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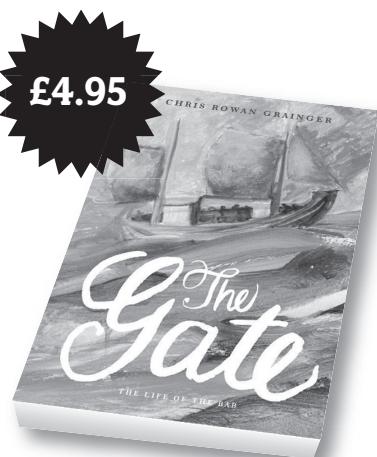


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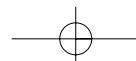
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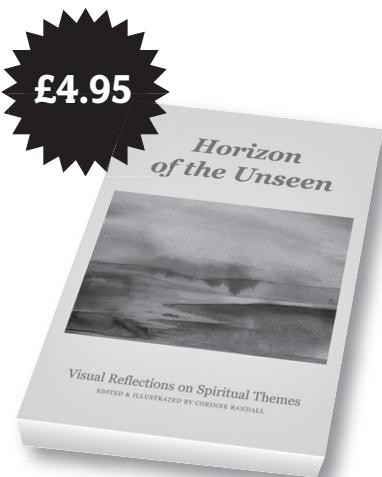


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# The Baha'i Faith and the Perennial Mystical Quest: A Western Perspective

Julio Savi

## Abstract

The author analyses a definition of mysticism formulated by William Ralph Inge and western ideas on mystical experience. Then he proceeds to discuss mysticism as an intrinsic aspect of the Baha'i Faith and mystical experience as expounded in the Baha'i writings. The latter pay greater attention to the practical and logical aspects of mysticism than to the visionary and illogical ones. The author examines some of the reasons for Baha'i and non-Baha'i criticism of mysticism and suggests a Baha'i definition of mysticism. He then attempts to describe the Baha'i mystical path, as expounded by the Universal House of Justice.

## A definition of mysticism

Most western scholars agree on the fact that it is difficult to define the word 'mysticism', and ascribe this difficulty to several factors.<sup>1</sup> In the first place, the term 'mystic' has been given different meanings in different centuries. In the second place, mysticism is a complex and polymorphic phenomenon, which is fundamentally religious in nature but has been studied from different perspectives: literary, historical, sociological, psychological, philosophical, theological and theosophical. In the third place, mysticism has been manifested in a variety of ways throughout history. For example, the forms of mysticism in nascent religions are quite different from those typical of the periods of spiritual decline in the historical development of religions. As to the former, the German Jesuit theologian Josef Sudbrack observes that '[a]t the historical (or prehistoric) ... outset of a religious experience there is an emotion which no one could escape; all were so deeply concerned with religion that we should say: all were mystics'.<sup>2</sup> As to the latter, in those periods of spiritual decline '[t]he protective walls of traditional religions crumble',<sup>3</sup> therefore mysticism is an 'elite'<sup>4</sup> phenomenon arising from 'the awareness that beliefs have lost their meanings' and from the resulting 'intense tension between faith in the Ineffable and the instruments offered by religion', and so mystics 'speak the language of the night' typical of 'the cultural and religious conditions of their world'.<sup>5</sup> In the fourth place, many authors have described mysticism in terms of a particular kind of personal experience, which they call 'mystical experience', and about which they say that it 'defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words'.<sup>6</sup> Last but not least, mysticism is a living experience and thus '[n]o definition of religious mysticism in general abstract terms is ever satisfactory. At its best it misses the vivid reality of a genuine mystical experience, somewhat as one misses the reality of motion when one stops a spinning top to see what motion is like'.<sup>7</sup>

## Keywords

Baha'i mysticism  
 William Ralph Inge  
 spirituality  
 mystical experience  
 insight or intuition  
 communion  
 holiness

1. Adapted from a paper presented at the first conference of the Italian Association for Baha'i Studies, Acuto (Frosinone), 7–9 June 2002.
2. Josef Sudbrack, *Mystik. Selbsterfahrung, Kosmische Erfahrung, Gotteserfahrung* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1988); Italian translation: *Mistica* (Casale Monferrato [Alessandria]: Edizioni Piemme, 1992) 13 [English translation by the author].
3. Sudbrack, *Mistica* 13 [English translation by the author].
4. Sudbrack, *Mistica* 13 [English translation by the author].
5. Joseph Beaude, *La Mystique* [Mysticism] (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1990); Italian translation: *La mistica* (Cinisello Balsamo [Milan]: Edizioni

Paoline, 1992) 37, 98 [English translation by the author].

6. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Glasgow: Collins, 1985) 367.
7. Rufus M. Jones, *The Flowering of Mysticism: The Friends of God in the Fourteenth Century* (New York: Macmillan, 1939) 250.
8. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1993) 72.
9. William Ralph Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (Montana, USA: Kessinger Publishing Company, [n.d.]) 5.
10. Baha'u'llah, *Muntakhabat az Athar-i Hadrat-i Baha'u'llah* (Hofheim-Langenhain: Baha'i-Verlag, 1984) 53; English translation: *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah* (trans. Shoghi Effendi, rev. edn., Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1952) 70. Among the Sufis the Arabic word 'irfan denoted mystic or initiatory knowledge. As to haqq, see below, note 22.
11. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 8 December 1935, in *Bahai News* 102 (August 1936) 3.
12. Inge, *Christian Mysticism* 3, 6–8.
13. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions* (trans. Laura Clifford-Barney, 3rd edn., Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1957) 227.

All these factors explain why, as Evelyn Underhill (1875–1941), the celebrated Anglican author on mysticism, writes, the word 'mysticism' has been

impartially applied to the performances of mediums and the ecstasies of the saints, to 'menticulture' and sorcery, dreamy poetry and mediaeval art, to prayer and palmistry, the doctrinal excesses of Gnosticism, and the tepid speculations of the Cambridge Platonists – even, according to William James, to the higher branches of intoxication.<sup>8</sup>

A definition of mysticism has been formulated by the British divine William Ralph Inge (1860–1954) as follows: 'the attempt to realize the presence of the living God in the soul and in nature'.<sup>9</sup> If this definition is accepted, among many other feasible and possible ones, the goal of mysticism is the same as the purpose of human life described by Baha'u'llah: 'to know [one's] Creator ('irfan-i haqq) and to attain His Presence'.<sup>10</sup> No wonder, then, that Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, has said that the Baha'i Faith, 'like all other Divine Religions, is ... fundamentally mystic in character'.<sup>11</sup>

### The foundations of mysticism

Inge lists, in his exposition of the 'general characteristics of mysticism', the following four propositions on which, in his opinion, all forms of mysticism rest:

1. 'the soul ... can see and perceive';
2. 'man, in order to know God, must be a partaker of the Divine nature';
3. ' "Without holiness no man may see the Lord" ';
4. 'The true hierophant (expounder of the sacred) of the mysteries of God is love.'<sup>12</sup>

These propositions are an essential part of the Baha'i teachings.

1. 'the soul ... can see and perceive'. 'Abdu'l-Baha, adopting the language of Avicennan psychology, states that the soul can know 'through instruments and organs' and 'without instruments and organs'.<sup>13</sup> He calls the latter knowing capacity of the soul 'insight',<sup>14</sup> 'inner perception' ([*didih-yi*] *baṣirat*, literally: the eye of insight), 'subjective ... knowledge' (*ilm-i vujūdī*, literally: knowledge of being), or 'intuitive knowledge' (*ilm-i taḥaqquqī*, literally: knowledge of certainty),<sup>15</sup> and describes its keenness as dependent on one's spiritual progress.
2. '[M]an, in order to know God, must be a partaker of the Divine nature'. 'Abdu'l-Baha states that human 'nature (*ṣūrat*, literally: form) is three-fold: animal, human and divine' (*ṣūrat-i malakūtī*, *ṣūrat-i insānī* va *ṣūrat-i ṭabī'ī*, literally: divine, human and animal form).<sup>16</sup> He describes the divine nature of human beings as 'the image or likeness of God' and says that it is characterized by 'justice, sincerity, faithfulness, knowledge, wisdom, illumination, mercy and pity, coupled with intellect, comprehension, the power to grasp the realities of things and the ability to penetrate the truths of existence'.<sup>17</sup> The Persian notes recorded by an

unmentioned listener during the same talk by 'Abdu'l-Baha provide a slightly different list of virtues, that may be provisionally translated as follows: 'justice (*adl*) and faithfulness (*vafā*), sincerity (*sidq*) and purity (*ṣafā*), wisdom (*hikmat*) and fear of God (*tuqā*), mercy (*rahm*) and generosity (*murūvat*), love (*maḥabbat*) and friendship (*mavaddat*), nobility (*rif'at*) and spiritual knowledge (*ma'rifat*)'.<sup>18</sup>

3. "Without holiness no man may see the Lord." Holiness, intended as 'spiritual perfection or purity',<sup>19</sup> is described in the Baha'i writings as a vital prerequisite to ensure nearness to God. Baha'u'llah writes: 'Thy heart is My home; sanctify (*quds*) it for My descent'.<sup>20</sup> And 'Abdu'l-Baha explains that 'nearness to God ... is dependent upon ... personal sanctification (*tanzīh* *va* *taqđīs*, literally: purification and sanctification)... [and] necessitates sacrifice of self, severance and the giving up of all to Him' (*infāq-i jān* *va* *māl* *va* *'izzat* *va* *mansab*, literally: giving up oneself, and wealth, and power, and high office).<sup>21</sup>
4. 'The true hierophant of the mysteries of God is love'. 'Abdu'l-Baha explains that love is 'the light that guideth in darkness, the living link that uniteth God (*haqq*) with man (*khalq*, literally: creation), that assureth the progress of every illumined soul'.<sup>22</sup>

In other words, the assumptions of mysticism, as described by Inge, and those of the Baha'i Faith are the same: human beings have a divine nature whose development through practising the love of God and self-effacement allows their inner vision to become keener and to perceive the presence of God. This perception of the presence of God is usually referred to by mystics and students of mysticism as 'mystical experience'. So important is 'mystical experience' considered that some scholars of mysticism uphold that one cannot define as 'mystic' any individual who had not at least one mystical experience.

### Mystical experience and its characteristics

The world religious literature is rich in descriptions of mystical experience. Based on these descriptions, scholars have listed a number of its characteristics as follows:

1. *A consciousness of the oneness of everything.* The English philosopher Walter Terence Stace (1886–1967) describes this consciousness as arising from the exclusion of 'all the multiplicity of sensuous or conceptual or other empirical content ... so that there remains only a void and empty unity'.<sup>23</sup> In this condition the mystic 'attains to complete communion with the Absolute Order, and submits to the inflow of its supernal vitality',<sup>24</sup> and thus experiences what the German philosopher Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64) called '*coincidentia oppositorum*'<sup>25</sup> or 'coincidence of contradictories'.<sup>26</sup>
2. *Timelessness.* The English educationalist Frank C. Hapgood (1893–1971) explains that, during a mystical experience, the relationships between events 'are not capable of being adequately described in terms of past, present, and future, or earlier than, later than. These experiences have a timeless quality'.<sup>27</sup>
3. *Sense of objectivity or reality.* Hapgood writes that mystical experiences 'are states of knowledge',<sup>28</sup> a knowledge characterized by a high degree of certitude.

14. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks delivered by 'Abdu'l-Baha during His visit to the United States and Canada in 1912* (comp. Howard MacNutt, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1982) 325.
15. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *An Nūr al-Abhā fi Mufāvadāt-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā. Table Talks collected by Laura Clifford Barney*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., New Delhi: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1983) 5, 111; English translation: *Some Answered Questions* 6, 157.
16. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Majmū'iḥ-yi Khatābāt-i Ḥadrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā* (Langenhain: Baha'i-Verlag, 1984) 641; English translation: *Promulgation* 465.
17. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation* 464, 465.
18. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Majmū'iḥ* 641; As to *ma'rifat*, cf. 'insight in divine matters or mysteries', (Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian–English Dictionary including the Arabic words and phrases to be met with in Persian literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) s.v. *ma'rāfat*, *ma'rifat*, 1271.
19. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (ed. John A. Simpson and Edmund S. C. Weiner, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) s.v. 'holiness', 7:307.
20. Baha'u'llah, 'Kalimat-i Maknūnih 'arabī', in *Alwāḥ-i Mubarakih Ḥadrat-i Bahā'u'llāh*, (rpt Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1978) 29; English translation:

*The Hidden Words of Bahā'u'llāh* (trans. Shoghi Effendi with the assistance of some English friends, Wilmette, IL: Bahā'i Publishing Trust, 1975) 17. The Arabic root *qadusa*, from which *quds* comes, has the same connotations as the Hebrew *qādōsh*, the Greek *hagios*, the Latin *santus* and *sacer*, the German *heilig*, and the English *holy*, whose meanings have been explained by Rudolf Otto.

21. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Majmū'iḥ* 397; English translation: *Promulgation* 148.
22. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Muntakhabatī az Makātīb-i Hadrati 'Abdu'l-Bahā* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'i Publishing Trust, 1979) 25; English translation: *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahā* (trans. Marzieh Gail, Haifa: Bahā'i World Centre, 1978) 27. *Haqq* and *khalq* are a binomial of Sufi theology: *haqq* designates the Divinity as distinguished from *khalq*, the creature.
23. Walter Terence Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1961) 79.
24. Underhill, *Mysticism* 432–3.
25. Nicholas of Cusa, 'Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae', in *Nicolaï de Cusa Opera Omnia* (ed. Raymond Klibanski, 2 vols, Leipzig/Hamburg: F. Meiner Verlag, 1932) 2:15.
26. Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's Debate with John Wenk: A Translation and an Appraisal of De Ignota Litteratura and*
4. *Feelings of blessedness, joy, peace, happiness, etc.*
5. *A feeling that what is apprehended is holy, sacred or divine.*
6. *Ineffability.* Mystical experience resembles a feeling and 'it is not possible to make a state of feeling clear to one who has not experienced it'.<sup>29</sup>
7. *Paradoxicality.* Mystics always feel an urgent need to share their experience with others. And they try to overcome its ineffability through 'linguistic devices as simile, metaphor and paradox, however inadequate these may be for the task'.<sup>30</sup>
8. *Transience.* Mystical experience, with its feeling of timelessness, is seldom prolonged. Whenever the timeless moment has vanished, the mystic feels a kind of 'nostalgia and longing for moments that he has perceived ... at times, and that he has perceived as not transient'.<sup>31</sup> And yet, some mystics are wholly immersed in their spiritual condition, so that their mystical experience 'can become so frequent, so much a way of life, that, in the words of St John of the Cross ... "the soul has it in its power to abandon itself, whenever it wills, to this sweet sleep of love"'.<sup>32</sup>
9. *Passivity.* The mystics perceive themselves as the object of their own experience, as deprived of any will, as being seized by an outward power.
10. *Unreality of the mundane self.* Usually there is a strict connection between the perception of the self, on the one hand, and sensory perception, awareness of time and the feeling of being willingly active, on the other. In a mystical experience all that disappears and, in the words of the German theologian and religious philosopher Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), the mystic perceives 'the self ... the personal "I", as something not perfectly or essentially real, or even as mere nullity'.<sup>33</sup> The perception of the self expands and brings the individual closer to her inner self, a reality that the German Dominican preacher, theologian and mystic Meister Johannes Eckhart (c.1260–1327) calls 'scintilla animae' (the spark of the soul).<sup>34</sup>
11. *A moral content.* Mystical experience leaves in its wake a sense of duty in its subject. As student of esoterism and mystic Arthur Edward Waite (1857–1942) observes: 'those who enter into this state come back into the world, with the yoke of the kingdom upon them in a law of service. Then God shall give them work'.<sup>35</sup> The accomplished mystic may be thus described as 'a pioneer of humanity, a sharply intuitive and painfully practical person: an artist, a discoverer, a religious or social reformer, a national hero, a "great active" among the saints'.<sup>36</sup>
12. *Side phenomena.* That is, 'special altered states – visions, locutions, raptures and the like – which admittedly have played a large part in mysticism but which many mystics have insisted do not constitute the essence of the encounter with God'.<sup>37</sup> Most scholars agree with the Irish Catholic theologian Dom Cuthbert Butler (1858–1934) – whose essay *Western Mysticism* has been described as 'a masterly exhibition of the religious and psychological normality of the Christian contemplative life, as developed by its noblest representatives'<sup>38</sup> – on the opinion that '[e]ssential mysticism should not be identified with occasional accidental concomitants, as visions, revelations, raptures, or other psycho-physical phenomena', and that 'the title mystical' should not be given 'to curious experiences and manifestations bordering on those of Spiritism; to intimations, second sight, telepathy; or religious "queer stories"'. For all

such phenomena there is an accepted scientific term: they are “psychic” not “mystic”.<sup>39</sup>

A question arises while studying mystical experience. Why is it confined only to a limited number of human beings, and not as common as sensory and rational experiences? What is the difference between the mystic who goes through such an experience and the individuals who never have it? On the one hand, Sudbrack observes that ‘the question whether each human being or only certain “privileged” individuals are called to mysticism is put in the wrong way. Mysticism as a meeting is an inner experience of each living faith in God.’<sup>40</sup> And Underhill maintains that ‘mysticism may be looked upon as the final term, the active expression, of a power latent in the whole race: the power, that is to say, of ... perceiving transcendent reality’, and that ‘[f]ew people pass through life without knowing what it is to be at least touched by this mystical feeling’.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, Robert K. C. Forman, Associate Professor of Religion, Hunter College of the City University of New York, describes mystical experience as a ‘pure consciousness event ... a wakeful but objectless consciousness’; maintains that ‘[t]he mystical encounter with awareness itself ... represents an innate capacity’ of each human being; quotes large-scale studies done in the 1990s, which have ascertained ‘that nearly half – 43 percent of all Americans and 48 percent of all British people – have had one or more mystical experiences’, and points out that ‘[t]hough most keep their tales of these extraordinary experiences largely private, many of this near majority have oriented vital aspects of their lives around them’.<sup>42</sup>

Another controversial issue is whether mystical experience is only spontaneous or may be induced. Some authors think that mystical experience is a gratuitous gift. Among them the French Jesuit theologian Father Augustin Poulain (1836–1919) wrote: ‘Supernatural acts or states are called mystical, which our own efforts and industry are unable to produce, even feebly, even for a moment.’<sup>43</sup> Other authors maintain that human beings can so refine their knowing capacities through a particular personal training as to have a direct experience of the Divine. Usually they also maintain that this training consists in ascetic practices, variously described by divers authors. Still other authors say, like Sudbrack, that mystical experience ‘is both a gift and the fulfilment of one’s freedom; lovers experience their love as both a gift and a free personal action’.<sup>44</sup>

Through their studies of the descriptions of the mystics, scholars have inferred that many factors may contribute to bringing about mystical experience:<sup>45</sup>

1. A personal predisposition, which may also be ignored by the subject.
2. An act of will on the part of the subject, which may express itself as an active search for God before her experience begins.
3. Specific stimuli, whose nature depends on the mystic’s personality, upbringing, and religious, social and cultural background. These stimuli are synthesized by Robert Andrew Gilbert, a historian of the occult revival of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as follows:

aspects of nature (commonly water and heights; trees, flowers and their scent; sunrise and sunset), music; poetry; pictorial art; architecture (especially

*Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae*, 3rd edn. (Minneapolis, MN: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1988) 470, at <http://www.cla.umn.edu/jhoppers/Apologia12-2000.pdf> (accessed 20 January 2006).

27. Frank C. Happold, *Mysticism: A Study and an Anthology*, 3rd edn. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) 47–8.
28. Happold, *Mysticism* 45.
29. Happold, *Mysticism* 45.
30. Robert Andrew Gilbert, *The Elements of Mysticism* (Shaftesbury [Dorset]: Element Books, 1991) 89.
31. Beaudé, *Mistica* 119 [English translation by the author].
32. Happold, *Mysticism* 55. St John of the Cross (1542–91), mystical doctor and founder of the Discalced Carmelites. Cf. St John of the Cross, *A Spiritual Canticle of the Soul and the Bridegroom Christ* (trans. David Lewis, with corrections and an introduction by Benedict Zimmerman, OCD, Prior of St Luke’s, Wincanton, 28 June 1909, stanzas 20–21, verse 21, at [http://www.ccel.org/j/john\\_of\\_the\\_cross/canticle/canticle2.5.rtf](http://www.ccel.org/j/john_of_the_cross/canticle/canticle2.5.rtf) (accessed 20 January 2006).
33. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational* (trans. John W. Harvey, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959) 21.
34. Meister Eckhart, *Passion for Creation: The Earth-Honoring Spirituality of Meister*

Eckhart (ed. Matthew Fox, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, c. 2000) 277.

35. Arthur Edward Waite, *Lamps of Western Mysticism: Essays on the Life of the Soul in God* (London: Kegan Paul, 1923).

36. Underhill, *Mysticism* 414.

37. Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 1997) xvii–xviii.

38. Underhill, *Mysticism* xi.

39. Dom Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism: The Teaching of Augustine, Gregory and Bernard on Contemplation and the Contemplative Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), lxii.

40. Sudbrack, *Mistica* 158 [English translation by the author].

41. Underhill, *Mysticism* 73.

42. Robert K. C. Forman, 'Mystical Consciousness, the Innate Capacity, and the Perennial Psychology', in *The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology and Philosophy* (ed. Robert K. C. Forman, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 7, 3.

43. Alain Poulain, *Les Grâces d'oraison* [The Graces of Interior Prayer] (Paris: Beauchesne, 1922); quoted in Butler *Western Mysticism* xix–xx.

44. Sudbrack, *Mistica* 158 [English translation by the author].

45. Cf. Gilbert, *Elements of Mysticism* 87–8.

churches); creative work; and sexual love ... natural beauty; sacred places; prayer, meditation and worship; the visual and auditory arts; literature in various forms; and ... personal relationships ... sorrow, despair and stress.<sup>46</sup>

4. Special historical circumstances. Different forms of mysticism have already been referred to above.

### Mystical experience in the Baha'i writings

The descriptions of the spiritual condition conferred upon all those who have successfully met the prerequisites of spiritual search, as set forth in the Baha'i writings, are similar to the descriptions of mystical experiences:

1. *A consciousness of the oneness of everything.* Baha'u'llah writes that the wayfarer in the Valley of Unity 'drinketh from the cup of the Absolute and gazeth on the Manifestations of Oneness'.<sup>47</sup> However, this consciousness of the oneness of everything is not meant in the Baha'i writings as the result of a 'tie of direct intercourse (*râbîtih va munâsabat va muvâfaqat va mushâbahat*, literally: tie, connection, similarity, semblance)' between 'the one true God' and 'His creation'.<sup>48</sup> It is rather intended as 'self-surrender and perpetual union with God (*fanâ' az nafs va baqâ bi-Allâh*)', a condition that is realized when 'men ... merge their will wholly in the Will of God, and regard their desires as utter nothingness beside His Purpose', that is, when 'they diligently, and with the utmost joy and eagerness, arise and fulfil' '[w]hatsoever the Creator commandeth His creatures to observe'.<sup>49</sup> And thus the consciousness of the oneness of everything is seemingly described in the Baha'i texts as the knowledge of one's divine nature attained in its expression through daily deeds performed in obedience to the divine laws, an effort that implies on the one hand purification of one's mundane self and on the other knowledge of one's divine self. This is the highest spiritual station a human being may attain on earth.
2. *No perception of time and space.* Baha'u'llah writes that the wayfarer in the Valley of Wonderment 'goeth from astonishment to astonishment, and is lost in awe (*mahv*: literally: annihilation) at the works (*şan'-i jadîd*, literally: new creation) of the Lord of Oneness'.<sup>50</sup>
3. *Sense of reality and certitude.* Baha'u'llah writes in the *Kitâb-i Iqân*: 'Gazing with the eye of God, he will perceive within every atom a door that leadeth him to the stations of absolute certitude' ('ayn al-yaqîn va haqq al-yaqîn va nûr al-yaqîn, literally: the eye of certitude, and the truth of certitude, and the light of certitude).<sup>51</sup>
4. *Feelings of blessedness, joy, peace, happiness.* Baha'u'llah writes that the traveller in the Valley of Contentment '[f]rom sorrow ... turneth to bliss, from anguish to joy. His grief and mourning yield to delight and rapture'.<sup>52</sup>
5. *Feeling that what is apprehended is holy, sacred or divine.* Baha'u'llah writes in the *Kitab-i Iqan* that whosoever has entered the 'City of Certitude ... will discern the wonders of His ancient wisdom, and will perceive all the hidden teachings from the rustling leaves of the Tree – which flourisheth in that City. With both his inner and his outer ear he will hear from its dust the hymns of glory and praise ascending unto the Lord of Lords'.<sup>53</sup>

6. *Ineffability*. Baha'u'llah writes, in the Valley of Contentment, 'The tongue faileth in describing these three Valleys [Contentment, Wonderment and True Poverty], and speech falleth short. The pen steppeth not into this region ('arsat, literally: court), the ink leaveth only a blot.'<sup>54</sup>
7. *Paradoxicality*. Baha'u'llah writes of the seeker who has entered the Valley of Wonderment: 'Now he seeth the shape of wealth as poverty itself, and the essence of freedom as sheer impotence. Now is he struck dumb (*mahv*, literally: annihilation) with the beauty of the All-Glorious; again is he wearied out with his own life.'<sup>55</sup>
8. *Transience and nostalgia for the timeless moment*. Baha'u'llah writes in the *Kitab-i Iqan*: 'They that valiantly labour in quest of God's will (*mujāhidīn fī Allāh*, literally: those who fight for God), when once they have renounced all else but Him, will be so attached and wedded to that City that a moment's separation from it would to them be unthinkable.'<sup>56</sup>
9. *Passivity*. Baha'u'llah writes: 'Were any man to ponder in his heart that which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed and to taste of its sweetness, he would, of a certainty, find himself emptied and delivered from his own desires, and utterly subservient to the Will of the Almighty.'<sup>57</sup>
10. *Unreality of the mundane self*. Baha'u'llah writes in the Valley of True Poverty and Absolute Nothingness: 'when the true lover and devoted friend reacheth to the presence of the Beloved, the sparkling beauty of the Loved One and the fire of the lover's heart will kindle a blaze and burn away all veils and wrappings. Yea, all he hath, from heart to skin, will be set aflame, so that nothing will remain save the Friend.'<sup>58</sup>
11. *Moral content*. Baha'u'llah writes in the *Kitāb-i Aqdas*: 'Were any man to taste the sweetness of the words which the lips of the All-Merciful have willed to utter, he would, though the treasures of the earth be in his possession, renounce them one and all, that he might vindicate the truth of even one of His commandments, shining above the Dayspring of His bountiful care and loving-kindness.'<sup>59</sup>
12. *Side phenomena*. As to visions, auditions, locutions, raptures and the like, Shoghi Effendi states that a distinction should be made. On the one hand, there are those visions 'experienced by Divine Prophets and Messengers'.<sup>60</sup> On the other, there are those experienced by ordinary human beings. As to the former, since Baha'i's share with other religionists the idea that 'the whole theory of Divine Revelation rests on the infallibility of the Prophet',<sup>61</sup> they are obviously considered 'direct and authoritative revelation from God'.<sup>62</sup> As to the latter, Shoghi Effendi mentions at least three categories:
  - a. '[T]rue visions which are true spiritual experiences ... granted to those who are spiritually pure and receptive'.<sup>63</sup> He says that these experiences 'are very rare',<sup>64</sup> come 'to an individual through the grace of God, and not through the exercise of any of the human faculties',<sup>65</sup> and that '[i]t is very difficult to distinguish between true visions which are true spiritual experiences of the soul and imaginations which have no reality in spiritual truths'.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, as precious as such experiences may be considered by the individual who has them, they 'should, under no circumstances, be construed as constituting an infallible source of guidance, even for the person experiencing them'.<sup>67</sup>

46. Gilbert, *Elements of Mysticism* 87. These data are the results of the studies of the English [born in Manchester] novelist, critic and journalist Marghanita Laski (1915–88) and the British scientist Sir Alister Hardy (1896–1985).

47. Baha'u'llah, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys* (trans. Marzieh Gail, rev. edn., Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1952 and 1991) 17.

48. Baha'u'llah, *Muntakhabatī* 51; English translation: *Gleanings* 66.

49. Baha'u'llah, 'Lawh-i Shaykh Fānī', in *Muntakhabatī* 217; English translation: *Gleanings* 337. 'Fānī' and 'baqā' are two Arabic words by which the Sufis refer to mystical death and mystical union with the Absolute, respectively.

50. Baha'u'llah, 'Haft Vādī', in *Āthār-i qalam-i a'lā*, vol. 3 (Baha'i Publishing Trust, Teheran, 129 BE/1972–73) 125; English translation: *Seven Valleys* 32.

51. Baha'u'llah, *Kitāb-i Mustatāb-i Iqān*, rpt. (Hofheim-Langenhain: Baha'i-Verlag, 1980) 152; English translation: *Kitāb-i Iqān: The Book of Certitude* (trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1970) 196.

52. Baha'u'llah, *Seven Valleys* 29.

53. Baha'u'llah, *Kitāb-i Iqān* 197–8.

54. Baha'u'llah, 'Haft Vādī' 122; English

translation: *Seven Valleys* 30.

55. Baha'u'llah, 'Haft Vâdi' 124; English translation: *Seven Valleys* 31–2.

56. Baha'u'llah, *Kitâb-i Mustâqâb-i Iqân* 153; English version: *Kitâb-i-Iqân* 198–9.

57. Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings* 343.

58. Baha'u'llah, *Seven Valleys* 36.

59. Baha'u'llah, *Kitâb-i Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1992) 20.

60. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to Mrs Kathryn Frankland, 1 November 1940, in *Baha'i News* 152 (April 1942) 2.

61. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 11 January 1942, in *Lights of Guidance: A Bahâ'i Reference File* (comp. Helen Bassett Hornby, rev. edn., New Delhi: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1996) 477.

62. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to Mrs Kathryn Frankland, 1 November 1940, in *Baha'i News* 152 (April 1942) 2.

63. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, to an individual believer, 26 November 1939, in *Baha'i News* 152 (April 1942) 2.

64. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, to an individual believer, 25 October 1942, in *Baha'i News* 152 (April 1942) 2. This statement may seem inconsistent with the above-mentioned results of the statistics quoted by Forman. The inconsistency may be due to the different

b. Experiences 'which have no reality in spiritual truths',<sup>68</sup> and are the product of human imaginations 'however real ... [they] may seem ... to be'.<sup>69</sup> Shoghi Effendi says that there is no way of knowing the 'origin and purpose' of such experiences, and warns the Baha'i not to 'place much importance on' them.<sup>70</sup>

c. '[P]sychic phenomena',<sup>71</sup> which 'pertain mostly to the domain of conjectures'<sup>72</sup> and are often 'an indication of a deep psychological disturbance'.<sup>73</sup> The Baha'i teachings warn the Baha'i to avoid 'all psychic dabbling and exercise of psychic faculties',<sup>74</sup> and Shoghi Effendi explains this Baha'i position as follows: 'If Baha'u'llah had attached the slightest importance to occult experiences, to the seeing of auras, to the hearing of mystic voices ... He, Himself, would have mentioned all of these things in His Teachings. The fact that He passed over them in silence shows that to Him, they had either no importance or no reality, and were consequently not worthy to take up His time as the Divine Educator of the human race.'<sup>75</sup>

### Mystical experience as explained in the Baha'i teachings

The Baha'i teachings do not deny the possibility and the relative value of mystical experience as a personal guidance, for people who meet the 'indispensable condition' of '[p]urity of heart'.<sup>76</sup> Shoghi Effendi admits that '[i]n many cases dreams have been the means of bringing people to the truth',<sup>77</sup> that daily prayer, meditation and concentration, as well as an earnest and sustained effort to do God's Will, may help us 'to feel the direct spiritual guidance of God',<sup>78</sup> and 'discover, though not always and fully, God's Will intuitively',<sup>79</sup> and thus 'not to make so many mistakes and to receive more directly the Guidance God seeks to give us';<sup>80</sup> that our power of insight may become keener if we 'strive to become pure in heart and "free from all save God"',<sup>81</sup> and that as we meditate, 'God can inspire into our minds things that we had no previous knowledge of, if He desires to do so'.<sup>82</sup> He also suggests that we test our insights, on the one hand, 'by comparing them with the revealed Word and seeing whether they are in harmony therewith',<sup>83</sup> and, on the other, by putting them into practice: 'if the way opens, when we have sought guidance', he says, 'then we may presume God is helping us'.<sup>84</sup> However, he concludes that 'implicit faith in our intuitive powers is unwise',<sup>85</sup> and that '[u]nder no circumstances ... can a person be absolutely certain that he is recognizing God's Will, through the exercise of his intuition. It often happens that the latter results in completely misrepresenting the truth, and thus becomes a source of error rather than of guidance'.<sup>86</sup> He explains that the Manifestations of God 'have the channels of the Cause through which to guide us. They do not need to go outside these and send individual revelations.' Thus, on the one hand, he directs the Baha'i to seek guidance from the writings and 'the channels of the Cause' (i.e. the Baha'i elected and appointed institutions) through study, meditation and consultation,<sup>87</sup> and on the other, he assures the Baha'i that '[i]f we are going to have some deeply spiritual experience we can rest assured God will vouchsafe it to us without our having to look for it',<sup>88</sup> and warns them not 'to go groping about in the darkness of ... [one's] imagination after the true thing',<sup>89</sup> making clear that '[w]hen a person endeavours to develop

faculties so that they might enjoy visions, dreams, etc., actually what they are doing is weakening certain of their spiritual capacities; and thus under such circumstances, dreams and visions have no reality, and ultimately lead to the destruction of the character of the person'.<sup>90</sup>

Therefore, in the light of the Baha'i teachings the purpose of mystic search, a search which is enjoined upon all human beings as a spiritual obligation, is not the development of 'faculties so that ... [one] might enjoy visions, dreams, etc.',<sup>91</sup> but the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers, as vital instruments in one's service to the cause of the well-being of humankind. Holiness, or spiritual perfection, as a perfect instrument for the service of humankind is exemplified by 'Abdu'l-Baha, who has been bequeathed by Baha'u'llah to his followers as 'the perfect Exemplar of His Faith ... endowed with super-human knowledge',<sup>92</sup> 'the embodiment of every Baha'i ideal, the incarnation of every Baha'i virtue',<sup>93</sup> in other words, as the perfect mystic.

### **Negative connotations associated with mysticism**

If, according to the Baha'i teachings, mysticism is such an important part of religion – its essence, we could say – why were so many negative connotations associated with it? Why did such a conflict arise between the mystics and their religious institutions? And, moreover, what are considered to be the dangers of mysticism in the Baha'i community, and what instructions are given to avoid the pitfalls into which other religions have stumbled while treading the mystic path? All these questions deserve serious attention and reflection.

Mysticism is so closely knit to religion that the destinies of the former are likely to be strictly related to the destinies of the latter. In the 19th and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the name of religion has been associated with many negative connotations, and many westerners have come to consider it as an obstacle in the path of progress. Mysticism also has been associated with many negative connotations. It was castigated by both detractors and upholders of religion. By the former, it was accused of superstition and charlatanism because of their materialistic worldview, and by the latter, because they were usually more attached to the shell of religion than to its kernel. In times of religious decline, mystics, endowed – as they often are – with attributes of inner perfection, may be more aware of the inner meanings of religion than are their own declining religious institutions. However, because they are human, they also are liable to make mistakes in their interpretations of reality.

Last but not least, both detractors and upholders of religion have been over-focused 'on the highly ambiguous notion of mystical experience', resulting not only in a wrong conception of mysticism itself, but also in a 'neglect of mystical hermeneutics'.<sup>94</sup>

### **Reasons for suspicion of mysticism in the Baha'i community**

Some Baha'is could be suspicious about mysticism on the grounds of three sets of factors: the influence of the humanistic and materialistic attitudes of western culture; some misunderstandings of the true nature of mysticism; and misinterpretations of the words of the Baha'i authoritative texts.

meaning given to the term 'mystical experience'. In the author's opinion, Shoghi Effendi here refers to the accomplished mystics, and not to those people who, in the words of Underhill, may be defined as 'contemplatives in the earlier and educative stages of the Mystic Way' (Underhill, *Mysticism* 41).

65. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 6 May 1952, quoted in *Baha'i Institutions: A Compilation* (New Delhi: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1973) 114.
66. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 26 November 1939, *Baha'i News* 152 (April 1942) 2.
67. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to Mrs Kathryn Frankland, 1 November 1940, in *Baha'i News* 152 (April 1942) 2.
68. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 26 November 1939, in *Baha'i News* 152 (April 1942) 2.
69. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 25 October 1942, in *Baha'i News* 152 (April 1942) 2.
70. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 9 April 1948, quoted in *Baha'i Institutions* 113.
71. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 20 November 1937, quoted in *Baha'i Institutions* 108.

72. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand, 30 March 1938, in *Letters to Australia and New Zealand 1923–1957*, rpt. (Sydney: The National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of Australia, 1971) 26.

73. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, to an individual believer, 20 November 1937, quoted in *Baha’i Institutions* 108.

74. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 24 June 1941, quoted in *Baha’i Institutions* 110. Cf. John E. Esslemont, *Baha’u’llah and the New Era*, 4<sup>th</sup> rev. edn. (Wilmette, IL: Baha’i Publishing Trust, 1980) 193.

75. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 22 April 1954, quoted in *Lights of Guidance* 539.

76. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 14 January 1938, quoted in *Baha’i Institutions* 108.

77. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 16 May 1925, quoted in *Baha’i Institutions* 107.

78. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 14 January 1938, quoted in *Baha’i Institutions* 108.

79. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 29 October 1938, quoted in *Baha’i Institutions* 109.

80. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an

### ***The influence of the humanistic and materialistic attitudes of western civilization***

The Universal House of Justice, the supreme governing Baha’i institution, has stated that ‘it does not beseem a Baha’i to write ... about his Faith as if he looked upon it from the norm of humanism or materialism’.<sup>95</sup> The Supreme Body also explained that ‘[t]his approach, although understandable, is quite impossible for a Baha’i, for it ignores the fact that our worldview includes the spiritual dimension as an indispensable component for consistency and coherence’.<sup>96</sup> However, if Baha’is are among those who, somehow influenced by contemporary western culture, consciously or unconsciously look upon certain aspects of daily life ‘from the norm of humanism or materialism’, they may encounter two different and opposing pitfalls.

On the one hand, they may undervalue such mystical aspects of life as prayer, devotion, meditation, and lay ‘too much emphasis ... on the social and economic aspects of the Teachings’.<sup>97</sup> They may underrate the importance of the mystical relation between their soul and the Manifestation of God. They may dissociate ‘the moral aspect’ of the Baha’i teachings – which, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, ‘cannot be over-emphasized’<sup>98</sup> – from their mystical aspect. And therefore they may assume that human beings may become spiritual people by the mere power of their being rational and logical (or ‘scientific’, as is sometimes said) without consciously and willingly drawing on the powers of the spirit of faith and the Holy Spirit. The difference between this approach and that of the best among western atheists, who strive after moral perfection without drawing on the spiritual powers of religion that they consider ‘as irrelevant to the major concerns of the modern world’,<sup>99</sup> does not seem to be very great.

On the other hand, they may encounter the pitfall of overestimating material miracles, dreams, visions, communications with departed relatives or friends, etc. In other words, they may fall into some of those forms of superstition that seem to have had a revival at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with ‘the emergence of an increasing number of obscure cults, of strange and new worships, of ineffective philosophies’.<sup>100</sup> Shoghi Effendi has given clear directives on these issues. He reminded the Baha’is that ‘modern psychology has taught that the capacity of the human mind for believing what it imagines, is almost infinite’.<sup>101</sup> And thus he urged them not to ‘believe in the divine origin of any such things which have not been mentioned in our own Sacred Scriptures by either the Bab, Baha’u’llah or the Master’.<sup>102</sup> He specifically warned them against such ‘vain imaginings’ as: ‘psychic practices and phenomena’,<sup>103</sup> alleged ‘communications with spirits’,<sup>104</sup> ‘table-writing’,<sup>105</sup> the illusion ‘of being directed by him [Shoghi Effendi] in the inner plane’,<sup>106</sup> or through ‘visions, dreams, etc.’,<sup>107</sup> certain forms of ‘radiations of thoughts or healing’,<sup>108</sup> ‘numerology and astrology’<sup>109</sup> ‘the Fourth Dimension’,<sup>110</sup> ‘the categorical affirmations of Rudolphe Steiner’ and other ‘scholars’,<sup>111</sup> ‘the pyramid of Cheops’ and their alleged prophecies,<sup>112</sup> ‘a concealed group of masters in the Himalayas or anywhere else’, as well as ‘mystical stories of beings that are “behind the scenes” so to speak’.<sup>113</sup> Shoghi Effendi referred to all these ‘metaphysical hair-splittings, and other abstract things carried to the extreme’, as the ‘fruitless sciences’ mentioned by Baha’u’llah.<sup>114</sup>

Last but not least, Baha'i's may come to overestimate the experiential aspects of mysticism and thus yield to a quite dangerous illusion of the human ego, that is, self-centredness and 'spiritual pride, the greatest "sin" in religious life'.<sup>115</sup> They would thus fall within that category of people who are 'more interested in mystical things, and in mystery itself, than in this present world in which we live, and how to solve its problems', people who only 'enjoy abstractions and complications'.<sup>116</sup> They may thus run the risk of being dangerous to themselves and to others.<sup>117</sup>

### ***Misunderstandings of the true nature of mysticism***

Baha'i's may misinterpret mysticism as a sort of independent esoteric religious movement, deprived of a central figure to whom all people may turn, and founded upon the doctrines formulated by various mystics through individual allegedly divine revelations. They may misconstrue it as a path, open only to particularly gifted individuals, unconcerned with society and its problems and aiming at the achievement of personal, deeper and deeper mystical experiences to the extent of a union of the mystic's soul with the Absolute. They may finally assume that it implies the acceptance of such theories as reincarnation, pre-existence of the human soul, etc. This conception of mysticism undoubtedly brings together many ideas repeatedly expressed by many self-styled mystics, but does not grasp its essence. If Baha'i's view mysticism from this perspective, they are like those atheists who condemn religion simply because of the different unreasonable dogmas and theories suggested by religionists. Mysticism is not a single movement, founded by someone, based on certain theories, and growing organically through the centuries. Mysticism is an inner attitude, whose outer expressions through the ages have been influenced by historical circumstance, as well as by the traits of the individuals who wrote of it and taught it. And this inner attitude of communion with the Divine is the core of all religions.

### ***Misinterpretations of the words of 'Abdu'l-Baha and of Shoghi Effendi***

A Baha'i may misunderstand the warnings of both 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi against spiritualism, psychic forces and metaphysical hair-splitting as referring to mysticism itself. In order to better understand the traits of the individuals who are described as mystics in the Baha'i writings, it is useful to refer to 'Abdu'l-Baha's *Memorials of the Faithful*. Marzieh Gail (1908–1993), its translator from Persian into English, writes in her proem that this book 'is more than the brief annals of early Baha'i disciples; it is, somehow, a book of prototypes; and it is a kind of testament of values endorsed and willed to us by the Baha'i Exemplar'.<sup>118</sup> 'Abdu'l-Baha's descriptions do not point out the charismatic or miraculous powers of his personages, as does most past eastern and western hagiographic literature, but rather their faithfulness in their application of divine law to the actions of daily life. A high moral standard makes of each one of them an example of a life to be recorded for posterity.

Among them we also find some individuals who tread the traditional mystical path, with its emphasis on the introspective and devotional aspects of spiritual life, and whom 'Abdu'l-Baha defines as belonging to 'the

individual believer,  
17 October 1944,  
quoted in *Baha'i Institutions* 112.

81. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 16 May 1925, quoted in *Baha'i Institutions* 107.
82. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 25 January 1943, quoted in *Baha'i Institutions* 111.
83. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 16 May 1925, quoted in *Baha'i Institutions* 107.
84. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 25 January 1943, quoted in *Baha'i Institutions* 111.
85. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 29 October 1938, quoted in *Baha'i Institutions* 109.
86. *ibid.*
87. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 22 December 1947, *Baha'i News* 152 (April 1942) 2.
88. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 25 October 1942, *Baha'i News* 152 (April 1942) 2.
89. *ibid.*
90. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 6 May 1952, quoted in *Baha'i Institutions* 114.
91. *ibid.*
92. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1957) 242.
93. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of*

Bahā'u'llāh: *Selected Letters* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1955) 134.

94. McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* xiv.

95. Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 4 October 1994, *The Compilation of Compilations*. Prepared by the Universal House of Justice (3 vols., Ingleside, NSW: Baha'i Publications Australia, 1991–2000) 3:261. The fundamental ideas of materialism, which emerged in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are described in *Century of Light*, an essay on the 20<sup>th</sup> century commissioned by the Universal House of Justice, as follows: 'Reality – including human reality and the process by which it evolves – is essentially material in nature. The goal of human life is, or ought to be, the satisfaction of material needs and wants. Society exists to facilitate this quest, and the collective concern of humankind should be an ongoing refinement of the system, aimed at rendering it ever more efficient in carrying out its assigned task' (*Century of Light* [Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 2001] 89). The Baha'i Faith does not agree with any of these statements. As to humanism, *Webster's English Dictionary* defines it as 'a philosophy that rejects supernaturalism, regards man as a natural object, and asserts the essential dignity and worth of

mystic element ('*urafā'*)'.<sup>119</sup> They are nine: Nabīl-i Akbar, Mullā 'Alī-Akbar, Muhammad 'Alī from Isfahan, Darvīsh Ṣidq-'Alī, Hājī Muḥammad Khān, Mishkīn Qalam, Hājī Āqā-yi Tabrīzī, Mīrzā Muṣṭafā and Shams-i Ḏuhā.<sup>120</sup> 'Abdu'l-Baha does not praise them for their mystical experiences, but for having escaped the snares of a corrupted form of mysticism and for having become lovers of the Truth as manifested by Bahā'u'llāh and the champions of his Covenant. While speaking of Darvīsh Ṣidq-'Alī he says that Bahā'u'llāh wrote that the word *darvīsh*, often used in Persian to mean 'mystic', 'designates those who are completely severed from all but God, who cleave to His laws, are firm in His Faith, loyal to His Covenant, and constant in worship'.<sup>121</sup>

We may well conclude that the Baha'i teachings condemn mysticism in what they regard as its corrupted aspects, as they do in the case of earlier religions, yet appreciate it in its essence. As Shoghi Effendi wrote through his secretary: 'the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling which unites Man with God'.<sup>122</sup>

### A Baha'i definition of mysticism

We can now attempt to formulate a Baha'i definition of mysticism. Shoghi Effendi stated:

We liken God to the Sun, which gives us all our life. So the Spirit of God reaches us through the Souls of the Manifestations. We must learn to commune with Their Souls, and this is what the Martyrs seemed to have done, and what brought them such ecstasy of joy that life became nothing. This is the true mysticism, and the secret, inner meaning of life which humanity has, at present, drifted so far from.<sup>123</sup>

'True mysticism' seems here described as a state of communion between a believer and the soul of the Manifestation of God that conveys the Spirit of God unto her, bringing 'such ecstasy of joy that life becomes nothing'. This communion is so important as to be identified with 'the secret, inner meaning of life' and with 'the core of religious faith'.<sup>124</sup> And thus, in the light of the Baha'i teachings, mysticism may also be defined as spirituality or 'spiritual progress',<sup>125</sup> intended as 'the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers',<sup>126</sup> that is, the capacity 'to perceive the Divine reality of things (*haqāyiq-i āshyā*, literally: the essential realities of all things) ... by the power of the Holy Spirit' (*az nafahāt-i rūḥ al-quds*, literally: by the issuing forth of the Holy Spirit).<sup>127</sup> Shoghi Effendi explains that 'spirituality ... is the essence of Man',<sup>128</sup> that it implies for 'the ego ... [to] be ever-increasingly subordinated to the enlightened soul of man',<sup>129</sup> and that 'the foundation of true spirituality is steadfastness in the Covenant'.<sup>130</sup>

These statements explain why Shoghi Effendi said that mysticism lies at the core of the Baha'i Faith, as of any other religion. All Baha'is are called to mysticism, because Bahā'u'llāh urges them to strive with every nerve so that they may commune with his soul, and thus receive the blessings of the Spirit of God, in the form of 'spiritual virtues and powers', and become effective instruments for the implementation of his plan for humankind.

## The Baha'i mystic path

Baha'u'llah, with his announcement of 'the coming of age of the entire human race',<sup>131</sup> and his promise that God will raise a new 'race of men (*khalq*, literally: creatures) the nature of which is inscrutable to all save God, the All-Powerful, the Self-Subsisting', and that 'He shall purify them from the defilement of idle fancies and corrupt desires, shall lift them up to the heights of holiness, and shall cause them to manifest the signs of His sovereignty and might upon earth',<sup>132</sup> is asserting that all human beings are now ready to tread the mystic path, struggling to achieve the purpose of human life: to know and to love God. Baha'u'llah states that he has given to human beings whatever they need to follow this path and accomplish this purpose.

1. First of all, he has revealed doctrinal explanations, the main features of which are expounded in his most important doctrinal work, the *Kitab-i-Iqan*. Through its study, on the one hand people can learn a method that will enable them to understand the meaning of the words of the Manifestations of God, both of the present and of the past, even when they speak the difficult language 'of the truth-seeker and the mystic' (*lisān-i ḥaqīqat va ṭarīqat*, literally: the language of the Truth and of the Way).<sup>133</sup> On the other hand, they can achieve a deeper understanding of God, His Manifestations, the meaning of revelation, human nature, and the path human beings should tread in order to acquire a deeper knowledge of reality, both in themselves and in the world of creation.
2. Baha'u'llah has conveyed, throughout his writings, 'a coherent poetic myth', described by William P. Collins as a 'universe, with constantly varying topography that extends into the past and future of eternity, out into the macrocosm of the physical universe and into the microcosm of that most spiritual of all universes – our own hearts and minds'.<sup>134</sup> Collins explains the importance of this language for human beings 'to have some grasp of the reality of the ultimate mysteries of the universe'.<sup>135</sup> As the soul is exposed to this language, and enters into its universe, which is a metaphorical description of the inner worlds of spirit, it goes through 'a crisis of understanding', it leaps 'to new knowledge and to that fruit of mature experience which is the acknowledgement of one's powerlessness, ignorance, and poverty. With that acknowledgement, the power, knowledge, and riches of the Reality behind the universe's mask becomes instantly and irrevocably ours'.<sup>136</sup> And this 'acknowledgement of one's powerlessness' and comprehension of 'the Reality behind the universe's mask' is certainly an important stage in the mystical path to be trodden by all human beings in their endeavour to achieve the purpose of their lives.
3. Baha'u'llah has provided ethical guidance, the essence of which is expounded in his most important ethical book, the *Hidden Words*, through whose study and practice people can learn how they must behave while living on earth.
4. He has revealed explanations on true mysticism, in works such as the *Seven Valleys*, his greatest mystical composition, the *Four Valleys*, *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, etc. through whose study people can better understand

man and his capacity to achieve self-realization through the use of reason and scientific method' (*Webster's New International Dictionary*, 3rd edn. [Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Inc., 1986] s.v. 'humanism', 1100). Although the Baha'i Faith is sometimes presented as 'a growing humanist influence on our world' (see for example the Christian Internet site 'Contender Ministries' at <http://www.contenderministries.org/index.php>, accessed 20 January 2006), and indeed shares some of the ideas of humanism, as, for example the appreciation of freedom of inquiry, expression and action, the aversion for bigotry, hatred, discrimination, intolerance, however, it dissents with those humanists who reject the concept of a personal God, deny the possibility of divine revelation to humankind, regard humans as supreme, and thus refuse the authority of the Messengers of God and the divine origin of human values.

96. Letter of behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 4 October 1994, *Compilation 3:261*.
97. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 6 September 1946, *Compilation 2:16*.
98. *ibid.*
99. The Universal House of Justice, 'The Promise of World

Peace, October 1985', *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996) 685.

100. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 184.

101. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 22 April 1954, *Baha'i Institutions* 119.

102. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, to an individual believer, 11 May 1954, *The Light of Divine Guidance* (Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í Verlag, 1985) 2:112. The Bab, Siyyid 'Ali Muhammad (1819-1852), is the founder of the Babi religion and the forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh. The Master is one of the titles denoting 'Abdu'l-Baha, Bahá'u'lláh's successor.

103. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 30 March 1938, *Baha'i Institutions* 108.

104. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 25 October 1942, *Baha'i News* 152 (April 1942) 2.

105. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 24 June 1941, *Baha'i Institutions* 110.

106. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 5 May 1947, *Baha'i Institutions* 112.

107. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 6 May 1952, *Baha'i News* 152 (April 1942) 4.

their mystic path, its nature, its requirements and the inner changes they will experience while advancing along that path.

5. Bahá'u'lláh has written a book of laws, the *Kitab-i Aqdas*, his 'Most Holy Book', through whose implementation people can spiritualize society itself.
6. He has established an unassailable Covenant so that people may be sure that, if they will faithfully abide by the Covenant, they will never remain without his living guidance on earth and thus they will never follow wrong paths.
7. Lastly, but not least, he has clearly explained the prerequisites of the mystical journey:

In all these journeys the traveller must stray not the breadth of a hair from the 'Law' (*shari'at*), for this is indeed the secret of the 'Path' (*tarīqat*) and the fruit of the Tree of 'Truth' (*haqīqat*); and in all these stages he must cling to the robe of obedience to the commandments, and hold fast to the cord of shunning all forbidden things, that he may be nourished from the cup of the Law and informed of the mysteries of Truth.<sup>137</sup>

The Universal House of Justice has summarized the prerequisites of the Bahá'í mystical path, described as 'the path towards the attainment of true spirituality that has been laid down by the Manifestation of God for this age', that is Bahá'u'lláh, as follows:

Bahá'u'lláh has stated quite clearly in His Writings the essential requisites for our spiritual growth, and these are stressed again and again by 'Abdu'l-Baha in His talks and Tablets. One can summarize them briefly in this way:

1. The recital each day of one of the Obligatory Prayers with pure-hearted devotion.
2. The regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures, specifically at least each morning and evening, with reverence, attention and thought.
3. Prayerful meditation on the teachings, so that we may understand them more deeply, fulfil them more faithfully, and convey them more accurately to others.
4. Striving every day to bring our behaviour more into accordance with the high standards that are set forth in their teachings.
5. Teaching the Cause of God.
6. Selfless service in the work of the Cause and in the carrying on of our trade or profession.<sup>138</sup>

### Preliminary conclusions

At this point, having read the above quotations from the Bahá'í writings, perhaps we can try to provide some answers to some of the questions posed above. We asked: 'If, according to the Bahá'í teachings, mysticism is such an important part of religion, why are so many negative connotations associated with it? Why did such a conflict arise between the mystics and their religious institutions?' Some answers may be found in the history of religions as explained in the Bahá'í scriptures. At the beginning of each religious cycle the presence of the Holy is so intense within the rising

community that most of its members perceive its power, and thus almost all of them are mystics. 'Abdu'l-Baha explains that

the day of the appearance of the Holy Manifestations is the spiritual spring-time; it is the divine splendour; it is the heavenly bounty, the breeze of life, the rising of the Sun of Reality. Spirits are quickened; hearts are refreshed and invigorated; souls become good; existence is set in motion; human realities are gladdened, and grow and develop in good qualities and perfections. General progress is achieved and revival takes place, for it is the day of resurrection, the time of excitement and ferment, and the season of bliss, of joy and of intense rapture.<sup>139</sup>

But in past religious cycles, at the time of the death of the Manifestation of God no Covenant had been clearly established, and thus the issues of the right to interpret the scriptures and of the guidance of the community remained problematic. This fact caused an early and progressive deviation from the purity of the primal teachings and very soon created the conditions for the rising of the mystical forms typical of periods of spiritual decline in the historical development of religions. In such circumstances the mystics sought for direct guidance from God, beyond any encumbering institutional mediation. They were also inclined to work in secrecy, lest their religious institutions might interfere with their activities and even persecute them. Those are the days of oppression, mentioned by Baha'u'llah: 'What "oppression" is more grievous than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God (*ma'rifat*, literally: insight in divine matters or mysteries), should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it?'<sup>140</sup> However, sincere and perceptive as the mystics may have been, they have also been limited by their own humanity, and thus liable to adopt mistaken behaviours and thoughts. And thus we find among the mystics both peaks of spirituality and understandable human flaws.

We also asked: 'What are described as the dangers of mysticism in the Baha'i community? And what instructions are given to avoid the pitfalls into which other religions have stumbled while treading the mystic path?' An answer may be found in the characteristics of the new age, and in particular two of them, as they are described in the Baha'i writings. On the one hand, Baha'u'llah has announced the coming of age of the entire human race, that is to say, the human race is ready for a spiritual maturity that will be manifested through the realization of the oneness of humankind on earth. This coming of age implies that each human being has today the capacity to recognize the 'mystic and wondrous Bride, hidden ere this beneath the veiling of utterance'.<sup>141</sup> It is seemingly the end of the esoteric stage of the mystic way. The hidden truth is today accessible to each human being, because Baha'u'llah has revealed the key for the interpretation of mystic scriptures and because his social principle of universal education is being and will be increasingly applied. He joyously announces that 'whereas in days past every lover besought and searched after his Beloved, it is the Beloved Himself Who now is calling His lovers and is inviting them to attain His presence'.<sup>142</sup> On the other hand, Baha'u'llah has established his Covenant, has denied any authority to any interpretations of Baha'i scripture besides those given by the authorized interpreters, has instituted

108. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 8 June 1948, *Compilation* 2:242.

109. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 26 December 1928, *Baha'i Institutions* 124.

110. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 19 July 1953 *Lights of Guidance* 514.

111. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 22 April 1954, *Baha'i Institutions* 116 [emphasis added]. Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), founder of Anthroposophy and originator of Waldorf Education. The focus of these words seems on the locution 'categorical affirmations', rather than on Rudolf Steiner and other scholars. And thus it seems a recommendation not to consider any human source as an infallible authority. The only infallible authority is the Word of God, as expounded in scripture and interpreted by its authorized interpreters.

112. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 10 July 1939, *Baha'i Institutions* 125.

113. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 11 May 1954, *Light of Divine Guidance* 2:112, 113.

114. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 30 July 1956, *Baha'i Institutions* 126. See, for example: 'Knowledge is as wings to man's life,

and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words, (Baha'u'llah, 'Tajalliyat', in *Tablets of Baha'u'llah* 51-2).

115. Alessandro Bausani, *Saggi sulla Fede Baha'i* [Essays on the Baha'i Faith] (Rome: Casa Editrice Baha'i, 1991) 392.

116. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 22 April 1954, *Baha'i Institutions* 118.

117. Shoghi Effendi stated in 1928 that 'the Baha'i Cause everywhere has suffered from spiritualists with psychic pretended powers' (Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 10 July 1928, *Lights of Guidance* 519).

118. Marzieh Gail, 'Proem', in 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Memorials of the Faithful* (trans. Marzieh Gail, Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1971) xi.

119. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Tadhkirat al-Vafā' fī Tarjumat Hayāt Qudarnā' al-Āḥibbā'* (Maṭbaah al-Abbāsiyah, Haifa, 1343 AH [1924 AD]) 63; English translation: *Memorials* 36. 'Urafā' is the plural of 'ārif', 'the highest grade to which a mystic can attain' (Steingass, *Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, s.v. 'ārif', 829).

a governing body which he has declared to be infallible and authorized to 'deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book',<sup>143</sup> that will remain in this world until at least the end of the Baha'i Dispensation. These three strictly interconnected factors assure the protection of his Faith in its development. This, he has declared, is the 'Day which shall never be followed by night',<sup>144</sup> the 'Springtime which autumn will never overtake'.<sup>145</sup> As to the individual Baha'is, it is asserted that they will be protected if, while treading their personal mystical paths, they will remain faithful to the Covenant, if they will always remember that in this Dispensation infallible guidance comes only from Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, who were invested by Baha'u'llah with the gift of infallibility. If the Baha'is will faithfully follow this mystical path, they will actively contribute to preventing that their Faith may 'degenerate into a mere organization, and become[e] a dead thing'.<sup>146</sup> If they will remain faithful to their scriptures, they will also escape the danger of becoming lost behind vain imaginings and metaphysical hair-splitting. But if they do not follow the mystical path, because their scriptures emphasize the importance of the spiritual maturity of the Baha'is in view of the realization of the oneness of humankind, they 'will be held responsible before God, that the race will remain longer in its state of waywardness, that wars would not be so soon averted, that human suffering will last longer'.<sup>147</sup>

The Baha'i mystical path, which may be considered as the core of the Baha'i Faith, is clearly outlined in the Baha'i scriptures in its animating spirit, in its regulating discipline, in the goals at which it aims. The Baha'is need only faithfully tread it and show 'what [their] endeavours in the path of detachment will reveal'.<sup>148</sup>

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### Side notes (continued)

120. Nabīl-i Akbar excelled in 'the teachings of the mystics (*'urafā'*) and of the Shaykhī School'; Mullā 'Alī-Akbar 'frequented the gatherings of philosophers, mystics (*'urafā'*), and Shaykhīs, thoughtfully traversing those areas of knowledge (*'ilm*, an Arabic word sometimes translated as science), intuitive wisdom (*'irfān*, among the Sufis this word denotes esoteric knowledge), and illumination' (*ishrāq*, in the Muslim world this word denotes the oriental theosophy or philosophy of Suhrawardi [1155–91]); Muḥammad 'Alī from Isfahan 'was one of the mystics (*'urafā'*'); Darvīsh Șidq-'Alī 'belonged to the mystic element (*'urafā'*'); Hājī Muhammad Khān 'became a mystic (*'urafā'*) when he was very young; Mishkīn-Qalam 'was among the most noted of mystics (*'urafā'*) ... [and] a spiritual wayfarer' (*sālik*, an Arabic word denoting among the Sufis the initiated on the mystical path); Hājī Aqā-yi Tabrīzī was 'a spiritual man' and 'had sensed the mystic knowledge (*'irfān*'); Mīrzā Muṣṭafā 'was concerned with the anemones of mystic meanings'; and Shams-i Duhā was 'strongly attracted to the mystical teachings (*'irfān*) of ... Siyid Kāzīm-i Rashtī ... [and] became thoroughly informed on subjects relating to Divinity, on the Scriptures and on their inner meanings' ('Abdu'l-Baha, *Tadhkirat al-Vafā* 6, 19, 43, 63, 142, 152, 218, 227, 268–9; English translation: *Memorials* 1, 9, 23, 36, 91, 98, 142, 148, 176).

121. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Memorials* 38.

122. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 8 December 1935, *Baha'i News* 102 (August 1936) 3.

123. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to Manchester Spiritual Assembly, 28 July 1950, *Unfolding Destiny* 406–7.

124. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 8 December 1935, *Baha'i News* 102 (August 1936) 2.

125. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation* 142. The Persian text of this talk may be found in 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Majmū'iḥ* 75.

126. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 8 December 1935, *Baha'i News* 102 (August 1936) 3.

127. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Majmū'iḥ* 132; English translation: *Paris Talks* 85.

128. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 25 April 1945, *Compilation* 2:14.

129. Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, to an individual believer, 14 December 1941, in *Compilation* 2:11.

130. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, to an individual believer, 31 March 1949, in *Light of Divine Guidance* 2:83.

131. Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahā'u'llāh* 163.

132. Bahā'u'llāh, *Lawḥ-i Haykal*, in *Āthār-i qalam-i a'lā*, 3rd edn (Dundas, Ontario: Institute for Bahā'ī Studies in Persian, 1996) 1:3; English translation in Bahā'u'llāh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts: Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh* (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Centre, 2002) 6.

133. Bahā'u'llāh, *Lawḥ-i Mubārak Khatāb bih Shaykh Muhammād Taqī-yi Isfahānī ma'rūf bih Najafī* (Canada, 2001) 11; English translation: *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (trans. Shoghi Effendi, 2nd edn., Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1953) 15.

134. William P. Collins, 'Sacred Mythology and the Bahā'ī Faith', *The Journal of Bahā'ī Studies*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1989–90) 11.

135. Collins, 'Sacred Mythology', 3.

136. Collins, 'Sacred Mythology', 12–13.

137. Bahā'u'llāh, 'Haft Vādī' 133; English translation: *Seven Valleys* 39–40. *Shari'at*, *ṭarīqat* and *haqīqat* are the three stages of the Sufi mystical path. Bahā'u'llāh seemingly describes obedience to the religious law as the essence of mysticism.

138. Letter on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 1 September 1983, *Lights of Guidance* 542, 541.

139. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Some Answered Questions* 74. In one of his American talks he describes this time as a time when 'the image and likeness of God become visible in man' ('Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation* 95).

140. Baha'u'llah, *Kitāb-ī Mustaṭāb-ī Iqān* 24–5; English version: *Kitāb-i Iqān* 31. Cf. Steingass, *Comprehensive Persian–English Dictionary*, s.v. *ma'arafat*, *ma'arifat*, 1271.

141. Baha'u'llah, *Hidden Words* 51.

142. Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings* 320.

143. 'Abdu'l-Bahā, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahā* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1971) 20.

144. Baha'u'llah, *Summons* 34.

145. Baha'u'llah, quoted in Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 99.

146. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 8 December 1935, *Baha'i News* 102 (August 1936) 3.

147. Letter on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, 20 February 1932, *Compilation* 2:4–5.

148. Baha'u'llah, *Hidden Words* 52.

# Jamal Effendi and Sayyid Mustafa Rumi in Celebes: The Context of Early Baha'i Missionary Activity in Indonesia

Jelle de Vries

## Abstract

*In the late 19th century Jamal Effendi and Sayyid Mustafa Rumi made a journey to the Dutch East Indies (now the Republic of Indonesia) to establish the Baha'i Faith there. This paper presents the results of an attempt to recover more details of that journey by using Dutch colonial sources. It focuses on Jamal and Rumi's sojourn on the island of Celebes (now Sulawesi) as it was there that they achieved what might be considered to be one of their main successes: the conversion of the king and queen of Boné.*

## Keywords

Baha'i history  
Jamal Effendi  
Sayyid Mustafa Rumi  
Indonesia  
Sulawesi  
Celebes Islands  
Karaëng Popo  
I Banri Patima

Already in the lifetime of its Prophet-Founder, Baha'u'llah (1817–92), efforts were made to establish the Baha'i Faith in South Asia. Two major actors in that respect were the Iranian Baha'i Sulaymān Khān Tunukābānī, known as Jamāl Effendi, and his Indian-Iraqi friend Sayyid Muṣṭafā Rūmī. Some years ago Dr Moojan Momen presented an overview of their efforts, which included a sojourn in the country we now call Indonesia.<sup>1</sup> Since the Dutch considered the vast Indonesian archipelago to be part of their empire at that time Jamal and Rumi made their journey to the islands of Java, Bali, Lombok and Celebes (now Sulawesi), a search for possible Dutch colonial sources on that journey seemed worthwhile. For practical purposes the search was limited to the Celebes part of the journey. This not only constituted the main part – Jamal and Rumi stayed on this island during four months of their overall six-months' sojourn in the Dutch East Indies – it was also the place where they achieved what might be considered to be their chief success: the conversion of the king and queen of Boné.

The aim of this study therefore was to recover details and context: when did Jamal and Rumi make their journey, whom did they meet, and did the king and queen of Boné indeed become Baha'is?<sup>2</sup>

## Makassar

Jamal Effendi, who was about 65 years old at the time, and Sayyid Mustafa Rumi, who was 33, started their journey in Batavia (now Jakarta) on the island of Java, where they arrived by boat from Singapore. They were not the only ones making that crossing. In September 1885 – I will later demonstrate that Jamal and Rumi made their journey in that year – the Dutch consul in Singapore reported to the viceroy (*gouverneur general*) of the Dutch

1. As he explained in a footnote at the beginning of his article, Momen made use of an account by Rumi, as well as four other Persian sources. As far as Indonesia was concerned, however, it seemed he had to base his reconstruction solely on a 31-page manuscript that Rumi sent to the United States on 6 June 1931 (Section C in Momen). Part of that manuscript was later published in the *Baha'i Magazine*. (Siyyid Mustafa Rourmie, 'Baha'i Pioneers: A Short Historical Survey of the Baha'i Movement in India, Burma, Java Islands, Siam, and Malay Peninsula,' *The Baha'i Magazine* 1931–1932.) See Moojan Momen, 'Jamāl Effendi and the early spread of the Baha'i Faith in South Asia', *Baha'i Studies*

Review, 9 (1999) 47–80.

2. To meet the aims set, I conducted a search at the Dutch National Archives (*Nationaal Archief*, henceforward NA) in The Hague, where I went through the various archives of the Colonial Department. At the library of the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology (*Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, henceforward KITLV) in Leiden, I used the 'Colonial Records' (*Koloniaal Verslag*) and the 'Government Almanac for the Dutch-Indies' (*Regeeringsalmanak voor Nederlandsch-Indië*). The first is the official annual report for the benefit of the Dutch parliament written by colonial civil servants, the latter an official guide containing facts, figures and other information about the Dutch Indies. In the archives of that same institute I also found A. J. A. F. Eerdmans' unpublished manuscript on the history of Celebes (KITLV, DH 817 1–5). Since Eerdmans was a 'first inspector' (*controleur der 1ste klasse*) in the area north of Makassar (*Noorderdistricten*, Maros) at the time Jamal and Rumi made their journey to Celebes, and later successively served as 'secretary' and 'secretary for native affairs' (*secretaris voor de inlandsche zaken*) at the governor's office in Makassar, he is an important historical source, the more so as he spoke the local East Indies that between March and August 'a total of 297 Arabs' had left that port for 'our properties in the Dutch East Indies'. He made this report because the times were troubled. In January of that year the British had lost Khartoum in Sudan as the result of a Muslim religious revival, and in June the leader of the revivalist movement, considered by his followers to be the Mahdi, had died. Did this Muslim Messiah have a following in the Dutch East Indies and should similar events be expected there? The consul did not think so.

From Batavia, Jamal and Rumi travelled eastwards to Surabaya, and from there via Bali and Lombok to the south-western peninsula of the island of Celebes. That area had a total population of about 600,000 Buginese and some 400,000 Makassarese, two closely related peoples who were known for their skills as seamen and traders. Although most were Muslim – Islam had come to the island at the beginning of the 17th century – the original animist priests and priestesses still wielded considerable influence.<sup>3</sup> In 1878, for instance, the colonial authorities reported:

The Muslims of Celebes only profess Islam in its outward form. Most indeed treasure pagan notions, which express themselves in the religious worship, even by born Muslims, of certain trees, stones, etc. In its credulity the population is easily deceived, as in October 1877, when a rumour that, along with the long-awaited rain, a maiden had descended from heaven drew many pilgrims to Tello (in the immediate vicinity of Makassar), until the police intervened to prevent disturbances.<sup>4</sup>

Makassar (now Ujungpandang) was (and still is) the major locality of Celebes and the largest trading place of the archipelago east of Batavia. This is how two Swiss explorers described the city in 1893:

The surroundings of the city consist of never-ending rice paddies that during the summer lie dry and dusty, and during the winter, when they are flooded, are an inexhaustible breeding ground for mosquitoes that make life very bitter. Makassar is situated on a flat bay; a number of small islands protect the harbour against an all-too-heavy swell, so that ships can moor directly to a landing stage ... The city has little to distinguish it from other towns in the tropical east. Its crown jewels are two broad and straight lanes, one shaded by impressive Tamarinds, the other by Canarium trees, the so-called 'Hooge pad' and the 'Heerenweg', along which are located the houses of most Europeans. Large grass fields, especially the impressive 'Koningsplein', serve as breathing spaces. Near the port the old Fort Rotterdam rises above the plain with its high, picturesque, protective walls, which surround the garrison buildings and warehouse. Fort Vredenburg, more inland, no longer serves as a stronghold, but only as a barracks. The city centre is the 'Passerstraat', which runs beside the sea. Here are the offices and warehouses of the European traders and the shops of Chinese merchants. The two-storey houses, built close to one another, could evoke memories of a European city if the heat trapped between the walls did not proclaim its tropical location. On all sides, mostly to the north and to the south along the sea, the city fades into native compounds, where the houses no longer stand in organized rows, but are surrounded by

orchards, mostly coconut palms. Neither train nor tram disturbs the peacefulness of the place.<sup>5</sup>

It was here in Makassar that Jamal and Rumi arrived. 'We landed here safely and the police instructed the porters to take us with our luggage to the Arab quarters, where we were to be put under the guardianship of the chief of this quarter', Rumi wrote in his account of the journey. In 1885 the city had some 20,000 inhabitants, including 4,000 Chinese, 1,000 Europeans and 200 Arabs.<sup>6</sup> The various communities all lived in their own quarters and so Makassar had separate European, Malay, Makassarese, Wadjoere, Endehnese, Chinese and Arab quarters. Each had its own police force. The head of each force, who acted as chief of the quarter, was designated by the title 'captain' (*kapitein*). The Arabs, however, had their own 'head of the Arabs' (*hoofd der Arabieren*). In 1885 Said Ali Matard occupied that position,<sup>7</sup> so it must have been he who greeted the two travellers cordially, allocated them to a large, abandoned brick building, and sent his men to rob and murder them in their sleep. As seasoned travellers Jamal and Rumi were able to foil this plot. They did not confront Matard with his evil designs, however, since they needed him in all their movements. Instead they presented him with 'a gem worth twenty dollars and thanked him for his kind protection'. During their stay in Makassar Jamal and Rumi became well known as faith healers and this enabled them to deliver 'the message of Baha'u'llah' to everyone with whom they came into contact.<sup>8</sup>

Makassar was not only a major trading place, it also served as the seat of the senior Dutch administrator of that region, the 'governor of Celebes and vassal states' (*gouverneur van Celebes en onderhorigheden*). His authority included most of Celebes as well as the so-called Lesser Sunda islands in the south. The north-eastern peninsula of Celebes made up the Residency of Menado, whereas the Moluccas, to the east, formed the Residencies of Ternate and Amboina. In central and south Celebes alone the Dutch sphere of influence included some 30 so-called 'alliance states' (*bondgenootschappelijke landen*), like Gowa or Sidenreng, as well as two 'vassal kingdoms' (*leenvorstendommen*): Tanette and Boné. All were feudal monarchies. A relatively small area surrounding Makassar, as well as the island of Saleijer (now Selayar), stood under direct Dutch rule, and were therefore called 'government lands' (*gouvernementslanden*). Only the Wadjo Federation (*Wadjo Statenbond*) was still independent.<sup>9</sup>

To continue their journey the two Baha'is needed the permission of the Dutch administrators. The office of the 'Government of Celebes and Vassal States' was located in Fort Rotterdam (now Benteng Ujungpandang), and consisted of only seven civil servants: Governor D. F. van Braam Morris, Deputy Governor Jacob Bensbach, Secretary J. van Slooten, Secretary for Native Affairs (*secretaris voor de inlandsche zaken*) Johan Albert George Brugman, and three clerks.<sup>10</sup>

Through the agency of the Turkish consul in Batavia it was Brugman who supplied Jamal and Rumi with the necessary travel documents. Brugman, who was probably born in Makassar and was in his late twenties, spoke the local languages fluently.<sup>11</sup> Since his appointment in 1883 he and his direct superior, Bensbach, had served as liaison officers between the Dutch governor and the local native rulers. This position gave Brugman

languages and knew the native rulers personally. His manuscript consists of 1,382 typed pages held in five folders. The last folder is entirely devoted to the history of Boné and also includes a detailed family tree of the rulers of South Celebes. The Royal Institute was also the place where I consulted most of the contemporary books I used as sources. Finally, I searched the *Celebes Courant*, the *Makassaarsche Courant*, *De Locomotief*, and the *Java Bode*, four early colonial newspapers kept at the Royal Library (*Koninklijke Bibliotheek*, henceforward KB) in The Hague. I likewise found there the volumes of the illustrated magazine *Bintang Hindia* and the 'Records of the East Indies Registry Office' (*Naamlijst der Europeesche Inwoners van het mannelijk geslacht in Nederlandsch-Indië en opgave omtrent hun Burgerlijken Stand*). The names and titles by which a person is designated in the former Dutch East Indies can be rather complicated, the more so when that person belongs to the nobility. Which part is a title and which a name? What does the title mean? And if it is a name, is it that of a person or of a place? Things can be even more difficult when names and titles have to be translated into another language and transcribed into another alphabet. And that was exactly the situation Rumi

found himself in, for the two main communities of South Celebes, the Buginese and the Makassarese, both had their own language, alphabet and script. When in the second half of the 19th century the Dutch started to tighten their grip on the various peoples and nations living in the Indian archipelago, they too were almost overwhelmed by the variety of languages and cultures. To cope with the problem, various booklets appeared and so it happened, for instance, that in 1884 Major P. B. van Staden ten Brink published a small book on the culture and geography of South Celebes for the benefit of his fellow officers in the Dutch Indian Army: *Bijdragen tot de Krijgsgeschiedenis en Militaire Geographie van de Zuidelijke landtong van het eiland Celebes*. Utrecht, 1884 (KITLV: M e 13). Of course, he also explained the various titles used by the nobility of the different peoples living there. Since this book dates from the time Jamal and Rumi made their journey, it seemed fitting to me to make use of it in this study. I also used Van Staden's book for the spelling of Makassarese and Buginese titles, which may be different from present-day spelling in Bahasa Indonesia, hence for instance: *tälloë-lattaé* (not: tellulatte). For the spelling of names I have followed Eerdmans; hence, for instance: Boné (not: Boni).

considerable executive power and maybe that was the reason Rumi mistook him for the governor.

### Paré-Paré

From Makassar the two Baha'i envoys proceeded in a small sailing vessel to the coastal town of Paré-Paré, some 120 kilometres to the north. There they were welcomed at the wooden palace of a king whom Rumi called 'Fatta Aronmatua Aron Raffan'. He translated this title as 'the Great Monarch and King of all Kings'; but, following Van Staden, a somewhat better translation of the words *pätta aroeng matowa aroeng Rappang*, would be 'his Highness the Supreme King [and the] King of Rappang'.<sup>12</sup> *Aroe* (king), *Karaëng* (prince), *Datoe* and *Daëng* are decreasing ranks in Celebes society.

The designation used by Rumi for the chief of Paré-Paré is confusing because two different persons seem to be indicated here. During Jamal and Rumi's visit to Celebes the title *aroe matowa* belonged to Akil Ali La Tjintjing *Karaëng Mangeppé Datoe* Pamana, supreme king of Wadjo, while the kingdom of Rappang, and also the kingdom of Sidenreng of which Paré-Paré was the capital, was ruled by his nephew and son-in-law, King Soemangaroekka (see below).<sup>13</sup> So whom did Jamal and Rumi actually meet – La Tjintjing or Soemangaroekka? Since Rumi reported that the king was advanced in age and that he attended the latter's funeral at the end of their stay, it can be safely concluded that La Tjintjing was indicated here, for that king died on 12 October 1885 in Paré-Paré at the age of about 70.<sup>14</sup> Since the two men travelled on a six-months' visa it now can be deduced that they made their journey some time between May and November 1885. Rumi:

On our arrival I went directly to the customs official to ask permission for landing. The officer in charge gave me a pony on which to ride to the royal palace – a palace built of bamboo – to obtain this permission from their King. The King, who was advanced in age, was eagerly awaiting our arrival and watching with a telescope through the window of his palace. As soon as I entered the royal palace the King got up from his seat and warmly embraced me saying that he was happy to see his honourable guest. Then he eagerly inquired the whereabouts of Jamal Effendi, who, I replied, was still in the ship awaiting his royal command to disembark. When I entered the royal presence I saw there two envoys sent to the King by the Dutch Governor of Macassar with a private letter to the King indicating the arrival of the two visitors – Jamal Effendi and the writer – and requesting the King to refuse any help that they might request for the purpose of making their journey into the interior of the native states; for the letter stated that these two men were necromancers, and would use the art of enchantment to win the chiefs and their subjects for their mystic religious rites.<sup>15</sup>

Since it was Brugman's (and Bensbach's) job to be in contact with the native rulers, it is almost certain that it was he who had sent this letter – the more so as Rumi held the view that Brugman was the governor. Why the secretary for native affairs had felt it necessary to issue such a warning, we do not know. It might have had something to do with a fear of Muslim missionary activity in general – during their stay in Java the two Baha'i's had been 'closely watched by detectives and spied upon everywhere' for that reason – or

with events that had occurred on the island of Sumbawa some years before. The Colonial Records state:

At the start of 1881 a Balinese living on Sumbawa caused some havoc in the sultanate of that same name by calling himself Imam Mahadi [sic] and proclaiming a new religious doctrine in which he claimed to be a resurrected ancient ruler. Summoned by the sultan of Sumbawa, he refused to appear and even started to use force against the messenger sent to him. When the sultan thereupon wanted to bring him into submission, it came to a violent confrontation in which the followers of this troublemaker were driven apart and he himself was so badly wounded that he died.<sup>16</sup>

In this connection it must not be forgotten that Sumbawa fell under the jurisdiction of the governor of Celebes; Brugman's colleagues had been directly involved in the matter. Anyway, La Tjintjing was, in the words of Rumi, 'not favourably impressed with this defamatory letter'.

In fact he was noticeably annoyed by it and in an angry tone he said to the two envoys, 'These venerable visitors are our guests and under our protection, and the Dutch Governor should not interfere with our religious affairs. This is my reply to his offensive letter, and an unofficial message which should be conveyed by you to him.' The envoys, thunderstruck, immediately retired disheartened and unsuccessful in their hostile mission.<sup>17</sup>

As Wadjo was still one of the few independent territories in Celebes, this strong reaction by the king is quite understandable. Why should he obey the orders of a Dutch secretary for native affairs who was about 40 years his junior? No, La Tjintjing certainly was not known for his pro-Dutch and servile stance – quite the contrary.<sup>18</sup> Anyhow, the letter did not have negative consequences. And when Jamal and Rumi succeeded in curing La Tjintjing's psoriasisiform skin disease 'the royal family was ... won to our friendship and to attachment to our Message more than ever before', Rumi reported.

The two Baha'i stayed in Paré-Paré for more than a month, during which time they had several meetings with not only the king but also 'his daughter, Fatta Sima Tana, who was married to Fatta Talloo Latta, the king of Sidenreng'. The woman indicated by *Pätta Simatana* or 'Her Highness Simatana' was Queen I Simatana Aroe Nepo.<sup>19</sup> She was married to the ruler of Sidenreng (*pätta tälloë-lattaé*), King Soemangaroekka Aroe Rappang, but it is not clear whether Jamal and Rumi actually met her husband.<sup>20</sup>

### Padalie and Pamana

Travelling eastwards from Paré-Paré, and after a rather alarming boat trip through a crocodile-infested river, most likely the river Tjenrana, Jamal and Rumi reached the Wadjo provinces of 'Padalia and Fammana' or, in the spelling of Van Staden, 'Padalie' and 'Pamana' on the banks of that river. Crocodiles were a plague that summer, but according to the *Celebes Courant* the number of these reptiles had only *apparently* risen, due to the exceptional low water levels that season.

In Padalie and Pamana – the area of Tempé (now Singkang) – the two Baha'i envoys were welcomed by a royal couple Rumi described as 'King Fatta

All extracts from Dutch sources have been translated into English by the author.

3. Paul and Fritz Sarasin, *Reisen in Celebes ausgeführt in den Jahren 1893–1896 und 1902–1903*, 2 vols, Wiesbaden, 1905, 2:202–3.
4. *Koloniaal Verslag* (Colonial Records) 1870–1903, 1878, § 15.
5. Sarasin, *Reisen* 2:197.
6. *Regeeringsalmanak voor Nederlandsch-Indië 1885–1903*, Batavia 1885, 1:4.
7. *Regeeringsalmanak* 2:201.
8. Roumie, 'Baha'i Pioneers' 275–6.
9. *Regeeringsalmanak* 1:105–6.
10. *Regeeringsalmanak* 2:200–1.
11. Brugman was the author of a small Dutch–Makassarese dictionary: *Nederlandsche en Makassaarsche Samenspraken*, published in Batavia in 1883.
12. The word *pätta* means 'his or her highness', *aroeng* or *aoe matowa* is a title exclusively used to indicate the king of Wadjo. In the Dutch Colonial Records the title *aoe matowa* is translated as 'supreme king' (*hoofdvorst*). See Van Staden, *Bijdragen* 66; and *Koloniaal Verslag*, 1882 and 1883.
13. *Regeeringsalmanak* for 1885, 233. Rumi's fusion of the two titles is most likely due to the fact that the king of Wadjo held residence with his daughter and son-in-law in Paré-Paré. See Van Staden, *Bijdragen* 85.

14. Governor of Celebes to viceroy, cablegram 17 October 1885 (NA Mailrapporten 1885, fiche 1520).

15. Rourmie, 'Baha'i Pioneers' 313.

16. *Koloniaal Verslag*, 1882.

17. Rourmie, 'Baha'i Pioneers' 314.

18. In the Colonial Records the king of Wadjo is denounced several times: for instance, for offering a safe haven to the anti-Dutch 'rebel' *Karaëng* Bonto-Bonto; for involvement in a coup in Balangnipa; for refusing to sign a contract with the colonial authorities; but also for failing to attend the inauguration of his pro-Dutch nephew and son-in-law as the new king of Sidenreng. See *Koloniaal Verslag*, 1870-83.

19. From 1906 to 1917 a woman called I Simatana was Aroe of Nepo, a place in the kingdom of Sidenreng.

20. The title *pätta tälloelattaé* is exclusively used to indicate the ruler of Sidenreng. The connection is further proved by the fact that Soemangareekka was married to 'Aroe Nepo, daughter of his uncle La Tjintjing ... Aroe Matowa of Wadjo', as Van Staden reported. See Van Staden, *Bijdragen* 74 and 83-4. The name of the daughter, Simatana or Samatana, is given by Mukhlis (*Sejarah; Kabupaten Daerah Tk. II Sidenreng-Rappang*. Ujung Pandang, 1985).

21. Van Staden, *Bijdragen* 112-13.

Chikourdi of Padali and his Queen Diammarala'. His reference here is to the *pätta tjakoridié*, the title for the deputy ruler of Wadjo.<sup>21</sup> The king indicated here therefore is Abdoel Rachman La Koro, *Aroe* Padali. Although *Aroe* Padali – as La Koro is referred to in the Colonial Records – was the official deputy of La Tjintjing, he could well be considered to be the de facto ruler of Wadjo at that time, since his superior had already been living with his daughter in Paré-Paré for several years.<sup>22</sup> A queen by the name of Diammarala cannot be identified in the Dutch sources.

Since the people of Pamana were not at all interested in their mission, Jamal and Rumi decided to continue their journey. Generously supplied with all the necessary travelling equipment and three long canoes with full escort, they headed for Boné, but not before they had helped with the control of a local outbreak of smallpox, which still gave them 'the opportunity to deliver the [Baha'i] Message to all'.

### Context

'We started down the crocodile-infested river once more. Before sunset we reached our destination', Rumi wrote. Since 1871 the kingdom of Boné had been ruled by Queen (Aroem Poné) I Banri Patima Aroe Timoeroeng, who in 1880 had married her cousin, Prince La Goeliga *Daëng* Sérang *Karaëng* Popo, a grandson of the king (*radja*) of Gowa. Two years later the couple had had their first child, Princess Boenga Soetara Bässe *Daëng* Baoe.

Already in the year of the marriage it had become clear that *Karaëng* Popo – for that was the name by which the prince consort was generally known – was a factor to be reckoned with. That same year tension between Boné and Wadjo rose to fever pitch after a Bonéan subject was murdered in Wadjo. Boné – read *Karaëng* Popo – demanded satisfaction. But the supreme commander (*pilla*) of Wadjo bluntly rejected this demand and even refused to receive a Boné representative. An armed confrontation seemed inevitable, but was prevented at the last moment by the Dutch administrators.<sup>23</sup> Yes, the prince consort seemed to have been quite a personality. This is what Secretary for Native Affairs A. J. A. F. Eerdmans – we will come back to him later – wrote about *Karaëng* Popo's arrival in Boné:

When *Karaëng* Popo came to Boné, theft and robbery were rampant there. No one contemplated improving the situation. Especially at the markets, insecurity was great (the followers of the rich and famous were the greatest and boldest thieves) and often resulted in disturbances and manslaughter. Supported by his wife, *Karaëng* Popo had it proclaimed at the markets that theft committed there would be punished by death. At first this had a good effect, but soon someone was caught red-handed. Without delay *Karaëng* Popo had the perpetrator dig a hole at the marketplace in full view of the public. When this was done the man was stabbed to death at the edge of the hole and buried there and then. The public was so struck by fear that from then on no theft, however small, was committed at the market or, as one Bonéan said, 'one could leave a bag with golden coins there in the evening to find it undisturbed the next morning'. Not only at the markets was security ensured: known thieves and robbers were also dealt with. A certain Latto Garimpang (translated: the old one from Garimpang) was known as a receiver of cattle and the terror of the countryside. Even cattle stolen in the Eastern Districts [which stood under

direct Dutch rule] were brought to him. In his home town he had made a fortress on a hill in which he and his insolent and fearless robbers lived. The entrance to the stronghold was a heavily guarded gate. No one dared to confront Latto Garimpang, and so he could continue his evil practices. Unsuccessfully, Karaëng Popo had him warned to end his practices. Seeing that his warning was not heeded, Karaëng Popo one day assembled some 500 horsemen and went straight into the town of this Latto Garimpang, who appeared trembling in front of Karaëng Popo. When he begged for clemency he was told that for once a just punishment would not be carried out, but that if in the future a message came that he had received even one piece of cattle, Karaëng Popo would return and hang him in public. After the stronghold was demolished, Karaëng Popo left. Latto Garimpang never returned to his old profession. It is reported that after Karaëng Popo had left, he exclaimed: 'This really is a man of whom I am afraid'.<sup>24</sup>

But, as always, there was a flip side. In its election of I Banri Patima to the throne of Boné, the state council (*Hadat*) of the kingdom had passed over her older half-brother, La Pawawooi Karaëng Ségeri.<sup>25</sup> Certainly, he had been elected (by way of compensation) commander-in-chief (*poenggawa*) and awarded a medal by the Dutch, but still he was in third place, after his half-sister and the prime minister (*tomarilaleng*, or in Dutch: *rijksbestierder*). Of course his position (and self-esteem) was further threatened when Karaëng Popo, a prince some 25 years his junior, appeared at the royal court. Eerdmans states:

Was it a surprise that Karaëng Popo was hated and feared by the numerous idle, arrogant descendants of kings and nobles, who, as followers, looked for and found protection with the Tomarilaleng, the Poenggawa and other nobles who, without these followers, had no power – and therefore gave ear to their complaints, objections and inspirations against the innovations introduced by Karaëng Popo for the benefit of country and population. Yes, it must be admitted that Karaëng Popo acted heavy-handedly, but what else could he do, if he wanted to be obeyed?<sup>26</sup>

In the summer of 1884 – a year before Jamal and Rumi arrived on the scene – La Pawawooi got his opportunity to (further) discredit his brother-in-law with the Dutch colonial authorities.

At the same time that Karaëng Popo had left Gowa to marry I Banri Patima, one of his uncles had left for the island of Sumbawa to marry the daughter of Sultan Ammaroela.<sup>27</sup> When the sultan died on 20 August 1883, a rumour spread that the division of the estate had resulted in discord and disputes amongst the heirs. The conflict had even caused riots, it was said. By the time the news reached the Dutch authorities, two Gowanese princes together with a sizeable armed escort had already set sail for Sumbawa to protect, with force if necessary, the interests of their brother.<sup>28</sup> Being a man of action, Karaëng Popo had not hesitated to join his uncles with an army of some 300 Buginese. The governor immediately dispatched the government steamer *Anjer* (*Carnation*) – on board his deputy Bensbach and the crown prince of Gowa, who was also the father of Karaëng Popo – to intercept the fleet and to settle matters peacefully. When they arrived in Sumbawa the

22. Aroe Padali lived most of the time in Tempé. In the Colonial Records he is praised on several occasions for his pro-Dutch stand and for his role as mediator during various conflicts between the Wadjo Federation and its neighbours. For this he was awarded 'the golden medal and chain of merit' in 1880. Aroe Padali succeeded La Tjintjing as king of Wadjo. Under his rule the Wadjo Federation signed a political contract with the Dutch, by which it recognized Dutch sovereignty over its territory and became an 'alliance state'. For his involvement in arranging this contract Brugman was awarded a decoration and promoted to deputy governor (*assistent-resident*). Aroe Padali died in May 1891. See *Regeeringsalmanak* 1891; Eerdmans, unpublished manuscript 3:751; and *Koloniaal Verslag* 1881, 1886, 1887 and 1889.

23. *Koloniaal Verslag* 1881.

24. Eerdmans, unpublished manuscript 4:843–4.

25. Boné was ruled by a seven-member state council which elected the head of state as well as the prime minister and the commander-in-chief. That the state council did not elect La Pawawooi, who was, after all, the eldest son of the late king, was due to the fact that his mother was of lower-ranking nobility than the mother of his half-sister. It is likely, however, that there was a second reason: La Pawawooi had

sided with the Dutch when they had subjected the kingdom in 1860. From a Bonéan point of view that, of course, was treason.

26. Erdmans, unpublished manuscript 4:843–4.

27. Erdmans, unpublished manuscript 4:825.

28. Erdmans, unpublished manuscript 4:847.

29. *Celebes Courant*, 5 and 22 August 1884.

30. *Koloniaal Verslag*, 1885.

31. For Deputy Governor Bensbach even these measures did not go far enough. In a report on the affair to the viceroy in Batavia (Governor Tromp had died on 27 December 1884), dated 2 January 1885, Bensbach expressed the opinion that it had been 'an omission' by his late superior to allow Karaëng Popo to return to Boné. He continued: 'Although some measure of leniency towards Karaëng Popo was justified, since the vassal queen was expecting for several months, and taking Karaëng Popo back to Makassar could have a highly negative effect on her condition, Karaëng Popo was not grateful for this favour, but upon his return in Boné misused his influence on the vassal queen of Boni to force her to do exactly the opposite of what the Governor had wanted and to keep the members of the Hadat out of the decisions made.' (NA Mailrapporten 1885, fiche 1475).

32. Queen of Boné to Governor of Celebes, letter E

rumours proved to be largely unfounded, and all returned to Celebes. The *Celebes Courant* commented somewhat scornfully: 'So the whole story boils down to a family brawl over the division of estate, a matter that is often not unknown even among civilized peoples, and as such not worth mentioning.'<sup>29</sup> But that was not the way Charles Christiaan Tromp, Dutch governor at the time, saw it. This was unauthorized behaviour and he had the two princes fined for it by their father.<sup>30</sup> And as for Karaëng Popo, he was summoned to Makassar.

Considering this military campaign a violation of the Dutch–Bonéan Treaty, which limited Boné's authority to its territory on South Celebes, the governor demanded an explanation. Karaëng Popo argued that he had been assured from various sides 'that the governor had left for Sumbawa in the company of the king of Gowa to discipline that country, and that he, as a [Dutch] subject as well as grandchild of the aforementioned king, had felt obliged to join them in war'. Although 'convinced of the opposite', the governor accepted this excuse. The main point, however, was that this incident offered him an opportunity to curtail the 'far-reaching arrogance' of the prince. And so Tromp, accompanied by Karaëng Popo, had gone to Balaengnipa, where he had summoned the members of the state council, the commander-in-chief and the deputy commander of Boné. In a meeting held on 20 October 1884 Tromp told those present that Boné had to obey the Dutch Indies government; that Karaëng Popo was to refrain from interference in the affairs of Boné; that he had to return all he had taken from the people of Boné; that the state council had to replace the aged prime minister; that it was his wish that La Pawawooi, half-brother of the queen and present commander-in-chief be elected to that office; and finally, that he would present the members of the council with written instructions as to how to behave towards the queen and the prince consort in the future.<sup>31</sup>

After the state council had briefed her on the meeting in Balaengnipa, I Banri Patima send a letter to the governor, in which she replied that there was no need for additional written instructions: the present Dutch–Bonéan Treaty was sufficient. 'Already this contract is often hard to live by, yet we hope and try to fulfil to the best of our abilities all that is enshrined therein.'<sup>32</sup> The queen agreed that Boné's prime minister was indeed so ailing that he himself had urged her 'to appoint another in his place since he [could] no longer carry the task put on his shoulders', but that this in itself constituted insufficient grounds for his dismissal. Therefore it had been decided to have him assisted by his son.<sup>33</sup> Hearing that the governor had reprimanded her husband in the presence of others, the queen wrote:

That Kraëng Popo is accused of having appropriated the belongings of the people, that we deny; this we know, however, that he has taken the properties of the queen of Boni, and all that with prior knowledge of the members of the Hadat, who themselves have arranged it, for Kraëng Popo has been instructed by me at all times to look after my properties and to do everything that our customs and traditions prescribe. I have never noticed anything other than that he always opposed those who committed injustice to the common man. In my opinion Kraëng Popo has always behaved in this way and it is because of this that I feel entitled to claim 'that peace and order reigned' in my country. I therefore inform the Governor that I have authorized Kraëng Popo to maintain

all that has been agreed upon by the members of the Hadat and myself, to enforce our customs and traditions, and to look after all of the properties of the queen of Boni.<sup>34</sup>

Was this merely an attempt by a woman to stand up for her husband, turning a blind eye to his mistakes? It is possible, but not likely. Right from the start of her reign I Banri Patima seemed to have had a keen eye for the welfare of her subjects, by abolishing all kinds of monopolies.<sup>35</sup> Had she really abandoned her egalitarian policies and allowed her husband to plunder the country?

And by the way, how did the Dutch actually know whether or not the people of Boné were exploited? From whom did they obtain their information? We know of at least one source: Prince La Pawawooi. In a letter to Deputy Governor Bensbach following the Sumbawa incident, he complained that some of his property, as well as that of the deputy commander, had been taken from him by the queen and her husband.

The incomes of the Pangaeloe djowa and myself, yes, also our vassal lands, have been taken away. It is intended to take away my land in Watoe and Pa also. These lands have always been connected to the title of Poenggawa. The revenues of both districts are not permitted to me, neither are the taxes on the paddy harvest and on fishing.<sup>36</sup>

The interests of the common man of Boné are not mentioned here. La Pawawooi seems to be preoccupied with his personal interests only. From the contents of these letters it is clear that a conflict had developed between the royal couple on the one hand and La Pawawooi on the other. In early 1885 the new governor, Van Braam Morris, deemed it necessary to visit Boné, in the company of the king and crown prince of Gowa, in an attempt to reconcile the two brothers-in-law. On that same occasion Van Braam Morris relieved the ailing prime minister of his duties and had him replaced by the most senior member of the state council.<sup>37</sup> It is interesting to note that the governor did not follow the solution previously offered by the queen, that is, to have the son of the prime minister appointed as his father's assistant. Maybe the choice for a member of the state council was a compromise: La Pawawooi did not become prime minister, as the Dutch would have liked, but neither did the son of the prime minister, who was known to be a loyal supporter of Karaëng Popo.

### Boné

This was the situation in Boné when Jamal and Rumi came to the kingdom in the summer of 1885. Times were hard for Queen I Banri Patima and her husband Karaëng Popo. Not only had the prince consort been publicly humiliated, the royal couple had also lost their second child, a boy, soon after his birth that winter. Despite this personal tragedy, Jamal and Rumi were warmly received and given the guest house opposite the palace for a residence. Rumi states:

After dinner we were invited to the audience chamber where we were received enthusiastically by the King and Queen. In this very first interview we became intimately acquainted with each other, and the King as simply as a child put all

22 October 1884  
(NA Mailrapporten 1885, fiche 1475).

33. Queen of Boné to Governor of Celebes, letter B 22 October 1884 (NA Mailrapporten 1885, fiche 1475).

34. Queen of Boné to Governor of Celebes, letter 29 October 1884 (NA Mailrapporten 1885, fiche 1475).

35. Already in 1872 the Colonial Records reported that the situation in Boné had changed for the better: 'The monopoly on commodities had been lifted and the cronies of the late king, who had been favoured by him at the expense of the population, had been forced to leave the country.' And again several years later: 'A Bonéan delegation that came to Makassar in April 1878 informed the administration of an important decision by the queen. It concerned the abolition of all monopolies within the kingdom, as a result of which – as was told – the common man and everybody else in Boni was free to sell his products wherever he could.' See *Koloniaal Verslag*, 1872 and 1879; Eerdmans, unpublished manuscript 4:792.

36. Poenggawa to Deputy Governor, letter 23 November 1884 (NA Mailrapporten 1885, fiche 1475).

37. Eerdmans, unpublished manuscript 4:846.

38. Roumie, 'Baha'i

Pioneers' 343.  
 39. Roumie, 'Baha'i  
 Pioneers' 344.

sorts of questions to us, both material and spiritual ... The King was so attracted by the stirring talks of Jamal Effendi that he kept him answering religious questions until the late hours of the night; in fact, it was not until two o'clock in the morning that we were permitted to retire.<sup>38</sup>

Several audiences later Karaëng Popo asked the two Baha'i's – they apparently conversed in Arabic –

...to write a handbook in Arabic outlining principles for the administration of his State, as well as a booklet for teaching Arabic colloquial conversation [for the benefit of the queen]. This gave us an unusual opportunity to present the principles of Baha'i administration and government to the King, for we based our handbook upon the universal laws of Baha'u'llah.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile Rumi had somehow evoked the anger of an Arab fellow traveller. And one day this man struck him on the head with a heavy block of wood. 'Fortunately the Queen, happening to look out from her palace window, saw this attack and informed the King who with a large corps of his followers rushed in and arrested the Arab.' Orders were given to execute the attacker, but Jamal and Rumi were able to ease this sentence and to have him banished to Makassar.

When the books were completed the royal couple 'accepted the Baha'i Cause and made a vow to promulgate it in all the provinces of the Celebes Islands as soon as they should receive [divine] confirmation for this missionary effort', Rumi reported.

What prompted the prince to ask for a handbook on government? And why a conditional vow? It is possible that the new Dutch governor still intended to issue new instructions, as announced by his predecessor. If the threat of a one-sided extension of the Dutch–Bonéan Treaty had indeed not completely evaporated, it could well be that a 'written instructions' of their own offered the royal couple a kind of bargaining tool or fresh arguments in their negotiations with the colonial authorities. And maybe a successful outcome of this dispute was the condition referred to. All this is, of course, pure speculation but it seems obvious that the exceptional request had something to do with the situation the royal couple found themselves in.

In October 1885 Jamal and Rumi set out to retrace their journey. 'The atmosphere was very melancholy when we went to bid adieu to their Royal Highnesses', Rumi wrote. In Padalie news reached them that La Tjintjing had passed away in Paré-Paré. Leaving Jamal behind, Rumi pressed on by pony to reach the town just in time to attend the funeral of the king. On that occasion Queen I Simatana presented Jamal and Rumi with adoption papers for two Buginese boys, Nazir and Bashir, to be servants in Baha'u'llah's household in Akka. Then the two men returned to Singapore by way of Surabaya and Batavia.

### Aftermath

How did the queen and prince of Boné fare? Few details have remained. We do know that the new prime minister of Boné held office until 1889. Then the Dutch granted him an honourable discharge and (finally) appointed

La Pawawooi to fill the vacancy.<sup>40</sup> Although La Pawawooi was now the most powerful man in Boné, his new position does not seem to have enabled him to control Karaëng Popo. On the outside, as in the previous years, all remained calm. But eventually it again became clear that the prince consort remained an influential figure – and that the Dutch authorities did not like it.

At the beginning of December 1894 – Karaëng Popo was in Gowa to attend the inauguration of his father as next king of Gowa – news came that the queen of Boné had become seriously ill.<sup>41</sup> When Queen I Banri Patima died on 17 February 1895 the Dutch antipathy towards her husband resurfaced in full. Following the death of the queen, the state council immediately elected her 13-year-old daughter and only surviving child, Boenga Soetara, as successor. But Van Braam Morris refused to ratify their choice. In a letter to his superior, the viceroy in Batavia, he explained why. First of all he held the opinion that the council had not been able to make its choice freely. Its members had been intimidated by Karaëng Popo, who had forced them to elect his under-age daughter so that he might remain in control as her regent. And that in itself was unacceptable.

He [Karaëng Popo] is, as Your Excellency is well aware, the second son of the radja of Gowa [and] about 34 years of age; he is a proud, impudent and greedy man, eloquent and cunning, but without tact and understanding. The vassal queen, who was at least 16 years his senior, was totally spoon-fed by him. He has been so stupid as to abuse this [trust] and to govern Boni in a Gowanese way, as a dictator that is, brushing aside the hadat [state council] and the institutions of the country. He has introduced various new taxes, enslaved the people to himself and his Gowanese followers, and humiliated the nobles in all possible ways, for instance by forcing them to give their daughters in marriage to his followers of low rank ... Moreover, he has been repeatedly guilty in their eyes of incestuous behaviour, which in their opinion will bring bad luck to Boni if he stays any longer. They have endured all this for the vassal queen's sake, but now they deem the time to be right to bring an end to this unbearable yoke, if not peacefully then by force. I am convinced that a civil war will not fail to occur in Boni if the power of Karaëng Popo is not curtailed.<sup>42</sup>

An unpleasant man this Karaëng Popo! But there was a second, more important matter to be taken into consideration. Princess Boenga Soetara was half Gowanese by birth and rumours had already started that there were plans to have her married to the eldest son of the crown prince of Gowa.<sup>43</sup> If that indeed happened, the risks involved were great, for 'might bad fortune cause their oldest child to be a son, that child would be both vassal king of Boni as well as radja of Gowa, as a result of which' – and here the governor showed his cards – 'the claims we have on Boni are in great danger of being eliminated'. This was the moment to stop Karaëng Popo once and for all. Within days Van Braam Morris and his right-hand man Brugman were in Boné 'to neutralize the after-effects of a political mistake made by the former governor' (i.e. Tromp's involvement with the marriage of I Banri Patima and Karaëng Popo).<sup>44</sup> The choice of the state council was nullified. And pending a final decision by the viceroy, the governor appointed La Pawawooi as the new king and the latter's eldest son as new prime minister. 'I am already old, I am not capable, I am an opium

40. According to the Colonial Records this choice was made 'on the recommendation of the queen'. But since the record carefully avoided the phrase 'elected by the state council' and stressed that according to the contract any new prime minister of Boné needed an appointment (not merely a ratification) by the Dutch Indies government, one can have doubts as to the true nature of this recommendation. See *Koloniaal Verslag*, 1890.

41. *Koloniaal Verslag*, 1895; and *De Locomotief*, 4 March 1895. (KB: C 76, microfilm).

42. Governor of Celebes to Viceroy, letter 9 March 1895 (NA Mailrapporten 1895, fiche 2349).

43. The new king of Gowa, Karaëng Popo's father, had died in May 1895.

44. Back in 1880 Governor Tromp had 'strongly pushed through' the marriage. See Eedmans, unpublished manuscript 5:389–99; and *De Locomotief*, 15 March 1895.

45. Eerdmans, unpublished manuscript 5:227; *De Locomotief*, 15 March 1895; *Java Bode*, 18 March 1895 (KB: C 47, microfilm).

46. Director Internal Administration to Viceroy, letter 27 March 1895 (NA Mailrapporten 1895, fiche 2349).

47 *Koloniaal Verslag*, 1895. Karaëng Popo is reported to have remarried to I Nako Karaëng Panaikang, by whom he had a daughter by the name of I Manene Karaëng Ballasari.

'smoker', La Pawawooi objected; but that was all false modesty, according to Van Braam Morris. 'Apparently he was afraid that Karaëng Popo would accuse him of tripping up his niece, and therefore had deemed it necessary to have himself forced', the governor explained.

When a member of the state council objected that he could not understand why Boné should not also be ruled by a girl, since this was the case in the Netherlands itself (Queen Wilhelmina had succeeded her father King Willem III in 1890 at the age of 10), Van Braam Morris angrily let slip the remark that Boné could not be compared to the Netherlands, adding: 'In Boné I am in charge!'<sup>45</sup> This 'bitter but salutary pill', as it was dubbed by a local newspaper, also came to the attention of G. A. Scherer, general director for the internal administration (*directeur binnenlands bestuur*). In a piece of advice to the viceroy on the matter he wrote:

Leaving aside for the moment whether or not the Governor's understanding of this matter is correct, it must be said that he, in dealing with it, has repeatedly violated both the spirit and letter of the contract signed with Boni, and this I consider to be very worrying.<sup>46</sup>

Although the Dutch colonial government in Batavia knew perfectly well that this course of action amounted to a violation of the Dutch–Bonéan Treaty, Scherer's objections were overruled. As was Eerdman's suggestion of arranging for a multiple regency in which Karaëng Popo would be aided by a Dutch civil servant, the commander (*doeloeng*) of Adjangale and a few family members. And so La Pawawooi was to be officially installed as the next king of Boné. In the meantime Van Braam Morris was bent on a way to sideline Karaëng Popo once and for all. 'It would be a blessing for Boni if he behaved in such a way that one could deny him stay in that country', he wrote on 9 March, having just returned from the vassal kingdom. And he also had an idea: at the inauguration of La Pawawooi as new vassal king the regalia would have to be handed over, as they represented royal authority. 'This will probably cause difficulties from Karaëng Popo's side, since they are kept in the royal home occupied by him and his daughter. I therefore deem it advisable to bring a guard of honour of 75 infantry troops, who can assist the Bonéans in procuring the ornaments when necessary.' A few weeks later he had his excuse. Deputy Governor Brugman, who had remained in Boné 'to be on the alert, to discuss the new contract with the newly appointed vassal king, and to make all the necessary arrangements for the latter's inauguration', reported that Karaëng Popo had refused to cooperate in the transfer of the regalia. And so the prince – accused of embezzlement – was banned from Boné. While he returned to Gowa, near Makassar, his daughter was placed under the care of the new king.<sup>47</sup> According to the official reading of events this was done 'in accordance with the explicit wish of her late mother, who apparently was of the opinion that she would be better off under the care of her uncle than that of her own father'. Not everyone was fooled by this, however. With indignation Eerdmans spoke of a 'false representation' and he continued:

La Pawawooi was never married to a noble woman. He was always surrounded by women of lower class, dancers, etc. His whole entourage was very mediocre, not at all royal – and would the late queen, who by the way was very devoted

to her consort, have preferred to have her child brought up in *such* a milieu, known to everyone, instead of that of her own father?<sup>48</sup>

Although Boenga Soetara never became queen of Boné, she did not lose her rights to the throne. A request by Van Braam Morris and La Pawawooi to appoint the latter's eldest son heir to the throne was denied by Batavia.<sup>49</sup> The princess died in Boné on 20 February 1903, a year after her father.<sup>50</sup> She was only 21. La Pawawooi soon came into conflict with the Dutch, was deposed by them in 1905, and spent the last six years of his life in exile on the island of Java.<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusion

Up to now it was not known when Jamal and Rumi made their journey to the Dutch East Indies. According to Momen it had been in about 1884–5. This study has been able to confirm and specify that date. As Rumi attended the funeral of King La Tjintjing of Wadio, who died on 12 October 1885, it can be established that the two Baha'i made their six months' sojourn in the archipelago some time between May and November 1885.

Rumi mentions the names or titles of several persons. As far as Celebes was concerned these can be identified as: Johan Albert George Brugman, secretary for native affairs; Akil Ali La Tjintjing *Kraëng Mangeppé Datoe* Pamana, supreme king of Wadio and his daughter I Samatana *Aroe Nepo*, queen of Sidenreng; Abdoel Rachman La Koro *Aroe Padali* of Wadio; and finally, I Banri Patima *Aroe Timoeroeng*, queen of Boné and her husband La Goeliga *Daëng Sérang Karaëng Popo*. It remains uncertain whether or not Jamal and Rumi also met Soemangaroekka *Aroe Rappang*, king of Sidenreng.

This study has not been very successful in uncovering biographical information on the queen and prince of Boné. We still know little about the queen, and the emerging images of the prince are not uniform. In Rumi's account Karaëng Popo comes over as a warm, enthusiastic, inquisitive and firm personality. But that was, as we have seen, not the way Van Braam Morris, Bensbach and Brugman saw him. Who is right here? Was Karaëng Popo a bad and dangerous ruler or, rather, a benevolent despot – possibly even influenced by the Baha'i Faith? The problem is that the picture presented here is almost exclusively derived from Dutch sources, that is to say, the Dutch colonial authorities. Apart from Rumi's account and three letters by I Banri Patima no sources have been discovered that might have told the story from the perspective of the other side. There is only one text that can serve as a kind of historical counterpoint here, and that is Eerdmans' unpublished manuscript on the history of South Celebes. Eerdmans succeeded Brugman in 1888 as secretary for native affairs and, by virtue of his office, got to know Karaëng Popo very well. Since the two men seem to have liked each other, Eerdmans' observations are of great historical importance here, the more so as he was denounced for making a stand on behalf of the prince.<sup>52</sup> So let us see how Eerdmans describes him. 'Karaëng Popo was short of stature but his sharp and piercing eyes filled one with awe, his whole way of behaving also bore evidence of courage, firmness and sovereignty.'<sup>53</sup> And he continues:

Karaëng Popo ... was a singular personality, someone with a rare, firm character for a native, that expressed itself in his words and attitude – that is why he

48. Eerdmans, unpublished manuscript 5:228–9.

49. Elsbeth Locher-Scholten: 'Een gebiedende noodzakelijkheid; Besluitvorming rond de Boni-expeditie 1903–1905', in H. A. Poeze en P. Schoorl (ed.), *Excursions in Celebes* (Leiden, 1991) 148.

50. *Koloniaal Verslag*, 1904.

51. Already in 1900 the new governor of Celebes reported that the king was not prepared, as the new Dutch–Bonéan Treaty stipulated, to give up his right to levy import and export taxes. Another governor could not resolve the problem either, and so it happened that on 28 July 1905 a Dutch expeditionary force landed on the coast of Boné. The capital Watampone was taken two days later. Many fled the town, but on 8 August five members of the state council returned and surrendered the regalia – Boné had fallen. La Pawawooi, who had fled north to Wadio, was taken prisoner on 18 November. His eldest son was among the hundreds who were killed. In the end it was Brugman, who had by then risen to the rank of Resident, who was assigned the task of escorting his one-time protégé, as well as two of his sons and three grandchildren, to Java. And there the last king of Boné died on 17 January 1911. In Watampone one of La Pawawooi's grandchildren, Andi

Mappasissi, now runs a small museum in his memory. See Eerdmans, unpublished manuscript 5:949 and 1015; and *Bintang Hindia*, 1906: 66 (KB: 9147 C6-9).

52. In the same year that Karaëng Popo was banished from Boné, Eerdmans was promoted away to the island of Borneo (now Kalimantan), where he was to become 'deputy governor of the peripheral territories'.

53. Eerdmans, unpublished manuscript 4:844.

54. Eerdmans, unpublished manuscript 5:218-20.

was called arrogant and bold, and did not find favour with the civil servants, who were the only ones who met him, Mr Bensbach and Brugman. Governor Van Braam Morris has only met him a few times and, moreover, did not speak Boegenese and Makassarese, the only languages Karaëng Popo spoke and understood. So everything the Governor knew of Karaëng Popo he had obtained through the channels of Bensbach and Brugman ... Karaëng Popo had, as I said, his peculiarities of language and attitude, which had to attract attention as they contrasted with the very polite, often servile and compliant attitude of other kings towards Mr Bensbach and Mr Brugman. But on the word of those other kings one could usually not rely; one could on that of Karaëng Popo, however. He did not easily give his word and did not readily admit to be mistaken, but once given or admitted, one could rely on him. The Government could have had much profit from Karaëng Popo; the prospect of a decoration would have prepared him to give everything; but one has preferred to put oneself in the front, rather than to make use of the good services of one like Karaëng Popo, who, in contrast to the others, had enough initiative to attract attention to his services and was not afraid to admit the truth. Such persons were too dangerous.<sup>54</sup>

If we weigh the evidence it must be concluded that Eerdmans presented the most reliable profile of Karaëng Popo. The Dutch governor and his associates undoubtedly pursued power, status and wealth themselves. Their allegations of exploitation and dictatorship can therefore well be interpreted as either psychological projection or pretexts for sidelining a powerful native ruler who stood in their way. Whatever the case, it is undeniable that Karaëng Popo stands out among the other native rulers of his time. And it is tempting to attribute this to a conversion to the Baha'i religion, as claimed by Rumi. But do we have any external evidence for that? Eerdmans is the most detailed source about the royal couple we have, but he does not make mention of their religion or a *change* in their religion. From the information he provides it is also not possible to detect any transformation in the behaviour of the couple. But maybe the source is overworked here. After all, Eerdmans first met the couple in 1888, three years after their possible conversion, so he was not able to see a difference, if indeed there had been one. And there is another problem: Rumi reports that the queen and prince 'made a vow to promulgate it [the Baha'i Cause] in all the provinces of the Celebes Islands as soon as they should receive [divine] confirmation for this missionary effort'. Why this vague condition? Does it have to be interpreted as a kind of polite escape clause? In the end the conclusion is inevitable: it cannot be confirmed by using Dutch sources that the queen and prince of Boné actually converted to the Baha'i religion. In fact, it is not even possible to prove that Jamal and Rumi ever visited the island of Celebes in the first place. The two Baha'is were simply never mentioned in Dutch sources. Yet it must also be stressed that there is no reason to disbelieve Rumi. His account fits well into the context provided by these same colonial sources and it can therefore be considered to be a reliable narrative of one of the very first Baha'i missionary efforts in that vast archipelago we now call the Republic of Indonesia.

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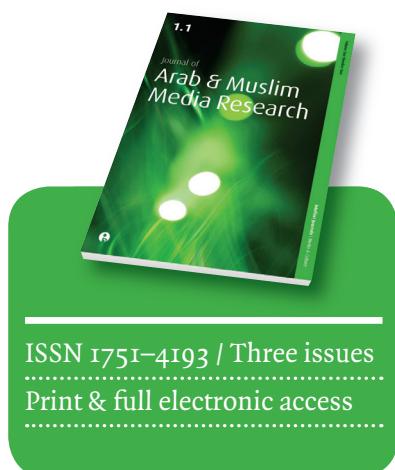
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# Baha'i Approaches to Christianity and Islam: Further Thoughts on Developing an Inter-Religious Dialogue

Seena Fazel

## Abstract

*This paper aims to present a novel Baha'i contribution to inter-religious dialogue, one that is based on developing intellectual bridges between the religions. It is argued that the concept of continuity of revelation is a framework by which religions can dialogue about their differences and similarities. Some preliminary aspects of this concept are outlined from scripture and current scholarship in Christianity and Islam. There are three aspects to continuity of revelation: commonalities between the religions, non-exclusivity and non-finality in relation to their claims. The paper concludes that a central theme of inter-religious dialogue should be the nature and lives of the prophet-founders. In the context of Christian – Muslim dialogue, the challenge that the prophetic career of Muhammad represents for Christians is discussed in relation to 'Abdu'l-Baha's talks in the West. Finally, the importance for Baha'is of contributing to the western discourse on Islam is explored.*

## Keywords

Baha'i  
 interfaith  
 interreligious  
 exclusivity  
 finality  
 Christian-Muslim  
 prophet

Since their establishment in Western Europe and North America, Baha'i communities have been active in interfaith encounters. Although the degree of this involvement has not been fully documented, evidence from community surveys indicates that it has remained one of the few consistent staples of Baha'i community life over the last few decades.<sup>1</sup> Most of these interfaith events have been local, involving prayer meetings with like-minded groups, discussions on contemporary social problems, and anti-racism marches.<sup>2</sup> Non-Baha'i media regularly report such activities, and prominent individuals, such as the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, have commented on their importance as part of the Baha'i contribution to community building.<sup>3</sup> On the national and international stage, Baha'i participation has included invitations to speak at the World Parliament of Religions and similar large conferences.

A recent contribution of the Baha'i community to inter-religious activities has been the 2002 message to the world's religious leaders from the Universal House of Justice. One notable feature of this letter is that it highlights a deficiency of 'intellectual coherence' in the interfaith movement.<sup>4</sup> Although it primarily addresses the leaders of other world religions, it has several consequences for the Baha'i community. Many will look for examples of leadership in the Baha'i community in forging new intellectual bridges between the religious communities. The message from the Universal House

1. M. McMullen, *The Baha'i: The Religious Construction of a Global Identity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000) 182–3.
2. R. Stockman, 'The Baha'i Faith and Interfaith Relations: A Brief History', *World Order*, 33:4 (2002) 19–33.
3. Tony Blair has highlighted interfaith activities in a number of Naw-Ruz greetings to the UK Baha'i community. See e.g. <http://bahai-library.com/newspapers/032199.html>.
4. The Universal House of Justice, 'To the World's Religious Leaders' (2002),

<http://www.bahai.org/article-1-1-0-1.html>

5. The Universal House of Justice, 'The Promise of World Peace', (1985) <http://www.bahai.org/article-1-7-2-1.html>
6. On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *One Common Faith* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 2005).
7. 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1982) 396.
8. This builds on my previous work, 'Interreligious dialogue and the Baha'i Faith: some preliminary observations', in *Revisioning the Sacred: Studies in the Babi and Baha'i Religions*, Vol. 7 (ed. J. A. McLean, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1997), [http://bahai-library.com/?file=fazel\\_interreligious\\_dialogue](http://bahai-library.com/?file=fazel_interreligious_dialogue).
9. J. Glover, 'Dialogue is the only way to end this cycle of violence', *The Guardian*, 27 July 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/attackonlondon/comment/story/0,16141,1536885,00.html>
10. The Universal House of Justice, 'To the World's Religious Leaders' (2002).
11. 'Abdu'l-Baha in London (London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1982) 19.
12. This includes Stephen Lambden's doctoral thesis, 'Some Aspects of Isrā'īliyyāt and the Emergence of the Bābī-Bahā'ī Interpretation of the Bible', University of

of Justice encourages consideration of what contributions the Baha'i community can make to the interfaith movement. In other words, beyond the assertion of the validity and unity of the world religions, what can Baha'i articulate on the central question in inter-religious encounters: how can the differences between the religions be reconciled in theory and in practice?<sup>5</sup> Without this, Baha'i believe, there will be 'harrowing consequences' arising from sectarian hatred between religious communities,<sup>6</sup> and continuing warfare between and within nations. 'Abdu'l-Baha is reported to have said that, 'Fundamentally, all warfare and bloodshed in the human world are due to the lack of unity between the religions, which through superstitions and adherence to theological dogmas have obscured the one reality which is the source and basis of them all.'<sup>7</sup>

In this paper, I suggest that the central Baha'i concept of continuity of revelation could form the basis of a deeper inter-religious dialogue between Baha'i and followers of other world religions.<sup>8</sup> Its implications are explored by examining difficulties in the dialogue between Muslims and Christians. These two religious communities are focused on as the Baha'i writings address specific tensions between them. Furthermore, the dialogue between these two faiths has become an important issue due to geopolitical concerns since 11 September 2001, and the increasing Muslim population of the West. A number of well-known public intellectuals have commented on the potential for such a dialogue. Jonathan Glover, an ethicist at the University of London, argues for a wider dialogue between the West and Islam in a recent article in the *Guardian* newspaper:

As the assassination at Sarajevo and the response to it triggered the 20th-century world wars, so 9/11 and the response to it could ruin our century. So much depends on whether we can break out of the cycle of violence. This requires a serious dialogue between the overlapping worlds of the West and Islam before irreversible mutual hatred sets in. We need such dialogue internationally, between western and Islamic leaders. We also need it in this country, between those who are not Islamic and those who are.<sup>9</sup>

### Continuity of revelation

From a Baha'i perspective, interfaith discourse 'must now address honestly and without further evasion the implications of the overarching truth that called the movement into being: that God is one and that, beyond all diversity of cultural expression and human interpretation, religion is likewise one'.<sup>10</sup> The oneness of religion, in the words of 'Abdu'l-Baha, is 'the gift of God to this enlightened age'.<sup>11</sup> How can Baha'i translate the teaching of the oneness of religion for the purposes of dialogue? I will argue that it is through the concept of continuity of revelation.

This central principle of the Baha'i Faith has received some attention in Baha'i studies,<sup>12</sup> although not in proportion to its prominence in the Baha'i writings. Shoghi Effendi describes 'the continuity of their Revelation' as the 'cardinal truth', which is the 'essence' of Baha'i teachings.<sup>13</sup> In fact, Shoghi Effendi uses three terms interchangeably: 'Baha'u'llah inculcates the basic principle of the relativity of religious truth, the continuity of Divine Revelation, the progressiveness of religious experience'.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, Shoghi Effendi explains what the concept of continuity of revelation does *not* mean:

The Faith standing identified with the name of Baha'u'llah disclaims any intention to belittle any of the Prophets gone before Him, to whittle down any of their teachings, to obscure, however slightly, the radiance of their Revelations, to oust them from the hearts of their followers, to abrogate the fundamentals of their doctrines, to discard any of their revealed Books, or to suppress the legitimate aspirations of their adherents.<sup>15</sup>

The term 'progressive revelation' is often used to summarize the Baha'i position in relation to other religions, and is based on Baha'u'llah's statement '*fa-lammā balaghā al-amr*', which Shoghi Effendi translated as 'this process of progressive revelation'.<sup>16</sup> Literally this means the 'maturation' of religion, capturing within it a sense of both commonality and progression – analogous to the maturation of an individual. As cited above, Shoghi Effendi also describes progress in relation to 'religious experience' over time.

I suggest that there is a tension between two poles – continuity and progressiveness – in the Baha'i approach to other religions. Where individuals' understanding exists on the spectrum between these poles will depend on their own spiritual state and the context in which they find themselves. Focusing on the progressiveness pole enables Baha'is to make sense of their uniqueness as a particular religious community and will be prominent in conversion-type or 'teaching' contexts. Examples of such progressiveness, Baha'is can argue, include the relevance of its laws compared to those of previous 'dispensations',<sup>17</sup> its scriptural integrity and comprehensiveness, its institutional structures and successful provisions for avoiding significant schism.

However, for the purposes of inter-religious dialogue, the continuity pole is more relevant than progressiveness. Terms such as 'progressive revelation' could be misunderstood as condescending. How can the continuity pole best be articulated? The view is presented in this paper that there are three related aspects to continuity of revelation: commonality, non-finality and non-exclusivity. Scriptures from Christianity and Islam that can form the basis of discussing this in interfaith encounters are explored. Further to the reasons cited in the introduction, focusing on dialogue and conflict resolution between these two religions will likely merit interest among intellectuals outside of those religions. For example, Salman Rushdie recently wrote that the most important challenge facing Islam will be a 'reformation' that Muslims and non-Muslims need to encourage through study of its beginnings and dialogue about this scholarship.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, Rushdie believes that this scholarship should explore the Qur'an as a historical document:

If, however, the Koran were seen as a historical document, then it would be legitimate to reinterpret it to suit the new conditions of successive new ages. Laws made in the 7th century could finally give way to the needs of the 21st. The Islamic Reformation has to begin here, with an acceptance that all ideas, even sacred ones, must adapt to altered realities.

Newcastle-upon-Tyne (2002); Udo Schaefer's *Beyond the Clash of Religions* (Prague: Zero Palm Press, 1995); and Zaid Lundberg, 'The bedrock of Baha'i belief: the doctrine of progressive revelation', *Lights of Irfan*, 1 (2000): 53–67.

13. Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1996) 107.
14. *ibid* 108.
15. *ibid* 108.
16. Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1983) 75.
17. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1974) 100.
18. *The Times*, 11 August 2005, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,1072-172998,00.html>

19. 'The Incoming Sea of Faith', *Spectator*, 18 October 2004.

20. He stated that 'Christ is the first-born of God, and we have declared above all that He is the Word (*Logos*) of whom every race of men were partakers; and those who lived according to reason are Christian.' Furthermore, all peoples, according to Justin, are able to participate in the '*logos spermatikos*' or seed of reason: 'For each man spoke well in proportion to the share he had of the spermatic word (reason disseminated among men), seeing what was related to it', because 'the seed of reason (*the Logos*) implanted in every race of men' makes God's revelation accessible to all. The pre-existence of the eternal Logos of God enables 'all the races of men to participate' in God's revelation. The 'seed of the Logos is innate in all the races of men and resides in all people' uniting humanity and making all 'part of the Logos', Justin Martyr, 'First Apology, 36', in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. Ferrmans Pub., 1950) 178, 191.

21. Qur'an 2:172; Matt. 22:37-40.

22. M. Momen, 'Baha'u'llah's prophetology: archetypal patterns in the lives of the founders of the world religions', *Baha'i Studies Review*, 5.1 (1995) 51-63, [http://bahai-library.com/bsr/bsros/55\\_momen\\_prophetology.htm](http://bahai-library.com/bsr/bsros/55_momen_prophetology.htm)

Another reason why the dialogue between Islam and Christianity will interest westerners is given by Alister McGrath, an Oxford professor of theology, who has argued that the two religions will continue to interact in ways important for the future of Christianity: 'The most significant, dynamic and interesting critic of western Christianity is no longer atheism, but a religious alternative, offering a rival vision of God – Islam.'<sup>19</sup>

The concept of continuity of revelation is not original to the Baha'i Faith, and there are analogous ideas in the history of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The clearest example is perhaps the concept of '*logos spermaticus*' in early Christianity. Justin Martyr, a second-century apologist, first presented the idea that both Gentiles and Jews will be saved on the basis of the 'seed of reason' being implanted within each person, and therefore being sensitive to development and progression.<sup>20</sup>

### Commonality

The commonality aspect of continuity of revelation is best exemplified in what is termed the 'Golden Rule' (that one should treat others as one would wish to be treated),<sup>21</sup> in the similarities in the lives of prophet-founders,<sup>22</sup> in the shared centrality of an unknowable divine essence<sup>23</sup> and the central transformative (or soteriocentric) aim of these religions. In relation to the latter, Baha'u'llah asks, 'Is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions?'<sup>24</sup> From a Baha'i perspective, then, it is this transformative core – the goal of the individual's spiritual transformation – that is the shared religious inheritance rather than a belief in a personal God. A theocentric view will alienate some Buddhists, Hindus and Taoists among others. Many spiritual qualities, the tools for this transformation, are therefore highlighted in religious scriptures and shared between them.<sup>25</sup>

A retrospective commonality is also stressed in the New Testament by the repeated linking of Jesus's teachings to that of Moses, especially through bringing to mind the Hebrew Bible's prophecies of the Messiah: in the words of one theologian, this 'catena of fulfilments of prophecy'.<sup>26</sup> In the Qur'an, passages describing how God does not make any distinction between prophets or between messengers are instances of retrospective commonality (2:136, 2:285), as is the view that Abraham and the apostles of Jesus were Muslims (3:67, 5:111).<sup>27</sup>

### Non-finality

The belief that any one religion is the last Divine message is one that is heavily criticized in Baha'i texts. The view that, 'all Revelation is ended, that the portals of Divine mercy are closed' is described as an 'idle contention' and represents 'a sore test unto all mankind'.<sup>28</sup> There are a number of reasons for this.

### Creative power of the Word

First, Biblical and Islamic scriptures state that the creative power of divine revelation cannot be stopped. For example, the Qur'an states, 'If all the trees that are upon the earth were to become pens, and if God should after

that swell the sea into seven seas of ink, His words would not be exhausted: for God is Mighty, Wise' (31:27, Rodwell's translation). Al-Sadiq, the sixth Imam of Shi'ism, apparently commented on this verse: '[God] here informs thee that the Word of God has no end, no termination, and It shall never cease at all [akhbaraka anna Kalām Allāh laysa lahū ākhirun wa lā ghāyatā wa lā yanqati'u abadan].'<sup>29</sup>

In the Hebrew Bible, the word of God is equated to rainfall. 'For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth' (Isa. 55:10–11).

### Legal developments

Second, the scriptures of these religions contain legal provisions that now appear 'archaic' in the words of 'Abdu'l-Baha. He asks a Jewish audience in North America: 'Is it possible nowadays to establish the archaic laws [anchih muqtadī nīst]<sup>30</sup> of an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth? Christ changed only that part of the Mosaic religion which did not accord with the spirit of his time.'<sup>31</sup> The situation is less clear-cut in Christianity due to its relative lack of laws, although St Paul's admonitions to women to wear veils<sup>32</sup> and not to speak in public<sup>33</sup> are thought to reflect the sociocultural context of early Christianity.<sup>34</sup>

In Islam, texts that do not assert the equality of women, such as marriage and divorce laws, inheritance rights, the treatment of adulterers and also the killing of unbelievers<sup>35</sup> are questioned by many writers as being outdated. A particularly difficult passage is one that appears to allow for the 'beating' of wives: 'And those [women] you fear may be rebellious admonish; banish them to their couches, and beat them' (Qur'an 4:34, Arberry's translation).<sup>36</sup> But, as Momen points out, the Qur'an supports the view that the laws of a religion can change over time for the better: 'None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar' (2:106, Yusuf Ali's translation).<sup>37</sup>

### Relativity and eschatology

A third rationale for non-finality is that the concept of the relativity of religious truth is implicitly endorsed. In the New Testament, there are suggestions that divine revelation will continue:

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now

(John 16:12).

Repent ye therefore ... when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord

(Acts 3:19).<sup>38</sup>

And in the Qur'an, there are similar indications:

Exalted then be God, the King, the Truth! Be not hasty in its recital while the revelation of it to thee is incomplete. Say rather, 'O my Lord, increase knowledge unto me'

(20:114, Rodwell's translation).

23. S. Lambden, 'Apothatic theology', in *Revisioning the Sacred: Studies in the Babi and Baha'i Religions*, Vol. 7 (ed. J. A. McLean, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1997).
24. *Kitāb-i-Īqān, The Book of Certitude* (trans. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1983) 240.
25. Some examples of shared spiritual principles are outlined in M. Momen, *Islam and the Baha'i Faith* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995) 6–16.
26. V. Stanton, *The Gospels as Historical Documents*, II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1909) 342.
27. In the sense that they submitted their will to God – the literal meaning of 'Islam'.
28. *Kitab-i-Iqan, The Book of Certitude* 162–63, 137.
29. Burhān, (–al-Sayyid Hāshim al-Burhānī), *Kitāb al-burhān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (4 vols. Tehran, 1375/1955) 496.
30. Literally 'not conformable to exigencies', according to Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian–English Dictionary* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977).
31. *Promulgation* 361. Also repeated to Pasteur Monnier, cited in "Abdu'l-Baha on Christ and Christianity", *Baha'i Studies Review*, 3.1 (1993) 1–6, [http://bahai-library.com/bsr/bsr03\\_1/311\\_abdulbaha\\_christianity.htm](http://bahai-library.com/bsr/bsr03_1/311_abdulbaha_christianity.htm)

32. 1 Cor. 11:5: 'But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.'

33. 1 Tim. 2:11–12: 'Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.'

34. L. Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics: New Studies in Christian Ethics* (No. 9) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

35. 'As for the unbelievers, for them garments of fire shall be cut, and there shall be poured over their heads boiling water whereby whatsoever is in their bellies and their skins shall be melted; for them await hooked iron rods; as often as they desire in their anguish to come forth from it, they shall be restored into it, and: "Taste the chastisement of the burning!"' (22:20–21, Arberry's translation).

36. Translated variously as 'beat them' (Palmer), '(and last) beat them (lightly)' (Yusuf Ali), 'scourge them' (Pikthall and Rodwell), 'chastise them' (Sale). Revisionist interpretations of this verse exist, including that it means to 'pat gently' (see, e.g. <http://www.unm.edu/~reemaz/>).

37. M. Momen, *Islam and the Baha'i Faith* 20.

38. Also references to gradual disclosure of truth or revelation exist: 'I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able

A final reason that argues in favour of non-finality in these religions is the expectation of future messengers. Some Baha'i introductory literature focuses on this perspective as being the main Baha'i approach to other religions, a view that is debatable.<sup>39</sup> Caution is warranted for focusing on this aspect because, for some religions, it has been suggested that prophecy is not intended to predict future events but should be read in a contextualized way as reflecting the needs of the religious community at the time the scriptures were written. It has been argued that Zoroastrian prophecies, to take one example, are likely to be medieval texts lamenting foreign invasions of Iran, rather than an apocalyptic vision of the future.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, in Christianity and Islam, there are some interesting pointers:

Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify  
(Matt. 23:34).

And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No  
(John 1:21–22).<sup>41</sup>

O Children of Adam! There shall come to you Apostles [rusul] from among yourselves, rehearsing my signs to you ...  
(Qur'an 7:34, Rodwell's translation).<sup>42</sup>

As suggested above, there is the implication in these religions of future renewal. Why the need for renewal? Three reasons, in addition to the problem of obsolete laws, are suggested in Baha'i writings. First, time brings with it a loss of focus from the scriptures to man-made dogmas, creeds and personalities. Baha'u'llah identifies the decline of institutional Shi'ism to the fact that religious leaders 'turned away from the light of God and corrupted the principle of His Divine unity [*tawhid*]', and that they 'increasingly centred their attention upon them who were only the revealers of the potency of His Word'.<sup>43</sup> Second, infighting between sects gradually saps the strength and moral force of a religion. Third, other religions have found it hard to respond to the modern challenges of secularism and materialism.<sup>44</sup>

### Non-exclusivity

A third aspect of continuity of revelation is non-exclusivity. Exclusivity is the belief that a particular religion is the only way to salvation and truth. In support of non-exclusivity, there are passages that suggest that other religions, particularly those that have preceded it, are valid. An obvious example is Islam's acceptance of the 'People of the Book' – referring to Christians, Jews, and Sabians: 'Surely they that believe, and those of Jewry, and the Christians, and those Sabaeans, whoso believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness – their wage awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them; neither shall they sorrow' (Qur'an 2:62, Arberry's translation; cf. 5:69).

One contemporary Muslim writer has suggested that the Quranic recognition of Jews and Sabians is a strong scriptural endorsement of dialogue: 'The real dialogue between religions was, however, started by the Qur'an. Its recognition of the People of the Book – the believers in God spread all over the earth, the Sabaeans and the Jews – was a dialogical recognition.'<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, the Sabians provide a potential bridge for Islam to embrace non-Abrahamic religious traditions, a view that was suggested by the early Baha'i scholar Mirza Abu'l-Fadl Gulpaygani,<sup>46</sup> although there has never been much consensus about who constitutes the 'People of the Book' in Islamic history.<sup>47</sup> Fazlur Rahman, the late Muslim academic, points out that there is no particular reason to focus on the first half of the above verse. Rather, the rest of it is itself a 'strong rejection of exclusivism': 'the vast majority of Muslim commentators exercise themselves fruitlessly to avoid having to admit the obvious meaning: that those – from any section of humankind – who believe in God and in the Last Day and do good deeds are saved'.<sup>48</sup>

Another contemporary Islamic thinker has emphasized the verse: 'O humanity! Truly We created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you might know each other. Truly the most-honoured of you in the sight of God is the most God-conscious of you' (Qur'an 49:18). Hussain notes that the passage is addressed to all of humanity, rather than only Muslims, and the positive value placed on differences in the world. In addition, he highlights the fact that it encourages people to transcend their differences and learn from each other. Hussain reads it as not saying that Muslims are better than other people, 'but that the best people are those who are aware of God'.<sup>49</sup>

There are three other indications of the non-exclusivity of Islam. First, in food and marriage, two of the most significant areas of social life, eating and marriage with People of the Book are permitted. Second, the religious laws of the Jews and Christians are upheld (Qur'an 5:47) and were even enforced by Muhammad when disputes arose among them (Qur'an 5:42–3). Finally, the preservation of the various places of worship, 'cloisters, churches, synagogues and mosques' (Qur'an 22:40), is upheld. It has been argued that this is not only because they play a role in the culture of a community but that the Qur'an is here acknowledging the validity of diverse religious expression.<sup>50</sup>

In Christianity, there is a clear basis for pluralism in the way that Jesus Christ acted towards non-believers, and in passages such as Acts 10:34: 'But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him' and 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets' (Heb. 1:1).

The notion that any one religion holds the sole message of salvation is also strongly criticized in Baha'i writings. It has been suggested that exclusivist views rest on a misinterpretation of scripture, a misrepresentation of the full range of worldviews promoted in these religions, and a misunderstanding of the language of scripture – arguments mainly based on hermeneutics.<sup>51</sup> In addition, exclusivist views are characteristic of human, imperfect thinking: 'To presume to judge among the Messengers of God, exalting one above the other, would be to give in to the delusion that the Eternal and All-Embracing is subject to the vagaries of human preference.'<sup>52</sup>

### **Exclusivity and comparative religion**

There are two further arguments against exclusivity. The first is from the perspective of comparative religion and is based on the observation that exclusivist claims in one religion are not unique, and are occasionally

[to bear it], neither yet now are ye able' (1 Cor. 3:2); 'But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, [even] those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil' (Heb. 5:14); and more circumstantially, 'For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear' (Mark 4:28, emphasis added).

39. e.g. see the first edition of the magazine *The Baha'i* published by the Baha'i International Community (1992). The BBC website has a balanced portrayal (see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/bahai/index.shtml>). Lundberg ('The bedrock of Baha'i belief') has argued that 'progressive revelation' is a more central theme.
40. C. Buck, 'Baha'u'llah as Zoroastrian Saviour', *Baha'i Studies Review*, 8 (1998), [http://bahai-library.com/bsr/bsr08/821\\_buck\\_zoroaster.htm](http://bahai-library.com/bsr/bsr08/821_buck_zoroaster.htm)
41. This quote is intriguing as it implies the expectation of three eschatological figures for the Jews: Elias (who Jesus said was John the Baptist), 'that prophet' (who could be interpreted as Muhammad), and the Christ. Mirza Abu'l-Fadl suggests that 'that prophet' refers to Muhammad (*Letters and Essays* [Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1985] 179).
42. See S. Fazel and K. Fananapazir, 'A Baha'i approach to the claim

of finality in Islam', *Journal of Baha'i Studies*, 5.3 (1993), [http://bahai-library.com/?file=fananapazir\\_fazel\\_finality\\_islam](http://bahai-library.com/?file=fananapazir_fazel_finality_islam), for a discussion of the original Arabic of this text in relation to this and other translations of the Qur'an. A good overview of Islamic prophecies is provided in M. Momen, *Islam and the Baha'i Faith*, chapter 4.

43. Cited in Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1972) 173.
44. Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Baha'u'llah* 179–86.
45. A. Askari, 'The dialogical relationship between Christianity and Islam', in *Muslims in Dialogue: The Evolution of a Dialogue* (ed. L. Swidler, Lewiston: Edwin Mellon, 1992).
46. *Miracles and Metaphors* (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1981) 100.
47. F. Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997) 153.
48. F. Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1989) 166.
49. A. Hussain, 'Muslims, Pluralism, and Interfaith dialogue', in *Progressive Muslims on Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*, (ed. O. Safi, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003) 251–69.
50. F. Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 160–1.

mirrored in one another. For example, the two most important claims to exclusivity in Christianity – the nature of Jesus Christ and his resurrection – are not unique ones. John Hick points out that the Mahayanist doctrine of the Three Bodies (Trikaya) of the Buddha parallels the Christian concept of the Trinity. The earthly or incarnate Buddha (Nirmanakaya) and the transcendent or heavenly Buddha (Sambhogakaya) are one in the Dharma Body (Dharmakaya) or the Ultimate Reality.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, the resurrection of Jesus is not presented in the New Testament as a unique event. For example, Matthew reports that at the time of the crucifixion: 'And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose ... and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many' (Matt. 27:53). The fact that these events were not reported in the histories of the time does not necessarily mean that they did not happen – rather, it implies that they were not perceived as unusual events.<sup>54</sup> By focusing on the resurrection as a central plank of the exclusivist argument, Christians may be downplaying the uniqueness of Jesus.

Another argument used against exclusivity is the problem encountered by interpreting texts in an exclusive way for a particular religion's understanding of previous faiths. For example, were Christians to read Biblical texts in an exclusive fashion, this would preclude the emergence of any subsequent revelation based on the literal reading of some Hebrew Bible texts:

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish [ought] from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you

(Deut. 4:2; cf. 12:32).

My salvation is gone forth ... But my salvation shall be forever

(Isa. 51:5–6).

Despite the Islamic doctrine of corruption of previous scriptures, there are passages that depict the Bible as complete:

Moreover, We gave Moses the Book, completing (Our favour) to those who would do right, and explaining all things in detail, and a guide and a mercy ... so follow it and be righteous

(Qur'an 6:154, Yusuf Ali's translation).

### Potential problems in the dialogue with Christians

There are a number of potential problems with a non-exclusive presentation of Christianity. The first is the 'remarkable universality of the biblical message as it stands'.<sup>55</sup> In support, Paul states that God was reconciling the whole world in Jesus (2 Cor. 5:19), and John sees a rainbow overarching the throne of God, reminding believers of God's covenant with all humanity (Rev. 4:3). The New Testament reports that God desires all to be saved, and Jesus died for the sins of the whole world (1 Tim. 2:4; 1 John 2:2). In effect, Christians may argue that, although the message of the New Testament is non-exclusive, it is nonetheless universal and more powerful than other revelations. A second problem is that Christians claim that Jesus's revelation was 'the eschatologically final (definitive and unsurpassable) revelation'.<sup>56</sup>

In support are quotes such as: 'In these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he created the world' (Heb. 1:2). The need to read such texts in the context of other, non-finality texts needs to be stressed.

A third problem in relation to commonality between the religions is the view that the ontological truths allegedly uniting the religions are in fact truths about entirely different things. In other words, it is argued that there is a deep rift between the different religions in their descriptions of God, life after death, the central problem afflicting human beings, and other central beliefs. It is contended that the metaphor of the blind men describing the elephant, that is used to explain how the different religions are all talking about the same ultimate reality, is not relevant, as the blind men are actually describing different things.<sup>57</sup> In response, John Hick argues that the believer's individual response to the religions' ethical imperatives is the determining issue, not their descriptions of ontology: 'By their fruit, ye shall know them' (Matt. 7:16). An interesting passage in this context is from Matthew's gospel and suggests that performing the 'will' of the Father is the religious duty of Christians, and superficial proclamations of belief are not sufficient: 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven' (Matt. 7:22). The dialogue theologian Paul Knitter comments, 'Not knowing whether Jesus is unique, whether he is the final or normative word of God for all times, does not interfere with commitment to the praxis of following him and working, with other religions, in building the kingdom. Such questions need not be answered now. In fact . . . they cannot be answered now. In the meantime, there is much work to be done. Not those who proclaim "only Lord, only Lord", but those who do the will of the Father will enter the kingdom (Matt. 7:21–23).'<sup>58</sup> An analogous situation can be found in the Qur'an's linking of the rejection of God and faith to the denial of mercy and compassion to the poor: 'Have you observed the one who belies *al-din* [the faith]? That is the one who is unkind to the orphan, and urges not the feeding of the needy' (107:1–3).<sup>59</sup> This parallels Baha'u'llah's teaching in the Book of Certitude, quoted above, that what unites the religions is their focus on transformation of the individual.<sup>60</sup> By implication, this puts ethics at the heart of religion.<sup>61</sup>

### Baha'i and religious pluralism

Although Baha'i texts explicitly state the divine origin of Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism and Islam, there remains a problem with those religions that are not mentioned. However, the Baha'i writings have a pluralist moment, similar to the wider meaning of the Sabians in the Qur'an or what defines a believer in the Acts of the Apostles (both cited above). 'Abdu'l-Baha widens the Baha'i understanding of what religions and spiritualities the Baha'i Faith recognizes when he states that 'the Call of God' (*nidā-yi ilāhī*) had been raised among the people of North America'.<sup>62</sup> It would appear, then, that the Baha'i writings endorse the appearance of native messengers of God who are not named in the Baha'i writings.

In summary, the Baha'i teachings present a spectrum of attitudes towards other religions from progressiveness to continuity. I have argued

51. An extended discussion of this appears in S. Fazel, 'Understanding Exclusivist Texts', in *Scripture and Revelation*, (ed. M. Momen, Oxford: George Ronald, 1997), [http://bahai-library.com/?file=fazelUnderstanding\\_exclusivist\\_texts](http://bahai-library.com/?file=fazelUnderstanding_exclusivist_texts)
52. *One Common Faith*.
53. J. Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1977) 168–9.
54. *ibid* 170.
55. C. Pinnock, 'An evangelical response to Knitter's five theses', in *The Uniqueness of Jesus: A Dialogue with Paul Knitter* (eds. L. Swidler and P. Mojzes, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997) 118.
56. K-J. Kuschel, "'Faithful' to the New Testament?", in *The Uniqueness of Jesus* 89.
57. The metaphor of the blind men is that four blind men are describing an elephant, and each describes something different. The blind men in this analogy represent the different religions.
58. Paul F. Knitter, 'Toward a liberation theology of religions', in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religion* (eds. J. Hick and P. F. Knitter, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998) 178–218.
59. F. Esack, *The Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism* 156.
60. *Kitab-i-Iqan, The Book of Certitude* 240.
61. M. Momen, 'Relativism: A basis

for Baha'i metaphysics', in *Studies in the Babi and Baha'i Religions*, Vol. 5 (ed. M. Momen, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1988).

62. C. Buck, 'Native messengers of God?', in *Reason and Revelation: New Directions in Baha'i Thought* (eds. S. Fazel and J. Danesh, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2002).

63. 'To the World's Religious Leaders' (2002).

64. 'Abdu'l-Bahā, *Promulgation of Universal Peace* 445–6.

65. *Paris Talks* 48–9.

66. *ibid* 49.

67. H. Küng et al., *Christianity and the World Religions: Paths to Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism* (trans. Peter Heinegg, New York: Doubleday, 1986) 25–6.

that the continuity pole should be the focus of an intellectual and theological dialogue with other religions that Baha'i could undertake. The paper has attempted to develop the concept of continuity of revelation and suggests that it incorporates the related themes of commonality, non-finality and non-exclusivity. Finality and exclusivity have been highlighted as 'suffocating impulses to unity' by the Universal House of Justice in its message to the world's religious leaders, urging the 'renunciation of all those claims to exclusivity or finality that, in winding their roots around the life of the spirit, have been the single greatest factor in suffocating impulses to unity and in promoting hatred and violence'.<sup>63</sup>

## Theological Rubicons

### Acknowledging the prophet-founders

A particular area to which Baha'i can contribute is in the intellectual dialogue between Christians and Muslims. 'Abdu'l-Bahā provides examples of this in his public lectures in the West. In a number of meetings with Jews in North America, including public talks at synagogues, 'Abdu'l-Bahā challenged the Jews present to accept the divinity of Jesus. His rationale was twofold. He argued that Jesus had done more than any Jew in disseminating Jewish scripture, and in bringing about a general recognition of the prophets of the Hebrew Bible. He also appealed to pragmatism in suggesting that there was little to lose from accepting Jesus as a prophet and much to gain.<sup>64</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahā presented an analogous situation in relation to Christianity acknowledging Islam. In a public talk in Paris, he argued that Christians should accept the divinity of Muhammad. His argument was that Muhammad had revered Jesus and the prophets of Israel: 'Muhammad recognized the sublime grandeur of Christ and the greatness of Moses and the prophets'.<sup>65</sup> He also suggested that there was no loss of faith for the Muslims who had done this: 'The people of Islam who glorify Christ are not humiliated by so doing.' He concludes with a general challenge: 'why should not the followers of each prophet recognize and honour the other prophets also?'.<sup>66</sup>

I would suggest that this exemplifies an approach that Baha'i could take in inter-religious dialogue – to challenge the Jews to accept Jesus as a prophet, and Christians to do the same in relation to Muhammad. Interestingly, the Catholic theologian Hans Küng has made a significant contribution in this area by highlighting seven historical parallels between Muhammad and the prophets of the Hebrew Bible:<sup>67</sup>

1. Like the prophets of Israel, Muhammad did not base his actions on any mission given to him by the community but on his special relationship with God.
2. Like the prophets of Israel, Muhammad was a man with a staunch will. He was wholly imbued with his divine vocation, totally taken up by God's calling, exclusively absorbed in his mission.
3. Like the prophets of Israel, Muhammad spoke amidst a religious and social crisis. With passionate piety and a revolutionary message, he stood up against the wealthy ruling class and the traditions of the age.
4. Like the prophets of Israel, Muhammad wished to be nothing but God's mouthpiece and to proclaim God's word, not his own.

5. Like the prophets of Israel, Muhammad tirelessly glorified the one God, who tolerates no other gods before him and is the kindly Creator and merciful Judge.
6. Like the prophets of Israel, Muhammad exhorted his followers to practise unconditional obedience, devotion and 'submission' (the literal meaning of 'Islam') to God.
7. Like the prophets of Israel, Muhammad linked his monotheism to humanism, connecting faith in the one God and his judgement to the demand for social justice. The unjust are warned that they will go to hell, while the just are promised paradise.

68. *ibid* 27.

69. P. Knitter, 'Hans Küng's Theological Rubicon', in L. Swidler, ed., *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987) 225.

70. M. Momen, 'Bahá'u'lláh's prophetology', *Bahá'i Studies Review*, 5:1 (1995) 51–63.

In this work, Küng implies that Muhammad was more than a prophet by referring to him as 'the model for the kind of life that Islam wishes to be'.<sup>68</sup> It is notable that the understanding of Muhammad as 'a model' is possibly similar to how the early disciples viewed Jesus – as an eschatological prophet who was intimately infused with God's presence and who could speak, represent and mediate God. Paul Knitter concludes from their roles as archetypes of human perfection that there is a significant similarity: 'Therefore, in its origins, the Christian view of Jesus was essentially the same as the Muslim view of Muhammad: they were both unique revealers, spokespersons for God, prophets.' Knitter also contends, in a perceptive critique of Küng's position,

I suspect that, like many Christians today, he [Küng] stands before a theological Rubicon. To cross it means to recognize clearly, unambiguously, the possibility that other religions exercise a role in salvation history that is not only valuable and salvific but perhaps equal to that of Christianity; it is to affirm that there may be other saviours and revealers; besides Jesus Christ and equal to Jesus Christ. It is to admit that if other religions must be fulfilled in Christianity, Christianity must, just as well, find fulfilment in them.<sup>69</sup>

What would be a Bahá'i view of this approach? First, the Bahá'i writings highlight other parallels between the prophet-founders. For example, Moojan Momen suggests nine 'archetypal' features shared between the prophet-founders: a period of solitude and doubt; a break with the previous religion, rulers and religious leaders to whom public declaration was made; a promise of a future saviour; internal and external opposition; and migration.<sup>70</sup> These parallels are phenomenologically derived and complement those discussed by Küng. Furthermore, the Bahá'i writings offer many theophanological perspectives on this issue, that is, from the study of nature of the Manifestation of God. To take one example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have said in 1913 in Budapest that Manifestations of God can be recognized by the following nine conditions:

*Firstly:* That Great Master will be the Educator of the world of humanity;

*Secondly:* His teachings must be universal and confer illumination upon mankind;

*Thirdly:* His knowledge must be innate and spontaneous, and not acquired;

*Fourthly:* He must answer the questions of all the sages, solve all the difficult problems of humanity, and be able to withstand all the persecutions and sufferings heaped upon Him;

71. Cited in W. Harmon, *Divine Illumination* (trans. Ahmad Sohrab, Boston: Tudor Press, 1915) 65–6.
72. Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990) 49.
73. Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981) 377.
74. 'Impossible histories: why the many Islams cannot be simplified', *Harpers*, 305:1826 (July 2002): 69–74.
75. *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (rev. ed. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1991).
76. 'The Crucifixion of Jesus in the Qur'an and Qur'anic Commentary: A Historical Survey (Parts I & II)', *The Bulletin of Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies*, 10:2 (1991) 34–62 and 10:3 (1991) 6–40.

*Fifthly:* He must be a joy-bringer, and the Herald of the Kingdom of Happiness;  
*Sixthly:* His knowledge must be infinite and His wisdom all-comprehensive;  
*Seventhly:* The penetration of His Word and the potency of His influence must be so great as to humble even His worst enemies;  
*Eighthly:* Sorrows and tribulations must not vex Him. His courage and conviction must be God-like. Day by day He must become firmer and more zealous;  
*Ninthly:* He must be the Establisher of Universal Civilization, the Unifier of Religion, the Standard-bearer of Universal Peace, and the embodiment of all the highest and noblest virtues of the world of humanity.<sup>71</sup>

I have presented seven historical parallels from Küng, nine phenomenologically-based similarities summarized by Momen, and another nine theologically-derived ones from 'Abdu'l-Baha. Developing further these commonalities would be a rich theme for dialogue discussions that this paper is proposing as an aspect of continuity of revelation, and may provide a means to intellectually address the issue for religionists to acknowledge each other's prophet-founders.

### ***Misinformation and disinformation about Islam***

An informed and impartial understanding of Islam is an essential part to any dialogue between Muslims and other religionists. Many writers and academics have achieved recognition and influence on the basis of their attempts to inform western readers about Islam, although they occasionally suffer from biased and limited viewpoints. Nevertheless, they are widely read and commented upon despite these limitations. Examples in English include Karen Armstrong's introductory books on Islam and Bernard Lewis's various works. French writers on Islam have also become prominent such as Gilles Kepel, Olivier Roy, Eric Rouleau and André Raymond. Interestingly, Shoghi Effendi anticipated the importance of having an unbiased education about Islam as far back as 1939. He stated that a 'sound knowledge of the history and tenets of Islām' and a study of the Qur'an was necessary for western Bahá'ís,<sup>72</sup> and he remarked that George Townshend's book, *Christ and Bahá'u'lláh*, which is predominantly an introduction to Islam for western readers, was his 'crowning achievement'.<sup>73</sup> Thus, a major Bahá'í contribution to inter-religious dialogue could be to promote the understanding of Islam in the West among the general population and academia. Edward Said's review of Bernard Lewis's 'What went wrong – Islam and the West' is the type of discourse that Bahá'ís should be engaging in.<sup>74</sup> Said's insightful critique outlines some basic prerequisites for writing about Islam. Martin Lings's book on the life of Muhammad<sup>75</sup> is a model of a study that is both academically informed and judicious in its use of sources. Certain Bahá'í historians, including Hasan Balyuzi and Moojan Momen, have also written sympathetic and academically informed accounts of Islamic history. The work of Todd Lawson, looking at alternative Islamic understandings of the crucifixion of Christ, is another excellent example of this type of contribution in an academic context.<sup>76</sup>

Beyond the challenges of the Christian-Muslim dialogue, the crossing of Rubicons needs to occur beyond the Abrahamic family of religions; so, for example, Christian attempts to understand Gautama Buddha, and Buddhists'

to understand Jesus should continue. Exploring commonalities in the lives of the prophet-founders may assist this process. From a Baha'i perspective, a vital bridge for Muslims to cross is the acceptance of Baha'u'llah, bringing with it the possibility of a cessation of the persecution of Baha'is in many Islamic countries.

## Conclusion

This paper has aimed to present a novel Baha'i contribution to inter-religious dialogue, one that is based on developing intellectual bridges between the religions. It is argued that the concept of continuity of revelation is a framework within which religions can dialogue about their differences and similarities. Some preliminary aspects of this concept have been outlined from scripture and current scholarship in Christianity and Islam. The article concludes that a central agenda for inter-religious dialogue for this century should be a theophanological one, a study of the nature and life of the Manifestation of God. In the particular context of Christian-Muslim dialogue, a challenge presented in the Baha'i writings is what the prophetic career of Muhammad represents for Christians. The importance for Baha'is of contributing to the western discourse on Islam is highlighted.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, the doyen of academic comparative religion, has stated: 'If we must have a rivalry among the religious communities of earth, might we not for the moment at least rival each other in our determination and capacity to promote reconciliation.'<sup>77</sup> Baha'is hope that their contribution will be significant in the future in many ways, but at the current time, it may rival the other religions in its clear and challenging ideas about how religions share a vision of the continuity of revelation, and acknowledge a common view about the nature and career of their prophet-founders.<sup>78</sup>

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77. 'The Christian in a religiously plural world', in *Christianity and Other Religions: Selected Readings* (ed. J. Hick and B. Hebblethwaite, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001) 51.

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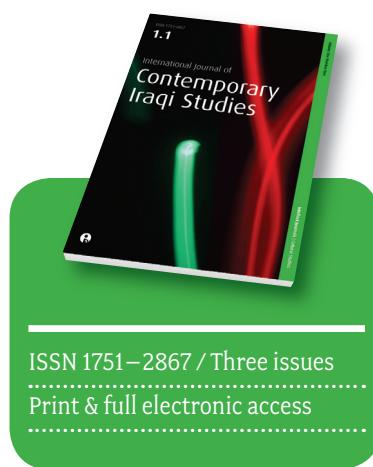
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# Translation

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## ‘Abdu’l-Baha’s Proclamation on the Persecution of Baha’is in 1903

Ahang Rabbani

### Abstract

*This is a provisional translation of an account by ‘Abdu’l-Baha of the persecutions of the Baha’is of Iran that erupted in 1903. There were outbursts in Rasht and Isfahan followed by a pogrom in Yazd and surrounding regions, which resulted in nearly two hundred deaths. This treatise by ‘Abdu’l-Baha was intended to bring this episode to the attention of the western Baha’is and to marshal public support in curbing the persecutions of Baha’is of Iran. It was originally translated and published in the United States as though the author were Haji Mirza Haydar ‘Ali Isfahani. The present provisional retranslation is based on the original text.*

### Keywords

Baha'i history  
 'Abdu'l-Baha  
 Baha'i persecutions  
 Iran  
 Rasht  
 Isfahan  
 Yazd  
 1903

By 1903, the Baha'i community of Iran had experienced nearly a half-century of relative peace. The last widespread persecution of its members had occurred in 1852–3, in the bloodbath that followed the unsuccessful attempt on Nasiru'd-Din Shah's life by a few disgruntled Babis. During this period the community had changed its character from a militant messianic Babi community to a peace-loving, ethically bound, progressive-minded Baha'i community that had grown considerably in numerical strength and geographic spread. Throughout this interval, though the Baha'is periodically continued to be harassed, and on occasions a few of them were killed by their opponents often as an excuse for political ambitions, no large-scale persecution was witnessed. This changed drastically in the summer of 1903 when a pogrom was unleashed against the community, resulting in the murder of nearly two hundred defenceless Baha'is. This occurrence outraged 'Abdu'l-Baha who wrote at length about the details and it is a rendering of this treatise that is the subject of this paper.

As the Qajar dynasty was drawing the last breath of its despotic rule, the situation for Baha'is also drastically worsened. In 1886, Mirza 'Ali-Asghar Khan (c.1859–1907), titled Amīn us-Sultan, became Nasiru'd-Din Shah's trusted prime minister and for the next 12 years (with a short break in 1897–8) ruled the central administration with tyrannical hands. During his tenure, Iran's foreign debts grew considerably, a national revolt was raised against his disastrous tobacco concession and considerable unrest was formed against his rejection of any suggestion for social and political reform.

1. For a detailed discussion see, Mirza Yahya 'Amidu'l-Attiba Hamadani, *Memoirs of a Baha'i in Rasht: 1889–1903*; trans. and annotated by Ahang Rabbani, *Witnesses to Babi and Baha'i History*, vol. 9, e-Book, 2007, pp. 25–33, <http://ahang.rabbani.googlepages.com/rasht>
2. For instance, in the nearby town of Manshad, 25 Baha'is were killed most brutally over a period of ten days. See Ahang Rabbani and Naghmeh Astani, 'The Martyrs of Manshād', *World Order*, 28/1 (Fall 1996) 21–36; and Muhammad-Tahir Malmiri, 'The Events and Tragedies of Manshad', trans. by Ahang Rabbani, <http://ahang.rabbani.googlepages.com/manshad-malmiri>

By 1903, political opposition against the prime minister's reactionary rule had gathered significant strength.

At first, the northern provinces, particularly the city of Rasht, rose against non-indigenous institutions such as schools. The Baha'is, as always, were used as a diversion. On 3 May 1903 a minor incident over a photograph between two Baha'i goldsmiths in Rasht, Mashhadi Taqi and Mashhadi Ridā, escalated into widespread disturbance and only the prudent intervention of the governor prevented bloodshed and calmed the troubled waters.<sup>1</sup>

In late May, as a result of the instigation of the notorious Shaykh Muhammad Taqi, known as Aqa Najafi, over 200 Baha'is of Isfahan were forced to take refuge in the Russian Consulate while the mob pillaged their homes. Two Azali brothers were killed on trumped-up charges. Through the intervention of the British and Russian Consulates, the situation subsided.

In Yazd the situation was considerably different. Aqa Najafi had written letters to all major cities encouraging them to follow his lead in harassing the Baha'is. The newly appointed prayer leader of Yazd, Sayyid Muhammad Ibrahim, arrived on 12 June and was anxious to prove his orthodoxy and to consolidate his authority. Therefore, before even arriving at the city, he circulated rumours about a general massacre of the Baha'is. The day after his arrival witnessed the first attacks against several Baha'i shopkeepers. The first murder of a Baha'i took place on 15 June when Haji Mirza Halabi-Saz was brutally killed. After that, for a week, the city was calm but soon the Baha'i-killing spread to the nearby villages and cities.<sup>2</sup> During the next month, wave upon wave of mob attacks left hundreds of Baha'is homeless, nearly 200 of them dead, and many more injured.

When this attempted genocide reached its peak in the midsummer of that year, 'Abdu'l-Baha wrote a proclamatory treatise outlining events leading to this pogrom, the motives and actions of the principal persecutors, and the intense sufferings of the Baha'i community. Like all his communications on such subjects, 'Abdu'l-Baha was full of praise for the patience, forbearance and the conduct of the Baha'is, young and old.

In retrospect, it appears that 'Abdu'l-Baha intended this treatise to be published in the West, galvanizing the support of prominent Baha'is, Baha'i communities of the United States and Europe in general, and the public at large. Towards this end, he instructed one of his secretaries, Dr Younis Khan Afroukhtih, to translate this treatise, which presumably was done in collaboration with some of the English-speaking Baha'is visiting 'Akka at the time. This work was further assisted by an English-speaking pilgrim of Jewish descent from Hamadan, Dr Arastoo Hakim, and was completed on 19 September 1903.

The translated treatise was then sent to the United States to be published under the title *Bahai Martyrdoms in Persia in the Year 1903 AD*. It was received in Chicago on 29 October 1903 and its publication took place through the work of the Baha'i Publishing Society in 1904. However, for reasons not clear to the present translator, it was published as a document prepared by Haji Mirza Haydar 'Ali, a prominent Baha'i residing in Haifa at that time. The following notation was included:

In compliance to the holy command of Abdul-Baha, the following account of the recent martyrdoms in Persia, up to the present time, is herein written and submitted for the perusal of the beloved of God.

(Signed) Hadji Mirza Heider Ali

In preparation for its publication, the Baha'i Publishing Society minimally edited the English for a smoother reading and revised a quotation from the New Testament to bring it in line with copies of the Bible available to the general public.

In the spring of 2004, the present translator coordinated a typing effort to enable the 1904 publication to be posted on the Internet for the use of researchers in Babi-Baha'i history. In April 2005, Dr Khazeh Fananapazir brought to my attention that this document was indeed a treatise by 'Abdu'l-Baha published in *Makātib-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā*, vol. 3, pages 122–47.

This important discovery facilitated a retranslation of the treatise, which appears below. In the course of the present effort, it was further discovered that the original translation differed considerably from 'Abdu'l-Baha's treatise: sections were moved around, large segments from the original text were missing in the published translation, various additions were made in the translation that were not in the original text, and a number of other deficiencies were noted. Therefore, I thought it necessary to undertake a fresh translation from the original text in *Makātib* as part of my project to collect and assemble a number of documents relating to the 1903 Baha'i persecution. And while undoubtedly my translation also suffers from important shortcomings, it is more aligned with the original text and hopefully offers a basis for more befitting renderings in the future.<sup>3</sup>

### **'Abdu'l-Baha's treatise (a provisional translation)**

A synopsis of the sorrowful events of the [Baha'i] martyrs in Yazd and Isfahan

He is God!

In this enlightened age, which is the century of the Almighty God, by the effulgence of the Sun of Reality, the lights of civilization are diffused over all horizons, and human attainments and divine virtues, just as dawn swells in the morning, are so spread in the East and the West that ferocity and bloodshed among mankind are abandoned; nay, rather, in civilized countries they are entirely forgotten. Religious contentions are completely eradicated and the prejudices of the dark ages are abolished. Among diverse groups and tribes no conflicts, discords or hostilities have remained save national conflicts and political ambitions. All peoples and nations, reposing in the cradle of security and safety, are well protected against the cruelty of tyrants.

In Iran, when the Divine Call was raised, the radiant morn appeared and the Sun of Truth arose, many people were delivered from the lowest depths of ignorance, attained the highest human perfections, became the centre of heavenly virtues, spirit incarnate and righteousness embodied – appearing in the world of humanity with spiritual qualities and holy attributes.

However, the adherents of the old religions still held fast to their former teachings and traditions, and day by day became more ignorant until they degenerated into ferocious wolves and rabid dogs, even outdoing the

3. In process of this retranslation, I benefited from several valuable suggestions of Dr Fananapazir and Phillip Tussing. All imperfections in this translation however, are to be ascribed to me alone.

4. Reference to the conflicts faced by the Babi community of Iran during the upheavals of 1848–53.
5. A reference to Aqa Muhammad Taqī Najafi.
6. A reference to Shaykh Muhammad Bāqir, for whom the Lawh-i-Burhān was revealed, a portion of which is cited at the conclusion of this Tablet.
7. The martyrdom of these two brothers, the King of Martyrs and the Beloved of Martyrs, took place on 17 March 1879. For details see: ‘Abdu’l-Hamid Ishrāq Khāvārī, *Nūrāyn Nayyirāyn* (Tehran: Mu’assisih Millī Matbu’āt Amrī, 123BE/1966); ‘Izzatū’llāh Nūr, *Khatirāt Muḥājirī az Isfahān dar Zamān Shāhādat Sultān ash-Shuhadā va Mahbub ash-Shuhadā* (Tehran: Mu’assisih Millī Matbu’āt Amrī, 128BE/1972); Fādil Māzandarānī, *Tarikh Zuhūr al-Ḥaqq*, vol. 5, H-Bahai: Lansing, Michigan, 1999, <http://www-h-net.msu.edu/~bahai/arabic/vol3/tzh5/5tzh.htm>, 242–8; and in English, Hasan M. Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahā’īs at the Time of Bahā’u’llāh: With Some Historical Background* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1972) 33–51.

ravenous man-eating beasts. Thus, they began to oppose those holy souls, each day instigating persecution, every hour causing new oppressions, each moment kindling the fires of destruction, burning the sanctified ones in the flames of hatred and malice, setting their heads upon spears, torturing their children, plundering houses and property, looting wealth and possessions, and banishing women and children from their native land. The honourable were debased, the revered were despised, and the virtuous were taken captive.

Among such outrages are numbered the recent events of Yazd and Isfahan, which caused the hearts to burn and quake, and the people of equity to shed tears of blood and beat their breasts. Although the Baha’is are brave and courageous, and in the field of combat each able to battle a large number of opponents, and when war ensues they manifest such valour as would quickly break the ranks of their foes,<sup>4</sup> and it has been proven that in bravery they have no equal or like, yet, by the divine and firm decree of God, they are commanded to maintain universal peace and entrusted with absolute meekness. When tyrants extend to them the hand of cruelty, attacking them like blood-thirsty wolves, the divine friends must submit like lambs before them, without offering the least resistance, accepting the wounds of daggers and swords as babes accept the honey and milk [from their mother’s breasts], kissing the hand of the killer while receiving a stab to the heart; and, while yielding their lives in the path of God, begging His forgiveness for the oppressors and asking for remission of their sins.

This approach and behaviour, however, has caused those ferocious animals and malicious snakes and scorpions to increase their repression day by day, staining their hands with the blood of their victims, taking the path of tyranny and never showing any mercy. In such wise these recent events of cruelty and violence have added to the manifold events of the past, and indeed eclipsed those afflictions and sufferings of former times.

In summary, this is what occurred. In these days, the *‘ulama* of the Shi’ite sect, that is, the old religion of Iran, saw that the Divine Call was raised and that the peoples of the East and of the West were moved. The effulgence of the Sun of Reality beamed forth so radiantly that all eyes were brightened, the standard of God’s Cause was hoisted, and the people flocked in multitudes under the tent of God’s Words. Shi’ites were converted to the Baha’i Faith, and even the Jews were overtaken with such enthusiasm and fervour that, ere long, none may be found in Iran who has not accepted this divine guidance. So with the Zoroastrians – Iran’s ancient religion – who had rejected all the prophets from Abraham to Moses as well as Christ and the Messenger of God [Muhammad], but now a majority of whom have come to accept, believe and confess to all holy scriptures and books of the prophets of God, and they are also recognized as Baha’is in all sincerity and faithfulness.

The witnessing of all these things caused the wicked *‘ulama* to be so filled with hatred and jealousy that patience became exhausted, and at every moment they kindled a new fire of animosity, instigating and compelling by all possible means the ignorant rabble and vicious idlers to shed the blood of these wronged ones. One of the wicked *‘ulama* (Najafi<sup>5</sup>), living at present in Isfahan, whose father<sup>6</sup> stained his hands with the blood of Sultan ush-Shuhada and Mahbub ush-Shuhada<sup>7</sup> and was denounced by Bahā’u’llāh as the ‘Wolf’, was himself denounced as the ‘Son of the Wolf’. Everyone wondered

concerning the significance of this title [the 'Son of the Wolf'] and what harm would come from him, until recently the wisdom of these names was revealed, as the following will testify.

The beginning of this turmoil, caused by the wicked 'ulama and their ignorant followers in Iran, took place in the city of Rasht in the month of March (1903), corresponding to the month of Muharram (1321 [AH]).<sup>8</sup> At first the ignorant 'ulama enticed the common people, vagabonds and idlers to loot and rob the friends [Baha'is], and incited them to persecution and oppression, and these, filled with greed, assaulted like wolves and attacked the lambs of God.

One of their deeds was the disinterment of the body of a believer who had recently died, after which they cut it to pieces before setting it alight. During his life this man had shown great sincerity and kindness to all the people, who, including the enemies and even the ignorant 'ulama, testified to his moral character, rectitude, trustworthiness and great love. They said, 'This is a just, honourable and faithful man, but he is a Baha'i.' His only sin was that 'he was a Baha'i!' That is, from earthly he became heavenly, from material he became spiritual, from worldly he became holy.

Praise unto God! How astonishing! They peruse the Qur'an, perceiving the counsels and exhortations of God, still they are fierce and bloodthirsty, and consider oppression to be one of the requirements of the sacred Shari'at [Islamic law], thus defaming and denigrating Islam in the sight of all nations. The just King of Iran endeavoured to restrain these thugs and vagabonds from their oppression, but found himself unable to do so. They plundered and pillaged the property of the Baha'is, and bitterly tortured the friends [of God]. This caused the 'ulama to incite the rabble to commit the same acts in other cities of Iran.

One of them is the 'Son of the Wolf' [Aqa Najafi] in Isfahan. Even though through various means he has amassed a vast fortune, stealing it all from the people, is immersed in all forms of carnal desires, and everyone testifies to his ill intentions, nevertheless the ignorant population follows his lead. For the purpose of plundering the friends' possessions, they obey his command, extending their hands to pillage and using brute force. When this man witnessed the ascendancy of God's Cause and the rise of the Divine Words, his breast was filled with the fire of hatred and jealousy. He raised the standard of mischief and caused enmity. He began by confusing the minds of the people by forging a telegram in the name of the prime minister of Iran and ordering his trusted confederates, under the cover of night, to post four hundred copies upon the walls of the city. The essence of this telegram was: 'Shaykh Taqi [Aqa Najafi], the Hujjat ul-Islam, must protect the religion (of Islam).' This telegram was a pure fabrication and lie. Nevertheless when morning came, the rabble and the vagabonds seeing and hearing of it became excited and proceeded to the house of Shaykh Taqi, who immediately issued a *fatwa*<sup>9</sup> for the killing of innocent Baha'is.

It is evident that in the midst of such tumult and under such circumstances when the guide of an ignorant populace issues such a *fatwa* what commotion and mischief results. The ravenous mob invaded the shops and houses of the believers and began to destroy and pillage. But the divine friends, knowing it to be unlawful to defend themselves without the permission and consent of the government, were obliged to appeal to the

8. 1 Muharram 1321 AH corresponded to 30 March 1903.

9. A religious ruling issued by a *mujtahid* (doctor of religious law) the execution of which is considered binding upon Muslims.

10. Qur'an 26:50.

governor of the city. Finding him, for some reason and purpose, negligent in the matter, they thought it best to gather the dispersed [Baha'is] in one place in order that some course of action might be determined upon. They assembled in the Russian Consulate, this being the only door open to them. There they passed the whole night in prayer, raising the cry, 'Yā Bahā'u'l-Abhā!' [O Thou Glory of the Most Glorious!] and at times they referred their difficulties to the governor, hoping thereby the mob might be quieted and the meek defended.

The governor inquired of Shaykh Taqi the cause of the riot and asked concerning the telegram, what it was and whence it came. In answer he declared complete ignorance of the telegraph matter. He then went to the Russian Consulate and erecting a pulpit, began to outwardly exhort and adjure the mob, which had assembled to injure and murder the believers, to disperse. The governor then addressed a letter to the friends of God saying, 'Be tranquil and at ease. The tumult has ceased and people have dispersed. Now return to your homes and attend to your work, and pray meanwhile for His Imperial Majesty, the King of Iran, for hereafter no one will molest you.' The governor's letter was registered in the consulate, after which the Baha'is came out of their retreat to go to their own homes.

However, in private, Shaykh Taqi had advised his trusted men that, when the believers emerged from the consulate proceeding to their own homes, they should incite the mob to attack and slay them. Therefore, when the friends of God came out of the consulate to go home, on the streets, the malicious multitude attacked them like bloodthirsty wolves, seizing and beating whomever they could. With utmost viciousness they tortured and wounded 70 people in all, killing some outright.

The honoured Sayyid Abu'l-Qasim Marnuni was one of the martyrs. This righteous Sayyid was about 80 years of age, and during his life was renowned in that realm for his piety, faith, knowledge and virtue. He was evident light and spirit incarnated. Even enemies bore witness to his chastity and sanctity, testifying to his generosity, charity and benevolence. He was in truth a help to the poor, and a refuge and support for the afflicted; his word was influential, honoured and accepted by all the people. In his last days, once he became known as a Baha'i, then the people of enmity, jealousy and denial attacked him. They themselves testify, 'When we assaulted him, he cried out: "We are from God and unto Him we return. Yā Bahā'u'l-Abhā!"' And in the very moment of his expiration he spoke this verse with great joy and exultation: 'You have done us no harm, we shall but return to our Lord!'<sup>10</sup>

While his tormentors, like wild beasts, attacked him with rocks, clubs, axes and cleavers, he, single and alone, under the weapons of his evil-doing persecutors who were wounding and cursing him, suffered it all in fortitude with grandeur and majesty. He faced the Kingdom of Lights as though he felt not a blow nor received a wound, but rather perceived the open gates of the Supreme Concourse, and yielded his life to his Beloved with utmost joy, happiness and exhilaration. O that I had been with him to partake of his joy and to attain his great happiness!

Finally the exalted prince governor, seeing the intensity of the hostility of those ferocious wolves, had no alternative but to arrest and seize the divine friends and as such many were protected by being confined in prison.

Behold how great was the outbreak and tumult that the prison-house became a place of refuge and the dungeon a court of safety. This much is sufficient and [the graveness of the matter] needs no further exposition.

When the intensity of the violence and tumult had reached its zenith in Isfahan, a certain Sayyid Ibrāhīm, son of Yazd's Imām Jum'ih, was returning from the sacred cities of Karbala and Najaf. In the exalted 'Atabāt'<sup>11</sup> he had received from Sayyid Kazim Yazdi, the chief of the [Shi'ite] religion, a *fatwā* and authority to shed the blood of the innocent. When he arrived at Isfahan, and perceived the flames of the fire of tyranny and persecution, read the forged and false telegram and saw the excitement of the people, he determined to hasten forthwith to Yazd. He received complete instructions from Shaykh Taqi to carry out, upon his arrival, whatever would cause destruction to the foundation of the friends of God. With these wicked intentions he reached the city of Yazd.

This decadent man, however, perceived that the governor would not tolerate such a violation, deeming it to be a cause of riot and revolt which would result in the destruction of Iran and the defaming of Iran's name. Therefore he carefully devised a stratagem and a ruse. Having arrived by chance upon the anniversary of the birth of the Messenger of God [Muhammad] – peace be upon Him – the people of the city came to visit him. In that gathering he related incidents concerning the rampages in Isfahan, describing in detail the courage and bravery of the people who had stood for the annihilation of the Baha'is, looting their wealth and property, and pillaging their possessions and belongings. At the same time, through pure lies and calumny, he insinuated that – I take refuge with God! – the just government would connive in such action and consent to these violations and transgressions. In reality, however, His Imperial Majesty and the illustrious prime minister had not a thought save that of justice and protection for their subjects. In short, this heartless man commended the people of Isfahan so greatly that the audience was inspired by religious zeal and fanatical enthusiasm to eradicate the Baha'is. In such ways he encouraged and provoked many, intimidated others who refused to listen, and instigated the rabble and hoodlums to rob and plunder [the Baha'is].

As a result, on the third day after the arrival of that worthless [man], either through persuasion or force, a mob of ruffians and vagabonds was assembled. A great multitude, armed with swords and daggers, invaded the house of the honoured [Haji] Mirza Muhammad Sīnī-sāz [tinsmith], with sticks and clubs beat and injured his wife and suckling babes, broke their household utensils and fixtures, plundered the furniture and demolished their home. With great force, they pulled the gentle Haji from his house, and dragged him in the streets until they arrived at a butcher's shop, where a bully attacked him, like a wild beast, and with a meat cleaver, assaulted his blessed head, cutting it deeply, and causing several more injuries to his chest and side.

It was then that a *farrāsh* [footman] of the governor arrived and rescued the poor victim from the hands of his tormentors. Because his wounds were severe and the blows of Shimr and Yazid<sup>12</sup> had been inflicted on him, that wronged man was unable to walk, and thus the *farrāsh* was obliged to drag him to the court of the governor, where he lay motionless.

During this time, his 11-year-old son was at school. His schoolmates, being urged by their teacher, attacked this innocent lad. The wretched, tormented

11. lit. 'thresholds'; a designation for Karbala and Najaf.
12. Yazid, son of the Caliph Mu'awiyah, was the man who ordered the killing of the Imam Husayn in Karbala. Shimr ibn Dhu'l-Jawshan was the man who carried out the order.

child ran to his teacher for protection and he, having a stone in place of a heart, commanded him to curse, insult and deny his religion. However, this wonderful child, with confidence and faith, refused to do so, saying: 'I am only a schoolboy, unfamiliar with the reality of affairs. How can I stain my lips with a curse?'

Then that pitiless instructor joined the other schoolboys, inflaming the fire of malice and enmity, and committing such a deed of cruelty which has caused hearts to burn and tears to pour forth from the eyes of friends and strangers. That inhuman teacher with his pupils, tortured that dear boy, beating him with sticks, stabbing him with penknives, picking him with needles and awls in such manner that pen cannot portray, nor tongue utter, nor ear hear, nor heart imagine.

In short, that light of the martyrs' eye and the first-fruit of the Abha Paradise, at the dawn of youth, manifested such constancy and steadfastness at the time of martyrdom and hastening to the divine altar of sacrifice, that brave men were stupefied. The teacher himself and the pupils would relate, 'When we were stabbing him he only cried out, "Yā Bahā'u'l-Abhā!" and "Yā Maḥbūbū'l-A'lā!" [O Beloved of the Most Exalted!]. Never wavering an instant, but with greatest joy and delight he yielded up life to the Life-Giver! In this manner he attained the presence of the Supreme Friend in advance of his noble father.

If there be but a particle of justice, it will testify that this constancy and firmness, this joy and exhilaration, manifested on the plain of martyrdom, this cry of 'Yā Bahā'u'l-Abhā!' at the zenith of anguish and pain, is beyond human endurance, especially when exhibited in a boy of such tender years. Sanctified is He Who confirmed his heart in God's love when he hastened to the field of martyrdom! Sanctified is He Who caused him to utter 'Yā Bahā'u'l-Abhā!' under the attack of the enemies. Sanctified is He Who caused his soul to rejoice when ascending to the Supreme Friend! Verily this is but one of the signs of the Mighty Lord!

The blood of that superb child was still flowing when the malicious crowd killed his illustrious maternal uncle with utmost cruelty and torture, chopping his body until it was a mass of pieces. And this prince of faithfulness, under the keen sword of the foes, was heard saying, 'I am content with the fate decreed by God, sacrificing myself for the sake of His Mighty Cause.' The evildoers then tied with ropes the sacred remains of the benevolent father, the pure-hearted son and the sanctified uncle, and disgracefully hauled them through the streets, clubbing and stoning their mutilated corpses, meanwhile clapping and cheering, until they reached the town square, where they threw down the bodies.

The mother of that fine child, seeing her martyred son, her husband slain by the severest cuts, and her brother covered with blood and dust, began to weep and bitterly cry over the wrongs they had suffered, and especially that of the child. One can imagine what must have been the condition of that wretched of the worlds, while being held captive by the people of enmity, upon finding those sanctified bodies thus hacked to pieces before her.

Such viciousness, ferocity, bloodthirstiness, tyranny and injustice have not been heard of in ancient or medieval times – even among the most brutal criminals or the wilds of Africa. Possibly barbarous tribes, in moments of revenge for massacres and severe losses in battle, might have produced

deeds of similar brutality. That would be the mere seeking of vengeance and attempting retribution. But such tyranny and gross injustice has never been witnessed from the hand of foes or the attack of enemies, as was poured out upon these angelic, pure-minded, trustworthy, righteous and pure-hearted souls – people that were kind to all, well-wishers of the world of humanity, renowned for their goodly characters, and even praised by their oppressors and well known as innocent and guiltless. If we refer to all the histories of the world, we will see that such oppression and tyranny on the part of the enemies of God toward the lovers of the Merciful One is unparalleled and unequalled, especially when we consider that not one of these martyrs ever stretched his hand in defence, nor uttered an uncivil word at the time of martyrdom. Nay, rather, with utmost concentration on the Supreme Concourse, with humility, submissiveness, tenderness and exaltation of spirit, they were praying until they surrendered their souls into the Hand of the Life-Giver.

Sanctified be God! The government of His Imperial Majesty, the Shah of Iran – may God protect his dominion – has strictly forbidden hunters from killing birds during the season of breeding, or to discharge a gun even into the air, it being considered cruel and unlawful that, during the hatching period, the young ones should be killed or even startled or troubled by the sound of a gun. But the Baha'is, notwithstanding their innocence and purity, with righteousness and deeds approved at the Divine Threshold, were the victims of their own countrymen, and made to suffer such calamity, and were the object of such enmity. Consider the equity and tenderness of His Crowned Majesty [the Shah], and how stony-hearted are the people of the old religion.

In short, on that day, in the course of this mighty cataclysm and the outbreak of this inferno of malice, gates and houses were burned, dwellings invaded, and they destroyed, beat, killed and plundered all. The governor tried as far as possible to protect [the Baha'is], but he was unable to do so and his efforts remained futile. However, the aforementioned Sayid Ibrahim, who was the Imam Jum'ih and the chief of the adversaries [of the Baha'is], together with a number of the mischief-makers, went to the governor's house. There they outwardly denied being the instigators of the revolt and troubles, whereas in fact they secretly provoked the rabble, vagabonds and ruffians, and incited them with the prospect of booty, spoils and plunder.

The next day, provoked by the iniquitous clerics, the merciless mob carried out a greater assault, robbing and spoiling more than ever. With the severest tortures, they martyred six holy personages, cutting their bodies to pieces and throwing them into the town square, after which they rode horses over the mutilated corpses of the martyrs and crushed them under the hooves of their steeds, mixing their blood and flesh with the dust.

Praise be unto God! For one thousand years, the Iranians, especially the Shi'ites, have been lamenting and loudly weeping over the tragedy of the Prince of the Martyrs [Imam Husayn] slain upon the plain of Karbala – a lamentation that reaches the highest pavilion of heaven – saying, 'The army of the malicious Yazid mercilessly ran their horses over the body of that Martyred One, crushing Him under the hooves of their steeds!'

It is because of this that Jesus said, 'Your fathers killed the Prophets of God, but you are building their tombs, visiting them, prostrating before them, and kissing them.'<sup>13</sup> And now this passage exactly reflects the present condition of the Iranians. With utmost cruelty and wickedness, certain people

13. Matthew 23:29–33 states, 'Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say: If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up, then, the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?' [King James Version]

14. This Tablet was printed based on the original text. From this point until the verse 'the rejectors shall be in great loss' is based on a text in 'Abdu'l-Baha's handwriting. [The editor of *Makātib*]

martyred Imam Husayn, and now the children of those murderers are mourning and lamenting, and building and adorning the tombs of the martyrs. How heedless and negligent are the people!

In summary, the idlers and vagabonds of Yazd, daily advancing in tyranny and mayhem, are becoming bolder and more impudent. A brief report has reached us that by Friday the number of martyrs had exceeded one hundred. This special reporter, in a brief letter, written in great sorrow and sadness, states:

Alas! Alas! And again alas! Our hearts are burning! Our breasts are filled with sorrow and grief! The cry of lamentation is raised high and the shriek of mourning heard in all directions. The hand trembles in writing and the heart brims with utmost pain. The eye is tearful and the ears unable to hear the account of that persistent tyranny. Every day there is a greater calamity, and every moment brings a manifest outcry.

In the city of Yazd there are nearly five thousand Baha'i households – none have a moment of rest or peace. They have no supper at night and no meal during the day. By the depth of their sorrow and grief, their food has become pieces of their liver, and for water they drink their tears, expecting at each moment the attack of the pillaging and murdering enemies, to persecute and take captive the women and children. The majority are hungry, thirsty and naked. The women especially are suffering so keenly on account of the slaughter of their fathers and husbands and the martyrdom of their brothers, and in such despair that they know not how to care for their suckling babes.<sup>14</sup>

In brief, the steadfastness of these souls under the swords of persecution, their resignation and acquiescence while facing thousands of enemies, the joy and exhilaration of these luminous realities at the Divine altar, the constancy of the confirmed women, the strength and faith of the holy maid-servants, their patience in coping with massacre, beating, plunder and the martyrdom of children, and the steadfastness of the young children themselves, are all the greatest proofs of the sincerity and faithfulness of the friends. Especially when in the time of this oppression and tyranny, they raised not a hand in defence of themselves, but rather considered self-sacrifice a great blessing and self-redemption as the greatest bounty of the world of humanity. They quaffed the overflowing cup of martyrdom as exhilarating wine. They sought not to withhold their lives from the sword, nor their throats from the dagger. They beheld destruction of their homes and dwellings, and yielded wealth and possessions to the plunderers and pillagers. Women and children were made helpless and homeless, and with utmost joy and gladness offered up their lives at the feet of the Divine Beloved, without uttering a single word at which their murderers could take offence. Rather, they entreated intercession for them, asking God's forgiveness and blessing upon their persecutors.

Had they raised their hands in defence, a single soul could have withstood a large multitude, as was written by one of the friends from Yazd, his own words being as follows:

God has tied the hands of all, giving no permission for defence; otherwise no one would be able to be impudent [towards us]. But, knowing that we never

transgress the revealed ordinances by raising the hands of resistance, the enemies are able to massacre, rob and shed pure blood with great audacity. Had they thought we would defend ourselves, the leaders and their followers would not have dared to breathe or utter a word against us. We yearn, however, for martyrdom in the Path of God, and ask it with all our hearts and souls. Only do we implore a refuge for our families, wives and children. Should we not do so, we fear we would be accused of neglect; otherwise, life itself has no merit and is not worthy to be offered as ransom in the Path of God. If it be accepted, it is our greatest honour and glory.

If such martyrdom, submission to pillage and plunder, loss of home and property, captivity of women and children, giving up of life with utmost joy, or such a cry in the throes of martyrdom as 'Yā Bahā'u'l-Abhā!' or the shout of 'Yā Rabbiya'l-A'lā!' [O My Lord, the most Exalted!] or the roar of 'You have done us no harm, we shall but return to our Lord!'<sup>15</sup> or the melody of 'Is anyone truly capable of beholding, to come and behold me?'; if all these things do not prove steadfastness and constancy, and demonstrate the greatest evidence of faithfulness, spirituality and love in these holy souls, then from what shall we produce the evidence of steadfastness and firmness? Thus, 'Seek ye death, if ye are sincere!'<sup>16</sup> Should they write the description of what befell them with the ink of their blood, of a certainty the pages of the leaves of the world would not be sufficient. If these souls be condemned, then from what shall we prove the steadfastness of the Prophets, the firmness of the chosen ones, and the constancy of the believers during past centuries? For the greatest virtue, for which the Prophet [Muhammad] was commended, was only his ability to 'stand steadfast as thou art commanded'.<sup>17</sup>

In short, the last information from Yazd, conveyed by the illustrious Sayyid Mahdi Afnan, the offshoot of the Divine Lote Tree, is as follows:

The number of the martyrs has reached one hundred and seventy pure souls, which we know of. Of those martyred that we have not counted, God knows. Several thousand houses, shops and stores have been robbed and plundered, and many homes have been burned. Women and children have been left helpless and neglected; left naked, hungry and homeless, without a kind protector, or a friend or an assistant or a companion. They go from door to door seeking shelter, all the while thanking God, day and night, for their mighty calamities, saying: 'Praise be unto God that we have received such affliction and hardship in the Path of God! We have been the targets for a thousand shafts of oppression in the Path of His Love! This was the utmost desire of our hearts and souls; this was our comfort and the repose of our being.'

It was known that these events would take place, and it was heard from the lips of 'Abdu'l-Baha several times that in a large assembly of the believers last year He stated unequivocally, 'Yazd is in great peril. Pray for it, pray for it.' By the will of God the fulfilment of the following passages, written by the pen of 'Abdu'l-Baha, will also appear:

Ere long, by the Command of God, the veils will be raised from the Face of His Cause, and its fulgence will be reflected upon the horizons of the world.

- 15. Qur'an 26:50.
- 16. Qur'an 2:94.
- 17. Qur'an 42:15.

18. Qur'an 5:59.
19. Qur'an 36:30.
20. Translation from *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 73.

The teachings of the religion will be promoted, the standards of your Glorious Lord will wave from the highest edifices; the base of superstitions will be shaken; the veils of darkness will be rent; the morn of [clear] evidences will appear; the Kingdoms of heaven and earth will shine with the lights of revelation. Then ye shall see the banners of the opposing nations hauled down, the faces of the enemies darkened, the decrees of the wicked leaders abrogated, and the believers shall be in great joy while the rejecters shall be in great loss.

At any rate, on the morning of that Friday, the mob suddenly assembled from all quarters, crying while attacking, 'Alas for our holy law! Alas for our faith! Alas for our religion!' Previous to this they had killed five or six persons every day, but on that day the guarding soldiers, instigated by the 'ulama, allied themselves with the ignorant rabble, and began to pillage. The vagabonds martyred a number of the believers, beat the women with clubs, hands and whips, and looted a large number of shops, stores and homes [of the Baha'is]. Many children became fatherless. Many mothers and fathers became childless. Many sisters became brotherless. How many homes were completely destroyed! How many families were scattered and made helpless and homeless! How great the number of the affluent that became penniless! How vast the number of those reared in beds of comfort were now compelled to sleep upon the cold, black earth! How numerous were the wounded and the ill, with none to care for them or dress their injuries!

At the time of their execution one would cry out, 'Is anyone truly capable of beholding, to come and behold me?' Another, 'Do you find fault with us for aught except that we believe in God and in His holy verses?'<sup>18</sup> And another, 'O the misery of men! No Apostle comes unto them but they laugh him to scorn!'<sup>19</sup> And yet another would exclaim, 'I witness that there is no God but God!' and 'Yā Bahā'u'l-Abhā!' And still another would shout, 'We have kept both Bahā and the khūn-bahā [blood-money]!'<sup>20</sup> One was loudly chanting the poem of Varqā, called *Servitude*, while another, with joy and delight, was bidding farewell to his murderer, saying, 'May God preserve you!' upon the utterance of which he was struck so violently in the mouth that from the blow he yielded up his life. And yet another martyr, at the time of his assault by the enemies, stated, 'No king has ever been accorded such majestic pomp and glory!' A handsome youth, at the moment of death, cried out joyously, 'Tonight is the night of my nuptials, and I am to obtain the Beloved of my heart and the Desire of my soul!'

Praise be unto God! What ignorance is this that the murderers take the exact last utterances of martyrs, weave them into verses to be chanted by children in the streets and bazaar, describing the place where this one was martyred, what his condition was, and what he said, and how such a young man chanted such a verse, and how he was torn into pieces.

There were two gentlewomen who, while mourning in their home for their martyred kin, were attacked by a cruel mob. First they beat and tortured the two wronged women as much as they could, and then dragged them outside the home, after which they were stabbed and chopped into many pieces with swords and daggers. When the ferocity of the people reached this level, the governor, finding himself powerless to stand against the rioters, fled from the city and retired to the citadel for self-preservation.

Praise be unto God! They seized a baker and with meat axes hacked him into pieces. Throughout the time of his torture he sang in a melodious and resonant tone and with great joy announced, 'For ten years I have been longing for this! I beseech God to forgive and to pour out upon you His bounties, that you may attain your hearts' desire, for through you I have attained the desire of my heart and soul!'

The number of those martyred, up to that day, is reported to have been more than 150 persons within the city of Yazd. In the surrounding villages, numerous personages were martyred in each hamlet. The details have not reached us, except a short report of a telegram received in Tehran to the effect that the governor, being pressed by the rioters and compelled by the vagabonds of the city, was forced to blow one of the friends from the mouth of a cannon, and to behead another in the town square. Briefly, the boorish mob put a woman in a sack, over which they poured kerosene, and burned her alive. They tightly tied and nailed another believer to a tree, poured kerosene over him and burned the tree and the man together.

In Ardakān, a village near Yazd, lived the honoured Sadr, the esteemed Mu'tamid ush-Sharī'ah, the adored Niẓām ush-Sharī'ah, and the beloved Ḍiyā' ush-Sharī'ah, with all their families, kinsmen and relatives. They were of the venerable 'ulama and were sayyids, and all had received titles from His Imperial Crown. Yet the 'ulama issued a *fatwā* demanding the blood of these honourable souls to be spilled. The ignorant mob, incited by the 'ulama, attacked those gentle beings with guns, arms and weapons of war. Though these believers had sufficient numbers to stand against the crowd, could have resisted easily and were provided with ample means of defence, yet, in accordance with the command, 'It is better to be killed than kill,'<sup>21</sup> they yielded their lives to the blood-thirsty wolves who, stretching out their claws of tyranny, martyred 17 persons with the utmost cruelty. Among the victims there was a young child who fell into a well, and he has survived and remains alive. None other was left standing. The orchard and mansion where they resided were utterly destroyed. The trees were uprooted. All that could be pillaged was taken away, including a considerable amount of wealth.

The number of martyrs in Ardakan has reached 19 by now and in the village of Taft the number was 28. In other villages, each suffered one or two martyrs. In Manshād there were ten. In Dih-Bālā they threw a believer, alive, into a baker's oven and roasted him to death. To date, six women have been martyred. While these many have been martyred, a great many more have been injured and wounded.

Jesus – may the spirits of both worlds be a sacrifice unto Him! – has plainly pointed out the pathway to the Kingdom, showing clearly the shortest and surest road. That straight path is the field of self-sacrifice. Therefore these sanctified souls have but followed that Effulgent Source [Christ], and through this path have they proceeded to the Kingdom of Mysteries. For the sake of such as these He said: 'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.' 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.' 'Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for my sake.'<sup>22</sup> Similarly, in the Most Holy Tablet it is revealed:<sup>23</sup>

21. *God Passes By*, p. 198, a statement attributed to Bahā'u'llāh. For a similar proclamation see *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Centre, 2002) 110.

22. Matthew 5:10, 5:8, 5:11 respectively.

23. The portion of the Lawh-i-Aqdas [the Most Holy Tablet] quoted by 'Abdu'l-Bahā is at considerable variance with the published version in *Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh revealed after the Kitāb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 16–17. In the above rendering, while following 'Abdu'l-Bahā's wording, the present translator has stayed close to the translation in *Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh* to the extent possible.

24. Qur'ān 2:88.

Blessed the slumberer who is awakened by My Breeze. Blessed the lifeless one who is quickened through My breaths. Blessed the eye gazing at My beauty. Blessed the one who heareth My melody. Blessed the distressed one who seeketh refuge beneath My canopy. Blessed the sore athirst who hasteneth to the kawthar of My generosity. Blessed the soul who casteth away his selfish desires for love of Me and taketh his place at the sanctified banquet table which I have sent down from the heaven of divine bounty for My chosen ones. Blessed the ignorant one who seeketh the fountain of My knowledge; and the abased one who layeth fast hold on the cord of My glory. Blessed the heedless one who cleaveth to My remembrance. Blessed the soul that hath been raised through My breath and hath gained admittance into My Kingdom. Blessed the one whom the savours of reunion with Me have caused to draw nigh unto the heaven of My Cause. Blessed the eye that hath seen and the ear that hath heard and the heart that hath recognized the Lord Himself, in His great glory and majesty, invested with grandeur and dominion. Blessed are they that have attained His presence. Blessed the being who hath sought enlightenment from the Day-Star of My Word. Blessed he who hath attired his head with the diadem of My love. Blessed the man who hath heard of My grief and hath arisen to aid Me among My people. Blessed he who is assured of My Word. Blessed is he who hath offered his life in My path. Blessed the one who hath borne hardships for My Name; and whom the things of the world have not kept back from attaining My Court. Blessed is the man who hath gained admittance into My Kingdom, gazed upon My realms of glory and power, quaffed from the sea of My utterance, hath acquainted himself with My Cause, apprehended that which I concealed within the treasury of My Words, and hath shone forth from the horizon of divine knowledge engaged in My praise and glorification. Verily, he is of Me. Upon him rest My mercy, My bounty, My generosity and My loving-kindness.

This is the ransom for the blood of the martyrs! This is the utmost desire of the near ones! This is the eternal life of the spiritual ones! This is the pathway of Jesus! This is the way of the Divine Manifestations, in both the ancient and modern ages!

In a Tablet addressed to the Wolf, the father of Shaykh Taqī, [Baha'u'llah] wrote:

Do thou think We fear thy cruelty? Know thou and be well assured that from the first day whereon the voice of the Most Sublime Pen was raised We offered up Our souls, and Our bodies, and Our sons in the path of God, the Exalted, the Great, and We glory therein amongst all created things and the Concourse on high. Unto this testify the things which have befallen Us in this straight Path. By God! Our hearts were consumed, and Our bodies were crucified, and Our blood was spilt, while Our eyes were fixed on the horizon of the loving-kindness of their Lord, the Witness, the All-Seeing. The more grievous their woes, the greater waxed the love of the people of Bahā. Unto their sincerity hath borne witness what the All-Merciful hath sent down in the Qur'ān. He saith: 'Wish ye, then, for death, if ye are sincere.'<sup>24</sup> Who is to be preferred, he that hath sheltered himself behind curtains, or he that hath offered himself in the path of God? Judge thou fairly, and be not of them that rove distraught in the wilderness of falsehood. So carried away have they been by the living

waters of the love of the Most Merciful, that neither the arms of the world nor the swords of the nations have deterred them from setting their faces towards the ocean of the bounty of their Lord, the Compassionate, the Generous.

By God, the Truth! Troubles have failed to unnerve Me, and the repudiation of the divines hath been powerless to weaken Me. I have spoken, and still speak forth before the face of men: 'The door of grace hath been unlocked and He Who is the Dayspring of Justice is come with perspicuous signs and evident testimonies, from God, the Lord of strength and of might!'<sup>25</sup>

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25. The passage cited by 'Abdu'l-Baha is from Baha'u'llah's *Lawh-i-Burhan*. However, a comparison of the version in *Makatib* 3:145–6 with *Lawh-i-Burhan* in the original text of the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (*Lawh Mubārak khitāb bih Shaykh Muhammad Taqī Mujtahid Isfahānī ma'rūf bih Najafī* (Langenhain: Bahā'ī-Verlag, 138 BE/1981) 57, suggests some discrepancies. For the purpose of this translation, reliance has been placed on Shoghi Effendi's translation of the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1988) 84–6.



# Methodology

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## The Modes and Intentions of Biography

Graham Hassall

### Abstract

*This paper explores a range of modes, intentions and problems of Baha'i biography, in order to offer some initial observations on the ways in which biographical literatures frame understandings of the individual in the context of community. It distinguishes between documentary, hagiological and critical modes of biography as these have emerged in the diverse literature of the world's religious traditions, as well as in the secular literature of the modern period. It suggests that much Baha'i biography has continued the traditions of remembrance and exempla, although more critical works have also begun to appear. The quest to write 'spiritual biographies' that explore a subject's inner life and journey remains difficult, due mostly to limitations on sources, since few subjects give adequate exposure to their inner thoughts. Rather than privilege one tradition above any other, Baha'i biographies have to date drawn on the skills of the craft elaborated across generations, religions and cultures, while beginning to draw also on Baha'i scripture for inspiration productive of new insights into how lived lives can be depicted in literature.*

This paper seeks to explore some of the 'moral implications' for writing biography from a Baha'i perspective.<sup>1</sup> It proceeds by searching out the modes, intentions and problems of Baha'i biography in order to ground its theoretical observations empirically and to point to some issues of method associated with biographical practice. A related purpose is to offer some initial observations on the ways in which biographical literatures frame understandings of the individual in the context of community.

Biography, as distinguished from all other texts, places the life experience of an individual (or individuals) at the centre of investigation. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* describes a biography as a 'narrative which seeks, consciously and artistically, to record the actions and recreate the personality of an individual life ...'<sup>2</sup> Other works such as histories and other types of commentary may well consider the same person or people, but without placing them at the centre of the investigation. There are, for instance, descriptions of Horace Holley in Gayle Morrison's study of Louis Gregory,<sup>3</sup> but the latter is at the centre of focus. Similarly, Robert Stockman's survey of the Baha'i Faith in America describes a great number of individuals, without seeking to write a biography of any one of them.<sup>4</sup> A further distinction can be made between biographies written about oneself (autobiographies) rather than about others. The noblest goal of an autobiography is to examine one's life and to share the results of this examination

### Keywords

Baha'i  
 biography and  
 religion  
 documentary  
 biography  
 hagiography  
 exemplum and  
 anti-exemplum  
 critical biography

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Katayoun Hassall, Will C. van den Hoonaard, Jack McLean, and several anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. W. P. Collins's *Bibliography of English-Language Works on the Bābī and Bahā'ī Faiths: 1844–1985* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1990, 505) has just over two hundred references to 'biography' as a subject and advises the reader to look also under 'history'. This paper, even though examining a comparatively small and recently commenced tradition,

can only refer in brief to the range of titles available.

2. Quoted in H. H. E. Loofs, 'Biographies in Stone: The Significance of Changing Perceptions of the Buddha Image in Mainland Southeast Asia for the Understanding of the Individual's Place in Some Buddhist Societies', in *Self and Biography: Essays on the Individual and Society in Asia* (ed. Wang Gungwu, Sydney: Sydney University Press for the Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1976), 9.
3. G. Morrison, *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancement of Racial Unity in America* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982).
4. R. H. Stockman, *The Bahá'í Faith in America Vol. II: Early Expansion, 1900–1912* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995).
5. D. Hofman, *George Townshend* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1983).
6. J. R. Averill and E. P. Nunley, *Voyages of the Heart: Living an Emotionally Creative Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 12.
7. Godzich continues: 'The mechanism of *exemplum* is simple: a singular happenstance is related so that it can serve as an instance of a universal principle, which can now be imposed as a moral imperative on the recipient of the story. The universal principle may have been explicitly stated in revelation, but, more often than not, it is enough that it be derived from the

with others. It requires the capacity to observe oneself at a distance. Autobiographies may also be written for other purposes, whether for the instruction of others or simply to record the times one has lived through and the events one has witnessed or participated in.

Not all biographies intend to explore their subject in similar depth. Those that are essentially chronological and descriptive intend to *document* a life 'for the record'. They seek, that is, to preserve or to record information of interest about a person, and they seek remembrance (*tadhkira*) of a subject without exploring the relationship between his or her values and actions, and without placing these actions in some specific historical or sociocultural context. In the case of religious biographies, they offer an assurance that a subject possessed the qualities of the spiritual and the virtues of the holy, but do not necessarily bring the reader any closer to an understanding of the struggles and achievements of their actual existence.

A more complex biographical exercise presents relevant events in some actual context, and examines the progression of the biographical subject through the conditions of their life. It takes the step of seeking the significance of the subject's existence, of extracting the essential from the myriad events and happenings in their life. For example, biographies of George Townshend<sup>5</sup> and Louis Gregory seek to position their subjects in the context of their times.

### Biographic traditions

Traditions of biography and autobiography have evolved in each of the world religions. Devoted at first to depicting the life of the prophet and the lives of the first disciples, they have expanded to include accounts of martyrs, saints and holy men and women. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines this literature as 'Hagiology' – 'literature that treats of the lives and legends of saints'. But this literature in its original form was not as concerned with the details of an individualized life as with the generalized moral story that it could be called on to tell. Such idealized biographies of saints that were the focus of medieval hagiographies, explain Averill and Nunley:

... were little concerned with the idiosyncrasies of individual lives. Their purpose was to further Christian ideals, and medieval biographers felt free to borrow anecdotes from one saint's life to embellish the life of another. To the extent that differences among people were accorded significance, such differences were based on pre-established regional, class, and gender expectations. A person was born into a certain social station (a nobleman, say, or a serf), and that station determined the meaning of his or her life.<sup>6</sup>

The 'exemplary' purpose of such texts has recently been elaborated by studies of the 'broad injunctions' found in Christian texts, in contrast to the 'specific regulations' found in Judaism:

Inevitably, there arose a need to identify models of proper, and improper, behaviour to compensate for the excessive laconism of the New Testament on this topic. Lives of saints were written and accounts of the lives of famous pagans were scrutinized to extract from them the models that would guarantee the moral uplifting of righteous Christians. We know these models under the name of *exempla*, narratives of others' lives, or of events in others' lives, admitting of a moral lesson.<sup>7</sup>

The Buddhist tradition offers a slightly different approach to biography, which yields a somewhat similar result. According to Gungwu, the practice of biography was inhibited by the attempt to limit the 'aggrandizement of the self' through placing little emphasis on 'any individual self' at any particular point or place in time: 'Self was knowable but specific selves were not worth knowing except where they might show a capacity to merge with the universal, with the infinite and the eternal. There was, therefore, no meaningful biography except where it might demonstrate how a few extraordinary men conquered their selves.'<sup>8</sup>

China's Confucian tradition elaborated *Shih Chi*, biographies exemplifying a 'Confucian moralism whose ultimate aim was to guide the conduct of statecraft'.<sup>9</sup> In Japan such literary figures as Mori Ógai developed a 'typology of virtue' to describe a vast corpus of biographical literature.<sup>10</sup> A similar hagiographic intention also informs Islamic biography. Biographies of the Prophet Muhammad were given the name *sira*, and the tradition of *rijāl* in Shi'a Islam focused on the study of the lives of the transmitters of the traditions of Islam.<sup>11</sup> Eventually clergy and caliphs, saints and missionaries, were equally subject to written remembrance. In some parts of the Islamic world these are known as *tarjama*, an Arabic term referring to both biography and autobiography.<sup>12</sup> *Tarjama* marshalled the particulars of the lives of learned men into settled categories:

The components include a genealogy, an account of formal education and Qur'anic memorization, a list of teachers (often including close relatives, which indicates family support for religious learning), the books and subjects studied, and selections from the subject's poetry, aphorisms, or other contributions to learning. Dates are provided whenever possible, since the ability to date events distinguishes the traditionally educated from the unlearned.<sup>13</sup>

As explained by Renard, the significance of the depiction of religious heroes in literature lies in that they 'live and move in a world ordered according to a divine plan', and that they exist 'only to reflect and point out God's signs and presence in creation':

When they conquer they do so by God's leave and power; and even when they lose in time, as rejected prophets or martyrs for justice, they win in eternity. Religious heroes function as custodians of hope against terrible odds, testifying to the virtual certainty of ultimate victory. Their life stories bear witness to the reality of a transcendent dimension in human experience. Most of all, prophets and Friends of God represent the best of religious and cultural ideals in accessible form, perhaps too far away to attain fully but not so far as to discourage an attempt.<sup>14</sup>

Religious biography, of course, exists within a larger practice of biography, which in the modern period has become dominated by studies from popular culture – cinema, literature, music and war. In the twentieth century biographical endeavour came to include accounts of previously silenced voices – of 'common' people, of women and of the oppressed and marginalized, who are now 'writing back' to their oppressors. In finding these voices, the practice

*exemplum* in such a way that it is consistent with the rest of revelation. There occurred thus a subtle shift in authority from revelation itself, though it remains unchallenged, to experience, the past experience of the exemplar. Moreover, since the signifying economy of the *exemplum* follows the rule of logical abduction, in which a law is derived from a singular instance to then be generalized to all instances, past experience, as the law that is derived from it is given the status of universal or general law (the distinction between universal and general is not material in this case).<sup>15</sup>

W. Godzich, 'Figuring out what matters; or, the microphysics of history', in *Making Sense in Life and Literature* (ed. H. U. Gumbrecht, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), vii–xvi.

8. Wang Gungwu, 'Introduction', in Wang (ed.), *Self and Biography*, 2.
9. 'Indeed, the *shiden* project in its entirety may be interpreted as a biographical exploration of the following exemplary traits: self-sacrifice (*kenshin*); martial spirit (*yuahī no awiāhin*); forbearance, magnanimity, and generosity (*kekku no michi*); learning (*gakumon*) self-reliance and inner strength (*Zuchi ni tanomu tokoro*); and indifference to material or utilitarian standards (*muyō*).'<sup>16</sup> M. Marcus, *Paragons of the Ordinary: The Biographical Literature*

of Mori Ógai (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 1993), 10.

10. *ibid* 178.
11. A. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844–1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 35.
12. D. F. Eickelman, 'Traditional Islamic Learning and Ideas of the Person in the Twentieth Century', in *Middle Eastern Lives: The Practice of Biography and Self-Narrative* (ed. M. S. Kramer, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991) 35–9.
13. *ibid* 39. An exemplary study of the relationship between religious training and power is found in R. Mottahedeh, *Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985).
14. J. Renard, *Seven Doors to Islam: Spirituality and the Religious Life of Muslims* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 77.
15. Increasingly, for instance, critical studies are taking into account psychological dimensions, as part of an exploration of the inner life.
16. R. B. Schwartz, 'Johnson's Johnson', in James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson: Modern Critical Interpretations* (ed. H. Bloom, New York: Chelsea House, 1986), 74.
17. A number of these appear in *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988). His Tablet of the Holy Mariner (*Bahá'í*

of autobiography (i.e. writing one's own story) has also burgeoned. With the emergence of secularism in western society, the hagiographic function elaborated within the religious traditions has been modified rather than completely rejected. Modern biographies generally avoid questions of 'ultimate purpose',<sup>15</sup> but proceed in the knowledge that 'each human life recapitulates common human experience'.<sup>16</sup>

### Biography in the Bahá'í writings

There seems little need to defend the practice of either history or biography in Bahá'í discourse. The writings of Bahá'u'llah are replete with references to history; those of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi similarly draw on past events and persons when referring to present and even future concerns. Bahá'u'llah immortalized the lives of those devoted to his cause and he referred to the lives of the past prophets and sages as being lives worthy of emulation. Furthermore, Bahá'u'llah described his own experiences in his Tablets.<sup>17</sup> Autobiographical references by him point to the worth of his experience, and allow the reader to compare the records of that experience with those of the lives of previous prophets.<sup>18</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá recalled the lives of kings, rulers and learned in *The Secret of Divine Civilization* and extolled sincere Babi and Bahá'í believers in *Memorials of the Faithful*.<sup>19</sup> He suggested that contemplation of the lives of heroic Bahá'ís in Persia would set an example that others might aspire to follow, once advising that time be taken at the Nineteen Day Feast to:

... recount the high deeds and sacrifices of the lovers of God in Persia, and tell of the martyrs' detachment from the world, and their ecstasy, and of how the believers there stood by one another and gave up everything they had.<sup>20</sup>

Thus we see that the intention of a work such as *Memorials of the Faithful* is to depict 'ordinary' people who, through their faith, do extraordinary things. Such stories inspire because they show the effect of faith on ordinary people.

Shoghi Effendi valued those who had served the Bahá'í cause and referred to them in the most admiring and loving language. He frequently sent epitaphs when notified of the passing of individuals whose efforts to promote the Bahá'í cause he cherished, and he instigated an 'In Memoriam' section from the fourth volume of *The Bahá'í World*, a tradition that continued through the remaining volumes of *The Bahá'í World* (vols. 4–20).<sup>21</sup> The brief biographies that appear in official records, however, were never intended to set limits as to the treatment of individual life stories. To the contrary, Shoghi Effendi on several occasions referred to the need for further elaboration, which the pressure of his more compelling responsibilities as Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith prevented him from exploring.

One feature that begins to emerge from a reading of Bahá'í biographies is the diversity of personalities depicted, and the seeming lack of limitations on culture or social class represented. In what may be an unconscious evolution, the literature has, in the first 150 years of its tradition, produced studies ranging from the twin 'Great Souls' (the Bab and Bahá'u'llah) to their followers of stations high and low alike, and even those who worked as servants and slaves.<sup>22</sup>

The question as to whether accounts of the prophets are biographies or some other form of literature is left aside in this essay – except to say that any attempt to place them ‘outside’ risks dilution of scrutiny. The biographies of the central figures by Balyuzi combine the approaches of meticulous western scholarship and religious attachment to produce studies that are at once faithful to and somehow detached from their subjects.<sup>23</sup> David S. Ruhe acknowledges the hagiographic element in his biography of Bahá'u'lláh, *Robe of Light*, and suggests also that a cold objectivity is neither possible nor desirable:

A natural tendency to reflect a feeling for Bahá'u'lláh well beyond hagiography must be moderated through such objectivity as is possible so soon after the lifetime of the Prophet. Nevertheless, the author's subjective emotional conviction has been sustained by a steadily deepening appreciation of the Great Soul.<sup>24</sup>

Ruhe points to a shift in perspective that is gaining ground in the ‘post-modern period’. Consisting of many ungathered strands, it is a perspective that questions the certainties of much modern thought, particularly the idea that knowledge can be produced ‘objectively’, and in a way that determines some ‘absolute’ or ‘scientific’ truth. This new perspective is prepared to admit its own boundaries, and to seek validity through disclosure of its own limited capacities to find meanings. Such a perspective finds many parallels that are useful in approaching Bahá'i biographical literature.

At this early stage in a new tradition, the lives of the central figures of the Bahá'i Faith have been presented anecdotally more than through comprehensive narrative.<sup>25</sup> The life story of ‘Abdu’l-Baha has been told in such early studies as Myron Phelps's *The Life and Teachings of Abbas Effendi* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Son, 1903), and more recently in Balyuzi's ‘*Abdu’l-Bahá: Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*’ (1971). ‘Abdu’l-Baha's sister, Bahiyyih Khanum, has only recently become the subject of close biographical observation.<sup>26</sup> Shoghi Effendi has been the subject of an initial biography by his widow, Ruhiyyih Rabbani,<sup>27</sup> and of numerous memoirs by early Bahá'is.

Of the more than 50 individuals appointed ‘Hands of the Cause’ by Bahá'u'lláh and Shoghi Effendi, only a handful have to date been the subject of serious (English-language) biographies. Accounts of Rahmatu'llah Muhajir and Zikrullah Khadem have been written by family members, primarily using personal notebooks and diaries, with later revision and supplementation. Iran Muhajir considers the biography of her husband Rahmatu'llah Muhajir an incomplete record of the life of this man who ‘lived only to serve Bahá'u'lláh and who tried to carry out the instructions of the beloved Guardian to the best of his ability’.<sup>28</sup> The life story of Dorothy Baker has been written by her granddaughter, Dorothy Gilstrap,<sup>29</sup> that of Leroy Ioas by his insightful daughter A. Chapman.<sup>30</sup> Other Hands of the Cause who have been the subject of biographical treatment include Martha Root,<sup>31</sup> George Townshend,<sup>32</sup> Louis Gregory,<sup>33</sup> William Sears,<sup>34</sup> and John Esslemont.<sup>35</sup> Barron Harper has produced a volume of essays on all Hands of the Cause in *Lights of Fortitude*.<sup>36</sup> The majority of other Bahá'i biographies focus on the first adherents of the Bahá'i Faith in particular countries, and on pioneering activities.<sup>37</sup>

Prayers, Wilmette: Bahá'i Publishing Trust, 1991, 220–8) can be regarded as ‘metaphorical autobiography’. David Ruhe has included ‘every crumb of autobiographical material’ by Bahá'u'lláh in *Robe of Light: The Persian Years of the Supreme Prophet Bahá'u'lláh 1817–1853* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1994).

18. This, for instance, was one of the devices used by the Bab to prove his own prophetic statement; see Arriarat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 193–8. Whatever difficulties practitioners of Bahá'i history may face, they do not equal those facing anyone who searches, for instance, for the ‘historical Jesus’.
19. ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'i Publishing Trust, 1990); ‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Memorials of the Faithful* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'i Publishing Trust, 1971). This latter book contains short sketches of the lives of 73 followers of Bahá'u'lláh, including two women. ‘Abdu’l-Baha's essays were written in 1915 and published in Persian in Haifa in 1924.
20. ‘Abdu’l-Baha, from a Tablet to an individual Bahá'i – translated from the Persian, *Compilation of Compilations* (Mona Vale: Bahá'i Publications Australia, 1991), vol. 1, 428.
21. *The Bahá'i World* (vols. 1–12, 1925–54, rpt. Wilmette, IL: Bahá'i Publishing Trust, 1980; vols. 13–14, Haifa: The Universal House of Justice, 1970–74; vol. 15–20, Haifa: Bahá'i

World Centre, 1976–98).

22. See for example, A. Q. Afnan, *Black Pearls: Servants in the Households of the Bāb and Bahā'u'llāh* (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1988).

23. H. M. Balyuzi, *Bahā'u'llāh* (London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1938); 'Abdu'l-Bahā: *The Centre of the Covenant of Bahā'u'llāh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1972); *The Bāb: Herald of the Day of Days* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1973); *Bahā'u'llāh: a brief life, followed by an essay on the Manifestation of God entitled The Word Made Flesh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1974); *Bahā'u'llāh, The King of Glory* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980).

24. Ruhe, *Robe of Light: The Persian Years of the Supreme Prophet Bahā'u'llāh 1817–1853* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1994), 180.

25. Some of these are listed in G. Faizi, *Stories about Baha'i Funds* (New Delhi: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1993).

26. The life of Bahiyyih Khanum is currently remembered in numerous histories and in the compilation of letters to and from her, *Bahiyyih Khanum, The Greatest Holy Leaf: A Compilation from the Baha'i Sacred Texts and Writings of the Guardian of the Faith and Bahiyyih Khanum's Own Letters* (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre 1982). J. A. Khan, *Prophet's Daughter: The Life and Legacy of Bahiyyih Khanum: Outstanding Heroine of the Baha'i Faith* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i

### Biography as *exemplum*

The traditions of hagiography in both Islamic and Christian literature have undoubtedly and quite understandably influenced much of early Baha'i biographical literature. Elements of *tarjama* (Islamic hagiography) are clearly evident, for instance, in Nabil-i-A'zam's account of the Babis, *The Dawn-Breakers*. So too is Mirza Abu'l-Fadl's *Short Sketch of the History and Lives of the Leaders of This Religion* reflective of this style.<sup>38</sup> Typical of scholarship in both East and West at the time, Abu'l-Fadl does not detail his sources, but does show that he has considered the evidence of writers who were supportive of his subjects, as well as those who were not, and he supports only those facts he is confident of.

More recent Baha'i literature also draws on the hagiographic and documentary Islamic and Christian traditions. This includes many biographies that appear in the 'In Memoriam' section of volumes of *The Baha'i World*. These are mostly based on the recollections of relatives or acquaintances and seldom rely on extensive use of documentary sources. They intend to honour the memory of their subjects and to acknowledge their contribution to the progress of the Baha'i Faith rather than to explore their individual contribution in detail. In fulfilling these functions, they encourage and inspire their readers and locate contemporary Baha'i activities against a background of worthy tradition. Furthermore, they establish a record of the past, which acts as an essential collective memory – a consciousness of the past – that strengthens individuals and communities as they operate in the present.<sup>39</sup>

Baha'i literature also includes several valuable collections of what might be termed 'biographical essays'. Some of these are by a single author, such as O. Z. Whitehead's *Some Early Bahā'īs of the West, Some Bahā'īs to Remember, and Portraits of Some Bahā'ī Women*,<sup>40</sup> and Dipchand Khianra's *Immortals*.<sup>41</sup> Multi-authored collections of this genre include *And The Trees Clapped Their Hands*, edited by Claire Vreeland, *Why They Became Bahā'īs*, compiled by Annamarie Honnold, and S. Sundrum's portraits of Malaysian Baha'is in *Mystic Connections*.<sup>42</sup>

These volumes of biographical essays each cohere around a specific theme. Whitehead's first volume (*Some Early Bahā'īs*) narrates the lives of 23 individuals who met 'Abdu'l-Baha.<sup>43</sup> The volume edited by Vreeland includes both biographical and autobiographical accounts of pioneers, while that compiled by Honnold presents 34 autobiographies and 101 biographies of 'first generation Bahā'īs by 1963'. Khianra presents stories of Baha'is from the Indian subcontinent. Numerous essays from among these four sets of biographical essays rely on existing secondary sources and on primary materials offered by subjects' relatives and acquaintances; not one among them suggests any reliance on formally archived materials.<sup>44</sup>

Baha'i biographical and autobiographical literature also includes an increasing number of works privately printed, or otherwise printed in small numbers, by family members or Baha'i communities and institutions.<sup>45</sup> Some works written in Arabic and Persian have been published in English translation.<sup>46</sup>

For the most part these biographical essays are vehicles for *exempla* – for inspiration and the consolidation of tradition. Such exemplary biographies are not inherently problematic, but they may become so when tension results from differences between a writer's intentions and readers'

expectations, or else through the selective (non-)use of biographical evidence, leading in some instances to 'biographies of denial'.

The life story of Fātimih Zarrīn-Tāj Baraghānī (also known as Tāhirih = 'The pure one', and Qurratu'l-'Ayn = 'Solace of the eyes'), for instance, is one still to be imagined from within its prism of both eastern and western biographic traditions. Being female, her learning did not satisfy the criteria of *tarjama*, and only her individual brilliance has saved her from being silenced like so many of her sister believers, as lamented in Bahiyyih Nakhjavani's insightful *Asking Questions*:

The pages of Nabil's *Dawn-Breakers* are filled with countless women. They ride beside their husbands and sacrifice their children. They are humiliated, beaten and raped. They are paraded on horseback as the heads of their sons and husbands are held aloft on pikes. They carry stones and build forts; they cut off their hair and use it to bind together the fracturing guns at Nayriz. They were no doubt among those who helped grind the bones of dead horses and who rushed out under cannon fire to gather the new grass to eat at Fort Shaykh Tabarsi. But they have no names and Nabil does not go out of his way to mention them ...<sup>47</sup>

As a martyr for her Faith, her persona as 'heroine' is more familiar than her individuality. An instance of difference between author's intention and reader's expectation on the subject of Tāhirih occurred in a critic's response to Martha Root's biography, *Tāhirih the Pure: Iran's Greatest Woman*.<sup>48</sup> F. W. Ebner, who received a copy of Miss Root's book at the time of her visit to China in 1938, wrote in the *North-China Daily News*:

Were this book written primarily to show the life and influence of a nineteenth-century Persian woman who suffered martyrdom in her attempt to emancipate women, it would have resulted in a unique contribution to oriental biography. However, the author's interest in her subject, Hadrat-i-Tāhirih, Her Highness the Pure One, has been secondary to her interest in the promotion of the Bahā'ī Faith. The review does not take exception to the purpose of the book as conceived by the author. He merely states that the ostensible purpose of the book seems to be of secondary concern.<sup>49</sup>

While Miss Root gathered much of her material first hand, in Iran, her treatment of the life story of Qurratu'l-'Ayn emphasized her role as champion of women's emancipation and Babi heroine rather than her individuality. Ebner, on the other hand, was evidently more interested in Tāhirih's individuality as poetess and religious reformer.<sup>50</sup>

Another instance of tension between biography as *exemplum* and narration of a unique life is related by anthropologist Michael Fischer. During extensive fieldwork in Yazd, Iran, Fischer befriended Nūru'llāh Akhtar-Khāvarī, a Bahā'ī employed to handle international affairs at the Kerakhshan wool-spinning and weaving mill. Akhtar-Khavari was a courageous advocate of his Faith, who was executed by the Khomeini government in 1980. In re-presenting the story of his life, Fischer recognized that 'two stories' could be told:

The more powerful one is of the exemplary figure, the modern man who had decided to operate in a very conservative society, not to badger or embarrass

Publishing Trust, 2005); See also M. Momen, 'The family and early life of Tāhirih Qurrat al-'Ayn', *Bahā'ī Studies Review* 11 (2003), 35–52.

27. R. Rabbani, *The Priceless Pearl* (London: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1969).
28. I. F. Muḥājir, *Dr Muḥājir, Hand of the Cause of God, Knight of Bahā'u'llāh* (London: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1992), xvi. This biography takes a straightforward approach to the genre of biography, and many details noted in haste by Dr Muḥājir while on his travels appear to have been transferred directly into the book without verification.
29. D. F. Gilstrap, *From Copper to Gold: The Life of Dorothy Baker* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1999).
30. A. I. Chapman, *Leroy Ioas: Hand of the Cause of God* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1998).
31. M. Garis, *Martha Root: Lioness at the Threshold* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1983).
32. D. Hofman, *George Townshend* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1983).
33. G. Morrison, *To Move the World: Louis G. Gregory and the Advancements of Racial Unity in America* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1982).
34. M. R. Sears, *Bill: A Biography of Hand of the Cause of God William Sears* (Eloy, AZ: Desert Rose Publishing, 2003).
35. M. Momen, *Dr. J. E. Esslemont* (London: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1975).

36. B. Harper, *Lights of Fortitude: Glimpses into the Lives of the Hands of the Cause of God* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997).

37. See, for example, R. Weinberg, *Ethel Jenner Rosenberg: The Life and Times of England's Outstanding Bahá'i Pioneer Worker* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995). L. Rowden, *Hidden Bounties: Memories of Pioneering on the Magdalen Archipelago* (Ontario: Nine Pines Publishing, 1994).

38. Abu'l-Fadl [Gulpaygani], *The Bahá'i Proofs (Hujaja'l-Bahíyyih) and A Short Sketch of the History and Lives of the Leaders of This Religion* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'i Publishing Trust, 1983).

39. Other examples include M. Gooljar, *The Teachers of the Bahá'i Faith: The World is One Country and Mankind its Citizens* (New York: Vantage Press, 1986).

40. O. Z. Whitehead, *Some Early Bahá'ís of the West* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1976); *Some Bahá'ís to Remember* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1983); *Portraits of Some Bahá'í Women* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1996).

41. *Immortals* (New Delhi: Bahá'i Publishing Trust, 1988) recounts the lives of 16 outstanding Indian Bahá'ís. Many of these brief biographies draw on the author's personal acquaintance with the subjects, in addition to drawing on previously published sources. Some outstanding Bahá'ís, such as Isfandíyár Bakhtíyárí,

it, but to show a new and open mode of behaviour. The challenge here is to show how one operates in such a society: it is almost an ethnographic challenge, the kind of challenge that requires the eye of a novelist for local colour and knowledge of local detail. It is a challenge to describe how a society changes, sometimes moving in reactionary self-destructive directions, but nonetheless irrevocably changes, in ways involving considerable internal conflict. The exemplary individual as well as all other individuals have to make choices, have to negotiate pragmatic as well as moral decisions.

The other narrative that can be told – by far the weaker story, I think – is to turn Akhtar-Khavari into a standard Bahá'i martyr. It is this that I fear will be his fate. I fear it not only because I will no longer recognize my friend, but also because he was larger than such stereo-typing allows. His personality (like every human being's) was unique: it was also graceful, informed, and forceful, and thus worth preserving.<sup>51</sup>

Fischer's understandable concern is that hagiographic treatment of Akhtar-Khavari would have a moulding effect, which would 'disembody' the authentic self. He sees the 'typing' of an individual as 'martyr' as a reduction of the subject, a shrinking of personhood into a brave but futile heroism. He regards the legacy of Nuru'llah Akhtar-Khavari not as 'a dialogue of martyrdom with Shi'ism' but 'the possibility of living in Yazd as if it were the twentieth century, as if one could live without fear of religious fanaticism, as if people could live and let live each by his or her own lights'.<sup>52</sup> His purpose is not to 'denigrate the suffering or the heroism of Bahá'i martyrs' but to 'raise for discussion the possibilities for more effective ways of countering the genocidal atrocities of the Khomeini regime'.

A survey of Bahá'i biographical literature suggests that Fischer's fear has not been realized. In the first place, despite the many deaths of Babis and Bahá'ís in the nineteenth century and the continued martyrdom of Bahá'ís in both pre- and post-revolutionary Iran, these martyrdoms have not necessarily led to biographies of hagiographic intent and 'martyrdom' trope.<sup>53</sup> Second, the appearance of such literature, when it does eventually emerge, need not betray the individuality of the subject in the way that Fischer fears. For sacrifice of self is regarded as honourable in the Bahá'i tradition as in those of the past, and lives that have been offered with the purest of motives will be remembered among the exemplary.

### Anti-exemplum

If there exists a 'true path' for human endeavour and the refinement of character, there also exists a path of 'waywardness'. Where one is a path of faithfulness, the other is that of deceit, and one role of biography is to clarify the distinction between the two. Thus the central figures of the Bahá'i Faith exalted the character and actions of the praiseworthy and noted the condition of its opponents for the purpose of instructing others in right conduct.

The extent to which accounts can vary in their evaluation of an individual's place in Babi and Bahá'i history is illustrated in studies of the life of the Persian activist Jamálú'd-Dín 'al-Afghání' (1838/9–1897). Afghani was an Iranian of considerable intellectual and political capacity who wove

deception into every phase of his eventful life. Renowned Persianist Nikkie Keddie suggests that Afghani saw himself as a 'kind of prophet or messiah, destined to reform, reawaken, and reunite the Muslim world and free it from its infidel conquerors'.<sup>54</sup> While there is no doubt that Afghani knew much about the teachings of the Bab, his association was with Azali Babis – principally Shaykh Ahmad Rūhī and Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kirmānī.<sup>55</sup> Kedourie has suggested that during his last years in Istanbul Afghani associated with 'Persian Bābīs prominent in the dissemination of heterodoxy, and active in subverting the authority of the Persian Government',<sup>56</sup> and suggests that an anti-Babi article attributed to Afghani in the fifth volume of Butrus al-Bustānī's encyclopaedia *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif* published in Beirut in 1881 was written by Bustani himself.<sup>57</sup> Shoghi Effendi, however, is clear in his assessment of Afghani's relationship to the early Baha'is, and describes Afghani as one of those 'enemies who have sedulously sought to extinguish the light of Bahā'u'llāh's Covenant':

The scheming Jamālu'd-Dīn Afghani, whose relentless hostility and powerful influence had been so gravely detrimental to the progress of the Faith in Near Eastern countries, was, after a chequered career filled with vicissitudes, stricken with cancer, and having had a major part of his tongue cut away in an unsuccessful operation perished in misery.<sup>58</sup>

In this passage Shoghi Effendi combines judgement of character ('the scheming Jamālu'd-Dīn') with matters of historical fact relating to his political and physical decline. While few biographies have been written to date about those who occupied themselves in active opposition to the central Baha'i figures and to the Baha'i community itself, the references to their actions in such works as Shoghi Effendi's *God Passes By* suggests that such studies will in time be required in the ongoing search for historical understanding of past events.<sup>59</sup> Studies of the life of Mason Remey, for instance, will be required to understand the positive contributions made in his earlier life and the circumstances leading to his tragic defection following the passing of Shoghi Effendi, and also to correct the inaccuracies in both fact and interpretation offered in works such as that by Spatharo.<sup>60</sup>

### Partial biographies

There are many individuals whose lives as Baha'is are only partially uncovered in the biographical literature. These include the famous film actress Carole Lombard, who did not live long after becoming a Baha'i; Queen Marie of Romania, whose allegiance to Baha'i principles is only marginally explored in the otherwise masterful study by Pakula,<sup>61</sup> even if more fully developed by Marcus;<sup>62</sup> and August Forel, world-renowned Swiss scientist, whose life is partially explored by Vader.<sup>63</sup>

Roy Wilhelm (1875–1951), the trusted servant of 'Abdu'l-Baha designated a 'herald of Bahā'u'llāh's Covenant' and later a Hand of the Cause by Shoghi Effendi, is known to Baha'is for his service on the Baha'i Temple Unity Board (from 1909) and the North American National Assembly (from its inception in 1922 until 1946, when he retired at the age of 71); and especially for the property in New Jersey which became the East Coast Baha'i community's first summer school. Less well known is the fact that Wilhelm rose

Narayenrao Vakil and Pritam Singh are to an extent already known outside India; accounts of the lives of others, such as Knight of Bahā'u'llāh to Daman, Ghulām-'Alī Ibrāhīmīj Kurlawala, are a significant contribution. As men were considerably freer than women in Indian society, only four women are described in *Immortals*, although several other chapters include mention of work achieved by men in partnership with their wives.

42. C. Vreeland, *And The Trees Clapped Their Hands* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1994); A. Honnold, *Why They Became Bahā'ís* (New Delhi: Bahā'í Publishing Trust, 1994); S. Sundrum, *Mystic Connections: Stories of Some Early Bahā'ís of Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Bahā'í Publishing Trust of Malaysia, 2003.)
43. The volume also includes the story of Queen Marie of Romania.
44. I make this observation cautiously, for an essay by this writer about Florence and Harold Fitzner that appears in *And The Trees Clapped Their Hands* relied greatly on archived materials, but footnotes to the essay were removed in keeping with the style and format of the volume; other essays in these works may have followed a similar path from research to publication.
45. Some recent examples include H. Falahi-Skuce, *A Radiant Gem: A Biography of Jinab-i Fadil-i Shirazi* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2004); B. Fitzpatrick-

Moore, *My African Heart* (Johannesburg: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1999); T. K. Foroughi (ed.), *My Love is My Stronghold* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995); F. Mayberry, *The Great Adventure* (Manotick, Ontario: Nine Pines Publishing, 1994); P. Matchett, *Down Memory Lane: The Autobiography of an Irish Bahá'í* (Bangor, Co. Down: privately published, 1999). B. Sims, *In the Light of the Rising Sun: Memoirs of a Bahá'í Pioneer to Japan* (Tokyo: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2002).

46. Haydar Ali, *Stories from The Delight of Hearts: The Memoirs of Hājī Mīrzā Haydar-‘Alī* (trans. A. Q. Faizi, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1980); A. ‘Alizādā, *Years of Silence: The Bahá’ís in the USSR, 1938–1946: The Memoirs of Asadu’lláh ‘Alizādā* (trans. B. R. Ma’ani, Oxford: George Ronald, 1999).
47. B. Nakhjavani, *Asking Questions: A Challenge to Fundamentalism* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1990).
48. M. Root, *Tahirih the Pure: Iran’s Greatest Woman* (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1938).
49. *North-China Daily News*, 13 September 1938.
50. Ebner: ‘A modern biographer might well find in Tahirih all the qualities which build a fascinating story. Miss Root has suggested these – a medieval society in the nineteenth century, the daughter of a Mohammedan priest who has cast aside the

from being a high-school drop-out to become one of the largest coffee brokers in North America, a story better told in the pages of the *New York Times*.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps even less well known are the troubled formative years that prepared Wilhelm for a life of service. As recalled by Wilhelm’s butler, Walter Blakely:

Roy was born in Zainsville, Ohio. He went to school; when he got to high school he didn’t like it so he ran away. His people found him and brought him back, then he ran again the second time, and he told me he covered his tracks thoroughly. He got a job as a pottery salesman on the road, what they called a ‘drummer’ in those days, and he used to go all over the US selling pottery, and finally he told me he saved up \$750. It was like \$7,500 now, and a confidence man came and cheated him out of it, which he said was a good thing, because he never got cheated again.

Roy Wilhelm used to write to the *Guardian* every day. I used to mail them for him, and he used to get a letter back about once a week. He sent the *Guardian* an automobile, a brand new Buick, the best ever made. I picked it out, because Roy said ‘you pick it out Walter, and pick out all the parts he will need for a number of years, 10 years’.<sup>65</sup>

Two valuable studies of recent times treat the lives of John Birks ‘Dizzie’ Gillespie and Bernard Leach.<sup>66</sup> Leach’s Bahá’í affiliation is widely known, but his struggles with religious ideas and values are only revealed through the meticulous scholarship of Cooper, an author principally concerned with Leach as potter but aware of the significance of the potter’s Bahá’í commitments.<sup>67</sup> While Shipton’s study of Gillespie similarly focuses his subject from an artistic rather than religious point of view, his treatment of Gillespie’s Bahá’í commitments leaves the reader keen to know more.<sup>68</sup>

The black American philosopher Alain Locke (1886–1954) is another whose activities within the Bahá’í community have only recently been assessed, with most biographies focusing on his achievements as philosopher and writer.<sup>69</sup> The Bahá’í literature, conversely, notes Locke’s involvement in race amity conferences in the 1920s without examining in any detail his work in philosophy.<sup>70</sup> Will van den Hoonaard has recently explored the notion of partial biography.<sup>71</sup> In the Australian context, the life of ‘Burnam Burnam’, who gained fame for his upholding of Aboriginal rights (in 1988 he marked the bicentenary of Australia’s ‘founding’ by claiming the White Cliffs of Dover on behalf of Australia – mocking Captain Cook’s act two hundred years earlier claiming the Australian continent on behalf of the British crown) and documentation of Aboriginal culture, as depicted by Norst,<sup>72</sup> could almost be mistaken as the story of a person other than Harry Penrith (1933?–1997), by which name this individual was known within the Bahá’í community from the time of his first association with it in 1956 until his passing.

Not all biographical subjects were in the public eye, and another source of ‘partiality’ in accounts is the obscurity of the subject, generally through lack of documentation. Thus Hellaby’s account of *Sarah Ann Ridgway* admits after 90 pages exploring the life of the first Bahá’í in the north of England that ‘We have really very little to go on in trying to find out what kind of a personality Sarah Ann Ridgway was and of what kind of character.

Until she became a Baha'i there is literally no information to be unearthed on the matter...<sup>73</sup>

Apart from the investigation of lives lived in loyalty to the Covenant of Baha'u'llah, there remains too the issue of lives lived outside it, or in wilful opposition to it. A small number of biographies focus on subjects who were not Baha'is, but whose lives intersected significantly with the Baha'i revelation. These include Edward Granville Browne, the Cambridge orientalist who devoted some three decades to the study of the Babi movement. Balyuzi's study *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahā'ī Faith* does not explore all facets of the scholar's life and work, but focuses, as the title suggests, on his activities and publications in relation to the religion and community of the Bab. More specifically, Balyuzi writes from the perspective of one who has examined Browne's early and later writings and who is puzzled at his increasingly contradictory and oftentimes disapproving conclusions.<sup>74</sup>

Biography, it seems, cannot aspire to full re-presentation of a subject's life. Its function and purpose is, rather, to select and present facets of that life which the biographer finds important. In doing so, biography offers commentary on the significance of that life, and on the uniqueness of that life. In contemporary terms, one commentator has suggested, 'The biographer imposes pattern on experience to declare the comprehensibility of human existence. Learning of other people, we learn of ourselves.'<sup>75</sup> To aid the task of finding and commenting on meaning, biography makes use of such devices as *metaphor* and *critique*.

### Biography as metaphor

St Augustine wrote in his *Confessions*:

Many things ... are done, which seem disallowable to men and yet are approved by thy testimony; and many things again are commanded by men, which by thy testimony are condemned. For the appearance of the act is often different from the intention of him that doth it; and the precise circumstances of the time, which are hidden from us, must often vary.<sup>76</sup>

The Christian tradition of biography developed metaphors with which to describe the evolution of the religious life, and against which to compare the specifics of the life of their subject. Vincent Brummer explains a three-stage growth process within the Christian tradition of mysticism, commencing with purification (or purgation), followed by illumination (or enlightenment) and finally ecstasy (or union). In the stage of purification one learns repentance, self-denial and humility.<sup>77</sup> This first stage is one of self-knowledge, a stage in which the 'spirit of God inflames our will with love. This is a love that is chaste, holy and ardent.'<sup>78</sup> The third level, union, is not possible in the mortal realm, although enlightened mystics may gain glimpses of it.

If a metaphor such as Brummer's is accepted, the biographical task becomes that of making evident the progress of the spirit as it becomes refined through the tests it encounters and endures in the material world. The stages of search, love, knowledge, unity, contentment, wonderment, poverty and absolute nothingness explored in Baha'u'llah's mystical work *The Seven Valleys* refers to stages that souls traverse in life in varying degrees

veil, one who contrary to custom carried on religious controversies with men and publicly took part in religious conferences. The author has described Tahirih as a "poetess whose work is sought by scholars in every land", yet but two of her poems are translated in an appendix. Oriental scholars of the character of Lord Curzon, Valentine Chirol and Sir Francis Younghusband have written of Tahirih with admiration. Abundant testimony of her remarkable personality and gifts exists. Yet this book cannot satisfy those who want an unbiased interpretation of that personality.' *North-China Daily News*, 13 September 1938.

51. M. M. J. Fischer and M. Abedi, *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990). See chapter 4, 'Social Change and the Mirrors of Tradition: Bahā'is of Yazd', 247–8. Mr Nuru'llah Akhtar-Khavari was one of seven Iranian Baha'is martyred in Yazd on 8 September 1980, see *The Bahā'ī World*, vol. 18, 1979–1983, 291.
52. *ibid* 249–50.
53. One of the few monographs in English focusing on the theme is M. Labib, *The Seven Martyrs of Hormuzak* (trans. M. Momen, Oxford: George Ronald, 1981).
54. N. R. Keddie, 'Sayyid Jamal ad-Din "Al-Afghani": A Case of Posthumous Charisma?', in *Philosophers and Kings*:

*Studies in Leadership* (ed. D. A. Rustow, New York: George Braziller, 1970) p. 170.

55. I am grateful to Dr Mojan Momen for pointing out these associations to me: email 20 May 2005.

56. E. Kedourie, *Afghani and 'Abdu'l-Bahá: An Essay on Religious Unbelief and Political Activism in Modern Islam* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1966), 20.

57. 'All that connects it with Afghani is the last sentence, which says: "This is what the well-known Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and others have related concerning them." It may, of course be true that, sceptic as he was, Afghani had little use for the involved and abstruse speculations of the Báb, but this would not prevent him from collaborating with his followers in a political cause.'

58. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1944), 317.

59. Biographies of those who opposed the Bahá'í central figures include R. Hollinger, 'Ibrahim George Kheiralla and the Bahá'í Faith in America', in *From Iran East and West, Studies in Babi and Bahá'í History*, vol. 2 (ed. J. R. Cole and M. Momen, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1984), 95–134. Much is known of the life of Mason Remey, a Hand of the Cause who broke the Covenant following the death of Shoghi Effendi, although no scholarly treatment of his life has appeared.

60. F. C. Spataro, *Charles Mason Remey and the*

of intensity, which relate to varying degrees of capacity. This model has been explored in systematic theologies<sup>79</sup> but has seldom provided the foundation for biographical study. The literary subject might render the biographer's task easy by depicting his or her spiritual state on paper, but few people are so inclined, and the interpretation of their interior journey on the basis of their exterior one remains extremely difficult. The most accessible biographical subjects are those who themselves engaged in literature. Thus biographer Wendy Heller found Lidia Zamenhof a subject at once tragic and accessible.<sup>80</sup> Zamenhof was the daughter of Ludwik Zamenhof, a Polish Jew who created the language of Esperanto. She devoted herself to propagation of the Bahá'í teachings through the medium of Esperanto language and culture, until her life was terminated by the Nazis of Hitler's Germany. Heller's treatment of Zamenhof's restless life excels in narrating her life journey against the backdrop of pre-war Europe, when Bahá'í communities laboured innocently in the context of a mounting maelstrom.

### The life cycle

More frequent use has been made of life cycles – the pilgrimage from childhood, to adolescence, to adulthood. This physical progression provides a metaphor for the spiritual journey that gives meaning to the physical: it offers a view on the quest for life – the conquering of self, the overcoming of desire; it seeks to examine the ways in which periods of crisis and test contributed to the subject's growth and development.

Various motifs recur in the depiction of the life cycle of an individual believer in the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. These include the process of conversion/confirmation of faith, socialization (becoming familiar with the value system of the community), conversion encounters (acts of teaching the Faith to others), acts or episodes of service (e.g. participation in administration, propagation, scholarship and learning, defence of the Bahá'í Faith).

Among the most successful biographies in exploring the life cycle are those by Marzieh Gail. In *Summon Up Remembrance*<sup>81</sup> and *Arches of the Years*<sup>82</sup> Gail graciously introduces the reader to the world as lived in by her parents, Ali Kuli Khan and Florence Breed, quite possibly the first Persian–American marital alliance and certainly a meeting of culture and learning on both sides. As a child witness to much that she records, Gail gives an account that benefits from her intimate association with her characters, and permits the reader not merely an understanding of the involvement of Khan and Breed in the affairs of the Bahá'í community – whether in Persia, Palestine, Turkey, France or the United States – but insights into the influences that shaped the development of their characters, and the forces in the world at large that shaped their destinies.

Gail describes the heroic without creating generic heroes or heroines, and in this she follows Ruhe in instinctively developing another of the 'ungathered strands': the new framework for observation of lived lives does not seek to be prescriptive, does not set up 'personas' modelling or somehow defining a set of 'ideal' behaviours. That modernist effort to standardize our every action, to stifle difference, to create categories which we can clearly label as 'the heroic' teacher or defender of the faith, or the 'stalwart' and tragic martyr or saint, has been dismissed. Here instead is an effort to see subjects in their individuality, to find qualities of humility, of love, of

brilliance, of courage, in their specific locations, rather than in some predefined categories into which our infinitely diverse characters must somehow be put. Instead is the project of finding heroic acts in the ordinary and everyday, of observing the saintly in the common believer, as in the extraordinary person of some other time and place. Here is a biography of *difference*, of identification and examination of that sense of individuality that is to be achieved in the context of community. Here is celebration of the subject's consciousness of individual worth, of being at one with other believers and community rather than of being the same as all other believers.

### Reformulating the biographical framework

Most contemporary biography seeks to convey not merely the facts and example of a subject's life, but interpretation and even evaluation of it. Most importantly, this critical approach has been encouraged by the presumption that an author occupies some superior and objective vantage point from which to view, and judge, the subject. 'In the recent past', it has been suggested,

the usefulness of a 'critical biography', one that purports to connect life and work, was thought to consist mainly in giving the work a limiting context ... Today, when the range of critical approaches has widened beyond the narrow verities of formal criticism, we are permitted an ampler view of critical biography. To understand any literary work requires, to begin with, a grasp of its genre and of its historical context. Equally essential is a personal context ... that biography provides to put the subject's work in adequate perspective. The work never provides sufficient information in itself for proper interpretations.<sup>83</sup>

Exponents of the critical mode of biography suggest its superiority over traditional hagiography, and over mere chronologies and purely descriptive works. It could be argued, however, that extreme practices of both critical biography and hagiography are best avoided, and that the most satisfactory biography emerges from critical examination that constructs and contextualizes more than it merely deconstructs a life story.

The Baha'i writings provide immense insight into the nature of man and the purpose of existence and can assist in formulating the criteria upon which sound biographical enquiry may proceed. They create, on the other hand, a dilemma for the writer of biography. We know that humans are imperfect; the Baha'i teachings also tell us not to dwell on the faults of others. Since we also know that in the discipline of biography the biographer is challenged to reveal the life of the subject, how can such a life be revealed without displaying imperfections, and at the same time avoiding simple hagiography? If we are to reveal our subject – and we know subjects are imperfect – then we will reveal blemishes of character. But if we are true to the facts as we find them, and reveal blemishes of character, then we are exposing the faults of others, and this appears to be contrary to the spirit of the Baha'i teachings.<sup>84</sup> If, furthermore, we sift the facts to present a partial picture of our subject, dwelling only on those aspects that we think will show our subject in a positive light, we are in danger of distorting the reality of 'things as they are': how might the biographer resolve this dilemma?

*Baha'i Faith* (New York: Carlton Press, 1987).

61. H. Pakula, *The Last Romantic: A Biography of Queen Marie of Roumania* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985).
62. D. L. Marcus, *Her Eternal Crown: Queen Marie of Romania and the Baha'i Faith* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000).
63. J. P. Vader, *For the Good of Mankind: August Forel and the Baha'i Faith* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1984).
64. 9 July 1921, 8:7 – criticizes arbitrary regulations in new tariff bill; 15 March 1925, IX, 18:3 – praises commercial arbitration; 4 January 1936, 14:7 – letter on calendar charges; 21 November 1937, IV, 9:7 – letter on calendar; 21 December 1951, 27:5.
65. Interview with Walter Blakely, 28 August 1984, Burbank, Los Angeles.
66. Mention of Leach brings to mind Leach's lifelong friend Mark Tobey, the Baha'i artist responsible for introducing Leach to the Baha'i Faith. While Tobey's Baha'i affiliation is well documented in work examining his role in modern art, it cannot be said that his life has yet been given full biographical consideration. Recent academic work includes E. R. Kelley, 'Mark Tobey and the Bahai Faith: New Perspectives on the Artist and His Paintings', Ph.D. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1983. The classic treatments are W. C. Seitz, *Mark Tobey* (New York: The Museum of Modern

Art, 1962), and W. Schmied, *Mark Tobey* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1966).

67. E. Cooper, *Bernard Leach: Life and Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

68. A. Shipton, *Groovin' High: The Life of Dizzy Gillespie* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

69. C. Buck, *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy* (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2005). Johnny Washington, *A Journey into the Philosophy of Alain Locke* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994).

70. Locke, who taught at Howard University, chaired sessions at the first 'race amity' convention in Washington in May 1921 and spoke at subsequent conferences in New York and Philadelphia (*The Bahā'ī World*, vol. 2, 1926–28, 23, 283). His essay 'Impressions of Haifa' appeared in *The Bahā'ī Yearbook*, 1925, 81–8, and was repeated in *The Bahā'ī World*, vol. 2, 1926–28, 125–7 and *The Bahā'ī World*, vol. 3, 1928–30, 280–2. An 'In Memoriam' article by Charlotte Linfoot appeared in *The Bahā'ī World*, vol. 13, 1954–63, 894–5.

71. W. C. van den Hoonard, 'Biographical Zoning and Bahai Biographical Writing: The Case of Rose Henderson', *Baha'i Studies Review* 12 (2004), 50–66.

72. M. J. Norst, *Burnum Burnum: A Warrior for Peace* (East Roseville: Kangaroo Press, 1999).

73. M. Hellaby, *Sarah Ann Ridgway* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2003).

First, I suggest, the intention of Bahā'i biography is not to *critique* for critique's sake, but to explore the relationship between a subject's conscious purpose and the fruit of the enactment of that purpose. Bahā'i biographies are not stories of selves engaged in rational strategies towards fixed objectives, but voyages of beings through time and space, being tested as they approach stations of spirituality. Bahā'i biography, in other words, attempts the depiction of enlightened ontological states, in which life meanings constructed in unique and specific circumstances accord with universal theological foundations; each human being has a specific path to tread, partly preordained, partly self-defined; each has a rational soul and a physical form, and possesses capacities of spirit, intellect and moral capacity which the life journey presents with opportunities to either develop or ignore, through the voluntary application of will. Interactions with the worlds of nature, of culture and of the spirit refine the soul for entry to a future (post-physical) life: such is the journey – should the biographer attempt to depict it.

Second, since we understand that the highest capacities inherent in the person are to know (to seek knowledge of God), to love and to act, these capacities should emerge in biography, through consideration of an individual's spiritual concerns, mental development, relationships with others and use of will. In writing about the mind of an individual, furthermore, such an approach would be informed by the relationship between the spirit and the intellect as this is explained in the Bahā'i writings.

The juxtaposition of scriptural passages, which at one time stress individual 'nothingness' and at another celebrate individual worth suggests not contradictory elements within the Bahā'i writings but the range of levels available for interpreting the worth of the self, and the individual life. Advocacy of self-effacement does not denote lessening of individual value, just as promotion of universal values does not deny the importance of particularity. Stories of the self thus find their importance at different levels. We must decide on some understanding of the self as the combined effects of physical, spiritual and intellectual selves. A mature biographer may feel confident to offer an evaluation of a subject's life; but those who write within a Bahā'i perspective will temper their evaluation of the worth of the life of another human being through consciousness of the biographer's own limited access to a suitable plane from which to judge. Bahā'u'llah's admonitions to observe the good and to ignore the shortcomings of others discourage the hasty passing of judgement. The more we consider the immensity of the task, however, the less we feel inclined to assume the role of 'judging observer'.

No biography can fully 'represent' a life story. It can, at best, provide a well-intentioned 're-presentation' of that story. Furthermore, the qualities of such a re-presentation are determined by several factors, including the intentions of the author and the nature of the records disclosed. Biographies are 'source-dependent', in that the extent to which the life of another may be 're-presented' depends much on the quality and quantity of records – written or otherwise – that remain. To textualize lived experience is to theorize it, to place a grid on it. The *tarjama* and hagiography are examples of such grids. They provide conventions and criteria for appraising a subject's acts. Least accessible are 'inner motives', which are rarely exposed,

except perhaps in autobiographical accounts, which are in and of themselves not a guarantee of authenticity.

A well-crafted biography grounded in Baha'i texts would address the nature of the individual person, noting his or her elemental qualities and underlying motivations. It would, furthermore, be informed by past traditions. Existing traditions of biography need not be rejected. To the contrary, the positive functions of each must necessarily be drawn on in the quest for more encompassing approaches to life writing. Certain steps are required, however, to transform brief adulterated and uncritical accounts into more substantial biographies. These seek to position a subject in context and, beyond that, seek to make a judgement, or an evaluation, of the subject's significance. I have suggested also that a biography should examine notions of public and private selves and distinguish between active and passive, or contemplative, facets of individual existence – between the capacity to reflect and the will to act. Such 'spiritual biography' – if it can be so called – must additionally be constructed on the bases of well-considered conceptions of the terms 'person' and 'society'. But all of these biographical objectives are subject to the availability of evidence and literary devices that can use this evidence to 're-present' their subject. The self is always in some relation to an order and biography is text that seeks to represent this relationship.

On the foundation of the arguments laid out in brief above, Baha'i biography is essentially the depiction in literature of moral heroism. Its exponents and readers must, therefore, consider deeply what concept of hero they seek to establish. We are most familiar with the hero/heroine whose exploits are apparent in the physical world and in the 'public' arena, and whose travels and exploits are well documented in the source literature. But the concept of the heroic conveyed in Baha'i scriptures includes heroes and heroines whose arenas for victory are the 'inner life', or the life at home in the family – lives far less accessible to the biographical process. The 'hero', thus, need not be famous, and what is 'heroic' need not be 'public'. Thornton Chase led a significant Baha'i life which examination shows to be one of daily and for the most part anonymous struggle.<sup>85</sup> An integrating and unifying personality may not be one that takes the lead, stands out, and breaks new ground. Such an integrating personality may make no specific, outstanding contribution and hence not attract individual attention. But such a life is quite an achievement, an outstanding contribution in its own way, worthy of celebration, worthy of examination. In this category we can include such works as Douglas's description of her parents' mixed-race marriage,<sup>86</sup> and Szepesi's account of life as a migrant.<sup>87</sup> The life of Thomas Breakwell was short, undocumented, but spiritually potent.<sup>88</sup>

In this essay I have suggested that the contexts in which Baha'i biography is written include each of the existing cultural and religious traditions. The hagiographic traditions of Christianity and Islam have influenced Baha'i biographies toward depictions of subjects as exemplars, as heroes, saints and martyrs. In the 'modern' biography the 'religious' or 'spiritual' orientation of life stories has given way to more secular views of the origins, character and motivation of the 'human spirit'. The modernist tradition has also allowed for representations of 'ordinary' believers, and for critical accounts that value factual accuracy as much as representations of 'ideal' personas.

74. H. M. Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Baha'i Faith* (London: George Ronald, 1970). Nineteenth- and twentieth-century Iran yielded a number of individuals who were not Baha'i but whose relationships with the Baha'i community await closer investigation. One thinks of the nationalists Malkam Khan and Jamalu'd-Din 'Al-Afghani'.
75. Patricia Meyer Spacks, 'Gossip', in Bloom (ed.), *James Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson*, 144.
76. St Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine* (London: Collins 1957), 84–5.
77. V. Brummer, *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). It is interesting to note that these conditions are expressed in the Baha'i Long Obligatory Prayer.
78. *ibid* 62. 'Chaste love' means, to Brummer, love for the sake of love itself, not for some other interest. He gives the example of a servant who may love his master for the wages he is paid, rather than through any love invoked by the master's personal qualities.
79. See, particularly, J. Savi, *The Eternal Quest For God: An Introduction to the Divine Philosophy of 'Abdu'l-Bahā* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1989); and J. A. McLean, *Dimensions in Spirituality* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1994).
80. W. Heller, *Lidia: The Life of Lidia Zamenhof, Daughter of Esperanto* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985).
81. M. Gail, *Summon Up Remembrance* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987).

82. M. Gail, *Arches of the Years* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1991).

83. F. Brady, 'James Boswell: Theory and Practice of Biography', in Bloom (ed.), *James Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson*, 99–100.

84. I am thinking here also of the seeming impossibility of knowing the 'real' person, as opposed to knowing the 'façade' that a subject presents to the world. In the context of Japanese culture, Takeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Self: The Individual in Japanese Society* (New York: Kodansha, 1986), refers to the *omote* (the 'face', or the front of things) and the *ura* (that which is hidden, for instance, that which remains secret in the mind). The Baha'i writings warn of the error of cultivating a public persona that differs markedly from the 'inner life and private character' which is only known to God; contemporary philosophers speak of 'authenticity' in the construction of identity.

85. R. H. Stockman, *Thornton Chase: First American Baha'i* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 2002).

86. D. Douglas and B. Douglas, *Marriage, Beyond Black and White: An Interracial Family Portrait* (Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 2002).

87. A. Szepesi, *Dreams, Nightmares and Dreams Again* (New Liskeard, Ontario: White Mountain Publications, 2000).

88. R. Lakshman-Lepain, *The Life of Thomas Breakwell* (London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1998).

Rather than privilege one of these traditions above any other, however, this paper has suggested that the Baha'i biographical project, in keeping with the facility that underlies Baha'i theological and philosophical pursuits, accommodates a range of biographical devices. This flexibility in approach will allow Baha'i authors to continue to draw on the skills of the craft elaborated across many generations, divergent cultures and traditions, yet draw on the Baha'i scriptures for inspiration productive of new insights into how lived lives can be depicted in literature.

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# Historical Documents and Chronicles

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## A Chronicle of the Babi-Baha'i Communities in Sangsar and Shahmirzad

Moojan Momen

### Abstract

*Sangsar is a small town about 220 kilometres east of Tehran and Shahmīrzād is a nearby village. A Babi community existed here as a development from an earlier Shaykhi community and Babis from Shahmīrzād participated in the Shaykh Tabarsi upheaval. Later this Babi community became Baha'is. A number of prominent clerics of the area became Baha'is, the best known of whom was Haji Mulla 'Ali Akbar Shahmīrzādi, who was known as Haji Akhund and was named by Baha'u'llah as a Hand of the Cause. Despite suffering relentless persecution, the community grew, developed its institutions and established a number of facilities such as schools and public baths.*

### Keywords

Baha'i history  
Iran  
Sangsar  
Shahmīrzād  
Haji Akhund  
Baha'i school  
Baha'i persecutions

More is known about the history of the Baha'i Faith in the larger cities in Iran than about what happened in the smaller towns and villages. It was much easier for Baha'is to remain anonymous in large cities, whereas in smaller communities everyone knew who the Baha'is were (at least those who identified themselves as such – there were a number of people who believed in the Baha'i Faith but chose not to identify themselves). This meant that they were more open to persecution and it was this (as well as economic factors and the desire for education for their children) that caused many Baha'is to flee from small towns and villages to the larger towns and cities during the 20th century. In these small towns and villages, however, it was easier, where there were a sufficient number of Baha'is, to build up a closely-knit community and to develop the Baha'i community institutions.<sup>1</sup>

This paper presents a brief chronology of the Baha'i history of the small town of Sangsar and the nearby village of Shahmīrzād, which are about 220 kilometres east of Tehran. They are situated in an area that was sometimes a separate province with its capital in Damghan and sometimes part of the province of Khurasan. They are close to the borders of Mazandaran and Tehran provinces. This history illustrates some of the problems faced by the

1. The Babi-Baha'i communities in the small towns and villages of Iran have not been studied much. Abbas Amanat devotes a chapter to Babi communities (*Resurrection and Renewal*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989, 332–71), but gives small towns and villages very little consideration, despite the fact that they were almost as important as the large towns in terms of the total number of Babis in Iran – see Peter Smith and Moojan Momen, 'The Bābī Movement: A Resource Mobilization Perspective', in *In Iran*

(ed. Peter Smith), *Studies in Bābī and Bahā'ī History*, vol. 3, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1986, 33–93. Juan Cole has analysed the Baha'i communities of Tehran and Shiraz, but again there is nothing here on the smaller towns and villages – 'Religious Dissidence and Urban Leadership: Bahais in Qajar Shiraz and Tehran', *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* 37 (1999) 123–42.

2. A photocopy of this manuscript consisting of 33 quarto pages (hereinafter TAS) is in the Afnan Library.
3. *Tarīkh-i Vaqāyi'-yi Māzandarān* (History of the Events of Mazandaran), manuscript in the hand of Muhammad 'Ali Malik-Khusravi, 84 quarto pages, Afnan Library.
4. 'Vaqāyi'-yi Qa'līh va Shahmīrzād' (The Events of the Fortress [of Shaykh Tabarsi] and Shahmīrzād), 131 quarto pages, Afnan Library.
5. The source for populations of these two places for 1914 is Ludwig Adamec, *Historical Gazetteer of Iran*, 4 vols. Graz: Akademische Drucku. Verlagsanstalt, 1976–89; and for 1951 is *Farhang Jughrāfiyā'-yi Irān* (ed. Razmara et al.) 10 vols. Tehran: Dā'irah Jughrāfiyā'-yi Sitār-i Artish, 1948–53.

Baha'i communities in small localities in Iran: the frequency of the persecutions from local clerics, the harassment by landowners and government officials and the manipulation of the Baha'i community for local political purposes. It also demonstrates the determination of the Baha'is to spread their religion, to set up their religious institutions and to establish social facilities such as modern schools and public baths.

The main source for this paper is a chronicle called 'Tārīkh-i Amrī-yi Sangsar' (The History of the [Baha'i] Faith in Sangsar). The author is not indicated but it was compiled under the supervision of the Local Spiritual Assembly of Sangsar following the request from Shoghi Effendi that all Baha'i communities in Iran write their histories. It begins in about 1834, before the advent of the Bab, and continues until the manuscript's date of completion in 1932. It includes events in Shahmīrzād as well. As with the other histories written at this time, events are portrayed from a Baha'i viewpoint with little correlation to other events that were occurring and there is also little attention paid to the economic, social and political aspects of history.<sup>2</sup> There are two other manuscripts that are of relevance to the early part of the history of Shahmīrzād. These are accounts by two brothers who were among the earliest Babis of Shahmīrzād. The first, by Mīr Abū Ṭalīb Shahmīrzādī, is mainly about the events of Shaykh Tabarsi,<sup>3</sup> and the second by Mīr Muhammad Ridā Shahmīrzādī is difficult to follow, with few dates or names but numerous dreams recorded.<sup>4</sup> Thus the usefulness of these two sources is limited.

## Geography of Sangsar and Shahmīrzād

Sangsar, or Sangisar, is a small town (population 3,000 in 1914 and 14,000 in 1951) 18 kilometres north of Simnan. The people speak a dialect of Persian that is peculiar to the town and can be difficult for other Iranians to understand. The main occupation of the residents of the town was sheep herding, which took many of the townspeople away especially in the summer months. Shahmīrzād is a large village 6 kilometres north of Sangsar (population 2,695 in 1914 and about 8,000 in 1951)<sup>5</sup> surrounded by orchards, the main products of which are walnuts and plums. There was some rivalry and conflict between these two places especially over the water from the springs of 'Aliyabad at Darband which is located between them. In Qajar times both places were under the authority of the governor of Simnan, and Simnan itself was usually under the authority of the governor of Damghan.

## Early Babi history of Shahmīrzād: the family of Aqa Mir Muhammad 'Ali

Individuals such as Karbalā'ī 'Alī, Karbalā'ī Abū Muhammad and Hājī Mullā Bāqir preached the near advent of the Qa'im in Sangsar in the decade before the Bab's advent. Aqa Mīr Muhammad 'Ali, a Shaykhi leader in Shahmīrzād (he had studied under Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsā'i), also preached the same message to the people of this area and he was widely respected. He was opposed, however, by the clerics of Simnan and there were threats against his life and so, towards the end of his life, he moved with his three oldest sons and some thirty students to Karbala to study under Sayyid Kazim Rashti. Here he was still alive when news of the claim of the Bab arrived and he accepted it but died shortly thereafter in 1847. He had

instructed his sons to return to Iran and look out for news of this movement. His sons Sayyid Ahmad, Mir Abu'l-Qasim and Mir Abu Talib returned to Shahmirzad, where Sayyid Ahmad took up his father's pre-eminent position. During the course of the journey of Mulla Husayn Bushru'i and his companions from Khurasan to Shaykh Tabarsi, they passed through the area when many were away tending their herds in their summer pastures. Mir Abu Talib was however travelling in Mazandaran and brought news of the Babis at Shaykh Tabarsi. Some 33 set off to join the Babis there, led by Sayyid Ahmad. As they were leaving, the notables and people asked Sayyid Ahmad to investigate the matter and if he was sure that this was the promised rising of the Hidden Imam, he should inform them so that they could join him. When he reached the Babis and had spoken to both Mulla Husayn Bushru'i and Quddus, Sayyid Ahmad wrote back to Sangsar and Shahmirzad attesting to the truth of the claims of the Bab, but no one honoured their word to join him. Karbala'i 'Ali, however, who was very old by this time, did become a Babi. Most of those who had gone to Shaykh Tabarsi, including Sayyid Ahmad himself, died in this episode, but eleven survived.<sup>6</sup>

Of the two youngest sons of Aqa Mir Muhammad 'Ali, Mir Abu Talib (c.1243/1827–1311/1893) survived Shaykh Tabarsi, while Mir Muhammad Ridā (1246/1830–1317/1899) had been left behind to look after their mother. After the end of the Shaykh Tabarsi episode, a severe persecution erupted in Shahmirzad and the family were forced to move in with their sister Ma'sūmih in Sangsar. Even here they were relentlessly persecuted, at one stage being reduced to eating grass. Although still in their teens and early twenties, the two brothers took on extensive responsibilities looking after the dependants of those who had been killed at Shaykh Tabarsi. Their property had been looted and so they began as peddlers, eventually developing a pattern of travelling together through Mazandaran in the winter months taking with them fruit and dried foods from Shahmirzad and returning to the Sangsar area in the summer with rice from Mazandaran. In all the years of their travelling, they faced many hardships and much persecution (see the episode of 1861 below) but they never hid their religion from anyone. Over the years, these two succeeded in converting many people in Mazandaran, in villages such as Ḵivil and Rawshankūh and towns such as 'Aliyabad (Shahi). The two brothers married the two daughters of a Babi, Mulla Amīnā of 'Arab-Khayl in Mazandaran, and established a residence in that village also. In 1861, they were arrested either in 'Arab-Khayl or Bihnamir and taken together with three of the Babis of those villages to Tehran where they were imprisoned together with several other Babis for two and a half years. At the shah's court, there was a native of Sangsar called Aqa Muhammad Sangsari of whom the shah was so fond that he called him 'Dā'ī' (uncle). This man had been a close friend of the brothers' father, Mir Muhammad 'Ali, and now managed to obtain orders for their release. (This man had also written to Mahdi Quli Mirza during the Shaykh Tabarsi episode and asked him to ensure the safety of the sons of Mir Muhammad 'Ali – an action that enabled Mir Abu Talib to survive this episode.) The two brothers would not leave the prison, however, until their fellow prisoners were also released, and Aqa Muhammad Sangsari arranged this as well. The latter took the two

6. Muhammad Rida Shahmirzadi, 'Vaqayi' 2–10; TAS 1–6, 18; Asadu'llāh Faḍil Māzandarānī, *Tārīkh-Zuhūr ul-Ḥaqqaq* (9 vols. vol. 3, Tehran, n.d. and vol. 8, parts one and two, Tehran: Mu'assisih-yi Millī-yi Matbū'at-i Amrī, 131–2 BE/1974–5; vols. 4 and 6 in manuscript, Afnan Library – hereinafter ZH) 3:185–9; Muhammad 'Alī Malik-Khusravī, *Tarīkh-i Shuhadā-yi Amr* (3 vols., Tehran: Mu'assisih-yi Millī-yi Matbū'at-i Amrī, 130 BE/1973) 1:441–5; 'Azīzu'llāh Sulaymānī, *Maṣābiḥ-i Hidāyat* (Tehran: Mu'assisih-yi Millī-yi Matbū'at-i Amrī, 9 vols., Tehran: 104–32 BE/1947–76 – hereinafter MH), 8:35–41, 57–61; Nabīl-i-A'zam. *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabīl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahā'ī Revelation* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1970) 405–8.

7. Muhammad Rida Shahmirzadi, 'Vaqayi'; TAS 8-10; MH 8:64-82; ZH 8a:288-9; Asadu'llāh Fādil Māzandarānī, *Asrār ul-Athār* (5 vols. Tehran: Mu'assisih-yi Millī-yi Matbū'āt-i Amrī, 124-29 BE/1967-72) 4:214-5; Malik-Khusravi, *Tarikh Shuhada* 2:247-58, 316-26.
8. TAS 7; ZH 8a:290-1.
9. TAS 11; ZH 6:393-4; MH 8:70-74; Mazandarani, *Asrar al-Athar* 4:215-17.
10. ZH 6:400, 8a:292; MH 8:43-7.

brothers to his home as guests and they convinced him of the truth of the Baha'i Faith. After this, they undertook a trip to Tehran, Isfahan, Yazd and Khurasan in the company of Ibn Asdaq, visiting Baha'i communities. Several accounts comment on the joyful and radiant faces of these two brothers and mention that the Baha'is in each place would look forward to their visits.<sup>7</sup>

Aqa Mir Muhammad 'Ali also had three daughters. The first, Ma'sumih (d. 1297/1880) was married to a wealthy Babi of Sangsar, Mir Ibrahim, who was killed at Shaykh Tabarsi. She herself played a role in the siege at Shaykh Tabarsi by arranging for supplies and money to be sent to the Babis there. After this episode, she was faced with raising her children whilst subject to a great deal of persecution. Her home was looted several times. She continued nevertheless to play a leading role and rallied the dispirited Babis in the immediate aftermath of Shaykh Tabarsi. On one occasion Ma'sumih was seized and threatened with being stoned to death on the decree of some local clerics. She and her daughter were run through the streets under a hail of stones to the house of a *mujtahid*. Ma'sumih spoke so eloquently and courageously before the *mujtahid*, however, that he ordered she be set free. The other two daughters, Halīmih and Fātimih, also married and gave rise to a large family of Baha'is.<sup>8</sup>

### Conversions of clerics

Among the leading religious figures of the area who were converted was Mulla Ibrahim of Shahmirzad (c. 1794-Aug. 1891), given the title Khalīl ar-Raḥmān (Friend of the All-Merciful) by Baha'u'llah. He had studied with the foremost religious leaders of Isfahan and Karbala and was a distinguished cleric. When he returned to Shahmirzad after his studies he was given an honoured place in the village and clerics from as far as Savadkuh and the Hizar-Jarib district of Mazandaran deferred to him, studied under him and regarded him as a religious authority. While he had been in Karbala, however, he had heard of the Babi religion and after his return to Shahmirzad he secretly converted, later also giving his allegiance to Baha'u'llah. He began to spread the new religion judiciously and secretly in the village, but his allegiance eventually became known and many who had sought him out before now cut him off. Several attempts were made on his life and on one occasion his house was attacked. Mulla Nasru'llah, who later became a Baha'i (see below), was one of those who defended him. A young man, Ghulam-'Ali, son of Mulla Mahdi, was converted at this time and took it upon himself to become Mulla Ibrahim's bodyguard. With a short sword in his belt, he would accompany Mulla Ibrahim to the public baths and back. Mulla Ibrahim became virtually housebound and spent his time copying the Baha'i scriptures in his fine *naskh* and *nasta'liq* script.<sup>9</sup>

Another leading cleric of the area to be converted was Mulla Yūsif Sangsari (d. 1329/1911) who had studied for 6 years in Sangsar and 16 years in the shrine cities of Iraq. He became a Babi, possibly through the above-mentioned Karbala'i 'Ali. He was later one of those who exerted themselves to bring the Babis of the area to belief in Baha'u'llah. He developed a reputation in Sangsar for being one whose prayers were answered by God and therefore many came to him with requests for prayers, while the enemies of the Baha'is feared his reputation.<sup>10</sup>

Mulla 'Ali Muhammad Mujtahid (d. 1325/1907) was another prominent cleric in the area who had studied in the shrine cities of Iraq and elsewhere and returned to an honoured position as a religious authority in Sangsar. He was fanatical in his views, even forbidding the people of the town to buy rice from Mazandaran because he said that many Babis had been killed there and their impure blood had polluted the ground and so the rice from that area should not be consumed. He would cover his head with his cloak if he encountered a Babi on the street so that his gaze would not be polluted. He lived next door, however, to the above-mentioned Mulla Yūsif and the latter began to invite him to investigate the new religion. At first he responded harshly and rudely to this invitation but eventually agreed to enter into discussions. Eventually, after reading the Bayan of the Bab, he was converted. He immediately resigned his position as prayer leader in the mosque and tried to inform those who had regarded him as their religious leader, but these people did not accept the new religion. Mulla 'Ali Muhammad spread the Baha'i Faith both in the Sangsar area and in Mazandaran and Gurgan.<sup>11</sup> A similarly important local cleric was Mulla Muhammad Hasan (d. 1322/1902) who was converted in 1285/1868 after speaking with Mir Muhammad Rida. He renounced his religious leadership and became a builder as well as a copier of the Baha'i scriptures. Nevertheless, his relatives tried to kill him. He was responsible for spreading the Baha'i Faith to the village of Aftar. His wife was also a distinguished Baha'i.<sup>12</sup>

Mulla Yahyā of Sangsar had a *maktab* (traditional school) and a small *madrasa* (religious college) in Sangsar. One day some of the religious students brought him a *fatwā* (decree) signed by the clerics of Simnan, Sangsar and Shahmirzad for the death of a number of Babis. He asserted that this *fatwa* was contrary to Islam and then declared that he himself was a Babi. The religious students beat him severely and left him for dead. After this he left teaching in his *maktab* and *madrasa* and devoted himself to promoting the Babi religion in the area. Other prominent and learned converts included Mulla Mawla, Mulla Muhammad and Haji Muhammad Big. With such an array against them, the '*ulama* of the area found themselves defeated in argument and thus persecutions in Sangsar were less frequent and severe than in other places.<sup>13</sup>

### Other converts

Another prominent Baha'i from Shahmirzad was Susan Bājī, the daughter of Mulla Mahmud. She later resided in Tehran and was one of a circle of women who were active in spreading the Baha'i Faith among the women of that city. It was she who managed to retrieve the body of Mulla 'Ali Jan Mahfuruzaki from the gallows after his execution in 1883, despite the presence of guards and a threatening mob<sup>14</sup> and it was she who stepped in front of the carriage of Nasiru'd-Din Shah in 1899 and said she would not move until the shah issued orders for the release from prison of her 'brother' Haji Baqir Najafabadi.<sup>15</sup>

A number of other notable figures of Shahmirzad became Baha'i's including Haji Mulla Aqa (who had been a tutor to Haji Amīn ad-Darb), Mulla Haji Zaman (d. 1305/1887), Ustad Muhammad Jan (d. 1342/1923), Mulla Jān 'Ali (d. 1904), Mulla Ramaḍān (d. soon after 1305/1887, son-in-law of Mir Muhammad Rida), his brother Ghulam-'Ali (d. 1922), Mulla Isma'il

11. TAS 16 (date of death here difficult to read but may be 1318/1900). ZH 6:400 gives his name as Mulla Muhammad 'Ali. MH (8:47–52, 53–5) gives his date of death as 1354/1935.
12. ZH 6:398; Mazandarani, *Asrar al-Athar* 4:219–20.
13. Muhibbatu'llah Subhani, 'Mullā Yahyā Sangsari' *'Andalib* vol. 16, no 62 (Spring 1997) 68–72; TAS 20.
14. Mazandarani, *Asrar al-Athar* 4:172–3, 218.
15. Fathu'llah Mudarris Jānimī Najafābādī, *Tārīkh-i Amr-i Bahā'ī dar Najafābād* (Darmstadt: Asr-i Jadid, 2004) 75–6.
16. TAS 13–14, 15; ZH 6:398–9, 8a:292; MH 8:71; Mazandarani, *Asrar al-Athar* 4:218–19, 221–3.

17. MH 8:52-3.
18. Muhammad Rida Shahmirzadi, 'Vaqayi' 14-22; ZH 4:206; MH 8:77-8.
19. Subhani, 'Mulla Yahya Sangsari' 71.
20. Subhani, 'Mulla Yahya Sangsari' 71.

(d. 1300/1882) and his brother Karbala'i Khanlar (d. 1312/1894). In Sangsar, there was Awad Muhammad Big (who protected the Baha'is and spread the Baha'i Faith), Mulla Muhammad Subhani, Mulla Mawla Rawdih-Khan (who was arrested and bastinadoed on one occasion) and Ustad Muhammad 'Askari Kafshdūz (d. 1322/1904).<sup>16</sup>

### Events in Sangsar and Shahmirzad in the time of Baha'u'llah

After a time, the townspeople obtained from the local clerics a *fatwa* for the death of Mulla 'Ali Muhammad, Mulla Yusif and Mulla Muhammad Subhani and sent this to Nasiru'd-Din Shah. Some executioners were sent to Simnan and the three men were summoned. They came to Simnan and stayed at the home of Mulla Ibrahim, who had been a fellow student of Mulla 'Ali Muhammad. The latter was very sorry to see how close these three were to death and sent word to Sangsar to alert their relatives to the danger. Their relatives, who were not Baha'is, came to Simnan, armed and angry. Seeing this, the executioners let the men go.<sup>17</sup>

In 1276/1859, there was an episode of persecution in Sangsar when the *mujtahid* of the town wrote to the governor of Simnan complaining about the Babis in the village. (This *mujtahid* was related to Mir Muhammad Rida and had been a Babi at first but had apostatized after the defeat of the Babis at Shaykh Tabarsi.) The governor sent some officials who ill-treated some of the Babis. They arrested Mir Muhammad Rida and his nephew, bound them and took them off towards Sangsar. On the way, they came to a shrine called Imamzadih Qasim (1 kilometre north of Sangsar) of which Mir Muhammad Rida had been custodian until he had been replaced (this was the original home village of the family). He spoke for over an hour to the people of the village that surrounds this shrine (population 500 in 1951) and several were converted. When they reached Sangsar, they arrested Ma'sumih, the sister of Mir Muhammad Rida, her son and their cousin as well as two other Babis and insulted and harassed them. They released Ma'sumih and took the other six off to Simnan, where they were thrown into prison. After three months of imprisonment, they were fined and released.<sup>18</sup>

In about 1866, when the split between Baha'u'llah and Azal occurred in Edirne, there was also a split in the community in this area. When Mulla Yahya heard, one day, that the Azalis were meeting at a particular house, he went there immediately. When the Azalis saw him coming, they locked the door but he broke the door down and entered. He took the Bayan, which they were reading, and put it respectfully aside and then began to speak to them about Baha'u'llah, chanting some of the writings of Baha'u'llah. It is reported that all present at the meeting became Baha'is and within a short period of time, no Azalis remained in the area.<sup>19</sup>

Each time a new tablet arrived from Baha'u'llah, the learned Baha'is of the area, Mir Abu Talib, Mir Muhammad Rida, Mulla Mawla, Mulla Yusif and Mulla Muhammad would gather in Mulla Yahya's house at night and would recite the tablet. Then they would disperse, the first two to Shahmirzad and the others to their homes in Sangsar and they would then recite the tablet for the other Baha'is.<sup>20</sup> A large number of travelling Baha'i teachers also came to this area including Samandar, Varqa, Jamal Burujirdi and Tarazu'llah Samandari.

## Mulla 'Ali Akbar Shahmirzadi, Hand of the Cause

The most prominent Baha'i to emerge from this area was Mullā 'Alī-Akbar Shahmīrzādī, known as Haji Akhūnd (1258/1842–4 Mar. 1910), who was named a Hand of the Cause by Baha'u'llah. Although his father Mullā 'Abbas had been a follower of Aqa Mir Muhammad 'Ali and had accompanied him to Karbala and become a Babi, he had subsequently fallen away from the new religion after the defeat of the Babis at Shaykh Tabarsi. It was not until Haji Akhund had grown up and was studying at a *madrasa* in Mashhad that, after investigating Sufism and Shaykhism, he became a Babi in 1861 as a result of reading Baha'u'llah's *Kitab-i-Iqan* and speaking with Mullā Sadiq Muqaddas. Haji Akhund began to teach the new religion to others and experienced so much antagonism and persecution that he was forced to leave Shahmirzad and settle in Tehran in about 1868. He did however manage to rekindle the faith of his father and bring his brothers and sisters into the new religion. His nephew, whom he also converted, was Mirza Bādī'u'llāh Bādī' ul-Ḥukamā, a distinguished physician of Shahmirzad. In Tehran Haji Akhund became one of the lynchpins of the Baha'i community, teaching the Baha'i Faith, acting as a channel of communications with Baha'u'llah for the Baha'i community and, for a time, being responsible for the remains of the Bab. He became so well known as a leading Baha'i that whenever there was an outburst of persecution, he would wrap his cloak around him and await the arrival of the guards to arrest him. He was imprisoned in 1868, 1289/1872 (spending seven months in prison), 1882–4 (two years in prison), 1887, and 1891–3 (two years in prison). He visited Akka on several occasions, in 1287/1870, about 1874, about 1305/1887, and 1312/1894. During this last visit, with 'Abdu'l-Baha's permission, he met with Mirza Muhammad 'Ali and unsuccessfully tried to persuade him to abandon his movement towards rebellion against 'Abdu'l-Baha. He was also much involved in the administrative developments of the community. Together with the other three Hands of the Cause, he established a consultative assembly in Tehran in 1897.<sup>21</sup>

## Prominent teachers in the time of 'Abdu'l-Baha

Mulla Naṣru'llāh Shahmirzadi (1255/1839–1915) came from a family that had held religious leadership in Sangsar and Shahmirzad for centuries. Although his father, Mulla Mu'min, and one brother were not Babis, his two uncles Mulla Mirza Ahmad and Mulla Mirza Husayn<sup>22</sup> (d. 1280/1863) were, as was his other brother. Mulla Nasru'llah received his early education in Shahmirzad and then went to Simnan where he studied under Haj Mulla 'Ali. When he had completed his studies, he was installed as the prayer leader in the Jāmi' Mosque and in the mosque of one of the quarters of Shahmirzad and was the foremost religious authority in the village. He also established classes and students would come to him from Hizar-Jarib and other parts of Mazandaran during the summer months. He was upright in his dealings, never accepting bribes or inducements, and fanatical in his views about the Baha'is, considering that they should be killed – although he always insisted on clear proof of belief and so the Baha'is did not suffer greatly under him.<sup>23</sup>

Although, as mentioned above, several of Mulla Nasru'llah's close relatives were Baha'is, they were too frightened of him to reveal this. In 1310/1892,

21. Biography by Shāpūr Rāsikh in 'Abdu'l-'Alī 'Alā'i, *Mu'assih-yi Ayādī-yi Amru'llāh*, (Tehran: Mu'assih-yi Millī-yi Matbū'at-i Amrī, 130 BE/1973) 371–401; ZH 6:394–8; 8a:327–9; 'Abdu'l-Baha, *Memorials of the Faithful* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1971) 9–12; Shaykh Kāzīm Samandar, *Tārīkh-i Samandar* (Tehran: Mu'assih-yi Millī-yi Matbū'at-i Amrī, 131 BE/1974) 233–6; Hasan M. Balyuzi, *Bahā'u'llāh: The King of Glory* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980) 265–6.
22. Mazandarani, *Asrar al-Āthar* 4:221.
23. MH 1:335–8.

- 24. MH 1:338–41.
- 25. MH 1:341–7.
- 26. MH 1:347–58.

Nayyir and Sina came to Shahmirzad. They observed that the Baha'is here were more secretive than elsewhere and asked the reason for this. They said that it was because of Mulla Nasru'llah's fanaticism. Since they were told that he was a just and moral man, however, they asked to meet with him. At this meeting, they showed Mulla Nasru'llah Baha'u'llah's *Lawh-i-Sultan* (Tablet to Nasiru'd-Din Shah). Reading just part of this was sufficient to convince Mulla Nasru'llah of the truth of Baha'u'llah's claim. He then studied as much as he could about the new religion and began to convey some of the new insights that he had learned in his lectures from the pulpit without mentioning their source.<sup>24</sup>

Over the years, Mulla Nasru'llah convinced many of the truth of the Baha'i Faith but he also aroused suspicion among the people of the village. His maternal uncle urged him to curse the 'Babi' religion but when Mulla Nasru'llah offered to withdraw from his religious leadership, everyone urged him to stay. All the time, however, his adherence to the Baha'i Faith was becoming more evident. Haji Amin ar-Ra'ayā and Amin al-Haram were two brothers who were sons of Mulla Nasru'llah's maternal aunt; the former was one-eyed and the latter was the fief-holder and tax-farmer (*tuyūl-dār*) of Shahmirzad and held a high position in Nasiru'd-Din Shah's court as a personal attendant to the shah. They were very hostile to the Baha'i Faith and plotted against their cousin. They eventually installed Mulla Nasru'llah's maternal cousin Shaykh Muhammad Husayn in the mosque and forced Mulla Nasru'llah out. The latter then began to earn his living by farming together with his sons. He was now free to be more open about his beliefs and he spoke to many people and wrote to many of the clerics in the area about the new religion. Many became Baha'is as a result of his teaching, including two clerics, Mulla 'Ali Akbar Surkhrabātī and Mulla Sulayman Kisilayānī, who had both been former pupils of his. At first, the wife of Mulla Nasru'llah and one of his sons were very opposed to his new belief and even tried to have him killed during the turmoil of the Constitutional Revolution. They eventually relented from their antagonism, however, and even became Baha'is.<sup>25</sup>

Mulla Nasru'llah was affected by the 1907 persecution of Baha'is (see below). In about 1905 and about 1911 he went on journeys through Mazandaran, during which he converted many people. During the 1911 journey, Mazandaran was in a state of disorder due to the attempt by Muhammad 'Ali Shah to regain the throne. The main supporter of Muhammad 'Ali Shah in the area was Rashid us-Sultan, an enemy of Mulla Nasru'llah's cousin Amin al-Haram. He tried to arrest Mulla Nasru'llah's son Muhammad Aqa in Babul but the latter escaped; then he sent someone to assassinate Mulla Nasru'llah in the Lur quarter of Barfurush, where he was staying, but the shots fired did not find their mark. Over the next few years, Mulla Nasru'llah survived a few further attempts on his life.<sup>26</sup>

On 25 July 1915 (13 Ramadan 1333), some 300 of the people of Shahmirzad met to plot Mulla Nasru'llah's death. They chose 82 people to take the appropriate steps and 4 people were chosen to lead them. Eight persons, both men and women, were set to spy on Mulla Nasru'llah and find an appropriate opportunity to kill him. A sum of 2,800 tumans was collected with which to bribe anyone sent to investigate the murder, 4 people were armed, ready to carry out the crime, and 80 of those chosen

took a solemn oath to accomplish the task. The other 2 declined to take the oath and sent word to Mulla Nasru'llah of what was happening. Mulla Nasru'llah thanked them and said that he had been wishing for such a day for a long time. On 8 August 1915 (27 Ramadan), about two hours after nightfall, the assassins attacked the house and shot Mulla Nasru'llah. He remained alive until dawn the next day before dying. The governor of Simnan together with armed men and some 300 Baha'is of Sangsar came to Shahmirzad to investigate the crime but the conspirators remained defiant and silent and no one was arrested.<sup>27</sup>

Another prominent Baha'i of Sangsar was Aqa Mirza Haji Aqa Rahmaniyan (1294/1877–Sept. 1950), who was the grandson of Haji Mulla Baqir (one of those mentioned above who preached of the near advent of the Imam Mahdi before the advent of the Bab) and the grandson of Halimih, a daughter of Mir Muhammad 'Ali. His father had been a Baha'i but had died when he was two and he had been brought up by his mother. He had studied the Baha'i proofs with the various learned Baha'is who came to Sangsar. In 1319/1901 he went to Tehran to meet the Baha'is and while there volunteered to accompany the Hand of the Cause Ibn Abhar to Qumm, Isfahan, Yazd and Kirman. Rahmaniyan then spent two years in Tehran and while there he attended the Baha'i classes of Sadr us-Sudur. After this he undertook journeys for the propagation for the Baha'i Faith to Mazandaran, to Qazvin and Rasht (with Rastigar in 1326/1908), Qumm, Kashan and Isfahan (with Sayyid Jalal, son of Sina, in 1327/1909), Khurasan (in 1922) and so forth until the end of his life.<sup>28</sup>

Other prominent Baha'is of Shahmirzad from the time of 'Abdu'l-Baha include Allah-Quli Subhani, who travelled through Iran propagating the Baha'i Faith, and Mirza 'Abdu'l-'Ali Shahab (1882–?), who was a school-teacher and set up the Husayniyyih School in Sangsar and later taught in the Baha'i school in Būr Khayl, Aratih, in Mazandaran. He was for a time secretary of the local spiritual assembly in Shahmirzad.<sup>29</sup>

### Difficulties and persecutions in the time of 'Abdu'l-Baha

In 1893, following the death of Baha'u'llah, Mir Muhammad Rida (see above) visited 'Abdu'l-Baha in Akka. During this trip, he became aware of the schemings of Mirza Muhammad 'Ali (even though these had not yet become public) and upon his return, he warned the Baha'is of the area so effectively of the dangers of failing to follow 'Abdu'l-Baha that no one from the area later followed Mirza Muhammad 'Ali, despite two visits to the area by Aqa Jamal Burujirdi, a Baha'i who sided with Mirza Muhammad 'Ali.<sup>30</sup>

Although in earlier years, this area had been comparatively free of persecution, from about 1896 onwards, Amin al-Haram became the fief-holder of Shahmirzad (see above), and he was much opposed to the Baha'is. He would try to prevent Baha'i meetings from taking place and barred travelling Baha'is from entering the village. In 1319/1901, he had Ustad Haji Kaffash tied to a tree and whipped. When his mother tried to protect her son, he ordered the mother to be tied up and whipped as well. Then the mother was freed while the son was thrown in prison. When his cousin tried to take him food, he was arrested and thrown in prison and severely bastinadoed until the executioner was worn out. Eventually their families bought their freedom for 30 tumans. Following this, the Baha'is of

- 27. MH 1:358–67; ZH 8a:298–301.
- 28. MH 4:538–83; ZH 8a:302.
- 29. ZH 8a:302; Ni'matu'llah Dhukā'ī Baydza'ī, *Tadhkirih-yi Shu'arā'-yi Bahā'ī-yi Qarn-i Aval-i Badi'* (4 vols. Tehran: Mu'assisih-yi Millī-yi Matbū'at-i Amrī, 122–7 BE/1965–70) 4:96–106.
- 30. MH 8:79–80; ZH 8a:291.

31. ZH 8a:292–3.

32. Mahdī Bāmdād, *Tārīkh-i Rijāl-i Īrān* (6 vols. Tehran: Zavar, 1347/1968–1351/1972) 5:58–61; Hāj Aqā Muhammad 'Alāqīhband Yazdī, 'Tarikh-i Mashrūtiyyat' (published as vol. 2 of a photocopied series from the Iranian National Baha'i Archives) 421–5.

33. 'Alaqīhband, 'Tarikh' 422.

34. MH 4:550–51 gives the date of this episode as 1325/1907, which would fit in with the other events mentioned in 'Abdu'l-Baha's letter that is cited immediately afterwards, MH 4:522–6. However, TAS 23–5 (and ZH 7:253, 8a:293–4 following it) gives the year as 1324/1906.

Shahmirzad telegraphed a plea for justice to Prime Minister Amin us-Sultan, and for a time after this they experienced some relief.<sup>31</sup>

During the reign of Muhammad 'Ali Shah (1907–9), Habibu'llah Khan Muvaqqar as-Saltanih (1877–1910) was appointed governor of Simnan. He was an unprincipled man who jumped from side to side according to what he thought was his advantage. He had at one time been a supporter of the Constitutional reformers, then during the reign of Muhammad 'Ali Shah had sided with the latter. After the triumph of the Constitutionalists he was executed in 1910.<sup>32</sup> He had some acquaintance with the Baha'i Faith and used this first to obtain information about the Baha'i community in the area and then to sow discord among the Baha'is of Sangsar and Shahmirzad. Then he began to denounce the Baha'is, had them arrested and beaten, fined them, confiscated their property and destroyed some of their houses.<sup>33</sup>

Among the events that occurred during the governorship of Muvaqqar us-Saltanih was an episode involving the Sufis of the Ṣafī 'Ali Shah (Ni'matu'llahī) Order, three hundred of whom lived in Sangsar. In the summer of 1907, these Sufis decided to pretend to act as peacemakers between the Baha'is and the other Muslims, while in reality trying to draw the Baha'is out and then attack them. The Baha'is, who at that time were depleted in numbers (during the hot summer months many left the town) and numbered only 30 men, were aware of this ploy and when the Sufis attacked, they ran away up onto a hill and then suddenly turned on their attackers and put them to flight, causing them many injuries. The Baha'is who had left the village were then summoned back. This episode, however, only served to increase the animosity of some of the Muslims of the area, and during the following Ramadan (October 1907) 4 Baha'is were shot, one of whom, a young man named 'Ali Muhammad, was killed, and many houses were attacked and looted.<sup>34</sup>

At the same time in Shahmirzad, Amin ur-Ra'aya, who appears to have succeeded his brother as fief-holder of the village, closed the shops of several Baha'is, looted them and caused several Baha'is to be assaulted. 'Ali Muhammad Khan Sar-rishtih-dār was visiting the Shahmirzad Baha'i community and there was an upsurge in activities. The local clerics announced a general massacre of the Baha'is and ordered the people to congregate in the mosque with weapons so as to attack the Baha'is. They sent for Mulla Nasru'llah and the Baha'is to come to the mosque to discuss their beliefs but Mulla Nasru'llah refused, saying that the heated atmosphere of the mob in the mosque was no place for religious discussions and that the clerics should come to the house where the Baha'is were meeting. In the meantime he told the Baha'is to disperse until there remained only his son, Sar-rishtih-dar and the owner of the house. As the mob approached, Sar-rishtih-dar mounted a horse and after a confrontation with the mob was allowed to leave the village, whereupon the mob dispersed. The Baha'is sent a plea for justice to the parliament, the central government and the new governor of Simnan. The latter sent some officials to Shahmirzad to investigate. The enemies of the Baha'is arranged for the investigating commission to hold their sessions in a mosque, and when three Baha'is appeared before the commission a mob that had collected in the mosque fell upon them, beat them and bound them. They were dragged off to the house of Amin ur-Ra'aya where they were ill-treated and sent to be detained

in a ruined house for two days, before being sent in chains to Simnan. In the meantime in Simnan, Haji Mulla 'Ali Mujtahid had intervened with the governor on behalf of the Baha'is and the governor sent another official towards Simnan. This official met the chained prisoners at Sangsar and ordered their release. Some of them continued to Simnan, however, and raised a complaint against Amin ur-Ra'aya. As a result, the latter was severely condemned and lost his position as fief-holder of Shahmirzad.<sup>35</sup>

### Baha'i institutions and facilities

The Baha'is of Shahmirzad formed a local spiritual assembly in 1327/1909 and established the Taraqqi Baha'i School there in 1335/1916. The Husayniyyih Baha'i School in Sangsar was established in 1910. During his journey with Ibn Abhar, Rahmaniyan had become aware of 'Abdu'l-Baha's instructions to start the practice of *mashriqu'l-adhkar* (dawn prayers). Upon his return to Sangsar in 1903, Rahmaniyan established this practice in his home. At first, some people complained to the governor in Simnan, who sent men to investigate but they returned satisfied. Eventually many of the Muslims of the town also came to the *mashriqu'l-adhkar*s so that there was standing room only. The result was a transformation of the town such that 'when they met each other in the streets and bazaar a chorus of "Allāhu Abhā" [God is Most Glorious, the Baha'i greeting] would go up and this became so general that someone coming to Sangsar might have thought that there was no-one apart from Baha'is in the town.'<sup>36</sup> From this time onward the Baha'is began to fast openly during the Baha'i month of fasting and to close their businesses on Baha'i holy days.<sup>37</sup>

The practice of gathering at dawn for prayers (*mashriqu'l-adhkar*) began in Sangsar in 1317/1899 and the Baha'is of that town began a building for a *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar* (house of worship) in 1921. It was a particularly fine building with doors made of walnut wood and the ceiling also framed in walnut. The enemies of the Baha'is raised an uproar about this development and sent letters to Tehran and elsewhere. At this time Rīdā Khan (later Reza Shah) was minister for war and he sent instructions to the military governor of Simnan to destroy this *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar*. Cossack troops arrived in Sangsar in 1922 and arrested 15 of the Baha'is and took them to the deputy governor of Sangsar (they were later transferred to prison in Simnan). They then set off with a large mob to destroy the building, but the Baha'i women had blockaded themselves in the building and refused to let the men destroy it. Eventually they poured paraffin on the building and set fire to it, thus forcing the women to leave, after which they destroyed it. They also burned and destroyed the Baha'i school and all its furniture. Some 80 of the Baha'is fled to Firuzkuh (40 kilometres to the west, in Mazandaran) and began to send telegrams from there to Tehran pleading their case. At this, a large mob surrounded the telegraph station and the governor was unable to prevent them from attacking the Baha'is. But the Baha'is defended themselves and the attackers were dispersed.<sup>38</sup> The Baha'is of Firuzkuh sent a brave young man, Muhammad 'Ali Akhavan to Tehran with a petition for Rida Khan. When his petition was refused at the front office of the War Ministry, he forced his way into the presence of Rida Khan and handed it over. Rida Khan took a liking to the impetuous young man and sent orders for the persecution to stop.<sup>39</sup>

35. TAS 20; ZH 8a:294–7; MH 1:349–53.

36. TAS 22–3; quote on p. 23.

37. TAS 24.

38. TAS 22–3; MH 4:542–3, 567–70; ZH 8a:292, 302–3.

39. From the notes of Dr Badi'u'llah Parsa in note *thā* of the notes of the translator, Kiumars Mazlum, of this article in *Payām Bahā'ī*, no. 331 (June 2007) 43–4.

40. TAS 30-3; ZH 8a:304, 9:31, 71, 91-2.

There were further episodes of persecution in 1341/1922, when two Baha'is were attacked and injured, in 1344/1925, when a Baha'i woman was killed as she slept at night in her home, and in 1348/1929, when public readings of Avarih's book attacking the Baha'i Faith caused a resurgence of hostility towards the Baha'is.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion

This history demonstrates a number of points which apply to many other Baha'i communities in Iran: the dependence of the Baha'i community on a prior Babi community which in turn had come into existence on the back of a previous Shaykhi community; the pressure exerted by the Muslim clerics of the area; the vulnerability of the Baha'i communities in small towns and villages to the notables and landowners of the area; the development of Baha'i institutions (such as local assemblies and devotional meetings) and facilities (such as a bath and schools); and the manner in which these Baha'i communities were constantly having to negotiate for their survival in a dialogue with clerics, governors, landowners and the mob. A number of features of the community, however, were unusual. The number of well-qualified clerics who became Baha'is is particularly notable. It was not unusual for one or two clerics to convert to the Baha'i Faith in each area, but these were often minor clerics. In this area, we have seven or eight major clerics and a number of minor ones converting. Presumably this must be due to the individuals mentioned at the start of this account, who prepared people for this event, and the Shaykhi movement, which carried out the same function.

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# Commentary

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## Imagining Baha'i Law

Commentary on Udo Schaefer, 'An Introduction to Baha'i Law: Doctrinal Foundations, Principles and Structures', *Journal of Law and Religion*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2002-3) 307-72

(available at <http://www.udoschaefer.com/pdffiles/introduction%2obahai-law.pdf>).

### Roshan Danesh

Very little has been written about Baha'i law, and even less about how it may be understood, expanded and applied in the future. In the Baha'i Faith, discussion of principles of legal interpretation and methodology has yet to begin. What we do know is that individuals are encouraged to interpret scripture for themselves.<sup>1</sup> Also, it is absolutely clear that such individual interpretations are not authoritative or binding<sup>2</sup> and, without question, that there exists a legislative body for the expansion of Baha'i law – the Universal House of Justice. But the principles that will govern the legislative enterprise have not been explicated or analysed. Further, beyond what appears to be a rejection of the strict principles of *stare decisis*,<sup>3</sup> and as such a privileging of a contextual approach, it is almost wholly unknown how a future Baha'i judiciary might function or interpret the law.

While scholarship concerning Baha'i law is in its infancy, it will likely begin to develop further in the near future. Increased interaction between religion and state has historically spurred the development of religious law and legal systems. This is true, for example, in the evolution of both Islamic law and canon law. In Islam, the emergence of Muslim rulers in historically non-Muslim territories contributed to the emergence of a body of Islamic law to be applied to the population. In the Middle Ages, the development of canon law was in support of papal claims to temporal power, as can most clearly be seen in the 11th and 12th centuries.

For very different reasons, Baha'i communities around the globe are increasingly interacting with the state – and becoming involved in public life. Historically, the main rationale for state-Baha'i interaction outside of Iran was to secure legal status for local communities or support for persecuted Baha'i communities elsewhere, but this is beginning to change. Baha'i communities are now sometimes asked to take on a more explicitly public role. Such public roles are largely a by-product of community growth and the recognition of the Baha'i Faith as an independent religion. However, the comfortable existence of Baha'i communities within liberal-democratic states in Europe and North America may face challenges in the near future, and in particular concerning how Baha'i law and the law of the state will interact. One example of this is

### Keywords

Baha'i law  
 Udo Schaefer  
*Journal of Law and Religion*  
 textualism  
 law in practice  
 religious law  
 interaction of law and religion

1. In relation to laws and ordinances Baha'u'llah articulates different principles of interpretation than those that apply, for example, to allegorical passages. In relation to laws and ordinances Baha'u'llah emphasizes the importance of the 'evident' or 'obvious' meanings of the words.
2. As opposed to the authoritative interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, which are binding on both individual Baha'i's and Baha'i institutions.
3. A Latin term meaning to stand by what has been previously decided. In general terms, the principle of

precedent – that earlier court decisions are binding on later courts faced with the same issue.

4. In Canada, for example, the legal definition of marriage was changed in 2005 to include two individuals of the same sex. It remains to be seen how this and consequent changes in the law will interact with the role of state-mandated Baha'i marriage officers, charitable status for Baha'i institutions and other related issues. This interaction will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

seen in the increasing number of governments legalizing, or considering legalizing, same-sex marriage. A Baha'i marriage, under Baha'i law, is limited to two individuals of the opposite sex. It is unclear how these changes in marriage law (which can reflect changing constitutional norms) will impact on the legal organization of Baha'i communities and, for example, the role of Baha'i marriage officers, who may also be agents of the state.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, historical examples of how religion–state interaction institutes a period of development of religious law are often much more stark than the forms of increased interaction that are currently seen in state–Baha'i relations. In the Baha'i context there is no current claim or issue of temporal power. Rather, the current questions are preoccupied with how the Baha'i community might assist the state in particular policy areas, or in the legal organization and status of the Baha'i community within the state. But these narrower questions are sufficient to require significant discussion and debate concerning Baha'i law. Thus, one may expect that individuals and institutions will intensify the study and development of Baha'i law in the near future.

Udo Schaefer's paper 'An Introduction to Baha'i Law: Doctrinal Foundations, Principles and Structures' is a logical starting point for exploring directions in which discussions of legal interpretation and methodology might develop within the Baha'i community, in particular as a result of Baha'i–state interaction. As the first overview of Baha'i law to be published in a major legal journal, Schaefer's paper represents one of the most likely entryways into Baha'i law for individuals, scholars and institutions, both within and outside of the Baha'i community. It is instructive, therefore, to review the approach Schaefer takes to Baha'i law, some of the choices and assumptions he makes, and the image a reader may be left with concerning the fundamentals of Baha'i law.

### Schaefer's text-centric construction of Baha'i law

Schaefer explains the purpose of his paper in the following terms:

The present study aims to provide an overview of the revealed law of the Bahā'i Faith, which is of interest for students of both legal history and religious studies. We are entering virgin territory here, as no attempt has yet been made at a systematic jurisprudence, nor has a tradition of Bahā'i jurisprudence been established that might compare with the Islamic *Usūlul-fiqh*. Since the foundations and principles of this law can be understood only within their theological context, and knowledge of this context is rare outside the Bahā'i community, some basic background information about the faith will be provided first. (308)

Within this purpose, one finds a text-centric approach towards Baha'i law. Namely, the task of providing an overview of Baha'i law primarily involves identifying and organizing the rules stated in Baha'i scripture. As Schaefer writes:

The Bahā'i community is in the possession of a revealed Law, a *ius divinum*, whose source is the entire body of sacred texts emanating from the pen of Bahā'u'llāh, which together constitute the 'Book' (*al-kitāb*). (317)

Specifically, in Schaefer's text-centric approach, an understanding of Baha'i law comes from placing it within its theological framework and thus within the Baha'i religious system as a whole. As a result the paper is basically constructed in three broad topics. It opens with a discussion of the historical, religious and theological context of Baha'i law – including Baha'i concepts of religion, the state and justice (312–16). This is followed by a discussion of the core constructs of a religious law: sources, how the law is brought into force and temporal validity (317–23). Finally, the bulk of the paper outlines some of the rules that Schaefer suggests from the corpus of the Baha'i *ius divinum*, organized in categories of penal, family, marriage, inheritance and community constitutional law (324–62).

Schaefer's approach results in a particular form of presentation of Baha'i law – a presentation that is familiar to legal academics and scholars of religious law. This is a rule-oriented, formal and positivistic body of law. Use of the term *ius divinum* connotes a set of clearly prescribed rules, which can be organized and categorized according to the general categories of either common or civil legal systems. Further, Baha'i law is also considered to be embedded within the logic of theology – the law is understood to exist within and to reflect fundamental norms and principles concerning the nature of God, and the relationship between God and human beings. Thus, as Schaefer describes, the expansion of the body of law must reflect these theological norms, and in the Baha'i context this means that all Baha'i law is elevated to the category of divine law. He discusses the legitimate sources of Baha'i law as follows:

Finally, the Bahā'ī community has a supplementary divine law that is also in the category of *ius divinum positivum*, namely the legislation made by the Universal House of Justice, the supreme administrative body, which is democratically elected by the world community. The published laws established by this body are therefore also sources of law. Thus, the Bahā'ī divine law is a *ius divinum positivum* with the subcategories of *ius divinum scripturae* and *ius divinum supplementum*, which together constitute the Bahā'ī sacred law. (319)

While other justifications for the law might be offered, the ultimate one is positivistic in nature – legitimacy is innate because the law is mandated by God, either through the intermediary of His Manifestation (Baha'u'llah), or through the institutions that He created and inspires as the lawgiver.

By providing an explication of the rules of the religion, the norms and principles that inspire them, and the affirmation of their status as being of God, Schaefer provides what one would expect from an early work on a religious law. Indeed, Schaefer's paper is somewhat similar to projects of scholars of Islamic law in Europe and North America in the 1960s and 1970s to provide broad overviews of Islamic law and organize and systematize vast bodies of material. For example, Joseph Schacht, in his seminal work *An Introduction to Islamic Law*,<sup>5</sup> focuses on the historical context of Islamic law, its status as a sacred law and the statement of legal rules, for which he used (like Schaefer) categories heavily drawn from western legal traditions.

Ultimately, Schaefer leaves the reader with the image of Baha'i law as a new *shari'a* – as Baha'i scripture providing a clearly delineated set of rules, which in various ways and to various degrees challenge, reform or overturn

5. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964.

6. For a review of the historical treatment of Baha'i law see Roshan Danesh, 'The Politics of Delay – Social Meanings and the Historical Treatment of Baha'i Law', *World Order*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2004) 33–45.

scriptural rules of the past. Indeed, the Qur'an is the main point of reference for Schaefer as he seeks to present Baha'i laws. Further, Schaefer places these new scriptural rules into some rational–legal structure, laying the foundation for future codifications of the law:

The Law revealed by Bahā'u'llāh (like all revealed law) is not a consistent legal system, let alone a systematic code. It is rudimentary, calculated for further development. The Kitāb-i Aqdas (like the Qur'ān) only regulates certain aspects of law, such as matters concerning personal status (e.g. family law and inheritance law) and penal law. The latter includes only a few norms which, in combination with statements on the theology of law and on the purpose of punishment, are intended to form the basis of a future criminal code. The Kitāb-i Aqdas and the Testament of 'Abdu'l-Baha comprise the constitutional law of the community. (324)

### Questioning a text-centric approach

While Schaefer's text-centric approach meets general expectations concerning the treatment of religious law, it is precisely in setting out to meet these expectations – to privilege a text-centric approach – that certain issues arise.

The treatment of Baha'i law and in particular core legal-scriptural texts such as the Kitab-i-Aqdas, has been a point of controversy in Baha'i history.<sup>6</sup> Baha'i law was consciously backgrounded by Bahā'u'llāh, a pattern which was largely maintained through the ministries of 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi, and continues to be maintained by the Universal House of Justice. This backgrounding was partially a function of the realities of a religious system in its early stages of development, especially for a community as small and dispersed as the Baha'i community. But more significantly, from the days of Bahā'u'llāh the backgrounding was positioned as one expression of the nature of Baha'i law itself. While the laws 'must be faithfully obeyed by all', in 'observing them one must exercise tact and wisdom' 'so that nothing might happen that could cause disturbance or dissension or raise clamour among the heedless'. In these statements, and the backgrounding of his law, Bahā'u'llāh is both affirming the normative validity – indeed the essentiality – of his law for the well-being of humanity while at the same time distinguishing the fact of normative validity from the political dimension of law, and specifically how the coercive force of law is used as a force for both individual and social change.

This recognition of the political dimensions of law innately frees the law from some of the implications of the positivist assumptions that often accompany assertions of divine law. While the fact of God's voice may legitimate the law, God's voice alone does not *de facto* legitimate the application of that law. In terms of placing Baha'i law within its own history, this means that the story is not one of revelation, interpretation and application. Rather, the story of Baha'i law is of gradualism, a privileging of individual conscience and choice over coercion, the acceptance of a diversity of practices in certain contexts, and a focus on the construction of social conditions in which the wider applications of a religious law may be a positive force for change. This is distinct from many traditions of religious law where the unquestionable validity of a divine legal sanction encourages a drive to apply the laws, and to starkly sanction their violation. It is also

foreign to aspects of modern traditions of positive law, in which law cannot be said to exist apart from the power of the state.

Schaefer notes this particular feature of Baha'i law when he writes:

A peculiar feature of Baha'ism is that most norms of the revealed law (including the ordinances of ritual) do not come into force *ipso iure* upon their promulgation, but have to be formally enacted by introductory acts of the supreme legislative body with global responsibility, the 'Universal House of Justice' (*Baytu'l-'adl al-a'zam*). This gradual process of bringing laws into force derives from the founder of the religion himself, who did not want the break with the customary order of life to be too abrupt; instead, it should be fitted to the capacity of people to accept it. Moreover, the socially relevant legal norms, especially the regulations concerning criminal justice, presume the existence of a society already shaped by the revelation, a 'society destined to emerge from the chaotic conditions that prevail today'. A further reason for the need for formal enactment of the revealed laws is that they are valid for a period of at least one thousand years. As social conditions on earth are subject to constant change, legal norms that regulate specific details once and for all are in danger of leading to rigid legal casuistry and to the petrification of the law. Bahā'u'llāh has eliminated this danger by providing the legal system 'with an essential element of flexibility'. The divine law regulates only 'matters of major importance'. Moreover, the legal norms have been revealed at a high level of abstraction. They are so general and leave so much unregulated that they need to be specified and adapted to the conditions of the time. They are in need of detailed sub-regulations. In the Baha'i community these sub-regulations – the development of the legal system – do not result from authoritative *interpretation* by the religious scholars, 'the learned ones' (as the Rabbis in Judaism and the '*ulama*' in Islam), but from supplementary *legislation*. The institution of a supreme legislature that has been 'freed from all error' allows for constant adaptation of the law to changing social conditions, since this legislature can amend its own laws, though *ius divinum*, and thus take account of altered circumstances.

Certain legal norms were (at least for the eastern Bahā'īs) considered binding from the start, others were declared universally valid by 'Abdu'l-Bahā, and later by Shoghi Effendi and eventually by the Universal House of Justice. As far as the institutions and structures of community order are concerned, implementation of law began during the office of 'Abdu'l-Bahā. It is self-evident that revealed legal norms are effective in the community as ethical guidelines even before they come into force. (321–3)

This excellent description of how Baha'i law operates points to the very tension found in Schaefer's text-centric approach. The fact that the laws revealed by Bahā'u'llāh are not automatically binding, are subject to another legislative act to be brought into force and are contingent on the construction of certain social conditions, would suggest that a text-centric approach is only appropriate for limited and certain ends.<sup>7</sup> An approach which focuses on delineating rules within their theological context to demonstrate their internal logic within the Baha'i system, and as such their normative validity within the Baha'i belief system, is perfectly appropriate to illustrate Baha'i theology, or Baha'i visions of a future state of society.

7. To be clear, the contingency of Baha'i law on the construction of certain social conditions – and more generally claims about the relative nature of divine law – should not be construed as absolute. The Universal House of Justice's supplementary legislation cannot be in conflict with a law explicitly stated in the writings of Bahā'u'llāh (noting, however, that the definition of what constitutes a conflict remains unexamined). In other words, the laws of Bahā'u'llāh form a general framework or outline of the religious law, and are laws that are intended to be activated. Those rules are expressions of divine will and give shape to the supplementary legislation that is expected to emerge in the future.

8. This is made explicit by 'Abdu'l-Baha:

Those matters of major importance which constitute the foundation of the Law of God are explicitly recorded in the Text, but subsidiary laws are left to the House of Justice. The wisdom of this is that the times never remain the same, for change is a necessary quality and an essential attribute of this world, and of time and place. Therefore the House of Justice will take action accordingly . . .

Briefly, this is the wisdom of referring the laws of society to the House of Justice. In the religion of Islam, similarly, not every ordinance was explicitly revealed; nay not a tenth part of a tenth part was included in the Text; although all matters of major importance were specifically referred to, there were undoubtedly thousands of laws which were unspecified. These were devised by the divines of a later age according to the laws of Islamic jurisprudence, and individual divines made conflicting deductions from the original revealed ordinances. All these were enforced. Today this process of deduction is the right of the body of the House of Justice, and the deductions and conclusions of individual learned men have no authority, unless they are endorsed by the House of Justice. The difference is precisely this, that from the conclusions and

However, it is limited as a method to illustrate the nature of Baha'i law, or to provide the foundations for a systematic jurisprudence – which is Schaefer's stated goal. Unlike *usul al-fiqh*, the Baha'i system is specifically designed to not create an elaborate apparatus of laws and doctrines that exist apart from (and often in tension with) the acts of legislative authority and formal institutions.<sup>8</sup> As such, it would make sense to emphasize how Baha'i law may operate and be applied early on in the process of developing approaches to Baha'i jurisprudence. Focusing primarily on text-based rules found in scripture is not as useful. Baha'u'llah, as well as Baha'i legal authorities, have emphasized the method of Baha'i law, as well as its substance.<sup>9</sup> Scholars should be attentive to this fact when outlining the nature of Baha'i law.

A text-centric approach also runs the risk of misconstruing issues of authority, enforceability and coercion in respect to Baha'i law. One illustration of this is in the very choice to use familiar legal categories born out of the western legal tradition to organize and delineate the rules found in Baha'u'llah's writings. These categories are not neutral – but rather carry with them assumptions and connotations that may, or may not, be appropriate for understanding the nature and function of Baha'i law.

For example, Schaefer's use and discussion of Baha'i 'penal law' raises many issues concerning how Baha'i law is being presented. Schaefer is not explicit about the way in which he uses the term 'penal'. His discussion appears to suggest that he is using the term in the sense of 'criminal' as opposed to the more general meaning of 'involving a penalty, or punishment'. The significance of this is that there are qualitative differences between different forms of offences. What a society agrees constitutes a criminal offence carries with it the full weight of social stigma and opprobrium, as well as the full coercive power of the state to do violence to offenders. On the other hand, there are vast ranges of penalties that are understood socially, and legally treated, as being distinctly different from pure criminal offences in nature. One example are offences that might be deemed 'regulatory' or 'statutory'.<sup>10</sup>

Schaefer begins his discussion of penal law by noting that:

The Kitāb-i Aqdas contains some provisions of penal law, but these are expressed in a very general and abstract way, allowing for the later specification of offenses. There is no legal definition of elements of an offense. The details of penal laws were not specified by Bahā'u'llāh. (324)

This raises a red flag. Baha'u'llah undoubtedly identifies many offences in the Kitab-i-Aqdas. But what constitutes a criminal offence, as opposed to an offence that we should understand in other terms, is not clearly identified in scripture – and cannot be identified at this point in the development of Baha'i law.<sup>11</sup> This is a matter to be clarified by the Universal House of Justice, in the context of the social norms and realities of the societies in which they are required to legislate and bring law into force. By lumping such a wide range of 'offences' into the category of penal law – including murder, arson, theft, homosexuality, adultery and backbiting – Schaefer has imposed a current legal category, which carries with it significant weight and connotations, onto a mixed bag of offences that may not all belong in

the same categories as Baha'i law develops. What constitutes a 'crime' in a Baha'i legal order, and how legal authorities might enforce the law and punish offenders remains wholly unknown. In other words, it is too soon, and too unclear, to speak of a Baha'i penal law, especially in the criminal law sense, and particularly a penal law which lumps together everything that has the appearance of being an 'offence' in the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*.

Further, 'penal' law is a public law – supported by the coercive power of the state. There does not exist a 'penal' law in the absence of such authority, except in the hypothetical or theoretical sense. Moreover, penal laws, especially as they connote a criminal offence by their very nature, are representative of and embedded within the social meanings and norms of the society in which they emerge. In this respect, Baha'i penal law is the quintessential example of how divine law is subject to processes of social construction. Baha'u'llah's assertion of the validity of his laws for all of humanity must be read in the context of his assertion of the dynamic, gradual and contingent nature of his law. One example of the effect of this may be found with the issue of adultery. While it is possible that sexual relations outside of marriage (or *zina*) will in any future Baha'i order constitute a penal (criminal) offence (though this is not clear from the texts), at the same time it can be legitimately asserted that within contemporary Baha'i communities adultery is not understood or treated as a penal (criminal) offence, nor do Baha'is tend to view adultery outside the Baha'i community through the lens of criminality.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the Baha'i community is not generally encouraged to view it in these terms, but rather individuals are encouraged to strive to be examples in their sexual conduct, to be tolerant and loving, and to accept that they will be subject to failures and tests. Consider the following statements from the Baha'i writings, all of which relate to how some of the offences that fall under the term *zina* are to be treated:

The world today is submerged, amongst other things, in an over-exaggeration of the importance of physical love, and a dearth of spiritual values. In as far as possible the believers should try to realize this and rise above the level of their fellow-men who are, typical of all decadent periods in history, placing so much over-emphasis on the purely physical side of mating. Outside of their normal, legitimate married life they should seek to establish bonds of comradeship and love which are eternal and founded on the spiritual life of man, not on his physical life. This is one of the many fields in which it is incumbent on the Baha'is to set the example and lead the way to a true human standard of life, when the soul of man is exalted and his body but the tool for his enlightened spirit. Needless to say this does not preclude the living of a perfectly normal sex life in its legitimate channel of marriage.<sup>13</sup>

We must struggle against the evils in society by spiritual means, and by medical and social ones as well. We must be tolerant but uncompromising, understanding but immovable in our point of view.<sup>14</sup>

It is the challenging task of the Baha'is to obey the law of God in their own lives, and gradually to win the rest of mankind to its acceptance.

In considering the effect of obedience to the laws on individual lives, one must remember that the purpose of this life is to prepare the soul for the next. Here one must learn to control and direct one's animal impulses, not to be a

endorsements of the body of the House of Justice whose members are elected by and known to the worldwide Baha'i community, no differences will arise; whereas the conclusions of individual divines and scholars would definitely lead to differences, and result in schism, division, and dispersion. The oneness of the Word would be destroyed, the unity of the Faith would disappear, and the edifice of the Faith of God would be shaken. (Quoted in Baha'u'llah, *The Kitab-i-Aqdas*, Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1992, 4–5)

9. The Universal House of Justice, in its 'Introduction' to *The Kitab-i-Aqdas* emphasizes the principle of the 'progressive application' of Baha'i law and that the 'number of laws binding on Baha'is is not increased by the publication of this translation' [the publication in English in 1992]. In this emphasis on aspects of the application of Baha'i law, and that the 'society for which certain of the laws of the Aqdas are designed will come only gradually into being', the Universal House of Justice reflects the emphasis on method of use of the law of Baha'u'llah, 'Abdu'l-Baha and Shoghi Effendi. For a fuller discussion, see Roshan Danesh, *supra* note 6.

10. For example, in Canada, a federation, only the federal government has the

constitutional authority to pass criminal laws. The provinces, however, pass numerous laws on subject matters within their constitutional jurisdiction, and include punishments in those laws (within limits), in order to ensure that they are taken seriously. Examples include punishments for a wide range of activities, such as certain traffic offences, environmental offences, hunting activity, forestry and resource extraction, etc. These provincial laws are not purely criminal, but regulatory or statutory in character.

11. None of the words for 'law' or 'rule' in the *Kitab-i Aqdas* specifically imports a meaning of a criminal law or offence.
12. To be clear, Baha'i's are expected to live up to very high moral standards, including in relation to their sexual behaviour. The Baha'i writings exhort adherents to live a chaste life, and there are many Baha'i laws that relate to ensuring the maintenance of standards of chastity.
13. From a letter dated 28 September 1941 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, published in *A Chaste and Holy Life*, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, Baha'i World Centre, London: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1988, also at [http://bahai-library.com/?file=com\\_pilation\\_chaste\\_holy\\_life](http://bahai-library.com/?file=com_pilation_chaste_holy_life) (accessed 27 November 2005).

slave to them. Life in this world is a succession of tests and achievements, of falling short and of making new spiritual advances. Sometimes the course may seem very hard, but one can witness, again and again, that the soul who steadfastly obeys the law of Bahá'u'lláh, however hard it may seem, grows spiritually, while the one who compromises with the law for the sake of his own apparent happiness is seen to have been following a chimera: he does not attain the happiness he sought, he retards his spiritual advance and often brings new problems upon himself.<sup>15</sup>

In this example, one can see the implications of Schaefer's text-centric methodology for the image of Baha'i law it creates. The understanding of Baha'i law one gains from Schaefer is one that emphasizes rules over method, and the absolute validity of those laws as a *ius divinum*. In contrast, Baha'i law may be framed in terms of the ways in which it is applied, used and enforced. One then finds a de-emphasis of positive authority, an enlightened and diffuse perspective on methods of social change, and a practical illustration of how unity cannot be achieved through coercion, such as the coercive applications of legal norms in social situations that are not prepared for them.

### Law as text/law in practice

Ultimately, the example above is intended to draw a distinction between 'Law as Text' as contrasted with 'Law in Practice', and illustrate that these two different discourses will create quite different perceptions and understandings of the same subject-matter. The key contrasts of these two approaches, in the context of a religious law, can be summarized as follows:

	Law as Text	Law in Practice
<b>Focuses on the</b>	Word	word in action
<b>In order to identify</b>	statements of rules	ways in which statements of rules are used or applied
<b>Which are part of</b>	the <i>ius divinum</i>	political and social institutions, and thus embedded within particular social meanings and norms
<b>And advances our understanding of</b>	the theology of law	the realities of how religious legal systems develop and change, and in particular how the Baha'i system might evolve
<b>And demonstrates</b>	the absolute validity of the rules.	the contingent/contextual validity of rules, and the political and social processes needed for the application of the rules.

To be clear, the main emphasis of this brief comment is not necessarily to argue for the objective or normative superiority of one image of law over another. Rather, the main assertion is that different legal discourses will interpret and treat a legal subject in a different manner, and the conclusions reached concerning that legal subject may thus vary widely. Students of law will also recognize that the general categories outlined in the table could be

situated within contemporary jurisprudential thought – and quite familiar debates between, for example, formalism and realism.

What has been put forward throughout this short comment, is that a 'Law in Practice' discourse is essential for meaningful discussion of Baha'i law, especially where the stated purpose is to contribute to the project of forming a systematic jurisprudence, or otherwise understanding Baha'i law in its legal character and dimensions. Schaefer's more formal approach also has much to contribute, but at this stage in the development of Baha'i law, privileging an image of Baha'i law as a new (updated) *shari'a* – especially to the exclusion of a 'Law in Practice' image – is problematic. Schaefer's portrayal of Baha'i law, while continuous with strong traditions within the study of religious law, and demonstrating continuity with scriptural legal traditions, is somewhat at odds with the history of Baha'i law. Indeed, the law as found in the texts is subsumed by a legal practice which – while maintaining the integrity and authority of the texts, and the rules stated therein – accepts that the application and expansion of Baha'i law is subject to a progressive and gradual process of social change. As valuable as Schaefer's work is, it puts forward an image of Baha'i law that is incomplete. Without the balance of a 'Law in Practice' discourse, Baha'i law is distorted in favour of a positivistic and formalistic portrayal that betrays the contextual underpinnings of the system. A 'Law in Practice' image is needed as a guidepost for future scholars as they build on the pathways Schaefer has laid.

#### **Suggested citation**

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14. From a letter dated 21 May 1954 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, published in *A Chaste and Holy Life*.

15. From a letter dated 6 February 1973 written by the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, published in *A Chaste and Holy Life*.



# Research Note

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## The Global Distribution of Baha'is in the 1920s

Peter Smith

### Abstract

Unfortunately, our knowledge of basic Baha'i demographics during the 1920s is still very poor. This note summarizes the information presently available, and may serve to encourage further and much-needed research on the topic.

### 1. Global distribution

With the introduction of the *Bahā'i Year Book/Bahā'i World* series from 1925–6 onwards, we have for the first time a global set of publicly available official Baha'i statistics and it becomes possible to gain a sense of the distribution of the Baha'i Faith worldwide. Thus, by 1925 there was at least a minimal Baha'i presence in 27 countries and colonial territories throughout the world. In the Middle East, there were Baha'is in Iran, Turkey and the mandated territories of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine; in North Africa, in Egypt and Tunis; in sub-Saharan Africa, in South Africa; in the rest of Asia, in India, Burma, China and Japan; in the Pacific, in Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii (then an overseas American territory); in the Americas, in Brazil, Canada and the United States; in Europe, in Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland. There were also Baha'is in the newly established Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, in the Caucasus, Turkestan and European Russia.<sup>1</sup> This was not a period of dramatic Baha'i expansion, but by 1930 there were Baha'is in an additional 15 territories (making a total of 42): Transjordan (modern Jordan); South West Africa (modern Namibia); [Southern] Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe); the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia); the Philippines; Hong Kong; French Polynesia (Tahiti); Fiji; Denmark; the Netherlands; Hungary; the Irish Free State (Ireland); Norway; Poland; and Yugoslavia. A Baha'i group in Korea emerged briefly, in 1928, but by 1930 it was no longer recorded.

Of course, these various Baha'i 'presences' varied greatly in their size and nature, from Iran, with a very large Baha'i community of many tens of thousands which traced its origins back to its Babi forebears of the 1840s, to the small but well-organized and dynamic community of North America and a sprinkling of newly arrived or newly converted individuals in such places as Tahiti, Norway and Rhodesia. Some presences were somewhat insubstantial: one address in Italy (of an American expatriate) is noted as 'In summer only'.<sup>2</sup>

### Keywords

Baha'i statistics  
 1920s  
 institutional growth  
 population figures  
 administration  
 Iran  
 USA

1. If these three areas are counted as separate territories (as in the *Bahā'i World* series), then the total number of countries and territories in 1925 would be raised to 29.
2. BW 2:185. The abbreviation 'BW' is used hereinafter for the successive volumes of *The Bahā'i World* (vols. 2–12, 1928–54. Rpt. Wilmette IL: Bahā'i Publishing Trust, 1980–81). 'BYB' represents *The Bahā'i Year Book*, vol. 1 (for 1925–6).

3. The available figures vary in what they provide. Those for 1925 (calculated from BYB 1:101–3) comprise a list of ‘Leading Local Baha’i Centers’ (a few of them specifically marked as [local] spiritual assemblies); ‘Local Baha’i Assemblies’ in North America; ‘Baha’i Groups’ in North America; and ‘Foreign Baha’i Centers’. The 1928 figures (BW 2: 182–90) list [local] spiritual assemblies – with names and addresses of secretaries corrected to 30 April 1928; ‘Baha’i groups’ (one list with contact addresses and another without); and ‘Baha’i Administrative Divisions in Persia’. The figures for 1930 (BW 3:217–27) provide lists of local assemblies (with secretaries’ addresses as of 30 April 1930); ‘Baha’i [local] Assemblies and Groups’ (a few with addresses, and with some inconsistencies, including the exclusion of North American local assemblies); ‘Young People’s Baha’i Groups’; and the Iranian administrative divisions. All three directories also list national spiritual assemblies.

An indication of these differences can be derived from a consideration of the figures for Baha’i ‘centres’, ‘groups’ and local spiritual assemblies, which can be calculated from *The Baha’i World* volumes for the Baha’i population outside of Iran. None of these conceptualizations is without problems as a measure of Baha’i distribution, especially during the 1920s, when the modern system of local assemblies was just being established and different systems of organization were in use in various parts of the Baha’i world. In modern Baha’i usage, which originated in the 1920s, a centre or ‘locality’ can refer to any place (city, town, village, hamlet, rural or urban district) in which there is at least one Baha’i; a group represents at least two Baha’is in a specific place but not yet an organized assembly; and a local assembly is a nine-member elected council representing a particular local Baha’i community. Centres or localities therefore provide us with the most inclusive measure of the Baha’i presence in a country or territory, while the establishment of local assemblies indicates organized bodies of local Baha’is. These measures do not give us a clear indication of Baha’i numbers – a local spiritual assembly might represent a community of only nine adult Baha’is (the bare minimum for its existence) or one comprising several thousands of families. Nor do they provide us with a uniform measure of distribution: localities have been defined differently over time and from one country to another (does the presence of a Baha’i in a neighbouring village or suburb constitute a separate locality, or does he/she belong to a nearby group or assembly? Should a large city be subdivided into separate sub-communities etc.). Nevertheless, the available data (Table 1) does allow us to make a number of broad-brush comments on the distribution of Baha’is around the world.<sup>3</sup>

Region	Local spiritual assemblies (LSAs)			Total listed localities <sup>1</sup>		
	1925	1928	1930	1925	1928	1930
Iran	U	17 <sup>2</sup>	17 <sup>2</sup>	28 <sup>3</sup>	346	473
Rest of Islamic heartland	U	5	5	34 <sup>3</sup>	66	68
North America	43	49	48	69	69	74
Europe	U	12 <sup>4</sup>	11	39 <sup>3</sup>	60	75
Rest of the world	U	19	20	20 <sup>3</sup>	32	41
<i>Totals</i>	U	102	101	190	573	731
<i>Totals excluding Iran</i>	U	85	84	162	227	258

Table 1: Local spiritual assemblies and localities by region, 1925–30.

Source: Calculated from BYB 1:101–3; BW 2:182–90; 3:217–27.

Key: U = Data unavailable or incomplete.

Notes: 1. LSAs and recognized groups unless otherwise stated.

2. LSA figures for Iran are for divisional centres.

3. ‘Baha’i Centres’.

4. Five German LSAs assumed (as per 1930). Original data undifferentiated.

As to Iran, it should be noted that comparable statistics do not exist during this period, the figures available being for the 17 Baha'i 'administrative divisions' into which the country was divided in 1927, each with its own listed towns and villages. To produce global figures, I have counted each of these divisions as a local assembly and each of the listed towns and villages as a locality, but I am obviously forcing the data in doing so. Note also, that I have included the 1925 figures, even though presuming that they massively under-report the number of Baha'i localities in Iran (with only 28 centres listed for 1925, whereas figures for 1928 and subsequent years list many hundreds).

It should also be noted that there are likely to be qualitative differences between the figures for North America and some parts of the rest of the world, reflecting the more rapid development of modern Baha'i administration in North America. Thus, while the American and Canadian figures for assemblies and groups can be presumed to be exact, some of the rest are more uncertain, with European 'groups', for example, including a number of localities in which only a single Baha'i was resident, and the British figures for 1925 and 1928 excluding everyone who was not in a local assembly area. Everywhere, the figures for local spiritual assemblies are likely to be accurate, as these bodies were required to be formally established and re-formed or re-elected on an annual basis. In summary, the information available is as follows:

	1925	1928	1930
North America	LSAs and groups	LSAs and groups	LSAs and groups
Iran	Centres	Administrative divisions	Administrative divisions
Rest of world	Centres	LSAs, groups and at least some isolated Baha'is	LSAs, groups and at least some isolated Baha'is

Pooling this information from three volumes of the *Bahā'ī Year Book*/*Bahā'ī World* series results in Table 1.

In terms of localities, Iran clearly dominated in the two years for which full data is available (1928, 1930), with 473 localities by 1930, and approaching two-thirds of the world total for both years (60%, 65%). Meanwhile, the number of localities in which Baha'is resided in the rest of the world rose from 162 (1925) to 227 (1928) and then 258 (1930), a 14% increase for the 1928–30 period, when the figures are more reliable. Of the areas outside Iran, the main concentrations were in the remainder of the Faith's 'Islamic heartland' (the Middle East, North Africa and Soviet Asia), North America and Europe, each with more than a quarter of the non-Iranian localities (26%, 29% and 29% respectively in 1930). The whole of the rest of the world (sub-Saharan Africa, the Indian subcontinent, East and South-East Asia, Australasia and Latin America) was relatively insignificant, together accounting for only 12% of the total in 1925, rising to 14% in 1928 and 16% in 1930.

Reliable local assembly figures for 1925, outside of North America, are not available; but the 1928 and 1930 figures outside of Iran may be assumed to be accurate. It is noteworthy that the figures for both years are almost the same (global totals of 102 and 101, and non-Iranian totals of 85 and 84), indicating that the newly established administration had stabilized. Note also that

the local assemblies in North America (the area of greatest administrative strength) constituted almost half the world total for both years. As already noted, the low figures for Iran may be misleading: the Iranian Baha'is adopted a system of administrative regions ('divisions') in 1927, and it is these figures which are given – no separate 'local assembly' figures being available.

## 2. The 'Islamic heartland'

The Baha'i Faith initially emerged and developed in Iran and the Ottoman Empire, which, together with the former Imperial Russian provinces in the Caucasus and Central Asia, I have termed the religion's 'Islamic heartland'. The region's predominance in the global figures for localities has already been noted and reflects its historical status. Differences between countries/territories within this area were considerable, as is indicated in Table 2.

Country	Local spiritual assemblies (LSAs)			Total listed localities <sup>1</sup>		
	1925	1928	1930	1925	1928	1930
Iran (Persia)	U	17 <sup>2</sup>	17 <sup>2</sup>	28	346	473
Turkey	1	1	1	2	3	9
ARAB WORLD						
Iraq (Mesopotamia)	—	0	0	4	7	8
Syria (and Lebanon) <sup>3</sup>	2	2	2	4	7	4
Palestine (and Transjordan)	1	1	1	2	4	8 <sup>4</sup>
Egypt	U	1	1	5	10	4
Tunis	—	0	0	1	1	1
<i>Sub-totals</i>	[3]	4	4	16	29	25
SOVIET ASIA						
Caucasus	—	0	0	11	17	17
Turkestan	—	0	0	5	17	17
<i>Sub-totals</i>	—	0	0	16	34	34
<i>Totals</i>	[4]	22	22	62	412	541
<i>Totals excluding Iran</i>	[4]	5	5	34	66	68

Table 2: Local spiritual assemblies and localities in 'Islamic heartland', 1925–30.

Source: Calculated from BYB 1:101–3; BW 2:182–90; 3:217–27.

Key: U = Unavailable or incomplete.

Notes: 1. 'Baha'i centres' in 1925. LSAs and recognized groups in 1928 and 1930, excluding Iran.

2. LSA figures for Iran are for divisional centres.

3. Beirut (Lebanon) is listed under Syria (both territories were part of the French mandate).

4. 'Adasiyyih (Transjordan) is listed under Palestine (both territories were part of the British mandate).

Clearly, Iran – with some 473 listed localities by 1930 – was in a category of its own, and represented the dominant concentration of Baha'is in the region (87% of the total of 541 localities), but the rest of the region had a significant share of the non-Iranian localities worldwide (26% in 1930). Very few local spiritual assemblies were formed, however, with only five listed in the Middle East outside of Iran during this period (Alexandretta, Beirut, Haifa, Istanbul and Port Said). The developing persecution of all forms of religion in the Soviet Union created problems for the Baha'is in the Caucasus and Turkestan, as is reflected by the absence of local assemblies in the two areas.

It should be noted that while there were Baha'is living in Iran, Turkey, the Soviet Union and seven Arab territories during the 1920s, there were no Baha'is listed in Afghanistan, the Sudan, Libya (Italian North Africa), Algeria, Morocco, or any part of the Arabian Peninsula.

The Iranian figures present special difficulties. Thus, the 1925 listing gives only 28 'Baha'i centres' for the whole country, a figure that presumably reflects not the total number of localities or local spiritual assemblies, but rather the lack of even basic Baha'i statistics for Iran at that time. This supposition is borne out by the detailed figures provided in 1928 and 1930, both of which utilize a framework of 17 'Baha'i Administrative Divisions', as adopted at the first Iranian Baha'i national convention on 23 May 1927, each with a designated central town and associated towns and villages – with overall totals of 346 (1928) and 473 (1930) respectively (Table 3). Exactly what these administrative centres represented is unclear: it is possible that each had an elected local spiritual assembly to coordinate Baha'i work in the division; but the official listing of local spiritual assemblies outside of Tehran remained meagre, with only five listed in 1928 and 1930 (Hamadān, Kāshān, Kirmān, Mashhad and Sultān-Ābād; BW 2:182–3; 3:218).

It will be seen that these administrative divisions vary considerably in their numbers of designated localities, with Khurasan (96), Isfahan (81 by 1930) and Yazd (55 by 1930) between them having almost half the total for the whole country (232 out of 473). The relative sparsity of Baha'i localities in the south of the country is noteworthy. It is not known whether the increases in the total number of localities between 1928 and 1930 was the result of administrative consolidation or of the establishment of Baha'is in new outlying areas. The system of administrative divisions established in 1927 was evidently amended at some point, with the Astarabad division of 1928 being subsequently absorbed into Mazandaran, while a new division for Sistan, in the remote south-east, had come into existence by 1930.

### 3. North America

Outside of Iran, the most important Baha'i community in the world during the 1920s was that of 'North America', i.e. the United States of America and Canada (Table 4). As will be seen, the community was predominantly American, with Canada contributing only a small number of local spiritual assemblies (1 and 2) and total localities (2 and 3). It will be seen that there was some slight growth during the period, with the total number of local assemblies increasing from 43 to 48, while localities increased from 69 to 74.

Division	Centre	1928	1930
<i>North-West</i>		84	103
Azerbaijan (Ādharbāyjān)	Tabrīz	33	37
Qazvīn	Qazvīn	13	18
‘Irāq [Ajamī]	Sultān-Ābād	12	12
Hamadān	Hamadān	14	22
Kirmānshāhān	Kirmānshāh	12	14
<i>North</i>		51	64
Tehran (Tehrān)	Tehran	22	23
Gilān	Rasht	8	8
Māzandarān	Sārī	20	33
Astarābād	Bandar-i Jaz	1	[in Māzandarān]
<i>North-East</i>		96	96
Khurāsān	Mashhad	96	96
<i>Central</i>		85	177
Kāshān	Kāshān	11	20
Isfahan (Isfāhān)	Isfahan	14	81
Yazd	Yazd	45	55
Kīrmān	Kīrmān	15	21
<i>South</i>		30	33
Fārs	Shīrāz	20	20
Khuzistān	Ahvāz	6	8
Banādir-i Junūb	Bushire (Būshīhr)	4	4
Sistan	Duzdab	—	1
<i>Totals</i>		346	473

Table 3: Baha'i administrative divisions and localities in Iran, 1928 and 1930.

Source: Calculated from BW 2:182–90; 3:217–27.

Note: The division into geographical regions (North-West, North, North-East, Central, South) is my own.

Country	LSAs			Total listed localities <sup>1</sup>		
	1925	1928	1930	1925	1928	1930
Canada	1	2	2	3	2	2
USA	42	47	46	66	67	72
<i>Totals</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>74</i>

*Table 4: Local spiritual assemblies and localities in North America, 1925–30.*

Source: Calculated from BYB 1:101–3; BW 2:182–90; 3:217–27.

Notes: 1. LSAs and recognized groups.

Again, an unusually high proportion of listed localities had established local spiritual assemblies (71% and 64.9% for 1928 and 1930 respectively, compared to global figures, excluding Iran, of 37.4% and 32.2%), indicative of the North American Baha'is' lead in administrative development.

Within each country, there was considerable regional diversity. In Canada, only three provinces had a Baha'i presence (Quebec and British Columbia having local spiritual assemblies and New Brunswick a group [in 1925]). In the United States of America, 22 out of the 48 contiguous states did not have any recorded Baha'i presence during the entire period (Table 5). These were heavily concentrated regionally, with 5 in the Mountain states (Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming), 3 in the farming states of the Great Plains (Kansas, North and South Dakota), and 13 in the South (Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia). In other regions, where there were concentrations of Baha'is throughout the period (the Pacific seaboard states, the eastern Midwest, the Northeast), only one state (rural Vermont in New England) had no Baha'i presence. The non-contiguous territory of Alaska also had no Baha'i presence at this time.

#### 4. Europe

During the 1920s there were Baha'is in 15 European countries, including the European part of Russia (Russia itself being a constituent republic of the recently formed Soviet Union). A total of 14 countries had no Baha'i presence at this time – Belgium and Luxembourg; Portugal and Spain; Czechoslovakia; the Baltic states of Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; Iceland; and in the Balkans, Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and Romania. Nor were there any Baha'is in the several mini-states (Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco and San Marino), or the free city of Danzig. There was a marked growth in the overall number of localities over the period – from 39 to 75 (almost double).

Among the countries where there were Baha'is, their distribution was highly uneven (see Table 6), with just over half (38 out of 75) of the localities

Census division and state	LSAs			Total listed localities <sup>1</sup>		
	1925	1928	1930	1925	1928	1930
WEST	11	12	15	14	16	19
<i>Pacific (3)</i>	9	11	14	12	14	16
California	7	8	12	9	11	13
Oregon	1	1	1	1	1	1
Washington	1	2	1	2	2	2
<i>Mountain (8)</i>	2	1	1	2	2	3
Arizona	0	0	1	0	0	1
Colorado	1	1	0	1	1	1
Montana	1	0	0	1	1	1
Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming	0	0	0	0	0	0
NORTH CENTRAL	14	15	13	23	24	24
<i>West North Central (7)</i>	3	1	1	6	5	5
Iowa	0	0	0	1	1	1
Minnesota	2	1	1	3	3	3
Missouri	1	0	0	1	0	0
Nebraska	0	0	0	1	1	1
Kansas, North Dakota, South Dakota	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>East North Central (5)</i>	11	14	12	17	19	19
Illinois	2	4	4	4	6	5
Indiana	0	0	0	1	0	0
Michigan	3	4	3	4	4	5
Ohio	3	3	2	5	5	5
Wisconsin	3	3	3	3	4	4
NORTHEAST	12	15	14	21	19	21
<i>Middle Atlantic (3)</i>	7	9	9	13	13	14
New Jersey	1	3	3	4	5	5
New York	4	5	4	7	6	7

Table 5: Local spiritual assemblies and localities in the USA, 1925–30.

(continued on next page)

Table 5 (continued)

Pennsylvania	2	1	2	2	2	2
<i>New England (6)</i>	5	6	5	8	6	7
Connecticut	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maine	1	1	1	1	1	1
Massachusetts	3	3	2	6	3	3
New Hampshire	0	1	1	0	1	1
Rhode Island	0	0	0	0	0	1
Vermont	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>SOUTH</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>West South Central (4)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0
Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>East South Central (4)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0
Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi Tennessee	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>South Atlantic (9)</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
Florida	1	1	1	2	2	2
Georgia	1	0	0	2	2	2
Maryland	1	1	1	1	1	1
Washington, DC	1	1	1	1	1	1
Delaware, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>NON-CONTIGUOUS</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
Alaska	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hawaii	1	2	1	2	2	2
<b>US totals</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>72</b>

Table 5: Local spiritual assemblies and localities in the USA, 1925–30.

Source: Calculated from BYB 1:101–3; BW 2:182–90; 3:217–27.

Notes: 1. LSAs and recognized groups.

Region	Local spiritual assemblies (LSAs)			Total listed localities <sup>1</sup>		
	1925	1928	1930	1925	1928	1930
Austria	o	o	o	2	2 <sup>2</sup>	2
Denmark	o	o	o	o	1	1
France	1	1	1	1	1 <sup>3</sup>	2
Germany	U	U [5] <sup>4</sup>	5	26	37	38
Hungary	o	o	o	o	o	1
Irish Free State <sup>5</sup>	o	o	o	U	U	2
Italy	o	o	o	4	6	6
Netherlands (Holland)	o	o	o	o	o	1
Norway	o	o	o	o	o	1
Poland	o	o	o	o	o	1
Russia	U	1	1	U	2	2
Sweden	o	o	o	1	2	2
Switzerland	U	1	1	2	4	3
United Kingdom	[3] <sup>6, 7</sup>	4 <sup>6, 8</sup>	3 <sup>6</sup>	3 <sup>6</sup>	4 <sup>6</sup>	12 <sup>5</sup>
Yugoslavia (Jugoslavia)	o	o	o	o	1	1
<i>Totals</i>	U	12 <sup>4</sup>	11	39	60	75

Table 6: Local spiritual assemblies and localities in Europe, 1925–30.

Source: Calculated from BYB 1:101–3; BW 2:182–90; 3:217–27.

Key: U = Unavailable or incomplete.

Notes: 1. 'Baha'i centres' for 1925; LSAs and recognized groups for 1928 and 1930.

2. Two separate groups recorded for Vienna, but here counted as one.
3. Two separate groups recorded for Paris but here counted as one.
4. Five German LSAs assumed (as per 1930). Original data undifferentiated.
5. Listed under 'British Isles'.
6. Listed under 'England'.
7. Three UK local assemblies assumed. Original data undifferentiated.
8. Includes two separate local assemblies for the Greater Manchester area.

in Germany; 12 localities (16%) in the United Kingdom; and six countries with only a single locality each. Of note is the meagre development of local Baha'i administration as compared to North America: while the two continents had almost the same number of localities by 1930, Europe had far fewer local assemblies: 11 (out of 75 localities, or 15%) compared to North

Country	LSAs			Total listed localities <sup>1</sup>		
	1925	1928	1930	1925	1928	1930
Australia incl Tasmania, Norfolk Is.	U	6	6	6	6	6
New Zealand	U	1	1	1	1	2
Fiji Islands	o	o	o	o	1	1
Society Islands (Tahiti)	o	o	o	o	1	1
<i>Totals</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>

Table 7: Local spiritual assemblies and localities in Australasia, 1925–30.

Source: Calculated from BYB 1:101–3; BW 2:182–90; 3:217–27.

Key: U = Unavailable or incomplete.

Notes: 1. 'Baha'i centres' for 1925; LSAs and recognized groups for 1928 and 1930.

America's 48 (out of 74 localities or 65%). Most of these assemblies were in Germany (5) or Britain (3), with ten of the European countries in which there were Baha'is never establishing a local spiritual assembly during this period.

## 5. Australasia

The only relatively substantial Baha'i community in the Pacific at this time was that of Australia (6 local assemblies/localities) (Table 7). There was also a small, active community in New Zealand, but apart from Fiji and Tahiti there were no Baha'is living in the rest of the Pacific.

## 6. Asia

Outside of the Middle East, the only major Asian Baha'i community during this period was that of India and Burma (with eventually 17 localities and 8 local assemblies between them), linked under a joint national Baha'i administration (Table 8). There were at the time no Baha'is in other parts of South Asia (Bhutan, Ceylon [Sri Lanka] and Nepal). In South-East Asia there were isolated Baha'is in the Dutch East Indies (modern Indonesia) and the Philippines, but no local assemblies were formed. There were no Baha'is in the British colonies of Borneo, Malaya and Singapore, nor in French Indo-China or Siam. There was a minimal Baha'i presence in East Asia (one local assembly each in China and Japan, and briefly one in Korea).

## 7. Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean

There was only a minimal Baha'i presence in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America during the 1920s, with only two local assemblies formed in Africa (in South Africa and South-West Africa) and one in Latin America (Brazil) (Table 9).

Country	LSAs			Total listed localities <sup>1</sup>		
	1925	1928	1930	1925	1928	1930
India	U	4	4	5	9	10
Burma	U	3	4	4	5	7
Dutch East Indies	o	o	o	o	o	1
Philippines	o	o	o	o	1	1
China	U	1	1	1	1	1
Hong Kong	o	o	o	o	1	1
Japan	U	1	1	1	2	2
Korea	o	1	o	o	1	o
<i>Totals</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>23</i>

Table 8: Local spiritual assemblies and localities in Asia, 1925–30.

Source: Calculated from BYB 1:101–3; BW 2:182–90; 3:217–27.

Key: U = Unavailable or incomplete.

Notes: 1. 'Baha'i centres' for 1925; LSAs and recognized groups for 1928 and 1930.

Country	LSAs			Total listed localities <sup>1</sup>		
	1925	1928	1930	1925	1928	1930
<b>SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA</b>						
South Africa	1	1	1	1	1	3
South West Africa <sup>2</sup>	o	o	1	o	o	2
Rhodesia	o	o	o	o	o	1
<i>Totals</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>6</i>
<b>LATIN AMERICA</b>						
Brazil	U	1	1	1	1	2
<i>Totals</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>

Table 9: Local spiritual assemblies and localities in Africa and Latin America, 1925–30.

Source: Calculated from BYB 1:101–3; BW 2:182–90; 3:217–27.

Key: U = Unavailable or incomplete.

Notes: 1. 'Baha'i centres' for 1925; LSAs and recognized groups for 1928 and 1930.

2. Listed under South Africa.

Almost the whole of sub-Saharan Africa (then mostly under colonial control), Latin America and the Caribbean had no Baha'is.

## 8. National spiritual assemblies

During the 1920s, nine national spiritual assemblies or their equivalent were in existence: Iran (Persia), Iraq and Egypt in the Middle East; the Caucasus and Turkestan in Soviet Asia; Germany and the British Isles (variously styled 'Great Britain and Ireland' (1925), 'Great Britain' (1928) and 'the British Isles (1930)) in Europe; and joint assemblies for India and Burma and for the United States and Canada (BYB 1:101; BW 2:181; BW 3:217). Several of these bodies had roots in earlier administrative bodies, and they were not identical in their method of functioning – most obviously in the cases of Iran and Iraq, where the old system of central coordinating assemblies apparently continued into the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> The difficulties experienced by the two Soviet assemblies in the face of official government persecution are indicated by the fact that both had mail forwarding addresses in London.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the difficulties faced by the Baha'is in the Middle East and Soviet Asia, it will be noted that over half (five out of nine) of the national spiritual assemblies in the world were in this region during the period under consideration (Iran, Egypt, Iraq, Turkestan and the Caucasus).

## 9. Total population

It is not yet possible to come to any firm conclusion about the size of the global Baha'i population during the 1920s. The most important gap in our knowledge is the number of Baha'is in Iran and other parts of the 'Islamic heartland', particularly in Soviet Asia. There is no certain information here, and my 'best guesses' – perhaps 100,000–200,000 Baha'is in Iran, 5,000 in Soviet Asia and at most 2,000 in Turkey and the Arab world – are no more than conjectures. Only detailed research by area specialists will bring us any nearer to more reliable estimates. As I have argued elsewhere, the Iranian figures need to be placed within a timeframe for the overall development of the community from the Babi period to the present day, and this throws into question the extremely optimistic statements that were sometimes made about Baha'i growth in Iran at the time.<sup>6</sup> Again, estimates of the Iranian Baha'i population must also take into consideration the changing definition of Baha'i membership (Shoghi Effendi encouraged the Baha'is to prepare accurate membership lists and we should not assume that everyone wanted to be listed, especially as the Iranian Baha'is were still subject to persecution) and the broader question of what exactly it meant to be a Baha'i in a large community that had been in existence for several generations: levels of commitment, involvement and identity presumably varied between core members, who were willing to give their lives for their religious beliefs, and less committed members on the periphery; children of Baha'is might drift away from the Faith but still be regarded as Baha'is by those hostile to the Faith; many individuals who were not formally Baha'is might nevertheless be sympathizers and consider themselves to be 'Baha'is in their hearts'.

Estimates are easier to make for Baha'is in areas outside of the Middle East, where members of the various – generally small – Baha'i groups were

4. A specific local assembly (Tehran and Baghdad respectively) acted as the coordinating body for the Baha'is throughout the country, in contrast with the system of Baha'i administration adopted from 1923 onwards, in which national assemblies are elected annually, normally in a delegate convention representing the national or regional community as a whole. A listing of 'National and Regional Spiritual Assembly Formation' prepared by the Department of Statistics at the Baha'i World Centre in January 1989 gives the following 'official' dates for the formation of the national bodies under the new system: 1923: British Isles; Germany and Austria; India and Burma. 1924: Egypt and Sudan. 1925: Caucasus; Turkestan; United States and Canada. 1931: Iraq. 1934: Persia (Iran).

5. Care of Ziaullah Azgharzadih. The two assemblies were dissolved in 1939.

6. Peter Smith, 'A note on Babi and Baha'i numbers in Iran', *Iranian Studies* 17:2–3 (1984) 295–301. For an example of what I would consider as an overly high figure, leading Tehrani Baha'i Mirza 'Ali-Muhammad Ibn-i Asdaq reported to J. E. Esslemont in 1919 that there were two or three million Baha'is in Iran (out of what he thought was a total population of 10

to 15 million, i.e. he believed that one-fifth of all Iranians were Baha'is). By contrast, his estimate for Tehran (10,000 Baha'is in a city population of 750,000 [0.01%]), seems plausible (see Moojan Momen, 'Esslemont's survey of the Baha'i world, 1919–1920', in *Baha'i in the West* (ed. P. Smith, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2004) 70).

7. United States, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Census of Religious Bodies, 1926* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1929–30), vol. 2, pp. 70–6.

8. Peter Smith, 'Shoghi Effendi and the Baha'is of India and Burma during the 1920s', *Baha'i Studies Review* 13 (2005) 15–40.

often recent converts (although again, it must be remembered that membership criteria were becoming more rigorous at this time, eventually excluding individuals who had formerly been considered Baha'is but whose involvement, commitment and identity were or became more peripheral). Thus, for North America, the US national census for 1926 recorded a figure of 1,247 Baha'is,<sup>7</sup> and even if the figure is raised by the inclusion of close sympathizers and others not definitely enrolled in the movement and the addition of a couple of dozen in Canada, the total is likely to be less than 2,000. India and Burma may similarly have had about 2,000 Baha'is.<sup>8</sup> The rest of the world – Europe, East and South-East Asia, Australasia, Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa – is unlikely to have had more than 1,000 Baha'is.

These guesstimates give us a maximum total of 7,000 Baha'is worldwide outside of Iran and the culturally cognate Baha'i communities of Soviet Asia (most of whose members were emigré Iranians) – a not insignificant number for a relatively new religious movement that had only recently begun to break out of its traditional religious and cultural milieu and become a genuinely international movement.

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# Compilation

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## The Baha'i Concept of Evil

Selected extracts from the Baha'i writings and letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice.

### From the writings of Baha'u'llah

Indeed the actions of man himself breed a profusion of satanic power. For were men to abide by and observe the divine teachings, every trace of evil would be banished from the face of the earth. However, the widespread differences that exist among mankind and the prevalence of sedition, contention, conflict and the like are the primary factors which provoke the appearance of the satanic spirit. Yet the Holy Spirit hath ever shunned such matters. A world in which naught can be perceived save strife, quarrels and corruption is bound to become the seat of the throne, the very metropolis, of Satan.

(*Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh Revealed after the Kitāb-i-Aqdas*  
 (Haifa: Bahā'ī World Centre, 1982), pp. 176–7) [1]

### From the writings and utterances of 'Abdu'l-Baha

As to the question of evil spirits, demons and monsters, any references made to them in the Holy Books have symbolic meaning. What is currently known among the public is but sheer superstition.

(From a Tablet to an individual believer – translated from the Persian) [2]

The tree of good and evil signifies the human world; for the spiritual and divine world is purely good and absolutely luminous, but in the human world light and darkness, good and evil, exist as opposite conditions.

(*Some Answered Questions* (Wilmette: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1985), p. 123) [3]

Man is in the highest degree of materiality, and at the beginning of spirituality – that is to say, he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. He is at the last degree of darkness, and at the beginning of light; that is why it has been said that the condition of man is the end of the night and the beginning of day, meaning that he is the sum of all the degrees of imperfection, and that he possesses the degrees of perfection. He has the animal side as well as the angelic side, and the aim of an educator is to so train human souls that their angelic aspect may overcome their animal side. Then if the divine power in man, which is his essential perfection, overcomes

the satanic power, which is absolute imperfection, he becomes the most excellent among the creatures; but if the satanic power overcomes the divine power, he becomes the lowest of the creatures. That is why he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection ...

Man is said to be the greatest representative of God, and he is the Book of Creation because all the mysteries of beings exist in him. If he comes under the shadow of the True Educator and is rightly trained, he becomes the essence of essences, the light of lights, the spirit of spirits; he becomes the centre of the divine appearances, the source of spiritual qualities, the rising-place of heavenly lights, and the receptacle of divine inspirations. If he is deprived of this education, he becomes the manifestation of satanic qualities, the sum of animal vices, and the source of all dark conditions.

(*Some Answered Questions*, pp. 235–36) [4]

The reality underlying this question is that the evil spirit, Satan or whatever is interpreted as evil, refers to the lower nature in man. This baser nature is symbolized in various ways. In man there are two expressions: One is the expression of nature; the other, the expression of the spiritual realm. The world of nature is defective ... It is an essential condition of the soil of earth that thorns, weeds and fruitless trees may grow from it. Relatively speaking, this is evil; it is simply the lower state and baser product of nature. It is evident, therefore, that man is in need of divine education and inspiration, that the spirit and bounties of God are essential to his development. That is to say, the teachings of Christ and the Prophets are necessary for his education and guidance. Why? Because They are the divine Gardeners Who till the earth of human hearts and minds. They educate man, uproot the weeds, burn the thorns and remodel the waste places into gardens and orchards where fruitful trees grow. The wisdom and purpose of Their training is that man must pass from degree to degree of progressive unfoldment until perfection is attained.

(*The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahā during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, 2nd edn. (Wilmette: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1982), pp. 294–5) [5]

Evil is imperfection. Sin is the state of man in the world of the baser nature, for in nature exist defects such as injustice, tyranny, hatred, hostility, strife: these are characteristics of the lower plane of nature. These are the sins of the world, the fruits of the tree from which Adam did eat. Through education we must free ourselves from these imperfections. The Prophets of God have been sent, the Holy Books have been written, so that man may be made free.

(*Paris Talks: Addresses given by 'Abdu'l-Bahā in Paris in 1911–1912* (London: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1979), pp. 177–8) [6]

There are no earth-bound souls. When the souls that are not good die they go entirely away from this earth and so cannot influence anyone. They are spiritually dead. Their thoughts can have influence only while they are alive on the earth. Caiaphas had great influence during his life but as soon as he died his influence ceased. It was of this kind that Christ said 'Let the

dead bury their dead.' But the good souls are given eternal life and sometimes God permits their thoughts to reach the earth to help the people.

(*Daily Lessons Received at Acca – January, 1908* by Helen S. Goodall and Ella Goodall Cooper (Chicago: Bahā'ī Publishing Society, 1908), pp. 41–2) [7]

There is no power exercised over the people by those evil souls that have passed away. Good is stronger than evil and even when alive they had very little power. How much less have they after they are dead ...

(*Daily Lessons Received at Acca – January, 1908*, p. 51) [8]

### **From letters written by or on behalf of Shoghi Effendi**

And as to the world's evil plight, we need but recall the writings and sayings of Bahā'u'llāh, Who, more than fifty years ago, declared in terms prophetic the prime cause of the ills and sufferings of mankind, and set forth their true and divine remedy. 'Should the Lamp of Religion be hidden,' He declares, 'chaos and confusion will ensue.' How admirably fitting and applicable are these words to the present state of mankind!

(14 November 1923, written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahā'īs of the United States and Canada, published in *Bahā'ī Administration: Selected Messages 1922–1932* (Wilmette: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1980), p. 50) [9]

With regard to your question on that part of the 'Words of Wisdom' where Bahā'u'llāh states that true wisdom lies in the fear of God: The meaning is that mere man-made laws are not sufficient to deter man from all forms of evil. It needs in some cases the fear of God and in others the love of God to prevent him from doing evil and to lead him to the straight and true path of righteousness. I hope that this brief answer to your question explains the thought to you. Of course its ramifications and application into the various forms of social and spiritual evil are great, but a proper understanding of this divine injunction explains it all to us.

(27 May 1927, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [10]

In regard to your question concerning evil spirits and their influence upon souls, Shoghi Effendi wishes me to inform you that what is generally called evil spirit is a purely imaginary creation and has no reality whatever. But as to evil, there is no doubt that it exerts a very strong influence both in this world and in the next. 'Abdu'l-Bahā in 'Some Answered Questions' gives us a thorough and true analysis of the problem of evil. You should preferably refer to that book for further explanation on that point.

(1 November 1934, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [11]

Regarding your question relative to the condition of those people who are described in the Gospel as being possessed of devils: this should be interpreted figuratively; devil or Satan is symbolic of evil and dark forces yielding to temptation.

(2 November 1938, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [12]

Evil forces do take control of our life, but it is within our power to free ourselves from falling under their subjection.

(26 November 1939, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [13]

The believers must realize that the forces of prejudice are, along with so many other evil practices, growing at present stronger in the darkness surrounding humanity. The Bahā'ís must exercise not only tact and judgement, but courage and confidence in the aid of Bahā'u'llāh, which He will vouchsafe to those who attempt to live up to His teachings, in their whole approach to this racial question. Too much hesitance, too great timidity in the face of public opinion, can be just as bad as too much disregard of the actual situation and the problems it involves.

(23 December 1941, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [14]

The youth are indeed those to whom the Cause should perforce offer its greatest appeal, as it holds alone the promise for their future security. Without that which Bahā'u'llāh has given to humanity the outlook for the future of the world would appear truly hopeless, for the evil forces in men's nature seem to have gained the ascendancy, and only a spiritual force, direct from God, can enable the good side of human nature to again assume command of men's lives.

(15 June 1945, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [15]

We know absence of light is darkness, but no one would assert darkness was not a fact. It exists even though it is only the absence of something else. So evil exists too, and we cannot close our eyes to it, even though it is a negative existence. We must seek to supplant it by good, and if we see an evil person is not influenceable by us, then we should shun his company for it is unhealthy ...

The Bahā'ī Faith teaches man was always potentially man, even when passing through lower stages of evolution. Because he has more powers, and subtler powers than the animal, when he turns towards evil he becomes more vicious than an animal because of these very powers.

(4 October 1950, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [16]

You should not be afraid anyone can affect your mind. Even when we want to catch the thoughts of those we love most we cannot do so, how much less can other people succeed in penetrating our minds.

(18 January 1951, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [17]

### **From letters written by or on behalf of the Universal House of Justice**

Your letter of 2 October 1970 reflects a number of concerns which have evoked interest from some Bahā'ís from time to time. Both 'Abdu'l-Bahā and Shoghi Effendi have replied to questions similar to those which you

raise, so their answers are available for elucidations of certain of these profound and perplexing issues. You have asked a number of questions which can be answered in some degree by the relevant passages below. In time a more thorough study of the Bahā'ī Writings will doubtless bring forth an ever greater illumination of these abstruse matters.

In this period of general world unrest and confusion there seems to be a current wave of interest in occult phenomena, in communication with other worlds, and in new and old kinds of spiritualism. With regard to the broad aspects of these subjects the beloved Guardian was most instructive, providing us with general guidelines in a 1954 letter to an inquirer, from which ... excerpts are quoted.

You ask why the Manifestation of God for this day, in other words, Bahā'u'llāh, has not given all the detailed answers to the theories advanced by occultists, spiritualists and many of the more abstruse philosophers of the present day.

It would be absolutely impossible for anyone to answer all the questions that might be asked by the curious, whether scholars or ordinary people, on any subject. We must turn aside from these vain imaginings and suppositions and philosophizings of the world, and fix our eyes upon the clear stream of the Teachings of Bahā'u'llāh. Out of these Teachings, and the society which they will create on this planet, will come a solution to all of the problems of men. Gradually, greater scholars, more deeply spiritual thinkers, will be able to answer from a Bahā'ī standpoint many of these questions. It is not necessary that they should be in the divine text; they can be studied and learned in the future; but at present we have not had time to evolve the Bahā'ī scholars who can deal with these subjects in detail, and take upon themselves to answer the abstruse points and the many unfounded doctrines which are advanced by modern philosophers ...

We must use the Writings of the Prophets as our measurement. If Bahā'u'llāh had attached the slightest importance to occult experiences, to the seeing of auras, to the hearing of mystic voices; if He had believed that reincarnation was a fact, He, Himself, would have mentioned all of these things in His Teachings. The fact that He passed over them in silence shows that to Him, they had either no importance or no reality, and were consequently not worthy to take up His time as the Divine Educator of the human race.

(29 November 1970, from the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [18]

There are many passages in our scripture which bear on this point and there is no doubt that Bahā'u'llāh rejects the concept of a personal Devil or Satan, i.e. a being who is the source of evil power in opposition to God. We refer you to chapter 74 (LXXIV) in Part V of 'Some Answered Questions', where this subject is dealt with by the Master, Who clearly states that although there is evil it is the non-existence of good. In addition we suggest you refer to various passages from 'Gleanings from the Writings of Bahā'u'llāh'. The first of these on page 94 (American edition) speaks of the Evil One and then says: 'The Evil One is he that hindereth the rise and obstructeth the spiritual progress of the children of men.' On page 168 of that same book Bahā'u'llāh quotes: 'The Evil One is lying in wait, ready to entrap you. Gird yourselves

1. The letter referred to was written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi.

against his wicked devices, and, led by the light of the name of the one true God, deliver yourselves from the darkness that surroundeth you. Centre your thoughts in the Well-Beloved, rather than in your own selves.' Likewise, on page 284 Bahā'u'llāh speaks of the blind in heart following the promptings of the evil ones.

In addition we can offer you the following quotation from a letter written on behalf of the beloved Guardian to an individual believer: 'Regarding your question relative to the condition of those people who are described in the Gospel as being possessed of devils: this should be interpreted figuratively; the devil or Satan is symbolic of evil and dark forces yielding to temptation.' This answers specifically your question 'Symbolic of what?'

You can say without hesitation that the concept of Satan or the Devil as an actual being opposed to God is rejected by the Bahā'ī teachings but that the term is understood by Bahā'īs to mean the promptings of self and desire and the dark side of human nature.

(22 October 1971, from the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [19]

We are confident that your National Spiritual Assembly is conscious of this problem, and tries to educate the friends not only to avoid such practices but to refuse to be influenced by them. The important thing is for your National Spiritual Assembly to bear in mind the necessity of deepening the friends in their knowledge of the teachings, reinforcing their trust and faith in the Cause of God in this day, and adding enrichment and illumination to their spiritual lives.

(18 July 1972, from the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly) [20]

In answer to those who may ask you what the stand is of your religion on the subject of demons, you can say without hesitation that the concept of Satan or the Devil as an actual being opposed to God is rejected by the Bahā'ī teachings but that the term is understood by Bahā'īs to mean the promptings of self and desire and the dark side of human nature.

(13 February 1974, from the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [21]

Bahā'īs recognize that evil is negative and has no existence in its own right, but that does not mean that there is no power in evil. Do not Bahā'u'llāh and 'Abdu'l-Bahā warn us repeatedly of the spiritual infection of Covenant-breaking? In one of His Tablets, 'Abdu'l-Bahā wrote:

... if you seek immunity from the sway of the forces of the contingent world, hang the 'Most Great Name' in your dwelling, wear the ring of the 'Most Great Name' on your finger, place the picture of 'Abdu'l-Bahā in your home and always recite the prayers that I have written. Then you will behold the marvellous effect they produce. Those so-called forces will prove but illusions and will be wiped out and exterminated.

(30 August 1984, from the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [22]

## From a memorandum written by the Research Department to the Universal House of Justice

### 1. Concerning psychic powers:

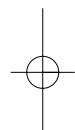
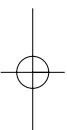
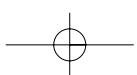
'We do not understand their nature and have no way of being sure of what is true and what is false in such matters.' (Letter to an individual believer dated 4 March 1946)<sup>1</sup>

People who have what they regard as psychic experiences are often so impressed by them that they tend to accord them great authority. It seems that this passage is intended to draw the believer's attention to the fact that, however moving such an experience may be, we have no way of being *sure* that it is true and is not just an erratic expression of the workings of the mind, whose mode of operation is still far from being scientifically ascertained. In other words, we are cautioned against playing with forces of which we know so little and, above all, against relying on them rather than on the clear guidance of the Manifestation of God or the voice of consultation. This does not mean, of course, that in the future science may not make strides in understanding more closely the nature of psychic experiences ...

### 5. 'You have asked regarding the influence of evil spirits. Evil spirits are deprived of eternal life. How then can they exercise any influence? But as eternal life is ordained for holy spirits, therefore their influence exists in all the divine worlds. At the time you were here, this question was accordingly answered, that after the ascension of the godly souls, great influence and wide-spreading bounties are destined for them, and all-encircling signs in the seen and unseen are decreed for them.' (From a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahā to Mrs. Ella Goodall Cooper published on pages 77 to 83 of *Daily Lessons Received at 'Akkā*, revised edition, published by the Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, Wilmette, in 1979)

We have been unable as yet to locate the original of this Tablet in order to check the translation. However, it seems clear that this statement is not referring to the influence of covenant-breakers in this world or to the satanic influence of one's own lower nature. The questioner is concerned about the influence of disembodied 'evil spirits' from the next world, and 'Abdu'l-Bahā is pointing out that she should have no such concern. An evil spirit is at that lower level of existence referred to as being 'spiritually dead', and therefore has no influence on this world from beyond the grave.

(26 October 1982) [23]



# Obituary

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## Abu'l-Qasim Afnan (1919–2004)

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Abu'l-Qasim Afnan, the last custodian of the House of the Bab in Shiraz before the recent revolution in Iran, was born in Shiraz on 19 March 1919 and passed away in England on 22 October 2004. He was the eldest son of Mirza Habibullah Afnan and Agha Bigum Afnan.

### Family background

Mirza Habibullah's parents were both related to the Bab's family. His father, Mirza Aqā, surnamed by Baha'u'llah Nūru'd-Dīn (light of religion), was the son of Zahrā Bigum, sister of the Bab's wife. While most of the Afnan family are relatives of the mother of the Bab, Mirza Nuru'd-Din Afnan's descendants are the only branch of this family that is directly related to both of the parents of the Bab (Aqa Sayyid Muhammād Rīdā and Fatimih Bigum). Mirza Habibullah's mother, Maryam Sultān Bigum, was the daughter of Mirza Abu'l-Qasim, the eldest brother of Khadījih Bigum, wife of the Bab.

His mother Agha Bigum was the daughter of Aqa Mirza and granddaughter of Haj Mirza Muhammad 'Ali and Haj Mirza Muhammad Taqī, surnamed Vakīl'u'l-Haq, who were the sons of Haj Sayyid Muhammad known as Khāl-i Akbar (the eldest maternal uncle of the Bab).

### Early life history

Abu'l-Qasim Afnan grew up in the spiritual environment of this distinguished household in Shiraz. During his childhood he was honoured by receiving a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Baha. He completed his primary and secondary education in Shiraz and acquired spiritual development and a rich knowledge of history and literature under the tutelage of his paternal uncle, Haj Mirza Buzurg Afnan. He also continued his studies in the Baha'i Faith and other religions by studiously attending the study classes conducted by such well-known and prominent Baha'i teacher-scholars as Fādil Tīhrānī, Hand of the Cause of God Tarazu'llah Samandari and others who stayed in Shiraz for extended periods of time. As a result, Abu'l-Qasim Afnan, who was endowed with an extraordinary memory, developed a special knowledge of the history of the Afnan family as well as extensive knowledge of the Baha'i writings, particularly the writings of the Bab.

After finishing high school he began serving as an assistant to his father in the affairs of the custodianship of the House of the Bab. At the same

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time he was also engaged in agricultural and gardening activities on the hereditary properties of the Afnan family.

### **Custodianship of the House of the Bab**

Baha'u'llah had delegated the custodianship of the House of the Bab in Shiraz to Zahrā Bigum, sister of the Bab's wife, and decreed that it would continue in that family. This is the only case of Baha'u'llah making such an honour hereditary in a family. After the passing of his father, Mirza Habibu'llah Afnan (in 108 BE, 1951), Abu'l-Qasim Afnan, according to the instructions of Shoghi Effendi (Guardian of the Baha'i Faith from 1921 to 1957), assumed the Custodianship of that House. Shoghi Effendi also instructed Abu'l-Qasim's younger brother, Hasan Afnan (who passed away on 28 May 2004 in the United States of America), to render assistance to and to cooperate with his brother in this service so that at all times, even when Abu'l-Qasim Afnan was away from Shiraz, one of the members of that household was present and performed the function of custodianship. These two brothers enthusiastically performed this duty and lovingly served and guided those visiting that holy site.

Hasan Afnan, in a short biography of his brother, 'Abu'l-Qasim, wrote:

The passing of our beloved father made the family members and the friends, and in particular Abu'l-Qasim Afnan, extremely sad and grieved. In those days Tarazu'llah Samandari was staying in Shiraz and noticed that Abu'l-Qasim was grief-stricken. He considered that the only way for my dear brother to be consoled would be to visit the Holy Land for pilgrimage and meeting the Guardian. So Samandari kindly requested the Guardian to grant permission for my brother's pilgrimage. The permission was immediately received and my brother together with our sister, Ferdows Khanum, and some other Baha'is of Shiraz proceeded to the Holy Land. They performed the pilgrimage and received the Guardian's infinite loving care and blessings. Thus, my brother's feeling of loss and grief completely disappeared and was replaced by a feeling of joy and cheerfulness. So he returned to Shiraz with a high spirit and feeling of confidence ready to assume the responsibilities and duties of custodianship.

In this visit Shoghi Effendi asked Abu'l-Qasim Afnan some questions regarding the House of the Bab. He recommended that his brother, Hasan Afnan, should also reside in Shiraz and both of them be at the service of the House on his behalf. These two brothers devotedly continued that service for 30 years up to 1979 when the revolution in Iran forced them to leave the country.

### **Other Baha'i activities**

Abu'l-Qasim Afnan became one of the first members appointed to the Baha'i Youth Committee of Shiraz. Subsequently he was appointed to serve on a number of committees such as Baha'i Properties, Baha'i Historical Sites and above all the Committee for the Custodianship of the Affairs of the House of the Bab. One of the duties of this committee was to carry out the necessary repairs and upkeep of the complex of the houses surrounding the House of the Bab and taking care of the historical relics belonging to the Bab and his family and the historic orange tree in that House which was planted by the Bab.

Thus for many years Mr Afnan used to go to the House of the Bab before dawn and take charge of guiding and serving the pilgrims and visitors.

Mr Afnan, for a number of years, was a member and secretary of the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Shiraz until 1972 when he was appointed a member of the Auxiliary Board for Protection in the province of Fars. Through all these years he had to deal with various cases of attacks by the enemies of the Faith against the Baha'i community and the House of the Bab. In addition, he attended to the problems of the persecuted Baha'is in Shiraz and other localities in Fars who were seeking his assistance and advice.

### **Personality and character**

Abu'l-Qasim Afnan was very jovial and cheerful. He had a smiling face, observing traditional Iranian etiquette in gestures and behaviour. He enjoyed a special popularity and was accorded special respect among both Baha'is and non-Baha'is. He had a vast knowledge of literature and history and was known to and in correspondence with prominent contemporary Iranian writers, poets and scholars such as Muhammad 'Ali Jamalzadih, Mujtaba Minuvi, Freydoun Tavaluli, Dr Iqtidari and Mahdi Hamidi Shirazi. Mr Afnan had a unique knowledge of historical documents and manuscripts especially those belonging to the members of the Afnan household. He had admirable skill in reading various manuscripts and documents and identifying the writers of each one of them. He was keenly interested and engaged in collecting, classifying, organizing and preserving a large body of historical documents related to the members of the Afnans and the early years of the Babi and Baha'i dispensations. As a result, a large amount of such documents were saved and deposited in the Baha'i archives. He closely collaborated with Baha'i scholars. In particular he worked with Hand of the Cause of God Hasan Balyuzi, to whom he was related, in researching and locating documents and photographs for the books on the central figures of the Baha'i Faith that Mr Balyuzi was writing. In addition he arranged for the publication of the books that Mr Balyuzi authored in the Persian language.

After the passing of Mr Afnan, at a memorial meeting that was arranged in Oxford, one of the professors of Oxford University while eulogizing him and praising his vast historical and literary knowledge added that Mr Afnan had an amazing skill in reading old handwriting and identifying their writers. He was especially expert in reading the documents that included *siyāq* (a notation for writing numbers and keeping accounts which does not involve the use of the usual Arabic numbers). As a matter of fact Mr Afnan was so intimately familiar with *siyāq* that he used to keep his own financial accounts in the same method. He had developed this attachment to *siyāq* due to the fact that the Bab had kept his business accounts in the same notation.

Both Abu'l-Qasim Afnan and Hasan Afnan were endowed with special poetical talent and composed a large number of poems in Persian that are highly regarded by literary experts and some of them are published in various Baha'i periodicals.

### **Family members**

Abu'l-Qasim Afnan married Minou Bāzyār, a descendent of Allah-Verdi Khan, the famous minister of Shah Abbas the Great of the Safavid dynasty. Minou Bazyar is an accomplished artist and has produced a number of

valuable paintings and other art works. The couple had two daughters, Maryam Afnan and Laleh Afnan-Samandari.

### **The years in England**

Abu'l-Qasim Afnan together with his family, his brother Hasan and his sister Ferdows left Shiraz for England in 1979 due to the severe persecution of the Baha'is by the new regime in Iran. They undertook this journey particularly because Ferdows Khanum had to have heart surgery. Three days after their departure from Shiraz, the enemies of the Baha'i Faith called on their residence in Shiraz to arrest them. When they did not find them, they confiscated all their belongings including all the historical documents that were in their home. Therefore at the recommendation of the Universal House of Justice they did not return to Iran. Abu'l-Qasim Afnan stayed in Oxford, England, for the rest of his life. During those years Mr Afnan frequently visited the Institute of Oriental Studies at Oxford University and associated with the professors and scholars there who invited him to deliver a number of lectures and also provide guidance to the graduate students in preparing their research papers, theses and dissertations related to the Babi and Baha'i Faiths.

After the passing of the Hand of the Cause of God Hasan Balyuzi, Abu'l-Qasim Afnan took a great interest in the development of the Afnan Library that was established by Mr Balyuzi in the memory of Fatimih Bigum, wife of the Bab. Abu'l-Qasim Afnan was deeply devoted to this project and was instrumental in finding a suitable venue for housing that collection.

Mr Afnan, during the years of living in England, was frequently invited to deliver talks at Baha'i summer schools and conferences. Many of those talks were audio-recorded. He also served as a member of the Editorial Board of *Payām-i-Bahā'ī*, a Baha'i periodical in Persian published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of France.

Mr Afnan had the privilege of making several visits to the Holy Land and received the loving hospitality and favour of the Universal House of Justice. During one of these visits that occurred after the passing of Hand of the Cause of God Hasan Balyuzi, Robert Balyuzi, Mr Balyuzi's son accompanied Mr Afnan. Together they managed to fulfill Mr Balyuzi's cherished wish by placing a copy of the book *Bahā'u'llāh: King of Glory* (authored by Mr Balyuzi) on the Threshold of the Holy Shrine of Baha'u'llah.

### **The last years**

Abu'l-Qasim Afnan had a sudden stroke in 1998, became paralysed, lost his speech, was hospitalized and then lived in a nursing home in Swindon until he passed away in 2004. He is buried in Oxford. The Universal House of Justice sent the following message to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of United Kingdom:

We were deeply grieved to learn of the passing of Abu'l-Qasim Afnan, kinsman of the Blessed Bab, who will be remembered as a valiant promoter and defender of the Cause. His long record of distinguished service included devoted custodianship, for more than three decades, of the House of the

Bab in Shiraz; membership on the Spiritual Assembly of that same city; appointment as an Auxiliary Board member in the Cradle of the Faith; and valued contributions in the field of Baha'i scholarship through the articles and treatises he authored on the early history of the Faith.

We are offering fervent prayers at the Sacred Threshold for the progress of his steadfast, noble soul in all the worlds of God and for the solace of the hearts of his beloved wife, Minu, and his cherished daughters, Maryam and Laleh, and their families.

Also, Hand of the Cause of God Dr 'Ali Muhammad Varqa addressed the following message to the family of Abu'l-Qasim Afnan:

Dearly loved Friends,

The soul-stirring news of the passing of your beloved husband and father, Abu'l-Qasim Afnan, to the Abhā Kingdom engulfed my heart in an ocean of sadness and grief. After several years of physical illness, his precious soul is now released from the pain of this mortal life and has ascended to the realm of God. Sharing your sorrow, I offer my deepest sympathy to you and other members of your distinguished and noble family.

In the vicinity of the Holy Shrines I supplicate that the Ancient Beauty may elevate his rank in the realm of eternity and immerse his loved ones in the ocean of his blessings and confirmations.

With loving Bahā'ī greetings,  
'A.M. Varqā

### Works of Abu'l-Qasim Afnan

Abu'l-Qasim Afnan, when living in Iran and extremely busy with serving in various capacities, in addition to composing poetry, may occasionally have contributed some articles to periodicals. After transferring to England, however, he had ample opportunity to spend his time in reading books and writing articles and books. His main research was devoted to producing a three-volume book on the history on the Babi dispensation called '*Ahd-i A'lā*'. He completed the first volume and managed to have it published in 655 pages in 2000 (Oxford: Oneworld). It is devoted to the history of the life of the Bab. The draft manuscripts and materials for the two remaining volumes remain to be published. The second volume will be devoted to the history of the Letters of the Living and the third volume will be on *Khānidān-i Afnān*, the history of Afnan family. These volumes include a wealth of documents that are of special historical value and have not been published before. They are the documents and photographs that Mr Afnan collected over the years while researching for the preparation of these volumes. Another book authored by Mr Afnan is *Black Pearls* (trans. Farzad Katira'i, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1988, 2nd edn. 1999). This is a small book of 55 pages on those serving the households of the Bab and Baha'u'llah who were of African decent. The third book is *Chahār Risālih-yi Tārīkhī dar bārih-yi Tāhirih Qurratu'l-'Ayn* (Four Treatises on Tāhirih Qurratu'l-'Ayn) in 112 pages published in 1991 (Landegg, Switzerland: Anjuman Adab va Hunar). Except for *Black Pearls*, which is in English, all the other works of Mr Afnan are in Persian. The following is a list of the research

papers, articles and poems authored by Mr Afnan in various Persian-language Baha'i publications:

'Savānih-yi zindigī va dawrān-i ḥayāt-i Jamāl-i Aqdas-i Abhā qabl az iżhār-i amr-i khāfi-yi mubārak' ('Events of the life of Bahā'u'llāh prior to His covert proclamation').

In *Mahbūb-i-'Ālam* (*The Beloved of the World*), n.p.: 'Andalib Editorial Board, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahā'ís of Canada, [1992]) 181–20.

'Maqām-i Ḥaḍrat-i A'lā az naẓar-i Diyānat-i Bahā'ī' ('The station of the Bāb from the point of view of the Bahā'ī Faith'). In *Az Siyāh Chāl-i Tīhrān tā Vahdat-i 'Ālam-i-Insān* (*From the Black Pit in Tehran to the Unity of Mankind*), n.p.: Payām-i-Badi', USA, commemorative volume for the Holy Year 1992–93, [1992]) 227–31.

**Payām-i Bahā'ī**, (a Baha'i periodical in Persian, published in Paris)

'Yādī az Jināb-i Ḥasan Muvaqqar Balyūzī' ('Remembering Hasan Muvaqqar Balyuzi'), no. 171 (February 1994) 8–21.

'Daw khāṭirih az jināb-i Ḥasan Balyūzī' ('Two recollections of Hasan Balyuzi'), no. 171 (February 1994) 38–40.

'Dar rathā-yi jināb-i Ḥasan Muvaqqar Balyūzī' ('An elegy for Hasan Muvaqqar Balyuzi'), no. 171 (February 1994) 41.

'Bushihr dar zamān-i iqāmat-i Ḥaḍrat-i A'lā dar ān shahr' ('Bushihr in the time of the Bab's residence there'), no. 175 (June 1994) 23–6.

'Dastān-i kutak khurdan-i Mīrzā Nasru'llāh Jāhrūmī' ('The story of the beating of Mirza Nasru'llah Jāhrūmī'), no. 182 (January 1995) 37–40.

'Safar-i Ḥaḍrat-i A'lā bih Hijāz' ('Journey of the Bab to Mecca'), no. 186 (May 1995) 15–19; no. 187 (June 1995) 18–22.

'Shuhadā-yi Abarqū' ('The martyrs of Abarqū'), no. 189 (August 1995) 28–30.

'Jilvih-hā-yi 'irfān dar andīshih-yi yik şāhrāgārd-i Bahā'ī' ('The manifestations of mysticism in the thought of a Bahā'ī nomad'), no. 197 (April 1996) 14–15.

'Khāṭirātī az bārgāh-i Maḥbūb' ('Memories of the court of the Beloved'), no. 204 (November 1996) 21–5.

'Yādī az ayyām-i tasharruf bih khāk-pā-yi mawla-yi mihrabān' ('Memories of a pilgrimage to visit Shoghi Effendi'), no. 208 (March 1997) 35–41.

A letter from Afnan also appears in Bahman Nīkandīsh, 'Jamālzādih va diyanāt-i Bahā'ī' ('Jamalzadih and the Baha'i Faith'), no. 222 (May 1998) 40–1.

**Andalib Magazine** (a Baha'i quarterly journal in Persian, published in Thornhill, Ontario, Canada)

'Dil maṭla' tajallī-yi Jānān ast' ('The heart manifests the Beloved'), no. 10 (Spring 1984) 65.

'Baytu'llāh al-akram' ('The most noble House of God'), no. 13 (Winter 1984–5) 16–27.

'Taḍmīnī bar yikī az ash'ār-i Sa'dī' ('A poem in style of one of the poems of Sa'dī' [a poem]), no. 16 (Fall 1985) 88.

'Sawdā-yi 'ishq' ('The passion of love' [a poem]), no. 29 (Winter 1988–9) 20.

'Yādī az guzashtigān: khādimih-yi bā vafā' ('Memories of departed friends: a faithful maid-servant of the Cause'), no. 28 (Fall 1988) 46–7.

'Khātirihī az musāfirat-i Muḥammad Baqir Khān Afnān va chikāmih-yi Shūridih (Faṣīḥu'l-Mulk)' ('A memoir of the journey of Muhammad Baqir Khan Afnan and a poem by Shuridih'), no. 34 (Spring 1990) 48.

'Yādī az guzastigān: jināb-i Rūḥu'llāh Bihishtī' ('Memories of departed friends: Rūḥu'llāh Bihishtī'), no. 38 (Spring 1991) 47–8.

***Khūshih-hā'ī az Kharman-i Adab va Hunar*** (volumes of the proceedings of the Society for Persian Arts and Letters, Landegg Academy, Switzerland)

'Mujmalī az aḥvāl va āthār-i jināb-i 'Andalib' ('A summary of the life and works of 'Andalib'), 1 (1990) 25–34.

'Damī dar bar-i aḥbāb' ('A moment with the Friends' [a poem]), 1 (1990) 169.

'Tanz-gū'ī va ṭanz-nivīsī dar adabiyāt-i Fārsī' ('Spoken and written satire in Persian literature'), 2 (1991) 117–23.

'Dar āridū-yi Shīrāz' ('Yearning for Shiraz' [a poem]), 2 (1991) 169.

'Sharāb-i Ma'rīfat' ('The wine of knowledge' [a poem]), 3 (1993) 159.

'Murūrī bar ash'ār-i Varqā' ('A review of the poetry of Varqa'), 5 (1994) 35–44.

'Haqīqat-i 'Ishq va Junūn' ('The reality of love and madness' [a poem]), 5 (1994) 230.

'Murūrī bar ad-Dalā'il as-Sab'iḥ' ('A review of the Seven Proofs'), 6 (1995) 147–56.

'Murūrī bar ash'ār-i Nabīl Zarandī' ('A review of the poetry of Nabil'), 7 (1996) 58–75.

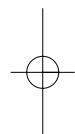
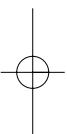
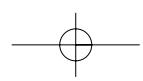
'Khabar az dargāh-i dūst' ('News from the threshold of the Friend' [a poem]), 8 (1997) 177.

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# Reviews

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***Hadrat-i Bāb, Nusrat'u'llāh Muhammad-Husainī (1995)***

Dundas, Ont.: Institute for Baha'i Studies in Persian. 1038 pp. + English preface (1 p.); 108 illustrations. ISBN 1-896193-10-2.

***'Ahd-i A'lā: Zindigānī-yi Hadrat-i Bāb, Abu'l-Qāsim Afnān (2000)***

Oxford: Oneworld. ISBN 1-85168-225-4. 16 + 654 pp. including index and 26 illustrations.

*Reviewed by Armin Eschrاغhi Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt, and author of Frühe Shaykhi und Babi Theologie (Leiden: Brill, 2004)*  
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In the past decade two voluminous monographs have appeared on the life of the Bab and the early years of the Babi Faith, both in Persian. In 1995 the Institute for Baha'i Studies in Ontario published N. Muhammad-Husaini's *Hadrat-i Bāb*. In 2000 A. Afnan's *'Ahd-i A'lā* was published by Oneworld Publications. The two books are quite different in their approach and, in fact, seem to be directed at different audiences.

A. Afnan's work on the Bab represents a refreshing departure from the standard Babi and Baha'i historiography. In the preface the author says that his intent was not to re-narrate the history of the Faith, as this has already been done in other publications. Rather, he attempts a re-evaluation of some of these narratives and sheds new light on them through a large collection of primary sources in his private possession, most of which have previously not been accessible to historians.

In the foreword Afnan gives a lot of interesting background information about his book and how it was written. The first chapter tells the reader about the city of Shiraz and its history. Chapter 2 is devoted to the Bab's youth. Chapters 3 to 10 deal with the ministry of the Bab in chronological order. Chapter 11 informs us about the martyrdom of the Bab and the subsequent efforts to preserve his remains and finally deliver them to Haifa. Chapter 12 is an overview of the Bab's major writings, though smaller in scope and importance than Muhammad-Husaini's. The final chapter is about the time of 'intermission' (*fitrah*) between the Bab's martyrdom and the proclamation of Baha'u'llah in Baghdad. This is a part of the early history of the Faith that has not been described in much detail yet, and Afnan, for the first time, makes a number of details available to a broader audience. For example, information is given on some of the claimants to religious authority after the Bab's martyrdom. This part seems to rely heavily on Fadil Mazandarani's unpublished *Zuhūr al-Haqq*, vol. 4, though this work is not referenced. In a number of places the original manuscript of Nabil's narrative is quoted, again, possibly from Mazandarani's work.

One appendix provides further information on some of the people referred to in the main text of the book. The second appendix lists all documents that have been published for the first time in this book. Finally there is a comprehensive index of names, places and books. As has been stated above, the main value of this book lies in the documents it contains. Among these are not only Tablets of the Bab himself, such as his letters to Muhammad Shah, to Haji Mirza Aqasi and to the 'ulama, published for the first time in full length. The book also contains a number of letters from the correspondence of the Bab's uncles with each other and with early Babis. Many of these documents shed new light on hitherto controversial issues. For example the Bab's level of education has often been a matter of controversy. The Bab's 'Greater Uncle', Sayyid Muhammad, in a letter to his brother, the 'Greatest Uncle', Sayyid 'Ali, and in another one to his brother-in-law 'Abdu'l-Husayn, testifies to the fact that the Bab had not received more than a very rudimentary education and that he was now astonished at the depth of knowledge his nephew has revealed (pp. 120–1, facsimile on p. 139 *passim*). We also read contemporary accounts from the family of the Bab about the outbreak of a cholera epidemic that made the Bab leave Shiraz for Isfahan. There also are numerous other letters from Vahid-i-Darabi, Sayyid Husayn-i Yazdi, 'Abdu'l-Karim-i Qazvini, etc. that help to form a more detailed and very lively picture of the early days of the Babi Faith. Afnan not only makes these documents available to the reader by printing the facsimile of the original manuscript and, in most cases, a typescript (and, if necessary, a Persian translation) – which in itself is great service to historians – but he also uses his profound and intimate knowledge of the history of the Faith, and especially of the Afnan family, to comment on and describe the background of the texts, thus helping to put these documents in a historical perspective. At the end of each chapter there is an appendix that includes all the documents that have been referred to throughout the text.

Unfortunately, in some places the book seems to suffer from the fact that Mr Afnan himself was unable to review it during the final stages of publication. Some references have been omitted, and the appendices do not always list all the documents published in a respective chapter and do not provide the relevant page numbers. All these are but minor issues that the publisher might want to consider for future editions. They do not diminish the immense value of the book, and Oneworld needs to be congratulated for publishing it. In the preface, the author writes that in the Afnan family archive in Iran 'there were without exaggeration more than 10,000 new letters/documents (*maktūb*)', among which a large number were relevant to Babi–Bahā'i history up to the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahā (p. 13 of preface). The book, as is explained in the preface, was originally designed to be the first part of a trilogy, the other two volumes being on 'the Letters of the Living and the early believers' and on the 'family of the Bab' (p. 15 of preface). There are also rumours that there is actually a fourth volume in manuscript dealing with the Babi uprisings in Nayriz, although not yet in printable form. However, the unfortunate and sudden decline in Mr Afnan's health, shortly before the first book came out, has caused confusion about the plans for publishing the other volumes. One can but hope that they will see the light of day very soon. Judging from the first book, a further number of

most important documents will be included, which will, no doubt, open new perspectives for researchers in the field.

Muhammad-Husaini's work is a survey of what is generally described as the beginnings of Babi–Baha'i history, thus starting with the Shaykhiyya and ending with Baha'u'llah's arrival in Baghdad in 1853. The book is divided into three main parts, each containing several chapters and sub-headings: (1) introduction, (2) biography of the Bab and his disciples, and (3) writings of the Bab. In the first chapter of the first part (i.e. on the first 30 or so pages), we find what is described in the English preface (penned by the publisher, not the author himself) as 'the author's [sic] philosophy of history'. The same preface also describes the book as a 'comprehensive, meticulously researched and enthralling one-thousand-page text in the life of the Bab and His disciples'.

The second chapter of the first part describes the sources used by the author, and the third chapter gives a very short overview of the 'state of the world at the time of the New Revelation'. The fourth chapter deals with prophecies in the West and in the East, which anticipated the coming of the Promised One. The Shaykhiyya is given particular attention in this regard.

The second part, which comprises the bulk of the book and includes 28 chapters, narrates the main events of the life of the Bab, starting with anecdotes about his early youth, then surveying the major events of his ministry and finally his martyrdom. Subsequent events are briefly treated until the attempt to assassinate the Shah (1852), which resulted in Baha'u'llah's exile to Baghdad. Considerable attention is also given to the Babi uprisings, in addition to the family of the Bab and to outstanding personalities during the Babi dispensation, such as the Letters of the Living, Baha'u'llah and Azal.

The third and last part is an overview of the Bab's better-known writings, which the author arranges more or less chronologically, briefly summarizing their contents. The book ends with an explanation of the Bab's station according to Baha'i theology.

Most of the historical information provided by Muhammad-Husaini could well be found in earlier works, such as *The Dawnbreakers*, Muhammad 'Ali Faizi's *Hadrat-i Nuqtih-yi Ūlā*, Fadil Mazandarani's *Tārikh-i Zuhūr al-Haqq*, vol. 3 and H. M. Balyuzi's *The Bab*. However, it is very useful as a reference work. There is a detailed index of names, places and books. Muhammad-Husaini also gives a systematic introduction to the sources he has used. Finally, the book is most useful for its description of some of the major writings of the Bab. A very extensive chapter, for example, contains a detailed summary of the Persian Bayan, certainly of great interest for those who do not yet have access to this book or have trouble with the heavily arabicized Persian style of the Bab. Producing a complete bibliography of the writings of the Bab is a task that seems to be virtually impossible to accomplish at present but, as a starting-point for all students of the writings of the Bab, Muhammad-Husaini's description of their contents will prove a useful addition to Denis MacEoin's *The Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History* (Brill, Leiden, 1992), which is largely focused on the location of manuscripts.

Despite its value as a reference work, *Hadrat-i Bāb* is neither an academic publication nor intended for a non-Baha'i audience. It is thus suitable for Baha'i readers with general interest in the early history of their Faith. One could perhaps describe it as a rewrite of *The Dawnbreakers*, with the addition

of a number of further details based on other sources. Muhammad-Husaini does not offer any fundamental new interpretations of historical events, nor does he seem to try to give an analysis of any aspect of the Babi movement. The work is essentially a narrative, and its author is keen only on reporting the facts in very fine detail, but does not explain their broader significance.

Muhammad-Husaini's main concern is an attempt to give an 'orthodox', canonized version of Babi history. He generally does so by consulting all accounts available to him and then choosing those accounts that mesh with the dominant narrative of Babi history current in the Baha'i community. The author fails to judge his sources according to academic or any other standards accepted in historiography. Rather, when faced with contradictions between the sources, he determines the authenticity of an account based on its agreement with *The Dawnbreakers* and *God Passes By*. Rarely does he present convincing reasons that would make his preference for a certain source understandable to an uncommitted (non-Baha'i) reader. As to why a certain narrative was chosen as more accurate, we seldom read anything other than that 'the Guardian confirmed' it. For example, there are three different manuscripts of a Tablet (Khutbah fī Jiddah) which all agree on the date of the Bab's return from pilgrimage to Shiraz. This date however does not seem to be in accordance with the one given in *God Passes By*. Thus, Muhammad-Husaini simply concludes that the scribes of these manuscripts must have made an error and that the real date is the one given by Shoghi Effendi (pp. 229–30). He goes on to say: 'When we take into account the explicit utterance of the Guardian, that the Bab returned to Iran in the month of Safar 1261, it becomes obvious that the existing manuscripts of the Khutbah fī Jiddah are to some extent corrupted and that some of the dates ... were not transcribed correctly' (p. 236). It cannot presently be ascertained that Muhammad-Husaini's assertion is wrong, and the possibility does exist that the manuscripts have been corrupted. But the argument he makes for his statement is based solely on authority and thus not convincing to any neutral observer. In a passage (p. 40 *passim*) he argues for the supreme authority of *The Dawnbreakers*, a work that was actually written a few decades (1880s) after the events had taken place and was mainly based on oral reports, over other accounts. Although he does acknowledge in passing that there might be 'problems with some of the details', he quickly affirms that this 'does not have any negative effect on the book as a whole' (p. 42). He also sums up a statement from Ruhiyyih Khanum to the effect that the English translation of *The Dawnbreakers* was 'in fact a completely new work' by Shoghi Effendi, thus trying to add to its authority. Among the reasons he gives, in the same passage, as to why other historical accounts must be subordinated to *The Dawnbreakers* is its conformity with later theological assumptions. For example, Muhammad-Husaini says that *The Dawnbreakers* ('contrary to other Babi historiographers') describes the Babis as being devoid of a violent nature and that the uprisings were solely defensive actions (p. 41). It is not understandable how this could be an argument for the accuracy of a historical account. Actually, this characterization of the early Babis differs from the more nuanced picture, derived from published and unpublished eyewitness accounts written by Babis such as Muhammad Ja'far Qazvini, Muhammad Husayn Zavari'i and Lutf-'Ali Mirza Shirazi. Similarly, Muhammad-Husaini states that in

*The Dawnbreakers* the subject of Azal's appointment is treated 'in a desirable (*maṭlūb*) fashion' (p. 40). Here, the historical value of a source is judged by the extent to which it serves a theological purpose, something which seems legitimate for a hagiography, but certainly not for an academic work.

Siyamak Zabihi-Moqaddam has, in addition to praising the many values of Muhammad-Husaini's book, already pointed out some of its author's flawed assumptions in his well-balanced review of the book under discussion ('Pīrāmūn-i Kitāb-i Ḥadrat-i Bāb', *Pazhūhish-Nāmih*, 4 (1998) 130–59) and it is thus unnecessary to dwell further on the work's methodological failings. But a word should be said about Muhammad-Husaini's response to Zabihi's critiques ('Pāsukh-i yik Naqd-Nāmih', *Pazhūhish-Nāmih*, 5 (1999) 148–70). Not only is it unconvincing, it employs a polemic which seems unsuited to a scholar as well read and well educated as Muhammad-Husaini. For example, it is unnecessary in such a work to describe one's reviewer as 'doubting the Master's station', 'limiting the sphere of the Guardian's infallibility', etc. The reproduction of a courteous letter written by the late Hand of the Cause Ali-Akbar Furutan in which receipt of his book is confirmed (p. 154) does not speak to the accuracy of the facts in that book. Such reactions to well-balanced criticisms are unhelpful in creating an atmosphere of open debate and unbiased research.

In conclusion, Muhammad-Husaini's book can be recommended to those not familiar with earlier works on the life of the Bab and with a chief interest in stories and narratives, that is to say, a general audience with little concern for academic discussion. It is also of importance to those who plan to study the writings of the Bab. Afnan's book is, due to the documents provided therein, certainly a 'must read' for every serious researcher in the area of Babi studies. No serious work in the future can afford to ignore the documents, letters and Tablets published therein. To all other readers it will provide many new insights and the effort of reading through sometimes difficult texts will certainly pay off.

### ***Baha'i, Margit Warburg, [2003]***

Studies in Contemporary Religions, Salt Lake City: Signature Books. 91 pp. ISBN 1-56085-169-4 (pbk). Price: \$12.95

*Reviewed by Daniel Grolin Independent scholar and author of Jesus and Early Christianity in the Gospels: A New Dialogue (Oxford: George Ronald, 2002)*

Do we need another introduction to the Baha'i Faith in the English language? Looking through the broad selection of such books, ranging from the popular books by Esslemont and Perkins to academic books by Momen and Smith, there seems to be no shortage of introductions. Until recently *The Gardeners of God: An Encounter with Five Million Bahā'is* by Colette Gouvion and Philippe Jouvion held the distinction of being the only modern, non-polemical account of the Baha'is by non-Baha'is. Gouvion and Jouvion must now share that privilege with Margit Warburg. Warburg's book was first

1. Abbas Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844–1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) 58–62.
2. This view is based on a document discussed in Denis MacEoin's *Sources for Early Babi Doctrine and History* (Leiden: Brill, 1992) where he states, 'There is evidence that the Bab decided on his policy of outward dissimulation while in Bushihr following the hajj, as a result of hearing about Bastami's arrest and trial' (p. 67). The main problem seems twofold: first, 'dissimulation' is something one does once one finds oneself in danger; it is not to stay out of danger altogether. Second, a letter by the Bab places his decision not to go to Karbala to the period when he was on pilgrimage (Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal*, 252–3). Yet news of Bastami's arrest did not reach him until he returned to Persia. MacEoin himself does not make this suggestion in his analysis of the Bab's motives; see Denis MacEoin, 'Early Shaykhī Reactions to the Bab and His Claims', in *Studies in Bābī and Bābā'ī History* (ed. M. Momen, Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1982) 23.
3. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal* 256–7.
4. In so far as this reviewer has been able to ascertain, Zoroaster is mentioned nowhere by the Bab.
5. The Bab, *Selections from the Writings of the*

published in an Italian translation (from English by Stefano Salzani) in 2001 by Elledici, a Turin publisher. The volume currently in review is a slightly amended version of the text that was translated into Italian.

The first two chapters suffer from plentiful, if minor, inaccuracies. Sometimes they appear to be unintentional implications, such as when, on the opening page, it is suggested that the description of the Sicilian Ḥażiratu'l-Quds might fit a Ḥażiratu'l-Quds anywhere. Further on, Warburg calls the Babi movement 'revolutionary' (p. 6), which might be mistakenly understood to imply that the Bab from the outset was intent on replacing the Shah or the monarchy, which he was not. Anachronistically, she states that Sayyid Rashti sent out his disciples to find 'a forerunner to the Hidden Imam, the Bab, or gate' (p. 6), and thus muddles title and function. Rashti apparently spoke of the Promised One, the Manifestation (*Zuhūr*), while the title 'Bab' which Sayyid 'Ali Muhammad adopted was already understood in the Shaykhī context as referring to the Perfect Shi'i who could communicate the will of the Hidden Imam.<sup>1</sup> In the telling of the events subsequent to the Bab's declaration we learn that 'Ali Muhammad planned to go to Karbala in Iraq to await the advent of the Imam. However, the Bab chose to stay away when a religious tribunal convened in Baghdad and condemned him and one of the local Babi leaders for blasphemy (p. 7). The Bab did indeed plan to go to Karbala, yet what he did was send his disciples ahead to rally the people for his arrival. 'Ali Bastami, who was arrested for his proclamation of the Bab and named in the fatwa against the unidentified Bab, was not a local person but had been sent specifically by the Bab to make the proclamation. The view that the Bab decided not to go when news of 'Ali Bastami's arrest reached him has been aired, but never formally published, and faces serious problems.<sup>2</sup> In view of the lack of consensus, Warburg would have done better to omit comments on the Bab's reasons for not appearing in Karbala, or at least to back up her opinion, to footnote supporting references, and note the divergence of opinion about this claim.

Following this, we are informed that, after a period of house arrest in Shiraz, the Bab 'escaped' until he was arrested again (p. 7). In truth, however, what he 'escaped' was not his imprisonment but the chaos that was provoked by an outbreak of cholera. It was a magistrate and Isfahan's governor who ended the imprisonment.<sup>3</sup> Another instance of anachronistic historiography is the inclusion of Zoroaster in the list of prophets named in the Bab's succession of revelations (p. 9).<sup>4</sup> One is puzzled that the mention of the Bab's title for the prophet that would come after him ('him whom God shall make manifest') should prompt a reference (unpaginated) to Browne's lengthy paper on the 'Babis of Persia' (p. 10 n. 7), in which only two paragraphs deal with this issue (pp. 926–7), when numerous passages from the Bab's own writings on this matter have been translated into English.<sup>5</sup> With regard to the Babis' exile from Baghdad we are told that 'Baha'u'llah and Subh-i-Azal, with their families and a group of followers were forcibly moved to Istanbul ...' (p. 12), although, in fact, the government papers did not mention Subh-i-Azal.<sup>6</sup> There are also a number of statements for which one would have liked to see a substantiating reference. Examples include claims that 'most of today's Baha'i approach to social and economic issues can be traced to this work [*The Secret of Divine Civilization*] (p. 15), the figures for

the Baha'i population of America (p. 17), and that Baha'i's consider rules of election as important as prayer (p. 18).

Throughout, Warburg consistently refers to the Baha'i religion as 'Baha'i', although well aware that Baha'i's themselves refer to it as the Baha'i Faith. She explains that Baha'i means 'People of Baha' (p. 13) and in an endnote (n. 17) explains that it can also be understood as an adjective. In fact, Baha'i merely means 'of Baha', the 'i' at the end of the noun making it genitive. In one passage this oddness becomes clearer when 'Babism' becomes 'Baha'i' (p. 6). The Italian translator avoids the confusion in this case by inserting 'movimento', and elsewhere by adding 'fede' or 'religione', notwithstanding that he translates the above-mentioned endnote, which explains Warburg's convention. The Italian title *I baha'i* refers to the Baha'i's (the people) and not to the religion – as does the English title.

Before moving on to the next chapter Warburg provides 19 photographs showing historical figures, structures and places of the Baha'i community. These provide a nice visual impression of the Baha'i Faith.

After a difficult start the book shifts up in gear, with chapter 3 providing an excellent summary of Baha'i beliefs. It succeeds in being both brief and accurate in its description of the theology and the social vision of the Baha'i community. Warburg describes the Baha'i calendar, and communal meetings such as the nineteen-day feast and holy days. Here she recounts from her notes an experience of attending a celebration of the birthday of Baha'u'llah. This chapter also contains a description of the practice of prayer and fasting in the Baha'i community. Here she draws on her experience of fieldwork in the Danish Baha'i community.<sup>7</sup> From her experience from her stay in Haifa, she gives readers a description of what Baha'i's do when they go on pilgrimage.

Throughout, Warburg maintains a sociological perspective. So, for example, the exclusive right of Baha'i's to donate to the Baha'i fund is viewed as community building (p. 40), and in several places the Baha'i Faith is compared with New Religious Movements (NRMs). This feature of the book provides an interesting perspective that is lacking in works such as that of Gouvion and Jouvin.

Occasionally Warburg dredges up little-known facts from her travels, such as the existence of a small portrait of Baha'u'llah in the Baha'i temple in Kampala (p. 84 n. 19) or that the financing of the shrine of Mirza Yahya was provided by a wealthy relative who came to Famagusta in the 1960s (p. 64).

Chapter 5, 'Schism, Opposition, and Persecution', returns to history, looking specifically at those subjects. A Baha'i reader will find it curious that the doctrine of the Covenant, which is so central to the issue of schism, is entirely unmentioned. For the most part, the survey of schisms is accurate, but two episodes bear comment here. The first is the publication of Ficicchia's book in Germany and the subsequent riposte by Udo Schaefer *et al.* (p. 65). Warburg's presentation here is somewhat uneven. Ficicchia was a disaffected Baha'i whose monograph can only be described as polemical. Its effect on the German general public was noticeable in that the Baha'i community suddenly found itself treated with disdain. So it was not an example, as Warburg's puts it, of 'sensitivity among Baha'i's to the issue of opposition to the leadership' (p. 65). The need for an effective *apologia* (which was substantially successful), was not internal, but a matter of public relations.

*Bāb* (trans. Habib Taherzadeh, Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1978).

6. E. G. Browne *Materials for the Study of the Bābī Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), 275–87. Baha'u'llah explains that when he was summoned to Constantinople he instructed his half-brother Subh-i Azal to go to Persia to disseminate some of the writings of the Bab specifically because he had not been mentioned in the decree; Baha'u'llah, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (trans. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, IL: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1988) 166–7.
7. Margit Warburg, 'Afholdsenhedsideler inden for baha'i', in *Idealer i religion og religionsforskning*, (ed. Lene Buck, Margrethe Haraldsdatter, Anneline Juul, Charlotte Schörbeck, Oluf Schörbeck, København: Museum Tusculanums Forlag København Universitet, 1997) 101–13. Her findings about the practice of prayer have not, as far as this reviewer is aware, been previously published.

8. *The Ministry of the Custodians 1957–1963: An Account of the Stewardship of the Hands of the Cause* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1992) 30.
9. Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, *Scholarship* (Mona Vale, Australia: Bahá’í Publications Australia, 1995) 36, #69.
10. *ibid* 35, #68.
11. Margit Warburg, *Iranske dokumenter: Forfølgelsen af Bahá’erne i Iran* (Copenhagen: Rhodos, 1985).
12. Not least through standard works such as Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge Classics, 2002).

The second episode was the change of leadership after the death of Shoghi Effendi, at which point, according to Warburg, leadership ‘was assumed by a self-appointed council of nine men called “the Custodians”’ (p. 66). The Custodians were elected from among the Hands of the Cause who had been appointed by Shoghi Effendi. The act of electing nine from among their number was provided for in the Will of ‘Abdu’l-Baha. Furthermore, the council was not restricted to men.<sup>8</sup>

In the sub-section on internal disputes and opposition Warburg interprets and summarizes the position of the Universal House of Justice on scholarship in a way that is plainly inconsistent with its statements on the issue, as well as with the passage which she herself cites. What makes this particularly odd is the fact that Warburg has sufficient contacts with Bahá’í academics to know otherwise. The Universal House of Justice relegates the choice of methodology to academics,<sup>9</sup> and states explicitly: ‘that the Faith, as the Guardian states, “enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth”, should reassure any aspiring Bahá’í historian that there can be no question of any requirement to distort history in the so-called “interests” of the Faith’.<sup>10</sup> Part of the problem appears to be that Warburg conflates review policy with methodology. Warburg’s presentation of the persecution of the Bahá’ís in Iran is well informed, as one might expect from one who has published a book on the subject.<sup>11</sup>

In the final section of chapter 5 Warburg discusses *najis* and rumours of immorality. The concept of impurity (*najis*) is well established in sociology,<sup>12</sup> and she presents two interesting stories where it comes into play. The first relates that the confiscated home of a Bahá’í was hosed down before a mulla would enter it; the second relates that donation of blood by Bahá’ís was refused. But the story regarding the tea that magically converts faithful Muslims into zealous Bahá’ís, amusing as it is, has nothing to do with *najis*.

The volume ends abruptly, with Warburg disavowing rumours of immorality in the Bahá’í community. A general audience might have been well served by some sort of conclusion or reflection at this point, rather than the notes and bibliography (or, in the case of the Italian translation, which has footnotes, just the bibliography).

Some of the difficulties from which the English text suffers may be due to the fact that Warburg’s primary language is Danish. For example, we are told that the Twelfth Imam ‘mystically disappeared’ (p. 5). In Danish the word ‘mystisk’ could be translated both as ‘mystical’ and as ‘mysterious’ (*mistico* and *misterioso* in Italian). It would seem that the latter meaning is more appropriate.

Warburg sets out to present the Bahá’í Faith, and in this book she does just that in a short and concise way. In a general audience there will undoubtedly be some who prefer Warburg’s style of writing and feel comfortable with the fact that she writes as an outsider. In an academic setting, however, the book’s value is severely limited by its imprecision and lack of references. Inaccuracies and mistakes that have little import for a general audience will soon frustrate the well informed, and students will find too many unsubstantiated or misdirecting assertions to make use of it in research. This is truly a shame, as the book had the potential to be useful in courses such as comparative religion, where the Bahá’í Faith is touched on only briefly. As it is, unfortunately, it seems unlikely that the book will be of value to readers other than those who are specifically interested in a non-Bahá’í view of the Bahá’ís.

A revised edition that corrected problems of the kind noted in this review would be most welcome and would likely fill a niche.

***The Baha'i Faith in America, William Garlington (2005)***

Westport, CT: Praeger. Distributed by Kalimat Press as volume 21 in its Studies in the Babi and Baha'i Religions series. xxiii + 221 pp. including select bibliography and index. (hbk Praeger) 0-275-98413-3 \$39.95; (pbk Kalimat) ISBN 0-275-98991-7 \$29.95

*Reviewed by Peter Smith Mahidol University, Bangkok*

William Garlington has provided us with an interesting addition to the growing number of volumes of American Baha'i history, and the first to attempt an overall summary from its beginnings in the 1890s to the present day. This is an admirable endeavour for, as Garlington notes, the American Baha'i community remains one of the most influential in the world (p. 73), and its development forms a crucial part of the development of the Baha'i Faith as a whole.

The book is divided into two main parts: a general introduction to the Baha'i Faith (dealing with its historical development, beliefs and principles, community life, and administrative system), and a survey of Baha'i developments in the United States of America. There is also a brief foreword by Jeffrey J. Kripal, J. Newton Rayzor Professor of Religious Studies at Rice University, who links Garlington's work with the contemporary struggle against religious intolerance and praises it for combining accessibility to the general reader with good historical scholarship, and appreciation for the Baha'i tradition with criticism of that tradition.

I will confine my main remarks to the American material – itself the core of the book. This consists of a historical survey in three chronologically based chapters (1892–1921; 1922–57; 1958–2000), followed by a discussion of 'priorities and issues' in the contemporary American Baha'i community, an account of recent examples of American 'anti-Baha'i polemic' (by William M. Miller, Francis Beckworth and Vance Salisbury) and Baha'i responses to it, and a summary conclusion, including interesting speculations about the future possibilities for the development of the Baha'i Faith in the United States of America.

Readers will already be familiar with the considerable amount of material about the beginnings of the American Baha'i community during the period of 'Abdu'l-Baha's leadership (1892–1921), and this is summarized well. The later periods have been less studied, and Garlington's account of them, while illuminating, is more idiosyncratic, both in its choice of themes (some receive great attention while others are relatively neglected) and in the way in which some developments are characterized.

Thus, Garlington provides us with relatively detailed accounts of the early development of the Baha'i administrative system during the 1920s and 1930s, and of the role of African Americans in the Baha'i community, and more generally, of Baha'i work in relation to race relations. But other themes, such as the successive teaching plans whereby the Baha'is sought to increase both their distribution and numbers; the actual pattern of geographical expansion;

the long-drawn-out project to build a Baha'i temple at Wilmette; the development of permanent summer schools; subsidiary administrative developments; and the major contribution made by American Baha'is to the global expansion of the Faith, are relatively neglected or omitted altogether. This is surprising, as source materials on all of these developments are readily available.

Again, while useful reference is made to developments in four local communities (Kenosha, Wisconsin; Baltimore, Maryland; Atlanta, Georgia; and Sacramento, California), demonstrating contrasting problems and successes at the local level, there is no proper account of regional developments and differences. Alaska, Hawaii and Puerto Rico – all parts of the United States but now with their own separate Baha'i administrations – are omitted altogether. Similarly, although short biographies of four of Shoghi Effendi's chief American lieutenants (Mason Remey, Horace Holley, Louis Gregory and Dorothy Baker) are provided (pp. 113–17), many major figures in later American Baha'i history are omitted (Mountfort Mills's exclusion from the ranks of 'American lieutenants' seems particularly curious – as does the identification of Remey as their 'chief' (p. 127)).

Turning to contemporary developments, Garlington deals with the beginnings of rapid growth in the American community during the late 1960s (including a selection of brief 'conversion accounts' from several 'rank-and-file' Baha'is); examines in detail the various controversies that have developed in relation to the development of 'Baha'i Studies' within the community and the resultant alienation of a number of intellectually inclined Baha'is; and provides a brief discussion of some of the difficulties involved in the integration of the large number of Iranian Baha'is (12,000–15,000) who migrated to the United States of America after 1979 – but neglects contemporary Baha'i concerns with interfaith activities, the encouragement of social and economic development projects, gender equality, and support for the work of United Nations agencies, noting them only in passing.

This relative neglect of many aspects of American Baha'i activity and experience is a major shortcoming, particularly in a book that seeks to provide a basic overview of its subject (For example, Garlington devotes almost as much space to the removal from Baha'i membership of the *Canadian* writer Michael McKenny in the late 1990s (the exact date is not given) (p. 168) as he does to the second American Seven Year Plan (1946–53, p. 112)). A focus on a few themes of particular interest to an author would be acceptable in a monograph explicating a particular argument, but not in an introductory work intended for the general reader. Indeed, given the space of almost 200 pages of text, these are entirely unnecessary omissions, and could have been avoided if the author had not decided to devote 70 pages to an often excessively detailed account of the overall history and practices of the Baha'i Faith – leaving only 113 pages for the actual topic of the book. Why do this? A very brief overview and references to the many useful general histories of and introductions to the Faith now available would have given Garlington the space he needed to adequately address his subject.

The characterization of the topics of major interest to the author is also not without problems. This is particularly evident in Garlington's examination of recent American Baha'i developments, which he examines largely in terms of a supposed 'fundamentalist'/'liberal' clash within the community.

Although such a conceptualization may well have value as an explanatory device, it cannot be presented unquestioningly, as happens here. Crucially, if such a dichotomy is going to be used, then the terms themselves must be clearly defined – which they are not. Certainly, there are Baha'is in the United States (and no doubt elsewhere) who see themselves as 'liberals' or 'conservatives' on some matters (none, I suspect, would call themselves 'fundamentalists'), but these are not defined and clearly labelled factions – particularly as Baha'is commonly seek to avoid factionalism. Again, without clear evidence, it is also unhelpful (or worse) to label particular members of the American national spiritual assembly as being 'liberals' or 'conservatives', whether on racial or other issues (e.g. p. 129).

A related problem concerns the use of sources. In part this reflects the author's strong focus on contemporary developments. Thus, recent Internet sources are much in evidence, while official Baha'i publications such as *The Bahā'i World* series or the periodical *Bahā'i News*, which are invaluable sources for the earlier period, are conspicuous by their almost total absence. The use of the Internet is problematic, however, in that it can lead (as here) to an over-reliance on some of the 'dissident' views critical of the Baha'i administration that have been presented in Internet discussion groups over the past decade or so. Such views are important and should be discussed, but they are unlikely to provide a whole or balanced view of developments, particularly when our author appears to adopt a partisan preference for them over more 'conservative' views (Garlington's use of published sources and personal informants on the contemporary period also seems to reflect a preference for 'radical' views). Again, convention discussions and statements of national spiritual assembly policies are not much utilized, but only referred to in selected controversial instances, and statements such as that some American Baha'is saw the attacks of 9/11 in apocalyptic terms (p. 149) are entirely unsourced.

It is also a matter of regret that Garlington makes little attempt at comparison with developments in other Baha'i communities – not even that of Canada, which until 1948 formed part of a joint North American Baha'i community with the United States of America, and which has been the subject of an excellent academic study by Will van den Hoonaard (not even referred to by Garlington). It would have been interesting if he had expanded his brief reference to differences between the mass teaching campaigns in India and those in the United States of America (p. 140).

The book would have benefited from more careful editing. Not only is there some overlap between the two main sections of the book but there are a number of minor ambiguities of expression for historians and others to quibble over, which should have been spotted and corrected. These are particularly evident in the first part of the book (the general account of Baha'i history, belief and practice): e.g. Muhammad-'Ali was the second oldest of a number of Baha'u'llah's sons and not simply the 'younger son' (p. 10); Shoghi Effendi did not experience 'immediate difficulties' after becoming Guardian because of Ahmad Sohrab's criticisms of the new administrative developments (p. 14); Dann May might better be described as a Baha'i who is a philosopher rather than as a 'Baha'i philosopher' (p. 27) – implying that a systematic body of 'Baha'i philosophy' has been developed; there is no set form for commemoration of the Declaration of the Bab (p. 47); the centre for present-day Baha'i

pilgrimage consists of Haifa and Bahji/Akka (p. 50); the Huququ'llah is not 'commonly known' as 'the Huq' (p. 54); national conventions are normally held during the Riḍvān period, which extends beyond 'April' (p. 60); the office of assembly chairman may well be just as important as those of secretary and treasurer (p. 61); certainly outside of the United States (and possibly even within it), it seems unlikely that most local assemblies meet 'once a week' (p. 58); assembly committees do not have to be chaired by an assembly member (p. 58); the assembly chairman is not necessarily the one who reports to the Nineteen Day Feast (p. 59); the playing of pre-recorded tapes from the national assembly at Nineteen Day Feasts (p. 59) is perhaps a specifically American practice; most national assemblies do not have publishing trusts (p. 62); whether or not national teaching committees have a bevy of subsidiary committees varies from one country to another, and not all committees present annual plans to their national assemblies (p. 62); it should be made clear that regional Baha'i councils have only been formed in a minority of national communities (they are not 'numerous'), that where they have been formed they vary in their method of functioning, and that the details of formation given by Garlington apply specifically to the contiguous United States and not necessarily to other national communities (pp. 63, 66); it is only the opinion of one particular scholar that the Universal House of Justice has legislated infallibly only on seven occasions (p. 66); 'Abdu'l-Baha named a number of individuals as Hands of the Cause, but purely as a honorific and generally posthumously, while Shoghi Effendi named 42 Hands (not 43), of whom only 32 were given a functional role (p. 66); the International Teaching Centre has primarily assumed tasks previously accomplished by the Hands of the Cause at the Baha'i World Centre and only indirectly those of the Universal House of Justice (p. 68); the Baha'i conception of *badā* differs from that of mainstream Shi'ism (p. 70); although the membership of the Universal House of Justice changes through periodic elections, it retains a continuity of existence which seems to be belied by referring to 'another House' (p. 70); Shoghi Effendi's letter 'The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh' (1934) provides an additional 'affirmation of the Lesser Covenant' (p. 71); I suspect that the followers of the various Remeyite factions now number in the hundreds rather than 'the thousands' (p. 73). Again, some important statements are not sourced (e.g. Shoghi Effendi's 'list of nine existing religions' (p. 27), or are given only a single controversial source (e.g. Sen McGlinn on Baha'i attitudes towards the relationship between church and state (p. 34, n. 23)).

Similarly, in the 'American' section of the book, the following can be noted: both Kheiralla and Horace Holley married more than once, so that references to the wife of either of these two need to be clearly explicated (pp. 78, 79, 114); Shoghi Effendi 'committed himself' to his work as Guardian from the time his appointment became known and did not wait until he had come to terms with the demands involved (p. 103); there is no indication that Shoghi Effendi initially conceived the 'World Order' letters as a series (p. 106); *Reality* magazine was presented as a Baha'i magazine, and not simply one influenced by Baha'i themes, and its sometime editor, H.G. Dyar, considered himself a Baha'i at a time when Baha'i membership criteria were still relatively undefined (p. 107); the tensions relating to the American national convention did not result from its gaining more powers in 1925, but from its being less powerful than the old Baha'i Temple Unity (p. 109); the first American Seven

Year Plan began in 1937 (not 1938), and the message cited from Shoghi Effendi came towards the end and not the beginning of the Plan (p. 110); in 1936, the Baha'is were not 'evenly spread' across the country (there were very few Baha'is in the South or the Mountain States) (p. 110); the reference to Latin America as 'southern' is idiosyncratic (p. 112); if I were a Canadian, I might object to the statement that 'some American members were lost to the new Canadian community' in 1948 (p. 112); the Nine Year Plan lasted until 1973 (not 1972) (p. 130); teaching efforts on Amerindian reservations pre-dated the 1980s (p. 139); and George Ronald publishers are not based in London (p. 147). I would have found a more detailed index helpful.

How should we assess this book? It reads well and is easily accessible to the general reader. Undoubtedly, it is of considerable interest in the questions it raises, and it provides a useful starting point for further research into the author's interpretations, but as an account of the overall development of the American Baha'i community it seems to me fundamentally flawed, both for its major lacunae in coverage and in its sometimes partisan account of recent developments and uncritical use of sources.

These limitations are unfortunate, both because they undermine the book's stated purpose as a general overview, and because they weaken the author's discussion of a number of contemporary themes and developments – such as the impact of the Internet on Baha'i discourse; the status of 'Baha'i scholarship' within the Faith; Baha'i attitudes and policies on various social and intellectual issues; and the place of the American Baha'i community in modern American religious life – all of which merit far more detailed examination. Garlington raises many interesting questions that could easily be the subject of a wealth of essays and monographs.

So, an interesting and perhaps provocative start to the process of mapping out the development of the Baha'i community in that 'great Republic' of the West, but not an adequate account of either that community's internal development or of its role in the Baha'i Faith as a whole.

***Rumi: Past and Present, East and West – the Life, Teachings and poetry of Jalal al-Din Rumi.* Franklin D. Lewis, 2000**

Oxford: Oneworld Publications, xxvii + 686 pp. ISBN 1-85168-214-7. Price: (hbk) £26.99, US\$35.95 (Winner in 2000 of the British-Kuwait Friendship Society Prize in Middle Eastern Studies administered by the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)

*Reviewed by Bruce Wannell York, England*

This is a book to be welcomed both by students and by the general public – a scholarly and sympathetic account of a great poet of the Islamic mystical tradition of Sufism. Extensive historical research underpins this book; the tone and style are approachable; the author takes us through his arguments with exhaustive patience, scrupulous honesty, and also humour.

Franklin D. Lewis gives an account of his first encounter as a teenager with Rumi's work quoted in the mid-19th century writings of Baha'u'llah, the founder of the Baha'i Faith, notably in his *Haft Vadi* (*Seven Valleys*). His sympathy with the roots of the Baha'i Faith in Persian Islamic mystical traditions is evident throughout this book. This sympathy is counterbalanced by an undertone of disappointment and irritation, and no doubt justified grievance, with traditional Ithna 'Ashari Shi'a exotericism and indeed with all religious legalism. He also condemns the Turkish nationalism of some recent writers on Rumi, and shows an amused disdain of contemporary fashionable Californian New-Age distortion of Rumi – though he wryly comments that without that fashion there might be only a limited market for his scholarly work. His 1995 doctoral thesis on the 12th-century Persian mystical poet Sana'i is a basis of sound historical research, which also benefits this book, one of the best Rumi studies in its range of reading, research and critical comparison of sources. The poet is here placed back in his context as a medieval Sunni Muslim of the Hanafi legal school, of Khurasani socio-linguistic and literary background, living and working in Mongol-dominated Seljuq Anatolia, between the remnants of Hellenic Byzantium and the Ayyubid, later Mamluke, territories of Syria and Egypt.

Lewis topples many myths from their shaky pedestals: Rumi's was born in September 1207 not in Balkh in northern Afghanistan but Wakhsh in the mountains of Tajikistan where his father was working as a preacher – though Rumi is actually referred to as 'Balkhi' in early sources. As a boy he did not meet the mystic poet 'Attar in Nishapur. He was not principally influenced by Ibn 'Arabi's style of mystical theosophy but was rather the inheritor of the Khurasani mystical poetic tradition of Sana'i and 'Attar.

The 37-year-old Rumi's relationship with the sexagenarian Shams was not a foretaste of Californian gay romance, but must be seen in the historical context of the Islamic medieval structures of learning. However, Lewis quotes (p. 207) the beginning of a passage from the *Fihi mā Fihi*, to argue a relationship of ceremonious formality and humility between Rumi and Salahu'd-Din the goldsmith, successor to Shams in Rumi's affections. The continuation of the passage shows that this 'humility' involved mutual massage in the steam bath. It is indeed difficult to reconstruct the emotional and social conventions of distant and foreign cultures long ago. Salahu'd-Din's daughter married Rumi's son, and Rumi conscientiously took care of Salahu'd-Din's other children after their father's death. The sobbing threnody which Rumi extemporized on that occasion – 'ay darīghā! ay darīghā! ay darīghā!' – is beautifully translated by Lewis on page 215. By returning these poems to their lived context, he restores also their immediacy and raw emotional power.

One of the most valuable parts of the book is the analysis of the influences on Rumi: his own father Baha'u'd-Din Walad; his preceptor, Burhanu'd-Din Muhaqqiq and his work the *Ma'ārif*; and Shams, who is given extended treatment on the basis of his rediscovered works, and especially the *Maqālāt*. There are very useful details of Rumi's life, and a carefully re-evaluated chronology, given in chapter 7, 'Towards a Biography of Rumi', as also a register of historical characters with whom he had dealings.

The hagiographies of Sepahsalar, Aflaki and Sultan Walad are critically evaluated and compared to the information discernible in Rumi's own writ-

ings, the *Mathnavī* (as edited by Nicholson, 1925–33), the *Dīvān* (as edited by Furuzanfar, 1957–67), the ‘*mafūzāt*’ records of conversations *Fihī ma Fihī* (recommended in the edition by Mudarris-i Sadiqi, 1994) and also the letters (as edited by Subhani, 1992), which show the social machinations of seeking patronage and favours from the powerful political and military elites of the Seljuqs and other power-holders recognized or established by the Mongols after their conquest of Anatolia in 1243. The mythmaking of the hagiographers is unmasked as a process of the later institutionalization of the Mevlevi order, which saw the formalization of the *Sama’* ritual, Ottoman patronage, and a geographical expansion to India and Central Asia and the modern West.

The most amusing part of this long book is the later section devoted to the entry of Rumi into western literary culture, where the inadequacies of free second- or third-hand adaptations masquerading as direct translations are lightly reviewed and dismissed, relativizing the recent popular successes of free adaptations of Rumi’s poetry by poets with little or no knowledge of the medieval Persian cultural and linguistic background.

Chapter 8 presents 50 of Rumi’s poems in translation: these are both contemporary and mostly faithful to the spirit of Islamic mysticism of the originals. Lewis conscientiously gives the transliteration of the first line of the original and reference number in the *Dīvān*, etc, and also the metre, emphasizing the importance of rhythmic declamation in the *Sama’* ceremonies; useful brief notes follow the translations.

However the treatment is often free (I like the translation of ‘*dar firāq-i jamāl-i ū, mā-rā jism vayrān u jān dar ū chun būm*’ on p. 178 as ‘In separation from his beauty, my flesh is in ruins, my soul hoots like an owl’ where the translator’s addition of ‘hoots’ makes the image even more vivid), but sometimes the attempt to accommodate modern experience leads to cultural anachronism or insensitivity (as when Rumi’s arrangements for his son’s wedding include a western-style wine-waiter, p. 212).

An occasional pseudo-French medievalism of expression does jar – Armance and Byzance, delire and delusion, fabliaux, études of poetry – as also, due no doubt to the absence of Latin from school curricula, ‘tribulation’ where temptation seems to be meant, ‘sojourner’ for traveller, ‘security’ for bribe, and later ‘amoretti’ for lovers.

In the first poem chosen for chapter 8, ‘*kafi afiyūn*’ is translated as ‘a froth of opium’: here the ‘*kaf*’ is the palm of the hand, so it would be better to translate it as ‘a fist-full of opium’.

In the second poem, in the last verse, “*alam*” a battle-standard is required by the metre and the sense, not “*ilm*” knowledge (*mustafīlūn mustafīlūn mustafīlūn mustafīlūn* – ‘*khāmūsh! kih bas musta’jil-am, raftam sū-yi pā-yi ‘alam’’). The metre could again have helped avoid the mistranslation ‘even in the midst of war’ (based on wrong insertion of *izāfih*) of ‘*v’andar miyān, jang afkānī*’ which means ‘You (God) raise up conflict (in their midst), ...’ compounded by a further mistranslation ‘that no one’s ever seen before’ for ‘*fi istinā’-i lā yurā*’ which is a quote ‘*lā yurā*’ from Quran Sura 46, verse 25, referring to the destruction of the tribe of ‘Ad, so that nothing except their empty dwellings was to be seen the following morning.*

In poem 5, which hinges on the illusory identities displayed by sorcery ‘*jādū*’ or ‘*sihr*’, with ‘*nimūdan*’ as a verb meaning to show (here falsely, by

slick sophistry), there are also several instances where the meaning could be expressed more precisely: especially the verse ‘*pur bād-i hidāyat ast rish-išh, az sihr-i taw, jāhil-i ghawī-rā*’ – where the windy, self-important, misguided, bearded ignoramus (i.e. exoteric cleric!) seeks to guide where he has no knowledge, and the verse ‘*suſīsata’iy-am kard sihr-at: ay Turk nimūdeh Hindū-i-rā*’ where the poet is turned into a sophist, passing off the blackness of a Hindu as a white moon-like Turk. Sophistry, like juggling and sorcery – ‘the equivocation of the fiend, that lies like truth’ – makes things seem other than they are, which was also a feature of training in rhetoric. The translation also mixes up ‘*shīrī*’ and ‘*āhū’ī*’, the timid gazelle is passed off as being lion-like, not vice-versa; and it also misses the negative connotation of ‘*āhwāl*’ – here the eye unable to see the unity that underlies the apparent multiplicity of existence – and of ‘*ālū*’ less prestigious than the ‘*turunj*’ golden citron which, according to Khaqani’s famous *qasīda* describing the ruins of Ctesiphon, graced the royal table of the Sasanians.

In the lines quoted from the *Mathnavī* on page 182, “*ishq-rā pansad parast, u har pari az farāz-e ‘arsh tā taht ath-tharā*”, the translation runs ‘Love has a thousand (not 500) feathers, and each one soars over the Throne beyond the Pleiades’: which fails to recognize a quote from the Qur’an, Sura 20, verse 6, where *taht ath-tharā* is usually translated as ‘under the soil’, which has nothing to do with the Pleiades constellation, the Arabic name of which, *thūrāyā*, could possibly lead to confusion; previously however, on page 24, *tharā* had been correctly translated as soil. Just a slip, or unfamiliarity with the basic text contemplated by all Islamic mystics?

The nature of the conquest state of Seljuq Anatolia – a Turkish military and tribal element superimposed on a Greek and Armenian peasantry and urban merchant and craftsman class, with numerous immigrants from Iran and central Asia – remains difficult to grasp. Since the floodgates were opened to the Turks after the battle of Manzikert in 1071, there had been, by the time Rumi was active in Konya in the middle years of the 13th century, a considerable degree of acculturation and even conversion to Islam among the Byzantine inhabitants of Anatolia. We find Sufis acting on different levels, as they have done repeatedly in history, as shock absorbers for disrupted and dislocated societies, as agents of conversion, as elements legitimizing a regime, as soul doctors, as purveyors of emotional catharsis, of pietism, of a subtle aesthetic and a spiritual philosophy.

Rumi’s patronage and promotion of music, especially after his undergoing the influence of Shams Tabrizi, led to the formalization of the *Sama’* ritual, which was obviously a powerfully emotive shared experience that could transcend linguistic boundaries, and offer a form of self-transcendence to artisans and new converts as well as to members of the court. But to whom was Rumi addressing his poetry and sermons? Who actually understood the Persian he spoke and wrote? One is left with the impression that the great *Divān* and the *Mathnavī* were addressed to an inner circle of elite students with leisure to learn and an already considerable knowledge of Persian, Arabic and the Islamic tradition.

But what were the relations among different groups of Sufis – say the Mevlevi and the followers of Sadru’d-Din Qunavi or Haji Bektash and the Akhis encountered by Ibn Battuta in his early 14th-century travels – were they friendly or distant or were they even hostile rivals? What was the social

morality of followers capable of threatening to murder or actually murdering their master Rumi's inspiring mentor Shamsu'd-Din of Tabriz or his beloved companion Salahu'd-Din – how far had they evolved on the spiritual path?

For visitors to Konya and the areas of Anatolia once dominated by the Seljuqs, the surviving buildings of the 13th-century AD evoke the ambience in which Rumi lived. We could have had a little more on these and their patrons, notably Sahib Ata Fakhru'd-Din who died in 1288, and was responsible for the 1258 Sahib Ata Jami' Mosque as well as the Ince Minareli Madrasa in Konya and the 1275 Tash Madrasa in Aqshahr/Aksehir and the 1271 Gok Madrasa at Sivas, and also Jalaluddin Qaratai and his magnificent madrasa of 1251 where Rumi passed with his disciples both during the lifetime, and after the death, of the founder. As so often in the history of Islamic or medieval culture generally, the gap between the surviving written record and actual buildings and objects is often unbridged.

There is thus still much work to be done in the field of Rumi studies. But with this book to instruct and inspire new generations of students, willing workers will surely be found – the field is rich and rewarding.