of Agriculture (*Ziraat Bankası*) by establishing a cash department; arranged for fiscal relaxations and opened public technical schools. Later, in 1868, he was summoned to Istanbul and led reforms in the juridical, educational and financial sectors. In the course of his governorship in Baghdad (1869–1872) Midhat again carried out successful reforms in various fields. At the end of this office, Sultan Abdülaziz appointed him as grand vizier. This, however, lasted only three months because Midhat was regarded as being too independent of the Sultan. He was also removed from Istanbul in 1873 and appointed *vâli* in Selanik (Thessaloniki in present Greece) as a result of his proposal for representative government. It is apparent that Midhat entertained difficult relations with the sultans in his drive for democratic reforms but, despite his dissidence, he was regularly reappointed to different positions because of his ability to improve the affairs of the state in the provinces.

All of the administrative activities of Midhat Pasha covered the years 1839–1878, which are known as the *Tanzimat-ı Hayriyye* (beneficial reordering, reform) period in the history of the late Ottoman Empire. The reforms were proclaimed basically through three imperial edicts in 1839, 1856 and 1876. The first and second edicts paved the way for the proclamation of the *Kânûn-ı Esâsî* ('Constitutional Law'), the first Ottoman (Turkish) constitution, which was announced on 28 December 1876. Midhat Pasha drafted a constitution called *Kânûn-ı Cedid* ('New Law'), together with the poet-statesman Namık Kemal, but Abdülhamid refused it and instead had the constitution of France translated and announced this as the *Kânûn-ı Esâsî*. Namık Kemal and his friend Ziya Pasha were among the founders of the 'Young Ottoman' reform movement a decade earlier with the aim of democratizing the Ottoman Empire in a synthesis of Islamic and Western ideas.

The central theme of the *Kânûn-ı Esâsî* was to restrict to some extent the exercise of the powers of the Sultan and to introduce the idea of a parliamentary system. Among other aspects, this constitution covered basic rights and privileges, and the reform decrees were partially directed toward winning the support of European powers and re-emphasized the equality of all subjects under the law. These decrees were formulated after European models and moved away from the Islamic shariah. However, the main goal of the reforms was to preserve the Ottoman state. Sultan Abdülaziz was deposed and died (in 1876) while Midhat

(newspaper), 25 Rabîu'l-Âhir 1328 (5 May 1910), no. 3, pp. 2–3; published by Mustafa Özel, 'Midhat Paşa'nın Besmele ve Fâtiha Tefsiri', *Marife* (journal), no. 2, 2003; online at <http://www.marife.org/8-ozel.htm> (accessed 23 June 2004).

## MIDHAT PASHA AND 'ABDU'L-BAHA IN 'AKKA

Pasha was prime minister and, following the three month reign of Sultan Murad V, Abdülhamid II became Sultan in 1876. Though he initially accepted the constitution (*meşrutiyet*) and parliament (*Meclis-i Meb'usân*), in 1878 he closed the parliament down and strengthened his position as absolute ruler for 33 years until he was overthrown by the Young Turk revolution (1908–1909), and the constitution and parliament were again put into effect.

Midhat Pasha's fate was determined by article 113 of the constitution, which he himself had added, giving the sultan the right to remove or exile 'dangerous persons'. Abdülhamid was greatly disturbed by Midhat's liberal views that undermined his authority. To understand his attitude toward Midhat, we have to keep in mind that the sultan accused him of the murder of his uncle Abdülaziz. In his memoirs, however, Abdülhamid states that he did not have any grudges against Midhat, admired his work as governor but disapproved of his political views.<sup>4</sup>

Abdülhamid made use of his right to change the prime minister, dismissed Midhat from his second term of office as grand vizier (December 1876 – February 1877) and, in accordance with article 113, ordered him to leave the Ottoman domains. Following an extended stay in Europe – by that time Midhat was celebrated there as 'the father of the constitution' – he was sent as governor general to Syria in late November 1878. Abdülhamid thus continued his scheming against the liberal pasha by removing him from Istanbul and putting him under the yoke of organising state affairs in the problematic province of Syria.

Whereas Midhat had all kinds of power during his previous governorships, Abdülhamid denied this to him in Syria, thinking that his minister wanted decentralisation in that region to increase his own power.<sup>5</sup> A German source gives some idea of the concerns and ideals of Midhat Pasha. It is recorded that he visited the Templer Colony in Haifa on 'Pentecost Monday' (17 May) 1880. He had come overland to Palestine on a tour of inspection via Tiberias, Nazareth and 'Akka and left Haifa on the same day for Beirut with the Austrian Lloyd steamship that was awaiting him. In Haifa, Midhat inquired in detail about the affairs and needs of the community; he thanked the Templers for their efforts and for being a good example for the local population through their institutions, and wished them continued existence and success. Also, the *vâli* showed utmost admiration for the diligence and endeavours of the colonists and said to the officials in his company that it was a shame that they (the Turks) could not achieve something similar. The pasha added that 'Turkey' had been stagnant in its development and thus turned to Europe for instructors in military institutions and the navy, industry and trade and would also need specialists in agriculture. He was not only very pleased to find a colony that met this need but promised to support its endeavours with whatever was in his power. For this he pointed out to the pasha of 'Akka and the *kaymakam* (head of the district) of Haifa, who were with him, that it was their duty to grant all possible facilities and support to the colonists and not to complicate things, as had happened in the past. Furthermore it is stated that Midhat Pasha was the first senior 'Turkish'

<sup>4</sup> İsmet Bozdağ, *Abdülhamid'in Hatıra Defteri* (Istanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 1985) 13–15.

<sup>5</sup> For details of Midhat Pasha as governor of Syria, see e.g. Ali Haydar Midhat, *The Life of Midhat Pasha* (Arno Press: New York, 1973, reprint of the 1903 ed. published by Murray, London) 178–80; Bilal Şimşir, *Fransız Belgelerine Göre; Midhat Paşanın sonu (1878–1884): les dernières années de Midhat Pacha (d'après les documents français)* (Ankara: Ayyıldız Matbaası, 1970) 15–38; Najib Saliba, 'The Achievements of Midhat Pasha as Governor of the Province of Syria, 1878–1880', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9 (1979) 307–323; and Butrus Abu-Manneh, 'The Genesis of Midhat Pasha's Governorship in Syria 1878–1880', in Thomas Philipp/Birgit Schaebler (eds.), *The Syrian Land: Processes of Integration and Fragmentation in Bilād al-Shām from the 18th to the 20th Century* (Berliner Islamstudien Band 6, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998) 251–67. On his reform proposal for Syria, see Hüseyin Tosun, ed., *Suriye Lâyihası* (Istanbul: Matbaa ve Kütüphane-i Cihan, 1324/1906–07).

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official who acknowledged and appreciated the efforts and success of the Templers, and that Midhat Pasha was a man who correctly judged the situation of 'Turkey' and was eager to bring about better conditions. However, the writer asked prophetically whether the Ottoman government in Istanbul would support the endeavours of Midhat Pasha or rather put obstacles in his way, unless he was backed up by substantial foreign aid. It was hoped that the *vâli* would have sufficient time and space to take steps for the good of that underdeveloped region and would fulfil the promises of support that he had given the Templers, the aim of whom was the welfare of the land.<sup>6</sup> The plans for a more prosperous and orderly Syrian province did not materialize. Sultan Abdülhamid made a great effort to undermine the reform attempts of Midhat Pasha. It was in the course of this strenuous period that Midhat Pasha visited 'Akka and had an encounter with 'Abdu'l-Baha, prior to their meeting in Beirut.

After several offers of resignation that were rejected, Midhat was recalled in August 1880, ordered to Izmir as governor of the Aydın province and finally charged, in 1881, with the murder of Sultan Abdülaziz, in spite of the latter's confirmed suicide. Due to Western pressure and especially as a result of British diplomacy, Abdülhamid turned the death sentence into life-long imprisonment in remote Taif on the Arabian Peninsula. However, on 8 May 1884 Abdülhamid ordered Midhat Pasha – who was called 'father of the liberals' (*Abu'l-Ahrâr*) by his supporters, and who had displayed tolerance toward other religions and cared for the well-being of the generations after him – to be strangled.<sup>7</sup>

### Midhat Pasha and the Baha'is

Before we discuss 'Abdu'l-Baha's visit to Beirut and the circumstances leading to it, let us briefly look at Midhat Pasha's relationship with the Baha'is. At present, two previous encounters of Midhat Pasha with Baha'is can be established. The first was when some 70 Baha'is were exiled from Baghdad to Mosul in 1868, after Baha'u'llah was banished to Istanbul. According to a Baha'i source this occurred through the instigation of the Persian consul in Baghdad, Mirza Buzurg Khan. Midhat Pasha, who became *vâli* of Baghdad in 1869, was passing through Mosul and, seeing that the Baha'i captives (*usarâ*) were treated badly, he administered justice towards them and set them all free (*hukm-i 'adl dar haqq-i usarâ namûdih hamih-râ âzâd sâkht*).<sup>8</sup> Another Baha'i account, without specifying the source, maintains that the Baha'is were forced to stay in Mosul for twenty years and does not mention Midhat Pasha.<sup>9</sup> It may be that some Baha'is were freed and others had to stay.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Letter of Friedrich Lange (a Templer teacher), dated 30 May 1880, published on 24 June 1880 in the Templer weekly journal *Süddeutsche Warte*; in Alex Carmel, *Palästina-Chronik 1853 bis 1882: Deutsche Zeitungsberichte vom Krimkrieg bis zur ersten jüdischen Einwanderungswelle* (Ulm: Vaas Verlag, 1978) 324–25.

<sup>7</sup> Abdülhamid himself says that Midhat was not involved in Abdülaziz's death; *Abdülhamid'in Hatıra Defteri* 15.

<sup>8</sup> Asadu'llah Fadil Mazandarani, *Tārīkh-i Zuhūr al-Haqq* 5:62 (see <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/arabic/vol3/tzh5/5tzh.htm>, viewed 15 November 2004). I am grateful to Sohail Farhad for this reference.

<sup>9</sup> 'These refugees were subjected to severe hardships in Mosul. When they arrived, some of the inhabitants crowded on to the rooftops and threw stones at them. The shopkeepers refused to sell them food and no one would give them shelter. It took a long time for them to settle in Mosul. After much privation and difficulties most of them managed to engage in some work, sharing their modest income with each other. They remained in Mosul for about twenty years.' (Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah*, 4 vols., Oxford: George Ronald, 1974–1987, 2:334)

<sup>10</sup> Hasan Balyuzi notes that one Baha'i stayed 'a few years' in Mosul and then left for 'Akka (*Baha'u'llah: The King of Glory*, Oxford: George Ronald, 1980, 2nd ed. 1991, 477).

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The second recorded contact of Midhat Pasha with Baha'is is based on a British consular report. When Nasiru'd-Din Shah intended to visit the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf in 1870, the Persian Foreign Minister, Mirza Sa'id Khan, considering security, asked the Ottoman authorities to remove the 'Babis' (Baha'is) in Baghdad. Charles Herbert, the British consul in Baghdad at that time, mentions in a letter that he was informed of the arrests of Babis in Baghdad and asked the *vâli*, Midhat Pasha, about the situation. The latter told Elliott that he had received orders from Istanbul to take measures 'with the view of preventing the occurrence of any acts on their part that might endanger the safety of His Majesty or give cause of umbrage', and that he 'had called upon the Babis to retire for a time from this city and had even offered assistance to those who might be without the means of travelling'.<sup>11</sup> Midhat Pasha is furthermore reported to have stated that he had asked 'principal known members of that sect' to leave Baghdad for a certain period and that he himself was reluctant to persecute decent subjects of the Empire and did not have problems with their religious ideas. Yet the *vâli* stressed that, in the interest of the safety of the Shah, it was compulsory to act thus.<sup>12</sup> It seems that through these occurrences and perhaps others, Midhat Pasha came to know about 'Abdu'l-Baha and later met him in 'Akka, which resulted in their meeting in Beirut.

### **'By the express invitation' of Midhat Pasha: 'Abdu'l-Baha's visit to Beirut**

Baha'i sources stress the importance of 'Abdu'l-Baha's visit to Beirut, during the course of which he met not only Midhat Pasha but also other notables. According to Shoghi Effendi, it was through 'Abdu'l-Baha's widespread influence that the Baha'i Faith gained respect among a wide circle of officials and intellectuals in the Middle East: 'It was through the extraordinarily warm reception accorded Him during His visit to Beirut, through His contact with Midhat Pasha, a former Grand Vizir of Turkey [sic], ... and through His constant association with officials, notables and leading ecclesiastics who, in increasing number had besought His presence, during the final years of His Father's ministry, that He had succeeded in raising the prestige of the Cause He had championed to a level it had never previously attained.'<sup>13</sup> The significance of this 'historic journey, unparalleled in the religious annals of mankind',<sup>14</sup> from the Baha'i viewpoint, is that Midhat Pasha invited 'Abdu'l-Baha at a time when the latter was a prisoner of the Ottomans, and the official edict of Sultan Abdülaziz ordering the exile of Baha'u'llah and his followers and their strict confinement in 'Akka was

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<sup>11</sup> Herbert to Elliott, No. 5, 17 August 1870: FO 195 949, cited in Momen, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions: Some Contemporary Western Accounts, 1844–1944* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981) 267.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. On the visit of the Shah, without a reference to the Babis, see Midhat Pasha, *Tabsira-i Ibret* and *Mir'ât-i Hayret* (2 vols. in one, Istanbul: Hilal Matbaası, 1325/1906–07) 1: 95–96. In a letter to the Persian ambassador Mirza Husayn Khan Mushiru'd-Dawlih in Istanbul, Nasiru'd-Din Shah refers to the Babis in Iraq and states that although Midhat Pasha was entrusted with this matter, no concrete steps were taken. He thus commissioned Husayn Khan to communicate with the province of Baghdad in order to arrest and imprison whoever was, or seemed to be, a Babi; the Shah expected the utmost effort in this matter. This letter is in the Archives of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Arshv-i Umûr-i Vizârat-i Khârijiyyih*), AVUHI-AM/25, 54; quoted in Mohammad Reza Nasiri, *Nâsireddin Şah zamanında Osmanlı-Iran münasebetleri (1848–1896)*, (Tokio: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1991) 151–52.

<sup>13</sup> *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1979 second printing) 242.

<sup>14</sup> Balyuzi, *Baha'u'llah* 378.

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still valid.<sup>15</sup> In honour of 'Abdu'l-Baha's visit to Beirut, Baha'u'llah revealed the *Lawḥ-i Arḍ-i Bā*, or the Tablet of the Land of Ba (Beirut).<sup>16</sup> Here, as in several other writings, Baha'u'llah extols the station of 'Abdu'l-Baha, whom he calls the 'Most Mighty Branch of God'. In the words of Shoghi Effendi, this tablet was 'a communication which He dictated to His amanuensis' as 'a glowing tribute, glorifying Him as the One "round Whom all names revolve," as "the Most Mighty Branch of God," and as "His ancient and immutable Mystery."<sup>17</sup> Shoghi Effendi provides the date for neither the visit nor this eulogy. Speaking about the house of 'Udi Khammar, to which Baha'u'llah and his family had moved in 1873, he states that 'Abdu'l-Baha's visit to Beirut, at the invitation of Midhat Pasha, occurred about that time.<sup>18</sup> However, the source of the material regarding 'Abdu'l-Baha's visit to Beirut is not provided here, nor is it in subsequent references<sup>19</sup> nor does Midhat Pasha mention this in his memoirs.<sup>20</sup>

The Baha'i historian Hasan Balyuzi offers different dates for 'Abdu'l-Baha's Beirut visit. In his work *'Abdu'l-Baha*, he says that 'Abdu'l-Baha travelled to Beirut 'by the express invitation of one of the most brilliant statesmen of the Ottoman Empire – Midhat Pasha, the liberal reformer, who as grand vizier was instrumental in inducing the Sultan to grant a constitution to his people'.<sup>21</sup> He adds that this 'must have taken place sometime in 1878, and on this occasion Baha'u'llah revealed a Tablet [*Lawḥ-i Arḍ-i Bā*] to commemorate and mark its significance'.<sup>22</sup> However, given the fact that Midhat Pasha arrived in Syria as the *vāli* at the end of November 1878, it is not likely that 'Abdu'l-Baha visited him right at the beginning of his governorship and 'sometime in 1878' could apply only to December that year.

Balyuzi then says, in the first edition of his book *Baha'u'llah: The King of Glory* (1980), 'Sometime in 1879, 'Abdu'l-Baha travelled to Beirut',<sup>23</sup> but in the revised edition of this book (1991) the date of the visit has been changed to 'In June 1880'.<sup>24</sup> The question arose as to why this change was made without an explanation. At this point our attention turned to possible records outside Baha'i sources. Newspapers generally mention arrivals and departures of notables anywhere, as did newspapers in the Middle East. It seemed plausible that 'Abdu'l-Baha's visit to Beirut was announced by a newspaper, since he was well known and respected

<sup>15</sup> The edict is in the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (Ottoman Archives) in Istanbul, Turkey, *Iraderler/Meclis-i Mahsus* 1475–1, dated 20 Rabi' al-awwal 1285/12 July 1868.

<sup>16</sup> The Arabic original is published in *Majmū'ih-ī az Alwāh-i Jamāl-i Aqdas-i Abhā kih ba'd az Kitāb-i Aqdas Nāzil Shudih* (Langenhain: Baha'i-Verlag, 137 B.E./1980) 138; English trans. in *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1988) 227–28.

<sup>17</sup> *God Passes By* 243; the amanuensis was Mirza Aqa Jan (see below).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid* 193.

<sup>19</sup> Both Shoghi Effendi and Hasan Balyuzi may have the information from Husayn 'Avarih' Ayati, *al-Kawāḥib ad-Durriyya*, (Cairo: Matba'at as-Sa'āda, 1924, see <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/vol4/kd2/kd2.htm>, viewed 15 November 2004) 2:17. This is discussed below.

<sup>20</sup> Midhat Pasha, *Tabsira-i Ibret* and *Mir'āt-ı Hayret* (2 vols. in one, Istanbul 1325/1906–07). In modern Turkish: Osman Selim Kocahanoğlu (ed.): *Midhat Paşa'nın Hatıraları: Hayatım Ibret Olsun* and *Yıldız Mahkemesi ve Taij Zindam* (Temel: Istanbul 2003). Moreover no reference to this is made by his son Ali Haydar Midhat in *The life of Midhat Pasha: a record of his services, political reforms, banishment, and judicial murder derived from private documents and reminiscences by his son Ali Haydar Midhat Bey* (London: John Murray, 1903); idem *Midhat-Pasha: sa vie - son oeuvre* (Paris: Stock, 1908). Ali Haydar may have omitted Baha'i references.

<sup>21</sup> Hasan M. Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Baha* (George Ronald: London 1971) 37–38.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid* 38.

<sup>23</sup> Balyuzi, *Baha'u'llah* 378.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*.

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not only in the Ottoman Empire. In fact, the Arabic Beirut-based weekly *Thamarāt al-Funūn* announced 'Abdu'l-Baha's arrival on 8 June 1880 with these words: 'His Excellency, the learned, erudite, intelligent and illustrious 'Abbas Effendi, resident of the city of 'Akka, has arrived in our city. The purpose of his arrival is change of air, may God prolong his well-being.'<sup>25</sup> In line with this, 'Abdu'l-Baha must have arrived in Beirut around that date. Yet no reference with regard to 'Abdu'l-Baha's departure could be found.<sup>26</sup>

The 'mystery' of the Beirut visit was solved after elucidation by the publisher of Balyuzi's book and the Baha'i World Centre. According to the publisher, a letter of 'Abdu'l-Baha was found in the Baha'i World Centre Archives in Haifa, dated a week after his return from Beirut, in which he states that he was in Beirut between 1 and 17 June 1880. The publisher also states that Baha'u'llah's Tablet of the Land of Bā was written on 9 June 1880, a week or so after his departure. This was all recorded in a list and this is why 'In June of 1880' replaced 'Sometime in 1879' in the revised 1991 edition of the book.<sup>27</sup> However, in a memorandum of the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice concerning this matter, which was forwarded to the present author, it is stated that in 'the Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Baha in question' which 'is dated 10 Rajab 1297 (19 June 1880)',<sup>28</sup> he 'alludes to His visit to Beirut, but He does not provide specific dates'. A provisional translation of the relevant passage is presented as follows:

... and this servant has, as a thing divinely ordained, been unwell for some time past, until I went to Beirut for a change of air. I have recently come back from there and at present I am staying at the village of Yarkā which lies on a hill some 18 kilometres from 'Akka, and I intend to remain here for a while.

Praise be to God, the Lord of mankind, that the illness is now remedied, though a state of infirmity still persists. Moreover, I am overshadowed by the bounties of God from every side.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, it is pointed out in the memorandum that 'in a copy of this Tablet in the handwriting of Mirza Aqa Jan, held in the World Centre archives, the date 1 Rajab 1297 appears, corresponding to 9 June 1880 in the Gregorian calendar'.<sup>30</sup>

Having fixed the approximate date of the visit and the actual day of the revelation of Baha'u'llah's *Lawh-i Ard-i Bā*, we may well ask about the circumstances, since Hasan Balyuzi states that 'Abdu'l-Baha went to Beirut by the 'express invitation' of Midhat Pasha.

<sup>25</sup> *Thamarāt al-Funūn*, 29 Jumāda ath-thānī 1297/8 June 1880 (Tuesday), p. 1.

قدم الى بلدنا جناب العالم الفاضل الذكي الماجد عباس افندي نزيل مدينة عكا و قدومه بقصد  
تبدیل الهواء اناله الله الصحة

<sup>26</sup> This is because of the illegibility of many issues of this newspaper at the Library of the University of Haifa. My thanks to Prof. Butrus Abu-Manneh for bringing this newspaper to my attention and to Dr. Fruma Zachs for providing access to the newspaper *al-Janna* (though no mention of 'Abbas Effendi could be found here).

<sup>27</sup> E-mail of Erica Leith (George Ronald Books) to Moojan Momen, dated 19 August 2004, forwarded to Necati Alkan on the same date. According to the e-mail the information that formed the basis for this change came from Mr Abdullah Mesbah, a former member of the Research Department at the Baha'i World Centre.

<sup>28</sup> This corresponds actually to 18 June 1880.

<sup>29</sup> Research Department Memorandum dated 9 December 2004.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

### Mirza Haydar 'Ali on Midhat Pasha's encounter with 'Abdu'l-Baha in 'Akka

As mentioned previously, the *vâli* Midhat Pasha visited Haifa during his inspection of Palestine. There is other evidence apart from the German source above that he also visited 'Akka.<sup>31</sup> But the only published reference in a Baha'i source known to the present author that mentions Midhat Pasha's visit to 'Akka is by Husayn 'Avariḥ' Ayati. Interestingly, he also says that Midhat met 'Abdu'l-Baha in 'Akka and became so much his admirer that he also met 'Abdu'l-Baha in Beirut; and that Baha'u'llah permitted his son to journey to Beirut where the 'young tree of the friendship with the Pasha was nourished'.<sup>32</sup> According to Ayati the visit of the Pasha to 'Akka and his meeting with 'Abdu'l-Baha thus occurred before the latter's visit to Beirut, and we have the first, albeit brief, reference to an encounter between Midhat Pasha and 'Abdu'l-Baha in 'Akka. This important information seems to have escaped the attention of later Baha'i historians and can be supported now by another source.

Recently a Persian manuscript that is an autograph by the noted Baha'i Haji Mirza Haydar 'Ali, kept at the Archives of the Baha'i World Centre in Haifa, has surfaced, which mentions Midhat Pasha's meetings with 'Abdu'l-Baha in, and near, 'Akka in some detail.<sup>33</sup> Haji Mirza Haydar 'Ali was an exceptional Iranian Baha'i, who propagated the Baha'i Faith very actively. He spent nine years in prison and exile in Khartoum (Sudan), travelled far and wide in Iran, and passed away in 1920 in the Holy Land. Baha'i pilgrims from the West knew him as the 'Angel of Mount Carmel'. He spent some time in the presence of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha in the Holy Land and wrote memoirs of this.<sup>34</sup> His account of Midhat Pasha's meeting with 'Abdu'l-Baha serves as the historical background of the encounter in the 'Land of Ba' and the revelation of the tablet in question. The date of the manuscript's composition is not clear, but it is after the death of Midhat Pasha in May 1884, since the author speaks about 'the late Midhat Pasha'.

Mirza Haydar 'Ali begins his account by introducing Midhat Pasha as the one who established democracy in the Ottoman domains, toppled Sultan Abdülaziz from his throne and brought about his death, as prophesied by Baha'u'llah in his Arabic *Lawḥ-i Ra'īs* ('Tablet to the Chief') addressed to Âli Pasha, who then was changing roles between the office of prime and foreign minister with Fu'ad Pasha. In that passage Baha'u'llah states that Âli's attempts to attack the religion of God (i.e. the Baha'i Faith) are futile, and he predicts the capture of Edirne. According to Baha'i interpretation, the war between the Ottomans and Russia in 1877/1878 fulfilled this prediction when the Russians occupied Edirne.<sup>35</sup> A clearer reference

<sup>31</sup> British consular records state that Midhat Pasha visited Haifa and 'Akka in May 1880; Public Record Office (London, UK), FO 195 1201 and 1306; see Balyuzi, *Baha'u'llah* 378, footnote.

<sup>32</sup> Ayati, *al-Kawākib ad-Durriyya* 2:17.

<sup>33</sup> I am grateful to Sohail Farhad for bringing this source to my attention. The Baha'i World Centre Archives cataloguing of this item is: 'M1239, Work proving authenticity of the Baha'i Faith. Holograph, over 400 pages, some pages missing. Also some articles and essays, including about the martyrs of Yazd and other places (ZAM: Papers of Haji Mirza Haydar 'Ali).' I am beholden to the Universal House of Justice for providing the photocopies of the pages 198–200 of this unpublished manuscript (Baha'i World Centre, Memorandum to Necati Alkan, dated 15 June 2004).

<sup>34</sup> On Haji Mirza Haydar 'Ali, see his *Bihjat aṣ-ṣudūr* (Bombay 1914; reprinted Hofheim: Baha'i-Verlag, 159 BE/2002); idem *Stories from The Delight of Hearts* (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1980); Hasan M. Balyuzi, *Eminent Baha'is in the time of Baha'u'llah* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985) 237–50; Habib Mu'ayyad, *Khātirāt-i Habīb* (Hofheim: Baha'i-Verlag, 2004) 2:15–17.

<sup>35</sup> See Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1980, rev. ed.) 64 and idem, *God Passes By* 225–26.

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to the removal of Abdülaziz is to be found in Baha'u'llah's *Lawḥ-i Fu'ād*: 'Soon will We dismiss the one ('Ali Pasha) who was like unto him (Fu'ad Pasha) and will lay hold on their Chief (Sulṭan 'Abdu'l-'Aziz) who ruleth the land, and I, verily, am the Almighty, the All-Compelling.'<sup>36</sup>

The author then refers to the discord between Sultan Abdülhamid and Midhat Pasha, the former having the minister appointed *vâli* of Syria in order to counter his influence in Istanbul. Once in Syria, Midhat set out to reform that region for the well-being of its people. Mirza Haydar 'Ali says that it was highly recommended to the governor that he stay during his inspection in the 'Riḍvân Garden' which, at that time, had been rented by 'Abdu'l-Baha. That garden was originally known as 'Na'mayn' and used to be a small island in a river and has a special place in Baha'u'llah's writings. Shoghi Effendi makes mention of this location as follows: 'The garden of Na'mayn, a small island, situated in the middle of a river to the east of the city, honoured with the appellation of Riḍvân, and designated by Him [Baha'u'llah] the "New Jerusalem" and "Our Verdant Isle," had, together with the residence of 'Abdu'llah Pasha – rented and prepared for Him by 'Abdu'l-Bahā, and situated a few miles north of 'Akka – become by now the favourite retreats of One [Baha'u'llah] Who, for almost a decade, had not set foot beyond the city walls, and Whose sole exercise had been to pace, in monotonous repetition, the floor of His bed-chamber.'<sup>37</sup> 'Abdu'l-Baha, who was responsible for the external affairs of Baha'u'llah and the band of his followers, was asked whether Midhat Pasha could stay there and 'Abdu'l-Baha – Haydar 'Ali calls him Sarkār Āqā<sup>38</sup> – granted permission.

One of the essential statements of this account is that Midhat Pasha had information about 'Abdu'l-Baha through the praise of him by many intellectuals. Among these were probably the above-mentioned Namık Kemal and Ziya Pasha. The Ottoman intellectual Süleyman Nazif writes: 'When I met 'Abbas Efendi ... two years ago [1917] in the town of Haifa he told me with complete sorrow that he had an extensive correspondence with Kemal Bey but that out of worry about investigation and persecution in the time of Sultan Abdülhamid II, he had burnt those letters.'<sup>39</sup> Kemal lived in banishment in Cyprus from 1873 to 1876 and was perhaps in touch with 'Abdu'l-Baha through the Baha'i exile Mishkin Qalam. Nazif, moreover, remarks that 'Abdu'l-Baha was acquainted with Ziya Pasha and was in contact with him.<sup>40</sup> The advocacy of Midhat Pasha, Namık Kemal and Ziya Pasha, in the 1860s and 1870s, for democracy (i.e. constitutional monarchy) in the Ottoman Empire coincided and converged with the reform proposals of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha on these issues.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Arabic in *Athār-i Qalam-i A'lā*, vol. 1: *al-Kitāb al-Mubīn* (Bombay, 1890, see <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/baha/A-F/F/fuada.htm>, viewed 16 November 2004) 210–14; English trans., *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 2002) 179; translated by Shoghi Effendi in *The Promised Day is Come* 64 and idem *God Passes By* 208–209.

<sup>37</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 192.

<sup>38</sup> *Sarkār Āqā*, 'His Excellency the Master', was a title given by Baha'u'llah to 'Abdu'l-Baha; see Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1975) 62. The meanings 'steward, administrator, manager, superintendent, supervisor', of *sarkār* or *sar-kār* well describe 'Abdu'l-Baha's position in the external affairs of the Baha'i community in the Ottoman Empire; s.v. *sar-kār* in the *Steingass Persian-English Dictionary* (online at <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/steingass>, viewed 16 November 2004) and *serkar* in the *Redhouse Turkish-English Dictionary* (ed. U. Bahadır Alkim, Nazime Antel, Robert Avery et al., Istanbul).

<sup>39</sup> *Nastruddin Şah ve Babiler* (Istanbul: Kanaat Kütüphanesi, 1923) 53–4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid 52.

<sup>41</sup> On the contacts between reformers in the Ottoman Empire and the Baha'is, see Necati Alkan, 'Ottoman Reform Movements and the Baha'i Faith, 1860s-1920s', in Moshe Sharon (ed.), *Studies in Modern Religions, Religious*

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Another interesting and novel aspect mentioned by Haydar 'Ali is that Midhat had heard about 'Abdu'l-Baha's utterances in Turkish, which were a proof of his immense knowledge. 'Abdu'l-Baha's pre-eminence in the Turkish language is attested by Haydar 'Ali in the paragraph<sup>42</sup> preceding the account of Midhat Pasha's visit to 'Akka. He says that 'Abdu'l-Baha's clear and adequate replies to inquiries about spiritual matters (*masā'il-i ilāhiyyih*) in most eloquent Turkish (*bi-zabān-i Turkī-yi faṣīḥ-i balīgh*) caused the eloquent and learned men (*fūṣahā, wa bulaghā wa fuḍalā*) of Turkistan to confess their weakness ('*ajz*) and made them humble and lowly (*khāḍī' wa khāshi*).<sup>43</sup> 'Abdu'l-Baha's profound knowledge of Turkish was also affirmed later by Ottoman intellectuals who met him; such as: 'The Shaykh spoke the Turkish language very well.'<sup>44</sup> Another observer remarks: "Abbas Effendi's firm grasp and proficiency in each of the Arabic, Turkish and Persian languages is indeed astonishing. In all three languages he is capable in prose and poetry like a native speaker."<sup>45</sup>

The account of Mirza Haydar 'Ali further points out that Midhat had pressed for a meeting with 'Abdu'l-Baha which the latter accepted, and that the pasha paid a return visit to 'Abdu'l-Baha in 'Akka. During his days with 'Abdu'l-Baha, Midhat is portrayed as having been delighted and meek in the presence of 'Abdu'l-Baha. Before returning to Beirut, the *vāli* invited 'Abdu'l-Baha to Beirut, but he declined. Midhat afterwards wrote to 'Abdu'l-Baha from Beirut and communicated, in a couplet, his desire to meet him. Haydar 'Ali notes that Baha'u'llah thereupon ordered his son to honour Beirut with his visit. Following 'Abdu'l-Baha's departure, Baha'u'llah revealed the Tablet of the Land of Bā, which Haydar 'Ali quotes.

Mirza Haydar 'Ali's account ends by stating that Midhat Pasha was responsible for the release of Baha'u'llah from imprisonment in 'Akka. On this issue Shoghi Effendi remarks that it was 'Abdu'l-Baha who 'had been chiefly instrumental in providing the necessary means for Baha'u'llah's release from His nine-year confinement within the city walls of 'Akka, and in enabling Him to enjoy, in the evening of His life, a measure of that peace and security from which He had so long been debarred'.<sup>46</sup> In the *Lawḥ-i Arḍ-i Bā* of June 1880, Baha'u'llah mentions that 'the doors of the prison were opened'. The meeting between Midhat Pasha and 'Abdu'l-Baha took place slightly more than nine years after Baha'u'llah's arrival in 'Akka; it is not clear when Midhat communicated his suggestion regarding the release of Baha'u'llah, if indeed he ever made such a suggestion.

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*Movements and the Babi-Baha'i Faiths* (Leiden: Brill, 2004) 253–74; idem 'The Babis and Baha'is in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, 1844–1928', Ph.D. thesis, Ruhr-Universität Bochum/Germany, 2004.

<sup>42</sup> Page 198.

<sup>43</sup> Turkistan probably meant just the Ottoman domains but could mean that by that time (1880), 'Abdu'l-Baha's fame and his Turkish writings had even spread beyond the Middle East as far as Turkistan in the sense of the Turkic-speaking regions east of Iran; in other words, Transoxania (also spelled Transoxiana); in Arabic *Mā Warā' An-nahr* ('That Which Lies Beyond the River'), the historical region of Turkistan in Central Asia east of the Amu Darya (Oxus River) and west of the Syr Darya (Jaxartes River), roughly corresponding to present-day Uzbekistan and parts of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. Whereas Turkish is the official language of Turkey, the term 'Turkic' includes various dialects of the Altaic language family stretching from the Balkans to Siberia. 'Abdu'l-Baha mastered at least Ottoman Turkish and the Turkic dialects of Caucasia; for this, see tablets and prayers of 'Abdu'l-Baha in *Majmū'ih-yi Alwāḥ wa Munājāthā-yi Turkī* (Tehran: Mu'assasa-yi Millī-yi Matbū'āt-i Amrā, BE 127/1970–71).

<sup>44</sup> Mehmet Refik (Temimi)/ Mehmet Behcet (Yazar), 'Babiler ve Babizm Hakkında Tedkikât-ı Mahalliyye' in *Beyrut Vilayeti* (vol. 1: Cenub Kısmı, Vilayet Matbaası: 1333/1917) 269–80 (here 273).

<sup>45</sup> Abdülganî Senî, 'Garb'a Meydan Okuyan Bir Hakîm-i Şark' in *Servet-i Fünûn*, no. 1216, 11 Eylül 1330/4 Zilkâde 1332, s. 308–13 (here 310).

<sup>46</sup> *God Passes By* 241.

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In conclusion, Mirza Haydar 'Ali's account presents the 'Akka meeting between these two illustrious figures of the late 19th century Middle East as the prelude to the Beirut visit and the revelation of Baha'u'llah's *Lawḥ-i Arḍ-i Bā*. We may surmise that Midhat also met Baha'u'llah during this visit to 'Akka. More sources, Baha'i and non-Baha'i, are needed to ascertain this and the details of what passed between 'Abdu'l-Baha and Midhat Pasha during their meetings.

**Annotated translation of Mirza Haydar 'Ali's account:**<sup>47</sup>

The late Midhat Pasha, prime minister and the founder of democracy (*mu'assis-i jumhūr*) in the Ottoman Empire, was the cause of the removal and annihilation ('*azl wa maḥw*) of his Excellency, the late Sultan Abdülaziz Khan that was foretold in the *Lawḥ-i Ra'īs*. The Lord – glorified is He – says: 'Hast thou imagined thyself capable of extinguishing the fire which God hath kindled in the heart of creation? Nay, by Him Who is the Eternal Truth, couldst thou but know it. Rather, on account of what thy hands have wrought, it blazed higher and burned more fiercely. Ere long will it encompass the earth and all that dwell therein. Thus hath it been decreed by God, and the powers<sup>48</sup> of earth and heaven are unable to thwart His purpose. The day is approaching when the Land of Mystery [Edirne] and what is beside it<sup>49</sup> shall be changed, and shall pass out of<sup>50</sup> the hands of the King ...'<sup>51</sup>

When the sultanate passed over to Sultan Abdülhamid [II] he wished to rule in a despotic manner (*istibdād-rā mīkh'āst*), and Midhat Pasha did not wish that. So he [the Sultan] plotted (*asbāb-chīnī namūd*) [against him]. And the Council took counsel together [and agreed] that Midhat Pasha's stay in the capital [Istanbul] was not appropriate. They appointed that well-wisher of the state, of the people and the subjects as governor of the province of Damascus, Beirut and the Holy Land. To put [the affairs of the province] in order (*barā-yi naẓm*), he would travel to the cities and towns under his government. For his arrival in 'Akka, there was no better and more pleasant place than the Riḍvān Garden. They asked Sarkār Āqā ['Abdu'l-Baha] – may the lives of all be a sacrifice unto Him – whether he [Midhat Pasha] could be honoured with staying in the Riḍvan Garden, and He gave permission. He [Midhat Pasha] arrived and because His Holiness ['Abdu'l-Baha] was a prisoner according to outer circumstances, He did not pay a visit. That great vizier (*wazīr-i kabūr*) was very pleased by the condition, beauty and purity of the garden and by its flowers. He recognized out of perspicacity that it belonged to Sarkār Āqā. He asked and they answered in the affirmative. He said: 'For years I have longed to meet Him. I have seen His utterances in Turkish that are beyond like or equal and eloquently testify to His vast knowledge. I have often heard many of the learned highly praising and extolling Him.' (*sanawāt ast kih ṭālib-i ziyārat-i shān hastam wa bayānāt-i shān kih dar turkī mithl wa mānand na-dārad wa az ihātīh-yi 'ilmīyyih-yi ishān ḥākīst ziyārat namūdih-am wa madḥ wa sitāyish-i shān-rā az dānishmandān bisyār*

<sup>47</sup> The kind assistance of Siyamak Zabihi-Moghaddam with the Persian manuscript is greatly appreciated. The passages from the *Lawḥ-i Ra'īs* and the *Lawḥ-i Arḍ-i Bā* that Mirza Haydar 'Ali quotes both have minor alterations; this is pointed out in footnotes. Wherever reference is made to Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha by the Baha'i author, words such as 'He,' 'His' and 'Him' are rendered with capital initial letters, this being from the point of view of a devoted believer. And whenever it was deemed necessary names, comments and original Persian words are inserted into the translation.

<sup>48</sup> In Mirza Haydar 'Ali's manuscript (MHA ms.): لا يقوم مع امره جنود من في السموات و الارض

<sup>49</sup> In MHA ms. 'what is beside it' ما دونها is missing.

<sup>50</sup> In MHA ms.: و تخرج من

<sup>51</sup> *Majmū'ih-yi Alwāh ba'd az Kitāb-i Aqdas* 65–66; English translation in *Summons* 142–43.

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*shanādh-am*) He despatched a messenger saying, 'I yearn to meet His Excellency (*ziyārat-i ḥaḍrat-i 'ālī bi-jān tālibam*).' He ['Abdu'l-Baha] honoured him with a visit. He [Midhat] was so attracted (*majdhūb shud*) [by 'Abdu'l-Baha] that he paid a return visit; he was humble and lowly (*khāḍi' wa khāshi' gashī*). During the two or three days he stayed, he was for the most part honoured by 'Abdu'l-Baha's presence. He asked ['Abdu'l-Baha] to accompany him and adorn Beirut with His blessed arrival (*bi-maqdam-i mubārak muzayyan farmāyand*). He ['Abdu'l-Baha] excused Himself. He [Midhat] wrote from Beirut:

The desire of meeting thee made my soul to be at death's door  
Should it return or enter, what is thy command?<sup>52</sup>

The Ancient Beauty (*Jamāl-i Mubārak*, i.e. Baha'u'llah), therefore, bade Him to honour Beirut with His visit (*amr farmūdand tashrīf-farmā-yi bayrūt shawand*). He was in Beirut when this holy and exalted Tablet [*Lawḥ-i Ard-i Bā*] flung open a myriad doors of this visible existent world, nay, the Kingdom of God, to the face of men. It testifies that His ['Abdu'l-Baha's] servitude (*'ubūdiyyat*), selflessness (*fanā*), complete self-effacement (*maḥwīyyat*) and detachment (*in'idām*) had no peer and will have no equal:

He is God, Glorified be He, Grandeur and Might are His!<sup>53</sup>

Praise be to Him Who hath honoured the Land of Bā<sup>54</sup> through the presence of Him round Whom all names revolve. All the atoms of the earth have announced unto all created things that from behind the gate of the Prison-city there hath appeared and above its horizon there hath shone forth<sup>55</sup> the Orb of the beauty of the great, the Most Mighty Branch of God—His ancient and immutable Mystery—proceeding on its way to another land. Sorrow, thereby, hath enveloped this Prison-city, whilst another land rejoiceth. Exalted, immeasurably exalted is our Lord, the Fashioner of the heavens and the Creator of all things, He through Whose sovereignty the doors of the prison were opened, thereby causing what was promised aforesaid in the Tablets to be fulfilled. He is verily potent over what He willeth, and in His grasp is the dominion of the entire creation. He is the All-Powerful, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

Blessed, doubly blessed, is the ground which His footsteps have trodden, the eye that hath been cheered by the beauty of His countenance, the ear that hath been honoured by hearkening to His call, the heart that hath tasted the sweetness of His love, the breast that hath dilated through His remembrance, the pen that hath voiced His praise, the scroll that hath borne the testimony of His writings. We beseech God—blessed and exalted be He—that<sup>56</sup> He may honour us with meeting Him soon. He is, in truth, the All-Hearing, the All-Powerful, He Who is ready to answer.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>52</sup> قصد دیدار تو دارد جان بر لب آمد باز گردد یا برآید چیست فرمان شما

<sup>53</sup> هو الله تعالى شأنه العظمة والإقتدار This heading is not translated in *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* and is thus my provisional translation.

<sup>54</sup> Beirut. This Tablet is 'a letter dictated by Baha'u'llah and addressed by Mirza Aqa Jan, His amanuensis, to 'Abdu'l-Baha while the latter was on a visit to Beirut.' (Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah*, Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1991, 136).

<sup>55</sup> 'hath appeared and above its horizon there hath shone forth' is in MHA ms.: طلع و لاح و ظهر و اشراق و خرج

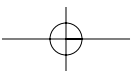
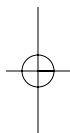
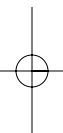
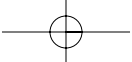
<sup>56</sup> بأن is in MHA ms.

<sup>57</sup> *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* 227–28.

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This wise old vizier (*waz̄ir-i khirad-p̄ir*) wrote to the Sublime Porte [Ottoman Government] (*bi-'aliyyih niwisht*) that 'Akka is an important trade centre (*mawqi '-i tijārāt-i 'azīmih*) and a good port city (*bandar-i khūbī*) that should be open by day and by night as a means of passage and that the rebels and criminals should be transferred to another place. They accepted, and so it happened, and the confinement [of Baha'u'llah] in the Prison (*qal'ih-bandī wa khārij na-shudan*) was ended. Thus has it been decreed by Him Who is the All-Powerful, the Almighty.



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## Shoghi Effendi's Letters to the Baha'is of India and Burma during the 1920s

PETER SMITH

### **Abstract**

*There are as yet few studies of the early history of the Baha'i communities of India and Burma. This paper provides a brief overview of the development of the Baha'i Faith in India and Burma up to 1921, and then offers summary notes on administrative and community developments that occurred during the 1920s under the guidance of Shoghi Effendi, including the establishment of a joint national spiritual assembly, the work of international travelling teachers, and the development of Baha'i periodical literature. The difficulties of uniting the Baha'i communities, of gaining support for the new national assembly and of expanding the Baha'i support base are noted, as is the changing role of women within the Baha'i community as a whole.*

The Baha'i communities of India and Burma are some of the longest established in the Baha'i world, but have as yet received comparatively little attention from historians.<sup>1</sup> The present article is offered as a contribution to our knowledge of the situation of the Baha'i Faith in India and Burma during the 1920s, with particular reference to the published letters of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian and Burmese Baha'is.<sup>2</sup> It also provides material for comparison with

<sup>1</sup> There is as yet no detailed study of Indian and Burmese Baha'i history, although two doctoral dissertations completed in the 1970s by Garlington and Garrigues provide some overall context. See William N. Garlington, 'The Baha'i Faith in Malwa: A Study of a Contemporary Religious Movement' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Australian National University, 1975) and Steve L. Garrigues, 'The Baha'is of Malwa: Identity and Change Among the Urban Baha'is of Central India' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Lucknow, 1976). See also Paula Drewek, 'Cross-Cultural Testing of Fowler's Model of Faith Development: the Bahā'īs of Canada and India', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Religious Studies, University of Ottawa, 1996. A recent study by Moojan Momen of Jamal Effendi, the pioneer Baha'i teacher to India, provides a useful overview of early developments; see 'Jamāl Effendi and the early spread of the Bahā'ī Faith in South Asia', *Bahā'ī Studies Review* 9 (1999–2000) 47–80. There is also an account of a visit by an early western Baha'i, see Sydney Sprague, *A Year with the Bahais of India and Burma* (London: The Priory Press, 1908). For a short summary of the situation c. 1920 see Moojan Momen, 'Esslemont's survey of the Bahā'ī world, 1919–1920', in *Bahā'īs in the West* (ed. P. Smith, Studies in the Bābī and Bahā'ī Religions, vol. 14, Los Angeles, CA: Kalimāt Press, 2004) 63–106 (see 83–6). William N. Garlington has also published several articles based on his research on developments in the Malwa area: 'Bahā'ī bhajans', *World Order* 16/2 (Winter 1982) 43–9; 'Bahā'ī conversions in Malwa, central India', in *From Iran East and West* (ed. J. R. Cole and M. Momen, Studies in Bābī and Bahā'ī History, vol. 2, Los Angeles, CA: Kalimāt Press, 1984) 157–85; and 'The Baha'i Faith in Malwa', in *Religion in South Asia* (ed. G. A. Odie, London: Curzon Press, 1977) 101–17. Dipchand Khianra has provided a series of short biographies of early Indian Baha'is in his *Immortals* (New Delhi: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> There are two separate compilations of Shoghi Effendi's letters to India and Burma. The later, expanded volume, *Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent, 1923–1957* (comp. and ed. Irān Fūrūtan Muhājir, New Delhi: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1995) substantially supersedes the earlier *Dawn of a New Day* ([comp. and ed. Irān Fūrūtan Muhājir], New Delhi: Baha'i Publishing Trust, n.d. [1970?]) (hereafter cited respectively as MIS and DND). Both volumes include secretaries' letters written on Shoghi Effendi's behalf and distinguish clearly

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developments in other parts of the Baha'i world during the early years of Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship.<sup>3</sup>

## The Baha'is of India and Burma up to 1921

British India – which during the period under review also included Burma as well as what are now the states of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh – was a vast territory covering 1.9 million square miles, with a total population of over 315 million immediately prior to the First World War.<sup>4</sup> It encompassed areas directly administered by the British, several hundred semi-autonomous princely states, and a number of tribal areas under separate administrations. Following the First World War (1914–18) there were increasing political tensions, related to the growing independence movements and the burgeoning development of separate 'modern' Indian and Burmese national identities. Both 'nations' included a variety of peoples of different religious and linguistic groups as well as tribal minorities, but whilst the greater number of Indians were Hindus of various castes and persuasions, most Burmese were Buddhists. Inter-religious and inter-ethnic tensions, particularly those between Hindus and Muslims in India proper, and anti-Indian sentiment in Burma, were becoming marked.

### *Early Baha'i history*

Several Indians became Babis, and relatives of the Bab established a trading company in Bombay in the 1850s, later becoming the first Baha'is in the subcontinent. At their request and under their sponsorship, Baha'u'llah sent Sulayman Khan Tunukabuni – now better known as Jamal Effendi (d. 1898) – as the first Baha'i missionary teacher to India, and it was with his arrival in Bombay (Mumbai) in about 1875 that the Baha'i history of India and Burma effectively began.<sup>5</sup> Travelling widely over the next two decades, Jamal was able to achieve a widespread diffusion (often in a somewhat covert fashion) of general Baha'i ideas and of some knowledge of Baha'u'llah, as well as to establish a core of firm Baha'is who became an

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between Shoghi Effendi's letters and postscripts and the words of the secretaries, although the names of the secretaries are not given. In addition to including far more letters than DND (particularly for Burma, with many messages from the International Bahā'ī Archives in Haifa being included that were not available in India for the earlier publication), MIS also includes beginnings and endings of letters that were omitted from DND – which often led to a loss of context in the earlier letters in DND. DND also omits the names of some particular individuals. A few passages that are present in DND are omitted from MIS.

<sup>3</sup> The period of Shoghi Effendi's Guardianship has as yet received comparatively little attention from historians. For a general overview see Peter Smith, *The Babi and Baha'i Religions: From Messianic Shi'ism to a World Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 115–28. Studies of Baha'i developments in particular communities during the 1920s include Loni Bramson(-Lerche), 'Some aspects of the development of the Bahā'ī Administrative Order in America, 1922–1936', in *Studies in Bābī and Bahā'ī History* (vol. 1, ed. M. Momen, Los Angeles, CA: Kalimāt Press, 1982) 255–300, and idem, 'The Plans of Unified Action', in *Baha'is in the West*, ed. P. Smith 155–97, both on North America; and Graham Hassall, 'Outpost of a World Religion: The Bahā'ī Faith in Australia, 1920–1947', in *Baha'is in the West*, ed. P. Smith, 201–26. The only detailed biography of Shoghi Effendi is Ruhyyih Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl* (London: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> Muriel Chamberlain, *The Longman Companion to the Formation of the European Empires. 1488–1920* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson Educational, 2000) 125.

<sup>5</sup> The following account is based on Momen, 'Jamal Effendi'. See also 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Memorials of the Faithful* (trans. Marzieh Gail, Wilmette IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1971) 134–8; *The Bahā'ī World* (vols 2–12, 1928–54, rpt, Wilmette IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1980–1) (hereafter cited as BW) 4:285; and H. M. Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahā'īs in the Time of Bahā'u'llāh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985) 119–28.

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important element in the subsequent development of the Baha'i Movement in India and more particularly in Burma.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, more openly Baha'i communities were developing both in Bombay and in Burma. With a group of resident Baha'i merchants, Bombay became a centre of Baha'i publishing in Persian from about 1882–3, and later in Urdu, and also the base of operations for a succession of Iranian Baha'i teachers.<sup>7</sup> A strong community emerged, including many newly-converted migrant Zoroastrians from Iran. During the early 1900s there was a significant diversification of the Baha'i community with the conversion of two young students: Pritam Singh (1881–1959), the first Baha'i of Sikh origin, and N. R. Vakil (1866–1943), the first Baha'i of Hindu background, both of whom were to become prominent in the Faith.<sup>8</sup> There was a scattering of Baha'is in other parts of India.

The separate Burmese Baha'i community also developed strongly during these years. Several of Jamal Effendi's most dedicated converts were there, including Syed Mustafa Roumie.<sup>9</sup> Both Mandalay and Rangoon (the chief cities of Upper and Lower Burma respectively) became important centres of Baha'i activity, and there were extensive conversions in two neighbouring villages in the Hanthawaddy district of Lower Burma.<sup>10</sup>

### *Numbers and distribution*

By the late 1910s, it was estimated that there were nearly two thousand Baha'is altogether in India and Burma, with over one thousand in Burma, about four hundred in Bombay, and small groups in Calcutta, Poona, Allahabad, Jurazhee, Surat and the Punjab. Significantly, the majority of the Indian Baha'is at this date were of Zoroastrian background, whilst the majority of Burmese Baha'is were of Muslim origin (i.e. both from minority groups). There were also a number of Indian Baha'is of Muslim background and a few Burmese of Buddhist origin. Apart from the Burmese villagers, and the poorer Baha'is in one of the districts of Bombay, the Faith seemed to be making most rapid progress amongst the educated middle class, and it was from this group that the Baha'i leadership of India and Burma was increasingly drawn. Whilst women were already playing a prominent role amongst the Burmese Baha'is, Baha'i

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<sup>6</sup> Care in not presenting 'the truth' to those who were not ready for it was in accord with 19th century Iranian Baha'i ideas of prudent wisdom (*hikmat*), see Susan S. Maneck, 'Wisdom and dissimulation: The use and meaning of *hikmat* in the Baha'i writings and history', *Baha'i Studies Review* 6 (1996) 11–23. A similar esoteric hierarchy of knowledge was employed by Ibrahim Kheiralla during his initial Baha'i missionary teaching in the United States (Momen, 'Jamal Effendi' 77–8).

<sup>7</sup> These included Mirza Mahram, who settled in India c. 1895, and Mirza Mahmud Zarqani (c. 1875–1927), who made the first of a series of missionary tours of the subcontinent in 1901 (Momen, 'Esslemont's survey' 85).

<sup>8</sup> On Pritam Singh, see BW 13:874–6; Khianra, *Immortals* 109–30. On Narayenrao Rangnath Shethji Vakil, see BW 9:637–41; Khianra, *Immortals* 7–25.

<sup>9</sup> See BW 10:517–20, and Barron Deems Harper, *Lights of Fortitude: Glimpses into the Lives of the Hands of the Cause of God* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997) 123–8. There is a variety of spellings of Roumie's name in print (Rumie, Rūmī, Rumi).

<sup>10</sup> Momen, 'Esslemont's survey' 85. The names of the villages in the 1920s are given as Kunjangoon [Kungyangoon] and Daidanaw-Kalazoo (e.g. BW 3:218, 222), with Baha'i sources giving the name of one or the other village in various spellings for the joint community. The conversion of all, or at least a majority, of the villagers was probably the first instance of what Baha'is now term 'mass conversion' outside of Iran. With the support of the Rangoon Baha'is, a village school for boys and girls was opened, as well as a prayer hall (*Mashriqu'l-Adhkār*). The Baha'i community continues to the present day but there is as yet no proper study of its history. There is an account by an early American Baha'i visitor in *The Bahā'ī Yearbook* (vol. 1, 1926, rpt, Wilmette IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1980) (hereafter cited as BYB) 84–6; BW 2:141–3, 147.

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activities in India appear to have involved mostly men, presumably reflecting traditional values about the role of women.<sup>11</sup>

### *Moves towards 'national' activities*

Initially, Baha'i activities in the various centres seem to have been fairly localized. Indeed, given the enormous distances involved, apart from correspondence and the occasional visit of a missionary teacher, there was little incentive to develop 'national' Baha'i activities. There were tentative moves towards a more organized and trans-local approach in the 1910s, however, with a 'national' teaching plan being adopted (1910) and a 'national' teaching council being formed to coordinate activities (1911). Even so, it was not easy to implement active coordination across a territory of almost two million square miles, and there do not appear to have been any genuinely national Baha'i events until the first 'All-India Bahai Convention' of 27–29 December 1920.

The Convention was held at the 'Bahai Hall' in Bombay, and accounts of its proceedings provide a snapshot of the Indian Baha'i community shortly before 'Abdu'l-Baha's passing. Altogether, there were nearly 175 Baha'is present, drawn from various parts of India (including Sind, the United Provinces and Madras), as well as Upper and Lower Burma, Iran and the United States, and including individuals of Muslim, Hindu, Zoroastrian, Sikh, Christian and Jewish backgrounds.<sup>12</sup> As in the case of the American Bahai Temple Unity Conventions (on which the Indian event was presumably modelled), the Bombay gathering comprised both a series of public lectures and a discussion of Baha'i 'administrative' matters.<sup>13</sup>

A second All-India Baha'i Convention was arranged for December 1921, and a third (in Karachi) for December 1922.<sup>14</sup> However, these events were overshadowed by the shock of 'Abdu'l-Baha's passing (28 November 1921).

## **Shoghi Effendi and Baha'i Administrative Developments**

### *Shoghi Effendi's first letters to India and Burma*

As in other parts of the Baha'i world, 'Abdu'l-Baha's passing came as a major shock for many of the Baha'is,<sup>15</sup> and there was an enthusiastic turning to his grandson, Shoghi Effendi, as the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith after the announcement of his appointment in January 1922. Shoghi Effendi himself was also greatly affected by his grandfather's death and retired from Haifa for an extended retreat in the Swiss Alps a few months after his appointment,<sup>16</sup> but shortly before his departure he met with at least one of the Indian and Burmese Baha'is – Syed

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<sup>11</sup> Momen, 'Esslemont's survey' 85–6.

<sup>12</sup> *Star of the West* (Chicago, 1910–35; hereafter cited as *Star*) 12/1:21, 26; 12/13:220. A photograph of Convention delegates shows 22 individuals (all men); judging by their dress, most appear to be of Iranian background (*Star* 12/1:20). A photograph of the banquet and reception shows a large room full of people, with segregation between the women and girls seated at tables, boys sitting at the front and men standing at the back (*Star* 12/1:23).

<sup>13</sup> Momen, 'Esslemont's survey' 85–6.

<sup>14</sup> *Star* 12/13:215; 13/8:220.

<sup>15</sup> One of the leading Baha'i Indian women 'wept continuously for months' (Khianra, *Immortals* 221).

<sup>16</sup> He left Haifa on 5 April 1922 and returned on 15 December (Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl* 56–7, 63).

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Mustafa Roumie from Burma, who was one of the small international group of Baha'is that was called to Haifa in March 1922 for consultations about the future of the Faith.<sup>17</sup> Shoghi Effendi also issued his first general letter, in which he addressed the need to establish local and national assemblies throughout the Baha'i world (5 March 1922),<sup>18</sup> and addressed his first general message to the Iranian Baha'is (16 January 1922), encouraging them to be steadfast and to protect the Faith,<sup>19</sup> a copy of which may well have been sent to the Baha'is of India and Burma – many of whom at this date were Iranian or at least familiar with the Persian language.

Following his return to Haifa in December 1922, Shoghi Effendi sent out a mass of telegrams and letters to the Baha'is. These included a cable to the Indian Baha'is, in which he prayed that his being now reunited with them 'in the glorious arena of service' would herald 'triumphal victories' in the 'spiritual field' of their land.<sup>20</sup> Two letters in Persian followed (a copy of a general message of encouragement addressed to all the Baha'is of 'the East', and later a letter addressed specifically to the Indian Baha'is and appealing to them to promulgate the Baha'i Faith), and then Shoghi Effendi's first English-language letter addressed directly to 'the few' (my emphasis) amongst the Indian and Burmese Baha'is who were 'as yet unfamiliar with the Persian tongue', dated 9 January 1923.<sup>21</sup>

As in letters addressed to other Baha'is around the world at this time, Shoghi Effendi sought to give the Indian and Burmese Baha'is encouragement and a sense of mission. Thus, in this first English letter, he referred to India as an 'alluring field of service' in which the opportunities of sowing 'the seeds of unity and loving kindness in the hearts of its divers peoples' were vast. India might now be unhappily plunged in 'the darkness of prejudice, hate and mistrust', but the present mists would soon clear away, and the darkness of the immediate prospect would be replaced by 'the dawn of a New Day'. The rays of Baha'u'llah's divine revelation would then make India into 'a spiritually-quickened, peaceful and united country'. Therefore, the Baha'is should teach the Baha'i Faith. Despite their own diversity of language, race and custom, they were 'united at heart', and were animated 'by one common desire to uplift humanity and carry out [Baha'u'llah's] Divine Purpose for this world'. Shoghi Effendi also welcomed the news of the progress of the Third All India Baha'i Convention [December 1922], and of the 'favourable comment' it had received from the Press; praised the efforts the Indian Baha'is were making to consolidate the Baha'i Movement; and expressed the hope that their spiritual activities would be 'crowned with brilliant success', that ['Abdu'l-Baha's] 'glorious Promise' regarding India's future would be 'speedily fulfilled', and that the Indian Baha'i periodical (*Bahā'ī News*, see below) would expand and develop.<sup>22</sup>

Shoghi Effendi's first separate letter to the Burmese Baha'is appears to have been written in February 1923.<sup>23</sup> In it, he referred to the present days of 'strife and turmoil', when it was 'sweet and glorious' to remember how 'the mighty hand' of 'Abdu'l-Baha had gathered together peoples of 'divers tongues and distant climes', and 'united their hearts in one

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<sup>17</sup> Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl* 55. According to Mountfort Mills, an American Baha'i, himself one of the participants at this Haifa gathering, there were Baha'is present from both India and Burma (*Star* 13/4:68), but no Indian is included in the list of participants.

<sup>18</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Bahā'ī Administration* (1974 ed., rpt, Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1998) 17–25.

<sup>19</sup> Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl* 52.

<sup>20</sup> Rabbani, *Priceless Pearl* 64.

<sup>21</sup> MIS 1.

<sup>22</sup> MIS 1–2.

<sup>23</sup> MIS 3.

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common spirit of love and servitude to the sacred Threshold of Baha'u'llah'. The [Baha'i] spirit that had achieved 'so great a measure of reconciliation' was the one factor that could, 'amid the unceasing contentions of races, nations, creeds and classes, assure to this disillusioned world the reign of true felicity and peace'. It was the Baha'is' great privilege 'to labour for the diffusion of this spirit'. Their task was 'vital and urgent' in order to relieve humanity from 'its present state of uncertainty and peril'. It was true that the work that was to be achieved was 'immeasurably difficult' and the obstacles that had to be surmounted were 'innumerable', but the Baha'is' reliance was on 'His ['Abdu'l-Baha's?]' all-conquering Spirit', which had 'effected such a change in the past' and was 'sure, according to his explicit promise, to effect a still greater change in future'. Shoghi Effendi asked the Baha'is to send a 'detailed report' of the 'present position' of the Faith in Burma and of their activities and plans, and assured them that their 'welfare and happiness' were the objects of his 'deepest care and concern', praying that their 'far-away region' would become a 'radiant centre of spiritual activity and humanitarian achievements', and expressing his 'readiness' to be of service to them in their labours for the Faith. Another general letter to the Indian and Burmese Baha'is, written in December 1923, reiterated some of these themes.<sup>24</sup>

### *The establishment of the National Spiritual Assembly and the Burmese Central Council*

Many of Shoghi Effendi's subsequent letters to the Indian and Burmese Baha'is during the 1920s concern the administration of the Baha'i Faith. This reflects what was one of his major objectives during the early years of his Guardianship: to promote a regularized system of Baha'i administration internationally, centring on the formation of 'national' spiritual assemblies in each major Baha'i community to oversee Baha'i activities and the consolidation of the local spiritual assemblies that already existed in many parts of the Baha'i world.<sup>25</sup> To this end, with his encouragement and guidance, nine *de facto* 'national' assemblies were established or recognized during the 1920s, of which the assembly for India and Burma was one of the first (1923).<sup>26</sup> As elsewhere, Shoghi Effendi built on existing institutions – in this case calling for an existing 'Executive Committee' (presumably the one responsible for organizing the successive Baha'i conventions) to be re-formed as the National Spiritual Assembly for the Baha'is of India and Burma. He also permitted the formation of a separate 'Central Council' to coordinate Baha'i activities in Burma, specifying that this body should be subordinate to the national assembly.

Shoghi Effendi's first letter to what would become the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma appears to have been an informal one sent by his secretary in April 1923 to

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<sup>24</sup> MIS 9–10.

<sup>25</sup> For a brief summary see Smith, *Babi and Baha'i Religions*, 120–2, and idem, *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Bahá'í Faith* (2nd ed., Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), 'administration', 'assemblies'.

<sup>26</sup> An official list of assemblies prepared at the Baha'i World Centre in 1989 lists seven: 'the British Isles' (Britain and Eire), 'Germany and Austria', and 'India and Burma' (all from 1923); 'Egypt and the Sudan' (from 1924); and 'the Caucasus', 'Turkistan' and 'the United States and Canada' (all from 1925) (Universal House of Justice, Department of Statistics, 'National and regional spiritual assembly formation', January 1989; document in author's possession), but *The Baha'i World* volumes for the period also list 'national' assemblies for Iraq and Persia (Iran) (BYB, 101; BW 2:181; 3:217) – a reference to the 'central' local spiritual assemblies of Tehran and Baghdad which at that time acted as national coordinating bodies and fulfilled many of the duties of national assemblies. It is of note that several of these early 'national' assemblies were actually bi-national and that two (Turkistan and the Caucasus) were formed in component areas of the Soviet Union.

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one of the members (probably N. R. Vakil, its 'auditor' and subsequently its long-serving chairman). In it, the then Executive Committee, was (1) directed to change its name to 'National Spiritual Assembly' so as to correspond with the form employed in England and America, 'uniformity in such matters' being 'most advisable'; (2) advised that Shoghi Effendi wished to receive 'regular and detailed reports' of the condition of the Faith and the activities of the Baha'is from the national assembly secretary, a request that he repeated in several subsequent letters; and (3) asked for both the postal and telegraphic addresses of the secretary so that he could send his communications via him, a request repeated in his next letter. The letter also expressed Shoghi Effendi's hope that the national assembly would be able to 'achieve a great deal and herald a new era of spiritual awakening in that land', and the hope that he placed in the younger Baha'is in teaching the Faith.<sup>27</sup>

A formal letter to the now renamed assembly was penned by Shoghi Effendi himself in June 1923.<sup>28</sup> In it, he expressed his 'deep satisfaction' at the 'vigour and earnestness' with which the members of the assembly were conducting the affairs of the Baha'i movement 'throughout the length and breadth of that vast and distant land'; stressed the importance of their *Baha'i News*; reminded them that, despite the forthcoming establishment of a separate Baha'i Central Council for Burma, all Baha'i activities in that territory remained under their jurisdiction and that the local spiritual assemblies there were under the 'protection, care and direction' of the national ('All-India') assembly; prayed that the assembly members might achieve 'the highest success' in all their endeavours, both 'individually and collectively'; and stated that he would 'spare no effort' to contribute his 'humble share' to the consolidation and extension of the teaching campaign throughout 'that vast Dominion'. In a general letter to the Baha'is in December, he directed their attention to the forthcoming convention, stressing the need for 'a complete and careful arrangement' for its success to be made in the intervening months by all the Baha'is and their local assemblies, and calling for the various component elements in the Baha'i community to unite in their endeavours so as to inaugurate a period of 'unprecedented activity'.<sup>29</sup>

In June 1923 Shoghi Effendi also wrote two separate letters to the Baha'is in Burma – to Rangoon, and to Mandalay, Daidanaw-Kalazoo and Tanbingyanng – acknowledging their letters and encouraging them. He expressed the hope that their endeavours to establish their own Central Council and Baha'i magazine would 'soon bear abundant fruit' and 'stand a testimony to the efficiency, the energy and the zeal' of the Burmese Baha'is, and awaited, 'with keen interest', 'the joyful news of the expansion of your work ... the consolidation of your Assemblies, the increase of your numbers'. He wished to receive 'frequent and direct letters from every Baha'i locality'.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> MIS 4. The secretary stressed the 'great hopes' that Shoghi Effendi placed in 'the younger Baha'i generation'. If they were to study the Faith 'deeply and thoroughly, read its history, find its underlying principles and become both well informed and energetic' they would surely 'achieve a great deal'. It was on 'their shoulders' that 'Abdu'l-Baha had 'laid the tremendous work of teaching'. They were the ones to 'raise the call of the Kingdom and arouse the people from slumber'. If they failed, the Baha'i Cause was 'doomed to stagnation'.

<sup>28</sup> MIS 5–6. The members of the first national assembly were: Mr M. U. Abasi, Haji Ahmad, Mr A. Bahram, Mr I. Bakhtiar [Mr I Bakhtiari], Mr Hashmatu'llah [Kureshi], Dr Kaushal (Koshal) Kishore, Mr M. Kodadad, Prof. Pritam Singh, and Mr N. R. Vakil (all men).

<sup>29</sup> MIS 9–10.

<sup>30</sup> MIS 6, 7–8.

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*Aspects of administrative functioning*

As the several national spiritual assemblies developed, Shoghi Effendi maintained an often detailed correspondence with them, encouraging them, guiding them through the various problems of functioning that they encountered, setting goals and directing them to undertake various tasks and activities. In the case of India and Burma – as elsewhere – the development of the assembly was often difficult, with Shoghi Effendi returning repeatedly to certain issues until he felt that the assembly was operating in the way that he desired.

A number of early letters outlined Shoghi Effendi's hopes for the national assembly. Thus, in November 1924 he called on the assembly to 'distinguish itself by its unremitting labours, its profound wisdom', and its contribution 'to the deepening of the spirit of love, service, unity, understanding and confidence' amongst the Baha'is.<sup>31</sup> In March 1925 he stated that he 'strongly' desired the members of the assembly 'to meet as often as possible', and to 'direct, co-ordinate and reinforce' the activities of individual Baha'is and local assemblies throughout India and Burma. The national assembly should be active, efficient and constant in this regard.<sup>32</sup>

Again, in April 1925, Shoghi Effendi emphasized 'the supreme necessity' of immediately establishing a national Baha'i fund and maintaining it to the best of the assembly's ability, and in May he reiterated that 'the institution' of the national fund was of 'vital importance' and should be 'stressed and emphasized in every circular or communication' addressed to the Baha'is.<sup>33</sup>

Writing to Wakil in May 1925, Shoghi Effendi's secretary stressed the desirability of each local assembly having 'a register of the names and addresses of all declared Baha'is' in its respective district. These should be kept up to date, with any changes in the addresses or numbers of Baha'is being noted. The national assembly should maintain a similar list of all those Baha'is who did not live in areas where there were local assemblies, so that they could be kept in touch with the body of the Baha'is by letter and so that travelling Baha'is would be able to visit them. The national secretary should also have 'a full list of the members and office-bearers' of each local spiritual assembly, together with the addresses of their secretaries, and keep in as close touch as possible with the local assemblies. All local assemblies, together with those Baha'is not living in areas with assemblies ('isolated believers'), should be kept informed of important matters affecting the Faith through circular letters and the like. They should also be reminded of the importance of contributing to the national fund and sending regular reports to the national assembly. Shoghi Effendi also asked that the new national secretary send him, in addition to his own postal address: (1) 'a full list of the members and office-bearers' of the national assembly; (2) a copy of the list of the local assembly members, office-bearers, and secretaries' addresses; and (3) a copy of the list of isolated Baha'is and their addresses. Fresh lists should be sent each year 'immediately after the election' of the national assembly.<sup>34</sup>

On several occasions Shoghi Effendi conveyed specific lists of goals, repeating them when he considered it necessary. Thus, in October 1926, he wrote that the 'most primary and urgent requirements of the new day that has dawned upon India' included the following: (1)

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<sup>31</sup> MIS 13.

<sup>32</sup> MIS 16.

<sup>33</sup> MIS 17, 19.

<sup>34</sup> MIS 17–18.

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the institution of the national Baha'i fund; (2) the establishment of a 'Baha'i Bulletin', similar to the American national assembly's *News Letter*; (3) a 'rigorous and well-conceived campaign' of teaching; (4) a 'continuous and purposeful endeavour to coordinate the activities' of all the Indian and Burmese local assemblies and groups; and (5) 'the sending of detailed and frequent reports' to him in Haifa. He 'eagerly' awaited their reports and would continue to pray for the success of their 'arduous labours'.<sup>35</sup> In May 1927 he urged that the newly-elected national and local assemblies would: (1) 'widen the scope of their activities'; (2) 'initiate new and valuable measures'; (3) 'extend the circle of their correspondence with foreign Baha'i centres'; and (4) 'promote the independence and distinctiveness' of the Faith,<sup>36</sup> whilst in June 1928 his secretary stated that Shoghi Effendi expected the newly-elected national assembly to take responsibility for: (1) the coordination of Baha'i activities throughout India and Burma; (2) devising means of attracting the attention of people of 'every class and creed' to the message and 'vital dynamic spirit' of the Faith and endeavouring to increase the number of Baha'is 'and fellow-workers' [i.e. what modern Baha'is would refer to as proclamation and teaching]; and (3) 'as a cumulative and culminating step', the achievement of recognition of the Baha'i community as 'a separate religious organization', similar what had been achieved in the United States.<sup>37</sup>

### *Initial problems*

Initially, there were evidently some difficulties in establishing a unified and effective administrative system in India and Burma. The main problems appear to have concerned the functioning of the national spiritual assembly itself, the lack of unity between the Indian and Burmese Baha'is, and difficulties experienced by the national assembly in gaining support from the Baha'i community as a whole.

*National assembly functioning.* One problem lay in the functioning of the national assembly. The nature of the difficulty has not yet been properly established, but one consequence appears to have been that Shoghi Effendi often communicated important messages to the assembly in personal letters to Vakil rather than directly to the assembly itself.<sup>38</sup>

Clearly, part of the problem was in the functioning of the national secretariat, and it would appear that, initially, important messages to the Baha'is were lost because the secretary did not

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<sup>35</sup> MIS 31.

<sup>36</sup> MIS 36.

<sup>37</sup> MIS 43–4. This is presumably a reference to the legal Declaration of Trust and its attendant by-laws adopted by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States and Canada in April 1927 (see BW 2:89–97; 10:180; Shoghi Effendi, *Baha'i Administration* 134–5, 142–3). Earlier official recognition of the American Baha'is as a distinct religious community dates back to at least 1906, when a separate Baha'i entry was included in the *Census of Religious Bodies*. Again, the American Bahai Temple Unity, established in 1909, secured legal status in order to hold monies and buy land for the projected temple (Robert H. Stockman, *The Bahā'ī Faith in America*, vol. 2, *Early Expansion, 1900–1912* [Oxford: George Ronald, 1995] 226, 312). The North American national assembly did not achieve legal status as an incorporated body until May 1929 (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* [rev. ed., Wilmette: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1974] 335–6).

<sup>38</sup> Thus, of 35 published letters from Shoghi Effendi or written on his behalf to India and Burma between 1923 and 1926, only 4 were addressed to the national assembly, whilst 13 (or possibly 14) were addressed to Vakil (MIS 1–33). Similarly, of 41 letters between 1927 and 1930, 7 were addressed to the national assembly, whilst 26 were addressed to Vakil (MIS 34–67). Of course, given the changes in secretary and some of the problems of assembly consolidation, it may be that the successive national secretaries were in receipt of more letters than those now published, but that these have been lost or mislaid (e.g. see MIS 16).

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forward them.<sup>39</sup> This was hinted at as early as 1924,<sup>40</sup> but references to the problem become clearer in subsequent letters. Thus, in March 1925 Shoghi Effendi urged that the secretary should ensure that all incoming communications be 'promptly and widely distributed', whilst in April he emphasized the need for an 'earnest, capable, energetic, loyal and experienced soul' to discharge 'the responsible and arduous duties' of national secretary – most unusually, a veiled appeal to the assembly to change one of its chief officers.<sup>41</sup>

The importance of getting the national assembly to function effectively was underlined in a message to Vakil on 12 May 1925 (after the new assembly for the year would have been elected), when, after praising Vakil's past and present services, Shoghi Effendi wrote that he wished him for the present to concentrate his efforts as much as he could 'on the consolidation of the foundations' of the national assembly. This was 'the first and most essential step to further expansion in any direction'.<sup>42</sup> By November, changes had evidently occurred, Shoghi Effendi writing to Vakil that he prayed that the 'newly constituted' assembly would 'grow from strength to strength'.<sup>43</sup> Again, in July 1926, Shoghi Effendi expressed his pleasure at the results of the recent election for the national assembly, his secretary noting on his behalf that as the assembly members were 'strong in their faith and unfailing in their services', and the Baha'is 'sincere in their love and devotion', there was 'full assurance of an ultimate victory and final settlement of the existing difficulties'.<sup>44</sup> That Shoghi Effendi was finally satisfied with the development of the national assembly is indicated in a letter to the assembly in October 1926, in which he referred to it as having now been 'properly constituted' and to its officers as being 'duly appointed'.<sup>45</sup>

*Uniting the community.* As Shoghi Effendi clearly realized, the Baha'is of India and Burma were not a unified community. The two territories might well be a 'promising' field of Baha'i endeavour, but they were also 'vast', and there were significant divisions between the Baha'is. In a general letter to the Indian and Burmese Baha'is in December 1923 he identified three sub-groupings, and stated that it was his 'earnest hope' and 'most cherished desire' that their unity at the forthcoming national convention would impart 'power and brilliancy' to the proceedings such as to herald 'an era of unprecedented activity for the ultimate recognition of the Cause' by the peoples of the two countries. Each group had its contribution to make: the 'vigour and enlightened efforts of the Baha'i youth of India', coupled with 'the generous support and devotion of the old beloved Parsee friends' and reinforced by 'the vast numbers' of the 'ardent' Burmese Baha'is. The time had now come for the 'dearly-beloved pioneers' of

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<sup>39</sup> Thus, in a letter to Vakil in April 1925 (MIS 16) Shoghi Effendi's secretary stated that a long letter had been sent by Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Baha'is via their national secretary only a few weeks previously, but no such letter is included in MIS.

<sup>40</sup> MIS 13.

<sup>41</sup> MIS 16, 17. Dr Kaushal Kishore, praised for his 'great zeal' as a Baha'i teacher in spreading the Movement (MIS 4), was the first secretary (1923), but evidently found Baha'i administrative work difficult, and was later replaced by Mr Hashmatu'llah (Hishmatu'llah, Hashmatu'llah) Kureshi, who appears to have been secretary from 1925 to 1929, when he was replaced by Mr Badri (BYB 101; BW 2:146, 181; MIS 54-5).

<sup>42</sup> MIS 19.

<sup>43</sup> MIS 22.

<sup>44</sup> MIS 27.

<sup>45</sup> MIS 31. That there was also concern about voting arrangements for the national assembly is perhaps indicated by a letter of May 1926 in which Shoghi Effendi expressed the hope that the elections just concluded had been conducted 'in the proper manner' (MIS 26).

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'Abdu'l-Baha's Cause who were now scattered throughout the country to 'unite, consolidate their forces', and 'combine' to lay 'a firm foundation for the future progress of their noble task'.<sup>46</sup>

That there were tensions between the Indian and Burmese Baha'is was perhaps first hinted at in a cable sent by Shoghi Effendi in December 1924, stating that 'Burma's participation' – presumably in national administration – was 'extremely desirable for success'.<sup>47</sup> More directly, in March 1925, Shoghi Effendi stressed that the national assembly was responsible for India 'and Burma' (Shoghi Effendi's emphasis), and expressed his pleasure at measures that Vakil had taken to bring about 'a better understanding' between the two parties.<sup>48</sup> He also sent a long letter (not included in MIS, see footnote 39) to the Baha'is of both territories, hoping that this would draw them together, and wrote later to Vakil of his sadness at 'the state of tension' that existed between the Baha'is of the two countries and their inability to work in harmony. He prayed that all the 'petty misunderstandings' would be forgotten and that, with the election of a new national assembly, the Baha'is would 'wholeheartedly unite in promoting the work of the Cause' and their activities would start 'on a new basis firmer than before'.<sup>49</sup>

Whilst calling for greater unity between the Indian and Burmese Baha'is, Shoghi Effendi also acknowledged that Burma had a separate and distinctive identity as a Baha'i community. Thus, writing to the editors of the newly-established Burmese Baha'i magazine (*The Dawn*, see below) in February 1925, he outlined a plan of action for the Baha'is of Burma – 'that beloved and picturesque country' which stood as 'sentinel on the eastern confines of the Baha'i world'. With its 'vast number of modest yet ardent' Baha'is, it should 'pursue diligently' its work of extending 'the sphere of its healing mission in life' ever further into 'the very heart of the Far East'. It should maintain the most close and cordial cooperation with the Indian Baha'is as a sign of the 'growing solidarity' of the Faith, but at the same time 'it should concentrate its energies on the consolidation of its work' in its 'own particular field'. It was the 'privilege' of the Burmese Baha'is to 're-adjust and stimulate their own activities, lay down their own programme for an intensive and systematic campaign of Teaching, and, with an unshakable resolve, arise to carry it to a successful conclusion'.<sup>50</sup>

By March 1926, the national assembly's relations with the Burmese Baha'is had evidently greatly improved, Shoghi Effendi noting that the Burmese Baha'is were now 'very satisfied and pleased with the consideration shown' (presumably towards them), as well as with 'the activity displayed' by the national assembly.<sup>51</sup>

*Local assembly support.* Another problem lay in the lack of support for the national assembly from some of the local spiritual assemblies – whose members may possibly have resented the assertion of the authority of the national assembly vis-à-vis their own. Thus, in July 1926 Shoghi Effendi notified Vakil that he had written personally to the long-established Bombay assembly, 'most emphatically' urging its members to support the national assembly both

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<sup>46</sup> MIS 9.

<sup>47</sup> MIS 13.

<sup>48</sup> MIS 15–16.

<sup>49</sup> MIS 16–17.

<sup>50</sup> MIS 14–15.

<sup>51</sup> MIS 25.

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morally and financially, adding that it was necessary to repeat things over and again until 'the truth, the necessity and the urgency' of 'Abdu'l-Baha's instructions sank into 'the hearts and minds' of the Baha'is.<sup>52</sup> He repeated the gist of this message in September by cable and letter to Bombay. As Shoghi Effendi's secretary noted, it always took time for people 'to change from one administration to another'. Having been accustomed to thinking of local assemblies as 'next only to the Centre of the Cause', the Baha'is would find it difficult to straightaway accept a new authority, and would have to be trained to do so. Shoghi Effendi was well aware of the difficulties that the national assembly was encountering, but its members should be assured of ultimate success.<sup>53</sup> A few days later, his secretary wrote that Shoghi Effendi had been somewhat 'comforted' to hear that the Bombay Baha'is had made a 'favourable approach' to the national assembly, and hoped that this would prove to be 'the first step towards a complete mutual understanding',<sup>54</sup> and in November 1926 the secretary referred to the recent difficulties 'which for a time prevailed and threatened grave disturbances' between the national and local assemblies, that had surely been due to misunderstandings that 'would be easily overcome', and Shoghi Effendi's pleasure that these had now 'vanished'.<sup>55</sup> Shoghi Effendi's secretary also referred to the fact that the national assembly had a duty, in return, to 'inspire the necessary confidence' of the local assemblies in its own leadership by 'keeping the management of its work as efficient as possible'.<sup>56</sup>

More generally, it may have been difficult for the national assembly to secure the support of the community as a whole. Thus, in April 1925, Shoghi Effendi expressed the hope that the Indian and Burmese Baha'is would support the new national assembly when it was elected, and 'whole-heartedly unite in promoting the work of the Cause', and in an October telegram he wished that the national assembly members might 'FULFIL OUR HIGHEST EXPECTATIONS'.<sup>57</sup>

### *Developments after 1926*

It is evident that Shoghi Effendi considered that at least some of the problems of consolidating the Indian-Burmese national assembly were moving towards resolution by late 1926, but it is also obvious that some problems remained.

Thus, after the difficulties of the past, Shoghi Effendi's October 1926 letter to the national assembly held out the hope of a new beginning. 'Now' that the assembly had been 'properly constituted', Shoghi Effendi called upon its members to 'promote such measures' as would 'consolidate the work' that the assembly had already begun 'so well' and referred to 'the new day' that had dawned upon India. His secretary wrote of the 'glorious Spirit' that Shoghi Effendi hoped to see 'emanating' from and through the members of the assembly, and of the expectation that through their 'earnest endeavours', 'consummate wisdom' and 'unflinching faith' they would lead the Baha'is of 'that great country' to 'ultimate victory'. It was 'a joy

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<sup>52</sup> MIS 27.

<sup>53</sup> MIS 29.

<sup>54</sup> MIS 30.

<sup>55</sup> DND 15. This passage is from a paragraph that does not appear in MIS 31-2.

<sup>56</sup> MIS 32.

<sup>57</sup> MIS 17, 21.

<sup>58</sup> MIS 30-1.

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beyond words' for him to do all he could to help them in the 'noble work' they had undertaken.<sup>58</sup> Vakil apparently replied to the effect that former difficulties had 'vanished' and that the national and local assemblies were now united in working for the Cause.<sup>59</sup>

In two letters of May 1927, his secretary noted Shoghi Effendi's expectations regarding the election of the new national spiritual assembly and his hope that a 'strong and capable' body had been elected for the new year, able to accomplish 'something more than routine work'.<sup>60</sup> In a letter to Vakil in August, Shoghi Effendi urged that the assembly try to 'follow the example' of the American national assembly 'in method, action, and procedure', and urged Vakil to encourage the Baha'is 'to follow and adopt the method outlined' in the American assembly's newsletter, as an exemplar of the methods that should be followed.<sup>61</sup>

It would seem, however, that Shoghi Effendi's expectations of a new beginning were at least partly disappointed, for in November 1927 he was asking if there were any recent developments that might have affected Baha'i teaching work in the sub-continent, whilst his secretary, in a later letter that month, opined that despite some recent successes, the progress of the Faith in India still did not 'come up to expectations' – particularly in view of the long period since the Faith had first been established there.<sup>62</sup> Then, in a dramatic note to Vakil in May 1928, Shoghi Effendi announced that he would make special supplication in ['Abdu'l-Baha's] shrine for the Baha'is of India and Burma, that they might 'arise with heart and soul and in perfect harmony and understanding' to promote the Baha'i Faith there.<sup>63</sup>

A sudden surge of administrative developments then occurred in late 1928 and 1929, with the holding of a proper administrative convention, the election of a new national secretary, the commencement of a plan to hold alternate national assembly meetings in India and Burma, and the beginning of the preparatory work for legal incorporation.

*National convention.* The sheer size of British India evidently made it difficult both to hold well-attended conventions to vote for the national assembly members and to have frequent and well-attended meetings of the assembly.<sup>64</sup> Thus, in October 1928, Shoghi Effendi gave approval for the idea of holding a 'Baha'i [electoral] Convention', returning to the topic in several subsequent letters – making 'the choice of the site and other arrangements' the responsibility of the national assembly.<sup>65</sup> In November he wrote that it was 'absolutely essential' for the Baha'is throughout India and Burma to be in 'closer touch' and to have a 'more frequent interchange of thought', and that the proposed Convention would enable them to achieve this. Later in the month his secretary expressed Shoghi Effendi's hope that it would

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<sup>59</sup> MIS 33.

<sup>60</sup> MIS 35–6.

<sup>61</sup> MIS 38.

<sup>62</sup> MIS 39.

<sup>63</sup> MIS 43.

<sup>64</sup> Prior to Shoghi Effendi's development of the administrative system, Baha'i Conventions had been, essentially, a combination of a series of public proclamatory meetings with a general administrative meeting (as in the Baha'i Temple Unity in North America and the All-India Baha'i Convention of 1920). Under the system of Baha'i administration established by Shoghi Effendi, however, the primary responsibility of national conventions became the electing of national assemblies. He also specified that the conventions should be held annually, ideally during the Ridvan period, and that when it was not possible to elect the national assembly by delegate meeting, voting should be conducted by post (BW 2:75, 77–8; Shoghi Effendi, *Baha'i Administration* 79–80, 91–2). It would appear that the Indian and Burmese Baha'is initially had to rely on postal elections.

<sup>65</sup> MIS 45.

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prove to be an event of major significance in the history of the Faith in the subcontinent and lead to 'wonderful results'.<sup>66</sup> Again, in two letters in December, Shoghi Effendi prayed for its success, trusting that it would be 'fully and widely represented by the divers elements' that constituted the joint community, and that it would 'remedy most if not all of the present deficiencies' in the Cause in India, and provide 'an unprecedented impetus to the progress of the Faith'.<sup>67</sup> In November he wrote also of his hope that the efforts of the national assembly would give a 'great impetus' to the spread of the Faith in India and Burma that winter season, and that the Baha'is would 'increasingly realize the sacredness and pressing nature of their obligations and responsibilities'.<sup>68</sup> In December his secretary referred to the assembly's hopes that the Convention would re-establish a 'sense of love and harmony' amongst the Indian and Burmese Baha'is, since without that it was impossible to 'preach the gospel of love' to the rest of mankind.<sup>69</sup>

Although successful, the Convention was evidently marred by the non-attendance of the Burmese delegates.<sup>70</sup> Another problem was the continuing differences between individual assembly members, a situation which Shoghi Effendi's secretary attributed (in February 1929) to the lack of frequent contact between the individuals concerned, and the misunderstandings and lack of mutual trust that this ultimately generated. The Guardian knew them as individuals and was sure that they desired only to serve the Cause and not retard its progress. Of course, there were basic physical problems – given that the country was so vast, it was not possible for meetings to be frequent or well attended – but for two or three years he had hoped that 'a spirit of mutual trust' would overcome these difficulties. Sadly, this had not happened.<sup>71</sup> Shoghi Effendi himself added that 'the utmost effort' would have to be exerted in the next election for the national assembly to elect only those who were 'best fitted for this supreme and responsible position'. Once elected, members should not be allowed to resign. The assembly members should 'meet and consult in person'. It was necessary to 'maintain and strengthen' the unity of the national assembly 'at all costs'. Everything else should 'be subordinated to this end'. Now that the Iranian Baha'is were preparing to hold national elections [and adopt the national administrative system delineated by Shoghi Effendi], it would be 'a decidedly retrograde step' if the Baha'is of India and Burma abandoned the new system and reverted to the old one [of 'central' local assemblies acting to coordinate activities].<sup>72</sup>

As to the conventions, Shoghi Effendi hoped that the Indian and Burmese Baha'is would now hold them on an annual basis and that, as in other countries, the gatherings would 'lead to a better understanding' amongst the Baha'is. Indeed, as his secretary noted, as the number of Baha'is increased, the diversity of opinion within the community would surely grow, and it would become even more important to have an occasion at which these differences could be discussed and 'true unity of purpose and activity' be obtained.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> MIS 46.

<sup>67</sup> MIS 47–8.

<sup>68</sup> MIS 46–7.

<sup>69</sup> MIS 47.

<sup>70</sup> Wakil dispatched his report to Shoghi Effendi in mid-January 1929. The Convention had presumably been held in late December. MIS 52.

<sup>71</sup> DND 25. This passage is based on a paragraph that does not appear in MIS 51.

<sup>72</sup> MIS 51–2.

<sup>73</sup> MIS 51.

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*A new secretary.* In 1929 the national assembly acquired a new secretary, a Mr Badri, apparently an Iranian student from Shiraz who was studying in India.<sup>74</sup> In his letters of June and July 1929 Shoghi Effendi conveyed his pleasure at Badri's election, and praised his 'sustained and unsparing efforts' to spread the Baha'i Cause in India as well as his endeavours to fulfil the duties of national secretary, despite limitations of time (presumably caused by the demands of his studies). Shoghi Effendi hoped that the newly-elected assembly would maintain both its own unity and the unity of the national community, and infuse a new spirit into Baha'i activities in India and Burma, vigorously promoting teaching of the Faith and trying to establish 'a progressive and representative Baha'i community in both countries'. He was delighted with the proposal that the national assembly should meet once each in Burma and India, and suggested that more frequent meetings be held in each of the countries if this were feasible – through this means, and by the 'individual effort' of each national assembly member, he hoped that the misunderstandings that existed between the Indian and Burmese Baha'is would be ended, so that a fresh start could be made in a spirit of true accord. These themes were reiterated in a letter of August 1929.<sup>75</sup>

Badri sent Shoghi Effendi his assessment of the Baha'i situation in India in August 1929. Replying in September 1929, Shoghi Effendi welcomed Badri's 'frank expression' of the situation and his 'energetic desire' to get things moving again after 'years of practical stagnation'. It was refreshing to see that many of the Indian and Burmese Baha'is were now dissatisfied with the present situation and desired 'fresh endeavours along enlightened lines'. He was particularly pleased with Badri's realization that the world was developing and becoming enlightened through the operation of unseen divine forces, and that it would be shameful for the Baha'is then to go around proclaiming principles that they had learnt from the Faith 'so many years before' but had failed to live up to.<sup>76</sup> Later (probably in February 1930), Badri suggested that a national secretariat (presumably a full-time secretary with a formal office) be established in India, a suggestion which Shoghi Effendi viewed favourably but left for the national assembly to determine.<sup>77</sup> Unfortunately, Badri himself seems to have had to leave India shortly after this.

*Alternate meetings.* The plan to have alternate meetings of the national assembly in India and Burma began in the autumn of 1929 with a meeting in Bombay. This was apparently successful, and in December Shoghi Effendi referred to the forthcoming meeting in Rangoon as having the potential to be a 'landmark' in the history of the Faith in the two countries. He prayed that it would 'lend a fresh and unprecedented impetus to the onward march of the Cause in those lands', and hoped that a meeting between the national assembly and the Burmese Baha'is in a spirit of goodwill would lead to the development of a 'new and enduring unity of purpose and effort'.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> In March 1930 his secretary conveyed Shoghi Effendi's sympathies at the news of Badri's father's death in Shiraz and referred to the ('unfortunate') possibility that Badri might return home after he had graduated (MIS 60). Badri's tenure as secretary seems to have ceased some time after this, as there are no more messages addressed to him – presumably he had returned to Iran.

<sup>75</sup> MIS 54–5.

<sup>76</sup> MIS 56.

<sup>77</sup> MIS 60.

<sup>78</sup> MIS 57–8.

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*Preparation for legal incorporation.* Also by late 1929, Vakil was beginning work on the documents required in order to gain some sort of legal status for the Faith in India – a significant step in consolidating the Faith. As in the United States, the documents consisted of a declaration of trust and a set of national assembly by-laws, jointly referred to as a ‘Baha’i constitution’ by Shoghi Effendi, who instructed Vakil to follow the American text as closely as possible in ‘subject matter, arrangement and form’.<sup>79</sup>

## Aspects of Community Activity and Development

### *The distribution of Baha’is*

Compared to the initial successes of Baha’i activity in India and Burma, the 1920s appear to have been a period of limited results. No Baha’i population estimates for the period are available,<sup>80</sup> but it seems unlikely that there was any significant increase in numbers over the decade, and there may even have been a decline from the estimate of fewer than two thousand Baha’is in the late 1910s (above). Certainly, the official listings of Baha’i groups during the period show meagre results, particularly for India, some places – such as Madras – that had previously had large and active Baha’i groups no longer being included. Thus, the first international listing of Baha’i centres (in 1925) included the names of only five localities in India (Bombay, Surat and Poona in the west, Calcutta in the east and Karachi in what is now Pakistan), with another four in Burma (the villages of Daidanaw-Kalazoo and Kunjangoon, and the cities of Mandalay and Rangoon).<sup>81</sup> These figures subsequently increased: to nine in India by 1928 (with the addition of Hyderabad, Cawnpore, Amritsar and Delhi), and to ten by 1930 (with the addition of Agra); and to five in Burma by 1928 (with the addition of Kyigon), and to seven by 1930 (with the addition of Kungyan and Taubingyoung).<sup>82</sup> Overall the number of groups remained extremely limited, however, and by 1930, in the two territories together (with a prewar population of well over 300 million), there were still only 17 localities in which there was a recorded Baha’i presence. Comparatively, of course, the Baha’i ‘presence’ was greater in Burma than in India, because of the much smaller environing population. Whilst the Indian Baha’i localities were all cities, most of those in Burma were villages, indicating a quite different kind of Baha’i community.

In terms of administrative development, of the ten Indian Baha’i ‘centres’, only four (Bombay, Calcutta, [Camp] Karachi and Poona) formed local spiritual assemblies during this period. Of the Burmese centres, three had formed local assemblies by 1928 (Kunjangoon, Mandalay and Rangoon) and four (out of seven) by 1930 (with the addition of Kungyan).<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> MIS 58. An official certificate of registration of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of India and Burma was issued on 20 January 1933 at Lahore (BW 5:236).

<sup>80</sup> In April 1930 Syed Mustafa Roumie sent to Shoghi Effendi a ‘comprehensive report’ of a Baha’i census that had been conducted for Burma (MIS 64), but this remains unpublished.

<sup>81</sup> BYB 103.

<sup>82</sup> BW 2:182, 187; 3:218, 222. It seems probable that Taubingyoung was in fact the same as Tanbingyang mentioned above.

<sup>83</sup> BW 2:182; 3:218.

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*Restraints on growth*

What were the reasons for this seeming lack of progress? Shoghi Effendi himself was aware of the situation and was concerned with this question, as is evident from his letters. Thus, on Shoghi Effendi's behalf in March 1925, his secretary noted that for the past few years, the 'harvest' of the Baha'is' endeavours in that 'vast and promising' country had not been 'as rich and abundant' as the Guardian or the Indian Baha'is wished,<sup>84</sup> and he returned to this theme in letters written in May 1926 and April 1927.<sup>85</sup> In November 1927, he again expressed his disappointment with overall progress.<sup>86</sup>

One possible reason for frustration of the Baha'is' efforts may have been the political situation. This had changed dramatically after the First World War, with a marked increase in pro-independence sentiment and political action.<sup>87</sup> The rise in nationalist fervour may have affected Baha'i teaching endeavours by focusing the attention of many people on the possibilities of political action and away from interest in 'religious' solutions to India's problems. Certainly, Shoghi Effendi was aware of this explanation, for in March 1925 his secretary observed that the political struggles of recent years and the resulting general unrest were 'undoubtedly' a major reason for the 'comparative unfruitfulness' of the Baha'is' 'self-sacrificing efforts'. He lamented 'the formidable difficulties and obstacles' with which the Indian Baha'is had to cope in their efforts 'to imbue the individual with a new spirit and to bring new measures of reform in the social order'.<sup>88</sup> In April 1930 Shoghi Effendi's secretary hoped that a forthcoming visit to India by the American Baha'i teacher Martha Root (below) would 'prove to be of some value' in attracting the attention of 'the intelligent classes', although the 'political agitation' might 'entirely defeat that purpose'.<sup>89</sup>

Another factor that may have impeded Baha'i success was the state of the Baha'i community itself during the period. The apparent instances of squabbling and petty resentments that divided the Indian and Burmese Baha'is and the difficulties that the national spiritual assembly experienced both in functioning effectively and in securing the allegiance and support of the Baha'i community as a whole may have dampened spirits and diminished the energies and enthusiasm necessary for successful Baha'i teaching endeavour. Certainly, several letters from Haifa implied a linkage between Baha'i unity and the spread of the Faith. Thus, in March 1926 Shoghi Effendi's secretary stated that the unity of the Baha'is, combined with effective teaching work, would be both a 'real accomplishment' and an important means of lightening Shoghi Effendi's 'stupendous task', giving him 'deepest joy and confidence'.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> MIS 15.

<sup>85</sup> MIS 26 and 34-5.

<sup>86</sup> MIS 39. See similar letters in November 1928 (MIS 45) and early December 1928 (MIS 47). In the November letter, the secretary stated that Shoghi Effendi would appreciate Vakil's personal opinion of the reasons for the lack of Baha'i growth in India (MIS 45-6). In response, Vakil evidently consulted with other Baha'is, and by December a full-scale national survey of Baha'i opinion on the matter was being conducted, Shoghi Effendi's secretary advising the national assembly to consider the Baha'is' written responses carefully, rapidly remedying any problem and inspiring the community to do what was needed in order to spread the Cause (MIS 48).

<sup>87</sup> India had given massive support to the British war effort, and many educated Indians expected this loyalty to be rewarded by moves towards self-government. Instead, they found that the British were intent on continuing wartime curtailment of freedoms and were unwilling to do more than mildly condemn a British general responsible for a massacre of unarmed Indian protestors in Amritsar (1919). It was in this context that Gandhi emerged as a popular leader of an increasingly radical pro-independence movement.

<sup>88</sup> MIS 15-16.

<sup>89</sup> MIS 63. See a similar letter in July 1930 (MIS 65).

<sup>90</sup> MIS 24. These thoughts were repeated in May and July 1926 (MIS 26, 27), and in December 1928 Shoghi

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As in other parts of the world, another possible reason for the relative lack of growth in the 1920s in India and Burma was the passing of 'Abdu'l-Baha and the dawning of a new and less charismatic age of Baha'i endeavour. A specifically Indian factor may have been the rising level of communal religious tensions between Hindus and Muslims, which may have made the Baha'i teachings of unity seem more problematic and impractical to some people.

### *Encouragement and guidance*

One of Shoghi Effendi's responses to the Baha'i situation in India was to offer regular encouragement, both to those individuals who were in the forefront of the teaching work and to the Baha'is more generally. Thus, writing to Vakil in March 1925, Shoghi Effendi's secretary stated that nothing could be 'more encouraging and gladsome' to the Guardian than news of the activities of the Indian Baha'is. They should not be discouraged at their lack of success, not letting anything dampen their zeal, nor should they for a moment doubt 'Abdu'l-Baha's prediction of 'the remarkable change' that would take place in their country.<sup>91</sup> In November 1928 Shoghi Effendi's secretary noted the recent and very sudden prominence which the Baha'is of Turkey had gained, musing that perhaps a 'similar awakening' would occur in India.<sup>92</sup>

Shoghi Effendi also encouraged or endorsed specific courses of action. Two letters in 1926 are of particular interest in setting the Baha'is four 'external' goals (in addition to achieving unity amongst themselves):

- 1] Spreading the Faith in 'that vast country', in particular amongst 'the real natives'.
- 2] Making 'intelligent connections with the universities and schools', so that their students would gain a 'proper understanding' of the Faith and its mission (27 March 1926).<sup>93</sup>
- 3] Attempting to bring Hindus and Muslims together (in the wider society), demonstrating to them a spirit of 'goodwill, devotion to humanity, and disinterestedness in the material result obtained' (i.e. not to be discouraged if their efforts had only limited success – or perhaps to be without the ulterior motive of making converts and to have the aim purely of bringing the two sides together).
- 4] Attracting the attention of prominent leaders to 'the reality of the Cause' (10 July 1926).<sup>94</sup>

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Effendi expressed his hope that the forthcoming national Baha'i Convention would remedy most of the present 'deficiencies' in the Indian community and lead to 'an unprecedented impetus' to Baha'i progress (MIS 48–9).

<sup>91</sup> MIS 15. This thought was repeated in Shoghi Effendi's letters of 1927 (MIS 36, 37).

<sup>92</sup> MIS 45–6. An investigation by the Turkish police into the activities of the Baha'is (as part of government moves to restrict unsupervised religious activity) led to the temporary arrest of a number of Baha'is, followed by the establishment of their innocence of any wrong intent, as well as widespread publicity for the Faith (Shoghi Effendi, *Baha'i Administration* 151–2, 167–9).

<sup>93</sup> MIS 24.

<sup>94</sup> MIS 27.

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*Action*

In India and Burma, as elsewhere, much Baha'i teaching endeavour was no doubt conducted on a personal basis and not recorded. In terms of public means of action, however, one common approach was for prominent Baha'is to visit a number of cities and give lectures relating to the Baha'i Faith in schools and colleges and to sympathetic organizations. Several such tours by both Indian Baha'is and international Baha'i teachers from Iran and the West are recorded. For example, for two months (1 January–28 February 1921) immediately after the first All-India Convention in December 1920, N. R. Vakil toured northern cities (Allahabad, Benares, Calcutta, Dacca, Patna, Lucknow, Agra, Karachi), speaking in colleges and hostels on such subjects as 'Universal Peace', the 'Bahai Movement', and 'Universal Religion', visiting the Brahmo Samaj centre at Uymensingh and Rabindranath Tagore's school near Bolpur (both in Bengal), and gaining good press coverage from two English-language dailies for his lectures in Allahabad.<sup>95</sup>

Other Indian Baha'is prominent in the teaching effort included Prof. Pritam Singh, Dr Kaushal (Koshal) Kishore, Mr Hashmatu'llah Koreshi and Syed Ilmi, all of whom were specifically praised for their efforts in letters from Haifa – as in July 1926, when Shoghi Effendi's secretary stated that the competence of Hishmatu'llah [Hashmatu'llah] and Singh, combined with 'the necessary divine blessings and guidance' assured that the potential results of their teaching work would be great.<sup>96</sup> Singh appears to have been particularly energetic and successful. A university teacher who resigned from his profession in 1927 in order to devote himself full time to Baha'i activity, he travelled and lectured extensively. As the Guardian's secretary noted, Singh and his wife were firm in the Faith and possessed of 'education and intellectual training', and as such had a duty to see that the Cause was 'properly presented to the outside world' and to attract 'the choicest' class of people.<sup>97</sup>

International teachers included several Iranians – such as Mirza Mahmud Zarqani and Aqa Mirza Munir, who both visited India in 1926. Shoghi Effendi conveyed his hopes that Munir's visit would 'cause another stir' in India, drawing many individuals into 'a full understanding of the Movement'.<sup>98</sup> Of westerners, three were noted in Shoghi Effendi's letters: Mrs Jean Stannard, Mrs Florence Evelyn (Lorol) Schopflocher and Miss Martha Root.<sup>99</sup>

Stannard seems to have been resident in India for a year or so in 1923–4.<sup>100</sup> Writing in December 1923, Shoghi Effendi described her as a 'talented and untiring servant of Bahá'u'lláh', and 'our highly esteemed sister'. He would welcome 'every effort' she might exert towards obtaining 'ultimate recognition' for the Faith in India and Burma, and hoped that she would play 'a conspicuous part' in presenting it to the 'enlightened public'.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *Star* 12/13: 220–1.

<sup>96</sup> MIS 27.

<sup>97</sup> MIS 28. See also Shoghi Effendi's comments on Singh's work in MIS 42.

<sup>98</sup> MIS 32, 33.

<sup>99</sup> Published English-language sources, such as *The Baha'i World*, focus on the activities of the two North Americans, Schopflocher and Root, reports from or about the other teachers presumably not being available. Stannard, an Englishwoman whom Shoghi Effendi described as 'devoted and able' (MIS 3), later moved to Geneva, where she established the International Baha'i Bureau in 1925 (see Smith, *Concise Encyclopedia*, 'International Bahá'í Bureau').

<sup>100</sup> There is a reference in February 1923 to Mrs Stannard's work in Burma (MIS 3), and later to her 'patient' pioneering efforts in Calcutta (BW 2:147). She was still in India in December (MIS 9). By March 1925 she had evidently visited Haifa, providing 'first-hand information' on the conditions of the Faith in India (MIS 15).

<sup>101</sup> MIS 9.

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Schopflocher visited India and Burma in 1927.<sup>102</sup> By April 1927, Shoghi Effendi was beginning to receive reports of her travels, and he regarded her work as a splendid beginning on which the Indian Baha'is should follow up.<sup>103</sup> In May, he noted that her letters breathed 'a spirit of hope and triumph', although, as his secretary observed, flying from one end of India to the other was 'not sufficient' – it was necessary for a teacher to 'stay long enough in one place and start regular gatherings' for 'definite and permanent results' to be achieved.<sup>104</sup> By Schopflocher's own account of her experiences, she was able to meet a number of Indian princes and ministers, as well as academics and a prominent feminist, and to visit the Tagore school in Bolpur.<sup>105</sup> Whatever the limitations of her tour, she evidently had sufficient impact for Shoghi Effendi to consider very seriously the idea of arranging for an 'experienced' western Baha'i to visit the following year and follow up on Schopflocher's work in a 'patient and enlightened' manner.<sup>106</sup>

Finding another western Baha'i teacher to visit India was apparently not easy, and it was not until 1930 that Martha Root was able to add India to her formidable itinerary. Shoghi Effendi wrote to the national assembly, and also to Vakil, in March 1930 to say that Root would soon be with them. She was 'a great soul', and he prayed that she might 'lend a fresh and much needed impetus' to the work of consolidating and spreading the Cause. In his letter to Vakil, he urged him to do all he could to make her trip 'fruitful and profitable'.<sup>107</sup> Root arrived in Bombay in mid-May, remaining in India until 22 July, and then spending a further two weeks in Burma before departing for Singapore (7 August), en route for China. As expected, nationalist agitation was a distracting force during her tour,<sup>108</sup> but she was still able to engage in an intensive array of activities, including meetings with Indian princes, officials, women's leaders (amongst them the poet Sarojini Naidu,<sup>109</sup> who was in jail at the time for her nationalist activities) and educationalists. She donated Baha'i books to libraries, prominent individuals and others, and delivered lectures – to Parsees in Karachi, at universities, at colleges and schools, and in Theosophical Society halls and Brahma Samaj temples, these two organizations arranging meetings for her. Although her time was limited, she travelled extensively (by rail), visiting Poona, Hyderabad (in the Deccan), Surat, Karachi, Lahore,

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<sup>102</sup> MIS letters misspell her name 'Schopflocker' and 'Schopplocher' (MIS 34, 35). For Schopflocher's own account of her tour see BW 2:145–50, 'Through India and Burma' (reprinted from *Star of the West*).

<sup>103</sup> Shoghi Effendi's secretary was less complimentary, describing Schopflocher's teaching work as having 'broken the ground in many places', but as being 'hasty and in many places insufficient services', which the faithful Indian Baha'is now had to consolidate so as to produce results of 'a more permanent and lasting character' (MIS 34).

<sup>104</sup> MIS 34–6.

<sup>105</sup> BW 2:145–50.

<sup>106</sup> MIS 35–6. There may also have been a plan for an American Baha'i teacher to be based in Bombay, as Shoghi Effendi's secretary advised the national spiritual assembly in December 1929 that it would be informed when a 'suitable person' had been found (MIS 58).

<sup>107</sup> MIS 60–1.

<sup>108</sup> The independence movement entered a new phase at this time, with the civil disobedience campaign being inaugurated by Gandhi's march to the sea to protest symbolically against the government's salt monopoly (6 April 1930).

<sup>109</sup> Mrs Naidu was one of Gandhi's leading supporters and had led 2,500 volunteers in a march on the Dharasana Salt Works (15 May) in a peaceful protest that was bloodily suppressed by the authorities. Root was able to give her a set of Baha'i books, which were well received, Baha'i sources stating that Naidu later became 'a strong proponent of the Baha'i Faith'. Root also tried (unsuccessfully) to visit Gandhi, also then in prison (Mabel R. Garis, *Martha Root: Lioness at the Threshold* [Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1983] 353–4).

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Simla, Delhi, Lucknow, Benares (Varanasi), Patna, Bolpur and Calcutta in India, and Mandalay, Kunjagoon and Rangoon in Burma.<sup>110</sup>

Important though the work of these international teachers was, the temporary nature of their presence in the subcontinent necessarily limited their impact. As Shoghi Effendi's secretary noted in May 1927, after the 'good work' recently accomplished by international teachers, there was a need for resident teachers who could start regular gatherings in specific places. This was a task that fell 'naturally' to the Indian Baha'is.<sup>111</sup>

### *Sympathetic organizations*

One element of Baha'i endeavour that Shoghi Effendi repeatedly encouraged was contact with other religious organizations. This was a well established practice amongst the Indian Baha'is, repeated contacts being recorded with three groups, the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj and Theosophical Society, as well as less frequent contacts with the Ahmadiyya.

Baha'i contacts with the Brahmo Samaj can be seen as a form of elective affinity. Growing out of the teachings of the Bengali reformer Rammohun Roy (1772–1833), the Brahmo movement advocated a rationalistic reform of Hinduism based on its early scriptures and the abolition of what it considered were ignorant social practices such as widow burning (suttee). It was sympathetic to the ethical teachings of Christianity and to 'universal' religion, and advocated liberal social reformism.<sup>112</sup> Although not numerous, and in decline as a movement by the 1920s, the Brahmos offered the Baha'is a sympathetic point of contact, welcoming speakers to their temples. It is of note that the Brahmo Samaj invited Shoghi Effendi to attend their centenary in Calcutta in 1928. Shoghi Effendi asked Vakil to send someone in his stead as he himself was too busy to attend, and to make sure that arrangements were made in good time for 'duly authorized' Baha'i delegates to be present and so maintain 'the most cordial relations' between the two movements.<sup>113</sup> After the centennial, Shoghi Effendi's secretary noted that such meetings were 'wonderful occasions for showing the spirit and teachings of the Cause', Shoghi Effendi's hope being that they would provide the Baha'is with opportunities to present the teachings to persons who might be 'otherwise inaccessible for individual contact'.<sup>114</sup>

Baha'i contacts with the Arya Samaj seem stranger in doctrinal terms (because of the movement's strident Hinduism and condemnation of Islam), and were probably less long-lasting. Originating with the teachings of Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824–83), the Arya Samaj aimed to reform Hinduism by returning to what Dayananda saw as the purity of the Vedas, cutting away most of Hindu ritual, opposing child marriage, providing a means of integrating low caste and untouchable individuals into Hindu society, and promoting education – including for girls. The Aryas carried out an active missionary programme and by 1931 had close on one million members, both in India and amongst the Indian diaspora.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> BW 4:89–90, 432–3; Garis, *Martha Root* 353–8.

<sup>111</sup> MIS 36.

<sup>112</sup> Kenneth Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India. The New Cambridge History of India, III.1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 30–9.

<sup>113</sup> MIS 41.

<sup>114</sup> MIS 44.

<sup>115</sup> Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements* 95–103, 192–9.

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Jamal Effendi met with Saraswati himself in Delhi in 1877,<sup>116</sup> and subsequent contacts with the Aryas were made by Shaykh 'Abdu'r-Rahman Hindi of Damascus, Zarqani and Shaykh Muhyu'd-din Sabri. Lectures on the Faith to the Aryas of Agra led to the Baha'is being given an open invitation to attend Arya meetings, and to participate in the celebrations of the centenary of the birth of their founder at a grand conference held in Mathura, some thirty miles north of Agra, from 15 to 21 February 1925 – Shoghi Effendi conveying his interest and pleasure at learning of the invitation.<sup>117</sup> The Baha'is sent a delegation of ten, and were given their own site, labelled 'Baha'i Camp'. They delivered a lecture on the Faith, attracted large numbers of enquirers, and distributed about five thousand booklets on the Faith – the only non-Arya organization allowed to do so.<sup>118</sup>

Although founded by westerners – the Russian Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–91) and the American Colonel H. S. Olcott (1832–1907) – the Theosophical movement thrived in India from the 1880s onwards, its world headquarters being established at Adyar, south of Madras, and its leaders praising the Hindu tradition – and in the case of Annie Besant (1847–1933), taking a leading role in the Indian nationalist movement.<sup>119</sup> Teaching the universal brotherhood of all humanity and the unity of religions, and promoting education, Theosophy had obvious points of contact with the Baha'i Faith, despite its esotericism and spiritualism, and it is not surprising that Theosophical Society venues were opened to Baha'is in various parts of the world, nor that some early western Baha'is were drawn from a Theosophical background. The Baha'is seem to have found Indian Theosophy a particularly sympathetic environment for lectures, and amicable relations between the two movements continued well into the 1930s.<sup>120</sup>

The Ahmadiyya were the only Indian Islamic movement with which close Baha'i contacts were recorded. The Ahmadiyya movement was centred on the person of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908), a member of a Punjabi landowning family who, in 1890–1, had publicly claimed to be the Islamic Mahdi and the Christian Messiah. Adopting elements of a modernist view of Islam, the Ahmadiyya proved popular amongst literate, middle class Muslims. After Ghulam Ahmad's death the movement split into two rival groups based respectively in Qadiyan and Lahore.<sup>121</sup> The extent of Baha'i contact with the movement is difficult to gauge, but certainly one of the most energetic members of the Indian Baha'i community at this time (Syed Ilmi) was a convert from the Ahmadiyya (Qādiyānī), and in March 1926 Shoghi Effendi himself made special note of the teaching work amongst that community, and said he would pray specially for the success of the endeavours of the Baha'i teachers.<sup>122</sup> Again, in 1932, the Indian national assembly secretary enthusiastically portrayed the Ahmadiyya as being the Indian religious group having the closest doctrinal unity with the Faith.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Momen, 'Jamal Effendi' 52.

<sup>117</sup> MIS 15.

<sup>118</sup> BW 2:42–3.

<sup>119</sup> Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements* 167–79.

<sup>120</sup> Whilst the Baha'is responded warmly to an invitation to attend the All Faiths Conference organized by the Theosophists for their diamond jubilee celebrations in 1935, by 1937 Shoghi Effendi's secretary was referring to the Theosophists as 'opponents' of the Faith, and warning the Indian Baha'is to avoid contact with them (MIS 135, 154). In 1950 Shoghi Effendi's secretary wrote that dual membership of Theosophy and the Baha'i Faith was not permissible (MIS 312).

<sup>121</sup> Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements* 115–19, 199–203.

<sup>122</sup> MIS 25.

<sup>123</sup> BW 4:91.

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*Publications*

The Baha'is of India and Burma published a number of Baha'i books and periodicals during this period. Of books, the official Baha'i bibliography for 1930 records nine items of Baha'i literature published in Urdu (all translations: five from the writings of Baha'u'llah, two from the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, and one each of works by Isabella Brittingham, an American Baha'i, and Mirza Mahmud Zarqani) and one in Burmese ('Abdu'l-Baha's *Some Answered Questions*). Eleven items were published in Persian in Bombay.<sup>124</sup> No books were produced in India or Burma in any of the other languages of the subcontinent or in English, nor is there any record of books authored by Indian or Burmese Baha'is.

*Periodicals.* Shoghi Effendi frequently emphasized the importance of Baha'i periodicals as a means both of keeping Baha'is informed about events and developments within the Faith and of presenting the Baha'i teachings to the general public. Various such publications were produced by the Indian and Burmese Baha'is during the 1920s, but most seem to have faced production problems and to have been short lived.

The earliest Indian Baha'i periodical appears to have been the *Herald of the East* (1921–4), possibly the same publication as that referred to by Shoghi Effendi in January 1923 as the '*Baha'i News*' of India (above).<sup>125</sup> Shoghi Effendi expressed his hope that this 'representative organ' of the Indian Baha'i community would 'expand and develop' and 'widen the sphere of its correspondence', adding to 'the number and quality of its articles in Persian as well as in English', reporting regularly the news of the 'spiritual activities of all Baha'i centres in India and elsewhere', and providing for the 'full, correct and dignified presentation of the Cause to the general public'.<sup>126</sup> In June, he urged those responsible for its production to 'do their utmost' to increase the 'volume' of the magazine, 'widen' its scope, 'broaden' its outlook, 'improve' its 'style and general presentation', and reflect the activities of the Baha'is, both in India and Burma and elsewhere, 'more extensively'. As it had been 'established in the days' of 'Abdu'l-Baha, and been 'the recipient of his special favours and blessings', it would no doubt 'carry out the great plan' that it was 'destined to fulfil in this world'. It needed the 'active support' and 'constant and general supervision' of the national spiritual assembly in order to do this.<sup>127</sup> That there were problems in its production is indicated by discussion in the early months of 1925 about possible suspension of publication (a decision Shoghi Effendi placed with the national assembly) – the assembly evidently deciding for this action.<sup>128</sup>

More successful was *The Dawn* (September 1923–June 1929), a 'Monthly Baha'i Journal' of the Burmese Baha'is produced by Mustafa Roumie in English, Persian and Burmese.<sup>129</sup> Writing to its editors and publishers in February 1925, Shoghi Effendi expressed

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<sup>124</sup> BW 3:241–2.

<sup>125</sup> The *Herald of the East* (March 1921–December 1924) was edited and published by Prof. Pritam Singh at Cawnpore for the national assembly (William P. Collins, *Bibliography of English-Language Works on the Bābī and Bahā'ī Faiths, 1844–1985* [Oxford: George Ronald, 1990] 174, no. 9.257). There is no publication under the name *Baha'i News* referred to in either Collins' inventory of Baha'i periodicals (Collins 164–84) or BYB/BW 2–3. Whatever its name, Pritam Singh, Vakil, Abasi, Haji Ahmad and Hashmatu'llah from the national assembly were all associated with its production, as were Mr Ardeshir Khodadad and Mirza Niku (MIS 5).

<sup>126</sup> MIS 2.

<sup>127</sup> MIS 5.

<sup>128</sup> MIS 17. The last issue recorded in Collins, *Bibliography* is November–December 1924 (174, no. 9.257).

<sup>129</sup> BYB 103; BW 2:190; 3:227; Collins, *Bibliography* 172, no. 9.218.

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his admiration and gratitude for what they had produced. *The Dawn* was a 'valuable organ' of the Burmese Baha'i community, and had in the past 'displayed magnificent efforts' and 'earned the satisfaction and esteem of its readers'. It was now 'steadily and determinedly' coming to 'establish its claim of providing for a long-standing need and fulfilling a vital function'. He hoped that this 'cherished and promising Journal' would 'eloquently recount the tale' of the deeds of the Burmese Baha'is, acquaint Baha'is elsewhere with their 'hopes ... plans, and ... achievements', 'reflect the spirit' of their 'selfless endeavours', and 'stand as witness of the growing vitality of the noble work' that they were 'destined to achieve'.<sup>130</sup>

A third periodical seems eventually to have begun regular publication in 1929. This was the *Kaukab-i Hind* ('Star of India'), published in Urdu. Earlier attempts to get it started, in 1926, seem to have foundered. In March 1926 Shoghi Effendi stated that he was waiting eagerly to receive the first issue of the national assembly's (new) publication – presumably *Kaukab*.<sup>131</sup> In September he urged the national assembly to continue publishing *Kaukab*, even if this entailed heavily subsidizing it for the time being. It was 'of great importance' and would 'gradually show its far-reaching influence in promoting the Cause in India'.<sup>132</sup> In November, he cabled that its 'EFFECTIVE CONTINUANCE' was 'ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL', and sent 19 pounds (£19) as his 'HUMBLE CONTRIBUTION' to its cost. The Baha'is should be urged to support it.<sup>133</sup> In a separate letter to Vakil he stressed that the journal should be continued 'at all costs' and desired that it would 'play an important role in drawing the attention of the more thoughtful and seeking people to the potency' of the Baha'i Cause. He also recommended the national assembly to appoint a committee under its own 'direct supervision' to manage all matters relating to the magazine.<sup>134</sup> In December, Shoghi Effendi expressed his eagerness to hear that *Kaukab* had been re-established.<sup>135</sup> For the immediate time, however, production difficulties appear to have been insurmountable, and it was only in March 1929 that Shoghi Effendi returned to the topic of the *Kaukab-i Hind*, conveying his 'increasing interest' in its 'permanent establishment and development', and sending 9 pounds (£9) as his contribution towards its running costs. He felt that the magazine had great potential as a means of spreading the Baha'i teachings in the subcontinent.<sup>136</sup> This time the national assembly was able to get the project going, the new monthly magazine appearing regularly for at least the next decade.<sup>137</sup>

Shoghi Effendi also wanted the national spiritual assembly to publish a 'Baha'i Bulletin', similar to the newsletter put out by the American national assembly, and included it in a list of goals he set the Indian assembly in October 1926.<sup>138</sup> He returned to the issue in a letter to Vakil in December, when he emphasized that this was an objective of 'utmost importance',

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<sup>130</sup> MIS 14–15.

<sup>131</sup> MIS 25.

<sup>132</sup> MIS 30.

<sup>133</sup> MIS 31.

<sup>134</sup> MIS 32. He suggested the appointment of the two present editors – 'our Qādiyānī friends'.

<sup>135</sup> MIS 33.

<sup>136</sup> MIS 53–4.

<sup>137</sup> It was published in Delhi under the editorship of Syed Mahfuzu'l-Haq 'Ilmi ('Mawlawi Fāḍil'). It is included in the official listing of Baha'i periodicals from 1930 until 1940 (BW 3:229; 4:307; 5:478; 6:550; 7:603; 8:749). By 1944 its name had been changed to *Payambar* (Messenger) (BW 9:710–11).

<sup>138</sup> MIS 31.

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expressing the hope that contributions to the national fund would be sufficient to make it 'a truly worthy and representative Baha'i periodical'.<sup>139</sup> This suggestion appears not to have borne immediate fruit.<sup>140</sup>

Finally, we may note that a limited-circulation *Bahā'ī Weekly* was started at Lahore early in 1930 with the objective of 'popularizing the Cause' amongst English-speaking Indians.<sup>141</sup>

### *Women*

As yet, there has not been any study of the nature of early Indian and Burmese Baha'i community life, but mention should be made of one aspect of Baha'i social life with which Shoghi Effendi was evidently concerned, namely the role of women in the community. 'Abdu'l-Baha's insistence on gender equality is well known,<sup>142</sup> but the implementation of this Baha'i principle was often difficult, particularly in parts of Asia where prevailing social norms required the public subordination of women. In these circumstances, Baha'i communities in the Middle East remained conservative in their social practice, at least in part, so as not to antagonize public opinion. Thus, Baha'i men and women generally continued to be segregated in Baha'i meetings, veiling was widely practised, and women were not eligible for election to Baha'i administrative bodies. There was greater possibility for implementation of gender equality amongst the Baha'is in British India: not only was there a different legal framework, but western influences and an indigenous women's movement were much stronger.

Initially, however, the role of women in the Indian Baha'i community seems to have been quite restricted, reflecting both the cultural attitudes of the more conservative elements of the environing society and those of the Middle Eastern (particularly Iranian) Baha'i communities that provided the cultural model for many of the Indian Baha'is (themselves often either recent Iranian migrants or heavily Persianate). In this regard, all the prominent early Indian Baha'is were men (including early public speakers and the members of the first national spiritual assembly). Again, it is of note that at the 1920 Bahai Convention, despite the emphasis being given in the public talks to the Baha'i teaching on gender equality, the organizers had originally intended to open the meeting solely to men, only allowing in Indian women at the last moment after the arrival of Elizabeth Stewart, an American woman and then a pioneer Baha'i medical worker in Iran. Stewart herself believed that the inclusion of 'Native women' in a public gathering of this nature was unprecedented in India and was in itself a significant event.<sup>143</sup> For the most part, Baha'i women presumably played a supportive role as wives and child-rearers – though it seems likely that there was a difference here between India and Burma, more Burmese Baha'i women playing a prominent role at an earlier date.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> MIS 33.

<sup>140</sup> Again, there is no record of it in either Collins, *Bibliography* or volumes of *The Baha'i World*.

<sup>141</sup> BW 4:90. Its editor was Prof. Singh.

<sup>142</sup> See Smith, *Concise Encyclopedia*, 'women'.

<sup>143</sup> *Star* 12/1:23–4, 27.

<sup>144</sup> An undated photograph in BW 3 (1928–30) of the 'Service Committee' of the Mandalay local assembly shows eight women members and two men. Another photograph is of Miss Hla Hla in her academic robes (she had obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree [MIS 19]). She was a member of both the Mandalay and national assemblies (BW 3:231). This seems to contradict Khianra's statement that Shirin Fozdar was the first woman to be elected as a national assembly member, in 1936 (Khianra, *Immortals* 222). Amongst the Indian Baha'i women, the first to acquire national prominence was Shirin Irani (1905–92), a daughter of Iranian immigrant Zoroastrians who married K. M. Fozdar (Foujdar) in Bombay in 1925, and was described at the time as holding 'a unique position'

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Shoghi Effendi encouraged change in Indian Baha'i gender roles. Of particular importance was his announcement in December 1923 that henceforth all those Baha'i women who had 'already conformed to the prevailing custom' of the region and discarded the veil should be given the right both to vote for the members of their local and national assemblies and to be eligible for election to those assemblies, thus opening the way for administrative equality between Baha'i men and women in India and Burma. Limiting the franchise to the 'modernized' women who had already unveiled presumably both acknowledged the cultural conservatism of some elements of the community and served as an incentive for all Baha'i women to unveil. Certainly, Shoghi Effendi hoped that 'this momentous decision' would cause Baha'i women to 'bestir themselves and endeavour to the best of their ability' both 'to acquire a better and more profound knowledge of the Cause' and 'to take a more active and systematic part in the general affairs of the Movement'. In this way, they would prove themselves to be 'in every way enlightened, responsible and efficient co-workers' with the men, and together advance the Faith throughout the country. He trusted that the women would fully realize their 'high responsibilities in this day', 'do all in their power to justify the high hopes' that he cherished for their future, and prove themselves worthy in every way of the 'noble mission' that the Baha'i world was now 'entrusting to their charge'. Recognizing the sensitivity of the cultural issues involved, he directed that 'the greatest care and caution, prudence and thoughtfulness' should be exercised in taking 'this definite and most important step'. Again, in electing women to Baha'i office, due regard should be paid to 'their actual capacity and present attainments'. Regardless of sex and social standing, only those Baha'is who were 'best qualified for membership' should be elected to the assemblies – membership being an 'extremely responsible position'.<sup>145</sup>

## Conclusions

Given the present paucity of studies of this period of Baha'i history, the observations made in this paper can only be provisional. There is a need for further studies both of the work of Shoghi Effendi in directing and guiding the Baha'i world during these years and of the histories of individual Baha'i communities. In the case of India and Burma – as with the rest of the Baha'i world – an examination of the published messages of Shoghi Effendi is useful in pointing to the issues that he considered important and in providing some insight into the situation and responses of the local Baha'is, but much more is evidently needed before we can begin to construct a more comprehensive portrayal of these early communities.

This having been said, the 1920s were clearly an important decade of transition in Indian and Burmese Baha'i history, particularly as regards the (often difficult) establishment of a more standardized and 'national' system of Baha'i administration, the expansion of Baha'i publishing, and a crucial change in the role that women could occupy within the Baha'i community. The consequences of these developments were sometimes slow to emerge, but eventually helped to define the modern successor communities of the region.

One area of Baha'i activity that does not appear to have changed significantly during the period, however, was the 'work' of propagating the Baha'i teachings – and, for that matter, nor does there appear to have been any significant growth in the size of the community.

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in being 'the first Eastern woman to be able to speak in public in the East' (BYB 148), and who subsequently became one of the leading figures in the expansion of the Faith in Southeast Asia (Rose Ong, *Shirin Fozdar: Asia's Foremost Feminist. Vignettes from the Life of Shirin Fozdar* ([Singapore:] n.p., 2000)). Shirin's mother, Dawlat-i Iran, was the first woman elected to the Bombay local spiritual assembly, in 1920 (Khanra 219).

<sup>145</sup> MIS 10–11.

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## Shoghi Effendi's view of providential history in light of the Judaeo-Christian tradition

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### **Abstract**

*As head and Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, Shoghi Effendi Rabbani wrote on both the internal history of the Baha'i Faith since its inception in 1844 and its interactions with world events. What may be said of his view of history? A faith-based, or theologically driven, overview or meta-history emerges that highlights what he regarded as the actions of God in history and the effect of the Baha'i Faith on world events. In its broad outlines, this overview of history closely resembles the linear features of Judaeo-Christian providential history. While providential theories of history are clearly at odds with the postmodern mindset and are viewed with suspicion as extra-historical theories by academic historians, they have a long and respectable intellectual history that endures until today. This providential history deserves re-examination in light of the writings of Shoghi Effendi who, qua Guardian, wrote history from the perspective of the official head and interpreter of the Baha'i Faith. This paper will examine six defining features of his providential view. They include: 1) palingenesis and transitional history, 2) synchronization in providential history, 3) teleological history, 4) organically whole history, 5) periodization: cycles, ages and epochs, and 6) history as community identity-creation.*

### **Introduction**

Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957 CE) was the head of the Baha'i Faith from 1921 until his death in 1957. He was also appointed to be the authorized interpreter of the Baha'i scripture. His explicitly theological view of history is antithetical to, for example, Voltaire's anti-religious Enlightenment 'philosophy of history',<sup>1</sup> and later twentieth-century, postmodern, secular views of history. These secular approaches have generally substituted human will, self-determination, the faculty of reason, and random and/or material causes for the will of God, prophetic teaching and divine Providence as determining factors in the making of history. Shoghi Effendi's providential standpoint is made apparent, not only by its own internal

<sup>1</sup> Voltaire was the first to use the term 'philosophy of history' to distinguish it from theological interpretations of history in his *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756). Although scholarly opinion is divided over Voltaire's belief in God (deism, agnosticism, atheism), 'Abdu'l-Baha called Voltaire an atheist. Speaking of French nationalism, 'Abdu'l-Baha said: 'Today France glorifies Napoleon Bonaparte, saying, "He was a French military genius", whereas, in reality, he was a tyrant. They say, "Voltaire was ours", although Voltaire was an atheist. "Rousseau was a great man of this nation", and yet Rousseau was irreligious.' ('Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Baha during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, comp. Howard MacNutt, Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1982, 414). Voltaire scholar, biographer and editor, Theodore Besterman (1904–1976) (*Voltaire*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969), also believed that Voltaire was atheistic. Voltaire originated the saying: 'Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer.' ('If God did not exist, we would have to invent Him.') While he was atheistic, he did recognize a salutary effect of religion on society in that the fear of God's retribution had a tendency to curtail crime.

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evidence, but also by his copious citation of Baha'i scripture, through which he interprets both contemporary events and Baha'i history itself. He also envisions future scenarios of a peaceful and united world, an approach that is rejected in traditional historiography.<sup>2</sup> His providential view is a type of *Heilsgeschichte* (salvation history).<sup>3</sup> In a Baha'i context, this means a fully prophetic history that anticipates the fulfilment of the destiny of the human race, what he calls 'the coming of age of the entire human race',<sup>4</sup> a form of world unity as conceived and adumbrated by Baha'u'llah, the prophet-founder of the Baha'i religion. This world unity will lead ineluctably to a world 'civilization with a fullness of life such as the world has never seen nor can as yet conceive.'<sup>5</sup> Shoghi Effendi views history as both an eschaton (the kingdom of God at the end-time) and an apocalypse in which a New World Order is 'destined to rise upon the ruins of a tottering civilization',<sup>6</sup> a history that is driving toward a predetermined finis and telos – a final end and goal. While God's overlordship of history clearly predominates in this view, the necessity of a viable human response to the divine will is clearly acknowledged. While providential history is admittedly deterministic, and becomes a type of historicism,<sup>7</sup> the elements of free-will and human responsiveness remain key factors in mapping out the divine plan. In a comparative perspective, Shoghi Effendi's view of providential history shares affinities with the Judaeo-Christian belief that a positive human response to the divine will is a form of partnership with God.

It is worth noting, however, that Shoghi Effendi's letters reveal that he did not consider himself to be expert in all matters historical, whether of Baha'i or non-Baha'i history, and that he expected Baha'i historians to follow a disciplined, or scientific, approach and to settle outstanding issues in the light of their own independent research and understanding.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> By definition, for historians the study of history ends in the present.

<sup>3</sup> A usually Christian expression that has deep Judaic roots and usually refers to the redemptive acts of God to save a fallen humanity through the aegis of the Hebrew prophets and the salvific work of Jesus Christ.

<sup>4</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day Is Come*, rev. ed., (Wilmette: IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1980) 117.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 123.

<sup>6</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America 1947–1957* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1965) 39.

<sup>7</sup> Historicism has changed meaning since the 19th century when, based on the work of philosopher and historian Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), it referred to a historically and philosophically based knowledge that would apply to all human activities. Dilthey reacted against scientific, positivist ideals of knowledge. In the 20th century, through the work of Popper and Hayek, it referred to 'historical laws' that held that history had a pattern and an end that could be discovered by social science. These laws should determine political action and social policy. Popper and Hayek criticised this view as pseudo-science. Here, it refers especially to the predictive and deterministic nature of providential theories. See further 'Historicism' in Robert Audi, general editor, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> For example, regarding statements in the Book of Mormon referring to the early history of America, Shoghi Effendi wrote through his secretary, in an undated letter: 'As there is nothing specific about Joseph Smith in the teachings, the Guardian has no statement to make on his position or about the accuracy of any statement in the Book of Mormon regarding American history or its peoples. This is a matter for historians to pass upon.' (Shoghi Effendi, *High Endeavors: Messages to Alaska*, Anchorage: Baha'i Publishing Trust, National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Alaska, 1976) 71. These letters were written to individuals between 1939 and 1943. But in a letter of February 21, 1942, Shoghi Effendi wrote through his secretary: 'Joseph Smith we do not consider a Prophet, minor or otherwise. Certainly no reference he made would have foretold the coming of the Revelation in his capacity as a Prophet.' (Helen Bassett Hornby, comp., *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá'í Reference File*, 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed., no. 1611, New Delhi: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1994). However, what the Book of Mormon says about Jewish or aboriginal peoples living in North America – 'regarding American history or its peoples' – would have to be determined by historical investigation.

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### The parameters of providential history

As used here, the term providential history is defined by six conceptual elements: 1) God may never be excluded from history. 2) A divine plan may be discerned within the baffling number of events that has occurred within recorded history. 3) The prophets are the founders of civilizations, the principal educators of humanity and the main instruments of the divine plan.<sup>9</sup> 4) This divine plan drives history toward a telos or final 'end'<sup>10</sup> (goal) which is the unity of the human race and ultimately the birth of a world civilization. 5) Those events which at face value appear to be adverse (disasters, reverses, setbacks), ultimately prove to contain some hidden wisdom and are seen as 'a "providence" of God'.<sup>11</sup> 6) The principle of indeterminacy remains in the unfolding of the divine plan. Chaos and unpredictability are inherent in 'this moving drama'.<sup>12</sup>

### Historical nihilism, scepticism or the search for meaning

Karl Löwith remarks in the *Introduction to Meaning in History* (1949) that the quest for meaning in history exists precisely because it is not readily apparent: 'It is the very absence of meaning in the events themselves that motivates the quest.'<sup>13</sup> Coherent patterns in some larger picture and a moral orientation are sought within the narrative. Philosopher-historian William H. Dray, in his cogent study *Philosophy of History* (1964), identifies three types of historical theories or non-theories. These theories both affirm and deny that meaning can be found in history: 1) Historical nihilists: those who deny any meaning to history whatsoever. Meaning is *ultra vires* to the study of history (value-judgements are also excluded). 2) Historical sceptics: those who assert that we cannot know whether or not there be either pattern or meaning in history, the viewpoint of many postmodern historians. 3) Philosophers/theologians of history: they assert that both meaning and morality are intrinsic to the study of history. This last approach, dead since the Enlightenment, was revived in the 20th century and can be found, *inter alia*, in the works of the British historian Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975), the cultural anthropologist Christopher Dawson (1898–1970), the American Protestant post-liberal theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971), and earlier in the metaphysical system of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) and his dialectic of freedom and necessity.<sup>14</sup> It would also correspond to Shoghi Effendi's concept of history.

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<sup>9</sup> Point 3 is simply assumed and is not elucidated in this paper.

<sup>10</sup> The word 'end' is being used here in its functional rather than its temporal sense. In its temporal sense, the meaning of the word 'end' is not absolute. It does not mean that nothing of significance will occur after the establishment of world peace and the eventual flowering of a world civilization. In the vast reaches of future time, there will necessarily have to be other ends and purposes that are fixed by God through a divine revelator or revelators.

<sup>11</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith* 145. The context was the 1955 persecution of the Iranian Baha'is. Further to this point, see section 2b below.

<sup>12</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day Is Come* 12.

<sup>13</sup> Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949) 4.

<sup>14</sup> The point is William H. Dray's in *Philosophy of History* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc. 1964) 60–62.

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Shoghi Effendi considered that Baha'is have certain insights into the meaning of the global crises that currently afflict humanity, what he called 'this titanic upheaval'.<sup>15</sup> In his extended letter, *The Promised Day Is Come*, which was written partly in England in 1940 and completed in Haifa in 1941, he wrote:

Dear friends! The powerful operations of this titanic upheaval are comprehensible to none except such as have recognized the claims of both Baha'u'llah and the Bab. Their followers know full well whence it comes, and what it will ultimately lead to. Though ignorant of how far it will reach, they clearly recognize its genesis, are aware of its direction, acknowledge its necessity, observe confidently its mysterious processes, ardently pray for the mitigation of its severity, intelligently labour to assuage its fury, and anticipate, with undimmed vision, the consummation of the fears and the hopes it must necessarily engender.<sup>16</sup>

### **The academic rejection of providential histories**

While history has become a widely differentiated field since the 1970s, especially under the influence of postmodern 'linguistic turn' theories of language and narrative,<sup>17</sup> many traditional and postmodern historians would find any theory of providential history both outdated and unacceptable. English historian of Soviet Russia, E. H. Carr (1892–1982), a proponent of modified objectivity,<sup>18</sup> in a series of lectures given at Cambridge (January–March 1961),<sup>19</sup> spoke on the relationship between history, science and morality. Carr argued that providential history, and what he viewed as extra-historical theories like it, should find no place on any serious historian's agenda. Carr did not object to the theorist's right to 'erect a super-historical standard or criterion in the light of which judgement is passed on historical events or situations – whether that standard derives from some divine authority postulated by the theologians, or from a static Reason or Nature postulated by the philosophers of the Enlightenment.'<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless he argued:

It is not that shortcomings occur in the application of the standard, or defects in the standard itself. It is that the attempt to erect such a standard is unhistorical and

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<sup>15</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day is Come* 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid* 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ignacio Olabarri, "'New" New History: A *Longue Durée* Structure' in *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History*, (Wesleyan University, 34:1, 1995) 13. By 'linguistic turn' Olabarri was referring to the radically different sorts of histories being written under the influence of postmodern theories of language in the 1970s. Olabarri examines various schools of history (New History, *Annales* school, Marxist historiography, *Historismus* etc.) and, despite the fragmentation and disparities that have arisen in historiography in modern and postmodern times, shows that certain continuities and commonalities persist, what he calls *longue durée* structures (long duration structures).

<sup>18</sup> Carr writes: 'The facts of history cannot be purely objective, since they become facts of history only in virtue of the significance attached to them by the historian. Objectivity in history – if we are still to use the conventional term – cannot be an objectivity of fact, but only of relation, of the relation between fact and interpretation, between past, present, and future.' (*What is History?* Harmondsworth: Middlesex, England, 1961 and 1990, p. 120).

<sup>19</sup> The George Macaulay Trevelyan lectures published as *What is History?* (1961).

<sup>20</sup> Carr, *What is History?* 83.

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contradicts the very essence of history. It provides a dogmatic answer to questions which the historian is bound by his vocation incessantly to ask: the historian who accepts answers in advance to these questions goes to work with his eyes blindfolded and renounces his vocation.<sup>21</sup>

Carr's solution to this problem is a thorough-going historical relativism. All values, he argues, 'are in fact rooted in history'. 'Every group has its own values which are rooted in history.'<sup>22</sup> For Carr no absolute values exist apart from historical context. Carr's absolute – since God and/or revelation are excluded – would have to be history itself, which is, ironically, just as impervious to a facile definition as are the words God, religion and revelation. C. S. Lewis made this point by giving six different meanings to the word 'history' in his anti-historicism essay 'Historicism'.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Carr's statement that all values are themselves rooted in history begs certain questions (*petitio principii*). We have to ask ourselves, what exactly is the nature of this history that he claims is lying at the root of all values? Do the events of history create values or are they created by them? We must know what is cause and what is effect. These are not rhetorical chicken-egg questions. The theory of providential history answers that values create history and not the reverse. We will now examine six defining features of Shoghi Effendi's providential view of history.

### 1) The dual phenomenon of palingenesis and transitional history

Shoghi Effendi wrote that contemporary history is marked by a 'dual phenomenon', the simultaneous disintegration and integration of the old and new world orders. The seminal passages that speak of this dual phenomenon are central to his thought and run as a leitmotif throughout his epistolary works:

We are indeed living in an age which, if we would correctly appraise it, should be regarded as one which is witnessing a dual phenomenon. The first signalizes the death pangs of an order, effete and godless, that has stubbornly refused, despite the signs and portents of a century-old Revelation, to attune its processes to the precepts and ideals which that Heaven-sent Faith proffered it. The second proclaims the birth pangs of an Order, divine and redemptive, that will inevitably supplant the former, and within Whose administrative structure an embryonic civilization, incomparable and world-embracing, is imperceptibly maturing. The one is being rolled up, and is crashing in oppression, bloodshed, and ruin. The other opens up vistas of a justice, a unity, a peace, a culture, such as no age has ever seen. The former has spent its force, demonstrated its falsity and barrenness, lost irretrievably its opportunity, and is hurrying to its doom. The latter, virile and

<sup>21</sup> Ibid 63.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid 84.

<sup>23</sup> These meanings are: 1) the total content of time: past, present and future; 2) the past only 'in all its teeming riches'; 3) what is discoverable about the past from surviving evidence; 4) the findings of professional historians; 5) 'that version of the matter so discovered which has been worked up by great historical writers', i.e. Gibbon or Mommsen; 6) 'that vague, composite picture of the past which floats, rather hazily, in the mind of the ordinary educated man.' (C.S. Lewis, 'Historicism' in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1967) 105.

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unconquerable, is plucking asunder its chains, and is vindicating its title to be the one refuge within which a sore-tried humanity, purged from its dross, can attain its destiny.<sup>24</sup>

Shoghi Effendi was not alone in his conviction that western civilization was dying. Decades earlier, Burkhardt in Switzerland, Nietzsche in Germany, Dostoevski and Count Tolstoy in Russia and, of course, Oswald Spengler in *Der Untergang des Abenlandes* (*The Decline of the West*, trans. 1926–1928), all predicted the fall of the West.<sup>25</sup> His unique contribution was that he linked, in graphic terms, and in a magisterial language of apocalyptic certitude, such a decline to the proclamation and rejection of Baha'u'llah's revelation. Unlike Shoghi Effendi, these historians abstained from making pronouncements about the future development of a world civilization.

The motif of death and rebirth alluded to in the above passage is very ancient. While the Baha'i Faith rejects reincarnation, death and rebirth have both a scientific and conceptual usage in biology,<sup>26</sup> philosophy and theology. It was used by the Romantics as palingenesia<sup>27</sup> – the more usual biological term is palingenesis – and was employed by the Pythagoreans, among others, to indicate metempsychosis, and by Schopenhauer to designate the continued existence of the eternal will in each newborn individual.<sup>28</sup> The duality highlighted above by Shoghi Effendi is found especially in his dyadic expressions 'death pangs/birth pangs'<sup>29</sup> that characterize the twin processes that define the modern age. These sets of binary relationships are found in other passages of his writings such as the 'processes of rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other'.<sup>30</sup>

With this last phrase, Shoghi Effendi has foreshadowed one of the key ideas in modern chaos theory. What first appears to the observer to be only chaos, when viewed in a longer and larger perspective may in fact signify the emergence of a new order of things. Physicist-theologian Dr Robert J. Russell throws light on Shoghi Effendi's statement:

From a theological perspective, we can add to the view that God creates the universe through chance and law, the claim that the order God is creating is in some sense the order of quantum chaos. Rather than saying that God creates order in place of (i.e., out of) chaos, from a quantum perspective we could say that one way God creates order is through creating properties of chaos.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day Is Come* 17.

<sup>25</sup> Löwith, *Meaning in History* 98.

<sup>26</sup> In biology it refers to the exact reproduction of ancestral features in the individual (ontogenesis).

<sup>27</sup> Geoffrey Nash, *The Phoenix and the Ashes: The Baha'i Faith and the Modern Apocalypse* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1984) 132.

<sup>28</sup> 'Palingenesis' in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1959.

<sup>29</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day Is Come* 17.

<sup>30</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, first rev. ed. 1963) 61.

<sup>31</sup> Robert J. Russell is the founder and director of the Berkeley-based Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences. From 'God's Providence and Quantum Mechanics' on his website 'Physics and Cosmology'. See <http://www.counterbalance.net/physics/qmprovid-topics.html> (accessed 7 September 2004).

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The scientific, religious and mythic views converge, then, on the point that order proceeds, and must proceed, from chaos. The stark contrast between these two simultaneous processes, the one a creative affirmation of life, and the other a thanatopsis<sup>32</sup> of a doomed civilization, points to the profound truth that new life springs from death in the grand continuum that is called existence. The death of the old world order does not mean annihilation but resurrection. The same may be said of Arnold Toynbee's cyclical view of the rise and fall of civilizations and cultures. Karl Löwith reminds us that for Toynbee 'disintegration may look like growth and vice-versa'.<sup>33</sup> In the 19th century Hegel made the same observation in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1830): 'But the next consideration which allies itself with that of change, is that change, while it imports dissolution, involves at the same time the rise of a new life, that while death is the issue of life, life is also the issue of death.'<sup>34</sup>

As mentioned, erudite histories usually abstain from making predictions. The academic historian does not make it her or his business to prophesy. Apocalyptic scenarios are necessarily excluded. Shoghi Effendi's view of history includes both apocalyptic judgements and future predictions, both sombre and bright. Among others, he predicts a transition from 'brutal nationalism'<sup>35</sup> to fraternal internationalism. Of this coming new age of fraternal internationalism he wrote: 'National rivalries, hatreds, and intrigues will cease, and racial animosity and prejudice will be replaced by racial amity, understanding and cooperation.'<sup>36</sup> As mentioned above, this view points to the coming maturity of the human race as it passes through its stage of adolescence, which he called 'the most turbulent stage of its evolution...when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax.'<sup>37</sup> This passage also gives credence to his linear view of the succession of historical events in '*the Day which shall not be followed by night*'.<sup>38</sup>

The ages of its infancy and childhood are past, never again to return, while the Great Age, the consummation of all ages, which must signalize the coming of age of the entire human race, is yet to come. The convulsions of this transitional and most turbulent period in the annals of humanity are the essential prerequisites, and herald the inevitable approach, of that Age of Ages, 'the time of the end' in which the folly and tumult of strife that has, since the dawn of history, blackened the annals of mankind, will have been finally transmuted into the wisdom and the tranquillity of an undisturbed, a universal, and lasting peace, in which the discord

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<sup>32</sup> From the Greek *thanatos* (death) and *opsis* (sight), meaning a reflection or musing upon death.

<sup>33</sup> Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* 13, quoting Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London, 1934-9) 5:16, 188 ff; 6:174, n. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Cited by Löwith in *ibid* 52. The original is found in Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (London, 1900) 75 ff.

<sup>35</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* (Wilmette: IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1965) 35. The context is Shoghi Effendi's analysis of the consequences of the provisions of the Versailles Peace Treaties (1919) which contributed to the outbreak of World War II.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid* 204.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid* 202.

<sup>38</sup> The context of this scriptural saying, quoted by Shoghi Effendi without attribution, is 'Abdu'l-Baha's appointment as Head of the Faith following the ascension of Baha'u'llah: 'The continuity of that unerring guidance vouchsafed to it since its birth was now assured. The significance of the solemn affirmation that this is "*the Day which shall not be followed by night*" was now clearly apprehended.' (Italics in original) (*God Passes By*, Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1944 and 1965) 245.

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and separation of the children of men will have given way to the worldwide reconciliation, and the complete unification of the divers elements that constitute human society.<sup>39</sup>

## 2) 'Synchronization' in providential history

Once widespread in the English-speaking world but now largely obsolete, 'providence' is a word that has been resurrected in Shoghi Effendi's theological vocabulary (cf. Lat. *providere*, to foresee, Gk. *pronia*, forethought). While firmly rooted in biblical theology, it lingers on mainly in the disquisitions of theologians and philosophers of religion. The existence of Providence, which is a large topic, is usually subdivided into general and special Providence. God's providence traditionally includes three functional components: 1) preservation and 2) provision, which may be subsumed by 3) government.<sup>40</sup> Shoghi Effendi's references to 'Providence' refer mainly to God's intervention, protection and foresight *vis-à-vis* seemingly adverse events in the world as they affect the Baha'i community. Two examples follow:

### a) The outbreak of World War II

Just prior to the outbreak of World War II, in order to fortify his readers for the ordeals that were about to engulf humanity, Shoghi Effendi shared his thoughts on what he called 'synchronization' between forthcoming catastrophic world events and the gradual but steady spread of the Faith he directed. His words heartened those who were soon to face the forthcoming global conflict; they also indicated a basic component of his view of Providence. Writing to the American and Canadian Baha'i communities in 1938, Shoghi Effendi alluded to the coming war on the European continent<sup>41</sup> which was soon to break out, on 3 September 1939:<sup>42</sup> 'Who knows but that these few remaining, fast-fleeting years, may not be pregnant with events of unimaginable magnitude, with ordeals more severe than any that humanity has as yet experienced, with conflicts more devastating than any which preceded them.'<sup>43</sup> And yet, he foresaw a divine wisdom in any future hostilities and encouraged the Baha'is to remain steadfast while finding a 'synchronization' between world events and their own appointed tasks:

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<sup>39</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day is Come* 117.

<sup>40</sup> For a good general introduction to the topic see Michael J. Langford's *Providence* (London: SCM Press, 1981). General providence usually refers to the government of humanity and the universe through natural law. Special providence refers to particular *ad hoc* acts of care and guidance either of individuals, groups or communities. See Lanford, *Providence* 3.

<sup>41</sup> The ominous events of 1938 and 1939 that foreshadowed the outbreak of war were chiefly the acquisition of Austria, Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia and Memelland (the city of Memell and environs) in Lithuania by Germany, and the acquisition of Ethiopia and Albania by Italy. According to some historians, these events were violations of the Treaty of Versailles of 28 June 1919 which was, however, an oppressively vindictive treaty of 230 pages that only 'sowed the seeds of future wars'. The various peace treaties with Germany concluding the First World War were 'conceived in hatred, vengeance, hypocrisy, and force' (J. Henry Landman and Herbert Wender, *World Since 1914*, New York: Barnes and Nobles, tenth rev. ed. 1959) 41.

<sup>42</sup> England and France declared war on Germany on this date following the invasion of the western Polish corridor by German armies on August 31.

<sup>43</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice* 60.

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Far from yielding in their resolve, far from growing oblivious of their task, they should, at no time, however much buffeted by circumstances, forget that the synchronization of such world-shaking crises with the progressive unfoldment and fruition of their divinely appointed task is itself the work of Providence, the design of an inscrutable Wisdom, and the purpose of an all-compelling Will, a Will that directs and controls, in its own mysterious way, both the fortunes of the Faith and the destinies of men.<sup>44</sup>

At the end of World War II, he wrote in a cablegram of 12 May 1945:

The cessation of hostilities in the European continent signalizes yet another chapter in the tragic tale of fiery trials providentially decreed by inscrutable wisdom designed ultimately to weld the mutually antagonistic elements of human society into a single, organically-united, unshatterable world commonwealth. They gratefully acclaim the signal evidence of the interposition of divine Providence which during such perilous years enabled the World Centre of our Faith to escape what posterity will recognize as one of the gravest dangers which ever confronted the nerve centre of its institutions.<sup>45</sup>

With these words, no sharp demarcation can be made between discernible secular history and the internal and less visible sacred events associated with the development of the Baha'i Faith.

**b) The 1955 persecution of the Iranian Baha'is**

During the summer of 1955, the Iranian government and clergy launched what Shoghi Effendi called a 'premeditated campaign' of persecution against the Baha'i community, which he called one of the 'mysterious dispensations of Providence'.<sup>46</sup> Fuller details of this incident may be found in his letters of 15 August and 20 August 1955.<sup>47</sup> The persecution included the formal outlawing of the Baha'i Faith in the Majlis (parliament), the banning of Baha'i activities, the destruction of the dome of the Baha'i National Centre, and various abuses and atrocities committed in the provinces which included 'the hacking to pieces' of seven Baha'is living near Yazd, the desecration of the Bab's house in Shiraz, the occupation of Baha'u'llah's ancestral home in Takur, the plundering of shops and farms, the desecration of cemeteries, the forcible entry and looting of private homes, forced marriages to Muslims, rape and murder. Always ready to evaluate the gravity of historical events, Shoghi Effendi described this persecution as 'more grievous than any of the intermittent crises which have more or less acutely afflicted the Faith since the inception, over thirty years ago, of the Formative Age of the Baha'i Dispensation'.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid 60–61.

<sup>45</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America* 80–81.

<sup>46</sup> *Citadel of Faith* 139.

<sup>47</sup> See *Citadel of Faith* 132–142. Subsequent references to this incident are taken from these pages.

<sup>48</sup> *Citadel of Faith* 133.

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The response to the persecution was both decisive and instructive. Shoghi Effendi directed the American Baha'i Community to send appeals for protection to President Eisenhower. Local and national spiritual assemblies (the elected administrative councils of the Baha'i Faith) sent thousands of 'appeals' to the Iranian government and the Shah. Appeals were lodged with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the President of the Social and Economic Council, 'copies of which were delivered to the representatives of the member nations of the Council, to the Director of the Human Rights Division, as well as to non-governmental organizations with consultative status'.<sup>49</sup> Shoghi Effendi wrote further that the 1955 persecution led to 'widespread publicity' that had attracted 'the notice of those in high places', which he saw as a prelude to 'the emancipation of these valiant sufferers from the galling fetters of an antiquated religious orthodoxy' and which would, 'in varying measure, have its repercussions in Islamic countries, or may be even preceded by a similar phenomenon in neighbouring territories, hastening and adding fresh impetus to the bursting of the bonds that fetter the freedom of the followers of God's infant Faith'.<sup>50</sup>

In a more poetic tone, his thought on this seemingly calamitous event was expressed in the following passage:

Indeed this fresh ordeal that has, in pursuance of the mysterious dispensations of Providence, afflicted the Faith, at this unexpected hour, far from dealing a fatal blow to its institutions or existence, should be regarded as a blessing in disguise, not a 'calamity' but a 'providence' of God, not a devastating flood but a 'gentle rain' on a 'green pasture', a 'wick' and 'oil' unto the 'lamp' of His Faith, a 'nurture' for His Cause, 'water for that which has been planted in the hearts of men', a 'crown set on the head' of His Messenger for this Day.<sup>51</sup>

### 3) The Judaeo-Christian heritage: teleological history

Whatever current theories of the philosophy of history may be, or the practice of historiography itself, it is clear that Shoghi Effendi's view of history is decidedly teleological (Gr. *telos*, end, completion). Teleology lends itself to the construction of the predictive grand scheme or the meta-narrative. Both teleology and the meta-narrative have been criticized as failures by the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1924–1998) in *The Postmodern Condition*.<sup>52</sup> It did not escape the notice of the respected Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye (1912–1991) that the teleological sense has virtually disappeared in modernity: 'One of the most striking cultural facts of our time is the disappearance of this teleological sense. We tend now to think of our lives as being, like the long poem described

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<sup>49</sup> *Citadel of Faith* 136.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid* 141.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid* 139.

<sup>52</sup> Lyotard's postmodern scepticism of meta-narratives includes what are taken to be universal or ultimate truths that are embodied in various historical projects such as Marxism, the American or French revolutions, and may include such time-honoured truths as the inalienable rights of the human being, the belief in progress and 'freedom and prosperity for all'. For example, the smashing of the Berlin Wall in 1989 signified the collapse of the socialist meta-narrative. This established the 'end of story' for Marxism. See his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

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by Poe,<sup>53</sup> a discontinuous sequence of immediate experiences'.<sup>54</sup> However, the philosopher of critical realism<sup>55</sup> and poet, George Santayana, in explaining Herbert Spencer's views on evolution and substance, has argued that 'evolution must have a goal, it must unfold a germ in a determinate direction towards an implicit ideal; otherwise there would be no progress involved, no means of distinguishing changes for the better from changes for the worse'.<sup>56</sup>

In this paper, teleology means that the divine will has predetermined the end-goal of history and ultimately directs the process toward its final achievement. The origins of teleology are found in rudimentary Greek science and philosophy (Aristotelian, Platonic, Neo-Platonic),<sup>57</sup> although curiously, not in their history, which was basically oriental (i.e. mythic and cyclical). Teleological movement in history is primarily Judaeo-Christian in origin since it is seen to be moving toward the coming of the messianic kingdom, the ultimate end-point, goal and purpose of all creation. Yairah Amit, a contemporary Jewish scholar, has pointed out how the belief in a coming kingdom contrasted markedly from the mythical sense of cyclical time in the religions that preceded Judaism, whether those of Greece or India. Only Persian Zoroastrian eschatology resembled the Hebrew view of history as a drama that moved toward a final resolution, after an eschatological clash of the forces of darkness and light (good and evil) at the end of the age, with the coming of a saviour-figure (*Saoshiyant*). Amit observes:

The concept of divinity as developed in biblical literature is of a single universal deity who manifests himself in history, conducts a continuous dialogue, direct or indirect, with humankind, and is not only a cosmic divinity in command of nature, but also a kind of providence, supervising human history and directing it. This concept gave rise to a new attitude to history, which came to replace mythology.<sup>58</sup>

And what of Islam? Briefly, Islam inherited from later Judaism and Christianity, as one of its five articles of faith,<sup>59</sup> a belief in the Last Day/Day of Judgement/End of the World and bodily resurrection (*qiyāma*), although the vivid details of end-time apocalyptic scenarios

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<sup>53</sup> Frye is referring to the long poem as a genre as analysed by Poe in his essay 'The Poetic Principle.' According to Frye's interpretation of Poe, the long poem was 'a contradiction in terms' since long poems consisted of 'connective tissues of narrative or argument which were really versified prose'. Northrop Frye, *Spiritus Mundi. Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society*, (Richmond Hill, Ontario: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1991) 32.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid 33.

<sup>55</sup> The theory that the structure of reality, in addition to the physical and mental realms, also contains a third dimension of essences of substances.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted from 'The Unknowable'. From the Herbert Spencer Lecture of October, 1923 delivered at Oxford. American writer and editor Clifton Fadiman said he considered it a 'masterpiece' and Santayana wrote of the address: 'I think it is one of the most reasonable things I have written, reasonable, yet not cold, and I am encouraged to find that it has not been altogether forgotten.' (Letter to Clifton Fadiman quoted in *Reading I've Liked*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945, 211; above quotation from 215)

<sup>57</sup> In Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes (*aitia*), the final cause (*telos*) was the most important since it fulfilled the purpose or end for which the thing was made. The material, the efficient and the formal were the other three causes.

<sup>58</sup> Yairah Amit, *History and Ideology: Introduction to Historiography in the Hebrew Bible* (trans. Yael Lotan, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) 16.

<sup>59</sup> The others are: 1) belief in God, 2) belief in the angels, 3) belief in the four inspired books – the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel – of which the Qur'an is the final and most complete, 4) belief in the twenty-eight prophets of whom Muhammad is the last.

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differ. The Islamic view of the Last Day would appear to bring closure to the time-line of history. According to one Hadith (oral tradition), the Prophet held up his thumb and forefinger, making only a tiny space between them, and said: 'I and the Last Hour are like this.'<sup>60</sup> The Muslim belief in Muhammad as the 'seal' (*khātam*) and last of the prophets reinforces this idea. Islamic eschatology centres in both the judgement of the individual soul (the lesser resurrection) and the judgement of all humanity (the greater resurrection) and the cosmic rearrangement or end of the world.<sup>61</sup> The Last Day glories of heaven and the terrors of hell are graphically spelled out in the Qur'an. The Surah of Abraham, in language reminiscent of Revelation 21:1, refers to the time of the end as the creation of a new heaven and a new earth: 'On the day when the Earth shall be changed into another Earth, and the Heavens also, men shall come forth unto God, the Only, the Victorious.' (14:49) Just as for the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the nature of the new order after the return of the Mahdi and/or Jesus Christ (Īsā) points to the defeat of evil. Thus Islamic eschatology points in a sense to the 'end of history'.

The eclectic Christian existentialist philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev (1874–1948) in *The Meaning of History* (trans. 1936) has explicated the unique contribution of the Judaeo-Christian view of history. Berdyaev underscored the dramatic, dynamic and teleological nature of this theology of history that was Western civilization's biblical inheritance, one that became possible only in light of the Judaeo-Christian doctrine of free will and the freedom of humanity:

For the Jews the idea of history turns upon the expectation of some future event which will bring with it a solution of history. They are the first to demonstrate the structural character of the historical process and to become conscious of the "historical"... Christianity introduced historical dynamism and the extraordinary force of historical movement, and thus made possible a philosophy of history... History is a progression; it possesses an inner significance and mystery, a point of departure and a goal, a centre and a purpose... There would be no drama of history, no tragic development, expressing the profound clash, interaction and strife between the Divinity and mankind on the ground of freedom, if only one principle, that of natural or divine necessity were involved... But history also demands a dynamic-creative element, a creative sequence and purpose, an urge towards self-fulfilment.<sup>62</sup>

Reinhold Niebuhr in his compelling work *Faith and History* (1949) has argued cogently how the idea of the 'one story' for humanity has developed from the belief in 'a single divine sovereignty',<sup>63</sup> the 'single universal deity' mentioned above by Amit. Niebuhr argues:

History is conceived as unity because all historical destinies are under the dominion of a single divine sovereignty... It would seem, therefore, that the story of mankind

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<sup>60</sup> Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (St Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House, 1994) 202.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid 203.

<sup>62</sup> Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Meaning of History* (London : Geoffrey Bles: the Centenary Press, 1936) 28, 33, 34, 37, 39.

<sup>63</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949) 107.

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is progressively becoming one story, both through an actual growth in cultural penetration and through the development of historical sciences, able to trace and analyse such interpenetrations.<sup>64</sup>

While Niebuhr's comment reflects on the Judaeo-Christian view of a Kingdom of God that governs the entire world, it is also coherent with the Baha'i view of providential history which is precisely a meta-history that shifts the focus away from the nationalistic, military or technical prowess of particular nations to concentrate instead on the story of the development of one human family.

Seminal texts in Shoghi Effendi's writings may be found that bear on the theme of the fulfilment of the end-goal of history, which he called 'the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man's collective life on this planet'. The following one announces the promise and fulfilment of this final end:

The Revelation of Baha'u'llah, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the coming of age of the entire human race. It should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man's collective life on this planet. The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture – all of which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden Age of the Baha'i Era – should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop.<sup>65</sup>

#### 4) Organically whole history

One of the central concepts of the seventh *World Order* letter, 'The Unfoldment of World Civilization', is that of 'this organic and spiritual unity',<sup>66</sup> also described simply as 'organic unity'.<sup>67</sup> This key phrase applies both to the structure and operation of the Baha'i Administrative Order and the future unified body of nations. It is coherent with that of the 'living organism' mentioned in the second *World Order* letter, 'The Goal of a New World Order' (1930). To speak of organic unity is to invoke holism, a word that was coined by the South African statesman and general, Field Marshal J. C. Smuts (1870–1950) in his philosophical treatise *Holism and Evolution* (1926). However, in a religion whose scriptures also promote 'unity in diversity', it is important to note that the philosophy of holism is not

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid 107–108.

<sup>65</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 163.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid 163.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid 195.

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synonymous with an undifferentiated wholeness. Holism conceals, moreover, an unsuspected moral character as indicated by Shoghi Effendi's maxim, based on 'Abdu'l-Baha's teachings, that 'the welfare of the part means the welfare of the whole, and the distress of the part brings distress to the whole'.<sup>68</sup>

Organic unity is intrinsic to Shoghi Effendi's view of Baha'i history as an organic whole: it unfolds in a developmental process that is orderly, holistic and evolutionary. He wrote in *God Passes By* (1944) that the four periods he first identified in the first Baha'i century were all interdependent and interconnected:

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... These four periods are to be regarded not only as the component, the inseparable parts of one stupendous whole, but as progressive stages in a single evolutionary process, vast, steady and irresistible. For as we survey the entire range which the operation of a century-old Faith has unfolded before us, we cannot escape the conclusion that from whatever angle we view this colossal scene, the events associated with these periods present to us unmistakable evidences of a slowly maturing process, of an orderly development, of internal consolidation, of external expansion, of a gradual emancipation from the fetters of religious orthodoxy, and of a corresponding diminution of civil disabilities and restrictions.<sup>69</sup>

### 5) Periodization: cycles, ages and epochs<sup>70</sup>

While periodization is an accepted commonplace of the historical method, philosopher, historian and archaeologist of Roman Britain R. G. Collingwood (1889–1943) observed in *The Idea of History* (1946), in his remarks on medieval historiography: 'Now, the attempt to distinguish periods in history is a mark of advanced and mature historical thought, not afraid to interpret facts instead of merely asserting them.'<sup>71</sup> As was pointed out in point 4 above,

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<sup>68</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day Is Come* 122.

<sup>69</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* xiv-xvi.

<sup>70</sup> 'The first seventy-seven years of the preceding century, constituting the Apostolic and Heroic Age of our Faith, fell into three distinct epochs, of nine, of thirty-nine and of twenty-nine years' duration, associated respectively with the Babi Dispensation and the ministries of Baha'u'llah and of 'Abdu'l-Baha. This Primitive Age of the Baha'i Era, unapproached in spiritual fecundity by any period associated with the mission of the Founder of any previous Dispensation, was impregnated, from its inception to its termination, with the creative energies generated through the advent of two independent Manifestations and the establishment of a Covenant unique in the spiritual annals of mankind. 'The last twenty-three years of that same century coincided with the first epoch of the second, the Iron and Formative, Age of the Dispensation of Bahā'u'llāh – the first of a series of epochs which must precede the inception of the last and Golden Age of that Dispensation – a Dispensation which, as the Author of the Faith has Himself categorically asserted, must extend over a period of no less than one thousand years, and which will constitute the first stage in a series of Dispensations, to be established by future Manifestations, all deriving their inspiration from the Author of the Baha'i Revelation, and destined to last, in their aggregate, no less than five thousand centuries.' (*Citadel of Faith* 4–5).

<sup>71</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956) 53. While Collingwood recognized the advances in periodization made by Christian historians, a clear advance over Graeco-Roman

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Shoghi Effendi has provided for the Baha'i community its own periodization, a basic technique of historiography.

His demarcation of periods was expanded to include the Baha'i Era itself and its ages. Following the teachings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, he wrote that the Declaration of the Bab marked the beginning of the Baha'i Era and the inauguration of a new cycle in human history which is to last, according to 'Abdu'l-Baha in a tablet to a Zoroastrian believer, some 500,000 years: 'May 23, 1844, signalizes the commencement of the most turbulent period of the Heroic Age of the Baha'i Era, an age which marks the opening of the most glorious epoch in the greatest cycle which the spiritual history of mankind has yet witnessed.'<sup>72</sup>

Then we have the assignment of ages. The first age is called 'the Heroic, the Primitive or the Apostolic Age'. The second age is called variously 'the Formative, the Transitional', or 'Iron Age'.<sup>73</sup> The third age is the Golden Age. As mentioned in point 4 above, he devotes a not inconsiderable portion of the foreword of *God Passes By* to the establishment of 'periods' (pp. xiii-xvi), by assigning four of them to the first century of the Baha'i Era (1844-1944). He thus supplies a useful gauge by which Baha'is may situate themselves within the temporal flux of their dispensation. Periodization serves two other useful purposes: it allows for the assessment of past events in order to better understand their import and it sensitizes to the necessity of seizing present opportunities since they in turn will become the 'stuff of history'.

A 'vital link' has connected these three ages. The *Will and Testament* of 'Abdu'l-Baha 'has forged the vital link which must for ever connect the age that has just expired [Primitive/Apostolic/Heroic Age] with the one we now live in - the Transitional and Formative period of the Faith'.<sup>74</sup> Shoghi Effendi's assurance in the ultimate success of the Baha'i Faith is based on his belief that it is rooted in the fertile soil of what the Greek fathers of the apostolic church called the *logos spermatikos*,<sup>75</sup> which alluded to the fecundating power of the Holy Word. Seed imagery is not, of course, exclusive to the Christian tradition. Just as the Bab referred to the Bayan as being in the stage of seed,<sup>76</sup> Shoghi Effendi used this seed imagery to indicate evolution or gradation, as he depicted the gradual unfoldment of the three ages of the Babi-Baha'i Faith: 'The period in which the seed of the Faith had been slowly germinating [Heroic Age] is thus intertwined both with the one which must witness its efflorescence [Formative Age] and the subsequent age in which that seed will have finally yielded its golden fruit [Golden Age].'<sup>77</sup> Needless to say, this is an image of organic wholeness.

In addition to assigning periods and ages, Shoghi Effendi has also subdivided these ages into epochs. The Universal House of Justice determined, in its message of 16 January 2001 to the Baha'is of the world, that they were entering the fifth epoch of the Formative

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histories, he rejects any appeal to God or revelation as determining any future outcome to history as being methodologically unhistorical.

<sup>72</sup> Shoghi Effendi *God Passes By* 3.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid xiii.

<sup>74</sup> Shoghi Effendi, 'The Dispensation of Bahā'u'llāh' in *World Order* 98.

<sup>75</sup> Reinhold Bernhardt, 'Interreligious Images and Parables', *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 5/1 (1995) 63.

<sup>76</sup> 'Today the Bayan is in the stage of seed; at the beginning of the manifestation of "Him Whom God shall make manifest" its ultimate perfection will become apparent.' Quoted by Shoghi Effendi in 'The Dispensation of Baha'u'llah' 100.

<sup>77</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 144.

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Age.<sup>78</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this paper to give a detailed account of the determination of these epochs,<sup>79</sup> one must bear in mind the following point in order to avoid confusion. A two-track chronology of epochs is unfolding concurrently. While each of the three great ages of the Baha'i Faith is subdivided into epochs, 'Abdu'l-Baha's Divine Plan, as contained in the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* to the North American Baha'is (1916–1917), inaugurated another series of epochs.<sup>80</sup> The dates of the first epoch of this Divine Plan are 1937–1963, corresponding to the inception of the First Seven Year Plan (1937–1944) and concluding with the Ten Year World Crusade/Plan (1953–1963). The Baha'is are currently in the second epoch of 'Abdu'l-Baha's Divine Plan, begun in 1964 with the Nine Year Plan of the Universal House of Justice.

Such an assignment of ages and epochs is not, of course, without precedent in religious history. St. Augustine in *The City of God (Civitas Dei)*, which narrated the history of the world from creation to the Last Judgement, and which attacked both the cyclical theory of history and the special destiny of Rome, assigned a scheme of six ages based on divisions of Old Testament history, with each age supposing to last for a thousand years, although Augustine later softened this rigidity. The seventh age is eternity. Augustine more or less absorbed these ages into the simpler scheme of the three eras: 1) the pre-mosaic, or pre-legal, 2) the legal, which corresponded to the Mosaic Dispensation, 3) the Era of Grace, i.e. the Christian Dispensation. He also assigned to his periodization the Four World Monarchies (Assyria, Persia, Greece and Rome), with Christ's kingdom being the Fifth Monarchy. His new scheme was, of course, the two cities that coexist in history, Babylon and Jerusalem, the earthly and the heavenly cities, of which all human beings are members.<sup>81</sup>

## 6) History as identity creation: the North American Baha'i Community

Shoghi Effendi's writings contributed to the Baha'i community a strong sense of its own historical consciousness. This is particularly true of the North American Baha'i community. In both *The Advent of Divine Justice* (1939) and 'America and the Most Great Peace' (1933), the fifth *World Order* letter, he sets out the 'mission' and signal accomplishments of the North American Baha'is, whom he calls 'the spiritual descendants of the dawn-breakers of an heroic Age'<sup>82</sup> and the 'champion-builders of the World Order of Baha'u'llah'.<sup>83</sup> He describes them as holding a position of 'undisputed leadership'<sup>84</sup> in the Baha'i world. Pre-eminent among these accomplishments is the establishment of the administrative order on

<sup>78</sup> 'With a spirit of exultation we are moved to announce to you: the Faith of Baha'u'llah now enters the fifth epoch of its Formative Age.'

<sup>79</sup> For a detailed account, see the memorandum of 5 February 1986, prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice and forwarded to all National Spiritual Assemblies, in *Bahā'ī Canada*, vol. 13 (Jamal BE158/April 2001), no. 12, pp. 13–16.

<sup>80</sup> *Baha'i News*, March 1953, 265:4. Letter dated 18 January 1953 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, cited in a memorandum of the Research Department of 5 February 1986.

<sup>81</sup> This paragraph has been summarized from Isabel Rivers, *Classical and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979) 59.

<sup>82</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Advent of Divine Justice* 6.

<sup>83</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 74.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid* 72.

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the North American continent and around the world, and America's mission as the leading nation in the establishment of world peace.

It is the identity-creating function of such passages that I emphasize here, rather than the pre-eminence of the North American Baha'i community. Sociologists of religion usually understand identity as a function of the individual's belonging to a religious community. Yet it is no less true that identity is also a function of the community's collective self-consciousness, particularly of its historical and doctrinal self-consciousness. Just as an individual's sense of identity undergoes change and development, the same is true of community identity. In his praises of the North American Baha'i community's recent achievements, Shoghi Effendi produced a transformation of its historical consciousness. In his eulogies, which find their origin in the writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi largely created a sense of Baha'i community identity.

In the subsection entitled 'Chief Remaining Citadel', in the opening pages of *The Advent of Divine Justice* (1939), Shoghi Effendi made a major statement on the historical achievements of the North American Baha'is. The following passage is only the preamble to a much longer eulogy, one that is framed by no less than thirteen rhetorical questions. Along the lines of Arnold Toynbee's 'challenge and response' causal factor in the rise and persistence of civilizations,<sup>85</sup> this preamble establishes the record of the North American Baha'is, despite the considerable obstacles and handicaps that confronted them in their early days. Each clause addresses a particular handicap or obstacle that has been faced and successfully overcome:

A community, relatively negligible in its numerical strength; separated by vast distances from both the focal-centre of its Faith and the land wherein the preponderating mass of its fellow-believers reside; bereft in the main of material resources and lacking in experience and in prominence; ignorant of the beliefs, concepts and habits of those peoples and races from which its spiritual Founders have sprung; wholly unfamiliar with the languages in which its sacred Books were originally revealed; constrained to place its sole reliance upon an inadequate rendering of only a fragmentary portion of the literature embodying its laws, its tenets, and its history; subjected from its infancy to tests of extreme severity, involving, at times, the defection of some of its most prominent members; having to contend, ever since its inception, and in an ever-increasing measure, with the forces of corruption, of moral laxity, and ingrained prejudice – such a community, in less than half a century, and unaided by any of its sister communities, whether in the East or in the West, has, by virtue of the celestial potency with which an all-loving Master has abundantly endowed it, lent an impetus to the onward march of the Cause it has espoused which the combined achievements of its coreligionists in the West have failed to rival.<sup>86</sup>

In this and similar passages, Shoghi Effendi held up a mirror in which this community doubtless saw itself reflected for the first time. This passage, and others like it, also provided

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<sup>85</sup> The challenge and response factor in making history belongs to Toynbee's theory of the 'genesis of civilizations' in his monumental 10-volume work, *A Study of History*. See II:V, 'Challenge and Response', in D. C. Somervell's abridgement (2 vols., New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1947) 1:60–79.

<sup>86</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* 6–7.

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a summary or outline of American Baha'i history which future historians can use as the basis for their research.

### **Conclusion**

I have argued in this paper that Shoghi Effendi's writings reflect a dynamic and coherent concept of history which is consistent in its main features with the Judaeo-Christian understanding of providential history. While Shoghi Effendi's view of modern history remains at odds with current postmodern theories and academic approaches, which reject grand narratives and predictive teleological schemes, these elements are clearly present in his concept. While it retains its own originality, his view adapts, prolongs and offers itself as the fulfilment of the ancient Judaeo-Christian view of the coming kingdom. As one theory among others, providential history ensures that history continues to be viewed as the result of prophetic teaching and divine intervention rather than the product of purely secular causes and effects. In Shoghi Effendi's view, God is no *deus absconditus*.

# Textual Resurrection: Book, Imam and Cosmos in the Qur'an Commentaries of the Bab

VAHID BROWN

## **Abstract**

*As a commentator on the canonical texts of Islam, the Bab was a highly innovative and creative reader. In what follows, the radical notions of textuality underlying the Bab's Qur'anic commentaries are discussed. Drawing upon categories from contemporary literary studies, a framework is provided for a discussion of textuality. The history of Qur'anic commentary in Islam is then discussed in light of these categories, focusing on elements in Akhbārī Shi'i religious thought that can be seen to underpin the Bab's novel approach to the Qur'anic text. Far from being traditional commentaries, it is then argued, the Bab's readings of the Qur'an were messianic performances, enunciations of an eschatological restoration of the Imam, the cosmos, and of the Qur'an itself.*

In the first half of his prophetic career, textual interpretation loomed large as the principal focus of the Bab's writings.<sup>1</sup> From the early commentary on *Sūrat al-baqara*, to the reported nine full Qur'an commentaries written while he was imprisoned in Maku, the Bab returned again and again to explicating the scriptural sources of Islam.<sup>2</sup> No one has contributed more to our understanding of these commentaries than Todd Lawson, who in many fine studies has illuminated the Bab's relationship to the Shi'i exegetic tradition and drawn out the subtler points of what could be called the Bab's metaphysics of interpretation.<sup>3</sup> Building on Lawson's work, this study focuses on the notions of textuality implied in the Bab's commentaries, or the theoretical assumptions regarding reading and meaning that underpin the Bab's elevation of textual interpretation to the level of messianic act. I will first introduce a number of key concepts from modern literary theory regarding interpretation and

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Michigan 'Irfan Colloquium in October 2003 and subsequently published in *Lights of 'Irfan: Papers Presented at the 'Irfan Colloquia and Seminars* (book 5, ed. Iraj Ayman, Evanston, IL: Haj Mehdi Memorial Fund, 2004) 41–58. I would like to thank Dr Ayman for the kind invitation to participate in that gathering. Thanks are also due to the people who provided helpful feedback on the paper at various stages of its development, especially Sara Brown, William McCants, Khazeh Fananapazir, David Bikman, and Todd Lawson.

<sup>2</sup> On the Bab's *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Baqara*, see T. Lawson, 'The Qur'ān Commentary of Sayyid 'Alī Muḥammad, the Bāb', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1987, part one; on the (lost) Qur'ān commentaries penned at Maku, see D. MacEoin, *Sources for Early Bābī Doctrine and History: A Survey* (Leiden: Brill, 1992) 88.

<sup>3</sup> I refer extensively to Lawson's studies in subsequent footnotes, so will not list his publications here. Another important study relevant to the Bab's approach to interpretation is Armin Eschraghi, *Frühe Šaiḥī- und Bābī-Theologie: Die Darlegung der Beweise für Muḥammads besonderes Prophetentum (Ar-Risāla fī Ithbāt an-Nubūwa al-Khāṣṣa)* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), which unfortunately appeared too late to be made use of in this paper.

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reader-reception, and will then briefly explore Islamic exegesis in terms of these concepts. This will provide the critical context against which I will attempt to define the semiological contours of the Bab's messianic readings.

It would be useful to begin with a framework of textuality, a spectrum of the kinds of readings that can be and are produced. One way of defining such a spectrum is to invoke the concepts of the worlds behind and in front of the text.<sup>4</sup>

The world behind the text is the world that generated and produced the text, and of course the author looms large in this world. When our attention is focused on the world behind the text, our assumption is that the text *represents* a single authorial intention. The text is a surface of 'signifiers', and the author's communicative intention is 'the signified'. Any interpretive practice that starts from this assumption will look to various features of the world behind the text in order to test or confirm the success of the interpretive movement from the signifying text to the apprehension of the signified intention. Among the features of the world behind the text that this kind of interpretation would most likely attend to include the author's biography, the historical circumstances, the contemporary character of the language, and intertextuality (the allusive relationship between this text and other texts that came before it). These features might be thought of as boundaries of the author's intention, boxing in what we, as the interpreters, may legitimately assume to have been the author's intended meaning.

Interpretation centred on the world behind the text assumes weak readers, which is to say that it does not assign to readers a very active or strong role in the production of meaning. The *meaning* is what the author *meant* or intended to communicate, and thus the author and the text are the strong elements in the reader/text interaction. The text is a static structure, its referential, representational, and informative nature pointing to a meaning that is stable and determinate.

The world in front of the text is the world in which the text is received, and this world is populated by readers. It is the ever-changing world of readers in history, who successively encounter the text as well as the various 'imaginaries' that have accumulated around the text in the process of the previous readings. By 'imaginaries' I mean the nebulas or auras that surround a text at any given moment in the history of its reception, auras comprising such things as the book's fame, the concretized evaluation of its worth or general meaning, its assignment to genre and labelling as to literary conventions and so forth. Imaginaries are networks of symbols or associated ideas that serve as screens or lenses through which a text is experienced, and they create expectations in the reader as to what he or she is likely to find in a text. Take *Moby Dick*, for example. Its earliest critics could not decide what it was: a romance, a novel, a philosophical enquiry, an adventure tale. But in the course of its history, certain imaginaries have surrounded it, such that we now will 'know', even before picking it up, that it is, first of all, a novel, second, a great novel, and third, a great metaphorical novel. This imaginary of *Moby Dick* will impinge upon our reading of the book, and our reading of it will be very different from those of its earliest readers, who did not read it through the same screen as we do. As Moshe Idel puts it:

Books, especially famous books, possess auras that may enwrap them long before most of their readers open them. The social imagination of certain elites prepares the ground for the acceptance, dissemination, and depth of influence of a book even before it has

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<sup>4</sup> My definition and use of these concepts is inspired by, but not identical to, Paul Ricoeur's notion of the 'world of the text'. See his *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (ed. Mark Wallace, trans. David Pellauer, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) 240f.

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been conceived by its author. Even more so in the case of books dealing with religious topics that already permeate the faith of many individuals and the praxis of groups and movements. These books, which are founding documents of a religion, ideology, or intellectual movement – that is to say, canonic – are rarely consumed as pure literature and only seldom are able to evince their ‘proposed worlds’ without the mediation of the imaginary that surrounds them and has been accumulated over the centuries and has conferred on them their particular status.<sup>5</sup>

Much has been written in recent literary theory about the world in front of the text and the role of the reader in the process of producing meaning in textual transactions. The significant trend in this literature is the shifting of focus from authorial intention and a view of the text as a static and determinative signifier toward a view of the ever-changing ‘concretizations’ (to use Ingarden’s term)<sup>6</sup> of textual possibilities in the active and constitutive encounter between readers and texts. Whether in so-called reader-response criticism, deconstruction, or reception aesthetic, these theoretical strategies recognize that texts do, in fact, mean many different things in the course of their various receptions, and that the richness of language itself, in its constant historical flux, outweighs the mastery or manipulation of language held by any author. The author, in other words, may have had a single intention, but language itself cannot be so easily reined in. No reader can interact with an author’s intention, but readers do interact with language in the text, and this language holds within it and in its dynamic history the possibilities of many, many meanings indeed.

To illustrate the idea of the world in front of the text, consider that, in modern Baha’i readings, a given work of Baha’u’llah is generally read with such questions as what ‘Abdu’l-Baha, the appointed interpreter, said or wrote about it, what Shoghi Effendi wrote about it, what stories have been passed down from Hands of the Cause regarding the text, and so forth. The prior readings by these figures condition current Baha’i readings of the Tablets of Baha’u’llah but are not related, in the conventional sense, to the world behind the text, to authorial intention. They create horizons of expectation (to use Jauss’s idiom)<sup>7</sup> within which a given Tablet of Baha’u’llah is situated in this act of reading. Modern Baha’is embody an interpretive community, operating in the world in front of the text, that is constituted by a set of imaginaries posterior to the text itself, and thus not likely to be involved in a reading of the Tablets of Baha’u’llah by another interpretive community.

I would like to turn now to the Bab’s readings, and give here an illustrative example of the Bab’s highly unusual approach to interpreting the Qur’an. Here then, are three passages: the first is the Sūrat al-‘Aṣr from the Qur’an; the second is an abridgement of a classical Sunni commentary on this surah by Ibn Kathīr; the third is a provisional translation of a brief selection from the Bab’s lengthy commentary on the same surah.

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<sup>5</sup> Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002) 112.

<sup>6</sup> See Roman Ingarden, ‘On the Cognition of the Literary Work of Art’, in *The Hermeneutics Reader* (ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, New York: Continuum, 1997) 187–213 (see 193).

<sup>7</sup> See Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (trans. Timothy Bahti, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982). See also Jane McAuliffe, ‘Text and Textuality: Q. 3:7 as a Point of Intersection’, in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur’an* (ed. Issa Boullata, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000) 56–76 (see 69 and 75 n. 76).

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**A) *The Sūrat al-‘Aṣr, Qur’an 103 (Rodwell translation)***

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

- 1] I swear by the declining day!
- 2] Verily, man’s lot is cast amid destruction,
- 3] Save those who believe and do the things which are right, and enjoin truth and enjoin steadfastness on each other.

**B) *From Ibn Kathir’s Commentary***

Verse 1: That is, the ages during which the deeds – both good and bad – of the sons of Adam take place. Malik said that it refers to the time of ‘aṣr prayer, but the first explanation is more correct.

Verse 2: God swears by it (time) that mankind is in loss, that is misfortune and ruin.

Verse 3: God excludes those of mankind who believe sincerely with all their hearts and do good deeds with their hands. That is, in the face of misfortune or calamity, the things which have been decreed for us and the persecution by those who would seek to harm whoever orders the good and forbids the evil. According to aṭ-Ṭabarānī, whenever any two Companions of the Prophet met, they would not part, until one of them had recited to the other Surat al-‘Asr and then delivered salutations upon him. Ash-Shafī‘ī said: ‘If the people were to ponder on this surah, it would be sufficient for them.’<sup>8</sup>

**C) *From the Bab’s Tafṣīr wa’l-‘Aṣr (min Sūrat al-‘Aṣr)***

(These are commentaries on each of the three Arabic letters in the word ‘Aṣr – meaning ‘time’, ‘age’, and ‘afternoon’ or ‘declining day’ – which are ‘ayn, ṣād, and rā’, respectively. These are the fourth, fifth, and sixth letters of the first verse.)

Then the fourth letter is ‘ayn, [1] the loftiness [‘uluw – which starts with the letter ‘ayn] of God’s Exclusive Unity [*al-aḥadiyya*] in the station of the Realm of Divinity [*lāhūt*]; [2] then the loftiness of Inclusive Unity [*al-wāḥidiyya*] in the states of the Empyrean of Power [*jabarūt*]; [3] then the loftiness of Existentiating Mercy [*raḥmāniyya*] in the stations of the Kingdom and its Estates [*mulk wa’l-malakūt*]; [4] then the loftiness of Eternal Glory [*ṣamadāniyya*] in what God hath self-manifested unto all, in all, in the realities of the souls and horizons, of the earth of the Realm of Humanity [*nāsūt*].

Then the fifth letter is ṣād, [1] the stations of the theophanic Eternal Glory [*ṣamadāniyya*] in the essential inner-beings of the inhabitants of the Divine Realm [*lāhūt*]; [2] then the radiant, sanctified, and theophanic Eternal Glory in the abstract essences of the inhabitants of the Empyrean of Power [*jabarūt*]; [3] then the gleaming, wondrous Eternal Glory in the veridical identities of the inhabitants of the Kingdom and its Estates [*mulk wa’l-malakūt*]; [4] then that Eternal Glory which is reflected from the first of the four levels of the divine Act, and which God sent down as manifest apparitions into the spiritual realities of the inhabitants of the Realm of Earthly Humanity [*nāsūt*].

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<sup>8</sup> Abridged translation of Ibn Kathir’s commentary on Surat al-‘Asr, from *Tafṣīr al-Qur’ān al-Karīm l-Ibn Kathīr*, online at <<http://www.muslimaccess.com/quraan/tafseer/103.htm>> (cited 9 December 2004).

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Then the sixth letter is *rā'*, [1] the universal mercy [*raḥmat al-kullīyya*] by which God created the Will by itself and before all things, which He then made to be the cause of the totality of the essences. [2] Next, it is the mercy of Inclusive Unity, by which God created the souls that are comprehended in the knowledge of the Book. [3] Next, it is the universal revealed mercy in the station of Determination [*qadar*], a billowing, surging, fathomless sea in which the judgements of character are marked out. The happy are gladdened by recognition of the abode which God hath created in the furthest limits of this station, while the miserable are saddened by their incognizance of what God hath revealed in that billowing, surging and fathomless sea. [4] Next, it is the mercy which encompasses all things, which God made to be as a well of a hundred portions [*juz'*], just as is explained by 'Askari [the eleventh Imam] in his commentary on the name of God the Compassionate [*ar-raḥīm*]: 'Only a single portion of compassion is found in this world, and ninety-nine portions are God's mercy upon His servants on the day of Resurrection, according to what He hath Purposed and Determined in the Book.' This all-embracing mercy encompasses believers and infidels, and indeed all things. It is that mercy that existentiates and essentiates the essential substances of all possible beings. Verily, God hath made the bearer of that mercy at that station to be Husayn, and therefore he (may my spirit and those of all who dwell in the kingdoms of command and creation be his sacrifice) intercedes with God on the day of Resurrection with an intercession such as no one whosoever has its like. May God bestow upon me, and upon whomsoever desires the meeting with Him, his intercession on the day of Reckoning. Verily, He is the Ever-Forgiving, in the beginning and in the end.<sup>9</sup>

The Bab, from this example, may appear to us as a rather unusual reader (of the text of the Qur'an). What notion of text might lie behind such an approach to 'interpretation'; what, in other words, can we say about the Bab's textuality on the basis of passages like these? What, for the Bab, is the process of reading, and what place does *meaning* have in this interaction of reader and text? Obviously, the Bab's commentary is pursuing very different interpretive strategies from Ibn Kathir's, based upon entirely different semiotic assumptions. In order to provide some context from which to approach these questions, I would like at this point to explore very briefly and further define these different textualities with reference to the history of Qur'anic commentary (*tafsīr*). In what follows, my schematization of this history will be necessarily over-simplified.<sup>10</sup> My general characterizations of periods and phases of commentary literature would not hold for every author in the given period, but I think they are nonetheless true to the general trends in the history of this literature.

The classical Sunni commentary literature, exemplified first and foremost by Ṭabarī, and crystallized in its most conservative form in Ibn Kathir, was overwhelmingly concerned with the world behind the text. Every scrap of information or detail about the life of Muhammad and his nascent community that could be seen as relevant to a specific verse or surah was scrupulously sought out and gathered together. The *asbāb an-nuzūl*, or specific circumstances

<sup>9</sup> Bab, Siyyid 'Ali Muhammad Shirazi, *Tafsīr Sūrat wa'l-'Asr*, University of Michigan British Manuscript Project Microfilm 745 (1). Digitally published in facsimile (Lansing, MI: H-Bahai, 1998) 36–39. Available at <<http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/bab/S-Z/sharhasr/asr.htm>>. All references to the Bab's *Tafsīr Surat wa'l-'Asr* will be to this MS. All translations are provisional and my own, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>10</sup> For a much richer exploration of the developments in *tafsīr* as a genre of Islamic letters, see Norman Calder, 'Tafsīr from Tabari to Ibn Kathir: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham', in *Approaches to the Qur'an* (ed. Gerald Hawting and Abdul-Kadeer Shareef, London and New York: Routledge, 1993) 101–40.

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of the revelation of a given verse, were likewise of central importance to the interpretive project of these early commentators (*mufasssirūn*), and the voluminous commentaries of these authors are teeming with them. Similarly, exempla of Arabic grammar and its lexicon were teased out of every available specimen of pre-Islamic poetry and Arabic literature, in an attempt to situate the linguistic usages of the Qur'an in their contemporary environment. These writers were following the assumption that the Qur'an was stable in meaning, that its *correct* interpretation could be obtained along the lines they pursued in their researches into the world behind the text. The early interpretation of a specific Qur'anic passage that well illustrates this is in the exegesis of Qur'an 3:7, of which I give here two translations:

It is He who sent down upon you the Book, wherein are clear verses [*muḥkamāt*] that are the Mother of the Book, and others that are ambiguous [*mutashābihāt*]. As for those in whose heart is deviation, they follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension, and desiring its interpretation [*ta'wīl*]; *and none knows its interpretation save only God. And those firmly rooted in knowledge say, 'We believe in it; all is from our Lord'; yet none remembers, but men possessed of minds.*

It is He who sent down upon you the Book, wherein are clear verses [*muḥkamāt*] that are the Mother of the Book, and others that are ambiguous [*mutashābihāt*]. As for those in whose heart is deviation, they follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension, and desiring its interpretation [*ta'wīl*]; *and none knows its interpretation save only God and those firmly rooted in knowledge. They say, 'We believe in it; all is from our Lord'; yet none remembers, but men possessed of minds.*<sup>11</sup>

These two translations of this verse are obviously very different, the meaning being radically dependent on how you divide up the semantic units (see sections in italics in the above two translations). The first version is the one that will be found in the vast majority of English translations of the Qur'an, and represents how the majority of Sunnis have read this verse. The second translation represents the predominant Shi'i (and, subsequently, Babi-Baha'i) reading. In the former, the Qur'an is acknowledged to have both clear and ambiguous verses, but the interpretation of the latter are known only to God. Given the classic Sunni approach to commentary, which assumed a stable and intelligibly signifying character to the Qur'an, it is not surprising that at-Tabari favoured an understanding of the ambiguous verses as meaning the isolated letters (*fawātiḥ*) that preface certain of the Qur'an's surahs.<sup>12</sup> As isolated letters, these are parasemantic in the first place, so it does not challenge the assumption of a stable structure of transparent intelligibility in the Qur'an to identify these as the ambiguous verses whose interpretation is known only to God.

In what has been called classical Shi'i commentary, represented by aṭ-Ṭūsī (d. 1067) and aṭ-Ṭabarsī (or Tabrisī, d. 1144), this narrow understanding of the ambiguous verses is set aside

<sup>11</sup> Adapted from the two translations given by Stefan Wild, 'Self-Referentiality of the Qur'an: Sura 3:7 as an Exegetical Challenge', in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (ed. Jane McAuliffe, Barry Walfish and Joseph Goering, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 422–36 (see 423), which he calls the 'majority' and 'minority' readings, respectively.

<sup>12</sup> For a wide-ranging, thematic survey of exegetical treatments of Q 3:7, see Leah Kinberg, 'Muḥkamāt and Mutashābihāt (Koran 3/7): Implications of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis', *Arabica* 35 (1988) 143–72. For a chronological survey of exegesis on this verse, see J. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 149–53. Kinberg announced a separate study on the *mutashābihāt-fawātiḥ* equation at p. 156, n. 71 of her article cited here, but this has yet to appear.

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in favour of a recognition of ambiguity throughout much of the Qur'anic text (the classical philosophical *mufasssirūn*, such as ar-Rāzī and az-Zamakhsharī, also maintained this position). This phase of commentary shares a great deal with the classical Sunni phase; a significant amount of attention is given to grammar and lexical oddities, and the world behind the text is turned to for help in clarifying problems in these areas. Likewise, masses of Sunni hadith regarding occasions of revelation and so on are included in their commentaries. But there is a good deal more attention given to the world in front of the text in this phase of commentary, which could again be well illustrated by the approach taken to Qur'an 3:7. On this verse, at-Tusi, at-Tabarsi, and ar-Razi all take a remarkably similar approach. First, they assume that there are ambiguous verses in the Qur'an beyond just the isolated letters. Second, they read Qur'an 3:7 according to the second version, and generally identify 'those firmly rooted in knowledge' with the 'ulama. But they also attempt to explain the utility of the ambiguous verses, to explain why God would have ordained ambiguity in His Book. Their answer is very interesting, as it involves a direct turn to the world in front of the text and to an assumption of relatively strong readers. For brevity's sake, I quote from Jane McAuliffe's distillation of Razi's exegesis of Qur'an 3:7 and the utility of the ambiguous verses, an argument which recapitulates points advanced earlier by Tusi and Tabarsi:

(1) The greater effort expended in trying to understand them [the ambiguous verses] will secure a greater reward. (2) They provide an opportunity to test and clarify diverse theological views. (3) The need to use reason frees one from 'the darkness of *taqlid* [blind imitation]'. (4) They require the cultivation of exegetical skills, such as knowledge of language, grammar, and *usul al-fiqh*. (5) Finally, and most importantly, the *mutashabihat* [ambiguous verses] suit the Qur'an to the differences in human capacity to receive it, allowing sufficient variety in the modes of revelation to accommodate both the learned and the ignorant.<sup>13</sup>

This view of the multiple unfoldments of textual meaning in the various reader encounters represents a fascinating medieval adumbration of modern reader-response criticism. The various elements of the world in front of the text are, in this phase of the development of commentary, bound up with the meaning of the text itself. The stability and transparency of the Qur'an as a surface of signifiers is a notion that clearly does not fit with this conception of textuality.

I would add, also, that in this phase the Qur'anic text has, in a sense, absorbed the social text; that is to say, the hierarchies that defined the social realities of these writers are found by them in their reading of the Qur'an; or, what amounts to the same thing, they read the social text *into* the Qur'anic text. The Qur'anic ambiguities will unfold in hierarchical readings – the commoners will understand what they need for their level, the learned will find more 'elite' stages of Qur'anic meaning – and thus the Qur'an, in its readings, will unfold the social hierarchy.

The last stage of the history of commentary that I would like to consider is that of later Shi'i exegesis, specifically Akhbari commentary, beginning in the late Safavid period and including, for all intents and purposes, the Shaykhi movement of more recent times. This trend represents a radical break with the previous two. Here there is absolutely no concern for the world behind the text, for the grammatical or lexical background to the Qur'an. The masses

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<sup>13</sup> McAuliffe, 'Text and Textuality' 65.

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of early Sunni hadith which served to situate the Qur'anic verses in a context for earlier interpreters are generally absent from Akhbari commentary. The Akhbari interpretive innovation is grounded in a view of the Qur'an that begins to emerge in the famous *hadith ath-thaqalayn*, or 'the tradition of the two weighty legacies'. There are dozens of variants of this tradition, so I will quote from a composite form presented by Todd Lawson:

The Prophet said: 'I am soon about to be received . . . I am telling you before I am taken up that I shall leave with you as representatives after me the Book of my Lord, and my progeny, the people of my household. The all-Gracious, all-Knowing told me that they [the two weights, *ath-thaqalayn*] shall not be separated until they meet me [on the Day of Resurrection] . . . Do not precede them, for you would go astray, and do not fall behind them, for you would perish. Do not teach them, for they are of greater knowledge than you.<sup>14</sup>

In this report, Muhammad's authority and guidance are seen as being carried into the future by twin representatives – the Qur'an and the Imams. It is the identification of these latter two entities in Akhbari commentary that is its defining characteristic. The commentary literature from this period is generally composed of two strata: voluminous citation of sayings of the Imams (*akhbār*, singular *khbar*, whence the designation Akhbari), and a reading of the Qur'anic text as a coded narrative of the Imams and their historical careers. For example, in the chapter of Sayyid Hāshim al-Baḥrānī's (d. ca. 1695) *al-Burhān* on the clear and ambiguous verses of the Qur'an, the following *khbar* from the sixth Imam is cited:

al-Ṣādiq said: 'We are the people obedience to whom God has made obligatory. To us belongs the booty and to us belongs the best property, and we are *those firmly rooted in knowledge* [Q. 3:7], and we are the objects of envy alluded to in the verse: 'Or do they envy mankind for what God has given them of his bounty?' [Q. 4:54].<sup>15</sup>

Akhbari commentary, relying on reports from the Imams such as this one, reads the entire Qur'an as ambiguous in itself, but capable of being disambiguated by reference to the Imams.<sup>16</sup> The resultant disambiguation is one that reads nearly every verse of the Qur'an as a hidden statement about the Imams, their followers, or their enemies. The tragic Qur'anic tales about the rejections faced by the pre-Islamic prophets are not really about pre-Islamic prophets; these tales are about the Imams and their lack of recognition from the Sunnis. The same formula is applied across the board, to an extent that the modern reader is left bewildered at what may seem to us as extremely arbitrary readings.

<sup>14</sup> Todd Lawson, 'Akhbārī Shī'ī approaches to Tafsīr', in *Approaches to the Qur'an*, ed. Hawting and Shareef 173–210 (see 178).

<sup>15</sup> Adapted from *ibid* 191.

<sup>16</sup> There is even a *khbar* from the sixth Imam according to which the Imams are the unambiguous verses: 'Abī 'Abd Allāh [Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq] said, with regard to God's saying – exalted be He – "It is He who sent down upon you the Book, wherein are clear verses [muḥkamāt] that are the Mother of the Book", that these are the Commander of the Faithful ['Alī] and the Imāms; "and others that are ambiguous [mutashābihāt]", and these are So-and-so and So-and-so [i.e., Abu Bakr and 'Umar]. "As for those in whose heart is deviation", these are their companions and followers [i.e., the Sunnis]. "They follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension, and desiring its interpretation [ta'wīl]; and none knows its interpretation save only God and those firmly rooted in knowledge." These last are the Commander of the Faithful and the Imāms.' Muhammad b. Ya'qūb Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfi* (ed. Shaykh Muhammad Ja'far Shams al-Dīn, Beirut: Dar al-ta'arīf li'l-matbu'at, 1419 AH/1998 CE) 1:482; the text in italics is from Qur'an 3:7.

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Corbin has referred to this as 'Imamocentric hermeneutics', even as a process of the 'Imamization' of the Qur'an,<sup>17</sup> but we must, following Lawson's insight, go further; we are dealing here with a 'fusion of Imam and text'.<sup>18</sup> That is, it is not simply that the Qur'an is read here as being a cryptic Shi'i mytho-history. It is also the case that the Imams are understood to be, in a certain sense, Qur'anic. The Qur'an and the Imams are assimilated to one another, they are mirrors of one another, and they complement one another. Consider, for example, this verse of the Qur'an and the commentary on it attributed to the seventh Imam, Mūsā al-Kāzīm:

*'Hā Mīm. By the Perspicuous Book! Verily, We have sent it down on a blessed night, to forewarn mankind; on a night when every precept was made plain as a commandment from Ourselves.'* [Q. 44:1–4] The letters 'hā mīm' are Muhammad . . . The 'Perspicuous Book' is the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali'.<sup>19</sup>

Not only are the Imams found in the Book – they *are* the Book, this being the implication of identifying references to the *kitāb al-mubīn* in the Qur'an with 'Ali. Furthermore, as is well known, 'Ali identified himself with the very textual essence of the Qur'an, in that famous statement wherein he says that all of revelation is contained within the point beneath the Arabic letter *ba*', the first letter of the Qur'an, and that he is that point.<sup>20</sup>

The complementarity of the Qur'an and the Imams is heightened by the Akhbari belief that the Qur'an, as they had it, was not the entire, or indeed the entirely true, Qur'an as it had

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Henry Corbin, *En Islam Iranien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971) 1:95; see also the discussion in Todd Lawson, 'Qur'an Commentary' 21.

<sup>18</sup> Lawson, 'Akhbārī Shī'ī approaches' 203, where he further alludes to the 'culmination of this process in the Qur'an commentaries of the Bāb'. See also Lawson, 'The Dangers of Reading: Inlibration, Communion and Transference in the Qur'an Commentary of the Bāb', in *Scripture and Revelation* (ed. Moojan Momen, Bahā'ī Studies, vol. 3, Oxford: George Ronald, 1997) 171–215, and idem, 'Reading Reading Itself: The Bab's "Sura of the Bees", A Commentary on Qur'an 12:93 from the Sura of Joseph', *Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies* 5 (November 1997) <<http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/bhpapers/vol1/nahl2.htm>>.

<sup>19</sup> From Kulayni, *Usūl al-Kāfī* 1:552.

<sup>20</sup> These traditions are not found in mainstream Shi'i collections, although the Bab quoted them frequently in his writings, as did Shaykh Ahmad before him and Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha after him. See, for example, *Bayān-i Fārsī*, vāhid 3, bāb 12, for 'I am the Point beneath the *bā*', and the *Tafsīr Ḥurūf al-Basmala*, Iranian Baha'i National Archives series, vol. 14, p. 57, for the longer version, in which 'Ali is quoted as saying: 'the essence of the basmala is in the *bā*', and the essence of the *bā*' is in the point, and I am the Point beneath the *bā*'. The statement 'I am the Point beneath the *bā*' is commonly attributed to Abu Bakr al-Shibli (d. 945) in such well-known Sunni works as Ibn al-'Arabi's *Futuḥāt al-Makkīyya* 83, al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* 1028, and Qushayrī's *Risāla* 69 (page numbers are for the online editions of these books at <[www.alwaraq.com](http://www.alwaraq.com)>). The earliest source that I am aware of in which this saying is put into the mouth of 'Ali is Rajab Bursi's 14th-century *Mashāriq Anwār al-Yaqīn* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lami lil-Matbu'at, 1970) 22. There is a complete form quoted by Qundūzī (d. 1877) in his *Yanābī' al-Mawwada* (Najaf: Matbu'at al-Hadariyya, 1965) 79: 'Know that the essences [*al-asrār*] of all of the heavenly books are contained in the Qur'an, and all that is in the Qur'an is within [Sūrat] al-Fātiḥa, and all that is in al-Fātiḥa is in the basmala, and all that is in the basmala is in the *bā*', and all that is in the *bā*' is in the point, and I am the Point beneath the *bā*'. A very similar version appears in a Babi treatise in Iranian Baha'i National Archives series, vol. 80, 293f. The anonymous 'al-Qatīl' also quotes a similar form of the extended version of this tradition in his/her *Risāla*, in *Zuhūr al-Ḥaqq*, 3:518. See also William McCants, 'Grammar of the Divine: Translation, Notes, and Semi-Critical Edition of the Bab's *Risāla fī al-naḥw wa al-ṣarf* (A Treatise on Grammar)', *Syzygy* 1:1 (2003), online at <<http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/SYZYGY/syzygy-03-yes/SYZYGY3.htm>>, note 2; Todd Lawson, 'Coincidentia Oppositorum in the Qayyum al-Asma: the terms "Point" (*nugṭa*), "Pole" (*qutb*), and "Center" (*markaz*) and the Khutbat al-tatanjiyya', *Occasional Papers in Shaykhi, Babi and Baha'i Studies* 5:1 (2001), online at <<http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/bhpapers/vol5/tatanj/tatanj.htm>>; and idem, 'Reading Reading Itself', subsection titled 'Contemporary Gloss on the Bab's Commentary'.

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been revealed by God.<sup>21</sup> This very early Shi'i contention – that verses of the Qur'an which unambiguously referred to the authority of 'Ali and the family of Muhammad were taken out, certain non-revealed verses were added, and the original ordering of the Qur'anic text was violated – was suppressed during the Buwayhid period, but re-emerged in Akhbari thought.<sup>22</sup> It was subsequently rejected anew in Uṣūlī-inspired twentieth-century Shi'i thought, as can be seen by the polemics *against* the notion of a corrupted Qur'an in the modern commentaries of Ṭabāṭabā'ī and al-Khū'ī.<sup>23</sup>

Obviously, there is a great deal at stake in such a belief. If the Qur'an is not entirely as it should be, and even when it *is* correct it is all codes and secrets, how is the faithful Shi'i to go about his business of being faithful? The Akhbari answer is that the Imams knew the whole of the Qur'an, that where they have spoken the path is clear, and that what we do know about the Qur'an is just going to have to be sufficient for the time being. This complementarity was symbolized by the terms 'Silent Book' (the Qur'an) and 'Speaking Book' (the Imams). In itself, the coded and, indeed, corrupted Qur'an was mute, but the Imams spoke with the voice of the Qur'an – they were the Qur'an speaking to the community in history.<sup>24</sup>

At the time that these attitudes and approaches were developing, however, the Imams were *not* speaking to the community in history. This is 17th–19th century Iran, the time of the Greater Occultation. The Book is entirely ambiguous, and the Imams are themselves silent. The implication is clear: not only is the community awaiting the return of the Hidden Imam, it is waiting also for the return of the Hidden Qur'an. The two have been identified with one another to such an extent in Shi'i discourse that they have become, in a sense, a single messianic figure. So, for example, this Tradition from the fifth Imam is cited by Muhsin Fayd Kāshānī (d. 1680) in his Akhbari commentary, *aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥ*: 'Al-Baqir said: "If the Book of God had not been added to and subtracted from, our right (*ḥaqqanā*) would not be obscure to anyone with understanding. When the Qa'im arises, he will correctly read the Qur'an."<sup>25</sup> Kashani himself, after affirming in his own words that the Qur'an has been excised, altered, and rearranged, has this to say: 'The Qur'an which is in our hands must be followed during the occultation of the twelfth Imam. It must be assumed that the true Qur'an is with him.'<sup>26</sup>

To reflect for a moment on the kind of textuality implicit in these Akhbari approaches to the Qur'an, I would first of all emphasize that the world in front of the text has swallowed up the text, as it were. There is no world behind the text in any meaningful sense, nor is the text

<sup>21</sup> On the history of Shi'i beliefs about the corruption of the Qur'anic text, see Etan Kohlberg, 'Some Notes on the Imamite Attitude to the Qur'an', in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition: Essays Presented to R. Walzer* (ed. S. M. Stern, A. Hourani and V. Brown, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) 209–24; T. Lawson, 'Note for the Study of a "Shi'i Qur'an"', *Journal of Semitic Studies* 36:2 (1991) 279–95; and H. Modarressi, 'Early Debates on the Integrity of the Qur'an: A Brief Survey', *Studia Islamica* 77 (1993) 5–39.

<sup>22</sup> See Lawson, 'Qur'an Commentary' 3; Meir Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism* (Leiden: Brill, 1999) 39–45 and 218–19, on the 'censorship' of anti-Sunni material in Shi'i commentaries during this period.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, al-Khū'ī's (d. 1992) *Prolegomena to the Qur'an* (trans. A. A. Sachedina, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) ch. 7, 'The Protection of the Qur'an from Alteration', where he presents a point-by-point refutation of earlier Shi'i beliefs in the alteration or corruption of the Qur'anic text.

<sup>24</sup> On this see M. Ayoub, 'The Speaking Qur'an and the Silent Qur'an: A Study of the Principles and Development of Imami Shi'i Tafsi'r', in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an* (ed. A. Rippin, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 177–98.

<sup>25</sup> Lawson, 'Akhbārī Shī'ī' 183.

<sup>26</sup> Ayoub paraphrasing Kashani, in Lawson, 'Akhbārī Shī'ī' 187.

seen as a stable semiotic structure. Pulsing *beneath* and *within* the surface of signs that make up the Qur'an, the tragic salvation history of the Shi'a is unfolding. I remarked earlier how classical Shi'i and philosophical approaches to the text led to an absorption of the social text by the Qur'anic text, of the hierarchical social reality being activated by the history of the text's readings. With Akhbari textuality, the Qur'an has continued to expand beyond the covers of a book, and is now a mirror of the community of its readers. The Qur'an and the Shi'a are living a shared experience of loss, of oppression, of abuse at the hands of the Sunni majority. Only the messianic age can alter this reality, and the One that is promised, awaited, and prayed for is not simply a returned Imam – it is just as much a renovated Qur'an.

There is one other element of Akhbari Shi'i thought that must be noted before we turn to considering the Bab's readings of the Qur'an. This is what could be called the divinization of the Imams. This was especially developed in the Shaykhi movement, wherein the Imams were seen not simply as the legitimate leaders and guides of the community and the knowers of the true Qur'an; they were seen by the Shaykhis as nothing less than the creators of the cosmos. Shaykh Ahmad, as is well known, was considered to have been skirting the lines of heresy in his belief that the Imams were the four Aristotelian causes of the universe.<sup>27</sup> The pre-existent lights of the Fourteen Infallibles – Muhammad, Fatima, and the twelve Imams – were understood as the generative energies of the coming-into-being of all things, as the substratum of all existence, as the inmost essence of reality by which all things subsisted. The Imams, then, are not simply persons, they are cosmic powers. The primordial essence of the Fourteen Infallibles is identified with the Primal Will, a concept which functions in Shaykhi thought in much the same way that it functions in Baha'i theology.<sup>28</sup>

I would argue that there are then three imaginaries coming from this Akhbari – and ultimately Shaykhi – milieu which provide the context for understanding what appears, at first blush, to be the Bab's strange reading.

1. The imaginary of the Imam/Qur'an assimilation. The Imams and the Qur'an are identified with one another. The idiom used to indicate this connection is textual rather than personal. That is, according to this imaginary, it is more that the Imam is seen as a Book than it is that the Qur'an is seen as a person.
2. The messianic imaginary that enwraps these two identified entities of Imam and Qur'an. As the Imams are textualized – imagined in terms of points, letters, books – so the messianic return will be a textual eschaton, the renovation of a clear and speaking Book. Also, as the Qur'an is corrupted, incomplete, the messianic expectation for the Imam is bound up with an expectation for a restored Qur'anic text.

<sup>27</sup> 'The Imams are the four causes of the created things. They are the efficient cause; they are the material cause – that is, their [primordial] lights and shadows [are the material from which all things were made]; they are the formal cause, in the apportioning of the capacities of all things for good and for evil; they are the final cause, inasmuch as all things were created for their sake.' From Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsā'ī, *Sharḥ al-ziyāra*, quoted in Muhammad Hasan Āl al-Tālaqānī, *al-Shaykhiyya: nash'atuha wa tatawwuruha wa masādir dirāsatiha* (Beirut: al-Amal lil-Matbu'at, 1420 AH/1999 CE) 288.

<sup>28</sup> For a brief exploration of the notion of 'Primal Will' (*mashiyya*) in Baha'i theology, see Vahid Brown, 'The Beginning that Hath no Beginning: Baha'i Cosmogony', in *Lights of 'Irfaan: Papers Presented at the 'Irfaan Colloquia and Seminars* (book 3, ed. Iraj Ayman, Evanston, IL: Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund, 2002) 21–40.

<sup>29</sup> On these seven, see Mehrān Jadhbānī, 'Marātib-i sab'ah-yi takavvun', *Payām-i Bahā'ī* 202 (1996) 38–41; 203 (1996) 31–34; see also note 30.

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3. The imaginary of the cosmic or divinized Imams, or what I would call the ontological imaginary of the Imams. The Imams, according to this view, are the creators and sustainers of the cosmos, and are thus assimilated to other concepts of cosmic creativity, such as the Primal Will, or the seven instrumental stages of coming-into-being (i.e., Will, Purpose, Determination, Decree, Permission, Fixed Time, and Book).<sup>29</sup>

With these concepts in hand, I think we can find a way into the Bab's notion of texts, reading, and meaning. They combine, in the context of the Bab's declaration of messianic fulfilment, into an ontological imaginary of the *messiah as text*, which leads, in the Bab's messianic Qur'anic commentaries, to a world-renovating cosmicization of the non-semantic units of the text. This may seem an impossibly obscure way to put things, so let me attempt to unpack this statement. The three imaginaries are explicitly linked together in a lengthy introduction to the Bab's commentary on the Surat al-'Asr, in which he provides the following schema for the homologous unfoldment of the cosmos, of the text, and of sacred history:

<i>Cosmic Levels</i>	<i>Textual Levels</i>	<i>Historical Manifestations</i>
Primal Will	Point	Muhammad
Purpose	Soft Alif	'Ali
Determination	Occulted Alif	Hasan
Decree	Upright Alif	Husayn
Permission	Letters as such	The Imams
Fixed Time	Joined Letters	The Remnant of God, the Promised One
Book	Word	Fatima

This is what the Bab says by way of introduction to the seventy-three individual letter commentaries that he proceeds to give in this commentary, one for each letter of the Surat al-'Asr:

Verily, in every letter of the Qur'an there are many stations. Rather, God hath created in one verse the reality of all that hath been given the name 'thing' . . .

<sup>30</sup> The stations or levels of the Act (*marātib al-fi'l*): this is a technical term of esoteric Shi'ism, and is found throughout the writings of Shaykh Ahmad and the Bab, wherein it refers to the seven levels of the coming into being of all things mentioned by the sixth Imam, Ja'far as-Sadiq, in the following tradition: 'Nothing on earth or in heaven comes into being but by these seven qualities: will (*mashīyya*), purpose (*irāda*), determination (*qadar*), decree (*qaḍā'*), permission (*idhn*), book (*kitāb*), and fixed time (*ajal*)' (Kulayni, *Uṣūl al-Kāfi* 1:200). The order of the last two was for some unknown reason reversed by Shaykh Ahmad, and this tradition was invariably quoted by the Bab with *kitāb* as the last of the seven. In another tradition, from the seventh Imam, Musa al-Kazim, we learn: "'Nothing comes into being but that God willed it, purposed it, determined it, and decreed it.'" [‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Hashimī] asked: "What does will (*mashīyya*) mean?" He said: "It means the beginning of the Act (*ibūda' al-fi'l*)" (Kulayni, *Uṣūl al-Kāfi* 1:201). These two traditions provide a classical Imami basis for the Shaykhi and Babi usage of the phrase *marātib al-fi'l*. For Shaykh Ahmad's usage, see for example, *Sharḥ al-Ziyāra al-jāmi'a al-kabīra* (4 vols, Beirut: Dar al-Mufid, 1460 AH/1999 CE) 2:110f. The Bab defines his own usage later in the *Tafsīr wa'l-'Asr* itself, where he writes: 'Faith in the levels of the Act and the manifestations of the acted-upon has been made obligatory for all, according to the command of as-Sadiq, regarding the allotments of the basis of the Act: "Nothing on earth or in heaven comes into being but by the following seven: will, purpose, determination, decree, permission, fixed time, and book, and whoever maintains that they are one less than these has thereby become an infidel.'" (*Tafsīr wa'l-'Asr*) 124.

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- Among the stations of the letters of the Qur'an is the level of the Point in the stations of the Act [= Will].<sup>30</sup> This station hath been specialized unto Muhammad, the Messenger of God, the blessings of God be upon Him and His family.
- Among them is the level of the 'soft *alif*', that is the station manifesting the second level of the levels of the Act [= Purpose]. Truly, God, in the subtleties of His wisdom and the greatness of His providence hath made that station to be specialized unto the regent [*waṣī*] of His Beloved [Muhammad], [that is,] 'Ali, upon him be peace.
- And among them is the level of the 'occulted *alif*', the pure theophanic and eternal glory [*ṣamadaniyyah*], the light of divinity, the letter of the manifestation of the divine ipseity, the sign of Exclusive Unity in the human reality. Verily, in that station this letter is for Hasan – upon whom be peace – and indicates the level of the manifestation of trinity in the level of Determination [*qadar*].
- And among them is the 'upright *alif*', which is the station of the manifestation of the Name of God, the Slayer [*al-mumīt*] in the levels of the Act, and the beginning of the cause of Decree [*qaḍā*']. Verily, God hath decreed that the bearer of that station be Abu 'Abd Allah al-Husayn, upon whom be peace. Verily he/it [Husayn, the upright *alif*] is the letter of command by which the heavens and the earth were established in a manner which none knows but God and whomsoever He has created in a level above those of Husayn's grandfather [i.e., Muhammad], his father ['Ali], and his brother [Hasan] – the blessings of God be upon them. How luminous are the wonders!
- And [further,] among them is the letter in the station of Permission [*maqām al-idhn*]. It is the station of letters as such and is specially designated for the Suns of Grandeur [the Imams], the blessings of God be upon them.
- And among them is the letter in the station of the assembled letters, the level of Fixed Time [*ajal*], and is the light of the Remnant of God . . .
- And among them is the letter in the station of the word, and it is the level of the Book in the sense of the conclusion of judgements [*khitab*]. Verily God hath determined the status of that letter unto Fatima – the blessings of God be upon her.<sup>31</sup>

This explicit identification of the imaginaries of book, cosmos, and manifestation is essential to the Bab's messianic performance. The reading of Surat al-'Asr that it leads into is consistently cosmic in its concerns, each letter being treated as a reality or spiritual force operating at each of the four levels of the Bab's universe.<sup>32</sup>

The Bab's 'commentaries' – with the exception of the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Baqara*, which was written prior to his declaration of mission – are distinct from any previous tradition of Qur'anic commentary in that they enunciate the inauguration of the messianic moment; they simultaneously enact the renovation of the world and the restoration of the Qur'an.<sup>33</sup> They were not simply written as expositions of the Qur'anic text, with the ostensible purpose of clarifying the meaning of the words and phrases used in that Book. Three of his lengthiest Qur'anic commentaries – the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'*, the *Tafsīr Sūrat wa'l-'Asr*, and the *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Kawthar* – were all 'written' in public, they were 'performances' that had as their

<sup>31</sup> *Tafsīr wa'l-'Asr* 12–18; my provisional translation is abridged.

<sup>32</sup> Todd Lawson translates a number of these letter-commentaries and puts them in historical and philosophical context in his 'Dangers of Reading'.

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of what might be called the irony of the Bab's utilization of such a traditional genre as the tafsīr (commentary) in announcing his messianic claims, see Todd Lawson's preface to his 'Reading Reading Itself'.

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purpose the communication of the Bab's messianic claims.<sup>34</sup> They were thus written in settings such that the Bab's 'readings' of the Qur'an were simultaneously messianic enunciations.

The Shi'i eschatological imagination is a rich and many-splendoured thing. There were a great many roles and expected deeds that the community assumed the Promised One would fulfil in his restoration of justice to a world plunged into injustice and oppression. The pre-messiah world, in a sense, was seen as broken, the cosmic order in disarray, the Qur'an corrupted, and the Qa'im alone, at some long-awaited time, was going to put things back in order. The way in which he was going to do so was worked out in advance, in detail, and these details constituted the imaginary of the end, expectations that filled the minds of the Shi'a to whom the Bab spoke. What I would like to emphasize here is that the Bab, in choosing to express his self-consciousness as the Promised One in such a textual way, engaged these eschatological expectations by shifting them into a textual register. This shift, as I tried to show above, had already started with the imaginary of the Imamized Qur'an, but the Bab took this much, much further.

The Qur'anic text, for the Bab, will not fit so well into our schema of readings, with the worlds behind and in front of the text. It is not primarily a surface of signs, pointing to extrinsic meanings, so the question of whether meaning is in the author, the text, or the reader is in a sense totally irrelevant. The Bab's Qur'an is a cosmic Qur'an. Its letters are generative, primordial substances that create and sustain the universe. The text lies behind all possible worlds, so if there is any 'meaning' to be extracted from it, it is cosmographic. Since the text unfolds in a way homologous to the cosmos, the cosmic structure can be described in terms of the Qur'an's structure. Babi semiotics is thus not meaningfully distinct from its cosmology. The 're-revealing' of the Qur'an, through the Bab's commentaries and other writings, is a textually-mediated recreation of the cosmos. The same is true of the unfoldment of the human being, of time, of religious communities, all of which are enwrapped in textual symbolism in the Bab's writings.

As seen in the Imami traditions quoted above, the Promised One was expected to restore not only the cosmos, but the Qur'an as well. In the words of the fifth Imam: 'When the Qa'im arises, he will correctly read the Qur'an' (see above). In the *Qayyūm al-Asmā'*, the text which signalized the Bab's arising as the Qa'im, there is a passage closely patterned after Qur'an 3:7:

Verily, We have sent down unto Our servant this Book, from the presence of God and in Truth, and have made therein clear verses [*muḥkamāt*], and no ambiguous verses [*ghayr mutashābihāt*]. None knoweth the interpretation [*ta'wīl*] thereof save God, and whomsoever We have willed from among the sincere and devoted servants of God. So ask of its interpretation from the Remembrance, for He, by the grace of God, is knowing with regard to God's verses and in accordance with the decree of the Book.<sup>35</sup>

The Bab declares here, in the midst of what is outwardly a commentary, a reading, that his reading is itself a re-revealing of the Book, and that this Book has *no* ambiguous verses. The oppression of the Book is ended.

<sup>34</sup> On the Bab's commentaries as 'performances', see T. Lawson, 'Qur'an Commentary as Sacred Performance', in *Iran im 19. Jahrhundert und die Entstehung der Baha'i-Religion* (ed. C. Bürgel and I. Schayani, Hildesheim: Olms, 1998) 145–58.

<sup>35</sup> Bāb, *Qayyūm al-Asmā'*: *Tafsīr Sūrat Yūsuf* (MS dated 1 Muharram 1323 AH/8 March 1905 CE, in author's possession), sura 3 (*al-Imān*) 9.

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TEXTUAL RESURRECTION

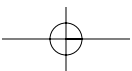
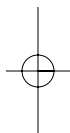
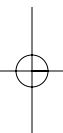
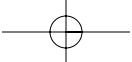
The Bab combined both of the expected redemptive functions into one act. He textualized his own messianic identity, assuming the title of Primal Point – the point from which all things, cosmic and textual, emerge. This is of course an identity drawing from the primordial sentence of the Qur’anic text, the *basmala*, which consists of four words, totalling 19 letters, the first of which begins with a point. Each of these 19 letters, according to the Bab, spawned 6 surahs, giving us the total 114 surahs of the Qur’an.<sup>36</sup> In the same way, he, the Point, and the 18 Letters of the Living, brought into being the members of his community, which were further identified by the Bab with textual realities. A similar unfoldment of this Qur’anic symbolism can be seen operating in every aspect of the religious world that the Bab created, from the Badi‘ calendar to ritual practice, from talismanic magic to the expectations of the Promised One of the Babi dispensation. The latter – ‘He Whom God will make manifest’ – was to be the ‘Speaking Book’ to the ‘Silent Bayan’, was to reveal the complete Bayan, left unfinished by the Bab, and was to produce an ordering of the Bayanic text that Shoghi Effendi interpreted as a re-ordering of the world.<sup>37</sup>

The sense in which the Bab is a ‘strong reader’ should by now be obvious. The Bab recognizes no constraints in the Qur’anic text that would limit the direction his reading would go. Neither sentences, nor phrases, nor even words are seen by the Bab as ultimately significant. The focus of the Bab’s ‘readings’ is not the signifying, semantic units of the texts, but rather what he sees as their substantive, cosmic reality. The individual letters, having in themselves no semantic content, are nonetheless the essence of the text and indeed of the world. His reading is strong or active in the most radical sense. His readings not only reconstitute the text, they recreate the world in which that text will be read.

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<sup>36</sup> See the Bab’s *Bayān-i Fārsī*, wahid 2, bab 2, online at <<http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/bab/A-F/bayanf/bayan020.jpg>> (cited 9 December 2004).

<sup>37</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahā’u’llāh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1991) 146f, and idem, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1995) 25f. For a discussion of this interpretation, with reference to previous treatments in the secondary literature, see Ismael Velasco, ‘Fixing the Gaze: Reflections on the “Order of Bahā’u’llī



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## **‘Abdu’l-Baha in Abu-Sinan: September 1914–May 1915**

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### **Abstract**

*Abu-Sinan is a Druze village about seven miles east of ‘Akka. To protect the Baha’i community of Haifa–‘Akka from the onslaught of the First World War and its effects on the coastal plain, ‘Abdu’l-Baha temporarily relocated the entire community of about 140 people to this village in the autumn of 1914. By the beginning of May 1915 the situation had calmed, the region was no longer threatened by bombardment or other aggression, and the Baha’is were able to return home. This paper describes the actions of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, records some of the words that he spoke during this period, and depicts the condition of the Baha’i community of the Holy Land during the time.*

Baha’u’llah arrived in ‘Akka on 31 August 1868, accompanied by his immediate family and some 70 close companions. With his arrival, the nucleus of an ever-growing Baha’i community was formed in the region. During the first decade, the only Baha’is allowed to live in ‘Akka were those who had accompanied Baha’u’llah, and visitors were encouraged by him to return home in order to propagate the Baha’i Faith, although a few were instructed to find an occupation either in the vicinity or in Haifa. In the course of the following two decades the situation improved and gradually other Baha’is were able to settle in ‘Akka, some being family members of the resident Baha’is, others being brought there for specific purposes, such as tending the Ridvan and Firdaws Gardens. During this period, the family of Mirza Muhammad-Quli – Baha’u’llah’s faithful half-brother – settled in the village of Nuqayb, on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, as farmers. As conditions permitted, ‘Abdu’l-Baha bought some inexpensive land in various villages, such as two parcels in the villages of Asfiya and Daliya near Haifa, which, at Baha’u’llah’s request, he gave to his younger half-brothers, Diyā’u’llāh and Badi’u’llāh.

During an earlier period, the Baha’i community of Baghdad had been forced to evacuate to Mosul, where many other Baha’i refugees from Iran soon joined them. In the 1880s they were compelled to leave Mosul, and some 180 settled in ‘Akka, or in nearby villages or in Haifa.<sup>1</sup> Many of them opened small shops, carrying on with their trades and professions and making modest livings.

In addition to Mirza Muhammad-Quli’s family, a number of Zoroastrian Baha’is, mostly from Yazd, settled in Nuqayb and engaged in cultivating land that had been purchased by ‘Abdu’l-Baha. He also acquired land in the villages of Samrih and ‘Adasiyyih, situated near the River Jordan, where a few Baha’is lived. Among other things that these industrious Baha’i farmers were producing was grain, a tenth of which was sent to ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s household,

<sup>1</sup> Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway* (London: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1956) 130, based on recollections of Sakinih-Sultan Khanum.

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the remainder being stored in pits<sup>2</sup> (some of which had been made by the Romans), sold or shared with other Baha'is and neighbours.

By 1907, because of the pressures brought about by the Committee of Investigation sent from Istanbul, 'Abdu'l-Baha had sent some 70 of the Baha'is, including his brother-in-law Mirza Asadu'llah and his family, to Egypt. He paid for their journey and other needs with funds that he 'borrowed ... from an American in Paris'.<sup>3</sup>

In 1909, following the change of regime in Turkey, 'Abdu'l-Baha gained his freedom. At the end of August 1910 he left the Holy Land for Egypt, from where he proceeded on his journeys to Europe and North America of 1911–13, returning to Egypt in June 1913 and eventually arriving back at Haifa in December 1913, to the great welcoming joy of his family and friends. In the summer of 1914 he sent a number of Baha'is on various missions: among others, Mirza Mahmud Zarqani was sent to India, 'Ali-Akbar Nakhjavani to Russia, Mrs Emogene Hoagg to Italy, Dr Habib Mu'ayyad and Mirza 'Azizu'llah Bahadur to Germany, Haji Sayyid Yahya and Mirza Asadu'llah Isfahani to London.

By the summer's end, the First World War had broken out, and the Ottoman Empire was about to commit itself to the cause of the Central Powers: Germany and Austria-Hungary. Although it had suffered successive and decisive defeats in Tripolitania and in the Balkans within the previous three years, its rulers, the Young Turks, and particularly the triumvirate of Enver Pasha, Tal'at Pasha and Jamal Pasha, forced it into another massive military campaign.

'Abdu'l-Baha observed that the situation across the Ottoman Empire and the Middle East had become perilous, with British occupation of Egypt, the repressive measures of Jamal Pasha and the spread of the war to the Haifa-'Akka region, where the population was panic-stricken. Most of the inhabitants fled inland, apprehensive of bombardment by the allied powers. All merchants, including Baha'i traders, suffered great losses, for the government commandeered their entire inventories. The Baha'i community, in spite of 'Abdu'l-Baha's incessant reassurances that no guns would be turned on Haifa, were living in constant fear.

It was under these circumstances that 'Abdu'l-Baha began to plan the removal of the remaining Baha'i community from the Haifa-'Akka area to Abu-Sinan.

## Sources

There are three main sources for study of 'Abdu'l-Baha's life during the Abu-Sinan period: the diary of Dr Habib Mu'ayyad, the memoirs of Mirza Badi' Bushru'i, and the diary notes of Mirza Ahmad Sohrab.

Habib Mu'ayyad (1888–1971) came to Haifa in 1907 on pilgrimage, and on 'Abdu'l-Baha's instructions went to Beirut to study medicine. For the next eight years he often visited the Haifa-'Akka area, spending the summer months and holidays there. In the summer of 1914 he went to Germany on a mission for 'Abdu'l-Baha, and there he learned to keep a diary. Upon his return from Germany he went to the Holy Land, where he arrived on 5 October, and stayed with 'Abdu'l-Baha in Abu-Sinan until May 1915, when he returned to Iran. During this period he took careful notes of 'Abdu'l-Baha's discourses. In early 1950s, on the instructions of Shoghi Effendi, these notes were organized and published under the title *Khāṭirāt Ḥabīb*

<sup>2</sup> 'Abdu'l-Baha used this grain to feed many in Haifa-'Akka in the famine years of 1914–18.

<sup>3</sup> Hasan Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahā, the Centre of the Covenant of Bahā'u'llāh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1970) 112.

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(Memoirs of Habib).<sup>4</sup> A complete translation has been prepared by the present writer and will be published by George Ronald.

The second source, the unpublished memoirs of Mirza Badi‘ Bushru‘i, is of similar length, over 400 densely written pages, and represents Bushru‘i’s recollections of ‘Abdu’l-Baha during the years of the First World War, although it is titled ‘Nūzdah Sāl Shādimānī’ (nineteen years of bliss).

The third set of notes, the daily diary of Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, who from 1912 to 1919 captured thousands of pages of notes on ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s activities and sayings, is perhaps the most useful for students of history.

Unless otherwise stated, Dr Mu‘ayyad’s diary is the source of the information in this paper and of the words of ‘Abdu’l-Baha that are quoted. Page references for the published Persian edition of the diary are provided in brackets.

### Departure for Abu-Sinan

Dr Habib Mu‘ayyad returned to the Holy Land from Beirut in October 1914, and thus he participated in the move to Abu-Sinan. He describes the conditions at that time as follows:

Day by day, the situation of the war grew worse and intensified. The means of acquiring daily necessities and provisions became correspondingly more difficult and restricted. With the passage of each day, worries and apprehensions grew more desperate. Power rested in the hands of a number of ruthless military men who did not consider themselves accountable to anyone. It was a time of mayhem and plunder by the Ottoman officials. They caused difficulties for whomever they chose and destroyed the innocent with the most trivial of charges. No one had the least control over his possessions or life. The government was under the control of a number of faithless, bloodthirsty and cruel men ... Gallows were active in every town, and all prominent citizens were eliminated ...

Jamal Pasha was an independent-minded military commander and a man of truly ruthless character. He would instantly kill anyone whom he discovered to have a prominent reputation. As one of the highest army generals, he had assembled an enormous force to attack and reduce Egypt and [capture] the Suez Canal. Tens of thousands of camels were arrayed solely for the transportation of the army’s water rations. His agents had confiscated whatever food, clothing, weapons, money, surplus and stored grains they could find. Thoroughly desolate, the citizens were left without the most basic provisions while the realm was cleansed of everything useful for the needs of the military. If anyone protested, hanging was the immediate response. They would perpetrate whatever act of tyranny, oppression, injury, calumny, murder, treachery and sedition was needed to achieve their end under the umbrella of the Committee for National Defence.

Taking advantage of this most perilous situation, each passing day the spiteful Covenant-breakers came up with a new way to provoke Jamal Pasha against the Faith and further agitate him in this regard. Sometimes they went to Damascus and provoked the enemies of the Cause [into action]. On other occasions they sought the help of Jerusalem, presenting such extravagant gifts as the tent of the Blessed

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<sup>4</sup> Dr Habib Mu‘ayyad, *Khātirāt Habib*, vol. 1, Hofheim: Bahā’i-Verlag, 1998.

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Beauty [Baha'u'llah], which was the tabernacle of the Most Great Peace and a precious memento of Baha'u'llah's days. In addition, they offered such sacred [Persian] carpets as remained from his time.

When giving these gifts, they always registered a complaint against 'Abdu'l-Baha, representing themselves as the wronged and the victimized. At times, they depicted 'Abdu'l-Baha as a political mischief-maker and a religious rabble-rouser, thereby sowing seeds of sedition. At other times, they accused the Master [Abdu'l-Baha] of having designs to inaugurate a new monarchy and described his communications with the East and the West as a means for inciting political chaos; or they accused him of being a foreign agent. In other instances, the Shrines of Baha'u'llah and the Bab were represented as military forts, and at other times, as the [new] Mecca and Medina. To confuse and provoke [Jamal Pasha], they had painted the Greatest Name on a flag and presented it as 'Abdu'l-Baha's new 'Standard of Monarchy'.

In response, in a meeting of the 'ulama in Jerusalem, Jamal Pasha, being a ruthless and rash man, had promised to slay 'Abdu'l-Baha and to level the Shrines of both Baha'u'llah and the Bab. This had greatly excited the Covenant-breakers, giving them courage to redouble their efforts against the Master.

This time, they submitted another written complaint, outlining various charges against 'Abdu'l-Baha ... Clearly, the friends of God needed to avoid troubles during such a time when the entire Ottoman Empire was in turmoil and revolution, the government in disorder and unsettled, when blood was being spilled at every turn, when no accountability or responsibility was assumed by anyone, and the Covenant-breakers unceasingly appealed to this ruthless man (Jamal Pasha) for action. [133–4]

By September, 'Abdu'l-Baha had decided to accept the invitation of the Druze Shaykhs in Abu-Sinan to remove the Baha'is and their children to that peaceful village, out of reach of the potential bombardments and troubles in the Haifa-'Akka area. In this village the limited resources of the Baha'is (who lived with the strictest economy), augmented by corn from 'Abdu'l-Baha's stores, would be sufficient for their survival.

Shaykh Šālih placed his house at the disposal of 'Abdu'l-Baha and his family and they were warmly welcomed, along with the entire Baha'i community, who were distributed among other homes in the village. The number of Baha'is was about 140 adults and at least the same number of children.

### The Druze

Before going further, it may be useful to describe briefly the Druze, their beliefs and their presence in the Holy Land. The Druze religion has its genesis in Isma'ilism, a religio-philosophical movement that founded the Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt in the 10th century. During the reign of al-Hakim (996–1021) the Druze creed came into being, blending Islamic

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<sup>5</sup> 'Abdu'l-Baha, is reported to have said: 'Speaking of the name "Druzes," the hospitable dwellers in Abu-Sinan, the Master said: "A few hundred years ago, Darzi, a tailor, came from Persia to Syria, where he established the Druze cult. 'Druze' is a corruption of the word 'Darzi'.'" (Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway* 195). The Druze, however, revere the Caliph al-Hakim as the founder of their movement, consider Hamzah ibn 'Ali as its original organizer and Muhammad al-Darzi or al-Darazi as a heretic who tried to undermine it.

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thought with Greek philosophy and Hindu and Zoroastrian influences.<sup>5</sup> Active proselytizing of the new faith lasted for less than a century, and since about 1050 the community has been closed to outsiders.

The first Druze community was formed in the region that is now southern Lebanon and northern Israel. By the time of the Ottoman conquest of Syria (1516), the Druze also lived in the hill country near Aleppo, and during the second half of the 19th century the centre of the community moved to Jebel-el-Druze (Mountain of the Druze) – the former name of Mount Lebanon – in Syria. The Druze in Galilee and on Mount Carmel have always maintained contact with the other branches of the community, especially with those of Mount Hermon and the Lebanon. During the British Mandate in Palestine they refrained from taking part in the Arab–Jewish conflict, later emerging in support of Israel, and they are now recognized as a separate religious entity. Their language is Arabic. Worldwide there are about one million Druze, living mainly in Syria and the Lebanon; over 100,000 live in Israel, and several thousand have emigrated to Europe and North and South America.

The Druze consider their faith to be an innovative interpretation of the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For them, Adam represents the first human being who believed in a single god. Since then, the idea of monotheism has been disseminated and embodied by prophets (guided by mentors). The mentors and prophets come from all three religions, and include Jethro, Moses, John the Baptist, Jesus, Salman the Persian, Muhammad and al-Hakim – all reinforcing the same monotheistic teaching.

Although the Druze recognize the Judeo-Christian-Islamic religions, they believe that rituals and ceremonies have caused them to turn aside from the ‘pure religion’. They perform their spiritual reckoning with God at all times, and consequently need no special days of fasting or atonement, nor ritualistic elements such as daily liturgy, holy days and pilgrimage. The Druze are forbidden to eat pork, use tobacco, or drink alcohol. They are taught to speak the truth, support their brethren, abandon the old creeds, accept the unity of God, and submit to the will of God. Druze religious books are accessible only to the initiates, the *‘uqqāl* (‘knowers’) who may be men or women – indeed, women are considered more suitable in some ways for this position. (The *‘uqqāl* men have shaven heads which they cover with white turbans, and have moustaches and beards; the women wear white head scarves.) The *juhāl* (‘ignorant ones’) accept the faith on the basis of what is taught to them by the *‘uqqāl*. Monogamy is enjoined on all. Both men and women are encouraged to guard themselves against immodest or impulsive behaviour.

At the beginning of the 20th century most of the 20 Druze villages in Palestine were populated exclusively by Druze, though since then Christian and Muslim minorities have emerged in some of them. These villages are located in northern Israel, mainly on hilltops – historically as a defence against attack and persecution. Among those that are favourite shopping spots for Baha’i visitors and others is Daliyat el-Carmel, the largest Druze village in Israel, which is located on Mount Carmel, south-east of Haifa (population 15,000). It has a large market in the centre of the town, selling traditional Druze and Arab goods, which draws both local and foreign tourists. The only all-Druze town in western Galilee, the historically important Yirkih (Yirka), is very prosperous, having well-established industries and a population of 11,000 (its population was 1,000 in 1914). From a Baha’i perspective, this town is of great importance, since ‘for three months, Baha’u’llah stayed there, in the home of Shaykh Marzuq. The sons of Shaykh Marzuq, Shaykh Sa’id and Shaykh Salman, had shown great devotion to him and dealt with Baha’is with utmost affection. They considered the room [used by] Baha’u’llah during his sojourn as a sacred shrine, illuminating it each Friday night with a candle. They never allowed anyone into that room, nor furnished it in any way; and

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indeed considered it a sanctified spot. During these three months, Baha'u'llah's tent was pitched in the hills of Yirkih.<sup>6</sup> Abu-Sinan, situated east of 'Akka (and west of Yirkih), is another large Druze town. It became important during the reign of the Druze Emir Fahu'd-Din Mani, who built a palace there for his son Ali in 1617. Today, Abu-Sinan is home to about 10,000 persons – 35 per cent Druze and the rest Christians and Muslims. The tombs of the prophet Zechariah and of Sheikh Hanbali are located in the town. The following is a description of the village in 1914, recorded by Dr Mu'ayyad:

The village of Abu-Sinan was a hamlet on the eastern side of 'Akka, situated on a choice hill, with pleasant and vivifying air and water. The people cultivated fig and olive trees and grew grapevines. The inhabitants were mostly Druze, with a few Catholic or Jewish residents, all of whom were engaged in farming. The Druze are mostly robust people, adapted to mountain life. Though their religious convictions are not known with any degree of certainty, they consider themselves monotheistic; that is, they believe in a single, all-powerful Omnipotent One Who revealed Himself through His manifestations. One of these manifestations, al-Hakim, the sixth Caliph of the Fatimid dynasty, will appear once more at the end of time, when the world is filled with tyranny and oppression and believers are surrounded by repression and hardship and he will establish justice and equity throughout the world and his religion would then be triumphant. They believe he will then reassemble the dispersed Druze tribe in Syria and, when the standard of his faith is hoisted over Mecca and Jerusalem, he will bring the whole of the earth under his own rule and establish justice.

The Druze of Abu-Sinan had a particular affinity for and attachment to the Shrine of Baha'u'llah and considered 'Abdu'l-Baha as one of God's chosen ones. When one of them fell ill, they would circumambulate the Shrine of Baha'u'llah with the sick person and give him or her some of the left-over food from the plate of the Master ['Abdu'l-Baha]. They showed great consideration and attraction [to the Baha'is]. Since the old days, all their chiefs and shaykhs have had profound affection [for Baha'is] because, from the time of the Blessed Beauty, they had only experienced love, sincerity and spirituality. With great devotion and sincerity they sought the presence of the Master. [135–6]

### The Baha'is in Abu-Sinan

By September 1914, 'Abdu'l-Baha had sent most of the Baha'is to Abu-Sinan while he went back and forth between Haifa-'Akka and that village. During this time, he avoided association with non-family members, keeping only one Baha'i in 'Akka, and permitting Haji Mirza Haydar-'Ali to remain in the Haifa pilgrim house (chiefly on account of his advanced age and ill health). All other Baha'is remained far from the turmoil, and this precaution proved necessary since, in addition to other considerations, it silenced the enemies of the Baha'i Faith.

'Abdu'l-Baha's family, which included Bahiyih Khanum (his sister), Munirih Khanum (his wife), his daughters and their respective families and the Americans Miss Edith Sanderson and Lua Getsinger, settled in the residence of the village head of Abu-Sinan.

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<sup>6</sup> Mu'ayyad, *Khatirat* 206.

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Shaykh Salih, who displayed enormous respect towards ‘Abdu’l-Baha and his family, and his two sons, Shaykh Salman and Shaykh Yusuf, eagerly and warmly welcomed the Baha’is. ‘They considered [‘Abdu’l-Baha’s] presence in their midst a profound source of bounty, honour and distinction, and his shadow, the fount of their everlasting happiness and salvation.’<sup>7</sup> Once every few days ‘Abdu’l-Baha would come to Abu-Sinan to visit the Baha’is and oversee their affairs. After a stay of one or two nights, he would return to ‘Akka or Haifa. Most of the dwellings in the village were dilapidated farmhouses, which the Baha’is rented.

‘Abdu’l-Baha instructed Mirza Badi‘ Bushru’i, who had recently completed his college training in Beirut, to set up a school for the children. It consisted of 25 pupils, mainly the children of ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s household, of the Baha’i residents and of the Druze chiefs.

Dr Habib Mu’ayyad, recently graduated from the Beirut medical school, was asked to set up a dispensary. This latter step was particularly important as most of the Ottoman physicians had been sent to the battle-fronts and there was an acute shortage of medical personnel. Lua Getsinger served as anaesthetic technician to Dr Mu’ayyad (or occasionally Badi‘ Bushru’i would assist in this regard). The room that served as Mu’ayyad’s infirmary also served as the Baha’i pilgrim house, where visitors would stay.

The Baha’i community lived most modestly and the strictest economy was the rule. Their food was simple: lentils, dried beans, olives and olive oil, and sometimes millet, eggs and even some goat meat. ‘Abdu’l-Baha had taught the Baha’is to grow vegetables, which, with the wheat and corn from his village of ‘Adasiyyih, kept many from dying of hunger. The air was pure and fresh, and the community quickly settled into a new routine.

On his regular visits, ‘Abdu’l-Baha brought any news from the outside world that was available, and would first visit his family, asking about the health of each member separately. There were some American guests in the early days, but ‘Abdu’l-Baha thought it unwise for them to remain. Most left by the last boat that sailed from Haifa to Alexandria in January 1915, and everyone was relieved when the American Baha’is had succeeded in reaching safety.

The Shaykh and his sons would gather in the divan. This was the reception room, vast and comfortable, of the male portion of the family. Here, with their friends and guests, they waited to hear any news ‘Abdu’l-Baha might bring. They loved, trusted and honoured him with all their hearts, feeling and believing that his wisdom grasped the future as well as the present. Prayers were chanted at these gatherings, the Druze joining with the Baha’is. For five months there was no word from any part of the outside world.

Sometimes the governor of ‘Akka, or the Commandant, the Chief Magistrate, the Mufti, or other high officials, would come to visit ‘Abdu’l-Baha, staying at the village as guests for one or two nights. All consulted him on many questions regarding feeding or otherwise caring for the population during this time of difficulty, and many other problems were discussed. Great was his wisdom. He answered many questions and explained many incidents.

What follow are glimpses into the daily life of ‘Abdu’l-Baha during this period and some of his discourses, mainly as captured by Dr Mu’ayyad. They are presented in chronological order.

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<sup>7</sup> Mu’ayyad, *Khatirat* 136. Mirza Badi‘ Bushru’i, ‘Nuzdah Sal Shadmani’ (‘Nineteen years of bliss’, undated manuscript in private hands, 402 pp.), p. 37, indicates that, in response to ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s encouragement, Shaykh Salih had served in ‘Akka as the Iranian Consul.

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### *30 October–1 November 1914*

For three days 'Abdu'l-Baha and several Baha'is tarried at Bahji, staying at a building connected to the Shrine of Baha'u'llah that served as the Bahji pilgrim house. In the morning and evening, 'Abdu'l-Baha led the Baha'is on a visit to the Shrine, where he chanted the Tablet of Visitation. Also, twice daily, for 20 minutes each time, he pumped water for the trees and plants in the gardens surrounding the Shrine.

On November 1, early in the afternoon, 'Abdu'l-Baha instructed everyone to leave for Abu-Sinan aboard his carriage. En route they were greeted by the locals, who would recognize the carriage and immediately show great humility and respect towards 'Abdu'l-Baha, and approach him and kiss his hands with reverence and affection. The carriage stopped at a military camp, where 'Abdu'l-Baha went to meet the commander, who recounted the army's defeat in the Battle of Sarab even though it numbered 70,000 strong. When 'Abdu'l-Baha returned to the carriage, he spoke about the history of the Baha'i community's relations with the Druze, as a means of preparing the group for their long stay at Abu-Sinan:

The Blessed Beauty journeyed to the village of Yirkih three times. On the first visit, I walked at the side of Baha'u'llah's steed until [reaching] the proximity of Abu-Sinan. Those days were marvellously pleasant! The Turks have a saying, 'The memory and reminiscence of those days are worth the world!'

At one time, after eight or nine years of confinement in 'Akka, [my uncle,] the late Mirza Muhammad-Quli and I came out to explore the countryside. The trees had only recently blossomed, the countryside was most enchanting, and we enjoyed the scenery immensely. There, the late [Mirza Muhammad-Quli] encountered a friend and enquired as to his destination. The friend responded, 'I am going to Abu-Sinan and Yirkih'. My late [uncle] sighed in sadness and I said to him, 'Do not be sad, for one day we shall do the same'. Now, every time I visit this village, I think of him. [131–2]

Upon his arrival, 'Abdu'l-Baha joined his family as a guest of Shaykh Salih.<sup>8</sup> That evening, Shaykh Salih organized a large feast in the main hall of his residence at which a number of Baha'is and others were present. 'Abdu'l-Baha spoke about the need of 'wise and sound policies' [132] in political affairs, noting that the European leaders were not prudent and their actions had led to the raging World War. He gave the example of Mirza Abu'l-Qasim Farahani, known as the Qa'im-Maqam (d. 1835), who, as Fath-'Ali Shah's Prime Minister, had prevented serious bloodshed during the Russo-Iranian War.

### *2 November 1914*

In the morning a group of Druze and their chiefs came to meet with 'Abdu'l-Baha. Shaykh Salih expressed his fear of the war, to which 'Abdu'l-Baha responded:

You have not experienced genuinely difficult times, for if you had, such occurrences would not perturb you. One night we owned a vast estate and possessed all manner of comforts, but in the morning we were evicted and deprived

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<sup>8</sup> Bushru'i, 'Nuzdah' 36.

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of all belongings. Not even a coat was left to us. In the midst of the most agonizing cold, we were banished from one country to another. I went to my mother, asking for some food, but she had none to give. I asked for some flour and ate it in place of food. En route, in the hope of a good meal, I purchased syrup, flour and oil [to make halvah]. Instead, they mistakenly added a large quantity of pepper, which severely burned our mouths and insides. One of our friends was branded seventy times. Others had their noses cut off. Yet others were hanged upside down, until all their intestines fell out. We have weathered such storms. I pray that everything goes well and that God will protect all. [137]<sup>9</sup>

At lunch-time Shaykh Salih gave a large feast with a variety of dishes. He had invited fifteen of Arab chiefs and had exerted much effort for this event beforehand.

#### *4 November 1914*

The remaining Baha’is of Haifa came to Abu-Sinan on this date and ‘Abdu’l-Baha left for ‘Akka. Also, it was at this period that a box containing Tablets and holy relics was sent to Abu-Sinan for safe-keeping. The contents of this box formed the nucleus of the future International Baha’i Archives.<sup>10</sup>

#### *11 November 1914*

‘Akka: Dr Mu’ayyad reports that ‘Abdu’l-Baha spoke about certain ancient Arab tribes. Afterwards ‘Abdu’l-Baha and Mu’ayyad walked to the House of ‘Abdu’llah Pasha, where an Arab beggar with filthy clothes and dirty, uncombed hair came to ‘Abdu’l-Baha. With utmost affection ‘Abdu’l-Baha caressed his face and beard and spoke many words of encouragement and humour to him: ‘May God grant you bounties. May God gladden your heart. What a wonderful chin! How is your health?’ After the beggar had left, ‘Abdu’l-Baha said:

When it is revealed, ‘Consort with all the religions’,<sup>11</sup> the intention is association with such people. Although there is no connection between us, I have served him for twenty years. [The intention of Baha’u’llah’s exhortation] is not to associate with a Covenant-breaker or those who curse the Blessed Beauty, or the likes of Haji Muhammad-Karim Khan who wrote in refutation of His Holiness the Exalted One [the Bab].

The intention is to consort with such people as are not antagonistic, or two-faced, or conniving, or hypocritical.<sup>12</sup> Such people [as this poor Arab] are not believers, and there is no harm in that; let him believe in his own convictions. It is exhorted that if we disfavour someone, it should not be over his religion. For

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<sup>9</sup> This is a reference to the severe anti-Babi pogrom in 1852 following the attempt on the life of Nasiri’d-Din Shah; see Nabil-i-A’zam, *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil’s Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahā’i Revelation* (Wilmette: Bahā’i Publishing Trust, 1970) 595–650.

<sup>10</sup> Bushru’i, ‘Nuzdah’ 55–6.

<sup>11</sup> *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā’u’llāh* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā’i Publishing Trust, 1983) 95.

<sup>12</sup> The original is ‘*munāfiq*’, which may be understood in this context to refer to those who rebel against the Covenant.

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instance, we should not avoid a Christian because of his beliefs. However, we should eschew people with abhorrent behaviour, such as a thief, or a philanderer, or a murderer. 'Consort with all the religions' does not apply to such people. That is, if you know that someone sows the seeds of rebellion and enmity against the Blessed Beauty, then you should not associate with him. We have no relations with these people and leave them to their own devices. [265–6]

'Abdu'l-Baha and several friends continued to stroll to the sea-shore. When they first reached the shore, portions of the sea-wall looked in complete disrepair. 'Abdu'l-Baha said:

This world is the plane of creation and disintegration. The process never stops: on one hand it creates new people, and on the other it destroys what it has created. The world will not grow tired. How numerous are the days witnessed by the world! They had buildings along this section [of the walls] and in front of them they built a bath house. With these rocks they made a natural pool and would wash their clothes there ... [266]

While in Europe, I always proclaimed, 'The Cause of Baha'u'llah embraces all the past Dispensations and manifests all their benefits to human society. It is like a tree that has many strong branches. The Faith of Baha'u'llah contains all the teachings beneficial to the world of humanity and will profit every segment of society. For instance, the New Testament speaks of compassion, kindness, forgiveness and clemency. These same teachings exist in the Faith of Baha'u'llah. The Qur'an speaks of justice and punishment, and these same concepts are preserved in the Cause of Baha'u'llah. In short, whatever good and productive precepts exist among the diverse groups of humanity, all are present in the Cause of God. In addition, the Faith offers certain principles, which others lack. For instance, [the principle of] the oneness of humanity; religion must be the cause of love and fellowship; religion must be in accord with reason and science; the proclamation of universal peace; the equality of men and women; the promotion of learning and spirituality, and many others.' [268]

The group continued walking in the company of 'Abdu'l-Baha to the cemetery, where a number of the early Baha'is were buried. 'Abdu'l-Baha stood by the graves and, with hands raised heavenwards, whispered prayers and supplicated divine mercy for those resting in their eternal abode.

The group strolled on further, to the railway station, where 'Abdu'l-Baha sat down and said to Dr Mu'ayyad, 'Now that you have become a physician, come and take my pulse.' When he checked 'Abdu'l-Baha's pulse he was shocked, and reported, 'Your pulse is very slow, but regular. The arteries seem to have the proper flow.' 'Abdu'l-Baha remarked, 'From the age of 30 I have had a slow pulse. All others have a pulse rate of about 75 to 80 [per minute] and therefore greatly wonder about my pulse rate. What rate did you measure?' Mu'ayyad said, 'I did not count the rate, but suspect that it is about 40 [per minute].' He replied, 'No, it is 45 to 46. Count for yourself.' Mu'ayyad reports that he counted closely, using his watch, and it was 45. So he reported the result. 'Abdu'l-Baha stated, 'If I have a fever, it goes up to 50.'<sup>13</sup> [269]

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<sup>13</sup> 'Abdu'l-Baha requested Dr Mu'ayyad to give him a complete physical examination; this was carried out and the report is included in Mu'ayyad, *Khatirat* 270.

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The friends proceeded to stroll through the streets of ‘Akka in the company of ‘Abdu’l-Baha. Along the way, wherever the people of ‘Akka were congregated or sitting, at the sight of ‘Abdu’l-Baha they would rise to full height and greet him affectionately. Whoever they passed by, that person would instantly bend low, with hands reaching the ground, then bring them up over the head, thereby offering the customary expressions of submissiveness, reverence and humility. Children playing in the streets would quit playing and run up to him and kiss his hands, and then return to their games.

*19–20 November 1914*

During this time Prince Shaykhu’r-Ra’is arrived in the Holy Land, and the Birth of the Bab was observed on 19 November<sup>14</sup> at Bahji. With utmost joy and excitement, all the Baha’is residing in Abu-Sinan walked to Bahji, where a feast was given by Aqa Mirza Sayyid Husayn. The friends visited the Shrine of Baha’u’llah twice, and before dusk they returned to the village of Abu-Sinan. ‘Abdu’l-Baha and Shaykhu’r-Ra’is returned to ‘Akka.

The following day, the Birth of Baha’u’llah was celebrated in Abu-Sinan, where 19 Baha’i children sang songs and engaged in a game of questions and answers, as a means of deepening and character training.<sup>15</sup>

*24 November 1914*

Aqa Mirza Nuru’d-Din Zayn came from ‘Akka to Abu-Sinan and reported the words of ‘Abdu’l-Baha spoken earlier in the day: ‘If the Covenant-breakers had not frustrated my efforts, I would have assembled some of the Muslim and the Christian chiefs and exhorted them to disallow internal conflict [in the nation]. However, the violators of the Covenant resisted and blocked me.’ [297]

*30 November 1914*

It was a clear, bright day with a calm sea. From afar, the Zeeb underwater reefs, which were typically covered by the waves, could now be seen, and the people of ‘Akka mistook them for warships. Therefore the entire population of ‘Akka fled in fear, leaving behind only a few handicapped people. The whole city was evacuated. Doors and windows were left open. Under these conditions, ‘Abdu’l-Baha stayed in ‘Akka, with Aqa Asadu’llah Kashi in his service. The Mutasarrif of ‘Akka had cabled Beirut that four enemy warships were fast approaching the city, and this news had further perturbed the citizens of ‘Akka.

Dr Mu’ayyad was in Abu-Sinan while all this was happening. Mrs Sanderson arrived in Isfandiyar’s carriage and informed him that ‘Abdu’l-Baha had summoned him. He immediately left for ‘Akka and arrived as people were beginning to return to the city.

In the evening, a number of the Baha’is were present at the House of ‘Abbud. Because of the disturbances, ‘Abdu’l-Baha spoke at length and most fervently about the storm of persecution that had occurred after the failed attempt on the life of Nasiri’d-Din Shah in 1852. He concluded his remarks by saying: ‘The point is that I told these people of ‘Akka what days

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<sup>14</sup> In the Near and Middle East, the observance of the Birth of the Bab and some other Baha’i Holy Days is marked in accordance with the lunar calendar.

<sup>15</sup> Bushru’i, ‘Nuzdah’ 56–7; *ibid* 57–8 has detailed entries for 21–22 November.

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we had witnessed, and that the threat of warships, in comparison, is like the sweetness of halvah. Indeed one cannot even call them threats.' [279–80]

#### 4 December 1914

Dr Mu'ayyad was summoned to 'Abdu'l-Baha's presence alone in 'Akka. He gave him a mission that required his going to Beirut by way of Damascus.

#### 31 December 1914

In the morning 'Abdu'l-Baha was pacing in the garden and Dr Mu'ayyad was in attendance.

'To what should I devote my time in Abu-Sinan?' Mu'ayyad asked.

'I wish for you to go to Iran,' 'Abdu'l-Baha replied. 'For now, however, remain in Abu-Sinan and, for the good pleasure of God, cure the ailing. Also, read from the treatise on proofs as well as *Ishraqat*, *Kalimat* [Firdawsiyyih] and *Tarazat*, and memorize them.'

'Should I also tend to the non-Baha'is?' Mu'ayyad asked.

'Yes, indeed,' 'Abdu'l-Baha remarked, 'We too are devoted to the poor. By all means, attend to all, particularly the needy.'

Mu'ayyad remarked, 'Aqa Shaykh Badru'd-Din has said, "The Shaykhu'l-Islam wants to proclaim *jihad*!"'

'Abdu'l-Baha replied, 'Shaykhu'l-Islam is a simple, common man with no religious convictions. He is utterly ignorant of the religion of God. *Jihad* had an effect at a time when people were devoted to God's Faith, but now that spirit is completely gone. They themselves do not believe what they say. They claim this issue is a global war and *jihad* must be a matter of national concern. If in truth these people believed in religion, by now the world would have become the Abha paradise. If you offered them a bribe, they would say the exact opposite of what they ruled earlier. No trace of spirit, sincerity, faith, certitude or firmness has remained in Islam. Only mere words have survived.' [307–8]<sup>16</sup>

#### 9 January 1915

After several days' absence, 'Abdu'l-Baha returned to Abu-Sinan. At night, a number of Baha'i and Arab friends met with him and his discourse concerned the situation of the war. He stated:

This war is indeed ruinous and devastating in its effects. However, afterwards, the number of peace-loving people will grow considerably, and the commotion, uproar and the mighty tumult will precipitate [universal] peace. For the West, the most important thing is the war. If Germany is victorious, then the Ottoman Empire will be triumphant as well. Otherwise, if the Ottoman army advances into Egyptian territory, their victory will be temporary.

May God deal justly with those who caused these wars and conflicts, who have caused so much bloodshed and trouble. Indeed, they have undermined the prosperity of the people. [145]

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<sup>16</sup> Bushru'i, 'Nuzdah' 59–62 has several detailed entries for December 1914 which augment the information given by Dr Mu'ayyad.

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*10 January 1915*

In the morning a number of non-Baha’is met with ‘Abdu’l-Baha. He spoke formally and on a variety of topics. In the afternoon, Shaykh Salman asked about the education of children and ‘Abdu’l-Baha replied:

It is universally recognized that evil is stronger than good. Evil has a rapid effect, whereas good is slow in its impact. If a trustworthy person and a thief were together, the thief would never become righteous, but the converse might occur. Because of their association, a truthful person may become a liar, but it is rare for the perjurer to become truthful, or for the parsimonious to become generous by reason of his association with the charitable, or for the wicked to become virtuous, and so forth. This is because evil is stronger and its influence is more penetrating. This issue does not require proof, it is as evident as the noon-time sun. If there were a thousand healthy men, but one among them had a contagious disease, the thousand would have no effect on the ill, but the illness of that one would spread to the remaining thousand. For instance, if a person is afflicted with smallpox and comes into contact with many healthy children, all will be infected, while it is not possible for the healthy to influence the sick. It is similar with the black plague or leprosy, where the healthy may be affected but the converse would not hold.

Consider how much time it takes to raise a building, but dynamite can destroy it in the blink of an eye. It takes five years to build an armoured ship, but only a minute for a torpedo to sink it to the bottom of the ocean. It takes twenty years to raise a person to maturity, but he perishes in an instant by the assassin’s bullet.

Therefore, if you desire for your children to be raised properly and remain protected, they must be cared for adequately. You must ensure that they do not meet or associate with ill-mannered persons. Either establish your own schools or do as we are doing. We have many students in the University [of Beirut]. Last year there were thirty of them. They associate only with each other [i.e. other Baha’is] and at the time of instruction they attend classes. Therefore they are well protected. However, there are other [Muslim] Iranians in Beirut and they are all vagabonds. Even the teachers despise them, to the point that they are expelled from the school. It is amazing! Most bewildering!

The Iranian children in ‘Akka were like angels, but alas, some of them associated with the Arabs or with ill-mannered children. When they argued, all their speech was in Persian, but then they would curse in Arabic, as they were not taught similar words in Persian. When they became youth, they associated with non-Baha’is and became totally corrupt. Soon I had no choice but to expel them all.

There is a story of a Shaykh meeting a Bektash and saying to him, ‘Why do you continue causing mischief and spending your time gratifying your carnal desires? Come with me and pray, meditate, fast for forty days, fear God and become righteous. Once you have become accustomed to praying and fasting, then you will no longer commit unseemly acts.’ The Bektash responded, ‘There is no need for forty days of prayer. You stay with me for just one night and all religion will be forgotten to you!’

Therefore, I exhort you to protect your children from the evil influence of the wayward. [145–7]

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*11 January 1915*

In the afternoon 'Abdu'l-Baha went to 'Umqih, and returned near dusk. He was in great spirits, laughed frequently and shared humorous stories. 'Abdu'l-Baha related a dream that he had had some years earlier, about the arrival of the Commission of Investigation and its activities. He described at length the collusion of the Commissioners with his half-brothers, the failure of their opposition to him and their eventual bitter end. After this fervent presentation he arose and left, his visage excited and filled with joy and energy.

*12 January 1915*

A number of Baha'is boarded 'Abdu'l-Baha's carriage and went to Haifa to accompany Mrs Edith Sanderson to her departure on board an Italian ship. The group remained in Haifa on 13 and 14 January.<sup>17</sup>

*14 January 1915*

Dr Mu'ayyad reports that he had earned a small sum from his medical practice in Abu-Sinan and contributed this to 'Abdu'l-Baha so that flour could be purchased and distributed among the village poor. At first, the Druze Shaykhs refused the offering, but after 'Abdu'l-Baha had pressed them, they consented and the entire amount, which included a sum contributed by 'Abdu'l-Baha, was given to the Catholics.

*19 January 1915*

It was Dr Mu'ayyad's birthday. A small festivity was organized and several gifts were presented to him. Faḍlu'llāh Khan [Banān] Shirazi<sup>18</sup> came [from Iran] with great difficulty to obtain some news of 'Abdu'l-Baha and the Baha'is. This was the last outside Baha'i that they saw for a long time. Some days later Fadlu'llah took the last Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Baha to Cairo, which was copied and dispersed to other communities – then there were no more communications.

*22 January 1915*

A group of Baha'is went for a visit to the village of Yirkih.

*30 January 1915*

A number of notables and affluent citizens of 'Akka came to Abu-Sinan, including Nazmy Bey Bashi, Alay Amini, Jawdat Bey, Yuzbashi Nazmy Effendi Bey and the city's physician, Dr Tahir Bey. The Druze Shaykhs prepared a dinner feast, and Badi' Effendi and Habib Mu'ayyad were invited as well. Before dinner, the ranking officer, Nazmy Bey Bashi Effendi, had mentioned that earlier in the day a feast had been given in 'Akka by Mirza Badi'u'llah,

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<sup>17</sup> Bushru'i, 'Nuzdah' 64 records more detail of 'Abdu'l-Baha's discourse on that day.

<sup>18</sup> A prominent Baha'i, who served as the secretary of the Spiritual Assembly of Shiraz during the 1930s and 1940s; see *In the Land of Refuge* (forthcoming).

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the half-brother of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, who had invited the military commanders of the region, the guest of honour being Haydar Bey, the chief of gendarmes. The guests were entertained with great quantities of food and alcoholic drinks and by Sadhijih, Mirza Badi‘u’llah’s daughter. She had planned to provoke Haydar Bey, who had complete authority over the region’s military, into imprisoning, exiling or murdering ‘Abdu’l-Baha. This scheme had backfired however, and a huge uproar against Mirza Badi‘u’llah had ensued in ‘Akka.

*7 February 1915*

Dr Mu’ayyad reports that on this day he went to Haifa and in the streets of the city he met ‘Abdu’l-Baha, who, after a short conversation, assured Mu’ayyad of a second meeting that day and went to the home of one of the Turks. Soon, he returned and they boarded his carriage. Mirza Ahmad Sohrab was also summoned, and together they went sight-seeing.

‘Abdu’l-Baha said, ‘I go to dangerous places by myself, but for sight-seeing, I like to take the friends with me. Today I want to take you on this excursion. Tell me, how do you spend your time in Abu-Sinan?’

Mu’ayyad replied, ‘Holding surgeries, and at night replying to polemics and reading books. I spend the afternoons doing operations and the evenings outlining [responses to] the polemics of [Muhammad-]Javad Qazvini. He has translated A‘zam as ‘Great’ and Akbar as ‘the Most Great’, whereas it should be the reverse.<sup>19</sup> (‘Abdu’l-Baha smiled.) Among his base accusations is that instead of bringing unity, ‘Abdu’l-Baha separated men from their wives, fathers from sons, and daughters from their mothers.’

‘Abdu’l-Baha said, ‘I never caused their separation. They separated themselves. The Blessed Beauty established a Covenant and they broke it, therefore, separation took place. If they obey and remain firm, there will be unity. The Cause of God has united easterner, westerner, southerner, northerner, Turk, Arab, Indian and American. All are united and would give their lives for one another. The ones that were far became near; the enemies became brothers. But he who violates the Covenant, be it one’s brother, sister, father or mother, naturally a firm believer will sever relations with him.’

The conversation continued. At that point ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s carriage reached the cave of Elijah, and about 200 needy women and children were near by. At ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s instruction, Isfandiyar, his coachman, distributed money among the poor. After a short walk, the group returned to ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s residence. That night, about 30 Baha’is were assembled at his house and ‘Abdu’l-Baha remarked: ‘Praised be God that out of the favours of the Blessed Beauty, I am well and healthy. Indeed, I am very well. After such an arduous journey [to Europe and America], I needed a repose. Now I am forced to rest a little, otherwise I would not relax.’ [164–7]

*8 February 1915*

‘Abdu’l-Baha was sitting in the sun by the entrance of his residence in Haifa. Aqa Mirza Fadlu’llah Banan Shirazi was also present. ‘Abdu’l-Baha said, ‘The call of the Supreme

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<sup>19</sup> Most likely, the issue had to do with the translation of ‘Ghusn-i A‘zam’ and ‘Ghusn-i Akbar’. The former is a title of ‘Abdu’l-Baha, which would be translated as ‘the Most Mighty Branch’, whereas the latter is a reference to Mirza Muhammad ‘Ali and means ‘the Greater Branch’. Baha‘u’llah had emphasized that ‘A‘zam’ is superior in rank to ‘Akbar’ in his Kitāb-i-Ahd (Book of the Covenant).

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Concourse and the fame of the Cause of God have enveloped the whole earth, but the Iranians have not yet awakened to it.' A Christian entered, carrying a basket. When he saw 'Abdu'l-Baha he was overwhelmed and dropped the basket, saying, 'There was no porter, so I was forced to carry the basket myself'. 'A person must be proud of his labour,' 'Abdu'l-Baha said, 'and only ashamed of his sins, not of his work and service.' [167]

In the afternoon some friends had tea in the company of 'Abdu'l-Baha. He said, 'Bring my overcoat so we can walk to the Shrine of the Bab.' A number of friends accompanied him. His carriage followed behind. En route, he rested in two places. Upon reaching a bend in the road, he spoke of the benefits of paved roads, noting, 'This is indeed an amazing mountain and now it has good roads as well'. (He meant that the large boulders had been removed.) Haji Sayyid Javad asked, 'Will there be a time that electricity will be available on this mountain?' 'Abdu'l-Baha said, 'Without a doubt! But not so soon. Eventually this mountain will be filled with light.'

The group reached a particular spot, and 'Abdu'l-Baha said, 'I purchased this parcel of land in order to make the road wider. The wretched Matran seized it and fenced it with a wall; but now he has lost that as well.' [168]

Half-way to the Shrine, his carriage arrived and 'Abdu'l-Baha boarded it. He spoke most appreciatively of the almond blossom, saying how it had adorned the mountain. After he had chanted the Tablet of Visitation the group retired to the pilgrim house, where he remarked to the resident Baha'is, 'Plant fruit trees, since they are productive. I am very fond of fruit trees, though I never eat fruits, except an occasional sweet tangerine. Nevertheless, I love for the tree to bear fruits. Similarly I like people who produce goodly results. Otherwise it is of no use.' [169]

That night, when some of the friends were gathered at 'Abdu'l-Baha's house, he said:

Cleanliness has a profound effect on the spirit. Even though cleanliness is related to worldly affairs, yet its effect is manifested in the soul. Now the Cause of God is not established, but when it is, you will see that cleanliness and refinement are one of the foundations of God's religion. Sometimes I am invited to places that serve wonderful food, but since it is not made in sanitary ways, I partake of it with hesitation. And actually there is no choice but to eat it ...

Even though some things are earth-bound, they have a great effect on the soul, such as cleanliness or a good voice. The voice is no more than airwaves that reach one's ear and cause the vibration of the eardrums. Yet, consider its profound effect on the spirit. Similarly, cleanliness affects the soul. [169-70]

### 9 February 1915

The German Mr Rothschild was a competent artist and had skilfully drawn a portrait of 'Abdu'l-Baha. He presented this drawing to him and asked that a few words be inscribed below the picture so that a German translation of them would further adorn the portrait. 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote:

*Humanity is created in the image of the Merciful [God], that is to say with Divine attributes. And so, the physical form will perish, but the heavenly character will endure. The soul is an effulgence of the divine, while the human body is composed of earthly elements. Therefore may a heavenly form be thine. 'Abdu'l-Baha 'Abbas.* [172]

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*15–17 February 1915*

Because of the humidity and the cold of Haifa, Haji Mirza Haydar-‘Ali, who was 85 years old, contracted a severe fever and unrelenting cough. When one of the friends suggested to him that a doctor should visit, he refused. Instead, he indicated his desire to be examined by Dr Mu’ayyad. On 17 February, one of the Afnans informed ‘Abdu’l-Baha and instructions were issued for Mu’ayyad to leave for Haifa on the following day to attend him.

*18–20 February 1915*

Dr Mu’ayyad arrived at the Haifa pilgrim house, where a number of the friends were gathered around the Haji’s bed. On examination, he was found to have pneumonia and heart disease. Mu’ayyad began to treat him, and for the next six days he remained in the pilgrim house, attending to him.

*21 February 1915*

Haji had become well enough to bathe. All day he related many virtuous stories, one example being: Mirza Badi‘u’llah gave a promissory note of 1200 liras to Yahya Bey, the Damascene, known as Tabur Aqasi, for him to arrange ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s exile to Fizan. However, after their plans fell apart Yahya Bey enforced the payment of the note. Mirza Badi‘u’llah was compelled to sell two pieces of land for six hundred liras and to sell the ownership of one-third of the Mansion of Bahji to Tabur Aqasi for the remainder of the debt.<sup>20</sup> Dr Mu’ayyad notes that, paradoxically, shortly thereafter ‘Abdu’l-Baha travelled, with the utmost majesty, to Europe and America to demonstrate that ‘God is the best of plotters’.<sup>21</sup>

*23 February 1915*

Mu’ayyad reports that in the morning he was in Haifa with Haji Mirza Haydar-‘Ali. Afterwards, he left for ‘Akka with Aqa Mirza Jalil and Aqa Mirza Husayn Yazdi and came into the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Baha. An Egyptian youth had come from Switzerland and was with him, discussing the World War. ‘Abdu’l-Baha stated:

In the loudest voice, I cried out in all the synagogues, and churches: O people! The world of humanity is in peril and Europe is like a barrel of gunpowder waiting for a single spark for it to explode. You must endeavour to prevent this occurrence. You must protect humanity. For six thousand years people have been afflicted with ills and prejudices in the religious, temporal, national and political realms. Have you not discerned that it has come to naught? Come, embrace divine politics, that is, the politics of love. This is an easy matter. Is it not better for us to embrace divine teachings above human conceptions? If God was indeed heedless of man, then He would not have created him in the first place, provided nourishment for him or educated him. Therefore, God loves man.

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<sup>20</sup> Shoghi Effendi purchased the remaining portion of the Mansion from the descendants of Tabur Aqasi. (Mu’ayyad, p. 176, n. 1.)

<sup>21</sup> Qur’an 8:29.

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Similarly, I announced: Religion must be the promoter of science and civilization. Otherwise, its absence is preferable. Why do we have inequality of the sexes? We all are children of the same father and the same mother.

Now, different groups of people in the world have made claims to various portions of the earth and have drawn lines around each, considering it to be solely theirs. They say, 'This is my nation and that is yours!' On this side of one line is a friend, on the other they see an enemy. We behave like dogs, considering a corner of a street to be ours, and, as soon as another dog approaches our territory, we attack. The only earth that belongs to man is the one that will ultimately be poured over him. Is it not a waste, so much bloodshed for this worthless soil? ... [178-9]

### *28 February 1915*

'Abdu'l-Baha returned to Abu-Sinan. In his company were a number of military officers, such as the Qumandan [Commandant?], Nazmi Bey and Jawdat Bey. In another carriage rode Dr Finkelstein, who was a German and the principal of the German Polytechnic in Haifa,<sup>22</sup> his sister and three other Germans. As soon as 'Abdu'l-Baha's carriage came into view, the Druze took four horses for the guests to ride. Out of deference to 'Abdu'l-Baha and with his permission, the Qumandan preferred to walk. However, he insisted that 'Abdu'l-Baha should ride as it was uphill and difficult for him. 'Abdu'l-Baha mounted a donkey and slowly came from behind, ordering all the others to accompany the Qumandan. That night, 'Abdu'l-Baha spoke in the gathering of the villagers and Dr Mu'ayyad served as the translator. Some of that discussion is as follows:

Dr Finkelstein: 'We are exceedingly happy and joyous that we have gained the bounty of being in the Master's presence, which is the ultimate desire of so many people. I too have always longed for a day such as this and for beholding an assemblage like this.'

'Abdu'l-Baha: 'Such gatherings are only possible through the divine bounties and favours. Otherwise, how could the two of us ever hope to meet? A gathering such as this, in such a location, at a time when no one draws a breath of comfort, is not possible unless decreed through God's benevolence.'

Dr Finkelstein: 'Throughout all of Europe, a meeting similar to this, with such depth of love and spirituality, is never seen. Even among members of the same family, such affection is not experienced. We have much to learn from the East, especially culture, humanity and spirituality. In its place, we can offer science, technology and industry.'

'Abdu'l-Baha: 'Yes, indeed. The relationship between the East and the West must be like that, otherwise it is of no benefit... the Germans were very kind to us. I am well pleased with the Germans. The spiritual future of Germany is very glorious. The word "German" in Persian means "Our kinsmen".<sup>23</sup> I was happier in Germany than anywhere else.' [180-2]

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<sup>22</sup> This was established by the German-Jewish Ezra Fund and was a predecessor of the Technion in Haifa.

<sup>23</sup> In Persian the French word *Allemagne* is used for Germany. In Persian, *Ālimān* means 'our family', 'our kin'.

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‘ABDU’L-BAHA IN ABU-SINAN: SEPTEMBER 1914–MAY 1915

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At night, the German visitors stayed in Abu-Sinan; the following day they had lunch with ‘Abdu’l-Baha and then returned to Haifa. At the time of his departure, Dr Finkelstein said to ‘Abdu’l-Baha, ‘These two days in your august presence were the sweetest time of my life.’ [182]

### *1 March 1915*

In Abu-Sinan, ‘Abdu’l-Baha instructed Dr Mu’ayyad to travel in his carriage to Haifa and visit Haji Mirza Haydar-‘Ali, and then to return the following day. At dusk, Dr Mu’ayyad was summoned to his presence. ‘Abdu’l-Baha spoke about Dr Finkelstein and the other guests, remarking:

Consider what an immense love and devotion governs our relationship and how devotedly we cherish them. They have no prejudice; they eat everything, unlike the Jews in this land. The Jews in America have similar traits and listen attentively. [183]

That night, in the home of Shaykh Salih, ‘Abdu’l-Baha remarked:

Piety is the mother of all goodly characters, and its absence is the mother of all evil ... One time in ‘Akka, fifty Christians were imprisoned. Their [Muslim] gaoler would beat and torture them, considering this a meritorious deed before God. Through [inflicting] various injuries, he would also exact money from the prisoners, and when they did not pay, would beat them even more severely, claiming, ‘This is *jihad!*’ Eventually one of them came to me. I complained to the governor, ‘Though the prisoners are Christians, such treatment is unwarranted. If any Muslim wishes to wage *jihad*, let him go to the battlefield and war against the Russians. Otherwise, what is the point of beating defenceless prisoners?’ The governor summoned the gaoler and ordered that he receive fifty strokes of the cane. Eventually, the situation of the gaoler deteriorated so that he would come to me, asking for alms for his needy wife and children. He became a beggar. [183–4]

### *2 March 1915*

Dr Mu’ayyad was summoned to ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s presence early in the morning and had tea with him. He remarked, ‘When you go to Haifa [today], give my greetings to that Egyptian youth and tell him that his letter was received. However, for his protection, I will not reply, as they search all the papers closely. Through divine bounties, without need for paper and pen, our spiritual communion will be everlasting.’ He added: ‘I use hyssop. Is it used in modern medicine?’ Mu’ayyad responded: ‘I do not know its chemical composition.’ ‘Abdu’l-Baha said:

It has a diuretic effect, and therefore it is beneficial. It is also very useful for curing shortness of breath. It has an indirect influence. The root of corn and cherry bark are also diuretic. But all healing resides with God. These are all instruments.

For healing, two causes are necessary: physical and spiritual. For a material remedy, physicians and medicine are needed. And for the spiritual cure, confirmations and divine healing are required.

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Similarly for commerce, two causes have been decreed. The material cause is having capital and expertise, and the spiritual cause requires divine confirmation. If the material means are not available, then all efforts are squandered. And should the divine confirmations accompany a deed, then its benefits will be immense and universal. If both are present, then it will be light upon light. Otherwise, efforts will be wasted. Confirmation and divine affirmation must surround all undertakings – this is true even in war ... [186]

### 3 March 1915

Shaykh Yusuf and Mirza Tarazu'llah, son of Mirza Mahmud Kashi, came to meet with 'Abdu'l-Baha in Abu-Sinan and reported, 'The governor is preparing for defensive measures and predicts that warships will bombard the city'. 'Abdu'l-Baha remarked:

In these days, it is time for calmness and dignity; it is time for confidence and assurance. We must rely upon God. Be most vigilant, so that you do not grow perturbed and perplexed. They say that [one day] when Napoleon was writing a letter, an enemy artillery shell exploded near his tent and dirt fell over the letter. He was not perturbed in the least, and paused for a minute to say, 'I am thankful to our foes for helping me in my work. I was going to pour some sand over this letter to dry the ink, but now our enemy has helped, so that I can finish this task and issue the command for attack.' With that, he ordered his men into the field with trumpet blasts. It so happened that they were victorious.

May God provide means for our succour. At present the situation is very troublesome. Some things can be tolerated, but others cannot. For instance, when we arrived in 'Akka, the situation was very difficult. We were imprisoned, and two of our friends passed away. No money was available for their burial. There was one small carpet which we sold for a few *qurush* and gave this to the Imam Jum'ih, who placed those two in a ditch and scattered a little dirt over them. We had to feed one hundred and fifty people.

Thinking about troubles is more difficult than the actual experience. How wonderful it would have been if human beings were like the birds of the air, which are carefree and never save for their next meal. I hope that soon God will fling open His gate of mercy upon His servants. It has been very difficult for people. Before my journey to America, I knew two or three hundred of the poor. But now, save for a handful, they have perished. [190–1]

### 5 March 1915

The news of the passing of Aqa 'Abdu'r-Rahim<sup>24</sup> was received, and for that reason, 'Abdu'l-Baha left for 'Akka. He remarked to Dr Mu'ayyad, 'Today I was not feeling well, and the household advised me not to leave. It is also rainy and very cold, but I want to go to 'Akka, and from there to the resting-place of Aqa 'Abdu'r-Rahim and then to Haifa. What do you think?' Dr Mu'ayyad responded, 'Whatever is your august will.' He replied, 'Confident of the bounties and favours of the Blessed Beauty, I will go and will complete this journey in good health ...' [192–3]

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<sup>24</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahā, *Memorials of the Faithful* (trans. Marzieh Gail, Wilmette: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1971) 64.

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### 20 March 1915

This day corresponded to the anniversary of the Declaration of the Bab<sup>25</sup> and also concluded the fasting period. In the morning, some of the Baha'is of Abu-Sinan left for 'Akka, so that on this Holy Day they would have the bounty of visiting 'Abdu'l-Baha, as it was also his birthday. They had tea with him. He enquired of Dr Mu'ayyad about the condition of the sick left in his care, as well as his own health. Then he spoke of the trenches dug on the beach.

Also on this day, Dr Mu'ayyad received a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Baha, of which a provisional translation follows. Paying their homage, the group returned to Abu-Sinan.

*Abu-Sinan. The honoured Doctor Aqa Mirza Habib, upon him rest the Glory of God, the Most Glorious.*

*He is God.*

*O God, my God! I have turned to Thee, supplicating bounties from the ocean of Thy healing. O Lord, assist me in the service of Thy servants and in the healing of Thy bondslaves. If Thou dost assist me, my medicine will be a remedy for every sickness, fresh water for every thirst and cool relief for every raging ill. If Thou dost not assist me, then my medication would be the same as an illness and I would scarcely treat a single person.*

*O Lord, my God! Aid and assist me through Thy healing of the sick. Thou art the Healer, the Self-Sufficient, the Remover of every adversity and illness. And Thou art, verily, supreme over all things. 'Abdu'l-Baha 'Abbas. [195]*

### 21 March 1915, Naw-Ruz

All the Baha'is in Abu-Sinan, 'Akka, Haifa, Bahji, and the Ridvan and Firdaws Gardens were present, and they numbered about 140, men and women in approximately equal proportions.<sup>26</sup> The community gathered at Bahji in the morning and visited the Shrine of Baha'u'llah. In addition to tea, plentiful fruits and sweetmeats, 'Abdu'l-Baha had purchased two cooked lambs for lunch. Early in the morning, he came from 'Akka to Bahji and prepared food in the kitchen for the friends.

After 'Abdu'l-Baha had seen to all the work and supervised the preparation of the food, he joined the gathering and gave instructions for appropriate prayers, Tablets and poems to be chanted. Afterwards, he spoke at length on the significance of Naw-Ruz.

### 26 March 1915

'Abdu'l-Baha returned on this Friday to Abu-Sinan, and some of his discourse was as follows:

Through the power of the Kingdom, human beings are saved from the grip of nature by the sanctified Manifestations of God and are illumined by the light of divinity. That is, they are released from the clutches of the animal world and guided to the

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<sup>25</sup> See note 14.

<sup>26</sup> In conformity with the exigencies of time, the Baha'i gatherings in the Holy Land were conducted separately for the men and women until the ministry of Shoghi Effendi.

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highest pinnacle of humanity. The state of human nature is injustice, butchery, tyranny, treachery, lechery, achievement of selfish motives, neglect of God and fulfilment of carnal desires. The sanctified Manifestations of God rescue humanity from this black pit and guide it to the highest stations of spirituality. Thereupon, human beings gain faith, attraction to the divine fragrance, the ability to discover mysteries, recognition of the Divine, knowledge of hidden secrets, trustworthiness, fidelity, charity, nobility and spirituality.

However, after the passage of time, human beings return once again to their base nature and are seized in the grip of darkness and unfaithfulness. The original condition is reinstated, the bright day is darkened, the world of humanity becomes the animal world, splendour is transmuted into obscurity, and heavenly attraction turns into fulfilment of carnal desires. Indeed, if we were to consider this closely, we would see that older societies are completely unaware of religion and are captives of nature. No sign of divine bounties is discerned among them, nor is any heavenly fragrance inhaled from them. They are governed by certain traditions and customs and follow the ways of their forefathers.

Thus, day is followed by night and the night-season overtaken by day. After a period of time, a new Dispensation of Reality dawns and divine effulgences shine forth from the horizon of truth. Spring then becomes summer, and then autumn, and eventually winter. After winter, once more, the spiritual spring is born. And this is how divine bounties are propagated for evermore.

Some negligent men think that the spring season has concluded and nothing but winter remains. They are immersed in their own vain imaginings. [197–8]

### *27 March 1915*

‘Abdu’l-Baha remained with his family in his private quarters. Only when he was leaving Abu-Sinan did he pass by Mu’ayyad’s room and say, ‘I must go. Do not trouble yourself. Be under God’s care.’ And with that, he left. [198]

### *28–30 March 1915*

An astounding locust attack took place during this period. Mu’ayyad reports that, like a thick cloud, the locusts blocked the rays of the sun, and when they landed, they formed several layers on top of each other. In no time, even the finest of farms were reduced to desolate, barren land.

### *6 April 1915*

According to Bushru’i, ‘Abdu’l-Baha visited ‘Akka briefly on this day, and then returned [to Abu Sinan] the same day, this time staying until 17 April.

‘Abdu’l-Baha arrived at the guest-hall of Shaykh Salih, where a group of Baha’is and others were present. The entire conversation revolved around everyday topics and was in accordance with the aptitude and interest of the audience who had the pleasure of attending. Regarding people’s fear of the locust attacks, ‘Abdu’l-Baha stated:

It is amazing that people are afraid of physical afflictions, but have no worries of spiritual handicaps. They are heedless of being afflicted with a myriad spiritual catastrophes, but do not desire the least harm to come to this transient body, or to

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be exposed to any jeopardy. They say whatever may happen to our souls, let it happen; but nothing less than utmost comfort for our bodies! [204]

*7 April 1915*

It was a rainy day. Mu’ayyad reports that he returned from Bahji and twice met with ‘Abdu’l-Baha in Abu-Sinan. ‘Abdu’l-Baha said:

Consider man’s infidelity. With a thousand worries, troubles and tears he raises a child. Then, he readily puts thousands upon thousands to the sword. It takes twenty years for a person to grow to maturity and full strength, but in an instant, these people massacre tens of thousands of men and allow them to perish. How many cities are thoroughly destroyed, how many villages are reduced to heaps of dust, how much blood reddens the earth and how immense are the properties that are plundered and wrecked? And yet, there is no benefit in any of this! Their purpose is to be victorious. At one time, France was triumphant over Germany, and at another time, the converse was true. None of these victories is lasting and no good will come of them, just as they did not benefit them in the past ... [204]

*8 April 1915*

It was a cold and rainy day, and until about dusk the friends did not have the bounty of entering ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s presence. In the early evening, ‘Abdu’l-Baha summoned Dr Mu’ayyad and asked after the condition of Aqa Muhammad Ibrahim<sup>27</sup> ... Dr Mu’ayyad enquired from ‘Abdu’l-Baha of his health and general condition, and he stated: ‘I am well. There is no illness. Only my nerves are shattered, and this is because, after Baha’u’llah’s ascension, I was enveloped in a depression and grief that words cannot describe. Now, when I work hard or speak for a long time, my health is affected. The burdens of the recent journey [to Europe and America] ruined my health and melted my bones. My feeble temple was not able to withstand such difficulties.’ [205–6]

Dr Mu’ayyad suggested, ‘A few days ago, when we went to Yirkih, it was a most pleasant and invigorating location. It would seem to be most suitable for your well-being if you would go there and rest beneath its trees.’ ‘Abdu’l-Baha remarked, ‘Of what use is good health to me? I want to wholly sacrifice myself in the path of the Blessed Beauty and give no thought to commerce, farming, or possessions. Only through absolute sacrifice and detachment can one be faithful to the love of the Ancient Beauty. There should be no other thoughts besides service to His Threshold. I hope that you will attain unto this station. The Cause of God is very great indeed!’ [206–7]

Aqa Mirza Tarazu’llah Kashi said that the violators of the Covenant had given a feast for the Mutasarrif of ‘Akka, who was here on Sunday. ‘Abdu’l-Baha responded:

I wish the end of my life to be musk-laden. That is, I wish to drink from the chalice of martyrdom in the path of the Blessed Beauty. I cherish no other desire than this. It would make no difference for me, for I have no comfort to miss or happiness to

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<sup>27</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Memorials of the Faithful* 81.

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grieve over. I have no joy, so I will not be saddened by its absence, and I have no delight, to lament over its loss. Whatever happens is of no difference to me. However, these people (i.e. the Covenant-breakers) exert effort night and day to cause tumult in 'Akka. And if there is turmoil in that city and it results in my capture, imprisonment and death, it is of no consequence! Inshā'llāh (God willing), they will crucify me! Or pierce my chest with a thousand bullets! ...

My trust unto you is this: Never forget the bounties and favours of the Blessed Perfection. Never forget his admonishments and exhortations. Not for a moment should you neglect your fidelity to him. You and I must be thinking ceaselessly of his ordinances, inattentive to any other thought or consideration. We must concentrate all our thoughts on his affection. Know that, by God, besides Whom there is no other God, all existence is not worth the skin of a peanut. It will give no benefit or reward. The only thing that remains is service to his Cause, exaltation of his Faith and diffusion of divine fragrance. Fī Amānu'llāh (Go in the protection of God). [207–8]

*9 April 1915*

On the occasion of the martyrdom of Shaykh 'Ali Akbar Quchani in Khurasan, 'Abdu'l-Baha commented:

These wretched soldiers die for the sake of some earth, which is the lowest form of creation, and do not know why they are slain. Consider how some are refined and how some abase themselves. In the world of humanity, some sanctified souls appear in the human temple who are revered by the whole of creation, while some others appear who worship the earth and give their lives in the path of dirt and rock. The latter are the abased! And yet there are some others who readily give their all – their lives, possessions, comfort and positions – in the path of the Blessed Beauty. How vast is the difference between those who sacrifice in the path of the earth and those who sacrifice in the path of the Blessed Beauty! The former are inferior to the earth, while the latter have won the eternal crown of glory. The former will gain naught but grievous loss, but the latter will give life to the world by their sacrifice.

Similarly to the honoured Shaykh 'Ali Akbar, many have quaffed from the chalice of martyrdom at the time when they were raising the call of the Abha Kingdom, guiding some to the religion of God, giving existence to others, sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, a voice to the mute and life to the dead. In such a state, in the utmost detachment, they drank from the cup of renunciation.

Thousands upon thousands of people are presently being killed on the battlefield, though their deaths will bear no fruit or benefit whatsoever. But one sanctified soul is martyred in the path of God and thousands of others are given life. They water the tree of God with their blood. Though they close one eye to this mortal life, they open the other to everlasting existence. They will shine resplendent as a morning star in all the worlds of God and, even on earth, their fame shall be exalted, their star will shine, their pavilion will be lofty. The spiritual fragrance wafted from their direction will be a sweet perfume. Consider how vast is the difference, which is why it has been revealed, 'And think not of those slain on God's path as dead. Nay, alive with their Lord, are they, richly sustained.'<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Qur'an 3:163.

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This sanctified soul, the honoured Aqa Shaykh ‘Ali Akbar, embraced the Faith some time ago and attained to certitude. He was instrumental in guiding others as well. He travelled frequently in Iran, the Caucasus and India and, in most instances, left behind radiant evidences and enrolled others under the banner of the Cause. The end of his life was musk-laden. With the utmost sanctity, purity and attraction to God, thrilled by divine promises and afire with the love of God, he drank from the mighty chalice of martyrdom in the path of the Beloved. What a hallowed personage he was! Blessed was he, and his end. His Holiness the Exalted One [the Bab] has revealed, ‘Those that seek martyrdom in God’s path do so by the grace of God. He bestoweth upon whomsoever He willeth and is the possessor of great bounties.’

Out of divine bounty and favour, I implore that we too may partake of this overflowing cup and this life-giving chalice so that, with the utmost joy and spirit, and enthralled by the breeze of the Merciful, out of love, we too will hasten to the field of martyrdom, and sacrifice this drooping life in the path of the Almighty God.

How cruel are the Iranians! They have not eased their oppression. So many calamities and adversities have befallen them and yet they continue with their former persecutions. But they must pay some day. It is revealed, ‘God gives them time but does not overlook them.’<sup>29</sup> [295–6]

‘Abdu’l-Baha telegraphed the following cable: ‘Mashhad. Mirza Ahmad Qa’ini. May my life be a sacrifice unto ‘Ali Akbar. I am well and in good health. ‘Abbas.’ [296]

### *10 April 1915*

‘Abdu’l-Baha visited Aqa Muhammad Ibrahim, who was ill in bed. The latter welcomed ‘Abdu’l-Baha excitedly and warmly. Dr Mu’ayyad was asked to attend to him, and subsequently reported the results to ‘Abdu’l-Baha.

That afternoon, ‘Abdu’l-Baha and a few friends went to Bahji, and in the evening they returned to Abu-Sinan and attended a gathering in the guest-hall of Shaykh Salih. ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s discourse covered ordinary topics, in response to various questions put to him by the Shaykhs.

### *11 April 1915*<sup>30</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Baha remained with his family most of the day. At night he came to the guest-hall of Shaykh Salih and, since Mirza Ahmad Sohrab had arrived, ‘Abdu’l-Baha enquired: ‘Aqa Mirza Ahmad, how long has it been since we left America?’ He responded, ‘Two and a half years.’ ‘Abdu’l-Baha continued:

Truly, this period has not been productive. At least when we were in America, we were busy and constantly met with people and corresponded with the friends. But now, time goes by unprofitably: no meetings, no communication, no travels, no

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<sup>29</sup> This verse is an allusion to the Qur’an 86:17, ‘Give a respite to the infidels; deal gently with them for a time’.

<sup>30</sup> Bushru’i, ‘Nuzdah’ 62–3 states that ‘Abdu’l-Baha was in Haifa on this evening, and gives a summary of his talk which differs considerably from Dr Mu’ayyad’s diary.

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service. It would have been better if we had gone directly to India. But what can we do? Such are God's decrees. He has not created us for comfort. My weakness and illness is because I am not occupied. What a wonderful time we had in America, all spent in the service of the Cause, and every minute of it filled with delight and high spirits. How much better it would have been if we had not returned here, had stayed there serving the Faith of God and day and night raising the cry of the divine Kingdom. Here we are wasting our lives. I am very sad that the means of service to the Cause are not available at present. My happiness resides in serving the spiritual friends and elevating the Word of God. All of these are now absent and, therefore, we are deprived of all bounties. [209–10]

Mirza Ahmad Sohrab responded, 'God willing, after the war', and 'Abdu'l-Baha continued:

Indeed, at that time [in America] every means of felicity and blissfulness was prepared. Joy and happiness are the cause of cures, and no joy can ever hope to rival service to the Cause of God. When a person is truly sacrificial, then he thoroughly forgets himself, dedicates his all in the path of the Blessed Beauty and arises in servitude, in His love. No exultation and delight can ever be greater than this.

A person serving the Cause is like a lamp, which has no joy and happiness greater than to be kindled. The ultimate satisfaction of the lamp is to be lit, to give illumination and to brighten the whole of the surrounding area. Similarly, our ultimate joy is in servitude to the sacred Threshold. And that servitude requires that with a brightened face, unsullied heart, illumined spirit and sanctified presence, we arise and teach His Cause. The Blessed Beauty did not create and educate us for the comfort, the joy and the cares of this world. He endured all these trials and tribulations so that we would be edified and enlighten the world. [210]

At this point a number of non-Baha'is arrived and 'Abdu'l-Baha's discourse moved on to conventional themes.

*12 April 1915*<sup>31</sup>

During the evening hours in Abu-Sinan, one of the friends remarked to 'Abdu'l-Baha, 'From the bounties of 'Abdu'l-Baha's teachings, the Iranians in Beirut are submissive'. 'Abdu'l-Baha responded:

People do not become submissive because of virtuous dictums; but rather, when they observe righteous deeds, they grow submissive. By God, besides Whom there is no God, if the friends were to follow the teachings and exhortations of the Blessed Beauty, then the necks of the kings of the earth would be humbled.

Consider the difference between the one who speaks of generosity and the one who is generous; between the one who claims justice and equity, and the one who is just and equitable. Or how significant is the contrast between the one who speaks

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<sup>31</sup> Bushru'i, 'Nuzdah' 63 indicates that 'Abdu'l-Baha was in Haifa on this occasion and gives a synopsis of his talk that considerably augments Dr Mu'ayyad's diary.

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of light, and the one who is illumined. If we were to follow the teachings and dictums of the Blessed Beauty, even stones and plants would be affected.

The Blessed Beauty sustained all these trials and tribulations so that we would attain to deeds, not so that we would only make mention of our intentions. The sun dawns so that people are able to perform their duties, not merely speak of them. It is revealed, ‘Adorn thyself through deeds, if thou art of the righteous’ and not ‘Adorn thyself through words, if thou art of the righteous’.

How many people exist who constantly state their readiness for self-sacrifice. Several thousand times they state: ‘May my life be a sacrifice unto you!’ Forfeiting possessions, rank and name in the path of Love is the first station. They express their desire for sacrifice, and perhaps it is based on truth. But how different it is to say such a thing and actually to be sacrificed on the field of martyrdom! That is why deeds have an effect. [212]

### *13 April 1915*

‘Abdu’l-Baha was in Abu-Sinan and his remarks included, ‘Greed and avarice are ingrained in human nature. However, divine teachings will change these attributes. The Prophets and chosen ones have not appeared so that people will worship them and shower them with praise and tributes. They have sustained all their trials so that they may guide and educate people.’ [215]

### *14 April 1915*

‘Abdu’l-Baha visited Aqa Muhammad Ibrahim, who had been ill for 21 days. Because of his illness, he was not able to talk, but when he opened his eyes and saw ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s countenance, he said, ‘How sweet to expire in the arms of the Beloved!’

### *15 April 1915*

Two warships of the French armoured naval division came into the bay, one [sailing] towards Haifa and the other towards ‘Akka. At the same time, a fresh swarm of locusts descended – this being the eighteenth day of such attacks. Suddenly the roar of the warships’ cannon was heard. They succeeded in destroying the steel Na‘mayn bridge between Haifa and ‘Akka. In all, 26 shells were fired, one of which fell in the Garden of Firdaws but did not explode. The people of ‘Akka were greatly perturbed. Women and children were permitted to leave the city, but the men were barred from so doing. After an hour the warships left, disappearing in a haze of dark smoke.

That day was the funeral of Aqa Muhammad Ibrahim and the entire village, including all Christians, Muslims, Druze and Baha’is attended.

### *16 April 1915*

Some of the Baha’is were in the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Baha in the morning. Afterwards, he strolled around the village of Abu-Sinan. At noon, the Qumandan and some others visited him. In the evening, a number of Baha’is and others were with ‘Abdu’l-Baha and he spoke for two hours on a variety of topics, including the history of the Egyptian pyramids. ‘Abdu’l-Baha remarked:

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One thing that has enabled European civilization to advance so considerably is the aptitude for accepting the truth. After investigation and research, even if it is against previously held notions, people do not reject the truth, but testify to its veracity.

I gave a talk for the professors at the renowned Oxford University, which ranks foremost in the world.<sup>32</sup> They published my talk in the university's newspaper and in *The Christian Commonwealth*. Many things were said in this talk. For instance, I told them about the fact that all things are captive in the hand of nature. For all its majesty, our sun is governed by certain universal laws, from which it cannot deviate by even a hair's breath. However, humanity has seized the sword from nature and with it is beating nature back. For example, the natural law is for human beings to remain on earth. Yet they swim in the sea like fish, or fly in the air like a bird. Or the law of nature is for electricity to flow freely. But we see that human beings have captured this power in the confines of a bulb. The nature of humans is to see for a prescribed distance and to hear only over a limited space. However, human beings have devised means to observe the heavens above and to communicate with every corner of the globe. Nature is tyrannical, uninformed of the past or the future. But humanity is not like that. Therefore, is it proper for human beings to continue thinking of themselves as captive in the grip of nature? [219]

### 17 April 1915

Mirza Husayn Yazdi came from Haifa and visited with 'Abdu'l-Baha. After enquiring about certain matters, 'Abdu'l-Baha decided to leave for Haifa. At the time of bidding the friends farewell, the topics of the war, the onslaught of the locusts, famine and various illnesses were discussed, and he said, 'These tribulations matter not and will pass by. The true calamity is to be far and removed from the divine fragrance.' [220]

### 5 May 1915

The days of sojourn in Abu-Sinan had come to an end. All of the Baha'is, being safe and protected, now started to return to their homes in 'Akka and Haifa. Badi' Effendi and Dr Mu'ayyad also closed the school and the dispensary, and proceeded to 'Akka. They carried with them the box containing the portraits of Baha'u'llah and the Bab, and upon arrival they proceeded directly to the residence of 'Abdu'l-Baha (the House of 'Abdu'llah Pasha) and conveyed them safely to Bahiyyih Khanum, the Greatest Holy Leaf, who was the custodian of the holy relics throughout 'Abdu'l-Baha's ministry and beyond. In the afternoon, the two left for Haifa. There, they were summoned to the presence of 'Abdu'l-Baha and he spoke to them:

I wish for you consecrated service to the Cause of God. I wish for you to manifest radiant attributes under all conditions and to raise the Word of God.

All that you have seen or experienced, all that exists in the world of humanity is like a picture reflected on water [insubstantial and transitory]. Consider how many men are engaged most devotedly in the present war, how they sacrifice and give their lives and possessions, how great is the number of soldiers among them.

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<sup>32</sup> Balyuzi, 'Abdu'l-Bahā 352–4; Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway* 168.

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‘ABDU’L-BAHA IN ABU-SINAN: SEPTEMBER 1914–MAY 1915

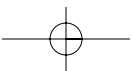
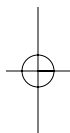
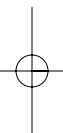
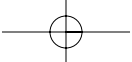
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They are commanded by men who have dedicated their lives to the study of the science of war. They are all ready to sacrifice themselves in an instant. And yet their sacrifice has no benefit – [it is transient] like a picture reflected on water. The most they can hope for is to have the names of the most prominent among them recorded in history, remembered for having loved their nation and sacrificed their lives and possessions for its sake.

However, for those who sacrifice in the path of the divine Cause and exert every effort to raise the Word of God, their glory is everlasting. It will neither change nor be forgotten over the passage of time, and their effulgence will remain ever resplendent.

A person must exert his very best in every undertaking and in all fields of endeavour and must employ the means and techniques of that field; otherwise, there will be no benefit. For instance, a person who arises to diffuse the divine fragrance in the path of the Blessed Beauty must be completely detached. He must be attracted, sanctified, righteous, itinerant and consecrated. Otherwise, the desired results will not be wholly achieved. In fact, great efforts may be lost through the slightest negligence. [221–2]

‘Abdu’l-Baha’s foresight had protected the Baha’i communities of the Haifa–‘Akka area and kept them safe during these difficult months. He greatly enhanced the relationship of the Baha’is with the local Druze by allowing them to live together and to get to know each other – an important relationship which has survived to the present day and has benefited both communities.



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## **Integrating moral values in rural education and sustainable development in Latin America: the System of Tutorial Learning (SAT)**

MICHAEL RICHARDS

### **Abstract**

*This paper describes the development of the System of Tutorial Learning (SAT), a Baha'i-inspired rural education programme, in two Latin American countries – Colombia and Honduras. It starts by discussing the conceptual basis of the Baha'i approach to social and economic development, especially the links between education and sustainable development. It then describes how the 'Rural University' and SAT evolved and developed in Colombia, following a profound critique of conventional development and education programmes by the Foundation for the Application and Teaching of Sciences (FUNDAEC). It describes the content and pedagogy of SAT, including, for example, its focus on the development of 'capabilities' rather than academic disciplines; the way disciplines are integrated in SAT; the integration of moral or spiritual values in SAT, especially 'service to the community'; and the participatory agricultural research programme and other livelihood-oriented components. The Colombian experience recently culminated in FUNDAEC being awarded a prestigious international award for the SAT programme.*

*In Honduras, SAT had to face an acute set of teething problems, partly resulting from its initial implementation in a very difficult and remote area. However, progress has been rapid over the last few years, including increasing government interest and ownership of SAT. A major expansion of SAT is at an advanced planning stage, and funding from several development agencies has been obtained. These experiences show the potential of applying spiritual principles in the arena of social and economic development, especially the importance of integrating moral or spiritual values into educational curricula, and focusing on the 'real purpose of development'. This is the realisation of individual human potential, largely through actions of service to the wider community, to be able to contribute to an 'ever-advancing civilisation'.*

### **Introduction: 'development' and education**

The commitment of the Baha'i Faith to social and economic development is firmly rooted in its sacred writings, which state that all human beings 'have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.'<sup>1</sup> Baha'u'llah also wrote, 'Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and

<sup>1</sup> Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh* (trans. by Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1983) 214.

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requirements.<sup>2</sup> Baha'u'llah made it clear that education, in its various forms, is the principal means for developing a just, peaceful and united society. 'Man is the supreme talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess . . . regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.'<sup>3</sup>

From a Baha'i perspective there is therefore a very clear link between education and efforts to promote sustainable development in (materially) poor countries, leading to a Baha'i view that 'the real purpose of development . . . is the cultivation of the limitless potentialities latent in human consciousness.'<sup>4</sup> Central to this concept is that individual potential can only be fulfilled through service to humanity.

This contrasts to conventional approaches to 'development', for example, as manifested in bilateral and multilateral development aid programmes. These have tended to emphasize the achievement of material goals like food, health, shelter and employment, although the international development discourse has gradually increased the emphasis on social development concepts. Due to the influence of writers like Armatya Sen,<sup>5</sup> the Nobel prize-winning economist, concepts such as community, family, self-esteem and 'social inclusion' have become important elements of sustainability, together with an increased emphasis on poverty reduction, participatory approaches, and governance. But from a Baha'i perspective, a major shortcoming of conventional development thinking and programmes is that they do not tap into the spiritual dimension of human nature, and therefore are unable to generate the levels of sustained motivation and service needed to tackle complex and deeply-rooted development problems – especially those associated with materialistic value systems. This is brought out in the following quotation from the *Promise of World Peace* by the Universal House of Justice, sent to world leaders in 1985:

there are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitates the discovery and implementation of practical measures.<sup>6</sup>

Thus the Baha'i position is that any serious attempt to tackle development requires an educational process with a strong spiritual or moral element. At the same time, the importance of a sound 'material' and scientifically-based education, and the commitment in Baha'i social and economic development projects to improve the material welfare of humanity, should not be underestimated. A recent Baha'i statement asserts that:

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<sup>2</sup> Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings* 214.

<sup>3</sup> Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings* 258–9.

<sup>4</sup> Bahā'ī International Community, *Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development*. A concept paper written by the Bahā'ī International Community for The World Faiths and Development Dialogue, Lambeth Palace, London, 18–19 February 1998 (London: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust) 20.

<sup>5</sup> Armatya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Universal House of Justice, *The Promise of World Peace*. A Statement by The Universal House of Justice (London: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1985) 15–16.

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throughout recorded history, human consciousness has depended upon two basic knowledge systems through which its potentialities have progressively been expressed: science and religion. Through these two agencies, the race's experience has been organized, its environment interpreted, its latent powers explored, and its moral and intellectual life disciplined.<sup>7</sup>

While conventional development views of 'development' and the role of education may appear limited from a spiritual perspective, there is at least a broad appreciation of the links between education and sustainable development; for example, we are just entering the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014). It is also widely agreed that a lack of rural education, or its poor quality, is a key cause of rural poverty; for example, the 2001 World Development Report identified education as the most important factor in improving rural welfare.<sup>8</sup> But cash-strapped developing country governments have been unable to respond to this need: state education coverage is low in rural areas, is of a generally poor quality, and is not oriented to rural life and its problems. Most poor families cannot afford to send their children to formal state schools anyway, as the children are needed for farm work or to earn cash. At the same time rural communities in most of the 'developing' world are undergoing a process of moral and social disintegration. To respond to such problems, it is widely accepted that innovative new approaches to education in poor rural areas are needed.

### What is SAT?

The Tutorial Learning System or, in Spanish, the Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT), is a non-formal secondary school education programme for rural areas. One definition of the objective of the SAT programme is to provide a 'social learning space' in which rural youth, with their own life experience, are able to participate by generating and applying knowledge in their own social and cultural contexts, and for the benefit of the wider community.<sup>9</sup> More simply, SAT aims to develop the (service-oriented) attitudes, knowledge and skills so that young people are better prepared to lead a socially useful and more productive rural life. It is hoped that in any community the SAT programme will leave behind a core group of better educated youth who become effective participants or leaders in various community development processes, including agricultural production, health, pre-school and primary education, community organisation and the development of small businesses. This human resource base becomes the real basis for 'sustainable' rural development, in contrast to many development programmes that undermine the basis of sustainability by increasing the dependency on outside resources and expertise.

SAT was originally developed in Colombia in the second half of the 1970s by a Baha'i-inspired non-government organisation (NGO) called the Foundation for the Application and

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<sup>7</sup> Bahā'ī International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*. A statement prepared by the Bahā'ī International Community Office of Public Information, first distributed at the United Nations World Summit on Social Development, Copenhagen, Denmark (Haifa: Bahā'ī International Community, 1995) 17.

<sup>8</sup> World Bank, *World Development Report 2000/01* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Francia Valcárcel and Gustavo Correa, *Para Salvar las Barreras, El Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial*. (Cali, Colombia: Editorial Feriva, 1995) 5.

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Teaching of Sciences (FUNDAEC). FUNDAEC was established in 1974 by a group of university lecturers, both Baha'is and others, working at the University of Valle in the city of Cali. The SAT programme has since been extended to Honduras, Guatemala, Ecuador, Venezuela, Panama, Costa Rica, Brazil, Nicaragua and, in the first experience out of Latin America, Zambia. This paper looks particularly at how SAT evolved and developed in Colombia, and its more recent application in Honduras.

### **FUNDAEC's critique of development and formal education**

The SAT programme has its origins in a lengthy diagnosis of rural development problems in the Cauca Valley region of Colombia by FUNDAEC. The latter observed that development was defined largely in terms of modernisation and industrialisation, and that development projects promoted by aid agencies were making little or no contribution to the welfare of the vast majority of rural people.<sup>10</sup> In fact most development projects were observed to have a damaging impact on sustainable development; they were increasing the gap between the relatively wealthier and poorer families, and were making the communities more dependent on outside support. FUNDAEC also noted that 'development' was being promoted more as a product than a process.<sup>11</sup>

A particular focus of FUNDAEC was on the concepts of 'participation' and 'education'. It was noted that in conventional development projects, 'participation' was limited to elaborate methods of inducing villagers to participate in projects designed by outsiders. FUNDAEC, on the other hand, defined participation in terms of people taking control of their own development process: 'it could be claimed that a people were in charge of their own development only if they were learning systematically about the changes that occurred in their society, and were consciously incorporating in their continuous learning process appropriate elements from the universe of knowledge.'<sup>12</sup> This definition implied that rural people had to take a central role in the generation, verification and diffusion of knowledge, and that a local or regional learning process was needed. The 'universe of knowledge' was seen to include rural people's own knowledge and that of other peoples and groups in the world facing similar problems, as well as 'northern' or urban-based scientific and technological advances.

Another key reason why people were unable to 'take charge of their own development' was that these development programmes were not resulting in structures and institutions which belonged to the people themselves. FUNDAEC was convinced that rural change would be impossible without the latter.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile the formal education curriculum was observed to be inappropriate for developing the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes for sustainable development. Rather it promoted negative attitudes to rural life; for example, farming was portrayed as a low prestige occupation, and negative social attitudes of teachers and students were seen to

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<sup>10</sup> Farzam Arbab, *Universidad Rural: Aprendizaje sobre Educación y Desarrollo* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1984) 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Ruhi Foundation, 'Strengthening and Systematizing the Efforts of Core Groups of the Rural University,' Proposal submitted to the Office of Social and Economic Development, Baha'i World Centre (Cali, Colombia: Ruhi Foundation, unpublished mimeo, 1989) 6.

<sup>13</sup> Francia Valcárcel, 'The Rural University belongs to the people', *ILEIA Newsletter* (Information Centre for Low External Input and Sustainable Agriculture, Netherlands) October 1991:14-15, see 14.

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be contributing to the social and moral disintegration of rural areas.<sup>14</sup> The urban bias of the education systems and these negative attitudes were (and still are) stimulating a continuous exodus of young people from the countryside to big cities like Cali and Bogota in search of the 'good life' and better employment prospects. However, much of this migration only served to increase urban unemployment, crime and other social problems in the big cities, as well as increasing the pressures on public services and accelerating family and community breakdown.

FUNDAEC also observed that the formal education system ignored the need for moral development, but that this was felt to be at the heart of equitable and sustainable community development. The omission of values in education, or its treatment as a discreet subject matter separated from everyday life, was seen to be reinforcing the prevailing materialistic and self-centred value system, and contributing to negative social attitudes.<sup>15</sup> These undermined the 'social cohesion' and institutions necessary for sustainable community development. Another observation was that the traditional rote-learning pedagogic system did not help students develop their conceptual thinking skills and critical faculties, but only resulted in the memorisation of facts. This was seen to promote or reinforce unquestioning attitudes to the problems of society, and formed a barrier to the 'independent investigation of truth' and to the capacity for solving problems.<sup>16</sup> It should however be noted that it is not intended that the SAT programme substitutes or competes with the formal education system. It is targeted at communities without any secondary education coverage, due to, for example, problems of distance, accessibility, and the limited national education budget.

Having observed the lack of a suitable institution to support a regional learning process, FUNDAEC initially dedicated itself to establishing a learning institution for the Cauca Valley region of Colombia. This was called the Rural University, the name chosen partly to question the standard urban university model.<sup>17</sup> The main objectives of the Rural University were to develop the human resources necessary to support a continuous regional learning process, and set in motion a series of community development learning processes, for example, in the areas of agriculture, health, education, institutional development, micro-enterprise development, credit and marketing.<sup>18</sup>

### The main elements and pedagogy of SAT

The SAT curriculum programme gradually emerged from the initial attempts of the Rural University to nurture these community learning processes. It was rapidly realised that the focus needed to be on developing a set of capacities or capabilities in rural people (and especially the young) so that they could effectively 'participate' in the development process. Therefore an essential aspect of SAT is the development by each student of a set of 'capabilities', a capability being defined as a 'capacity to think and act in a well-defined

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<sup>14</sup> Arbab, *Universidad Rural*, 30.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid* 30.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid* 13.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid* 12.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid* 14.

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sphere of activity and according to a well-defined purpose.’<sup>19</sup> Each capability in turn requires a number of skills and abilities.

For example, social capabilities include the ability to consult effectively, take part in collective enterprises, serve on institutions, and build unity among diverse people. Individual capabilities include the ability for systematic reflection on one’s actions, to be able to manage personal affairs and responsibilities with rectitude of conduct, to be able to think systematically about solutions, and to infuse daily actions with love. A more specific language or communication capability is to be able to describe what can be observed in a wider context, for example, people’s behaviour in the context of a social system.<sup>20</sup>

Reflection on the importance given to service and sacrifice in the Baha’i writings led to the adoption of ‘service to the community’ as the core value to be developed in SAT, as well as an emphasis on developing moral values like honesty, compassion and trustworthiness. These concepts were integrated into all the teaching materials (SAT texts), and service to the community was built into the practical activities of SAT students. The latter, as part of their course, have to carry out service projects with neighbouring families in the areas of literacy, health and organisation. The SAT programme also emphasizes the development of community identity, since it was felt that the replacement of traditional values and community-based identity structures by more competitive or market-based values were behind the process of moral and social disintegration in rural communities.<sup>21</sup>

One of the key problems of the formal education system identified by FUNDAEC was the sub-division of knowledge and science into separate specialized branches. It was felt that this resulted in students developing a ‘fragmented’ view of reality, which in turn prevented the development of the more holistic thinking needed for solving complex and multi-dimensional development problems. It was also diagnosed that there were severe problems in converting scientific theory into practical knowledge and action.<sup>22</sup> Therefore FUNDAEC decided to integrate the disciplines as much as possible, and to adopt a ‘learning-by-doing’ approach.

Thus when SAT students learn about animal nutrition, they also learn about and practice the economics of running a chicken farm, develop statistical skills, and are introduced to business accounting concepts. Another example is in the course unit on ‘insect populations’; as well as learning about the principles and concepts of entomology, epidemiology and statistics, the students learn basic principles of integrated pest management, which they are then encouraged to apply to their agricultural crops. This can be seen as the practical application of the Baha’i principle of ‘unity in diversity’, as well as showing the importance of how the learning process is more effective when it takes place in a practical context which the students can easily relate to. A further key element of SAT is the emphasis on a continuous ‘action-reflection-learning’ cycle, including the use of ‘consultation’ and discussions (following the action part of the cycle) to explore concepts and deepen understanding.

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<sup>19</sup> Farzam Arbab, ‘Promoting a Discourse on Science, Religion and Development’, in S. Harper, *The Lab, the Temple, and the Market. Reflections at the Intersection of Science, Religion, and Development*, Canada: Kumarian Press, 2000, 149–237.

<sup>20</sup> Arbab, ‘Promoting a Discourse’; Valcárcel and Correa, *Para Salvar las Barreras* 18.

<sup>21</sup> Pascal Molineaux, ‘Strengthening Local Economies and Community Identity’, *LEISA Magazine* (previously ILEIA Newsletter) July 2001:22–23, see 23.

<sup>22</sup> Arbab, *Universidad Rural* 29.

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The SAT secondary education programme has three levels, each of which lasts about two years. The first level is 'Impulsor of Rural Well-being'. At this level, 28 courses and 'interactive' textbooks are studied in six main areas, as detailed in Table 1. Each course unit has an interactive workbook (SAT text). These have been developed by some of Colombia's leading educationalists, who became interested in the programme. The second and third stages of SAT are called the 'Practitioner' and 'Bachelor' levels of Rural Well-being'.

**Table 1** SAT '*impulsor*' level study areas and course units

<b>Study area</b>	<b>Course units</b>
<b>Mathematics</b>	1. Groups and numbers 2. Adding and subtracting 3. Decimal system 4. Multiplication and division 5. Application of arithmetic operations 6. Fractions and percentages 7. Epidemiology and demography
<b>Sciences</b>	1. Growth of a population of insects 2. Calorific processes 3. Plant growth 4. Utilisation of electric energy 5. Photosynthesis
<b>Service to the community</b>	1. Health 2. Literacy 3. Community processes
<b>Readings and Comprehension</b>	Consists of 20 sections of readings about society, culture, the environment, values and the analysis of social processes
<b>Descriptions</b>	1. Properties 2. Systems and processes 3. Description of a family
<b>Agriculture and livestock technology</b>	1. The productive process 2. Subsystems 3. Poultry rearing

As far as possible the teachers of SAT (called tutors) are from the community, rather than brought in from outside as in the state education system. They usually have a degree or are already trained teachers, and in order to ensure their acceptability, the community is involved in selecting them. The tutors receive intensive training in regular short courses at the rural university, and in synchronisation with the course units they have to teach. SAT classes take place at times chosen by the students, often in the late afternoons and at weekends. The flexible timing of the classes means that the SAT students can largely continue their essential livelihood and household activities – thereby removing one of the main constraints to secondary education in rural areas.

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### **The agricultural technology and credit programmes**

Science and technology play a major role in the SAT curriculum. In SAT, technology is defined simply as the application of science, and the objective of technological development is to help transform a struggling subsistence economy into a viable and more self-reliant rural economy.<sup>23</sup> The main focus of technology development in SAT has been on farming and small-scale agro-industrial development, since the vast majority of SAT students are from farming families. Therefore a very important component of SAT is the development of agricultural 'subsystems' through a kind of participatory agricultural research process.

The main objectives of the agricultural subsystems component are to develop more diversified farming systems which reduce the risks of crop failure, minimise the use of expensive chemical inputs, are profitable, and improve and diversify family nutrition.

Each SAT group of students has a 'learning plot', which usually belongs to one of the students, but may be land loaned by the community. The students help the SAT agronomist design the experiments, unlike in many 'participatory research' projects in which farmers merely provide their labour in researcher-designed experiments. This reflects another important principle - respect for farmers' traditional knowledge and rationality. The experiments have mainly involved testing out and 'validating' various combinations of crops which complement each other in the use of the soil and release of nutrients (for example, by using nitrogen-producing cover crops like green manures), in the biological control of pests, control of soil erosion, retention of soil moisture, complementary use of labour, and so on.<sup>24</sup> Each crop and agricultural technology combination is a 'subsystem'. Here we can observe the principle of unity in diversity tied in with ecologically sound farming practices.<sup>25</sup>

Another key element in the process of appropriate agricultural technological development is the 'socialising' of agricultural knowledge in the wider community. As part of this socialisation process, the need emerged for credit or small loans to enable farmers to take up improved agricultural technology. The credit programme is an example of the way FUNDAEC has strengthened traditional or community values of reciprocity, interdependence and trust.<sup>26</sup> The credit has been an important vehicle for developing small 'solidarity groups' of (usually) three to five farmers. Each group receives training, both in the technical aspects of the proposed agricultural project, and in the development of moral values. The group members share and exchange resources, knowledge and labour, and there is joint responsibility for the repayment of loans. Solidarity credit groups are also obliged to establish 'solidarity funds' from a small percentage of profits; these are used to meet urgent individual or community needs, for example, hiring a teacher, day-care for small children, or starting a reforestation project.<sup>27</sup>

A very important aspect of these more 'livelihood-oriented' components of SAT is that they encourage the students to remain in the rural areas. One of the goals of SAT is that some proportion of the educated youth remain in the countryside and act as 'agents of change', although this is not easy given the economic realities facing rural areas, including depressed agricultural prices, poor social services and lack of infrastructure. Even with SAT,

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<sup>23</sup> Arbab, *Universidad Rural* 38.

<sup>24</sup> Valcárcel, 'Rural University' 15.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid* 15.

<sup>26</sup> Molineaux, 'Strengthening Local Economies' 23.

<sup>27</sup> Valcárcel, 'Rural University' 15.

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it is inevitable that a large proportion of students will leave the countryside. But there are some important qualifications to this. One is that many of the 'migrants' have ended up in influential government, NGO or private sector jobs, and have made important contributions to rural development in Colombia.<sup>28</sup> A second is that they often return after a number of years, and with increased skills as a result of higher education qualifications and professional experiences. Also, a large proportion of SAT students have been women with children (particularly in Honduras), who tend to stay in their communities.

### Achievements in Colombia

By 2003 over 50,000 rural people had studied SAT in Colombia, and there are currently about 30,000 ongoing SAT students. SAT had been implemented in some 2,300 villages, 500 municipalities and 19 Departments corresponding to about a third of rural Colombia.<sup>29</sup> The Ministry of Education in Colombia has recognized the three educational levels as equivalent to the entire secondary or high school syllabus, giving SAT students the same opportunities for employment and higher education as those from the state system. The Ministry of Education also pays for most of the running costs of SAT, so that it can be claimed that the SAT programme is financially sustainable and nationally owned.

The Rural University of FUNDAEC also runs a five year degree course in rural education, again recognized by the Ministry of Education. Many of the undergraduates are SAT graduates, and many of these go on to become SAT tutors or 'coordinators'. The latter assume a monitoring and support role for the tutors in a specific area, take on tutor training tasks, assist in project management and planning tasks, etc. There is therefore a built-in sustainability in SAT and the Rural University in terms of its human resource requirements.

An important strategy of FUNDAEC has been to work through other organisations, which implement SAT with FUNDAEC's technical assistance and supervision. Some 50 organisations, both public and non-governmental organisations, have been involved in the implementation of SAT in Colombia.<sup>30</sup> A postgraduate programme at the University (now re-named the University for Integral Development) trains the human resources from these organisations, so that they are able to implement SAT.<sup>31</sup>

In October 2002 FUNDAEC was fêted with a prestigious Club of Budapest 'Change the World – Best Practice' award given to 'education projects which empower people to take control of their development'.<sup>32</sup> This award, one of four given for outstanding 'education for sustainable development' projects, was presented in a special ceremony held in Germany, and attended by Peter Ustinov, Paulo Coelho and other representatives of the Club of Budapest, as well as a representative of the Hungarian Prime Minister. The Club of Budapest jury that chose SAT included Maurice Strong (the Secretary-General of the 1992 Earth Summit), Mikhail Gorbachev, Mary Robinson and Klaus Töpfer (Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme).

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<sup>28</sup> Valcárcel and Correa, *Para Salvar las Barreras*.

<sup>29</sup> Gustavo Correa (Director of FUNDAEC), Personal communication.

<sup>30</sup> Gustavo Correa, personal communication.

<sup>31</sup> Baha'i International Community, *For the Betterment of the World: The Worldwide Baha'i Community's Approach to Social and Economic Development* (New York: Office of Social and Economic Development, Baha'i International Community, 2003) 24.

<sup>32</sup> Bahá'í World News Service, 'Baha'i inspired educational system for the poor of the world honoured by the Club of Budapest' (<http://www.uga.edu/bahai/2002/021222-2.html>, 22 December 2002).

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**The development of SAT in Honduras<sup>33</sup>**

Following the experience in Colombia, pilot SAT programmes have been started in several other Latin America countries, and most recently by the William Mmutle Masethla Foundation in Zambia, known as the 'Capstone' project.<sup>34</sup> The best-established programme outside Colombia has been in Honduras. A requirement for developing SAT is a strong Baha'i-inspired development organisation. The Bayan Association for Indigenous Social and Economic Development was established in 1985 in a very remote area on the north coast of Honduras called 'Mosquitia'. Bayan established its field office at the meeting point of two ethnic groups: the Garifuna people, of mixed Black Carib and West African descent, and the Miskito Indians. At the time SAT was introduced, the only access to the area was by sea or light aircraft, and the main form of transport in the area remains the dug-out canoe. Most of the area is in the buffer zone of the UNESCO-declared Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve, which contains one of the largest remaining areas of tropical rain forest in Central America. This is a very difficult area for development programmes, characterized by severe poverty and governance problems. As with other remote areas, it is vulnerable to the growth of what has been called the 'uncivil society', including drug traffickers, illegal loggers, and corrupt local politicians.

Following a decade running a small rural hospital and health clinic, and having carried out some health and educational outreach work, the Bayan Association started to implement SAT in 1996 with technical assistance support from FUNDAEC and small grants from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and Kellogg Foundation.<sup>35</sup> Around the same time, the UK registered charity, the Baha'i Agency for Social and Economic Development (BASED-UK), was asked by the Office for Social and Economic Development (OSED) at the Baha'i World Centre to assist Bayan by helping it raise funds for its development efforts. In close consultation with Bayan, a proposal to support the establishment of SAT in Honduras was successfully submitted by BASED-UK to the Joint Funding Scheme of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in 1997. This involved a grant of about a quarter of a million pounds over a five year period. The main aim of the pilot project was to convince the Honduran government to adopt SAT as an effective education system for rural areas which the state secondary education system found difficult to reach.

The first few years of SAT in Honduras proved very difficult, largely due to having chosen a very backward and remote area, to the prejudices confronting a new and innovative non-formal education system, and also to the impact of Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Among the problems were:

- identifying and retaining good quality local tutors;
- high drop-out levels, especially as a result of the social and economic devastation which followed Hurricane Mitch – many SAT students were forced by family circumstances to abandon their studies and seek out alternative income sources;

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<sup>33</sup> This section is based on the author's personal knowledge of the area and project.

<sup>34</sup> BIC, *For the Betterment of the World* 27.

<sup>35</sup> BIC, *For the Betterment of the World* 21.

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- severe transport and communication difficulties which prevented effective support for the SAT tutors – for example, a rough sea would often prevent the movement of the SAT coordinators;
- opposition from some local religious leaders and state education system teachers, either due to religious prejudice (although there is no religious content in SAT) or because some teachers saw SAT as competing with the formal education system;
- initial community prejudices against a non-formal education system, for example, based on the fact that the students did not have uniforms or a fixed classroom, and because the qualification was not at first recognized by the government;
- difficulties surrounding the slow or inadequate adaptation of the Colombian SAT texts to a completely different cultural and ecological context;
- the occupational structure in which most young men worked in the off-shore fishing industry, which prevented them attending SAT classes on a regular basis. On the other hand this has provided the opportunity for women to become future community leaders – about three quarters of the students in the Mosquitia area were girls or women; and,
- the pressures of poverty which often prevented the students continuing their studies.<sup>36</sup>

There was therefore a very high drop out rate, which meant that the DFID project was unable to fully achieve its quantitative goals (in terms of the number of SAT students and groups). But as against this, the surviving SAT groups showed great enthusiasm in their studies, generally received strong support from parents and the wider community, and carried out a wide range of community service activities, including in the areas of health, literacy, primary and pre-school education, organising cultural events, and environmental projects (such as reforestation, refuse collection, and organising community 'clean-ups'). One community held a competition for designing the best signs to encourage local people and visitors to respect the Biosphere Reserve.

And in spite of the above-mentioned problems, the national and regional educational and political authorities gradually perceived the value of SAT as a relatively high quality, flexible and lower cost education programme (compared to what the government could offer). Academic tests carried out by the Ministry of Education in mathematics and Spanish writing found that the SAT students scored consistently higher than students in the state secondary system. Bayan has invested considerable time in nurturing strong relationships with the national and regional educational authorities. Two Ministers of Education, as well as vice-ministers, have visited the SAT project. A study tour to FUNDAEC for Honduran Ministry of Education officials was also undertaken.

A very important development in 2001 was the signing of agreements between Bayan and the educational authorities of three regional government Departments for the expansion of SAT, as a result of grass-roots demands from communities which had heard about SAT. Under these agreements, 35 new SAT groups with about 900 students were started in 2001 and 2002. The decentralised Ministry of Education offices took over paying for the SAT

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<sup>36</sup> These problems are documented in a series of annual reports of BASED-UK to the UK Department For International Development (DFID) compiled by the author, as well as in the final evaluation report of the DFID project: Erin Murphy-Graham, Ada Leticia Vega, Filippo Del Gatto, Ineke Gijsbers and Sarah Richards, 'Final Evaluation of DFID Tutorial Learning System (SAT) Rural Education Project on the North Coast of Honduras 1997–2002 (JFS 1353)', Baha'i Agency for Social and Economic Development, 2002.

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tutor and field coordinator salaries, and some of the running costs. At least initially, while the Ministry of Education funding was coming through, some of the SAT costs were paid for by local government, church groups and the communities themselves, which shows how much SAT was valued.

In March 2002, the Ministry of Education officially recognized SAT as fully equivalent to the state secondary education qualification. Shortly after this, Bayan was requested by the Ministry of Education to present a national expansion plan for SAT focusing on the highest poverty areas. With limited funding, the SAT programme had expanded (by late 2004) to about 2,800 students divided between about 140 SAT groups. Part of this expansion involved a consortium of five non-government organisations in western Honduras, supported by Ireland Aid.

The SAT programme in Honduras is now set for rapid expansion, following the approval of funding from the Inter-American Development Bank, the Ford Foundation, the Canadian International Development Agency, and a Swiss-based children's charity called Pestalozzi. The current expansion plan involves a target of 17,500 students by 2009, and the opening up of several new areas, especially in the poorest areas of western Honduras. One reason for the donors' increased interest in SAT is that in the current development dialogue, the development of 'human capital' (mainly through education and health programmes) is a major priority in the fight against poverty. For example, a strategy paper on rural development by the Inter-American Development Bank stated that 'investing in human capital . . . is unquestionably the main priority for permanently reducing rural poverty.'<sup>37</sup> The SAT programme is now included as a key component of Honduras' Poverty Reduction Strategy, regarded as the most important policy instrument for sustainable development.

The next five years will be crucial as SAT is scaled up from a relatively small regional project to become a national education programme in the same way as has happened in Colombia. In view of the scale of the expansion, Bayan has been in close consultation with the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Baha'i World Centre as to how best to proceed. An important future step is to establish the Bayan University, so that it can fulfil a similar role to the Rural University in Colombia; to this end a legal and feasibility study has been carried out with a small grant from DFID's Central America office.

### Conclusion

In a world littered with the failure of development projects and strategies, the SAT education programme stands out as an innovative and durable response to the huge problems facing developing countries, especially in how to tackle rural poverty. By integrating the development of necessary skills and knowledge with service-oriented values, and promoting a regional learning process that tackles local development problems, SAT has now demonstrated its potential for promoting sustainable development. What really marks SAT out from conventional approaches to development is that it responds to the need for a values-based approach to education and development, and is therefore able to contribute to the 'real purpose' of development – the realisation of human potential, a potential that can only be fulfilled by serving others.

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<sup>37</sup> Inter-American Development Bank, *Rural Poverty Reduction: Bank Strategy Paper* (Washington, DC: Sustainable Development Department, Inter-American Development Bank, 1998) 15.

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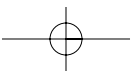
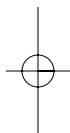
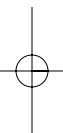
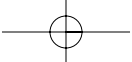
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But while appropriate education is a necessary condition for sustainable development, it is not a sufficient one. This is because it does not, at least in the short term, counter the 'macro' problems and limitations facing poor rural communities. These are problems which stem from an inequitable world economic order (for example, a system of international trade and farm subsidies in industrialised countries which means there is not a 'level playing field', and developing country farmers are unable to compete with cheap imported food), as well as a range of national governance and policy problems stemming from corruption, political graft and national political economy problems which protect the vested interests in the status quo. This is why, ultimately, the purpose of SAT is seen as contributing to the development of a new civilization (or 'new world order' in Baha'i terminology) in which such inequities and injustices would not be permitted, as is apparent in the following quotation:

Education is seen not simply as the acquisition of knowledge and development of skills, but also in terms of the development of vast and powerful potentialities and talents, inherent in the very nature of every human being. The development of these potentialities and talents is considered as a God given right and responsibility of the individual, and attains fruition when it is pursued in the spirit of service to humanity within the context of creating a new world order.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ruhi Foundation, 'Strengthening and Systematizing' 4.



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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Search for Values: Ethics in Baha'i Thought*. Edited by John Danesh and Seena Fazel.  
Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2004, xii + 239 pp. ISBN 1-890688-32-0.  
Price: US\$ 29.95

Baha'i ethics as an object of academic study has not yet been given much attention in Baha'i scholarship. Apart from some preliminary discussions in the form of articles by Udo Schaefer in the *Baha'i Studies Review* (nos. 4 and 5), systematic discussions on Baha'i ethics in general and different aspects of it in particular are missing. The volume of several articles edited by John Danesh and Seena Fazel under the title *Search for Values: Ethics in Baha'i Thought* might appear to fill this gap. However, the reader hoping to gain new insights into Baha'i ethics will be disappointed. Only the first two articles of the volume deal with Baha'i ethics itself while all the other articles cover various aspects of Baha'i doctrines and history but not, as the title of this volume would suggest, Baha'i ethics explicitly. Most of the contributions are revised versions of articles that have already been published in the *Baha'i Studies Review*.

Udo Schaefer's contribution, 'Towards a Bahā'ī Ethics', is one of the articles providing a systematic discussion of Baha'i morality. Originally published under the title 'The New Morality: an outline' in the *Baha'i Studies Review* 5 (1995), it does not provide a comprehensive introduction to Baha'i ethics but identifies some of its characteristics. According to Schaefer, the Baha'i Faith offers a complete ethical system that is based on divine revelation transmitted to Baha'u'llah. This moral system is not really novel but aims, like other religious traditions, at the moral transformation of the individual through following the divine commandments and assuming a virtuous character. In order to provide Baha'i morality with a theoretical structure, Schaefer refers to the teleological and deontological character of Baha'i ethics. Baha'i ethics is teleological in the sense that it stipulates the acquisition of a good character as a moral objective. It is deontological as it contains moral laws that must be obeyed by virtue of being based on divine revelation. In addition to this distinction, Schaefer offers a hierarchy of virtues in Baha'i ethics. 'Theocentric virtues' (p. 8) hold the highest rank and are virtues that relate to God, like love of God, trust in God or steadfastness. Schaefer calls the second class of virtues 'virtues of the Path' (p. 8). They refer to those qualities human beings are supposed to assume in order to realize their divine potentials. Detachment, purity and chastity belong to this category of virtues. Finally, there are 'worldly virtues' (p. 10) which determine social relations, like truthfulness, trustworthiness, justice and moderation.

Schaefer's article is certainly a good starting point for a systematic discussion of Baha'i morality. However, further discussion needs to proceed from it. Schaefer argues, on the one hand, that Baha'i ethics contains the very same values laid down by other religious traditions but, on the other hand, that 'the new revelation [of Baha'u'llah] ... provides these values with a new language, with new meanings and nuances and, above all, with a new spiritual power' (p. 7). Future studies on Baha'i ethics need to address to what extent Baha'i morality offers a 'new dimension' (p. 6). With the exception of some ritual particularities, Baha'i ethics seems to promulgate the same moral values as the Judaeo-Christian and Islamic traditions. Finally, to denounce the moral decline of the modern Western world is to some extent legitimate; but to contrast a perceived moral laxity in the contemporary world with

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moral laws in the Baha'i Faith which stand in direct contradiction to current moral trends, alone, gives the impression that Baha'i morality is merely a conservative reaction against the decline of traditional morality. Such an approach runs the danger of disregarding the potential new elements of Baha'i ethics.

William P. Collins, in his article, 'Baha'i Family Life: Beyond the Traditional', shows that the Baha'i understanding of family life is not simply a conservative reiteration of traditional patriarchal family structures in opposition to their erosion in the modern world. The basic thesis of Collins' article is that 'Baha'i family life is not traditional' (p. 26). Despite the stress on the family as the nucleus of society and the centrality of marriage in Baha'i ethics, the principles and laws informing the Baha'i conception of family do not follow traditional patriarchal patterns that are part of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic understanding of family and marriage. According to Collins, the Baha'i writings offer a new vision of family life and marriage that – though not legitimizing non-marital relations – is guided by principles that transcend the traditional understanding. Marriage and family are not solely social institutions to provide economic security and to satisfy mutual romantic feelings. The Baha'i family has the purpose of conveying and practising values which are important for the interaction of the family members with the wider society. Two of the guiding principles that should be realized in the family and in the society at large are unity and gender equality. In the Baha'i understanding of family life, authority is not based on gender, physical strength or economic power. The Baha'i principles of unity and gender equality require consultative decision-making within the family without favouring the opinion of either husband or wife: 'Since men and women are equal, so then do husband and wife have reciprocal and co-equal rights and duties' (p. 34). Collins makes an interesting proposal for the legal exegesis of those laws in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* which disfavour women, like the inheritance laws. Collins follows Shoghi Effendi's interpretation that laws that address men alone can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to women. As the inheritance laws in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas* favour male heirs, an extended application of 'the *mutatis mutandis* principle' (p. 35) would allow female heirs to be privileged if the deceased is a woman. Collins' article, as one of the two newly published articles in this volume, is an original contribution to the development of Baha'i ethics in relation to family and marriage, providing new insights into the structure and role of family life and marriage in the Baha'i Faith.

The other contributions in the volume do not really deal with issues regarding Bahā'ī ethics. Franklin Lewis, in his 'Discourses of Knowledge', explores how Abdu'l-Baha's statements about modern academic methods inform the Baha'i attitude towards knowledge produced by these methods. Lewis begins his contribution with the observation that Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha employ different modes of discourse depending on the presuppositions of their audience. When Baha'u'llah addresses Shiites and Babis he uses Islamic and Shii eschatological terminology referring to the return of the Twelfth Imam and the rise of the Mahdi. In his correspondence with Zoroastrians, however, Baha'u'llah does not put forward his messianic claims within the Islamic framework but argues within the parameters of Zoroastrian eschatology. For Lewis, Baha'u'llah's and 'Abdu'l-Baha's adaptation to the expectations and assumptions of their addressees has two consequences for the understanding of these different discourses. First, one needs to distinguish between two kinds of truth: 'propositional' and 'metaphorical' (p. 54). When Baha'u'llah chooses a specific kind of discourse, like the discourse of Islamic philosophy in the Tablet of Wisdom, the propositions he makes in the tablet should not necessarily be considered to be facts that are absolutely true. Rather, Baha'u'llah intends to convey spiritual or metaphorical truths that lie behind the mere propositions he makes in the tablet. Second, when Baha'u'llah

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refrains from any reference to Islamic beliefs in his tablets to Zoroastrians, he does not deny these beliefs but just brackets them in order to make his message relevant to a different audience. Consequently, Lewis argues that when, in academic discourse, Western Baha'i academics exclude their beliefs, they do not deny them but simply bracket them to gain recognition in the intellectual and academic world that does not share these beliefs.

Lewis further justifies the legitimacy of academic Baha'i studies with a survey of Baha'ullah's and 'Abdu'l-Baha's statements on knowledge. With the spread of the Baha'i Faith in the West, 'Abdu'l-Baha comments on the post-Enlightenment discussion of the relationship between science and religion. Not only does he propose the unity of science and religion, but he also suggests science as a necessary corrective to counter religious fanaticism. Furthermore, 'Abdu'l-Baha not only distinguishes different kinds of knowledge and discusses their advantages and disadvantages but also gives precedence to logical proofs and empirical evidence. While intuitive knowledge and religious beliefs are subjective, logic and empirical methods are commonly shared among all humans and are therefore a solid foundation for an open discussion. For Lewis, 'Abdu'l-Baha's statements on different kinds of knowledge and methodologies to acquire it suggest that academic methods are not discarded but endorsed from a Baha'i perspective. Lewis's article was originally published under the title "First we speak of logical proofs": discourse of knowledge in the Bahā'ī writings' in the *Baha'i Studies Review* 10 (2001/2002). The article is very comprehensive and well argued and successfully counters the assumption that the Baha'i Faith is hostile towards academic methods, or that devout Baha'is cannot engage with the academic world without denying their beliefs.

John Hick's contribution, 'Can There Be Only One True Religion?' (first published in the *Baha'i Studies Review* 10, 2001/2002), contains a short and accessible summary of his pluralistic theology. To relativize claims of exclusivity common to many religious traditions, Hick attributes the differences among them to historical and cultural contexts in which they emerged. According to Hick, such a perspective would respect the individuality of each religion and allow its followers to participate in an interfaith dialogue. Unfortunately, Hick's article does not relate his own pluralistic theology with the Baha'i understanding of salvation history, although there are obvious parallels. Such a comparison would not only have been interesting but also quite appropriate, given that the article is published in a Baha'i studies series.

The last three articles in the volume deal with Baha'i individuals who translated doctrines of the Baha'i Faith into the intellectual, social and religious environment in which they lived. Christopher Buck provides an intellectual biography of Alain Locke (1885–1954), one of the leading Afro-American philosophers of the 20th century who became a Baha'i in 1918. Locke studied in Harvard and Oxford and pursued a distinguished academic career. He became the intellectual motor of the Harlem Renaissance, an aesthetic movement of the 1920s to promote the emancipation of Afro-Americans by artistic means. Buck gives new insights into a neglected aspect of Locke's life, providing an overview of his activities in the Baha'i community and discussing the 'synergy' (p. 109) between his religious beliefs as a Baha'i and his philosophical ideas. Although Locke's philosophy was shaped by various influences, Buck traces his notion of cultural pluralism back to the Baha'i principle of unity in diversity. Buck's article is one of the very rare discussions of how Locke's commitment to the Baha'i Faith affected his philosophy. Being a revised version of an article on Locke which was published in the *Baha'i Studies Review* 10 (2001/2002), it contains new archival material that gives further insights into Locke's relationship to the Baha'i Faith.

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Moojan Momen's contribution, 'Jamāl Effendi and the Baha'i Faith in Asia', provides an overview of the missionary activities of Jamal Effendi (d. 1898) in South Asia and South East Asia. The article gives a travel itinerary of Jamal Effendi's journeys to India, Burma, Thailand and Indonesia, describing his activities and methods used to promulgate the Baha'i Faith. Momen's discussion of the strategies Jamal Effendi employed to win new adherents constitutes the most interesting part of the article. Jamal Effendi presented himself as a Sufi shaykh and in targeting the Muslim population in India and South East Asia presented the Baha'i Faith not as a new religion but as a Sufi order with Baha'u'llah as its spiritual master. Only a small number of the new converts were initiated into the full impact of Baha'u'llah's theophanic claims. Momen's article (first published in the *Baha'i Studies Review* 9 (1999/2000)) is not only a valuable study of the history of the Baha'i Faith in Asia but also opens the discussion on how Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha and contemporary missionaries like Jamal Effendi used esoteric strategies to present the Baha'i Faith to a Muslim audience that would have been scandalized by Baha'u'llah's claims to a post-Quranic revelation.

The American equivalent of Jamal Effendi is Ibrahim Kheiralla. Richard Hollinger, in "Wonderful True Visions": Magic, Mysticism, and Millennialism in the Making of the American Baha'i Community', re-assesses Kheiralla's importance in the establishment of the Baha'i Faith in North America. The article provides information on Kheiralla's religious background and his early missionary efforts in the USA. Hollinger examines the interaction between Kheiralla and his first American disciples and how, through their interaction, a distinct American Baha'i community was formed. While initially Kheiralla gave lectures and classes on Eastern religions in general and on occult knowledge, referring only marginally to Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, the increasing interest of his disciples in the history of the Baha'i movement and Baha'u'llah's messianic claims created the nucleus of an American Baha'i community, whose members established a link between biblical prophecies and early Baha'i history. Hollinger's contribution – the second newly published article in this volume – sheds new light on the early history of the American Baha'i community and relativizes Kheiralla's importance in its formation.

The articles collected in this volume are all useful contributions to various fields of Baha'i scholarship. Only John Hick's article stands out in this collection as a rather cursory summary of his theological ideas. There are however two caveats. The title of the book is somewhat misleading. Only two articles really deal with ethics while the others discuss doctrinal and historical questions. Furthermore, one wonders why articles which have already been published and are to a large extent available online (<http://www.breacais.demon.co.uk/abs/bsr.htm>) have been printed again. Instead of recycling articles, Baha'i studies series, like the one of Kalimat Press, should be used for new contributions. One would hope that future Baha'i scholarship will proceed from these pieces of research and make original contributions, as William Collins and Richard Hollinger did with their articles in the present volume.

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*The Poetry of Tāhirih*. By John S. Hatcher and Amrollah Hemmat. Oxford: George Ronald, 2002. ix+202+45 pp. ISBN 0-85398-460-3. £18.95, US\$36.95

*Tāhirih: A Portrait in Poetry*. Edited and translated by Amin Banani. Studies in the Babi and Baha'i Religions, vol. 17. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2004. 145 pages. ISBN 1-890688-36-3 \$23.95

The publication of two books within two years on the subject of Tahirih's poetry is to be welcomed by all those who are interested in the life and poetry of this great female personality of nineteenth-century Iran. Recent decades have seen the publication in English of some valuable works on the life of Tahirih.<sup>1</sup> But the study of her poetry has been understandably lacking because, in dealing with Tahirih's poetry, we encounter three main problems.

First, the number of poems attributed to Tahirih is not many. As Dr. Banani puts it,

the short and tumultuous life, the beleaguered circumstances of the Bābī community, the clandestine handling of Bābī manuscripts, the scattering of her possessions, and the hostility of her immediate family members, who may have destroyed or suppressed her papers – all these mitigate against any sense of assurance that we now have access to all the poems that she wrote.<sup>2</sup>

The second problem concerns the authenticity of some of the poems attributed to Tahirih. It is now certain that some pieces that for years were considered to be hers actually belong to other poets. Therefore a thorough investigation is needed to verify the genuineness of the rest of the poems attributed to her.<sup>3</sup>

The third problem resides in the difficulty of the mystical and religious language employed in her poetry. Unlike a small group of Tahirih's poems that are easily understood by any literate Iranian, most of her poems depend on a rather ambiguous and complicated language. Therefore, a good knowledge of the Qur'an and the Hadith, as well as of the mystical expressions of the Sufis, is needed to understand them.

Bearing all this in mind, we can better appreciate the appearance of two books of Tahirih's poetry translated into English verse by two eminent scholars of English literature.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1944–1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) 295–331; Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse University Press, 1992) 77–99; Moojan Momen, 'The Family and Early Life of Tahirih Qurrat al-'Ayn', *Baha'i Studies Review* 11 (2003) 35–52 and idem, 'Usuli, Akhbari, Shaykhi, Babi: The Tribulations of a Qazvin Family', *Iranian Studies* 36/3 (September 2003) 317–337.

<sup>2</sup> Banani, p. 4. For the historical overview about collecting Tahirih's poems see Banani, 'The Survival of the Poems,' pp. 8–11.

<sup>3</sup> See N. Dhukā'i Baydā'i, *Tadhkirih-yi shu'arā-yi qarn-i avval-i Bahā'ī* (The biographies of the Baha'i poets of the first Baha'i century), vol. 3 (Tehran, 126 B.E./1969) 107–133; and Vahid Rafati's article on this subject: 'Ash'ār-i mansūb bih hadrat-e Tāhirih' (Poems attributed to Tahirih), *Payām Bahā'ī*, no. 251 (Oct 2000) 11–13.

<sup>4</sup> John S. Hatcher is Professor of English literature at the University of South Florida and the author of several books, among them the life and poetry of American poet Robert Hayden (1984). He has written more than 100 poems and articles that have appeared throughout the world in refereed literary journals. Jascha Kessler, who has turned Banani's translation into verse, is Professor of English and Modern Literature at University of California, Los Angeles. Besides his three volumes of poetry, he has translated, with Amin Banani, Forough Farrokhzad's *Bride of the Acacias* (from Persian) and has collaborated on several volumes of poetry translated from Hungarian, Serbian, Bulgarian and Greek.

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Hatcher and Hemmat start with a chapter that is based mostly on quotations from Abdul-Baha and Shoghi Effendi on the life of Tahirih. These, together with the description of her religious background in the Shaykhi-Babi milieu, acquaint the reader with Tahirih's personality and help to understand her position in the nascent Babi community.

The next chapter, 'Translating the Poetry of Tahirih', deals primarily with the problem of poetry in general and ends with a discussion of the characteristics of Tahirih's poems. In his essay Dr. Hatcher vividly explains the difficulty of translating any poetry that is culturally based, such as Tahirih's poetry. He has found it useful to devote a few pages to explaining the foundation of mysticism and the inner meaning of such words and idioms as 'Beloved', 'Path', and 'Seeker'. Finally, he explains the method adopted by the authors to solve the problem of translation:

We have not tried to imitate the metrical pattern or rhyme scheme used by Tāhirih ... We have attempted to capture the meaning and feeling of the original without translating the poetry out of her rhetorical devices. By doing this, we feel, we have better captured the tone, the spirit and the overall sense of the piece than had we attempted to imitate poetics alone.<sup>5</sup>

The translation of the poems follows. The 43 poems by Tahirih in Hatcher and Hemmat's book are divided into four categories: The Day of Resurrection, The Ecstasy of Nearness, The Praise of the Abha Beauty, and The Voice of God's Command. Each group contains between 7 and 11 poems, and each poem is assigned a title reflecting the taste and understanding of the authors. Each entry starts with an effort to unearth the hidden intentions of the poet in creating that particular piece.

This part of the book ends with an extensive appendix, sources of poems, bibliography, and notes. The next part contains the original texts of the poems in Persian – correctly without the titles, since classical Persian poems were never given titles.

Amin Banani's book starts similarly with a 30-page description of Tahirih's personality, her poems, the classical tradition of Persian poetry, the question of the survival of her poems and their cultural and historical context. He ends this first section with a description of a few of Tahirih's poems, trying to discern the secret of the great popularity these pieces enjoy among the Iranian public.

In the following chapter, 'On Translating a Persian Mystical Poet', Jascha Kessler and Anthony A. Lee, who have rendered Banani's translation into English verse, discuss the problems facing any translator in conveying the mystical and ecstatic poetry of Tahirih to the reader of contemporary English. To elucidate these problems, Jascha Kessler discusses different methods by which he could have translated Tahirih's poems and comes to this conclusion:

My decision was therefore to carry her over into our vernacular in both form and content, deliberately risking the exotic, sometimes anachronistic, effect. I see nothing to be gained by removing her altogether from the forms of her nineteenth century Persian world, which most assuredly would have occurred in any free-verse translation ... If the reader can believe that it is Tāhirih who is speaking in these poems, Tāhirih as she stands in the Persian, then I have succeeded in my aim to represent her – again, as *she* is, and not as she would look garbed in the casual American dress of fashion today ... So, let us take the risk of exhibiting her in the costume of the forms she

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<sup>5</sup> Hatcher and Hemmat, *ibid*, p. 29.

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employed, so that we may read and admire and come to understand her rather more as she was, and somewhat less as we might see her in our time.<sup>6</sup>

Then follows the translation, in verse, of 23 poems by Tahirih. Each piece bears a title and appears together with the original Persian text in calligraphy. The book ends with notes for each poem by Amin Banani, in which he explains the different literary aspects of that piece.

In order to show how the two books have treated Tahirih's poems I quote here one short poem, first in transcription, then in its literal translation followed by the English translation. The piece in question is no. 2 in Banani's book, entitled 'Just let the Wind...', which appears as no. 12 in Hatcher and Hemmat, where it is entitled 'For Love of My Beauty'.

*Agar bih bād daham zulf-i anbar āsā rā  
Asīr-i khīsh kunam āhūvān-i šahrā rā  
Vagar bih nargis-i shahlā-yi khīsh sormih kisham  
Bih rūz-i tūr-i nishānam tamām-i dunyā rā  
Barāy-i dādan-i rūyam sipihr dar dam-i šubh  
Burūn bar-āvarad āyini-yi muṭallā rā  
Guzār-i man bih kalīsā agar fitad rūzī  
Bih dān-i khīsh baram dukhtarān-i tarsā rā.*

*Literal Translation:*

If / to wind / I give / hair of / amber / scent  
Captive / of mine / I would make / deer of / wildness  
If / to / narcissus (eyes) / blue-black / mine / collyrium / I would draw  
To / day of / dark / I would set / entire / world  
For / seeing / my face / sphere / every / early / morning  
Outside / brings out / mirror of / gilt  
Path / mine / by / church / if / should fall / one day  
To / religion / mine / I would take / girls of / Christian

*Banani:*

Just let the wind untie my perfumed hair,  
My net would capture every wild gazelle.

Just let me paint my flashing eyes with black,  
And I would turn the day as dark as hell,

Yearning, each dawn, to see my dazzling face,  
The heaven lifts its golden looking-glass

If I should pass a church by chance today,  
Christ's own virgins would rush to my gospel.

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<sup>6</sup> Banani, *ibid.*, pp. 36–37.

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*Hatcher and Hemmat:*

If I blandish my tresses  
 So that the wind extracts their fragrance,  
 I will capture  
 The gazelles of the plains.

If I line my eyes  
 With collyrium,  
 I will distract the whole world  
 With my beauty,  
 Each morning heaven  
 Brings out its golden mirror  
 Only that it might  
 Observe my face.

If one day by chance  
 I should pass by the church  
 I would convert to my Faith  
 All the Christian girls.

Comparing the two commentaries on the same piece, we will see how differently the two authors have understood Tahirih's poems. This pattern repeats itself almost constantly in relation to the other texts. Banani studies the piece in the context of classical Persian literature and points to the images that Tahirih uses, such as perfumed hair, gazelles in the wilderness, painted eyes, dawn and mirror. He finds the piece 'an exceptionally forceful poem in which Tahirih celebrates her own charismatic power'. He continues: 'A few women poets in Persian history – among them Rābi'ih and Mahsati of Ganja – have pursued this theme in their work, insisting on the power of their gender to attract and subdue. Being female, far from becoming a disability, becomes the source of power and dominance...'

Hatcher and Hemmat consider the images used by Tahirih 'outlandish hyperbole' and write: 'the point of view or persona employed by Tāhirih is not the poetess herself but that of the Prophet ... Most immediately it reminds the Bahā'ī reader of the statement by Bahā'u'llāh in the Kitāb-i-Aqdas that the goal of the believer is to "Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty."' After quoting a verse from Kitāb-i Aqdas, paragraph 4, there comes yet another philosophical explanation: 'Of course, since every Prophet states that His power and attraction derive from the capacity to manifest the attributes of God, the frank confession of His attracting power is naught but praise of God – the source of all beauty (or "forms" of beauty, as Tāhirih states in another poem).' (p. 57)

It is beyond the scope of this review to assess the literary value of each translation, but a few general remarks would be pertinent. As we saw, Hatcher and Hemmat treat Tahirih's poetry only (and sadly) in a religious context. They have created a Tahirih from a Babi-Baha'i point of view, who, in the state of ecstasy, either praises the new revelation or chants verses glorifying the Bab or Baha'u'llah. The titles of the four categories into which her poems are divided, the names assigned to the poems, as well as the commentaries at the beginning of each piece, all direct the reader to one point: Tahirih is a passionate religious poet who sees nothing but the glorified new revelation. At the same time, at that early stage in the history of the Faith, she is well aware of the role of the Bab as the inaugurator of a new religious epoch,

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and of Baha'u'llah as *man yazhiruhullāh* (the one whom God shall make manifest). No doubt Tahirih does allude in some of her poems to Bab and Babi leaders such as Baha'u'llah, Quddus, Mulla Husayn, Subh-i Azal and others. Yet Hatcher and Hemmat believe that she addresses only the Bab and Baha'u'llah.

Banani's book considers Tahirih as a Persian Babi poetess and studies her as such. In his commentaries on her poems, Banani provides ample reference to other Persian literary traditions, locating Tahirih in a sequence of other Iranian women poets. When raising the question of to whom Tahirih addressed her poems, Dr. Banani writes:

Except for her versified correspondence with Bihjat, the Bābī poet of Shiraz,<sup>7</sup> very little internal evidence can be deduced from the poems of Tāhirih regarding the time, identity of addressee, if any, or other specific circumstance surrounding their composition. Persian poetic traditions and practices being what they are, such ambiguities are not unusual.<sup>8</sup>

Similar to the works of many Iranian poets the authorship of some of Tahirih's poems is subject to dispute. She was loved and respected by Baha'is, and enjoyed high esteem among Iranian scholars. By the time her popularity grew, more poems were attributed to her either by carelessness or by the over-enthusiasm of subsequent generations of Baha'is. Some of these pieces were used to reflect her eventful life, and some to mirror the love and devotion she felt for her religious beliefs.

In the recent decades, two new trends can possibly be discerned. One is that some Baha'i scholars – as will be seen later - have tried to find out who are the actual authors of some of the disputed poems of Tahirih; and the other is from opponents of the Baha'i Faith. The latter group either deny that Tahirih was ever a Babi and also a poetess, or doubt the authorship of some of the poems that are almost certain to be hers. This is a familiar approach and in the case of Tahirih it needs to be researched in more detail.

Any editor of the collection of Tahirih's poems, when facing these problems, needs to be more critical in the selection of poems and in introducing them as hers. Awareness of the dating of publications is important in this task. For example, it is possible that poems of Tahirih are wrongly assumed not to be hers if they can be found in the works of poets contemporary to her or of previous generations. Therefore it is necessary for the editor to check the authenticity and accuracy of such *publications* or possibly refer to the original manuscript.

Hatcher and Hemmat are somewhat uncritical in their selection of poems. On page 30 the question of sources is discussed, and in referring to Baydā'i and Rafati (see note 3), the authors ascertain that of eight poems credited to Tahirih in Fadil Mazandarani's *Zuhūr al-Haq*, only three are actually hers (nos. 7, 14 and 24 in Hatcher and Hemmat). According to Rafati, three more belong to Fayd-i Kashani (1598–1680) (nos. 2, 5 and 26), and the authenticity of the two others is in doubt. Hatcher and Hemmat have included even the three poems belonging to Fayd-i Kashani ('This Longing for You', 'Arise!' 'The Love of Baha'), arguing that

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<sup>7</sup> Hatcher and Hemmat, quoting Dhuka'i Bayda'i, on p. 128, state that Bihjat was the pen name of Karīm Khān Māfī, a famous Baha'i from Qazvin. (Dhuka'i Bayda'i, himself a poet, is the author of a 4-volume biography of the Baha'i poets of Iran.)

<sup>8</sup> Banani, *ibid.*, p. 20.

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the disputed poems which we have included as hers should at the very least tell us something about Tāhirih's interest, her state of mind and her thinking. Furthermore, Tāhirih could have applied a poem in a way not intended by the original author. For example, Tāhirih might have employed the term Bahā as an allusion to Bahā'u'llāh even though the word in the original poem was used in its denotative sense of 'glory', 'light', or 'splendor'. (p. 31)

This rather odd statement disregards the fact that the identity of the three poems belonging to Fayd-i Kashani is not 'disputed' – it is beyond any doubt that those pieces belong to him and not to Tahirih. Moreover, in making this statement the authors assume that Tahirih had in her lifetime a *Dīvān* (collection of poems) and that she deliberately included such poems in the corpus of her own poetry. We know very well that no such thing – even if it ever did exist – has come down to posterity, and the whereabouts of Tahirih's original papers are unknown. Her poems were saved thanks to oral tradition, and different people have added poems, as is the custom with most Iranian poets.

Another case is attributing to Tahirih some of the poems of Suḥbat-i Lārī, a leading Mulla of Fars who died nine years before the declaration of the Bab. In his poems Suḥbat-i Lari makes astonishing prophecies about the coming of the Bab and the events related to His life. No wonder Tahirih would memorize and recite them and people would consider them as being her poetry.<sup>9</sup> Hatcher and Hemmat, as well as Banani, have attributed one of the poems by Suḥbat-i Lari to Tahirih (Banani, pp. 66–67 'You Brilliant Face'; Hatcher and Hemmat, p. 112 'Meditation on My Death'). However, the author of *Fārs-nāmih-yi Nāṣiri*<sup>10</sup> records the verse in question as belonging to Suḥbat.

Hatcher and Hemmat also include for the first time as a poem by Tahirih a short verse entitled 'The Footsteps of Bahā' (no. 20), provided to them by an individual Baha'i. A Baha'i singer sang this popular verse at the Baha'i gatherings in Tehran about 30 to 40 years ago. At that time no one assumed this verse to be by Tahirih or to be of any Baha'i significance. The inclusion would be more understandable if the person who provided this verse was an authority on Tahirih's life and works, but this is not the case. The introduction to the verse in question, relating it to the gathering of Badasht, exceeds the wildest imagination: 'three tents or pavilions were rented in three separate gardens.'<sup>11</sup> In this poem we are to imagine that Tahirih hears the footsteps of Baha'u'llah outside her pavilion. Fully aware of Baha'u'llah's station, she speaks of this sound as causing rapture in her heart... (p. 88). And all this is imagined in nineteenth-century Persia, where it was considered blasphemous for a man to enter the area in which a woman resided.

Still another verse (Banani pp. 69–70 'In Pursuit'; Hatcher and Hemmat pp. 106–7 'A Shameless Servant Am I?') is attributed to Iṣmat Khānum Tihrānī (under the nom de plume Tā'irih, 1861–1911), a Baha'i woman of the late Qajar period who had become engaged in women's rights by writing articles, forming women's societies and writing poems.<sup>12</sup>

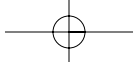
Apart from these points, the authors of both works should be complimented for their endeavour of translating into verse the large body of poems attributed to Tahirih. In Amin

<sup>9</sup> For more on Suḥbat-i Lari see Rouhollah Mehrabkhani, *Ilhām-i Shu'arā* (The inspiration of poets), Darmstadt, Germany: Asr-i Jadid Publishers, 2004, pp. 98–108.

<sup>10</sup> By Mirza Hasan Fasā'i (1821–1898), on the history and geography and the notables of the province of Fars.

<sup>11</sup> For Baha'u'llah, Tahirih and Quddus.

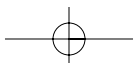
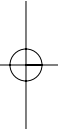
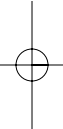
<sup>12</sup> For more on Ismat Khanum, see Juan R. I. Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) 180–81.



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Banani's work, Kalimat Press has produced a beautiful book imbued with good taste in its layout, typography, design, etc., a book that not only exhibits Tahirih's poetic ability but also represents by its appearance the femininity of the poet.

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*Religion and Society in Qajar Iran*. Robert Gleave (ed.). London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005. xiv, 482 pp., 12 illustrations, index. ISBN 0-415-33814-X (Hbk) £65.00.

This book is a collection of twenty papers on Qajar Iran, all but two of which were originally presented at an international conference held in September 2000 organized by the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Bristol University, England, and representing the culmination of a project sponsored by the British Institute of Persian Studies.

In terms of Babi-Baha'i studies, four papers are of particular interest: Todd Lawson's 'Orthodoxy and heterodoxy in Twelver Shi'ism: Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī on Fayḍ Kāshānī (the *Risālat al-'Ilmiyya*)'; Juan R. I. Cole's 'The evolution of charismatic authority in the Bahā'ī faith (1863–1921)'; Moojan Momen's 'The role of women in the Iranian Bahā'ī community during the Qajar period'; and Sohrab Yazdani's 'Heterodox intellectuals of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution'.

Lawson's piece deals with a polemical work by al-Aḥsa'i, the *Risālat al-'Ilmiyya* (1815), directed against Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (1597–1680), and through him a long tradition in Islamic philosophy. For al-Aḥsa'i, Kashani was to be stigmatized as a believer in *waḥdatu'l-wujūd* (existential monism) and as one who had implied that humans might know God's knowing – two forms of knowing which were totally incommensurate. Lawson suggests that al-Aḥsa'i's critique was a means to safeguard God's utter transcendence from what he saw as the contamination of the Mullā Ṣadrā school of philosophy, noting a certain similarity here with the likewise uncompromising attitudes of the contemporary Sunni Wahhabi movement in al-Aḥsa'i's own homeland, and drawing parallels with the views of 'Alā'u'd-Dawlih Simnānī (d. 1336) in his defence against Buddhist thinkers at the time of the Il-Khānids. He alludes to Ismā'īlī motifs which he perceives in al-Aḥsa'i's thinking, as well as in that of the heterodox movements that came after him.

Lawson emphasizes al-Aḥsa'i's importance in modern Iranian religious history. Thus, during his lifetime, al-Aḥsa'i was enormously popular among the political and religious leaders of Iran, in part perhaps because his mystical Shi'ism offered a potentially powerful counter to the growth of the Sufi orders. He was also important in his claims to experiential authority based on his own spiritual encounters with the Hidden Imam in the interworld, and the challenge this posed to the authority claims of the Uṣūlī clerics of the time, and in the influence which he later had on the Babi and Baha'i movements as well as on wider currents in the Islamic world. Of course, Usuli clericism eventually prevailed, and al-Aḥsa'i himself came to be increasingly regarded as heterodox – as Lawson notes, his attack on Kashani had the effect of making the latter appear more orthodox than he in fact was.

As is often the case with histories of ideas, Lawson's account is suggestive but elusive: a stimulus to fresh thinking about the sources, context and impact of al-Aḥsa'i's ideas, but an as yet fragile intellectual structure which future research will doubtless flesh out and make more substantive.

Cole takes as his theme changes in the authority structures in the Baha'i Faith during the lifetimes of Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha, referring in particular to the importance of the charismatic authority accorded to the two leaders by their followers. Thus, from the beginning of his prophetic ministry, Baha'u'llah was seen as possessing extraordinary authority as a divine revelator. He was the spiritual centre of the religion he had founded. During his years in Edirne and 'Akka, he also identified six other sources of authority for various matters: his own writings; the two eldest of his sons, 'Abdu'l-Baha and Muhammad-'Ali; the collectivity of his [male] children, the *Aghsān* ('Branches'); 'the people' and the various national

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parliaments functioning as their representatives; the Baha'i 'learned' (*ulamā*); and the general [international] House of Justice, several of these assuming some importance during his own lifetime. Local Houses of Justice were also referred to. After Baha'u'llah's passing (in 1892), however, tensions arose which led to significant changes in the Faith's authority structures, indicating the inherent instability of designating so many varied sources of authority.

After outlining Baha'u'llah's own designations of these various authorities, Cole seeks to account for the changes they underwent under the leadership of 'Abdu'l-Baha. The structure of his essay makes this account more complex than it need be, however, as neither the International House of Justice (only established in 1963) nor the world's parliaments had any bearing on Baha'i authority structures during the period covered by this paper. Interesting though Cole's discussions of these topics are, they are effectively digressions from his stated purpose – and make an account of his paper more difficult.

As I understand Cole's argument, he points to two profound changes in the framework of Baha'i authority structures which Baha'u'llah had outlined. First, Baha'u'llah's appointment (revealed only in his will) of 'Abdu'l-Baha as his successor and as the expounder of his teachings set in train a series of events which transformed the position and role of Baha'u'llah's sons. Although accepted by the mass of the Baha'is, 'Abdu'l-Baha's leadership was challenged by his half-brother, Muhammad-'Ali, who had been specifically designated as the next in line to the succession and resented 'Abdu'l-Baha's pre-eminence – as well as wishing for a share in the control over financial contributions from the Baha'is. When the dispute became public, 'Abdu'l-Baha cut off funding to his brother and those who had followed him, while the majority of the Baha'is shunned them. Furthermore, in his own will, 'Abdu'l-Baha denounced Muhammad-'Ali and declared that he had forfeited his successorship, appointing instead his own grandson, Shoghi Effendi, to serve as 'Guardian' of the Baha'i Cause and interpreter of its scriptures. As the other half-brothers and their families had also sided with Muhammad-'Ali, they were also disinherited, and the role projected for them by Baha'u'llah ended.

Second, Baha'i authority structures in Iran also changed. During Baha'u'llah's lifetime, certain prominent Baha'is with Islamic clerical training had exercised great influence over the Baha'is (all the more so in that Baha'u'llah's exile prevented immediate contact with him and enhanced the role of intermediaries), but Baha'u'llah had also called for the establishment of local Baha'i Houses of Justice to oversee Baha'i activities, and as these began to form, tensions between them and a few of the Baha'i 'clerics' developed, both Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha supporting the Houses of Justice (local assemblies) in these instances. Later (under Shoghi Effendi), the role of these individuals was further diminished.

Both these points have been made by other writers elsewhere, but Cole finesses them by considering relevant financial flows and controls. Baha'u'llah himself ordained that his followers should pay *Huqūqu'llāh*, essentially a religious tax on net profits over a certain amount, and somewhat similar to the Shi'i payment of *khums*. These funds provided Baha'u'llah with a source of revenue additional to the stipend he received from the Ottoman government, and could be used to support the activities of the Baha'is. Correspondingly, the support of wealthy Baha'i merchant clans was important in consolidating 'Abdu'l-Baha's leadership, as they were able to fund his initiatives and to block funding to those who opposed them, as in the case of the Baha'i cleric Aqā Jamāl Burūjirdī, which Cole examines in detail.

Cole makes a number of interesting points which seem to be subsidiary to his main argument, notably about 'Abdu'l-Baha's discussions of law and government – which Cole interprets as calling for a sharp separation between civil and religious authorities in the

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contemporary Middle East as well as envisaging that future Baha'i Houses of Justice would only be concerned with spiritual issues and matters of personal status such as marriage (pp. 322–27); and the practical sociological tensions between Baha'u'llah's injunction to his followers to consort with the followers of all religions and the shunning of Covenant-breakers, and between the assertion of 'blind obedience' to the Covenant and Baha'i emphasis on personal conscience.

For this reviewer, Cole's lengthy asides detract from the paper's value and could more usefully have been discussed in separate essays. By packing so much into one paper, Cole obscures his main argument. Again, in sociological terms, what is key here is the actual realities of authority and power within the Baha'i Faith as it developed up to 1921: ideals for the future propounded by the religion's leaders are only relevant in so far as they relate to those realities.

From a sociological viewpoint, a second weakness of the paper is Cole's use (and overuse) of the term 'charisma', which becomes almost a synonym for 'authority'. Although Weber identified different kinds of charisma, he also stated that charisma was only one form of authority, and indeed one of the main developments in Baha'i history is the 'routinization' of charismatic leadership into rational–legal authority. It is true that there were a number of conflicts over authority in Baha'i history, but only some of these can be usefully discussed in terms of charismatic competition: thus training in Islamic studies (p. 317) was not sufficient in itself to endow an individual with charisma, and a local House of Justice (p. 322) bears rational–legal, not charismatic, authority. Again, while it was significant that Baha'u'llah called on the world's parliaments to undertake certain social policies, and that he assured individual Baha'is that they could receive some measure of divine inspiration (p. 318), this does not entail charismatic authority in Weberian terms.

Regrettably, there are hardly any published studies of the Iranian Baha'i community in European languages (and even in Persian, while there are many community chronicles, there are no analytical community studies), and so Momen's study of Baha'i women in the late Qajar period is to be greatly welcomed. Focusing on a number of prominent Baha'i women of the period (Varaqtu'l-Firdaws – the sister of Mullā Husayn (c. 1815–1902); Shamsu'l-Duḥā – another Babi who later became a Baha'i (d. 1890s); Fā'izeh Khānum (c. 1854–1927); 'Alaviyyih Khānum (c. 1855/6–1921); the poetess Tāyirih Khānum (1861/1865–1911); and Fāṭimih-Sulṭān and Ummu'l-Awliyā' (no dates given)), he uses their stories as exemplars of the various activities and achievements of Iranian Baha'i women at this time. Necessarily, this technique yields a somewhat impressionistic account of developments, but prior to more detailed research appearing, it is a valuable start.

Momen's main observations are that leading women sometimes played a very significant role in the Baha'i community of the time, in some instances even acting as the leaders of the entire community in a particular locality. Several were also active in promoting education among girls and in teaching the Baha'i Faith to other women (and sometimes to husbands). Some deliberately challenged social convention by urging fellow Baha'i women to abandon the veil in certain circumstances, and one (Tāyirih) was active in the national women's movement that was then beginning to emerge in Iran. Several faced persecution, and in some instances were severely beaten because of their Baha'i activities. Two were able to assist persecuted Baha'i men in Tehran through food deliveries and other means. Momen also notes the sociological importance of women's networks as a basis for action and the spread of the Baha'i Faith; the reputation which Baha'is had already begun to gain among Europeans in Iran by the 1870s for allowing women greater freedom relative to prevailing social norms; the

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inspiration provided by the Baha'i ideals of female advancement found in the writings of Baha'u'llah, and even more particularly in those of 'Abdu'l-Baha; the role of women in sometimes pressuring Baha'i men to implement 'Abdu'l-Baha's injunction to pay special attention to the education of girls; the impact of links with Western Baha'is, particularly the arrival in Tehran of a small number of American Baha'i women to promote Baha'i education and health care in the capital; and the symbolic importance of the Babi leader Tāhirih (1817–50) as an inspiration for the Baha'i women. The article also includes some interesting historical photographs.

As a minor criticism, Momen seems to assume a fairly close linkage between the presentation of particular Baha'i teachings (such as Baha'i family law and the injunction on all Baha'is to propagate their religion [pp. 347, 358]) and the implementation of these teachings by the Baha'is, whereas impressionistic evidence suggests that throughout the development of Baha'i communities a considerable range of practice, including deviation from officially desired norms, has been usual. Again, an inevitable weakness of Momen's study is its concentration on leading Baha'i women and its neglect of the rank and file, but, given the literary sources available for his study, this neglect is presumably unavoidable. As he himself admits, his study provides us with 'glimpses' (p. 347) of what was probably a far more complex situation.

In short, this is a valuable pioneering study that draws attention to a topic which demands far more attention from historians. Further research could usefully examine more closely any linkages between the moves towards women's activism in wider Iranian society evident from the 1890s onwards and the ideas and actions of the Baha'i women; any changes over the period in the role of Baha'i women in the family (the prohibition on concubinage and temporary marriage; the eventual insistence on monogamy; the discouragement of divorce; etc.) – a topic deliberately excluded by Momen from his study; and some attempt to construct a general historical narrative of the overall role of women in the Iranian Baha'i community. More generally, of course, there is an enormous need for detailed historical studies and sociological analysis of the overall development of the Iranian community, as well as of its location and interlinking with wider developments in Iranian society. While most studies of modern Iranian history and society consistently marginalize the importance of the Babis and Baha'is (a foolish neglect in my opinion), Baha'i historians have a tendency to confine themselves to rather inward-looking and contextless biographical studies.

Yazdani's piece attacks the view advanced by some historians that Azali Babi intellectuals played a prominent role in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, arguing that with the exception of Mīrzā Yaḥyā Dawlatābādī, there is no evidence that these men were actually Azalis, and that even if they originally came from an Azali background, the political and social views they expressed were so far removed from traditional Babi doctrines and so evidently influenced by the ideals of the European Enlightenment, modernism and socialism, as to make any supposed Azali linkages meaningless. While agreeing with Yazdani that there was a disjunction between Azali religious thought and the socio-political views of men such as Sayyid Jamāl Iṣfahānī and Mīrzā Jahāngīr Shīrāzī, this does not necessarily nullify the hypothesis of an Azali link – it is perfectly plausible that these men were exercising *taqiyya* (dissimulation of belief) in order to exert greater influence on contemporary society. The question does not yet seem to have been conclusively decided, and their 'true' religious beliefs will perhaps always remain a matter of speculation. Certainly, there are earlier instances of Azali political radicals with complex beliefs (notably Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī and Mīrzā Aqā Khān Kirmānī), but Yazdani does not mention them in his argument.

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 PETER SMITH
 

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Readers of *Baha'i Studies Review* will also find the article by Haideh Sahim ('Jews of Iran in the Qajar period: Persecution and perseverance') of interest in the parallels which can be drawn with persecutions of Baha'is in Iran. Sahim focuses on the persecution of the Jews of Hamadan in 1892–3 instigated by a certain Mullā 'Abdu'llāh Burūjirdī, noting that the incident illustrated both the ability of a minor cleric to make a name for himself by attacking a minority and the ineffectiveness of Qajar government, and arguing that it became a role model for similar assaults elsewhere – including one against the Jews of Tehran in 1897 led by Sayyid Rayḥānu'llāh Darābī (younger brother of the Babi leader Vaḥīd).

As to the rest of the book, the coverage is diverse, the essays being grouped into five sections. First, there are four articles on various aspects of the relationship between Twelver Shi'ism (particularly as represented by the *ulamā*) and the Qajar state: Saïd Amir Arjomand on the development of what we might describe as political theory in the early Qajar period; Robert Gleave on the juristic theory of *jihād*; Mansur Sefatgol on the role played by some ulama in the administration of the Qajar state; and Irene Schneider on the work of the religious and state courts during the reign of Nāṣiru'd-Dīn Shāh.

A second section contains four essays on 'religious thought'. Apart from Lawson's and Yazdani's work reviewed above, these comprise: Sajjad Rizvi on the ideas of being (*wujūd*) and sanctity (*wilāya*) in the writings of three late Qajar philosophers (Sabzavārī, Qumshihī and Zunūsī); and Andrew J. Newman on the anti-Akḥbārī sentiments of Muḥammad Bāqir al-Khwānsārī (d. 1313/1895).

The third section deals with aspects of lay religiosity (and exemplifies the creative use of archival materials), with Roxane Haag-Higuchi examining the religious interests of a literary figure (Yaghmā-yi Jandaqī (1781–1859)) who was also a mid-ranking Qajar bureaucrat; Christopher Werner looking at the religious sentiments of some Tabrizi merchants as revealed in their wills; and Nobuaki Kondo describing the life of Manūchihr Khān (d. 1847), the one-time advisor to Faṭḥ-'Alī Shāh who subsequently became governor of Isfahan, and discussing his religious patronage. (This is the same man who came to the support of the Bāb, but this episode in his life is not discussed in the article, other than to note Manuchihr Khan's apparent religious liberalism.)

The fourth section deals with religious minorities: Abbas Amanat on the Shi'ite response to the Christian missionary Henry Martyn (1781–1812); Florence Hellot on the impact of Western missionaries in the Urumia region of western Azerbaijan; Haideh Sahim on the Jews of Hamadan; and the two Baha'i studies by Cole and Momen reviewed above.

The book's final section deals with several aspects of religion and culture: Kamran Aghaie on the wider significance of Muharram passion plays in Tehran; Pardis Minuchehr on the presentation of religious themes in the exile press during the period of Constitutionalist agitation; Hormoz Ebrahimnejad on the impact of Western medical practice; and Jennifer Scarce on religious and nationalistic iconographic motifs in Qajar tilework.

As the editor himself notes, the essays in the book comprise a series of case studies on various aspects of religion in the Qajar period and not a comprehensive or systematic survey – indeed, such a survey has yet to be written. Inevitably, then, some important topics are more or less neglected, including Sufism, the Zoroastrian and Christian minorities, and tribal and peasant religion. The episodic nature of the book can therefore perhaps be seen as a goad to further research.

One final point: given that the book is expensive, I was a little surprised when it fell apart on first reading due to the poor quality of its binding. Perhaps it was just my copy, or maybe this reflects the exigencies faced by the modern book industry. By contrast, my library

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contains numerous volumes (including Browne of course), which were printed in the nineteenth century and are still in good condition, despite many years of use and the travails of a tropical climate.

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## Biographical Notes

Necati Alkan has a PhD in History from Ruhr University, Bochum, Germany and teaches Turkish history at Yildiz Technical University in Istanbul. The focus of his research during the last eight years has been the contacts between Islamic reformers and the Baha'is in the context of dissent and heterodoxy in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire. He has published several articles in non-Baha'i and Baha'i academic journals.

J. Vahid Brown is a student, researcher and independent scholar. He has published a number of articles in Islamic, Babi and Baha'i studies. He and his wife and three children live in Portland, Oregon.

Jack McLean, a private scholar living in Ottawa, Canada, has an MA in the History of Religions from the University of Ottawa (1972). His main interest is in mysticism, philosophical theology, literary criticism and correlating the Baha'i Faith to the Judaeo-Christian tradition. His writings cover scholarship, poetry, essays and journalistic articles; his publications include *Dimensions in Spirituality* (George Ronald, 1994), (as editor) *Revisioning the Sacred: New Perspectives on a Baha'i Theology* (Kalimat Press 1997), *Under the Divine Lote Tree: Essays and Reflections* (George Ronald, 1999). His forthcoming book, *A Celestial Burning: The Writings of Shoghi Effendi*, is a theological and literary critical analysis of the main works of the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith.

Ahang Rabbani lives in Houston, Texas, where he enjoys studying the history and teachings of the Babi and Baha'i Faiths.

Michael Richards is a Trustee of the Baha'i Agency for Social and Economic Development (BASED-UK). Trained as an agricultural economist, he has worked for 28 years on rural development and environmental issues in developing countries, and currently works for the International Non-Government Organisation Research and Training Centre (INTRAC), Oxford.

Oliver Scharbrodt is a lecturer at the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies. He studied Comparative Religion, Islamic Studies and Philosophy at the University of Bonn and the School of Oriental and African Studies. His PhD thesis is a comparative intellectual biography of 'Abdul-Baha and Muhammad 'Abduh. His research interests are in modern Islam and mystical and esoteric traditions of Islam, and in Iranian Shi'ism in particular. His future research will examine the role of Sufism in the modernisation of Iran in the 19th century.

Peter Smith is head of the Social Science Division at Mahidol University International College, Thailand, where he lectures in world history and anthropology. He is the author of several books and a number of articles on Babi-Baha'i Studies.

Fereyduh Vahman, Professor Emeritus, University of Copenhagen, studied Persian literature at the University of Teheran (MA) and undertook post-graduate studies on Iranian Philology at the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies and at the University of Copenhagen. His PhD dissertation 'The Iranian Divina Commedia' is on a Middle Persian text on the concept of Heaven and Hell in Zoroastrianism. He is the author of nine books on Iranian religions and dialects, among them *Ardāy Wirāz Nāmag: The West Iranian Dialects* (3 volumes), *Zoroastrian Religion*, and the *Folklore of Kirmān*. He is also the author of many articles in different scholarly journals and the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.