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Many articles published in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* allude to the institutions and central figures of the Bahá'í Faith; as an aid for those unfamiliar with the Bahá'í Faith, we include here a succinct summary excerpted from <http://www.bahai.org/beliefs/bahaullah-covenant/>. The reader may also find it helpful to visit the official web site for the worldwide Bahá'í community (www.bahai.org) available in several languages. For article submission guidelines, please visit <http://bahai-studies.ca/the-journal-of-bahai-studies-submission-guidelines/>.

ABOUT THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

The Bahá'í Faith, its followers believe, is “divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men.” The mission of the Bahá'í Faith is “to proclaim that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is continuous and progressive, that the Founders of all past religions, though different in the non-essential aspects of their teachings, “abide in the same Tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech and proclaim the same Faith” (Shoghi Effendi).

The Bahá'í Faith began with the mission entrusted by God to two Divine Messengers—the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Today, the distinctive unity of the Faith They founded stems from explicit instructions given by Bahá'u'lláh that have assured the continuity of guidance following His passing. This line of succession, referred to as the Covenant, went from Bahá'u'lláh to His Son 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and then from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to His grandson, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice, ordained by Bahá'u'lláh. A Bahá'í accepts the divine authority of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and of these appointed successors.

The Báb (1819-1850) is the Herald of the Bahá'í Faith. In the middle of the 19th century, He announced that He was the bearer of a message destined to transform humanity's spiritual life. His mission was to prepare the way for the coming of a second Messenger from God, greater than Himself, who would usher in an age of peace and justice.

Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892)—the “Glory of God”—is the Promised One foretold by the Báb and all of the Divine Messengers of the past. Bahá'u'lláh delivered a new Revelation from God to humanity. Thousands of verses, letters and books flowed from His pen. In His Writings, He outlined a framework for the development of a global civilization which takes into account both the spiritual and material dimensions of human life. For this, He endured 40 years of imprisonment, torture and exile.

In His will, Bahá'u'lláh appointed His oldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), as the authorized interpreter of His teachings and Head of the Faith. Throughout the East and West, 'Abdu'l-Bahá became known as an ambassador of peace, an exemplary human being, and the leading exponent of a new Faith.

Appointed Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), spent 36 years systematically nurturing the development, deepening the understanding, and strengthening the unity of the Bahá'í community, as it increasingly grew to reflect the diversity of the entire human race.

The development of the Bahá'í Faith worldwide is today guided by the Universal House of Justice (established in 1963). In His book of laws, Bahá'u'lláh instructed the Universal House of Justice to exert a positive influence on the welfare of humankind, promote education, peace and global prosperity, and safeguard human honor and the position of religion.

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The Báb's prayer beads

From the Editor's Desk

JOHN S. HATCHER

THE ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL:
CELEBRATING THE BICENTENARY
OF THE BIRTH OF THE BÁB

To commemorate the Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, our cover is graced by the photo “Terraces of Light, Light upon Light.” The title refers to the dark nights the Báb spent imprisoned in the mountain fortress of Mahku, where He was not allowed even a candle.

The nineteen terraces, which ascend the holy mountain and embrace the Shrine of the Báb, were first envisioned by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, then instigated by Shoghi Effendi, and finally designed and completed by renowned architect Fariborz Sahba, in consultation with the Universal House of Justice. Naturally, the focal point of the terraces is the Shrine of the Báb, the “Queen of Carmel,” which contains the sacred remains of the “Primal Point” and His young companion Anís, who were martyred together in 1850, in Tabriz. The spot for this edifice was chosen by Bahá’u’lláh Himself, during a trip to Mount Carmel with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. It wasn’t until the 21st of March 1909, however, that the Báb’s remains were finally laid to rest within the simple structure erected by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself.

That evening, He placed the Báb’s remains in a marble sarcophagus in the middle room. According to Shoghi Effendi,

When all was finished, and the earthly remains of the Martyr-Prophet of Shíráz were, at long last, safely deposited for their everlasting rest in the bosom of God’s holy mountain, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who had cast aside His turban, removed His shoes and thrown off His cloak, bent low over the still open sarcophagus, His silver hair waving about His head and His face transfigured and luminous, rested His forehead on the border of the wooden casket, and, sobbing aloud, wept with such a weeping that all those who were present wept with Him. That night He could not sleep, so overwhelmed was He with emotion. (*God Passes By* 276)

The room where the Bab’s casket lies is in the second row of six rooms within the modest building, constructed of stone from a nearby site. “Every stone of that building, every stone of the road leading to it . . . I have with infinite tears and at tremendous cost, raised and placed in position” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, qtd. in *God Passes By* 276). In 1929, three more rooms were built behind the second row, thereby placing the remains of the Báb and Anís at the precise center of the nine-room structure.

In 1921, the remains of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá were interred in the middle room, next to the Báb’s resting place, until such

time as an appropriate shrine could be built for Him alone. As announced this year (176 BE) in the Ridván letter from the Universal House of Justice, the site for the Shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has already been selected, the architect chosen, and pictures of the model are available for all to see.

The idea of nine terraces leading up to the Shrine of the Báb and the nine ascending from it to the top of Mount Carmel was instigated by Shoghi Effendi, who also guided architect Sutherland Maxwell in constructing a beautiful domed superstructure to house the original stone shrine.

The whole story and evolution of the Shrine of the Báb and its terraces has yet to be told in full. Mysteries of significance and meaning could lead us to wonder, for example, why the Shrine of the Báb is the focal point of the Bahá'í gardens on Mt. Carmel, while the Qiblih (Point of Adoration) of the Bahá'í Faith is the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh—which is currently a simple garden house outside the city of ‘Akká. One answer is that this is what Bahá'u'lláh Himself desired and designated. Another answer lies in the Báb's own declaration that He was the long-awaited Qá'im of Islam, as well as the herald of a worldwide Resurrection prophesied in all the Abrahamic religions. His station is that of the “Primal Point,” the beginning of a new era—the Bahá'í Era—as well as a new Cycle in human history destined to last no less than five hundred thousand years. In addition, the Báb's Writings, many of which explain the

more abstruse and important Súrihs of the Qur'án, summarize all previous divine Revelation during the Prophetic (or Adamic) Cycle. The Báb is thus the point of confluence between these two important periods in the advancement of civilization and humanity's spiritual evolution.

While symbolism is plentiful relating to the Báb, the Shrine of the Báb, and the terraces that ascend Mount Carmel, for the purposes of this introduction, let us examine three deeper meanings that are especially apt in this Bicentenary year. The first of these—and relatively unknown to most contemporaries—is the symbolic allusion to climbing this holy mountain as a mystical act of ascending to God. This idea was popularized in a work by St. John of the Cross in the sixteenth century.¹

St. John of the Cross was a Spanish Catholic mystic and poet. He composed a poetic treatise titled *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, which portrays how the individual can—through intense prayer, reflection, and adherence to the ascetic life—attain the presence of, or union with, the Beloved (Christ, in the context of St. John's masterpiece).

O night that guided me
O night more lovely than the dawn
O night that joined

1 The sacred importance of Mount Carmel can be traced back to the fifteen century BCE, and it plays a part in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá'í Faith.

The Beloved with the lover
 Lover transformed in the Beloved

Upon my flowery breast
 Which I kept whole for himself
 alone
 There he stayed sleeping
 and I caressed him,
 And the fanning of the cedars
 made a breeze

The breeze from the turret
 While I was parting his locks
 With his gentle hand
 He was wounding my neck
 And causing all my senses to be
 suspended

I remained myself and forgot
 myself
 My face I reclined on the lover,
 All ceased and I abandoned
 myself
 Leaving my cares
 forgotten among the lilies.²

Because this magnificent opus is similar to Persian and Arabic mystic poetry written around the same period, one could imagine some Islamic or Moorish influence here, especially since St. John lived in those parts of Spain that had been governed by the Caliphate of Cordoba. But the main reason for his symbolic use of the ascent of Mount Carmel was his membership in the Carmelite Order, a monastic order that be traced back to a community of

hermits who lived on Mount Carmel in the thirteenth century.

The similarity in tone and imagery of St. John's verses to the "Ode of the Dove"—a poem Bahá'u'lláh composed while He was dwelling in the mountains of Sulaymáníyyih (and which is translated and included in this issue)—might seem remarkable. However, there seems to be a common theme and spiritual process within mystic poetry, no matter to what religion, gender, or culture its authors belong. This can be seen in the poems of Rumi regarding "the Friend," in the poems of Ṭáhirih regarding the Báb, and in the verses of Bahá'u'lláh regarding the Ḥuríyyih (the Maid of Heaven).

St. John's verses are also reminiscent of many of Bahá'u'lláh's statements that comprehension of the mystic or hidden significances of scripture is ultimately a matter of "purity of heart" rather than intellect alone: "The understanding of His words and the comprehension of the utterances of the Birds of Heaven are in no wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit" (*Kitáb-i-Íqán* ¶ 233).

A second important meaning of Mount Carmel relates to Shoghi Effendi's description of the nature of this holy site as the symbolic center of the earth. In a letter written 29 March 1951, Shoghi Effendi states that "just as in the realm of the spirit, the reality of the Báb has been hailed by the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation as 'The Point round Whom the realities of the

² Trans, P. Silverio de Santa Teresa and ed. E. Allison Peers, 10.

Prophets and Messengers revolve,' so, on this visible plane, His sacred remains constitute the heart and center of what may be regarded as nine concentric circles, paralleling thereby, and adding further emphasis to the central position accorded by the Founder of our Faith to One 'from Whom God hath caused to proceed the knowledge of all that was and shall be,' 'the Primal Point from which have been generated all created things'" (*Citadel of Faith* 97).

Of greater interest still is the detail with which Shoghi Effendi describes what each of these nine concentric circles represents. The ninth or "outermost circle" represents "the entire planet"; the eighth is the "Holy Land," what 'Abdu'l-Bahá referred to as "the Nest of the Prophets"; the seventh encircles Mount Carmel, "the Vineyard of the Lord"; the sixth contains "the extensive properties permanently dedicated to and constituting the sacred precincts of the Báb's holy Sepulcher"; within these properties is the fifth circle, containing "the most holy court, an enclosure comprising gardens and terraces"; the fourth is "the mausoleum of the Báb"; and within "the shell designed to preserve and adorn" it is the fourth circle, the "chambers which constitute the tomb itself, and which were constructed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá"; the third circle is "the vault wherein reposes the most holy casket"; the second designates "the alabaster sarcophagus" within that vault; and, finally, within that sarcophagus lies "that inestimable jewel, the Báb's holy dust" (*Citadel of Faith* 95). His detailed overview

of the spiritual influence emanating from this sacred spot concludes with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's observation that "the tomb itself housing this dust" is the "spot round which the Concourse on high circle in adoration" (95).

A third meaning of this sacred spot is conveyed by the terraces that emanate from the Shrine of the Báb, as conceived of by architect Fariborz Sahba. In one sense, Sahba's plan encompasses both aspects of the symbolism just described. The terraces rise majestically from the base of the mountain to the summit, drawing pilgrims' hearts and minds toward God. Like the steps in the mystic ascent portrayed in the treatise of St. John of the Cross, or the successive stages of spiritual growth in Bahá'u'lláh's *Seven Valleys*, each terrace is unique, a special experience for the wayfarer. Some offer a retreat, a place of rest and reflection amid the flowers and fountains. Yet the steps beckon us onward, urging us to continue this journey of heart and spirit, drawing ever nearer to the Queen of Carmel. Once we have attained that sacred point, we are not finished with our journey, but must climb ever higher, approaching the summit from which we can gaze across the Bay of Haifa towards the Qiblih, the threshold of "Him Whom God would make Manifest," the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí.

The water that flows alongside the stairs circulates like blood in the body. The descending water refreshes the gardens at each terrace, and, having reached the bottom, returns to the top

reinvigorated, so that it may once again descend and make the entire design a living, life-giving creation.

Perhaps the most clear and compelling meaning is offered by the shape of the terraces seen from a distance. The eighteen terraces represent the eighteen Letters of the Living, the first disciples of the Báb. Sabha has shown their spiritual relationship visually. The lower terraces curve up, while the top terraces curve down, forming concentric circles that ripple outward from the Shrine of the Báb. Similar to the concentric circles described by Shoghi Effendi, the terraces appear to be generated by the Shrine of the Báb, with the Shrine itself, and the gardens surrounding it, forming the nineteenth terrace and the focal point—or “Primal Point”—of the entire design.

With these meanings in mind, this issue contains three articles that delve into the symbolism contained in three of Bahá'u'lláh's works. The first article, “Bahá'u'lláh's Symbolic Use of the Veiled Húríyyih” analyzes some of the meanings behind the appearance of the Veiled Maiden, as alluded to by Bahá'u'lláh in His letters, and as portrayed in detail in such works as the *Súriy-i-Haykal*. Following this, and in keeping with the theme of mysticism at the heart of all divine Revelation, we have published a provisional translation of Bahá'u'lláh's famous poem “Ode of the Dove.” Here, Bahá'u'lláh presents a lengthy dialogue between Himself (as persona/narrator) and the Húríyyih—the Maid of Heaven (a personification of “the Most Great Spirit”).

The second essay is a discussion of the well-known Lawh-i-Tibb, Bahá'u'lláh's tablet to a physician. While there is not yet any authorized translation of the work, the maxims it contains regarding health are often cited. This discussion by Dr. Misagh Ziaei reviews the tablet's historical context, as well as some of its guidance regarding the study and practice of medicine, including the attributes its practitioners must acquire and maintain.

The final article is Tom Lysaght's creative comparison of the biblical figure of Joseph and the character of Edgar in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Lysaght, a student of drama, does a fascinating and useful job in uncovering how these two at-first disparate figures must endure similar challenges in order to become their true selves and serve society. In addition, because Joseph is central to works such as the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá*, this comparison encourages us to examine his story and allusions more thoroughly, in light of the Báb's and Bahá'u'lláh's Writings.

Indeed, we are calling for more creative studies of the sacred Bahá'í texts, including the Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as well as the Guardian's letters, histories, and commentaries. For while individuals cannot produce authoritative translations or interpretations of the Bahá'í Writings, all are encouraged to dive into the vast ocean of this Revelation—and to share the beautiful pearls of wisdom they find in those depths.

YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE TO READ. . .

As a service to our readers, we are including the hyperlinks to articles related to the subjects presented in this issue. These are articles that have been previously published in the *Journal* and are available for free on our website.

First is a piece by Paula A. Drewek titled “Feminine Forms of the Divine in Bahá'í Scriptures.” The article responds to feminist research in religious studies, but from a Bahá'í perspective and answers the resurgence of interest in a feminine divine in several religions by offering examples of the interaction between male and female principles in Bahá'í sacred writings.

<https://bahai-studies.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/5.1.Drewek.pdf>

The article “Metaphor and the Language of Revelation” by Ross Woodman asserts that metaphor is the literal language of the soul. He explains that to enter the realm of metaphor as the language of the soul is to come into direct contact with the Word as the originating power of creation, and in his discussion he explores the metaphorical language as the language of Revelation and the richer unveiling of its meaning that can be found in the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

<https://bahai-studies.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/8.1-1Woodman.pdf>

The article “Concealment and Revelation in Bahá'u'lláh's ‘Book of the River’” by noted Bahá'í scholar Nader Saiedi examines and counters a thesis previously proposed by Juan Cole that Bahá'u'lláh did not consider himself a Manifestation of God until a short time prior to His Ridván declaration and that Bahá'u'lláh experience in the Siyáh-Chál was not really a divine revelation. Saiedi refutes this thesis by examining the text of the “Book of the River” in terms of “the dialectic of concealment and revelation that characterizes Bahá'u'lláh's early writings.”

<https://bahai-studies.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/9.3-Saiedi.pdf>

Finally, there is an article by our editor John S Hatcher, “Unveiling the Húrí of Love,” which attempts to explain a parallel relationship between (1) the means by which the essentially unknowable intelligence we call “God” employs the intermediaries of extraordinary beings (Manifestations) to run physical reality, and (2) the means by which the essentially unknowable intelligence we call the human “soul” employs the intermediary of an extraordinary creation (the human brain) to run our physical bodies. The abiding theme of this discourse is the attempt to understand how the Creator's love is the motive force instigating and sustaining these parallel systems.

<https://bahai-studies.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/15.1-4.Hatcher.pdf>

Bahá'u'lláh's Symbolic Use of the Veiled Ḥúríyyih

JOHN S. HATCHER,
AMROLLAH HEMMAT,
EHSANOLLAH HEMMAT

Abstract

“Ḥúríyyih,” a term whose roots can be found in the Qur’án (44–54, 52:20, 56–22, and 55:72), refers to angelic female figures that reside in paradise and accompany the believers. In the Bahá’í Writings, the word has often been translated as “the Maid of Heaven,” a symbolic personification of the divine reality of Bahá’u’lláh. In this article we explore how Bahá’u’lláh employs this figurative device to portray the forces at work in the context of His appearance as a Manifestation of God. In particular, we wish to examine the crucial symbolic role the unveiling of the Ḥúríyyih plays in relation to Bahá’u’lláh’s gradual unfolding of His mission. While some readers might believe the portrayal of this figure to be a literal depiction of the Holy Spirit appearing to Bahá’u’lláh, we hope to demonstrate that Bahá’u’lláh has, instead, created a figurative or symbolic portrayal of how He gradually reveals His guidance for this long-awaited era in human history—the “Day of Days,” the culmination of all previous revelations. Put simply, we feel that the image of the Ḥúríyyih does not represent a force separate from Bahá’u’lláh, but rather an expression of the Holy Spirit operating through the inherent spiritual capacity unique to a Manifestation of God.

Résumé

« Ḥúríyyih », terme tirant son origine du Coran (44–54, 52:20, 56–22 et 55:72), fait référence aux figures féminines angéliques qui résident au paradis et accompagnent les croyants. Dans les Écrits bahá’ís, ce mot a souvent été traduit par « la céleste Houri », une personnification symbolique de la réalité divine de Bahá’u’lláh. Dans cet article, les auteurs explorent comment Bahá’u’lláh utilise ce procédé métaphorique pour illustrer les forces à l’œuvre dans le contexte de son apparition comme Manifestation de Dieu. En particulier, ils examinent le rôle symbolique crucial que le dévoilement de la céleste Houri joue par rapport au dévoilement progressif de la mission de Bahá’u’lláh. Alors que certains lecteurs pourraient croire que cette figure est une représentation littérale de l’Esprit Saint apparaissant à Bahá’u’lláh, les auteurs espèrent démontrer que Bahá’u’lláh a plutôt créé une représentation figurative ou symbolique de la façon dont Il révèle progressivement ses instructions pour cette époque tant attendue de l’histoire humaine, ce « jour des jours », le point culminant de toutes les révélations précédentes. En termes simples, les auteurs sont d’avis que l’image de la céleste Houri ne représente pas une force distincte de Bahá’u’lláh, mais constitue plutôt une expression de l’Esprit Saint agissant par l’intermédiaire de la capacité spirituelle inhérente propre à une Manifestation de Dieu.

Resumen

“Ḥúríyyih,” a un término cuyas raíces se pueden encontrar en el Qur’án (44–54, 52:20, 56–22, and 55:72), se refiere a figuras femeninas angelicales que residen en el paraíso y acompañan a los creyentes. En los Escritos de la Fe Bahá’í, la palabra a menudo se ha traducido como “la Doncella

del Cielo,” una personificación simbólica de la realidad divina de Bahá'u'lláh. En este artículo exploramos cómo Bahá'u'lláh emplea este dispositivo figurativo para retratar las fuerzas en el trabajo en el contexto de su aparición como una Manifestación de Dios. En particular, deseamos examinar el papel simbólico crucial que la revelación del Húríyyih juega en relación con el desarrollo gradual de Su misión por parte de Bahá'u'lláh. Aunque algunos lectores podrían creer que la representación de esta figura es una representación literal del Espíritu Santo apareciendo a Bahá'u'lláh, esperamos demostrar que Bahá'u'lláh, en cambio, ha creado una representación figurativa o simbólica de cómo Él revela gradualmente Su guía para esta era tan esperada en la historia humana: el “Día de los Días”, la culminación de todas las revelaciones anteriores. En pocas palabras, sentimos que la imagen del Húríyyih no representa una fuerza separada de Bahá'u'lláh, sino más bien una expresión del Espíritu Santo que opera a través de la capacidad espiritual inherente única de una Manifestación de Dios.

THE HÚRÍYYIH AS PERSONIFICATION OF “THE MOST GREAT SPIRIT”¹

In *God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi, quoting from the Súriy-i-Haykal, renders the Arabic word *húríyyih* as “Maiden” and states that this character

1 We wish to express our gratitude to the Bahá'í World Centre for providing the authorized translation of the Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá (Tablet of the Vision) in advance of its publication, as well as our thanks to Dr. Vahid Rafati for introducing us to additional sources, and to Dr. Sasha Dehghani for sharing his thoughts on this topic.

personifies the Holy Spirit emanating through Bahá'u'lláh:

the “Most Great Spirit,” as designated by Himself, and symbolized in the Zoroastrian, the Mosaic, the Christian, and Muhammadan Dispensations by the Sacred Fire, the Burning Bush, the Dove and the Angel Gabriel respectively, descended upon, and revealed itself, personated by a “Maiden,” to the agonized soul of Bahá'u'lláh. (100)

Let us examine how this figurative device is developed by Bahá'u'lláh in the unfolding of His revealed works as it is employed in the chronology of His ministry.

THE INITIAL APPEARANCE OF THE HÚRÍYYIH

From the perspective of the Bahá'í authoritative texts, the Maid of Heaven is a symbolic or allegorical mystical concept intended to convey various levels of meaning. Consequently, this trope is open to multiple interpretations. For while the principal “intended” meaning, according to Shoghi Effendi, is the Holy Spirit being channeled through Bahá'u'lláh, we can hardly pretend to decipher in any comprehensive manner the totality of what it represents. Indeed, the depth and breadth of its meaning call to mind Bahá'u'lláh's observation, “How great the multitude of truths which the garment of words can never contain! How vast the number of

such verities as no expression can adequately describe, whose significance can never be unfolded, and to which not even the remotest allusions can be made!" (*Gleanings* 89:3).

Perhaps the most illuminating explanation of the term is Shoghi Effendi's statement that the Maid of Heaven as portrayed by Bahá'u'lláh in His description of the dream vision He experienced in the Siyáh-Chál² "personified the Spirit of God within Him [Bahá'u'lláh]" (*God Passes By* 121). Accordingly, in various of the works by Bahá'u'lláh, the Húríyyih represents an intermediary figure who imparts to the Manifestations of God that which the Creator wishes to convey to humankind for a specific era or dispensation.

Bahá'u'lláh Himself writes in the *Kitáb-i-Badí'* (1867) that "the Holy Spirit spoke in My heart and the Most Great Spirit³ uttered through My tongue. This is not from me, but from that Powerful One whose power encompasses all things."⁴

2 "The Black Pit," an infamous subterranean dungeon in which Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in 1852.

3 A definitive distinction between these two spiritual realities is not possible, but the "Most Great Spirit" can be thought of as an allusion to the essential reality of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, and the "Holy Spirit" represents the spiritual influence emanating from that reality, like rays emanating from the sun.

4 This and all other provisional translations in this article are by the authors—John S. Hatcher, Amrollah Hemmat, and Ehsanollah Hemmat.

This description parallels what Bahá'u'lláh depicts in His epistle to Násiri'd-Dín Sháh when He says, "O King! I was but a man like others, asleep upon My couch, when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been. This thing is not from Me, but from One Who is Almighty and All-Knowing" (*Summons* 1:192).

Thus, while the intermediary reality of the Maid of Heaven is personified in the form of an immanent corporeal image, Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes that this appearance is a means whereby He can provide His followers with a sense of the experience He undergoes as His revelation is conveyed to Him, something we can understand solely by metaphorical or allegorical representations. Consequently, the image is replete with symbolic detail and actions, and in His recounting of this experience, He treats this allegorical personification with utmost respect, inasmuch as She is assigned a station belonging to the loftiest realm, the transcendent domain of the Divine.

Using as a starting point the appearance of the Húríyyih in the Writings, let us examine the distinction between accepting the Maid of Heaven as an actual being and viewing Her as a symbolic figure that Bahá'u'lláh has devised for our benefit—that we might understand in simpler terms a most ephemeral, mystical, and spiritual process. For example, in Judaism, Moses claims that God speaks to Him through the burning bush; after this experience, His words

are considered to have divine authority. In Christian scripture, the appearance of the figure of the dove as a simile for the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus when He is anointed by John the Baptist signals the beginning of Christ's ministry, but the dove does not continue to represent the Holy Spirit or an intermediary between God and Christ. From that moment forward, instead, He frequently alludes to Himself as the intermediary between God and humankind: "For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John 12:49). However, in Islam, the Angel Gabriel as intermediary is much more significant. Gabriel is understood by most Muslims to be a literal intermediary between Allah and Muḥammad, the untutored recipient of the revelation.⁵ As we can observe, the beginning of every Dispensation is depicted as an "announcement" by the Holy Spirit informing the Prophet that He is the Chosen One to carry out that particular stage in God's plan for the education of humankind. The act of revelation itself (as in Muḥammad's example) is often portrayed as the simple transmission of the Word of God by means of

5 Quite possibly because Muḥammad appeared among unlearned warring tribes, He employed this sort of benign artifice to maintain their belief, something He seemed to confirm and perpetuate by going into a form of trance or seizure when revealing what became the suras of the Qur'án. In other words, the presumption by those present was that Gabriel was speaking to Him with Divine Authority.

an otherwise "uninformed" Messenger. Such depictions, however, are allegorical and—like many other similar uses of metaphorical imagery in the scriptures of all religions—are intended to illustrate realities that cannot be adequately expressed in a literal form.⁶

Bahá'u'lláh, in fact, states unequivocally that everything the Manifestations say or do is of Their own devising, has authority, is carrying out the will of God, and is explicitly for our benefit: "The essence of belief in Divine unity consisteth in regarding Him Who is the Manifestation of God and Him Who is the invisible, the inaccessible, the unknowable Essence as one and the same. By this is meant that whatever pertaineth to the former, all His acts and doings, whatever He ordaineth or forbiddeth, should be considered, in all their aspects, and under all circumstances, and without any reservation, as identical with the Will of God Himself" (*Gleanings* 84:166).

Let us keep this relationship in mind as we expand our research into Bahá'u'lláh's utilization of the figure of the Ḥúriyyih as a representation of the spiritual force and impact of the Holy Spirit being communicated to us through the Manifestation, even as was the figure of Gabriel for Muḥammad:

Wrapped in its stygian gloom,
breathing its fetid air, numbed by
its humid and icy atmosphere, His

6 For an ampler discussion of this theme—which is outside the purview of this article—please see Hatcher, *The Face of God among Us*, especially chapter 7.

feet in stocks, His neck weighed down by a mighty chain, surrounded by criminals and miscreants of the worst order, oppressed by the consciousness of the terrible blot that had stained the fair name of His beloved Faith, painfully aware of the dire distress that had overtaken its champions, and of the grave dangers that faced the remnant of its followers—at so critical an hour and under such appalling circumstances the “Most Great Spirit,” as designated by Himself, and symbolized in the Zoroastrian, the Mosaic, the Christian, and Muhammadan Dispensations by the Sacred Fire, the Burning Bush, the Dove and the Angel Gabriel respectively, descended upon, and revealed itself, personated by a “Maiden,” to the agonized soul of Bahá'u'lláh. (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 100)

SOME FURTHER APPEARANCES OF THE HÚRÍYYIH

The exalted station of the Húríyyih is clearly evident in Bahá'u'lláh's observation that the “Holy Spirit Itself hath been generated through the agency of a single letter revealed by this Most Great Spirit, if ye be of them that comprehend” (*Summons* ¶50). The transcendent nature of the Húríyyih is thus an essential characteristic of this personification, and Her importance symbolically is demonstrated in a number of works of Bahá'u'lláh where She is mentioned or discussed.

Bahá'u'lláh's initial references to the Húríyyih are found principally in the works He revealed in Baghdad and Sulaymáníyyih. For example, we encounter allegorical references to a heavenly, chaste, and luminous female figure in the *Qaṣídiy-i-Izz-i-Varqá'íyyih* (“Ode of the Dove”), the *Hidden Words*, the *Lawḥ-i-Húríyyih*, the *Lawḥ-i-Húr-i-'Ujáb*,⁷ the *Lawḥ-i-Subḥana Rabbíu'l A'lá*, the *Lawḥ-i-Hili Hili Yá Bishárát*, the *Lawḥ-i-Malláhu'l-Quds* (Tablet of the Holy Mariner), the *Lawḥ-i-Bulbul-i-Firáq*, and the *Lawḥ-i-Ghulámu'l-Khuld*, all of which except for the “Ode of the Dove” were revealed in Baghdad after Bahá'u'lláh's return from His two-year retreat to the mountains of Sulaymáníyyih.

The Maid of Heaven continues to appear in some of the tablets revealed after the Baghdad period. For example, She appears in the *Súriy-i-Qalam* and in the *Ishráqát*, the *Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá*, and most importantly in the *Súriy-i-Haykal*⁸ in which Bahá'u'lláh's experience and conversation with Her in the *Siyáh-Chál* is described in its totality.

As we will discuss later, in these works the figurative images of the Húríyyih and the hurís can assume different meanings in different contexts. Yet the allusions to these personifications are not entirely limited to these works, nor are they limited to the works of Bahá'u'lláh. For example, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá refers to the “maid of

7 Khávárí, *Risáliy-i-Ayyám-i-Tis`ih* 251–54.

8 Originally revealed in Adrianople, as we will explain later.

heaven” as representing the “new Jerusalem,” and the “angelic company” as figures announcing to the universe the news that the prophecies in the book of Revelations regarding the advent of the kingdom of God on earth have actually been fulfilled:

O ye beloved of God! O ye children of His Kingdom! Verily, verily, the new heaven and the new earth are come. The holy City, new Jerusalem, hath come down from on high in the form of a maid of heaven, veiled, beautiful, and unique, and prepared for reunion with Her lovers on earth. The angelic company of the Celestial Concourse hath joined in a call that hath run throughout the universe, all loudly and mightily acclaiming: “This is the City of God and His abode, wherein shall dwell the pure and holy among His servants. He shall live with them, for they are His people and He is their Lord.” (*Selections* 3:1)

Here, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains the Ḥuríyyih’s appearance in the Book of Revelation—a reference He elucidates more fully in *Some Answered Questions*—as the new Law revealed by Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: “Clearly, the New Jerusalem which descends from heaven is not a city of stone and lime, of brick and mortar, but is rather the religion of God which descends from heaven and is described as new.” He continues, “For it is obvious that the Jerusalem which is built

of stone and mortar does not descend from heaven and is not renewed, but that what is renewed is the religion of God” (*Some Answered Questions* 13:3).

THE PERSIAN AND ARABIC LITERARY TRADITION OF THE ḤURÍYYIH

As most students of the literary traditions of Persian and Arabic mystical poetry are aware, portrayals of love relationships are frequently employed to symbolize the overwhelming longing of a seeker or wayfarer to attain the presence of the Beloved, the Friend, or the Divine—each of which represents some form of the love of God. With Rumi, for example, his adoration of “the Friend” is often captured in what seems to be his portrayal of the affection, adoration, respect, and obeisance he expresses for his spiritual teacher, Shams of Tabriz. On a symbolic level, however, the “Friend” in his poems represents not a literal personal relationship, however powerful and important this was for his spiritual edification, but rather his awareness of and longing to attain union, or reunion, with “the Beloved”—the “Perfect Man,” One who, like Muḥammad, manifests as perfectly as is possible in human form the attributes or “names” of Allah, or of the transcendental Divine reality that is the spiritual realm.

Similarly, in His mystical work *The Seven Valleys*, Bahá’u’lláh represents the seeker’s longing for the Beloved through the symbolic story of Majnun (the “insane one”) and his tireless quest

to attain the presence of the hidden or concealed Layli. This traditional story from Persian and Arabian lore—celebrated most famously by Nizámí⁹—is a good example of the Súfí use of an intense and all-consuming human love to symbolize the intensity of the wayfarer's quest for divine love in a relationship with "the Friend." The tragedy of Shirin and Farhad is a similarly symbolic love story that represents the intense, unrelenting desire of the lover or seeker to attain the presence of his beloved—the same longing portrayed by Bahá'u'lláh in His description of the "Valley of Love" in *The Seven Valleys*.

It is worthwhile to note that in these symbolic or allegorical stories the Beloved (the One who is sought) is female and the wayfarer or seeker is male, even though the Deity (God or Allah) is always alluded to in terms of a male identity. The feminization of the Divine or the Beloved doubtless derives from passionate human love being the most immediately evocative trope or analogical experience to which we can relate such intense love, longing, and passion. In most romantic literature, the beautiful woman is portrayed as the object of love (the Beloved), and the male is portrayed as the lover seeking the object of his affection.

Consequently, because the Beloved has a female persona in these and numerous other poetic works, great

attention is paid to the detailed portrayal of Her beauty, focusing on a variety of specific physical attributes relevant to what was considered evocative in the cultural context in which the poem was composed. More specifically, each of the physical attributes of beauty in the portrayal of the feminized Divine most often represents a corresponding spiritual virtue or power.

Thus, in His own utilization of these traditions, Bahá'u'lláh employs images of the beauty and glory of the Húríyyih to dwell on those physical attributes that are most emblematic of Her beauty—Her form, a beauty mark, Her brow, the grace of Her movements and gestures. Likewise, these portraits of female allure and sensuality are often accompanied by stark and dramatic emotional scenes characterized by immense sorrow, joy, and affection. What becomes unmistakably apparent when one studies Bahá'u'lláh's use of this figurative imagery is that He utilizes it to convey spiritual and metaphysical attributes—His objective is never to create sensational or sensual imagery for its own sake. The ecstatic longing, and the even more ecstatic sensation of attaining the presence of the Beloved are never meant to be ends in themselves—they are *not* the attainment of ecstasy for its own sake. This distinction is extremely important in light of the emphasis that some contemporary translators of Rumi have placed on the literal story, even going so far as to attribute some literal or physical love relationship to the poet/persona and his

9 Nizámí Ganjaví (12th century CE) is considered by the generality of scholars to be the greatest Persian poet to write in the tradition of the romantic epic (Sajjádi).

friend Shams of Tabriz.¹⁰

Clearly, Bahá'u'lláh's utilization of these figurative images has a spiritual intent. Therefore, in Bahá'í texts, when the reader encounters allusions from traditional mystic Persian literature regarding the body of the Húríyyih (for example, locks and ringlets of hair, the hair's enthralling fragrance, and the entrancing beauty of the face, forehead, eyebrows, beauty marks, hands, and breasts) and the various attributes commonly associated with the portrayal of the feminine "Beloved," we are assured that our job is to discern their underlying or veiled meaning.

THE SYMBOLIC IMPORTANCE OF THE VEIL

There are countless other important images in mystical Persian and Arabic literature—particularly allusions to certain affective behaviors, such as smiling, crying, weeping, graceful movements, coyness, and amorous glances in the poetry of the Sufi tradition. However, important as these images are in understanding the various intended meanings of the Bahá'í Writings, for the purposes of this present study, it is most essential that we focus on the symbolism latent in Bahá'u'lláh's reference to the veil as

10 See, for example, Barks, *The Soul of Rumi*, and Lewis, *Rumi*. Barks tends to read this relationship in literal terms—Shams himself is the "Friend" or the "Beloved" to whom Rumi alludes, whereas Lewis explains these allusions as being poetic or allegorical portrayals of Rumi's adoration of Allah.

it pertains to the appearance of the Húríyyih.

Perhaps the most obvious and yet surely one of the most important allusions to the veil is the relationship between the Húríyyih being veiled and subsequently becoming unveiled. This important action—though possibly barely noticeable to most—plays a central role, both in symbolizing the appearance of the Manifestation, and in the subtle and often gradual stages by which Bahá'u'lláh reveals His station, His essential nature, and His purpose in revealing Himself to humankind.

Other imagery that also assumes importance in the portrayal of the Húríyyih concerns Her attire. For example, in the Commentary on the Sura of Joseph, the Báb refers to various qualities of Her veil and attire as being beautiful, or coarse, or of silk (*Qa-yyúmu'l-Asmá'* 126–27). Or, as we will discuss later, in the Sura of the Pen, Bahá'u'lláh addresses Her by these words: "Come forth as thou willest, and array thyself as thou pleasest with the brodered robe of names and the silken vesture of immortality" (*Days of Remembrance* 23:14). However, one can hardly address the image of the Húríyyih without also addressing other images that, on the surface, seem to be portraying an intense physical love relationship—an embrace, the separation of the lover (Bahá'u'lláh) from His Beloved (the Húríyyih), and the sorrow caused by the lover's constant pursuit of the seemingly unattainable presence of the Beloved.

THE VEIL AND
AN UNFOLDING DRAMA

The tablets of Bahá'u'lláh that include references to the Ḥuríyyih and the hurís (the plural form of the word), while clearly allegorical in nature, might be likened to mystical or spiritual dramas—something like the English morality plays of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the Western literary tradition. With this in mind, one may well find it useful and enlightening to approach the appearance—and particularly the unveiling—of the Ḥuríyyih by examining the chronology of these images as if they were three successive acts in the unfolding drama that represents three successive stages in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

However, in considering such an approach, one must be careful not to confuse these “acts” with the more obvious and commonly recognized divisions of the Baghdad period, the Adrianople period, and the ‘Akká period. Neither are these equivalent to the three Declarations of Bahá'u'lláh—first in the Siyáh-Chál, secondly in the Garden of Ridván, and thirdly in His letters from Adrianople announcing His station to the world’s kings and rulers. Instead, the three parts in this drama, portraying the gradual symbolic unveiling of the Ḥuríyyih, correspond to the progressive unfolding of the station and power of Bahá'u'lláh and His Revelation.

In brief, the acts begin with the earliest appearances of the Ḥuríyyih, in which She is veiled, remote, and ostensibly aloof from the narrator/persona.

These appearances are powerful poetic renderings of the Manifestation’s emotionally charged experiences with the Holy Spirit, despite Bahá'u'lláh’s transcendent station and foreknowledge of all He must endure. In particular, this first act symbolizes the agony He will experience in concealing Himself, His powers, authority, and message until such time as His followers are ready to receive His unfolding of the Word.

The appearances of the Ḥuríyyih in those tablets we designate as “the second act” are a mixture of the heights of joy and the depths of foreboding and even sorrow. The lover is no longer disdained by the Beloved and experiences a taste of nearness and a closer relationship to the Holy Spirit. At the same time, in several tablets, Bahá'u'lláh reveals to the reader the trials, betrayals, physical hardships, and pain He must endure.

The concluding act, the complete unveiling of the Ḥuríyyih, is, in a figurative sense, accomplished as Her true identity and purpose are made plain, even as is the mission of Bahá'u'lláh. The most prominent portrayal of this final act occurs in ‘Akká when Bahá'u'lláh has the Súriy-i-Haykal combined with five of His letters to rulers into a calligraphic pentangle. As we will demonstrate, this added symbolic gesture gives us the opportunity to appreciate in full the story behind the metaphorical devices that have, until this point, characterized the Ḥuríyyih. What has heretofore been only hinted at in such works as the Tablet to Nasíri'd-Dín Sháh is unleashed in

the Súriy-i-Haykal's narrative of the Ḥuríyyih's dialogue with Bahá'u'lláh in the dream vision experienced in the Siyáh-Chál. Thus, the trope comes full circle, ending where it begins, with Bahá'u'lláh's first intimations of His ministry.

ACT ONE:
THE EARLIEST APPEARANCES
OF THE ḤURÍYYIH

The poem Qaṣídiy-i-Izz-i-Varqá'íyyih ("Ode of the Dove")¹¹ was revealed during Bahá'u'lláh's sojourn in the mountains of Kurdistan (1854–56). Since He had left Baghdad to avoid becoming the cause of further contention among the Bábís,¹² the tone of this poem alludes to the deep sorrow He has experienced, as well as the further difficulties He will be made to endure. It is also valuable to note that

11 Bahá'u'lláh, *Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 321–39. A provisional translation by John S. Hatcher, Amrollah Hemmat and Ehsanollah Hemmat of this poem is published in this issue of the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*.

12 Though Mírzá Yahyá had been appointed by the Báb to help conduct the affairs of the Bábí community, he never fulfilled this duty. Instead, he hid and disguised himself so that authorities might not associate him with the Bábís or, later, with the Bahá'ís. However, whenever Bahá'u'lláh made an effort to assist the believers by explaining the teachings or texts of the Báb, Mírzá Yahyá would complain and characterize these actions as an attempt by Bahá'u'lláh to usurp his authority, even though he himself never lifted a finger to assist the bewildered and disorganized community of believers.

Bahá'u'lláh revealed these verses in response to a request by local Sufis who had come to revere Him and His remarkable and unfathomable knowledge. They thus exhorted Bahá'u'lláh to compose a poem in the style of the famous Qaṣídiḥ Ṭá'íyyih Kubrá of Ibn-i-Fárid, reputed to be one of the greatest Súfí poets the Arab world had produced.¹³ To their amazement, Bahá'u'lláh proceeded to compose a poem of two thousand couplets in that identical style, though He allowed only 127 of these to be preserved.

We must take into account Bahá'u'lláh's self-imposed exile from His family and from the Bábí community in Baghdad, alongside the style and language appropriate to the mystical tenor of the Súfí verse He was emulating. Then, we can appreciate both the sorrowful tone of the poem and the mystical and philosophical themes so prevalent throughout the work. These themes allude to the fact that, ontologically, the spiritual or transcendent reality is essentially unknowable and likewise unattainable by those abiding in the realm of creation—the physical

13 Though little acknowledged in the West, Ibn-i-Fárid is considered to be on par with Rumi as a writer of Súfí mystical verse. His most famous works are "The Poem of the Súfí Way" and "The Wine Ode." The former explains at great length the mystical experience as an arduous and demanding spiritual journey, while the latter employs the metaphor of the intoxication of wine to represent the ecstasy of being in the presence of the divine, a figurative device also used prominently by Táhirih, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh.

realm or the “Kingdom of Names.”

It is in this sense that the sorrow expressed would seem to allude to the intrinsic distance between the immanent and the transcendent. This spiritual distance is demonstrated with particular power when the Maid of Heaven compares Her own lofty and sublime station to the highest degree of illumination possible in the realm of creation (the material world):

“In My sight the most glorious
glory of Túr is abject,
and to Me the most luminous
beam of light is but darkness.”
 (“Ode of the Dove” line 100)

The transcendent divine has been eternally and intrinsically sanctified from any conceptions that can be formed in the mind of existent beings, even as the Húríyyih relates:

“And certainly I have eternally
existed in an immaculate state,
and certainly I have been infinitely
stainless.” (line 102)

Because this essential separation of the world of creation from its Creator (the transcendent Beloved) necessarily leads to sorrow, Bahá'u'lláh—in the persona of the seeker or lover—recounts His despair at His remoteness from the Maid of Heaven:

And whenever I rushed toward
reunion with Her light, after at-
taining nearness, I was wounded

by the arrow of remoteness.

And if I stretched forth my be-
seeching hands for reunion with
Her, with a sword She replied,
“This shall be the recompense for
My lovers!”

And my sole yearning hath been
but to hold fast, while Her relent-
less intent remaineth but to sever
my grasp! (lines 14–16)

It is in the portrayal of this relationship that, in mystic literature, the symbolic veil comes into play by further representing the ontological separation or distance between humankind and the divine source. At the beginning of the wayfarer's search, for example, the ability of the seeker or lover to behold in any complete way the beauty of the Beloved is absent—the Beloved is veiled or concealed. But more importantly, in the context of the revealed works of Bahá'u'lláh—Himself a transcendent Being—the analogy of the veil assumes another more specialized meaning, implying an ever more complete revelation (or manifestation) of the station and powers of Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

Therefore, while in the “Ode of the Dove” the Maiden of Heaven is distant, aloof, and unreachable, in the later stages of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, the Húríyyih is portrayed in His works as appearing without veil, hence representing to the reader how the Holy Spirit is becoming more fully revealed in the divine station of Bahá'u'lláh. The unveiling also alludes to the

completeness with which the Holy Spirit will be revealed in this dispensation, the “Day of God,” the period of fruition and fulfillment of all previous revelations. Or stated with an equally relevant symbol, the resurrection of the body politic foretold in all of the previously revealed religions will come to pass.

However, in the final verses of the “The Ode of the Dove,” written in the early stages of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, we find the Maiden reminding Bahá'u'lláh that He should not reveal the complete reality about Himself—that the time for Him to begin His ministry (unveiling the countenance of the Húríyyih) has not yet begun. And the Maid of Heaven informs Him that if He does reveal Himself prematurely, the totality of existence will vanish, and His objective to unite the peoples of the world will thereby falter or fail.

“And within thee have I concealed a truth that transcends all knowledge.

Even every enlightened mind is unable to comprehend it!

“Relish the companionship of that holy mystery concealed within thee!

If thou art trustworthy, then disclose it not.

“If thou removest the veil from the countenance of what thou hast observed, all existence will vanish in the twinkling of an eye.”¹⁴

14 Though in a different context, a similar effect on the whole of creation by an untimely “unveiling” is mentioned by

In these verses, the countenance which Bahá'u'lláh has observed—the face of the Húríyyih—is, in truth, naught but His own divine aspect or station. But even as the Báb requested that “Him Whom God shall make manifest” (*Selections* 7) withhold revealing His station until the year nineteen (1863), Bahá'u'lláh is being cautioned—in reality, explaining what He already knows to the attentive reader—that the people of the world (particularly the Bábís, who are His most immediate audience) are not yet ready to be exposed to the magnitude of His station nor to comprehend the totality of His revelation.

To those familiar with Bahá'í history, the wisdom in this caution is obvious—the Bábís still needed to be better prepared for the advent of Him Whom God would make manifest, something Bahá'u'lláh would assist them in accomplishing when He returned to Baghdad. In a related matter, this gradual disclosure of station and purpose is very much akin to the approach the Báb Himself employed. At the outset of His declaration, the time for revealing His full station to the public had not yet arrived. Therefore, we see in the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*¹⁵

Bahá'u'lláh in one of His tablets: “If the veil were lifted, and the full glory of the station of those that have turned wholly towards God, and have, in their love for Him, renounced the world, were made manifest, the entire creation would be dumbfounded” (*Gleanings* 93:15).

15 The same work He commenced to reveal for His first believer, Mullá Husayn, the day they met in Shiraz.

that the Ḥuríyyih is first permitted to adorn Herself with beautiful attire, veil Her face, and come out of Her palace (126). Subsequently, She is told to return to Her abode. The command to return would seem to be an allusion to the fact that the Báb would reveal His station by degrees and that the time for a public declaration of His station and mission was not yet at hand, even as He advised Mullá Ḥusayn that first night, "It is incumbent upon you not to divulge, either to your companions or to any other soul, that which you have seen and heard" (qtd. in Nabil 63).

THE LAWH-I-ḤURÍYYIH (TABLET OF THE MAIDEN)

After His two-year sojourn to Sulaymáníyyih, Bahá'u'lláh returned to Baghdad where He revealed the Tablet of the Maiden,¹⁶ which is composed in a sublime Arabic style. According to Shoghi Effendi, in this work "events of a far remoter future are foreshadowed" (*God Passes By* 140). Relevant to our analysis of the symbol of the Maiden is Shoghi Effendi's explanation that in this work, the Ḥuríyyih "symbolizes the divine reality in Bahá'u'lláh." He continues, "In this Tablet He alludes to His passing, and most of it is in the nature of a communion with His own Spirit" (letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, 6 May 1939).

It is important to note that in the Tablet of the Maiden, as is the case

with many other works of Bahá'u'lláh, there is an abundant use of terminology and imagery common to Persian and Arabic mystical texts, such as those of Ibn-i-'Arabi and the Persian poets and authors who succeeded him (such as Jami). In this connection, the Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice has observed the following about the imagery in this work:

The subject matter of this Tablet is that of the relationship between the Divine Youth and the Maiden. In the past, as you are well aware, it has not been uncommon to use human love, passion and longing as an allegory of the divine love between God and His creatures. One has only to think of the Song of Songs in the Old Testament, the writings of some of the Christian saints and much of Persian mystical poetry. The tradition represented by such literature was used by Bahá'u'lláh in aspects of His Revelation. (Letter dated 27 August 1998)

The terms used in the first parts of this tablet would seem to portray the Ḥuríyyih variously as belonging to the essential reality of the Creator, as representing the divine station of the Manifestation—the sole representative of God on Earth—and as a sublime Reality loftier than the world of creation.

The tablet begins by praising God for His creation of a paradise that reflects His Essence and for His sending down from that paradise a Ḥuríyyih

16 The original Arabic can be found in *Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 647–53.

that manifests God's glory in the world of creation. Bahá'u'lláh's description of paradise is very elaborate, depicting it with mystical terminology that refers to the various realms of God: to the realms of *láhút* (the Heavenly Court) and *aḥadiyyah* (Divine Unity), which principally denote God's ineffable and transcendent Essence, and to the realms of *jabarút* (the Celestial Dominion) and *malakút* (the Divine Kingdom), which represent the World of Command, the intermediary reality between God and His creation (*Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 647).¹⁷ Therefore, in this context the reader understands how the Ḥuríyyih descends from the realms of paradise as a herald of the transcendent Divine so that, operating through Bahá'u'lláh, She may (metaphorically speaking) serve as an intermediary between God and His creation.

SYMBOLS OF PURITY AND CHASTITY

Representing the transcendent divine, the concept of the Ḥuríyyih cannot be adequately comprehended nor be described through the medium of ordinary language; therefore, Bahá'u'lláh employs various allegories and metaphors to depict Her reality in corporeal terms. He ascribes to Her the attributes of purity and chastity (*iṣmat*), and He asserts that the Ḥuríyyih has been eternally preserved in the tabernacles of inviolability and glory: "The Ḥuríyyih appeared, She who had dwelled from

time immemorial in the tabernacle of holiness, security, and splendor, and in the sanctuary of chastity, honor, and glory."¹⁸ Bahá'u'lláh then continues, "In crimson ink the Most Exalted Pen hath writ upon Her snow-white brow: 'By God, None hath been aware of this Ḥuríyyih save God, the Inaccessible, the Most High. God hath, in the realm of eternity, sanctified the hem of Her chastity from the allusion of the people of names, and Her countenance from the gaze of all who inhabit the world of being'" (*Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 647–48).

The Ḥuríyyih then emerges from Her pavilion adorned with a robe so beauteous and dazzling that the inhabitants of the heavenly realm are rendered unconscious, and the dominion of creation becomes illumined by Her beauty (*Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 648). In another tablet Bahá'u'lláh describes Her announcement of Her inaccessible lofty station in the most eloquent terms: "Cry out before the gaze of the dwellers of heaven and of earth: I am the Maid of Heaven, the Offspring begotten by the Spirit of Bahá. My habitation is the Mansion of His Name, the All-Glorious. Before the Concurrence on high I was adorned with the ornament of His names. I was wrapped within the veil of an inviolable security, and lay hidden from the eyes of men" (*Gleanings* 129:10).

In light of these verses, we can better understand the meanings intended by the metaphors of purity and chastity in the Tablet of the Maiden as a

¹⁷ The realms of *láhút*, *jabarút*, and *malakút* are also mentioned in Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys* 25.

¹⁸ Original text in *Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 647.

reference to the fact that She personifies a transcendent divine reality that cannot be understood in the realm of creation. Metaphorically, then, She has been protected from the eyes of and the grasp of creation. In the aforementioned quote (“God hath, in the realm of eternity, sanctified the hem of Her chastity from the allusion of the people of names, and Her countenance from the gaze of all who inhabit the world of being”), the attribute of chastity can be understood as referring to the transcendent aspect of the Ḥuríyyih—namely, that She is cleansed from the impurity of names and attributes. Because She does not dwell in the world of creation, the kingdom of names and attributes cannot fully or adequately portray Her ineffable reality.

Yet names and attributes still play an important role in this portrayal. The above passage indeed refers to the fact that the habitation of the Ḥuríyyih is “the mansion of God’s Name,” and She has been “adorned with the ornaments of [God’s] names” or divine attributes. Furthermore, inasmuch as She has been preserved in the tabernacle of glory, the word “Name” could be understood to represent “the Greatest Name” (Bahá), a Name that is likewise beyond any complete or final comprehension by those dwelling in the realm of creation.

Thus, though adorned with the ornament of *all* God’s names and attributes, the Ḥuríyyih cannot reveal Her *essential* reality. That aspect of Her nature must needs remain forever concealed because it represents the reality of God Himself and His transcendent Essence.

Even when the Ḥuríyyih steps out of Her pavilion, She is still concealed by Her veil from the eyes of creation.

Reflecting on what we have thus far examined, the image of the Maid of Heaven is employed by Bahá'u'lláh to represent the transcendent and divine aspects of that intermediary level of reality—between divine and human—occupied by the Manifestation of God. Furthermore, accompanying the image of the Ḥuríyyih are a variety of symbols appropriate to Her transcendent station: Her veil, Her garment, and the pavilion, palaces, tabernacles, and chambers in which She abides, thereby concealed in chastity and purity from the eyes of all in heaven and on earth.

UNVEILING THE ḤURÍYYIH

This same metaphor of the veil, together with the related metaphors of Her garment, Her actions of removing or changing the garment, and Her becoming adorned with a new garment, occurs on other occasions in the Tablet of the Maiden, as well as in other works of Bahá'u'lláh. These portrayals provide additional insight into His strategic use of this imagery.

Further in this tablet, Bahá'u'lláh continues with the following description of the Maid of Heaven as She appears before Him: “She descended and approached until She stood before Me. I was perplexed by the subtleties of Her creation and the marvels of Her form. I found Myself in an ecstasy of longing and a rapture of love for Her. I lifted My hand toward Her and raised

the hem of the veil from Her shoulder” (*Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A‘lá* 648).

Reflecting on what we have previously noted, the veil can assume other symbolic values. It can represent an obstacle that *should* be removed, an obstacle that is *inappropriate* to remove, or an obstacle that is intrinsic and therefore *impossible* to remove. The use of the veil in the first instance simply denotes an obstacle that impedes our recognition of the Manifestation of God, or that conceals from us His glory and perfections. When employed in this manner, the veil obviously should be removed, or at least partially lifted so that we can glimpse the divine attributes of the Holy Spirit, though, as the Bahá'í Writings repeatedly assert, humankind is prevented from ever entirely comprehending the station and attributes of the Manifestations of God. Thus we find the following verse in Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví*:

Like the Valiant One,¹⁹ tear asunder
all the veils that thou mightest
behold the resplendence of the
All-Bounteous!²⁰ (line 295)

Yet, removing the veil is a reciprocal process. At times, the Húríyyih unveils Herself, as in the *Lawḥ-i-Húr-i-Ujáb*; at times, She is unveiled, as in the *Lawḥ-i-Húríyyih*. Extending this analogy to the relationship between God and humankind, we can conclude that along with the desire of the Beloved to unveil

Himself, there should be yearning, capacity, and readiness for receiving the bounties of His perfections. Therefore, in addition to the seeker's longing and striving to recognize God—through recognizing His Manifestation—God will also reveal Himself through the reality of the Manifestation. With such Revelation, the Beloved appears again, and a new spiritual era is commenced. So in the *Mathnaví* of Bahá'u'lláh we read in His elucidation of the “spiritual spring” (*bahár-i-rawḥānī*):

When our King casts aside the veil
from His face,
this spring will pitch its tent upon
the universe.
When our Friend casts aside the
veil from His face,
the bright spring will become em-
blazoned. (lines 49–50)

And on another occasion, Bahá'u'lláh, speaking as the Manifestation of God, proclaims:

Thus might I ignite in the uni-
verse such a fire
that I could consume the veils of
the holy ones!
Thus would I disclose the húr of
inner meaning from behind Her
veil,
cast aside the cloak of the con-
cealed light! (lines 23–24)

Furthermore, He addresses the Great Spirit operating through His own Self:

19 Also an allusion to ‘Álī.

20 Original in *Athár-i-Qalam-i-A‘lá* 189.

O Countenance of God, emerge
from behind the veil
so that the sun will dawn from the
West. (line 80)

. . . that I may appear in the world
unveiled
and disclose a portion of the mys-
tery about Your loving kindness.
(line 93)

Thus in this mutual process of Revela-
tion and of search, advancement, and
acceptance by the people, the veils
between God and His creation will be
lifted.

Next we need to address another
allegorical meaning of the unveiling:
when the unveiling is not appropriate
since there is lack of capacity and read-
iness on the side of people. Bahá'u'lláh
revealed His station as the Manifesta-
tion of God—"Him Whom God shall
make manifest"—to the Bábís short-
ly before He moved from Baghdad
to Constantinople. The *Mathnaví* of
Bahá'u'lláh was revealed in Constan-
tinople when the majority of the Bábís
were still unaware of His station and
a clear separation between Him and
Yahyá had not taken place. Yet in Con-
stantinople the time for the emphatic
separation—what would take place
in Adrianople—was getting close.
So perhaps the following verse in the
Mathnaví refers to this process:

O Countenance of God, emerge
from behind the veil
so that the sun will dawn from the
West.

Open the musk of divine
knowledge!
Disclose the treasure of the hid-
den mysteries. (lines 80–81)

Yet, as we know, there has been a rea-
son for Bahá'u'lláh's essential concern
with revealing His true station. It would
be inappropriate to remove the veil if
the act itself becomes an obstacle to the
recognition of the glory of the Beloved.
For that reason, Bahá'u'lláh says that
if the glory and beauty of the Ḥuríyyih
become fully manifest, the whole of
creation will be rendered unconscious,
as the recognition of the true station of
the Manifestations of God would be
beyond the capacity of the generality
of humankind: "If you remove the veil
from the countenance of what you have
observed, all existence will vanish in
the twinkling of an eye" ("Ode of the
Dove" line 123). In fact, we discover in
the Bahá'í Writings that even the Man-
ifestations of the past were not able
to fully comprehend the magnitude
of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation: "None
among the Manifestations of old, ex-
cept to a prescribed degree, hath ever
completely apprehended the nature of
this Revelation" (Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in
Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 99).

Thus, as we have noted, the Báb also
gradually "unveiled" His true station.
At first, He alluded to Himself as the
Gate to the Hidden Imam; after some
years, He revealed Himself as the
Hidden Imam, and, subsequently, as a
Prophet with a station equal to that of
Muḥammad. Finally, He unveiled His
station of Lordship (*rubúbiyyah*). This

process is represented analogically by the act of gradually removing a veil in accordance with the capacity or preparedness of the people to accept, by degrees, the ultimate loftiness of the station of the Báb as the Primal Point. The same revelatory methodology is repeated in Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. We can appropriately infer that in the Tablet of the Maiden, the lifting of the hem of the veil from the shoulder of the Ḥuríyyih most probably alludes to the initial and careful disclosure of the true station of Bahá'u'lláh while He was in Baghdad, during the period when this tablet was revealed.

Occasionally, in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, the meaning of the veil and of the unveiling becomes more complicated and intricate, thereby necessitating that we acquire knowledge about the philosophical context of these images. An example of this complexity occurs when the veil is used as a positive symbol of something that cannot be removed. For example, a well-known Islamic ḥadīth portrays God as being hidden behind seventy-thousand veils of light,²¹ a metaphor or conceit intended to convey the notion that God's glory and splendor are so powerful and overwhelming as to prevent any created being from beholding Him, in the same way the brightness of the sun prevents

us from being able to stare directly at it with the naked eye or to discern its essential reality. In brief, the transcendence of God and His unknowable Essence are eternally beyond any exact or complete human comprehension.

REVELATION

Bahá'ís believe that the attributes of the unknowable Essence that is the Creator become revealed through the intermediation of the Manifestations—progressively and in accord with the capacity and preparedness of humankind at a given point in history. In light of this belief, we can appreciate that the revelatory process requires the timeliness or gradualness with which the successive revelations educate humankind about spiritual truth and how that truth can best become manifest in human action and governance.

In the same vein, in this tablet the beauty of the Ḥuríyyih—symbolizing the names and attributes of God—is gradually unveiled. First Bahá'u'lláh removes the hem of the veil from the shoulder of the Ḥuríyyih; later He further reveals Her beauty by exposing Her breast. This gradual unveiling, we might thus presume, signifies that while the time for full revelation of the exalted beauty and glory of the Most Great Spirit had not yet arrived, it was gradually approaching.

In this sense, the unveiling of the Ḥuríyyih would seem to represent something akin to Bahá'u'lláh's announcement of His revelation: first, to the near ones in Baghdad in the Garden

21 The “Ḥadīth of the Veils” has been variously recorded and translated, but all versions allude to the inaccessibility of any complete knowledge of God. One of the better explications of the ḥadīth is in *Science in the Qur'án* by Sayyid Rami Al Rifai, where he compares this ḥadīth to the “verse of light” in the Qur'án 24:35 (16).

of Ridván; a few years later, more openly and forcefully in Adrianople to the kings and rulers of the world; and, finally, in 'Akká, with the Kitáb-i-Aqdas disclosing the full splendor of a blueprint for a world commonwealth—the New Jerusalem made manifest on earth in the plenitude of its glory and its redemptive powers for humankind.

ACT TWO: THE HEIGHTS OF JOY AND DEPTHS OF SORROW

In the second act of the dramatic appearances of the Ḥuríyyih—in those tablets revealed around 1863—we witness intense heights of joy, as well as the depths of despair. On the one hand, there is a clear atmosphere of jubilation, a reversal of the tragic crisis evident in the previous stage. On the other hand, a number of tablets express intense feelings of foreboding and sorrow.

In this second period, the Ḥuríyyih appears in the Lawḥ-i-Ḥúr-i-'Ujáb, the Lawḥ-i-Subḥána Rabbí-al-A'lá, the Hili Hili Yá Bishárat, the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, the Bulbul-i-Firáq, the Lawḥ-i-Ghulámu'l-Khuld, and the Súriy-i-Qalam. Even though two of these tablets—the Tablet of the Holy Mariner and the Bulbul-i-Firáq—foretell the difficulties that will afflict Bahá'u'lláh in the near future,²²

22 The “supreme crisis Bahá'u'lláh Himself designated as the Ayyám-i-Shidad (Days of Stress), during which ‘the most grievous veil’ was torn asunder, and the ‘most great separation’ was irrevocably effected” (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 163).

the hallmark of the other tablets is the festivity and joy emanating from the announcement of Bahá'u'lláh's station and the exalted tenor and jubilation that prevail in the Garden of Ridván.

In these tablets, there is the playing of music (in the Ḥúr-i-'Ujáb) and the offering of wine and dances of joy (in the Lawḥ-i-Subḥána Rabbí-al-A'lá). In the poetic Hili Hili Yá Bishárat, each of the verses ends with the phrase, “Hasten, hasten, hasten, O Glad Tidings!” Similarly, in the Lawḥ-i-Ghulámu'l-Khuld, the appearance of the Youth of Paradise and the Maid of Heaven is celebrated with the greeting “Glad Tidings!” echoed more than thirty times.

But returning to our central theme, let us examine a few of these joyous and blissful tablets, as they inform us further about the image of the Ḥuríyyih, especially as this figure personifies “the Most Great Spirit.” In discussing the impact of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Adib Taherzadeh makes the following comments concerning the significance of the image of the Most Great Spirit, or the Ḥuríyyih:

The Most Great Spirit is therefore the begetter of the Holy Spirit and the Revealer of God's attributes to man. Through It all Revelations have been sent down and all created things called into being. The “Most Great Spirit” which has existed from eternity and which will exist for eternity had never before revealed Itself directly to mankind. God had waited for millions of years for man to

develop spiritually and intellectually to a point where he could receive this Most Great Revelation. Bahá'u'lláh has declared that this was indeed God's purpose in creating man. (*Revelation*, vol. 4, 133)

THE LAWH-I-SUBHÁNA RABBÍ-AL-A'LA AND THE LAWH-I-ḤÚR-I-'UJÁB:
FORESHADOWING A JOYFUL FUTURE

In the *Lawḥ-i-Subḥána Rabbí-al-A'lá*,²³ the sorrows of tribulation and separation expressed in the Tablet of the Holy Mariner and in the *Bulbul-i-Firáq* are overshadowed by the glad tidings of the new revelation. One senses from the outset that this tablet may well mark the commencement of a time of felicity and celebration, a dominant theme in other tablets of this period.

The tablet begins with the divine voice consoling the "Letter of Eternity" (Bahá'u'lláh), exhorting Him not to be disturbed by the trials and difficulties of the world, but, instead, to put on the sandals of detachment and step onto the summit on high. If He were to do this, He is told, He would hear clearly the call of God announcing that the Ḥuríyyih of Eternity has once more descended. In wonderfully poetic and imaginative language, the tablet describes the process of spiritual regeneration brought about through the periodic reappearance of

the reality of the Manifestation of God after its disappearance.

The disappearance of the Manifestation of God—the decline in the efficacy of an Era or Dispensation—can be likened to the veiling of the Ḥuríyyih after She has been unveiled. Indeed, in the Bahá'í Writings, we come across instances where the Ḥuríyyih becomes veiled again after She has unveiled Herself, or where the decline of religion is represented by Her return to the heavenly realm after Her descent to earth. For example, in the tablets of Ḥuríyyih and Ru'yá, Bahá'u'lláh portrays the return of the unconscious or lifeless Ḥuríyyih to the celestial realm from which She had descended.²⁴ We can infer that most probably these conceits allude to the cyclical appearances of the Manifestations of God.

In contrast, in the Tablet of the Wondrous Maiden (*Lawḥ-i-Ḥúr-i-'Ujáb*), revealed in Baghdad, the Ḥuríyyih appears on earth and removes Her veil. With a "lightning glance," She turns Her gaze to "the dwellers of the realm of dust," lets them behold "a raven lock," and passes round in "cups and chalices" the "wine of life." She then sings a song "in praise of Her Beloved" with "harp and lute," causing the hearts to melt in consuming flames. Then She smiles, causing "the hearts of them who know" to cry and weep. But when the doubters and those who "boast of self" deny Her truth, She sorrowfully "repair[s] to Her abode,"

23 For the original version, see Ishráq-i-Khávarí, *Ghanj-i-Sháyigán* 61–64.

24 See Kamálí in *Safíniy-i 'Irfán*, vol. 18, p. 159.

anguished, uttering words of rebuke, warning that the mysteries of God's scriptures will be concealed until the Promised One appears:

"Why do ye gainsay Me, O people of the Book?" How astounding is this, how astounding indeed!

"Claim ye to be the guided and the loved ones of the Lord?" By God! How astounding a lie, how astounding indeed!

"O my friends," She said, "We shall not come again,"—how wondrous a return, how wondrous indeed!—

"But will conceal God's secrets in His Scriptures and His Books," as bidden by One mighty and bounteous indeed!

"Nor shall ye find Me till the Promised One appear on Judgment Day." By My life! How astounding an abasement, how astounding indeed! (Bahá'u'lláh, *Days of Remembrance* 60)

Another possible interpretation derives from the applicability of these allusions to the history of the Bahá'í Dispensation—the veiling or disappearance of the Ḥuríyyih might represent the period between the martyrdom of the Báb in 1850 and the subsequent unveiling of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh in 1863.

In addition, inasmuch as the Bahá'í Writings assert that each appearance of a new Manifestation of God leads to the resurrection of humankind,²⁵ in

25 For example, see Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 32–34.

the *Lawḥ-i-Subḥána Rabbí-al-A'lá*, Bahá'u'lláh associates the appearance of the Ḥuríyyih with the Qur'anic sura appropriately titled "The Resurrection," particularly with the verse regarding creation: "Then he was a clot; so He created [him], then made [him] perfect" (75:38).²⁶ Similarly, each verse of this poetic tablet (*Lawḥ-i-Subḥána Rabbí-al-A'lá*) ends with a phrase from this same Qur'anic verse: "created and made perfect." A few examples demonstrate how Bahá'u'lláh has incorporated this idea into the tablet as He alludes to the recurring pattern of the appearance and subsequent disappearance of the Ḥuríyyih in terms of Her veiling and unveiling:

And hear the call of God with a manifest melody from the concealed [realm], Praised be my Exalted Lord. Say: the Ḥuríyyih of Eternity descended once again to face this luminous most sweet Moon: praised be the One Who created [Her] and made perfect . . .

Once [more] She disclosed Her face and once again She covered it: praised be the One Who created [Her] and made [Her] perfect.

Then did the essences of spirit in their eternal bodies dance by virtue of what appeared and yet again became concealed

26 This and all citations of the Qur'an are from *The Holy Qur'an*, translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, as modified by Hatcher, Hemmat, and Hemmat.

. . . and the minds of holy ones were entranced by what descended and [then] ascended. (Provisional translation)

In this tablet, the theme of the cyclical appearance and disappearance of the Ḥuríyyih clearly represents the advent of the Manifestations of God. In the Sura of the Pen, as we will see in the next section, Bahá'u'lláh captures the joyous occasion of the reappearance of the Maiden of Heaven, especially at this specific point in history, the Day of God prophesied in all previous revelations and fulfilled by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

THE SÚRIY-I-QALAM

In the Súriy-i-Qalam (Sura of the Pen),²⁷ revealed in Adrianople around 1865 on the occasion of the celebration of Ridván, the Ḥuríyyih is informed that the time for Her return has arrived:

O Pen! Announce unto the Maid of Paradise: “By God! This day is thy day. Come forth as thou wilt, and array thyself as thou pleasest with the brodered robe of names and the silken vesture of immortality. Emerge then from thine eternal habitation even as the sun that dawneth from the countenance of Bahá. Descend from thy lofty heights and, standing betwixt earth and heaven, lift the veil of

concealment from thy luminous face and shine forth above the horizon of creation as the black-eyed Damsel, that haply the most great veil may be torn away from the eyes of these people and they may behold the Scene of transcendent glory, the Beauty of God, the Most Holy, the Most Powerful, the Best-Beloved. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Days of Remembrance* 133)

This is a metaphorical description of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of His station and mission in the garden of Ridván immediately prior to His departure from Baghdad, surely one of the most momentous events in the history of the Faith. Yet at that time, not many were capable of appreciating the true station of Bahá'u'lláh and the ultimate significance of this event.

Once in Adrianople, the time had arrived for a forthright and unambiguous public proclamation of the station of Bahá'u'lláh, not only to the Bábís, but to the world at large as He penned informative, enlightening, and prophetic epistles to the kings and rulers of the world. Therefore, as opposed to the Tablet of the Maiden in which only partial disclosure or unveiling of the beauty of the Ḥuríyyih takes place, in this tablet He calls upon Her to disclose Her full glory.

As the Sura of the Pen continues, Bahá'u'lláh thus instructs the Ḥuríyyih of Bahá to depart from the abode of Eternity—leaving the kingdom of names on Her right and the dominion of attributes on Her left—and, by His

²⁷ Original published in *Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'la* 570–77.

permission, to arise like the dawn from the east of His inviolability, disrobed of all that was created in the realm of Command and divested of all that existed in the kingdom of Creation, so that, by disclosing Her ravishing beauty, the wondrous visage of God would appear to all creation. He then advises the Ḥuríyyih to rise from the dawning place of paradise with the beauty of the Most Merciful: “[L]et thy fragrant locks flow upon thy bosom,” He enjoins Her, “that the perfume of the garment of thy most gracious Lord may be diffused throughout the world” (*Days of Remembrance* 114).

He thus cautions Her not to cover or veil the ornaments of Her beauty; then, He advises Her in more detail how to adorn Her beauteous form and commands Her to offer in white cups the red wine of God's Beauty to the concourse of Eternity:

Present thyself, then, before the Throne with thy locks flowing, thine arms bejewelled, thy countenance blushing, thy cheeks aglow, and thine eyes adorned, and take hold of the snow-white chalice in My most exalted Name. Proffer then to the denizens of the realm of eternity the crimson wine of Mine all-glorious Beauty, that haply the concourse of Revelation may sanctify their souls in this most august Festival by virtue of this pure draught, and that they may emerge from behind the veil of concealment through the power of Mine almighty and all-powerful, Mine

all-subduing and self-subsisting sovereignty. (*Days of Remembrance* 114)

We thus observe in this sequence of events how the Ḥuríyyih is advised to emerge and to ascend beyond the realms of names and attributes and above the dominions of Creation and Command. Bahá'u'lláh, the Pen, thus exhorts the Ḥuríyyih—the Most Great Spirit—to appear in the most sublime station because “the Beloved of the Worlds is come!” (*Days of Remembrance* 114).

This command doubtless alludes to the unique station of this Day, the Day of Days, the turning point in human history and the culmination of all previous revelations, a period of transformation and fulfillment, the magnificence of which the Prophets of old could not fully comprehend, even though They longed for its advent. The implication is that had humanity, in the past, experienced the bounty of attaining the presence of the Prophets or Messengers of God to the same extent as in this promised Day of God, when the Most Great Spirit Itself is appearing to them unveiled, they would not have found it bearable, let alone comprehensible.

As Bahá'u'lláh explains, the divine rationale for the gradual nature of progressive revelation is to prevent the kind of cataclysm that would result if the sun were to appear of a sudden in its full midday splendor, causing the world to be “dismayed and overpowered” rather than enlightened and assisted:

Know of a certainty that in every Dispensation the light of Divine Revelation hath been vouchsafed unto men in direct proportion to their spiritual capacity. Consider the sun. How feeble its rays the moment it appeareth above the horizon. How gradually its warmth and potency increase as it approacheth its zenith, enabling meanwhile all created things to adapt themselves to the growing intensity of its light. How steadily it declineth until it reacheth its setting point. Were it, all of a sudden, to manifest the energies latent within it, it would, no doubt, cause injury to all created things. . . . In like manner, if the Sun of Truth were suddenly to reveal, at the earliest stages of its manifestation, the full measure of the potencies which the providence of the Almighty hath bestowed upon it, the earth of human understanding would waste away and be consumed; for men's hearts would neither sustain the intensity of its revelation, nor be able to mirror forth the radiance of its light. Dismayed and overpowered, they would cease to exist. (*Gleanings* 38:1)

Probably the most important revelation in this tablet occurs when Bahá'u'lláh declares that He Himself is the Ḥuríyyih, that no eye in existence hath witnessed Him as He has been eternally hidden behind the veil of inviolability (*'iṣmat*). At this point, He hears the sweet voice of His Lord

and witnesses paradise itself and all created within it in motion and eager to attain the presence of God. Then another call is raised announcing that indeed the Beloved of the world has appeared:

By God! I am the Maid of Heaven, abiding in the midmost heart of Paradise, hidden behind the veil of the All-Merciful and concealed from the eyes of men. From time immemorial I remained shrouded in the veil of sanctity beneath the Tabernacle of Grandeur. I heard a most sweet call from the right hand of the throne of my Lord, the Most Exalted, and I saw Paradise itself set in motion and all its inhabitants stirred up in their longing to attain the presence of God, the All-Glorious. Whereupon another call was raised: "By God! The Beloved of the worlds is come! Blessed be the one who attaineth His presence, and beholdeth His face, and giveth ear to His most holy, His most glorious and beloved utterance." (*Days of Remembrance* 114–15)

In this proclamation, reminiscent of a passage in the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* where the Báb declares Himself to be the Ḥuríyyih (*Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* 126), the Ḥuríyyih would seem to symbolize the eternal Reality of the Manifestations of God in Their station of "essential unity."

In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Bahá'u'lláh discusses at length this station of unity, the same Reality that recurrently appears in the world of creation with

each successive dispensation or era. Bahá'u'lláh asserts,

These Manifestations of God have each a twofold station. One is the station of pure abstraction and essential unity. In this respect, if thou callest them all by one name, and dost ascribe to them the same attribute, thou hast not erred from the truth. Even as He hath revealed: "No distinction do We make between any of His Messengers!" For they one and all summon the people of the earth to acknowledge the Unity of God, and herald unto them the Kawthar of an infinite grace and bounty. They are all invested with the robe of Prophethood, and honoured with the mantle of glory. . . . These Countenances are the recipients of the Divine Command, and the day-springs of His Revelation. This Revelation is exalted above the veils of plurality and the exigencies of number. (Kitáb-i-Íqán ¶161)

It is in this sense that the appearance of each of the Manifestations of God can be symbolized by the appearance and subsequent unveiling of the Ḥuríyyih, Their eternal divine aspect.

From the perspective of progressive revelation as articulated in the Kitáb-i-Íqán by Bahá'u'lláh, the current era is designated as the long-promised Day of God, the Day of Resurrection when people stand in God's presence and, figuratively speaking, behold God directly (*liqá'u'lláh*). Consequently,

compared to bygone ages, humanity will, in this Day, develop the capacity and preparedness to witness the unveiled glory of God. Or stated in symbolic terms, this is the time when the unveiled beauty of the Ḥuríyyih will be displayed for all to behold.

In this same context, we can also appreciate allusions in the Writings to replacing the garment or covering the hurís with a new one. For example, in one tablet, Bahá'u'lláh speaks of clothing the hurís with His words. Metaphorically, we can infer that He is adorning spiritual attributes with new meanings, understandings appropriate to the enlightenment of people of this day and age: "I have summoned the Maids of Heaven (hurís) to emerge from behind the veil of concealment, and have clothed them with these words of Mine—words of consummate power and wisdom" (*Gleanings* 153:7).

In still another tablet, the Ḥuríyyih is summoned to appear in any type of garment She wishes, but is cautioned not to divest Herself of the robe of glory, a garment that infuses the grace of God in the plentitude of its power into the whole of creation:

Say: Step out of Thy holy chamber, O Maid of Heaven, inmate of the Exalted Paradise! Drape thyself in whatever manner pleaseth Thee in the silken Vesture of Immortality, and put on, in the name of the All-Glorious, the broidered Robe of Light. Hear, then, the sweet, the wondrous accent of the

Voice that cometh from the Throne of Thy Lord, the Inaccessible, the Most High. Unveil Thy face, and manifest the beauty of the black-eyed Damsel, and suffer not the servants of God to be deprived of the light of Thy shining countenance. . . . Beware that Thou divest not Thyself, Thou Who art the Essence of Purity, of Thy robe of effulgent glory. Nay, enrich Thyself increasingly, in the kingdom of creation, with the incorruptible vestures of Thy God, that the beauteous image of the Almighty may be reflected through Thee in all created things and the grace of Thy Lord be infused in the plenitude of its power into the entire creation. (*Gleanings* 129:8)

In the *Lawḥ-i-Ghulámu'l-Khuld*,²⁸ we similarly read the following regarding the appearance of the Ḥuríyyih with special splendor and beauty in this Day of God: “The Ḥuríyyih of beauty shone like the dawning of the sun from the dawning place of the manifest morn! Praised be God! This is the Ḥuríyyih of Bahá! She hath arrived with wondrous beauty and appeared with an adoration that hath dumbfounded and enthralled the minds of the near ones!”

ACT THREE:

A TRIUMPHANT RESOLUTION

In this third and final stage, we note how the weight of Bahá'u'lláh's sorrow

is lifted by the power and authority of the new Revelation as unequivocal messages of fulfillment and victory are clearly heard. In this phase of the dramatic appearances of the Ḥuríyyih, there is a further departure from Her veiled appearance as the relationship between Her and Bahá'u'lláh unfolds more completely. Indeed, this final stage concludes with a triumphant and joyous resolution to all the turmoil, tumult, and tragedy of the first two stages. In the “Ode of the Dove,” we felt Bahá'u'lláh's sorrow as a result of the separation from the Ḥuríyyih. In the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, the hurís “bared their heads, rent their garments asunder, beat upon their faces, forgot their joy, shed tears and smote with their hands upon their cheeks” in their grief because of the people's inability to recognize Bahá'u'lláh (*Bahá'í Prayers* 327). In both the Tablet of the Maiden and the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, we witness the death of the Ḥuríyyih as She “fell upon the dust and gave up the spirit” (*Bahá'í Prayers* 326). The *Bulbul-i-Firáq* foreshadows Bahá'u'lláh's exile from Baghdad and makes various other allusions to the unrelenting and egregious opposition by His enemies.

But the principal tablets relating to the Ḥuríyyih in this final stage of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry—the *Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá* and the *Súriy-i-Haykal*—are quite different in tone and portray the authority and triumph of Bahá'u'lláh, as we will see in the following brief assessment of how such changes play out in these two works.

28 *Khávarí, Risáliy-i-Ayyám-i-Tis`ih* 92–99.

THE LAWḤ-I-RU'YÁ

The predominant theme in the Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá (Tablet of the Vision)²⁹ is the climax of the revelation and manifestation of the names and attributes of God. Revealed in 1873 on the anniversary of the birth of the Báb, the Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá portrays the unveiled appearance of the Húríyyih as Bahá'u'lláh comments on the splendor of the names and attributes of God that Her beauty and comportment make manifest.

In this tablet, Bahá'u'lláh powerfully emphasizes the greatness of His Revelation, the intensity and grandeur of which are symbolized by the appearance of the Húríyyih in the fullness of Her splendor. She is dressed in a long white gown, "Her countenance as bright as the full moon shining in the midmost heaven" (Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá ¶2). She then removes Her veil, whereupon creation is "flooded with light":

No sooner had She removed Her veil than the heavens and the earth were flooded with light, as though the ancient Essence had cast the full splendor of His radiance upon Her. Exalted be the Lord Who fashioned Her; no mortal eye hath ever seen Her like! (Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá ¶3)

Bahá'u'lláh then describes, one at a time, certain features of Her body, together with Her movements and emotional disposition, with His description

of each one of these symbolic attributes concluding with the phrase, "no mortal eye hath ever seen Her like!" Perhaps most revealing in this vision of the Húríyyih is that the disdain She formerly expressed in the "Ode of the Dove" in response to the yearnings of the seeker (Bahá'u'lláh) has now been replaced by complete and total affection.

She places Her arm around the neck of "Her Lord" and gives Him an embrace, which He returns. A theme of union—or, more aptly, reunion—with the Maid of Heaven is clear. At this stage, Bahá'u'lláh as Revelator has assumed His full stature and revealed the loftiness of His station—His place upon the Throne of Revelation. Whereas once He was subordinate, He and the Most Great Spirit are now united as one. Or stated in another way, He has become fully imbued with and inseparable from the Most Great Spirit. Not coincidentally, Bahá'u'lláh reveals this work shortly after—or possibly around the same time as—He reveals the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book and "the Mother Book of His Dispensation." Its revelation can be taken to symbolize—or to represent quite literally—the plenitude of the powers unleashed by Bahá'u'lláh to bring about the reformation of humankind.

So it is that, in exquisite and joyous metaphoric language, Bahá'u'lláh portrays the smile of the Húríyyih while She encircles Him with no will of Her own, orbiting Him as "glory itself wait[s] upon Her, whilst the kingdom of beauty follow[s] in Her

29 *Khávarí, Risáliy-i-Ayyám-i-Tis`ih* 16–20.

wake” (Lawḥ-i-Ru’yá ¶6). And in this context, it is well worth noting that “glory” (*jalál*) and “beauty” (*jamál*) are two of the central attributes of God portrayed in Sufi literature, the former indicating divine attributes such as grandeur, might, and power, and the latter referring to attributes like mercy, beauty, and kindness. As such, the simultaneous association of the *Húríyyih* with the attributes of both majesty and beauty is yet another indication of the fullness of the manifestation of God’s names and attributes in the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh. Note, for example, how the following verses allude at once to Her physical beauty—Her “winsome ways,” “comely form,” and “jet black hair” on Her “snow-white neck”—and to the “magnet of that Beauty” (Bahá’u’lláh) that is the “true north” towards which “love’s needle” points through no will of its own:

With no will or purpose of Her own, She moved and circled about, as though love’s needle was drawn by the magnet of that Beauty that shone resplendent before Her. Exalted be the Lord Who fashioned Her; no mortal eye hath ever seen Her like!

She stepped forth, and glory itself waited upon Her, whilst the kingdom of beauty followed in Her wake, acclaiming Her wondrous grace, Her winsome ways and Her comely form. Exalted be the Lord Who fashioned Her; no mortal eye hath ever seen Her like!

We beheld then Her jet-black

hair cascading round Her snow-white neck, as though night and day had embraced in this glorious spot, this goal of all desire. Exalted be the Lord Who fashioned Her; no mortal eye hath ever seen Her like! (Lawḥ-i-Ru’yá ¶5–7)

In this tablet Bahá’u’lláh also alludes to the image of the veil: “Gazing upon Her face, We beheld a spot concealed beneath the veil of Unity, shining above the horizon of Her brow.” Here we discover the usage of a mystical term that needs particular attention. “Unity” (*waḥidiyyah*), in Islamic mystical philosophy, alludes to the manifestation of God’s names and attributes, so, in the sense of this tradition, the veil of Unity implies the veil of names and attributes.³⁰ Furthermore, the “spot” or beauty mark can be taken to represent the “Primal Point,” inasmuch as the tablet is revealed on “the anniversary of the birth of My Herald, He Who extolled My praise, celebrated My sovereignty, and informed the people of the heaven of My Will, the ocean of My Purpose, and the daystar of My Revelation. We exalted this Day through the advent of that other Day whereon was revealed the hidden Secret, the treasured Mystery, and the well-guarded Symbol” (Lawḥ-i-Ru’yá ¶17).

Elucidated in another way, the “spot concealed beneath the veil of Unity” is the Point or transcendent source of the

30 See Kamáli in *Safíniy-i-‘Irfán*, vol. 20, p. 122, for further discussion of this subject.

Revelation which is hidden behind the veil of names and attributes and thus obscured from the comprehension of humankind. Indeed, the names and attributes of God—which we can observe and appreciate—are only allusions to that ineffable Essence expressed in a limited manner—namely, by images and language we can comprehend. The transcendent Reality of the Ancient of Days will forever be concealed beyond the capacity or power of words, signs, and symbols.

Finally, even though in this tablet the Húríyyih's extreme joy is momentarily halted by Her sympathy for Bahá'u'lláh's tribulations while imprisoned in 'Akká, She does not tragically de cease, leave this world, or return back to the realm from which She descended. With compassion She asks Bahá'u'lláh to leave 'Akká and move to regions that the people of names have never observed: "May all creation be a ransom for Thine afflictions, O King of earth and heaven! How long wilt Thou commit Thyself into the hands of these people in the city of 'Akká? Hasten unto Thine other dominions—realms whereon the eyes of the people of names have never fallen.' Whereat We smiled" (Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá ¶15). According to Shoghi Effendi, this statement foreshadows Bahá'u'lláh's ascension (*God Passes By* 221).

THE SÚRIY-I-HAYKAL

We conclude our concise but hopefully informative examination of the complex and sometimes abstruse

symbolism underlying Bahá'u'lláh's use of the imagery of the Húríyyih with what is, for our purposes, the climactic work—the Súrīy-i-Haykal (Sura of the Temple). The word *haykal* means "structure" or "temple"—in this case, the "human temple," or, in the context of this work, the Most Great Spirit manifest to humankind through a human form or persona.

Though Bahá'u'lláh originally revealed the Súrīy-i-Haykal in Adrianople, later in 'Akká He had it transcribed into the calligraphic form of a pentacle, symbolic of the human body. In this configuration were included epistles He had formerly sent to five prominent figures: Pope Pius IX, Napoleon III, Czar Alexander II, Queen Victoria, and Násiri'd-Dín Sháh.

Regarding the Maid of Heaven's appearance in the Súrīy-i-Haykal, Shoghi Effendi has explained that in this work Bahá'u'lláh is recounting how the Maiden appeared to Him in a dream vision while He was imprisoned in the Siyáh-Chál. Thus, we observe that in this tablet the Húríyyih's tidings focus on Her announcement about the station of Bahá'u'lláh and Her admonition to the world of creation that all must recognize His station.

The language of this tablet is characterized by a tone of majesty and power, sanguinity and victory. The sorrowful moments observed in several of the previous tablets are replaced by the joyous announcement of Bahá'u'lláh's station and mission, together with the emphatic assurance of the ultimate victory of His Cause. This triumph is symbolized,

we may conclude, by the perfect manifestation of divine attributes in the human temple of Bahá'u'lláh. His inclusion in this calligraphic design of His exhortation to the kings and rulers of the world to manifest in their own personage and governance these same divine attributes may well represent the goal of transforming the body politic of the world of humanity.

As we read this tablet, we can appreciate that while the human aspect of Bahá'u'lláh feels pain, whether physical or emotional or spiritual, He also can wield immense power where-with to change the hearts and minds of humankind. Taherzadeh notes, "This Tablet is replete with glad-tidings of the appearance of a band of devoted believers whom Bahá'u'lláh refers to as the new race of men" (*Revelation* vol. 3, 135). Consequently, in this tablet we read the announcement to the world of the astounding transformation of the human body politic "this Youth" (Bahá'u'lláh) is going to bring about:

Erelong shall God draw forth, out of the bosom of power, the hands of ascendancy and might, and shall raise up a people who will arise to win victory for this Youth and who will purge mankind from the defilement of the outcast and the ungodly. These hands will gird up their loins to champion the Faith of God, and will, in My name the Self-Subsistent, the Mighty, subdue the peoples and kindreds of the earth. (*Summons* ¶34)

In terms of our examination of the three stages of the appearance of the Húriyyih, the Súriy-i-Haykal can be understood to represent the climax of Her function as the personification of the Most Great Spirit in the works of Bahá'u'lláh.

Most students of the Bahá'í writings are aware of the appearance of the Húriyyih to Bahá'u'lláh in the *Siyáh-Chál*. During a dream vision, He receives the first intimation of His Revelation through the appearance and announcement of the Húriyyih. This vision signals that the time has come for Bahá'u'lláh to assume His inherent station, though He will conceal this fact until revelation is timely—first in the Garden of Ridván and later to the world at large in the epistles He begins sending to the kings and rulers while He abides in Adrianople. We can read His description of this vision in the *Súriy-i-Haykal* as translated by Shoghi Effendi:

While engulfed in tribulations
I heard a most wondrous, a most
sweet voice, calling above My
head. Turning My face, I beheld
a Maiden—the embodiment of
the remembrance of the name of
My Lord—suspended in the air
before Me. So rejoiced was She
in Her very soul that Her counte-
nance shone with the ornament of
the good pleasure of God, and Her
cheeks glowed with the brightness
of the All-Merciful. Betwixt earth
and heaven She was raising a call
which captivated the hearts and

minds of men. She was imparting to both My inward and outer being tidings which rejoiced My soul, and the souls of God's honoured servants (Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* ¶6).

Bahá'u'lláh continues by describing how the Húríyyih points a finger at His head and announces His advent to the whole of creation in such exalted and glorious language that it is well worth recounting here:

Pointing with Her finger unto My head, She addressed all who are in heaven and all who are on earth, saying: By God! This is the Best-Beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within you, could ye but understand. This is the Mystery of God and His Treasure, the Cause of God and His glory unto all who are in the kingdoms of Revelation and of creation, if ye be of them that perceive. This is He Whose Presence is the ardent desire of the denizens of the Realm of eternity, and of them that dwell within the Tabernacle of glory, and yet from His Beauty do ye turn aside. (*Summons* ¶7)

In the Súriy-i-Haykal, the process of progressive revelation of the station and mission of Bahá'u'lláh symbolized by the appearance of the Húríyyih and the manifestation of Her own glory is

complete. The Maid of Heaven is summoned to become unconcealed: "O Maid of Heaven! Step forth from the chambers of paradise and announce unto the people of the world: By the righteousness of God! He Who is the Best-Beloved of the world—He Who hath ever been the Desire of every perceiving heart, the Object of the adoration of all that are in heaven and on earth, and the Cynosure of the former and the latter generation—is now come!" (*Summons* ¶100).

So it is that in this tablet Bahá'u'lláh invites the Maiden to appear with the adornment of the celestial Realm (*láhút*) and offer the wine of the heavenly Dominion (*jabarút*). And if She meets with no response, She should not be sorrowful, but rather return to Her tabernacles of grandeur where She will find a tribe whose faces shine like the sun and who praise God with joy. Such sanguine and joyous reversal in the drama of the Maid of Heaven denotes a turning point in human history: this is a Day that will not be followed by night.

This hope-filled assurance thus marks the conclusion to our examination of this entrancing figure, the symbolism of Her appearance, and the relevance of understanding Her function in the works of Bahá'u'lláh. While there is so much more to learn from studying the allegorical nature of the entire tablet as it portrays the dialogue between the Húríyyih and Bahá'u'lláh, especially as She informs Him what powers and capacities He must employ if He is to succeed in His arduous mission, it will suffice our objective to conclude with

a passage from the Súriy-i-Haykal in which Bahá'u'lláh calls for the Maiden of Heaven to reveal Herself and announce the glad tidings of the appearance of the Beloved of the World:

O Maid of inner meanings! Step out of the chamber of utterance by the leave of God, the Lord of the heavens and the earth. Reveal, then, thyself adorned with the raiment of the celestial Realm, and proffer with thy ruby fingers the wine of the heavenly Dominion, that haply the denizens of this world may perceive the light that shone forth from the Kingdom of God when the Daystar of eternity appeared above the horizon of glory. Perchance they may arise before the dwellers of earth and heaven to extol and magnify this Youth Who hath established Himself in the midmost heart of Paradise upon the throne of His name, the All-Sufficing Helper—He from Whose countenance shineth the brightness of the All-Merciful, from Whose gaze appear the glances of the All-Glorious, and in Whose ways are revealed the tokens and evidences of God, the omnipotent Protector, the Almighty, the All-Loving. (*Summons* ¶22)

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A garment the Báb wore under His jubbih

Qaṣídiy-i-Izz-i- Varqá'íyyih (Ode of the Dove)

REVEALED BY BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

A Provisional Translation by
John S. Hatcher, Amrollah Hemmat,
and Ehsanollah Hemmat

INTRODUCTION

The history of when and how this poem by Bahá'u'lláh came about is extremely interesting, but rather than rehearse it ourselves, we have simply included Shoghi Effendi's own description from *God Passes By*. However, there are a couple of important points for the reader's attention.

First, the elaborate notes at the end of the poem are by Bahá'u'lláh and we have simply translated them as faithfully as we could. Needless to say, the reader would do well to examine these carefully inasmuch as they are obviously authoritative insights into both particular allusions and the overall intent of this remarkable work.

Second, rather than discussing here how this poem incorporates one of Bahá'u'lláh's most significant utilizations of the allegorical or symbolic portrayals of the Húríyyih (the Maid of Heaven), we have included that discussion in our article "Bahá'u'lláh's Symbolic Use of the Veiled Húríyyih." Nevertheless, the reader should

appreciate from the outset that the dialogue portrayed in this beautiful poem is, as Bahá'u'lláh Himself notes, not to be taken literally but, rather, as a figurative or symbolic representation of an internal reflection by Bahá'u'lláh as He converses with the Holy Spirit that dwells within Him and speaks through Him.

We have, as much as possible, translated the poem line for line and word for word, though we have taken some liberties when it has been necessary to convey accurately the tone, the tenor, and the sometimes allusive and elusive meaning underlying the literal words and phrases. As with any translation of poetry from one language to another—especially languages that belong to entirely different family of languages as, in our case, from Arabic to English—it is impossible to convey most of the exquisitely beautiful sound effects, one of the central features of poetry. But we have attempted to convey the sense and feel of the rhyme, line, and meter.

John S Hatcher, Amrollah Hemmat,
and Ehsanollah Hemmat, translators

COMMENTS BY SHOGHI EFFENDI

"Amazed by the profundity of His insight and the compass of His understanding, they [the students and teachers at the seminary in Sulaymaniyyih] were impelled to seek from Him what they considered to be a conclusive and final evidence of the unique power and knowledge which He now appeared in their eyes to possess. 'No one among the mystics, the wise, and the learned,'

they claimed, while requesting this further favor from Him, 'has hitherto proved himself capable of writing a poem in a rhyme and meter identical with that of the longer of the two odes, entitled *Qasidiy-i-Ta'íyyih* composed by Ibn-i-Farid. We beg you to write for us a poem in that same meter and rhyme.' This request was complied with, and no less than two thousand verses, in exactly the manner they had specified, were dictated by Him, out of which He selected one hundred and twenty-seven, which He permitted them to keep, deeming the subject matter of the rest premature and unsuitable to the needs of the times. It is these same one hundred and twenty-seven verses that constitute the *Qasidiy-i-Varqá'íyyih*, so familiar to, and widely circulated amongst, His Arabic speaking followers.

Such was their reaction to this marvelous demonstration of the sagacity and genius of Bahá'u'lláh that they unanimously acknowledged every single verse of that poem to be endowed with a force, beauty and power far surpassing anything contained in either the major or minor odes composed by that celebrated poet.

This episode, by far the most outstanding among the events that transpired during the two years of Bahá'u'lláh's absence from Baghdad, immensely stimulated the interest with which an increasing number of the ulamas, the scholars, the shaykhs, the doctors, the holy men and princes who had congregated in the seminaries of Sulaymáníyyih and Kirkuk, were now

following His daily activities. Through His numerous discourses and epistles He disclosed new vistas to their eyes, resolved the perplexities that agitated their minds, unfolded the inner meaning of many hitherto obscure passages in the writings of various commentators, poets and theologians, of which they had remained unaware, and reconciled the seemingly contradictory assertions which abounded in these dissertations, poems and treatises" (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 122–24).

Ode of the Dove

Concerning the Essence of the Holy Spirit:
Private not public praise of the Beloved

He is the Exalted, the Most Glorious

1

The light from such a countenance so attracted me;
its brightness outshone every bright sun,

2

as if the effulgence of the sun had become resplendent by the light of Her beauty
as it shone forth among the planets and glistened.

3

The musk of Amá¹ was released through Her joy!
From Her loftiness did the station of Exaltation become exalted!

4

At Her call the trumpet of Resurrection Day sounded!
Her breeze swept away the shadows of clouds,

5

With Her dazzling brilliance, the Túr of eternity appeared!
Through Her radiance the radiance of Bahá shone forth!

6

From Her West, the sun of the Manifestation became manifest!
From Her East, the full moon of moons² became eclipsed,

1 See note 8 in *The Call of the Divine Beloved*, 105, which quotes from a tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to explain this allusion in full. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states: “Amá’ is defined as an extremely thin and subtle cloud, seen and then not seen. For shouldst thou gaze with the utmost care, thou wouldst discern something, but as soon as thou dost look again, it ceaseth to be seen. For this reason, in the usage of mystics who seek after truth, ‘Amá’ signifieth the Universal Reality without individuations as such, for these individuations exist in the mode of uncompounded simplicity and oneness and are not differentiated from the Divine Essence.”

2 Compare with the passage: “Thus, it hath become evident that the terms ‘sun,’ ‘moon,’ and ‘stars’ primarily signify the Prophets of God, the saints, and their companions, those Luminaries, the light of Whose knowledge hath shed illumination upon the worlds of

7

and from Her hair wafted the scent of pure Divinity,
and by glancing at Her face, the eyes of Beauty became enlightened.

8

Indeed, the beam from Her face guided the face of Guidance.
The fire from Her face purified the soul of Moses.

9

The most exalted breasts turned to be pierced by arrows from Her eyes.
The head of Existence stretched forth its neck toward the noose of Her tresses.

10

And mine utmost longing is (to be) wherever Her feet have passed,
And the throne of Amá is the lowly earth she trod.

11

In every eye my tears were shed to attain reunion with Her,
and I burned in every fire because of my separation.

12

I spread myself out far and wide with the fondest wish
that She might tread upon my heart.

13

In every face I sought (a semblance of) reunion with Her.
On every plain I inscribed in the sand a sign of nearness.

14

And whenever I rushed toward reunion with Her light,
after attaining nearness, I was wounded by the arrow of remoteness.

15

And if I stretched forth my beseeching hands for reunion with Her,
with sword she replied, "This shall be the recompense for My lovers!"

16

And my sole yearning hath been but to hold fast,
while Her relentless intent remaineth but to sever my grasp.

17

I said, “May my soul and all bestowed on me be but a sacrifice for our reunion!
Have mercy on me and disclose not my shame!

18

“And bestow upon me as a sign of Thy love
a reunion that will endure forever, even to eternity!

19

“I swear by the joy of manifestation, by the appearance of which the whole of creation
was illumined and, in truth, mine own resurrection was consummated,

20

“I swear by Hussayn’s sorrow, by reason of which the sadness of Existence
brought forth mine own perfection into the world of being,

21

“that Thou art are the desire of my heart and the beloved of mine inmost self,
the custodian of my soul, and the source of my light and life!

22

“Bestow upon me the victory of reunion after this separation!
Bestow upon me the delight of companionship after all my suffering!

23

“The flame of every fire was ignited by my burning,
and the manifest realm was illumined by my sighs.

24

“The heat from my craving has dried up the ocean of Amá,
and the stream of Exaltation itself cannot quench any portion of my thirst.

25

“All the blood I witnessed in every land
was but a token of the blood trickling from mine eyes.

26

“And compared to my tears, the vast ocean is merely a drop,
and compared to my burning, the flame Khalil³ endured was less than a spark.

3 Khalil is Abraham and the verse alludes to Abraham’s survival in the fire. See Qur’án 21:66–69.

27

“And from my sadness, the tumultuous sea of happiness became stilled,
and from mine anguish did springs of afflictions stream forth.

28

“My splendor became shrouded, my illumination ensconced,
and my light extinguished by the haughtiness of the scoffer.

29

“My bones are now brittle, my body worn to a sigh,
and my heart shriveled from the incessant flame of my yearning.

30

“My ardor for Thee hath crushed me! My love for Thee hath sifted me into dust,
and separation from Thee hath melted me, yet reunion with Thee
remaineth my desire,

31

“and the mystery of my mourning cleft the heavens asunder,
and mine inmost torment shattered to dust the ground of my heart,⁴

32

“and the tears from mine eyes recount my heart's ardor,
and my jaundiced face signifieth the flame of mine inmost self.

33

“Each night I grieve from rebukes the scoffers have hurled!
Each day in tears I pray and plead for assistance!

34

“I have attained such a state of bitter abasement
that tongues falter attempting to recount it.

35

“Because of my heart's tribulation, in every chamber of Paradise
the húrís have adorned themselves in robes of black.

36

“I became sorrowful from the sadness I found in every heart,
and every happiness caused me but sorrow.”

4 Compare Qur'án 77: 9-10.

37

Suddenly, from behind me, Her voice said, “Hush!
Cease thy lamenting about all thou hast endured!

38

“Countless Husayns like thee are enthralled with Me!
Numberless are the ‘Alís like thee amongst My lovers!

39

“Numerous are the lovers who occupy a station loftier than thine!
I have chosen countless pure ones like thee,

40

“lovers who lamented at every moment, yet never attained
the light of reunion to enjoy even a single glance from Me!

41

“Compared to My dawning, the midday sun is like a star,
and compared to the light from My appearance, the light of the world is
but a flicker.

42

“Compared to the splendor of My mystery, the mystery of existence is but an ant.
The igniting fire of My love made all enkindlement like a spark.

43

“By My craft, the nature⁵ and form of the revelation of the Beloved was manifest,⁶
and by My palm was the splendor of Moses’ palm made luminous.⁷

44

“And the essence of Cause itself derived from the manifestation of My Cause,
and the justice of Command derived from the justice of My wisdom.

45

“And the ebullition of the ocean was formed by the vibration of Mine inmost
being,
and the Holy Spirit wafted (into the world) from the light of My glory,

5 Qur’án 30:30.

6 Qur’án 30:30; 10:105.

7 Qur’án 20:22.

46

“and from but a glimpse of Me did the Moses of eternity swoon,⁸
and from the force of a flash of My light did Túr become crushed.

47

“By the resurrecting power of My Cause did souls gather at Judgment Day!
From the trumpeting of My spirit did the dried bones become revived,⁹

48

“and the soul of Cause circumambulated the temple of Its command;
indeed, the spirit of that temple became established by the light of My
countenance,

49

“and the kingdom of exalted knowledge contained in ‘B’ is naught but a secret,
and secretly did ‘B’ prostrate itself before My Point.¹⁰

50

“All guidance hath issued forth from the dawn of My command,
and all exaltation ascended from My descent.

51

“Through My benevolence the birds sing delightful songs,
and through My melody the humming of helpless bees resounds.

52

“Though vain imaginings thou didst devise a fountain of your own,
and for the love of a stranger you imbibed from a spring other than mine.

53

“Thou didst bring attributes which thou didst associate with Me,
and thou didst attribute names to me unbecoming My true self.

54

“Thou didst devise whatever essence thou imagined and attributed it to Me!
Such invention is limiting, and assigning limitations to Me is the greatest
error of all.

8 Qur’án 7:143.

9 Qur’án 36:78–79, and compare Ezekiel 37:1–14.

10 The letter “B”; See Bahá’u’lláh’s note at end of poem.

55

“Thou didst think to attain reunion with Me through thine own ingenuity. Alas, it cannot be!

A covenant exists between us in which thou art treated faithfully only if thou art faithful,

56

“imbibing from every cup the tribulations of the world
and watering the river of anger with thine own life’s blood,

57

“and abandoning all hope for the slightest respite,
and repressing all desire for the things of this world,

58

“(and) shedding the heart’s blood is obligatory in the religion of Love,
and burning of the heart for love is the first requirement of My Covenant,

59

“(and) sleepless nights, because people will sting (thee) like scorpions,
and each day (will there be), the harangue of incessant reproach,

60

“but by the standards of Faith, deadly poison is like a refreshing drink,
and according to My creed, destiny’s rage is like affection.

61

“Therefore, abandon this claim of love, or else be content with whatever transpires!
Such is the rule established for those who would tread My path!”

62

Then ardently I called to Her, “O My Beloved!
“My fondest wish and my heart’s desire,

63

“now am I truly prepared to endure whatsoever Thou dost wish through Thy
majesty and might!
Now will I cherish whatsoever Thou hast decreed for me!

64

“Verily, I now desire only what is pleasing to Thee,
and truly my only longing is for whatever Thou hast have ordained.

65

“Here is my chest to welcome the arrows of Thy sovereign might!
 Here is my body, ready to receive slashes from Thy fierce swords!

66

“Thy fire is my light, and Thine anger my fond desire!
 Thy attack is my solace, and Thy command my highest wish!

67

“Behold now the tears in mine eyes, how plentifully they flow!
 Then witness how every joy in my heart hath been annihilated!

68

“Each day everyone attacked me with arrows!
 Each night was I slain by swords of rejection!

69

“In each verse I read was a book blaspheming me!
 Each moment I encountered censure from everyone!

70

“Every moment I was mocked by the accusation of (being) idolatrous.
 Every moment I was struck by the arrow of rejection,

71

“as if the tribulations of the universe had descended upon my soul,
 as if every blade of anger had been sharpened for my neck alone.

72

“Jacob’s grief and Joseph’s confinement,
 Job’s afflictions and Abraham’s fire,

73

“Adam’s regret and Jonah’s fleeing,¹¹
 and David’s bewailing and Noah’s lamentation,

74

“and Eve’s separation and Mary’s burning sorrow,
 and Isaiah’s affliction and Zachariah’s anguish—

11 Jonah’s flight to the ship. See Qur’án 37:139–44.

75

“all that occurred to each of these is but a drop of my sorrow,
and truly, all other adversity was caused by the dripping of my anguish.

76

“Now, behold me—alone, wandering about this remote region!
And now, witness my companionship with the wild beasts in this far desert.

77

“And from the tears of my eyes do waters gush forth from the heavens,
and from tapping my heart, springs gushed forth and joined together as
decreed.

78

“And from the force of my sorrow was the essence of Eternity rent asunder,
and from the flame of my distress did the throne of Exaltation crumble
and perish.

79

“All the redness of existence came from the redness of my heart’s blood!
Tears flowing from my eyes caused every twig in existence to sprout.

80

“For me, the bitterness of adversity suffered in the path of Thy love is sweet,
while the sweetness of this life from any other source is bitter.

81

“On my neck, scars from shackles of iron appeared.
On my feet remain the marks from links of chain.

82

“Not a day passed that I was not seared
indirectly by the insinuations of poems or directly by rebukes in prose.

83

“Indeed, my soul was uprooted and my heart dissolved,
and indeed, my inner being boiled from the fervor of my distress.

84

“I remained without spirit, soul, or heart!
That I survived at all is my greatest astonishment.

85

“Verily, exaltation of all that lies in my heart is cause for what I have been made to endure.

Oh, would that whatever exalted my nature had never existed to begin with!¹²

86

“Thus it was that adversity assaulted me from every direction
such that at every moment I was afflicted by yet another ordeal.

87

“In solitude I ascended to the apex of Unity!
In my inmost heart I attained complete reunion.

88

“Though I am only able to describe Thee in terms of what mine own eyes have beheld,

Thine own vision can only discern evidence available to (Thine)
All-Perceiving eyes.¹³

89

“If my understanding was limited, the limitation was imposed by Thee,
and if I dared to portray Thee, my portrayal derived solely from Thee.

90

“And from my own dejection did the gloom of night emerge,
and from the joy in my heart did the light of day achieve its brilliance.

12 This is an incredibly poignant statement. In other occasions, Bahá'u'lláh said that, were it left to Him, He would not have manifested Himself, but it was only the will of God that compelled Him to continue: “By God besides Whom there is none other God!” is His emphatic assertion to Shaykh Sultan, as reported by Nabil in his narrative, “But for My recognition of the fact that the blessed Cause of the Primal Point was on the verge of being completely obliterated, and all the sacred blood poured out in the path of God would have been shed in vain, I would in no wise have consented to return to the people of the Bayan, and would have abandoned them to the worship of the idols their imaginations had fashioned” (Shoghi Effendi 126).

13 Compare “No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision: He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things” (Qur’án 6:103), or the translation by Shoghi Effendi of Bahá'u'lláh's allusion to this same verse: “No vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision; He is the Subtile, the All-Perceiving” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* ¶104).

91

“It matters not that for now I have been rejected;
I became entirely jubilant the day I was awakened!¹⁴

92

“By the light of His friendship, I enjoyed the company of holiness,
and I immigrated from the land of Tá¹⁵ during the time of my remoteness.

93

“And through the illumination of my inner being, I attained belief in the Light,
and I ascended (to realm of) spirit through the joy of mine own heart.

94

“I call on thee, O Spirit of life, to abandon this self
that hath become emptied of all life.

95

“Then, O Spirit of Amá, descend from Thy throne on high,
for there is no greatness remaining for Thee in my abject station.

96

“O my heart, I am calling out to thee! Depart!
There is no glory for thee in this contemptible realm.

97

“And O my patience, be reconciled with all the afflictions thou hast endured
for the contentment of thy Beloved, whether in comfort or in adversity!”

98

With heavenly affection She called to me and said, “Calm thyself!
“Verily, I have become aware of all that thou hast recounted.

99

“Relinquish all thou hast understood before—and thence worshipped.
Indeed, for Me (even) idolatry is but a recognition of the unity of God.

100

“In My sight the most glorious glory of Túr is abject,
and to Me the most luminous beam of light is but darkness.

14 Compare with, “I was asleep on My couch, when lo, the Breeze of God wafting over Me roused Me from My slumber” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 41:1).

15 Tehran.

101

“Thy verses depicting Me are accurate, but appropriate only to a mere vassal!
Thy verses of adoration are apt, but with the competence of a mere servant!

102

“And certainly I have eternally existed in an immaculate state,
and certainly I have been infinitely stainless.

103

“In My sight, so many of the just ones were cruel,
even as so many of the knowledgeable ones were ignorant.

104

“In My sight, so many of the enduring ones were evanescent,
even as to Me, many a mystic knower knew not a single letter.

105

“In My sight, so many suppliants were but ruffians,
and many who prostrated themselves never attained a moment's humility.

106

“All the heavenly verses are established in the realm of My essence,
and all the luminous scriptures descended from My Book.

107

“By a mere particle of Mine, the enveloping sun was darkened,¹⁶
and from but a drop of Mine, the ocean of existence was formed.

108

“All the joyous melodies created by the peoples of the earth
are to Me no more than the cry of an ant or the buzz of a bee.

109

“From the ecstasy of (My) joy, all minds became joyous!
From the song of My spirit all souls acquired life.

110

“By the droplets of My command did all the adored ones become lords,
and at its trickling did every lord attain lordship.

¹⁶ See Qur'án 81:1.

111

“Indeed, the land of the spirit was trod in obedience to My command,
and verily, the kingdom of Túr became the place where I trod.

112

“Because of My light, the star of manifestation shone forth,
and because of My gladness the sun of happiness bestowed its splendor.

113

“Every single verse of God—those illumined signs of revelation—
as well as the places of the decent of revealed verses, the dawning places
of holiness,

114

“the essence of all reflection—those jewels of thought,
those ornaments of enlightenment, that manifestation of all wisdom—

115

“indeed, the command that instigated all of these derived from My single
command ‘Be!’¹⁷
And from the kindness of My heart was every new thing generated.

116

“When thou turned away from My face, thou didst think thou hadst turned
towards it,
and thou didst fly to the water of vain imaginings pouring from the
fountain of illusion.

117

“Because thou didst not secure thyself in the concealed Divine Light
That I had implanted within thee, thou didst squander away all that I
created.

17 “Shoghi Effendi, in letters written on his behalf, has explained the significance of the ‘letters B and E’. They constitute the word ‘Be’, which, he states, ‘means the creative Power of God Who through His command causes all things to come into being’ and ‘the power of the Manifestation of God, His great spiritual creative force’. The imperative ‘Be’ in the original Arabic is the word ‘kun’, consisting of the two letters ‘kaf’ and ‘nun’. They have been translated by Shoghi Effendi in the above manner. This word has been used in the Qur’án as God’s bidding calling creation into being” (in Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* note 188).

118

“Hold fast to the cord of the Cause in its conspicuous appearance!
Recognize the Face of Light in its concealment!

119

“Then, free from allusions, rend asunder the veil of nearness
that thou mayest behold directly the Sanctified Countenance within thyself!

120

“Then become serene because the powers of the kingdom have become agitated!
Then become patient because the hidden Eyes of Divinity have shed tears!

121

“And within thee have I concealed a truth that transcends all knowledge.
Even every enlightened mind is unable to comprehend it!

122

“Relish the companionship of that holy mystery concealed within thee!
If thou art trustworthy, then disclose it not.

123

“If thou removest the veil from the countenance of what thou hast observed,
all existence will vanish in the twinkling of an eye.”¹⁸

124

In this manner was the command issued from the Kingdom of Grandeur!
From this command emanated the mystery of power!

125

Blessed are those who have attained loyalty and steadfastness!
Blessed are those who have enlisted in this new Cause!

126

Blessed are the lovers who have shed their life's blood!
Blessed are the confidants who have held fast the cord of my loving kindness.

127

Blessed are the chaste ones because they have hastened
from every quarter to enter the shade of my Sovereignty.

18 See Bahá'u'lláh: “If the veil were lifted, and the full glory of the station of those that have turned wholly towards God, and have, in their love for Him, renounced the world, were made manifest, the entire creation would be dumbfounded” (*Gleanings* 93:15).

NOTES FOR “ODE OF THE DOVE”

WRITTEN BY BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

Line 4

This is a reference to the mountains moving, moving even as the clouds do. As God has said, “You see the mountains, and you assume they are stable, yet they move like clouds. These are the signs of the Day of Resurrection and what must transpire in that Day.”¹⁹

Line 7

Because of the pure breezes that wafted from her hair, the fragrance of glory and exaltation, together with the musk of grace and glory, is blowing from the left of the Divine Paradise ferrying delight. The musk of mercy and glory is (likewise) moving from the left of the Sublime Paradise proffering the blessings with the right hand of the dwellers of the garden of the Eternal King. By inhaling the diffusion of its delightful fragrances and by quaffing the wondrous cup of the immortal, new and incomparable wine, the dust and the moldering bones of the essences of existence may perhaps become blessed with eternal and everlasting life and become thereby the object of glory. By observing her countenance, the eyes of beauty itself—of which the sun is but the most meager sign—also became illumined, lustrous, and bright. Thus is God, her creator, sanctified beyond (the praise of men) or the allusion of words.

19 Qur'án 27:88.

Line 8

When Moses sanctified and purified the feet of His divine reality, which were entrusted to His human temple, from the “sandals of vain imaginings,” and then withdrew the hand of divine power from the robe of Benevolence covering the bosom of Grandeur, He entered the holy, sanctified, and blessed desert of the heart, which is naught but the place of the throne of Splendor of the Eternal and the throne of exaltation and the attributes of Sovereignty. And when he reached the land of *Túr*,²⁰ which had descended from the right side of the blessed point of light, He inhaled and smelled the pure fragrance of the spirit from the Eternal East, and perceived from every direction the lights of His holiness, the Everlasting King.

After the unveiling of the lamp of “I am,” He became inflamed and ignited by the heat of the fragrance of the Divine love and by the sparks from the flames of the fire of Oneness in the lamp of His heart. And from the wine of reunion with the countenance of the Incomparable Lord and the pure wine of His Eternal Holiness, He entered the desert of eternal sobriety after the annihilation of the station of contradictions.

And by means of the ecstasy of His eagerness for reunion, He became aware of the city of insatiable delights. Whereupon He entered that city whose

20 The land of *Túr* refers to Sinai—*Túr* is mentioned in the Qur'án (see, for example, 19:52) in reference to Mount Sinai where Moses received His Revelation from God.

people were oblivious (of their Lord) when He became a companion of the Ancient Flame of God and became illumined with the light of the Almighty Lord, even as He informed the people, “*Wait! I have discovered a fire!*” (Qur’án 20:10).

When He understood and comprehended the countenance of guidance from the favors of the Ancient of Days from that Tree that belongs neither to the East nor to the West,²¹ He was honored and urged to turn aside from the ephemeral face of distinction and turn to the eternal face of the Everlasting God. Thereupon He discovered the face of exalted and marvelous guidance from the enkindled fire that was concealed in the hearts of the heavenly (ones). That is why he uttered “*or I might discover guidance in the fire.*”²²

Understand also the intent of the blessed verse that says, “*the one who made for you a fire from a green tree.*”²³

21 “Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a lamp: the Lamp enclosed in Glass: the glass as it were a brilliant star: lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither of the East nor of the West, whose Oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! Allah doth guide whom He will to His Light. Allah doth set forth Parables for men, and Allah doth know all things” (Qur’án 24:35).

22 “Behold, he saw a fire, so he said to his family, ‘Tarry ye; I perceive a fire. Perhaps I can bring you some burning brand therefrom or find some guidance at the fire’” (Qur’án 20:10).

23 “Say, He will give them life Who

O would that a hearer could be found so that a drop from the depths of the sea of fire and this conflagration full of sparks would have been mentioned! But better it is, indeed, that this pearl remains concealed in its shell within the divine ocean and contained within the chamber of mystery so that every vacillating one becomes deprived and every confident believer becomes a pilgrim of the Kaaba of Grandeur and enters the sanctuary of Glory. Then how auspicious is it when one who consumes concern for his body with the fire of love and becomes a companion of the Essence of Spirit so that he attains the lofty grace of tranquility and becomes nourished by the exquisite blessing of honor.

And regarding all that which we have mentioned about Our Prophet—may peace be upon Him—regarding the stations of guidance and the conditions of the purification of self to the rank of Moses, the meaning concerns the manifestation of these effulgences in the world of existence. Otherwise, His Holiness (Moses) has been eternally guided by God, and will forever be (guided), even as the sun of guidance shone from Him and the moon of benevolence appeared from Him and the

created them for the first time! For He is well-versed in every kind of creation, the same One Who produces for you fire out from the green tree. Then behold! Ye kindle therewith (your own fires)! Is not He Who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like thereof? Yea, indeed! For He is the Supreme Creator, infinite of skill and knowledge! Verily, when He intends a thing, He commands, ‘Be,’ and it is!” (Qur’án 36:79–82).

divine fire was ignited from the fire of His essence and the Eternal light was illumined by the light of His visage.

The words of His Holiness Moses themselves remove all vain imaginings. When Pharaoh asked about the man He murdered, He answered: "*I did it when, when I was among those who are astray. Then I fled from you when I feared you, and my Lord granted me a command and appointed me among those sent (by Him).*"²⁴

Though the page has ended, the subject is endless and will remain unfinished.

Line 9

The word "*Sahm*" means "arrow," and this line means that the breasts of those who are most exalted and illumined will eagerly face towards the arrows, which are the eyelashes of the Beloved. The word "*Vahq*" (from the root *viḥāq* meaning "lariat") implies here that the head of the universal divine reality is stretched out before the "lariat" of Her curls so that it will become entangled in this snare. Therefore, the breast that is not pierced by arrows will be deprived, and the head that does not become entangled by this lariat will be annihilated.

Praised is He Whom we have been praising, and exalted is He beyond any words you might devise.

24 "I did it then, when I was in error. So I fled from you (all) when I feared you; but my Lord has (since) invested me with judgment (and wisdom) and appointed me as one of the Messengers" Qur'ān (26: 20–21).

Line 11

The first part of the line means that whichever exalted eyes mysteriously concealed in the hidden worlds, as well as those eyes that exist in the manifest realm of existence that cried and wept, regardless at what time or in what situation, did so as a result of the separation of this servant from seeing the lights of the countenance of the Beloved. This is that which can be understood from this poem, but it is a mystery that *no one knows except God, whereas we understand less than one letter of its complete meaning.*

Also delve into the meaning of the second half of the verse, so that in the realm of your existence, your enthusiasm, eagerness, ecstasy, attraction, love and ardor may become manifest and you may become ennobled thereby and attain your furthest tree and the furthest mosque, which symbolize submission to the order and command of God. *And indeed your exalted Lord is a trustworthy witness for you and Our just Vicegerent.*

Lines 12-13

These two verses mean that I have spread myself out by traversing every land, even into the remotest regions, from the land of heart and higher, even to endless heights hidden in veils of mystery, then (back) to the world of existence, so that perhaps I might (gain admittance) into the heart wherein lie the hidden mysteries. Truly, this is of the paramount desire of all the divine and holy hearts.

Lines 17-18

Or: All that which was allotted to me from the stations of speech and meaning, and what I understood of Her from (my perspective in) the realm of names and attributes, in addition to that (wisdom) with which God vouchsafed unto me in both the hidden and the manifest realms, all this I sacrificed so that I might once encounter You and behold You (if only) with one glance. I now beg Your forgiveness, O my God, for (the meagerness) of that which I have accomplished in Your presence, but by Your grandeur; O my God, if I were not privileged to meet You, I would still desire to abide in Your presence, for naught else but this will suffice me, nor could my heart be satisfied by aught else, even were You to bestow upon me all that is in the heavens and on the earth. Thus I beseech You, O my God, by the One who beheld in Your path what no one else but Him had witnessed, that You would bestow upon your servant the signs of Your great love and the ensigns of your glorious affection so that my soul could be satisfied with that which You expect from him. Verily, You are omnipotent over all things.

Line 28

The “blamer,”²⁵ that is, most of those who dwell in the realm of existence, or,

25 This term is defined by the context of the lines that follow as those who cavil at the guidance and understanding from God revealed through His Manifestations, especially those teachings that seem contradictory to inherited traditions and commonly accept interpretations of scripture.

by God, that which no eye has beheld and no ear has heard and no tongue could recount, nor any imagination conceive, like rains streaming down from the heaven of the ignorant servants. Say, O people of the earth, content yourselves entirely with Him who manifests naught in His heart but the rays of the morn of Amá. Fear God and contend not with Him. If you find yourself unable to love Him, at least do not detest Him. So long as God's love becomes manifest in existence, I have no concern for aught else. We praise God that He made Us independent of their love and their mention, for He is the One Who is omnipotent over all things.

Line 49

1. Through the letter “B,” existence appeared and through the Point, the worshipper and the worshiped were distinguished from one another—a reference to the *hadith* which says, “Whatsoever appears in the *Qur’án* is contained in the phrase ‘praised be Thou’” . . . unto the end of the *hadith*.²⁶
2. The meaning of “the Point” is uncountable and incalculable and limitless and imperishable, since the Promised Countenance and the Almighty

26 The tradition goes like this: “‘Ali said: ‘All that is in the *Qur’án* is contained in the first Surah. All that is in the first Surah is contained in *Bismi’llahi’r-Rahmani’r-Rahim*. All that is in *Bismi’llahi’r-Rahmani’r-Rahim* is contained in the “B” of *Bismi’llah*. All that is contained in the “B” of *Bismi’llah* is contained in the point which is beneath the ‘B.’ And I am that Point” (from Cameron, *Disconnected Letters of the Qur’an*, 62).

Word and the Divine Temple was designated as the greatest throne, the dwelling place for the descent and the abode of the Hidden Essence, with this exalted name and supreme title and this appellation being assigned solely to that same Temple, for *He Himself is My witness*.

Line 73

1. Qur'án 21:87

2. Both Noah and David lamented and supplicated (God for assistance). The story of Noah is well known, but the lamentation of David and the extent to which he suffered and was afflicted can be discovered only by (reading) the Psalms.

Line 117-123

These lines refer to the sign of splendor from which the grandeur of the rays of the morn of *Amá*,²⁷ and to the manifestations of the dawning of the sun of holiness and exaltation which, from the sun of existence and the moon of the Desired One and the Point of the Exalted One, dawned and appeared unto the realities of all existing things and unto the essence of the hearts of all created things. And from the drops of the water of divine existence, and from the drops from the spring of perpetual, crystalline water, all existing beings in the kingdom of names were granted eternal and everlasting life and were embellished and bedecked with ethereal robes, with exquisite attire, with garments perdurable and eternal.

Yet with all this bestowal, we did not become confirmed by this most great sign and by this most supreme gift and by the inextinguishable lights and by these imperishable gifts. Neither did we become steadfast through this imperishable elixir and through this inexhaustible grace, and through this perpetual honor and this eternal nobility.²⁸ We were veiled from the holy utterances of the Holy Spirit and the fragrant breezes from the nearness of the Illumined One to such a degree that were a thousand Davids in the realm of existence to sing the psalms and songs of joy in the most wondrous and revivifying melodies over the rotting bones of the servants of God, these people would yet fail to become quickened and respond inasmuch as their chance (to receive) the downpour of that mercy from the heaven of power has vanish from their midst, and all have become imprisoned in the cages of their bodies as a result of their attraction to their natural desires. They are thus unconscious and have become so preoccupied in the land of ignorance that they will never become conscious nor attain the station of union and nearness, even though this is the principal goal (of their existence).

It is the cause of incalculable grief and regret that we (did now allow

²⁸ Interestingly in this passage Bahá'u'lláh uses the collective “we” to include Himself among humankind even though He is indicting the failure of humanity to respond adequately to God’s grace. Later in the note, He shifts to the third person, referring to the negligent ones as “they.”

27 See footnote 1.

ourselves) to be guided by the very Essence of guidance, nor did we follow the Essence of eternity. Neither did we advance to the Sinai of the *Túr*²⁹ of His nearness, nor did we reject the symbols of His denial. We failed to become attracted to the ecstasies of His Holy Spirit and failed to follow the guiding lights of His glory.

Among the requisites for becoming a follower are dedication of the soul—an honor we failed to attain—and adorning (ourselves) with the robe of steadfastness—which we likewise failed to achieve.

Verily, we are seated in the midst of the Sea of Essence, even as we wait for a sip of water. And we reside under the bountiful glare of the Sun of Eternity, even as we search for a lamp. Such is the condition of this servant and all God's servants in whatever region they reside. And even if fire from the Tree becomes ignited, we fail to become enkindled, but instead we attempt to extinguish that light.

Fortunate is he who in battle is clothed with the robe of justice. If you become distinguished by this greatest of attributes, you will certainly attain the bounty of *Abhá*. This is that primordial cord by whose motion everything in existence moves and by whose stillness, all are still who dwell in the cities of the Adored One.

So it is that we must cleanse and burnish our hearts (to rid ourselves) of base, corrupting, and abominable imaginings so that the wondrous face of justice will raise its head from behind the

mountain of *Qáf*³⁰ and we could then perceive the transcendence of Eternal felicity and the enchantment of divine love emanating from the quivering wings of the Everlasting Dove and the approbation of the resplendent souls. We could then rest and reside on the cushion of love. This is our supreme desire, the station of *or even closer*.³¹

Also, in all affairs we need to avoid association with those who have turned away from God and not for a moment attempt to justify companionship with them since, according to God, wicked souls will dissolve pure souls, even as flames consume dry wood and heat dissolves the cold snow. *O, refrain from the company of those whose hearts are hard (and) impenetrable to the mention of God.*

In any case, what has been discussed by way of interpreting this verse has been devised as a boon to the insight of those who have turned away (from God) and as a mercy to the eyes of those who (are filled with) such hate

30 *Qáf* is a legendary high mountain made of emerald that surrounds the world and is the place in which the phoenix (*'anqá*) has made its nest. In mystical literature it refers to the spiritual and divine realm in which human hearts need to abide. In the Persian Hidden Word no. 1, "the mount" is a translation of the word *Qáf*: "The first call of the Beloved is this: O mystic nightingale! Abide not but in the rose-garden of the spirit. O messenger of the Solomon of love! Seek thou no shelter except in the Sheba of the well-beloved, and O immortal phoenix! dwell not save on the mount of faithfulness."

31 See note for line 268.

that they would not perceive its meaning, but instead would interpret it according to their own desires.

These poems were uttered during a period of wandering in the region of exile in the lands of the Ottoman Empire,³² and not one of the clergy or the scholars of this region objected or criticized (me), but I imagine that after this interpretation, even the wild beasts among these people will object, and in their delusion will tread the path of vain imagination and error and blindness. *Indeed, this path was taken for God's sake, whether the (people) are thankful or unappreciative and whether (they are) advancing (toward the truth) or fleeing it.*³³ When the seal of the container of musk is opened, everyone with a sense of smell will become aware, while everyone with rheum will be denied. But even if everyone were to become afflicted with rheum, no imperfection would beset the perfume of Eternity nor would any deceit contaminate the musk of Khatá.³⁴

Then praised are You, O Lord my God. I call on You at this time when traces of sadness descended on me from You, traces which, if they overflowed into the realm of existence, would cause both the hidden and the

manifest realms to become annihilated to such an extent that this disturbance would almost cause the soul to depart. By Your grandeur and by Your Hidden Eternity, were I to breathe (a word about my sorrow), the essence of hearts would burn, and the sky and all that is therein would be cleaved, and the earth and all that is thereon would be destroyed. Then, alas, the fragrance of loyalty would never waft from the garden of Glory, and the scent of eternity would never drift from the city of Bahá, and the dove of Amá would never sing on the crimson leaves, and the cock of Glory would never crow in the loftiest realm. By the majesty of the One Whom You made great and Him Whom You made to be the manifestation of Your divinity and the source of Your lordship, I have cannot recall the utterances and all that You taught me in the past from the wonders of Your knowledge and the plentitude of Your wisdom. Even so, I was forgotten and neglected, as if I had never been seen on the plane of existence. By the life of Ali and the persistence of Muhammad and the spirit of the Chosen One and the mercy of the Merciful One and the attraction of the Praised One and the wonderment of the Most Laudable One and the joy of the Beloved One and the glory of the Sanctified One, I cherish no desire to remain in the kingdom of existence, even for a moment, and verily, God Himself is my witness.

32 Present-day Iraq.

33 A reference to Qur'án 76:3.

34 A city in China celebrated for its musk-producing animals: "See foes as friends; see demons as angels; give to the tyrant the same great love ye show the loyal and true, and even as gazelles from the scented cities of *Khatá* and *Khután* offer up sweet musk to the ravening wolf" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 72).

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The Lawh-i-Tibb (Tablet to the Physician) – Beyond Health Maxims¹

MISAGH ZIAEI

Abstract

The Lawh-i-Tibb is a well-known, oft-referenced tablet by Bahá'u'lláh and one of the few explicitly related to medicine and healing. While the health maxims contained in it are often the focus of popular interest, relatively little attention has been paid to other aspects of the tablet. Complicating the study of this important work is the lack of an authorized English translation.² This paper, drawing on provisional

1 I am extremely grateful to Dr. Khazeh Fananapazir and Dr. Stephen Lambden for their masterful translation of the Lawh-i-Tibb and for their extensive research into this tablet. My deepest thanks go out to my family (Fakhroddin Ziaei, Zahra Pourjafar-Ziaei, Mahtab Ziaei, Michael Sabet, and Neda Ziaei) and my wife Jamal Gabriel, all of whom assisted with this manuscript and served as a sounding-board for ideas. I dedicate this paper to the memory of Dr. Rahmatu'llah Muhajir, whose professional and spiritual achievements are a constant source of inspiration to me.

2 See the Department of the Secretariat's letter regarding the difference between authorized English translations of the Bahá'í holy writings by a committee at the Bahá'í World Centre and provisional translations undertaken by individuals for personal or scholarly use.

translations, focuses on the tablet's historical context, its paradigms for the study and practice of medicine, its description of the ideal characteristics of a physician, and its foreshadowing of the evolution of medical science.

Résumé

La Lawh-i-Tibb est une tablette bien connue de Bahá'u'lláh, à laquelle il est souvent fait référence, et l'une des rares qui porte expressément sur la médecine et la guérison. Bien que les préceptes en matière de santé qu'elle contient soient souvent au cœur de l'intérêt qu'elle suscite, relativement peu d'attention a été accordée à d'autres aspects de la tablette. L'absence d'une traduction anglaise autorisée complique l'étude de cet écrit important. S'appuyant sur des traductions provisoires, l'auteur examine le contexte historique de la tablette, ses paradigmes pour l'étude et la pratique de la médecine, sa description des qualités idéales d'un médecin et son anticipation de l'évolution de la science médicale.

Resumen

La Lawh-i-Tibb es una tableta muy conocida y referenciada por Bahá'u'lláh y una de las pocas relacionadas explícitamente con la medicina y la curación. Si bien las máximas de salud contenidas en él a menudo son el foco de interés popular, se ha prestado relativamente poca atención a otros aspectos de la tableta. Para complicar el estudio de este importante trabajo es la falta de una traducción al inglés autorizada. Este artículo documento, basado en traducciones provisionales, se centra en el contexto histórico de la tableta, sus paradigmas para el estudio y la práctica de la medicina, su descripción de las características ideales de un médico y presagiando la evolución de la ciencia médica.

INTRODUCTION

The “Lawh-i-Tibb,” also known as the “Tablet to the Physician” or the “Tablet of Medicine,” was written by Bahá'u'lláh sometime in the early ‘Akká period of His ministry, likely in the early 1870s (Fanapanazir and Lambden 18). The tablet was addressed to Mírzá Muhammad Ridá'-i-Tabib-i-Yazdí, a physician of the traditional style of medicine living in the city of Yazd in Iran (18). The full Arabic and Persian text of the tablet was first published in Cairo in the early 1920s (18),³ while provisional English translations of portions of the tablet began appearing in the periodical *Star of the West* in 1922 (“Physical” 252) and 1930 (Kirkpatrick 160), and in the book *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* in 1923 (Esslemont 106). The first half of the tablet—written in Arabic—discusses mainly topics related to medicine and health and is the focus of this paper. The second half of the tablet was written in Persian and contains “admonitions to Bahá'ís, designed to increase their level of wisdom, devotion and service” (Fanapanazir and Lambden 18); however, I do not intend to discuss this part of the tablet in this paper.

A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi raised the possibility that Bahá'u'lláh wrote the Lawh-i-Tibb in response to questions posed by Mírzá Muhammad Ridá' (*Compilation vol. 1* paragraph 61). Thus far, no definitive evidence has been found to confirm

this possibility (Research Department). Nevertheless, Bahá'u'lláh seems to paraphrase or quote extensively from a wide variety of historical medical texts, which would seem to be in keeping with the tablet being an answer to medical questions posed by Mírzá Muhammad Ridá'. Among these references, Bahá'u'lláh seems to intersperse His own advice. A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi states that the tablet “does not contain much of scientific informations [sic] but has some interesting advices [sic] for keeping healthy” (*Light* 21).

There is no English translation authorized by the Bahá'í World Centre of the full text of this tablet. A provisional translation of the full tablet published by Khazeh Fanapanazir and Stephen Lambden will be used in this paper as the main English translation, as it is the most recently published one. The other full translation of this tablet was done anonymously and was found among the papers of Dwight Barstow, a U.S. Bahá'í (Bahá'u'lláh, “Tablet”). This translation is similar to excerpts of the tablet translated in *Star of the West*, also by an anonymous translator (“Physical” 252; Kirkpatrick 160). The Barstow and *Star of the West* translations will be referred to only where their rendering of the original Arabic departs substantially from the Fanapanazir and Lambden translation. Lines are numbered in this paper to give the reader a sense of the order of information presented in the tablet, but these numbers are not present in the original.

This tablet, mainly referenced for its

3 See Bahá'u'lláh, *Majmu'a-yi al-wah-i mubaraká*, 222–26.

health advice, is one of the few Bahá'í holy writings with specific guidance on nutrition, medication, lifestyle factors (such as exercise), mental health, and spiritual aspects of healing. A detailed study of the health maxims in the tablet is difficult without an authorized translation; thus, these maxims will only be superficially discussed. Largely missing from contemporary discourse in the Bahá'í community is the fact that the tablet describes fundamental concepts related to health and the practice of medicine, as well as the characteristics desired in a physician. In both the explicit statements and implicit conclusions in this tablet, Bahá'u'lláh prophesied the evolution of the practice of medicine.

MEDICINE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY PERSIA

Shoghi Effendi writes,

The Tablet to a Physician was addressed to a man who was a student of the old type of healing prevalent in the East and familiar with the terminology used in those days, and [Bahá'u'lláh] addresses him in terms used by the medical men of those days. These terms are quite different from those used by modern medicine, and one would have to have a deep knowledge of this former school of medicine to understand the questions Bahá'u'lláh was elucidating. (*Compilation vol. 1* paragraph 61)

According to Fananapazir and Lambden (18), the medical maxims and advice contained in the Lawh-i-Tibb are similar to those found in ancient Greek and early Islamic literature. Medical practice in Persia at the time when Bahá'u'lláh wrote the Lawh-i-Tibb included an eclectic blend of traditional and modern—so-called “Western”—concepts (Ebrahimnejad, *Medicine* 7). As explained by Shoghi Effendi in the passage above, Mirzá Muhammad Ridá' likely based his practice on a tradition of ancient Greek medical knowledge that had been expanded upon by various physicians throughout history, including Hippocrates, Alcmaeon, and Avicenna (Pourahmad 96). Unsurprisingly, there were also Zoroastrian and Indian influences on Persian medicine throughout its history (Gignoux). Persian medical textbooks contemporaneous with this tablet were typically written for an audience of both physicians and the lay public (Ebrahimnejad, “Theory” 173), and Bahá'u'lláh seems to employ this approach in the Lawh-i-Tibb.

Humoralism, a medical philosophy that explains disease as a consequence of an imbalance in one or more of four humors (or fluids) of the body, was the central tenet in nineteenth-century traditional Persian medicine. These four humors are blood (*khun*, *dam*), phlegm (*balgam*), yellow bile (*safra*), and black bile (*sawda*), and each of them is associated with a particular organ: the heart, brain, liver, and spleen, respectively (Pourahmad 96). In addition, each of the humors could be described

as either hot (*garm*) or cold (*sard*), and wet (*tar*) or dry (*khoshk*) (Pourahmad 96). In this theory, it is believed that a “vital force” (*Quwwat-i-Mudabbira*) maintains these humors in a dynamic equilibrium and thereby keeps the body healthy (Syeda 971). The correct proportion of these four humors can be affected by six factors,⁴ comprising various environmental, dietary, and psychological influences (Verotta 61). Curing disease often involves suppressing the over-active humor while encouraging the under-active one. Even “modern” Western medicine in the nineteenth century integrated some theories related to humoral medicine (Mahdavi 170).

In 1851, Persia’s first medical school teaching a European-style curriculum was established in Tehran (Pourahmad 98). It was called Dar al-Fanoun, and by 1925, 253 general medical practitioners had trained there. In the same year, from other training settings, there were 652 medical practitioners who had learned medicine through the more traditional, experiential model (Pourahmad 98). Interestingly, the Dar al-Fanoun school provided training in both modern Western and traditional medicine (Ebrahimnejad, *Medicine* 102), in order to quell the conflict between the traditional and modern medical sciences brewing among the lay public, clergy, and medical practitioners (Mahdavi 185).

4 Some sources describe five or seven external factors, but most sources agree on six (Jarcho 372; Berryman 515). Galen originally described six “non-natural” influences on health (Niebyl 486).

Religion and faith practices were an important component of nineteenth-century Persian medicine. The Qur’án was seen as a complete guide to health, and everyone, especially the ‘ulamá (Muslim clergy), was expected to have some knowledge of medicine (Ebrahimnejad, “Theory” 175). Consequently, religious interpretations and practices were often intermingled with medical treatments (175). In fact, prior to the introduction of so-called “Western” medicine in Persia, the ‘ulamá had a “monopoly” on medical education (Mahdavi 186). The ‘ulamá used their knowledge and practice of medicine as a means of maintaining authority and control over the population. Western medicine thus became a threat to the clergy’s power (186). It is in this context that one can glimpse the interaction between Bahá’í religious practice and medicine in the *Lawh-i-Tibb*.

Traditional medical practitioners in nineteenth-century Persia were known by various designations (*tabib*, *hakim*, *mo’alej*, among others), depending on their area of expertise (Ebrahimnejad, “Theory” 173). The designation *tabib* typically denoted a practitioner who treated illness through the use of diet and medications, while other titles were often nebulous in meaning (173). In addition, other practitioners—such as barbers, bath attendants, and bone-setters—performed some medical tasks (173).

There were several Western-trained physicians in Iran during the 1800s, some of whom were well known in Persia’s upper class. One of these was

Dr. William Cormick, an Irish-Armenian physician living in Tabriz in 1848 (Momen). He attended to the Báb while the latter was imprisoned in Tabriz (Browne 260). It is noteworthy that when the Báb was offered medical assistance for a facial injury inflicted during an interrogation there, instead of requesting a Persian surgeon, He asked specifically for Dr. Cormick. The doctor's report, written directly to the Shah himself, helped temporarily save the Báb's life (Browne 261).

MEDICINE AS SCIENCE:

ESTABLISHED MEANS, CAUSE AND EFFECT, AND ATTAINING EQUILIBRIUM

In the Lawh-i-Tibb, Bahá'u'lláh describes medicine as the “science of healing,” and explicitly advocates a scientific and rational approach to practicing it:

41 Say: The science of healing is the most noble of all the sciences.

42 Verily, it is the greatest instrument given by God, the Quickener of mouldering bones, for the preservation of the bodies of peoples. God hath given it precedence over all sciences and branches of wisdom.

20 Counter disease by utilizing established means (*bi'l-asbab*).

21 This utterance is the decisive command in this discourse. (Fanapanazir and Lambden 23)⁵

To paraphrase: medicine is a “science of healing” that seeks to discover and use proven therapies (“established means”) to counter disease.

Since the time this tablet was written, humanity's knowledge of “established means” has been shaped by a remarkable evolution in scientific knowledge, both in medical fields such as anatomy, physiology, microbiology, and nutrition, and in related disciplines such as chemistry, biology, epidemiology, psychology, physics, and mathematics. These scientific discourses have helped us understand the causes and consequences of disease, have allowed us to perform diagnostic tests with accuracy and reproducibility, have given us therapeutic targets, have created a common vocabulary, and have resulted in a systematic approach to further research.

Having designated medicine a science, Bahá'u'lláh describes two concepts in relation to its study and practice. The first concept is the phenomenon of cause and effect:

27 We, assuredly, have decreed a cause (*sababan*) for all things and vouchsafed everything with an effect (*al-athar*).

28 All of this is by virtue of the effulgence of My Name, the Efficacious (“Producer of Effects,” *al-mu'aththir*) upon existing things. (Fanapanazir and Lambden 23)

20 and 21 thus: “Search for the cause of disease. This saying is the end of this speech” (Bahá'u'lláh, “Tablet”).

5 Another translation renders lines

The second concept is the equilibrium among various constituents of the human body. In describing the effects that His instructions will have on the body, Bahá'u'lláh employs the medical terminology used in theories of humorism—terms that were familiar to the tablet's recipient:

30 Say: Through all that which We have expounded the [equilibrium of the] four humours (*al-akh-lat*) will not exceed their moderate balance (*al-i'tidal*); neither will their measures deviate from their mean conditions.⁶

31 The [human constitutional] foundation will remain in its purity and the “sixth part” and the “sixth of the sixth part” (*wa'l-suds wa suds al-suds*) in their stable condition.⁷

32 The twin active forces (*fa'ilan*) and the twin passive realities (*munfa'ilan*) will be rendered whole. (Fananapazir and Lambden 23)

Line 30 suggests that Bahá'u'lláh's teachings—either those conveyed in this tablet or throughout His entire

6 The Barstow translation offers a slightly different perspective on this passage: “Say: From what We have explained, the humors of the body should not be excessive and their quantity depends upon the condition of the body” (Bahá'u'lláh, “Tablet”).

7 Another translation suggests the following: “One sixth of each sixth part in its normal condition (is the right proportion)” (Bahá'u'lláh, “Tablet”).

revelation—will help one achieve a healthy equilibrium among the four humors as well as healthy levels of each.

Fananapazir and Lambden provisionally translate a quote from Bahá'u'lláh wherein He answers a question regarding line 31 of this tablet (47).⁸ In His explanation, Bahá'u'lláh states that the “sixth part” and the “sixth of the sixth part” are referring to humoral balance. Interestingly, He also says that this description of humoral balance “accords with the belief of the people” (47). In adding this qualifier, Bahá'u'lláh may indicate He is utilizing terms and humoral concepts so that the people of the time (especially the recipient of this tablet) could understand. To a modern reader, this response on His part might suggest that Bahá'u'lláh's knowledge of scientific reality transcends the knowledge of His time, while these theories of humoral balance may be at best an incomplete understanding of medicine, and at worst a faulty medical paradigm.

Notably, Bahá'u'lláh also states that there are “other explanations” for line 31 (Fananapazir and Lambden 47). To give one such explanation, this line could refer to the six “un-natural” (or external) influences that can affect the levels of humors in the body: air (or environment), food and drink, sleep and wakefulness, motion and rest, evacuation and repletion, and passions of the mind (Barryman 517). These influences formed part of the classical Greek (Barryman 517) and Islamic (Deuraseh 4)

8 For the source of the quote, see Bahá'u'lláh, *Ma'ida-yi Asmani*.

understanding of hygiene and preventive health, and were also part of therapeutic modalities for a number of diseases (Barryman 517).

The “active forces” and “passive realities” from line 32 are terms first used by Aristotle to describe the properties of the physical world (Ma’ani). The “twin active forces” are the properties of cold and warm, while the “twin passive realities” are those of wet and dry (Aristotle 482). The Islamic philosopher al-Kindi believed that medicines worked by exerting certain effects based on their physical qualities of warmth, coldness, wetness, or dryness (Ma’ani). In declaring that His teachings would bring about equilibrium in the human body, Bahá’u’lláh is using terms that were likely familiar to Mulla Muhammad Ridá’. Interestingly, in His Tablet of Wisdom, Bahá’u’lláh refers to the “active force” while describing the origin of the physical universe (*Tablets* 140).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in one of His tablets, expounds on the theme of equilibrium in health and disease, and encourages the “temperance and moderation of a natural way of life” (*Selections* 153). In this same tablet, He refers to medicine as a “science,” and on two separate occasions He emphasizes that the concept of equilibrium in medicine “requireth the most careful investigation” (*Selections* 153–54).

CHARACTERISTICS OF A PHYSICIAN

In the Lawh-i-Tibb, Bahá’u’lláh describes features that would be desirable

in a physician. As mentioned in the previous section, physicians are encouraged to be rational in their search for the causes and effects of disease, and to regard medicine as a science. They are to look for ways of re-establishing equilibrium in the patient, and to use established means in their medical practice. Bahá’u’lláh also counsels the tablet’s recipient to approach treatment methodically; in the following example, He advises using foods to heal before resorting to medicines:

8 Treat an illness firstly with nutrients (or foods, alimants, *agh-dhiya*) and proceed not [immediately] unto medications (*adwiyat*). (Fanapanazir and Lambden 22)

Another desirable attribute for physicians to manifest is a humility born from an understanding that God is ultimately responsible for healing, and therefore, both the patient and the physician should turn to God for assistance:

29 Verily, thy Lord is the One who exercises command over all that He wills.

33 And upon God is all our trust.

34 There is no God but Him, the true Healer, the Omniscient, the One Whose succor is sought by all. (Fanapanazir and Lambden 23)

Wisdom is another highly prized attribute cited in the tablet, because it allows the physician to withhold or

remove medical treatment when it is not needed:

6 Do not avoid medical treatment (*al-'ilaj*) when thou hast need of it but abandon it when thy constitution hath been restored (*istiqamat*).

10 Abandon medication (*al-da-wa'*) when thou art healthy but take hold of it when thou hast need thereof. (Fananapazir and Lambden 22)

Finally, Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes the importance of physicians being firm in their faith. For example, He encourages what may be prayer and reflection on His writings ("remembrance of thy Lord") as part of a physician's treatment regimen.

35 O Physician!

36 Firstly, heal thou the sick ones with the Remembrance of thy Lord (*bi-dhikr rabbika*), the Lord of the Day of Mutual Invocation (*yawm al-tanad*) and afterwards by that which We have ordained for the health of the constitutions of the servants.

37 By My life!

38 Merely attaining the presence of the physician who has drunk of the Wine of My Love confers healing and his mere breath brings mercy and hope.

39 Say: Adhere to him for the restoration of the body's well-being.

40 For, verily, such a physician is assisted by God for the treatment of ills.

In this same vein, the tablet contains a short healing prayer, which has been authoritatively translated by Shoghi Effendi:

Thy name is my healing, O my God, and remembrance of Thee is my remedy. Nearness to Thee is my hope, and love for Thee is my companion. Thy mercy to me is my healing and my succor in both this world and the world to come. Thou, verily, art the All-Bountiful, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, chapter 170)

IN THE ABSENCE OF PHYSICIANS

In the third line of the tablet, Bahá'u'lláh makes a profound statement that provides much insight into the tablet itself:

3 The Tongue of the Ancient of Days utters that which shall be a sufficient treasure for the wise ones in the absence of physicians. (Fananapazir and Lambden 22)

By describing His revealed writings as a "sufficient treasure" when no physician is available, Bahá'u'lláh seems to be implying that physicians are to be consulted for matters of health.⁹

9 Bahá'u'lláh explicitly enjoins people to consult "competent physicians" in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (paragraph 113).

It is worth noting that if a physician is available, he or she may conceivably treat a patient in a way that is at variance with Bahá'u'lláh's injunctions in this tablet and, presumably, elsewhere. In Bahá'u'lláh's other writings, He permits exemptions to certain Bahá'í laws if advised by a physician. For instance, Bahá'u'lláh forbids the taking of alcohol or "opium and similar habit-forming drugs," unless specifically prescribed by a physician (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* notes 144 and 170; *Compilation* vol. 2, 247). Another example can be found in a statement by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

should a physician console a patient and say, "Thank God, you are doing better and there is hope for your recovery," although these words may be contrary to the truth, yet sometimes they will ease the patient's mind and become the means of curing the illness. And this is not blameworthy. (*Some Answered Questions* 215–16)

Here again, even though Bahá'u'lláh exhorts His followers to be truthful,¹⁰ the physician is exempt from being absolutely truthful in such an instance as cited above.

Another implication of this verse concerning the absence of a physician could relate to humoral medicine. The tablet's recipient was a physician who presumably used humoral theory in his medical practice. Bahá'u'lláh may be implying that in the absence of doctors

such as the recipient, the injunctions in this tablet would be sufficient to produce a balance of the humors. Consequently, one may not need the services of a doctor trained according to humoral theory if one follows the tablet's advice in this regard. This interpretation is further corroborated by lines 30 to 32 (described above), which seem to indicate that the key to balancing the humors lies in the tablet's counsels—though there could be a bit of irony in line 3, as Bahá'u'lláh is explaining to a physician how a patient can stay healthy without a physician. This line is also reminiscent of a book by Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyya al-Razi (also known as Rhazes) that is entitled *Man La Yahduruhu al-Tabib* (Meri 672), translated as "For one without doctor" (Mollazadeh 1154) or "He who has no physician to attend him" (Osborn).

Finally, Bahá'u'lláh does not specify to what or to whom He is referring when He uses the word "physician." The Universal House of Justice has stated that "no specific school of nutrition or medicine has been associated with the Bahá'í teachings" (*Compilation* vol. 1, 488). As we have noted, in nineteenth-century Persia, there were a variety of medical practitioners (Ebrahimnejad, "Theory" 173). Such diversity persists in the present day, as there are a variety of medical and surgical specialties, often with overlapping areas of practice. In addition, disciplines such as nursing, nutrition, physiotherapy, speech language pathology, and others are also involved in the treatment of and care for patients.

¹⁰ See, for example, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 119.

HEALTH MAXIMS

DIET AND NUTRITION

A considerable part of the tablet concerns diet and nutrition. Bahá'u'lláh counsels the reader regarding healthy eating as well as treatment of illness through diet. This emphasis on nutrition is in keeping with one possible purpose of the tablet: to give advice on health to the general population when a physician (who can prescribe medication or another treatment) is unavailable. However, another possibility is that Bahá'u'lláh revealed this tablet specifically for its recipient; Mirzá Muhammad Ridá's title was *tabib*, which typically denoted a medical practitioner who treated illness through diet and medications (Ebrahimnejad, "Theory" 173).

In brief, Bahá'u'lláh draws attention to the relationship between eating and prayer; the proper order, timing, and chewing of food; foods to avoid; what to do after eating; the importance of eating breakfast; the dangers of over-eating; and food as medicine. As mentioned earlier, line eight of the tablet contains the following advice:

8 Treat an illness firstly with nutrients (or foods, aliments, *agh-dhiya*) and proceed not [immediately] unto medications (*adwiyat*). (Fanapanazir and Lambden 22)¹¹

11 Another translation renders line 8 as follows: "Treat disease first of all through the diet and refrain from medicines" (Bahá'u'lláh, "Tablet").

In this line, Bahá'u'lláh clearly wants the reader to first use diet to cure illness. Based on His injunction to leave off medications when the "constitution hath been restored" (Lawh-i-Tibb line 6),¹² only when food does not produce healing should medications be used.

Bahá'u'lláh implies that meditating on the health-related maxims contained in this tablet, would be "a sufficient treasure for the wise ones in the absence of physicians" (Lawh-i-Tibb line 3). One possible reading of line eight might thus be that in the absence of physicians, patients are to first treat their illness through diet rather than through self-medication. This reading of the line is further corroborated by Bahá'u'lláh's prefacing line 4 (and the beginning of His list of health-related maxims) with this general invocation to humanity as a whole:

4 O People! Eat not except after having hungered, and drink not after retiring to sleep (*al-huju*'). (Fanapanazir and Lambden 22)

The first half of this line may be seen as a warning against eating for reasons other than hunger, such as depression, boredom, stress, or, more obviously, gluttony. A thread running throughout the tablet is that people should be aware of their "natural, inborn equilibrium" (*Selections* 152) and of their attendant body signals. In the first part

12 "Do not avoid medical treatment (*al-'ilaj*) when thou hast need of it but abandon it when thy constitution hath been restored (*istiqamat*)."

of line four, Bahá'u'lláh specifically draws our attention to the hunger signal. The second half of this line, however, deserves further consideration.

Fananapazir and Lambden (31–33) provide an excellent review of the Arabic word *al-huju'* and its possible meanings, with reference to Greco-Islamic medical sources. In each of the three translations referenced in this paper, the word *al-huju'* has been translated as “sleep.” It can, in fact, also be translated as being satisfied, appeased, or subsided (as it relates to hunger) (Steingass 1165; Wehr 1195). So, line four could be read as Bahá'u'lláh cautioning against drinking fluids (or taking in food of any kind) after having achieved satisfaction (or satiety) with a meal. Pursuing this reading, and assuming that eating and drinking are essentially the same action, Bahá'u'lláh's injunction may be paraphrased as: do not eat except when needed to overcome hunger, and do not overeat.

LIFESTYLE HABITS

Some of the health maxims in the tablet concern healthy lifestyle habits, such as exercise and “purification of the bowels”:

25 Purification of the bowels (*tanqiyat al-fudul*) constitutes a pillar [of health, *al-'umdat*] when accomplished in the temperate seasons (*al-fusul al-mu'tadila*). (Fananapazir and Lambden 23)

Another translation of the same line

reads: “To cleanse the body is essential, but only in temperate seasons (should it be done frequently)” (Bahá'u'lláh, “Tablet”).

This line is sparse in details, but a comparison of the two translations above may assist the reader in arriving at a reasonable interpretation. “Purification of the bowels” performed in the “temperate” seasons, which acts to “cleanse” the body, may be a reference to fasting, and in particular the Bahá'í Fast. Bahá'u'lláh lived in the northern hemisphere, and the Bahá'í Fast occurs in March, which coincides with the northern hemisphere's temperate season.

MEDICATIONS

Bahá'u'lláh gives advice on the appropriate use of medications for illness. He differentiates between “elemental nutrients” and “compound treatments”:

9 If that which thou desire results from elemental nutrients (*al-mufradat*) refrain from the compound treatments (*al-murakkabat*). (Fananapazir and Lambden 22)

As stated in line 3 (see above), this tablet provides advice to the reader in the absence of a physician (whose training allows him or her to supersede the above advice). In this case, the first appropriate pharmacological treatment should be one that is composed of a single medicinal ingredient, or “elemental nutrient.” Because measuring the effectiveness of a treatment is more

straightforward when a single medicine is used rather than a compound one, this advice implicitly reinforces a methodical and logical approach to the practice of medicine.

MENTAL HEALTH

Some of Bahá'u'lláh's health maxims also concern mental health, specifically the avoidance of harmful habits of the mind, such as substance addiction, anxiousness and depression, and envy and rage, as well as the importance of striving to attain a condition of contentment under all circumstances. As we can see from the relevant passages quoted below from Fananapazir and Lambden's translation, each admonition is accompanied by a brief rationale:

19 Eschew harmful habits [i.e. addictive substances (*al-i'ada al-mudirra*)] for they truly, are a calamity for created beings. (22–23)

23 Eschew anxiety (*al-hamma*) and depression (*al-ghamm*) for through both of these will transpire a darksome affliction (*bala' adham*). (23)

24 Say: Envy (*al-hasad*) consumeth the body and rage (or anger, wrath, *al-ghayz*) burneth the liver: avoid these two as ye would a fierce lion (*al-asad*). (23)

22 Most necessary to thy well-being is contentment

(*al-qana'at*) under all circumstances for through it will the soul be saved from sloth and ill-being. (23)

FINAL THOUGHTS

In the *Lawh-i-Tibb*, medicine is described as a harmonious blend between the physical and the spiritual, the practical and the mystical. The tablet enjoins a rational approach to the study and practice of medicine and encourages humanity to discover medical truths. This same approach is invoked in another of Bahá'u'lláh's writings, where humanity is urged to free itself “from idle fancy and imitation,” and to “look into all things with a searching eye” (*Tablets* 157). This exhortation stands in contrast to the study and practice of medicine in Persia during the time this tablet was written, both of which were largely under the control of the 'ulama (Mahdavi 186; Ebrahimnejad, “Theory” 175), who would blend medical prescriptions with rituals, prayer (Mahdavi 186), astrology, and magic (Ebrahimnejad, “Theory” 175). By challenging any part of established medical knowledge or practice, Bahá'u'lláh may have been understood by some to be challenging the power and authority of the clergy.

As we noted at the outset, many of Bahá'u'lláh's health injunctions are similar to those found in antiquity (*Tablet* 19–21). Likewise, many of the diverse composers of authoritative medical texts in nineteenth-century Persia, ranging from the Twelver Shia Imam's to empiricists like al-Razi,

drew on knowledge first recorded by ancient Greeks. To illuminate this intellectual lineage, Fananapazir and Lambden (18–53) have cross-referenced Bahá'u'lláh's health injunctions with both ancient and more contemporary Greco-Islamic medical literature.

Why does Bahá'u'lláh extensively quote and paraphrase past medical sources, which may have already been familiar to the tablet's recipient? Assuming the Lawh-i-Tibb was revealed in the same rapid and uninterrupted manner as many of Bahá'u'lláh's writings, a reader of the tablet might consider this work to be miraculous, given His ability to effortlessly quote or closely paraphrase such a number and breadth of sources. There are examples of this impressive feat in Bahá'u'lláh's other writings, too; in His Lawh-i-Hikmat, Bahá'u'lláh quotes verbatim from well-known historians of antiquity, demonstrating to the reader His knowledge of, and authority on, historical matters.¹³ He also extensively quotes (in a similarly rapid and uninterrupted manner) from His own decades-long corpus of writings in His *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*. These demonstrations may have the effect of galvanizing a reader's faith in Him.

By extensively quoting medical sources, Bahá'u'lláh (who never received any formal medical training)

13 Bahá'u'lláh's reason for quoting these historians is "that the eyes of the people may be opened thereby and that they may become fully assured that He is in truth the Maker, the Omnipotent, the Creator, the Originator, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise" (*Tablets* 144).

was also demonstrating that He was conversant with the medical knowledge of His time. To any contemporaneous reader of the tablet, Bahá'u'lláh speaks as an authority on medicine. This authority is important, given Bahá'u'lláh's challenge in the tablet to elevate medicine to a scientific discipline above the reach of ecclesiastical control and superstition.

Does Bahá'u'lláh endorse the medical advice that He references? On the one hand, He does not explicitly suggest that this advice is faulty, nor does He implicitly critique it as He may have critiqued the humoral theory elsewhere in His writings.¹⁴ On the other hand, Bahá'u'lláh may be hinting that the medical advice in the tablet can be superseded by physicians and by medical science in general.¹⁵ One possibility is that Bahá'u'lláh omitted any critique of the health advice in the interests of wisdom and conciliation, evoking His well-known maxim, "Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it" (*Gleanings* 176). Moreover, from the perspective of a modern reader, none of the health advice is unreasonable or dangerous to follow. And one must remember that Bahá'u'lláh uses terminology that the tablet's recipient would

14 See discussion above; also see Fananapazir and Lambden (47) for their provisional translation of a tablet from *Ma'ida-yi Asmani*.

15 Lawh-i-Tibb, line 3.

understand, rather than more accurate terms that would have been unintelligible to His audience.

This tablet is the first instance in which the Founder of a major world religion calls for medicine to be viewed as a science (utilizing proven diagnostics and therapies) and specifically advocates for paradigms (cause-effect and equilibrium) meant to help it advance in a rational way. In retrospect, Bahá'u'lláh's description of medicine is prophetic. In the years since the tablet was written, medical science has, in many ways, evolved and matured far beyond what physicians contemporaneous with the tablet could have imagined. To determine the cause of illness, the modern physician, aware of disease categories and how commonly they present, is trained to obtain a thorough history and to use validated, evidence-based physical exam maneuvers and tools, such as diagnostic imaging and laboratory tests, to arrive at a list of possible diagnoses. These same maneuvers and tools allow for ongoing monitoring of the equilibrium in the body. A physician anywhere in the world can, using a common vocabulary and shared understanding, discuss a patient's case with a physician elsewhere.

In nineteenth-century Persia, conflict existed between practitioners of Western and traditional medicine (Mahdavi 185). Disagreements on medical diagnosis and treatment aside, other factors played into their conflict, such as medicine's role in the social, political, and religious control of the masses (185). The *Lawh-i-Tibb* seems

to provide a point of conciliation and a common frame of reference for these opposed practitioners, in that Bahá'u'lláh wrote the tablet in a style accessible to any reader, and He used terms familiar to both Western-trained and traditionally-trained physicians.

Bahá'u'lláh also challenges both types of physicians: while possibly casting doubt on the time-honored beliefs about humoral theory held by traditionalists, He also affirms the role of God and spirituality in medicine, which may have been, and may still be, difficult for "Western" medicine to accept. Today, this dichotomization between "Western" "allopathic" medicine and "traditional" "holistic" medicine continues. Bahá'u'lláh's focus on fundamental concepts in medicine (such as cause and effect, equilibrium in the body, use of established means, and spirituality in healing) can form the basis of a discourse to which anyone—lay public or physician of any kind—can contribute, and the discussion of which will likely be at the heart of ongoing efforts to unify medicine.

Bahá'u'lláh, speaking from a place of authority, refers to medicine as a science. Scientific discovery involves, among other things, justice, consultation, and putting ego aside in preference for the search for truth. The vast Bahá'í teachings shed light on these and many other relevant concepts. In this way, as it does for all other fields of human endeavor, Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation provides a foundational framework for the study and practice of the science of medicine.

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Genesis in *King Lear*: Joseph's Many- Colored Coat Suits Shakespeare

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“If we tire of the saints,
Shakespeare is our city of refuge.”
— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Abstract

A luminary of five religions, Joseph of Egypt looms larger than life. Bahá'u'lláh even likens Himself to “the Divine Joseph” (*Gleanings* 103:4). However, Joseph's gradual unveiling as a minor prophet also renders him humanly relatable in ways a Manifestation of God can never be. In the West, Shakespeare and the Bible have each served as paths to knowledge, and their union a way to wisdom. That assertion proves especially true upon comparing Joseph's odyssey of becoming with Edgar's in *King Lear*. Both the prophet and the fictional character, each brother-betrayed, transform unjust adversity into psychological and spiritual growth. They each attain an exemplary sovereignty of self over and above their separate temporal kingships. A comparison of the two affords a deeper appreciation of Joseph's prominent place in scripture, particularly in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Résumé

Luminaire de cinq religions, Joseph d'Égypte est un personnage plus grand que nature. Se référant à lui-même, Bahá'u'lláh s'est même décrit comme le « divin Joseph » (*Florilèges*, 103:4). Cependant, le fait que Joseph s'est dévoilé peu à peu en tant que prophète mineur lui confère aussi, de diverses façons, une dimension humaine que l'on ne pourrait jamais prêter à une Manifestation de Dieu. En Occident, Shakespeare et la Bible, pris séparément, ont servi de chemins vers la connaissance; conjugués, ils ont été une voie vers la sagesse. Cette affirmation se révèle particulièrement vraie si l'on compare l'odyssée de l'évolution de Joseph avec celle d'Edgar dans la pièce *King Lear*. Tous deux trahis par leurs frères, tant le prophète que le personnage de fiction transforment leur adversité injuste en croissance psychologique et spirituelle. Chacun d'eux atteint une souveraineté personnelle exemplaire au-delà de leurs royautes temporelles distinctes. Une comparaison des deux permet de mieux apprécier la place prééminente de Joseph dans les Écritures, en particulier dans les Écrits de Bahá'u'lláh.

Resumen

Una luminaria de cinco religiones, Joseph de Egipto parece más grande que la vida. Bahá'u'lláh incluso se compara con “el Divino Joseph” (*Gleanings* 103:4). Sin embargo, la presentación gradual de Joseph como un profeta menor también lo hace humanamente identificable en formas en que una Manifestación de Dios nunca puede ser. En Occidente, Shakespeare y la Biblia han servido como caminos hacia el conocimiento, y su unión como un camino hacia la sabiduría. Esa afirmación resulta especialmente cierta al comparar la odisea de Joseph de convertirse con la de Edgar

en *King Lear*. Tanto el profeta como el personaje ficticio, cada uno traicionado por su hermano, transforman la adversidad injusta en un crecimiento psicológico y espiritual. Cada uno de ellos alcanza una soberanía ejemplar de sí mismo por encima de sus reinos temporales separados. Una comparación de los dos ofrece una apreciación más profunda del lugar prominente de Joseph en las Escrituras, particularmente en los Escritos de Bahá'u'lláh.

The remarkable figure of Joseph, known for his striking beauty—both physical and moral—shines as a luminary in the scriptures of five different religions. To Jews, he is the Abrahamic link between Moses and the twelve tribes of Israel. To Christians, he is a predecessor to the suffering Christ. To Muslims, he is a prophet—the only prophet to whom an entire chapter of the Qur'án is devoted. The very first work revealed by the Báb, on the first night of the Bábí Dispensation, was His commentary on this Surah of Joseph. Thus, over millennia, and through multiple spiritual dispensations, Joseph looms as a larger-than-life figure, seemingly unapproachable and inimitable. His spotless chastity alone renders him a most formidable male role model.

Shakespeare's character of Edgar helps us in approaching the seemingly peerless Joseph. However, before undertaking that comparison, fairness dictates that we underscore Joseph's matchless influence. Numerous Bahá'í scholars have written of him at length, likening Joseph to "a kaleidoscopic motif" (Stokes) present wherever one turns in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh.

"Imagine the Bahá'í writings," poses Todd Lawson, "without those four tropes of the Covenant, fragrance, the garment and beauty. And there are many more Josephian tropes throughout the Bahá'í corpus than those four" (*Return of Joseph*).

Edgar and Joseph are both examples of the betrayed brother, an archetype as ancient as Cain and Abel and one as lethal a threat in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life as in Bahá'u'lláh's. However Joseph, unlike Edgar, also serves as a divine archetype. Identified as a prophet in the Kitáb-i-Íqán (212, 254), Joseph represents the all-forgiving Sufferer, the imprisoned Promised One, the longed-for Beloved, as well as the gradually unveiled divine Manifestation. So powerful is Joseph as a transcendent prototype that in the first book revealed by the Báb's, the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá', we see that "Joseph symbolizes the Báb Himself" (Saiedi 142), while Shoghi Effendi identifies Bahá'u'lláh as "the true Joseph" (23). And yet, unlike the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, Joseph is not a Manifestation of God, but a minor prophet."¹ Therefore, Joseph can also

1 "Bahá'u'lláh explained that the Divine Will of God does sometimes choose ordinary people as 'prophets' and inspires them to play certain roles in human affairs. Examples include the Hebrew prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. Still others have been inspired as 'seers' or 'saints.' Not even the prophets, however, are anywhere close to the station of the Manifestations, Who provide humankind with God's infallible Revelation. The prophets are still ordinary men and women whose powers of inspiration have been developed and used by God"

serve as a human archetype. Whereas the Manifestation of God possesses innate knowledge, reveals the Creative Word, and exemplifies a perfected state of being, a prophet, like other human beings, is a *created* work in progress—in a state of becoming.

When it comes to human nature, no writer has portrayed and dramatized our psychological depth and complexity like William Shakespeare. In his plays, the created word attains its loftiest heights. In fact, Harold Bloom, the modern dean of Shakespearean scholarship, elevates the Bard of Avon's plays to a station just below that of the Creative Word—as evidenced by the title of his text, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. As the literary critic Robert Atwan is moved to remark:

It is a gigantic, intriguing—and by all means a provocative—leap from imagining a Shakespeare who is the “sphere of humanity” to imagining that he outright *invented* humanity. But what exactly does that mean? . . .

When Shakespeare began to write there was very little systematic study of the human mind and emotions. However, when Bloom claims that Shakespeare invented the human, he doesn't merely mean that he pioneered these psychological fields in literature before they became established in what gradually became our modern disciplines. According to

Bloom, Shakespeare—especially in his creation of Falstaff and Hamlet—so utterly altered human consciousness that after him the world was a different place and we were different creatures. In other words, Shakespeare *re-created* humanity. (Atwan)

One might contend that Bloom is given to hyperbole, if not idolatry, especially when he claims that if “any author has become a mortal god, it must be Shakespeare” (*Shakespeare* 3). Then again, we might very well say to him, as King Lear says to his daughter Cordelia, “You have some cause” (*Shakespeare* 4.7.74). In fact, in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, we see the human prototype of Joseph portrayed in the character of Edgar. Whereas Joseph as divine archetype—and as an exemplar of male chastity—can prove intimidating, Joseph's human incarnation as Edgar helps readers grasp that personal transformation is more readily within their reach.

In contrast to Joseph, who is found in the scriptures of so many religions and whose story is known by so many followers of those religions, Edgar is by no means the first dramatic hero who leaps to the mind of even the most ardent lover of Shakespearean tragedy. And yet, upon comparing their mutual odysseys of transformation, we discover a psychological depth to Joseph and a metaphysical depth to Edgar. The former suddenly becomes more humanly imitable; the latter more spiritually heroic. As they raise themselves out of

the lowest depths of the most violent tests—both favored by fathers, then betrayed by brothers—these men evolve as consummate archetypes for weathering unjust adversity. On their ascent from naked homelessness, eschewing self-pity and blame, both sons inhabit numerous social roles, defining themselves by none, identifying themselves instead with a quest for self-mastery. As a result, they attain a sovereignty over self as forces for good in society. As wayfarers on life's journey, Joseph and Edgar prove as persevering as Odysseus, and as relatable as anyone who has ever had to start over again.

CAN CLOTHES MAKE THE (HU)MAN?

“A tailor make a man?”

— *King Lear* 2.2.58

Just as we often change clothes for different roles or tasks (to go on a hike, on a date, or on a job interview), our dreams about clothing (coats, shoes, hats) might be seen as symbolizing a possible or necessary role change. In like manner, dreams of being naked often indicate the vulnerability of our current persona or way of being. Wearing a disguise is an intentional concealing of identity, sometimes to hide from our weaknesses, sometimes to experiment with other ways of engaging with the world (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 316). So when the Joseph of *Genesis* receives a coat of many colors from his father Jacob, we pay attention (Genesis 37:3).

As a rainbow includes all color possibilities, such a garment suggests the many roles Joseph will inhabit during the adventures of his mythic life. However, Shakespeare gives us no symbolic rainbow robe in the comfortless *King Lear*. We receive no hint that Edgar will also evolve into a man for all seasons. But like Joseph, Edgar proves to be equally multifaceted when, multi-garbed as an outcast, he evolves exemplary skills for weathering unjust adversity. Both youths thus personify how one can blossom by becoming a master of transformation. It is no wonder that Joseph *is* the last word in *Genesis* and Edgar *has* the last word in Shakespeare's great drama. The characters of both great works deserve our close attention, if we too would be king—not of Egypt or Britain—but of the multiple identities we disguise ourselves with. “Let all be set free from the multiple identities that were born of passion and desire,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá urges, “and in the oneness of their love for God find a new way of life” (*Selections* 36:3).

At the outset of their stories, both Joseph and Edgar are flawed, naïve young men. Joseph foolishly—even boastfully—tells his brothers of two inflated dreams he has had. In one, he says, the sun, moon and stars bowed down to him. In the other, his brothers bowed down to him. His father scolds him for recounting such dreams. Jacob knows his other sons are already envious of their younger brother because he himself favors Joseph. But Jacob unwisely makes no effort to hide his

preference—even gifting only Joseph with a beautiful coat. Alas, Joseph compounds the problem. Whether naïve, vain or willfully blind, the youth flaunts his favorite-son status:

So with this coat, this very fancy and high-priced coat, Joseph goes sa-shaying in to his brothers and says, “Oh, and another thing, boys, I had a dream last night that you all are going to be bowing down to me.” Whether Joseph was arrogant or what, a lot of the Muslim exegesis says he was put in the well of his own self love; that, in fact, he has a reputation for being very much in love with himself in the Haggadah—the stories of the prophets that accompany the Quranic tale, in the legends of the Jews that you read you see that Joseph was considered almost effeminate because of his beauty, and waltzing around the compound and lording it over the others because of this beauty (Lawson).

Consequently, Joseph first appears, not as a perfect exemplar, but as a work in progress. Later, in Egypt, when Potiphar’s wife Zuleikha repeatedly attempts to seduce him, and even makes him strut his handsome stuff for her female friends, Joseph struggles to remain chaste. “O my Lord! I prefer the prison to compliance with their bidding,” he is moved to pray, “but unless Thou turn away their snares from me, I shall play the youth with them, and become one of the unwise” (Qur’án 12:31–33). When spurned, Zuleikha falsely accuses Joseph of rape and has him imprisoned. Yet again, he displays understandable human frailty. As a

fellow prisoner is released, Joseph asks the freed man to put in a good word for him with their mutual former master. However, if God is sufficient unto him, the Qur’án suggests, in Him alone should the trusting trust: “But Satan caused him to forget the remembrance of his Lord, so he remained some years in prison” (Qur’án 12:42).² As the Haggadah explains, “Satan induced Joseph to place his confidence in man, rather than in God alone, in punishment of which sin the imprisonment was continued” (Roswell 234).

Indeed, Joseph’s “sin” might very well make us wonder how fully any of us trusts in God. After all, who among us has not sought favor or influence from a fellow human being rather than from the All-Sufficing? Thus, the delayed and gradual unveiling of Joseph as a prophet allows him to be portrayed with flaws and perceived as a relatable human being. It is no wonder that for three thousand years people have both revered and empathized with Joseph, and that the Prophet Muhammad called his story “the most beautiful of stories” (Qur’án 12:3). Nonetheless, the initial naïveté of both Joseph and Edgar invites malevolent reactions out of all proportion to their innocent natures. Joseph’s envious brothers actually set out to murder him: “Come let us slay the dreamer. . . and we will see what will become of his dream” (Genesis 37:19–20). In Shakespeare’s play, Edmund, the

2 This incident might lead the reader to recall a powerful verse taught to other falsely imprisoned believers by Bahá’u’lláh, three millennia later.

bastard brother of Edgar, also seethes with envy because of their father's preferential treatment of his "legitimate" son. Blind to his brother's envy, Edgar, "[w]hose nature is so far from doing harms/ That he suspects none" (Shakespeare 1.2.185–86) gullibly accepts embittered Edmund's lies (about their father's alleged wrath) as truth. Like Joseph, he too loses his home, and almost his life, due to brotherly deceit. Both Joseph and Edgar find themselves exiled—not just from their homes—but also from their selves. "Edgar I nothing am" (2.3.21). Both men are stripped of their garments of identity, as well as being literally stripped naked: Joseph of his coat of many colors and Edgar "the naked fellow" (4.1.40) of all but a blanket—"else we had been all shamed," quips the Fool about such scant covering (3.4.64). Both sons are disrobed of their grandiose sense of self as the favorite child. According to Shakespeare's drama, naked or "unaccommodated man," stripped of the "lendings" of civilization—social personas and comforting self-concepts—becomes reduced to "the thing itself." And unless "such a poor, bare, forked animal" re-creates himself in his Maker's image, he will remain "no more than this" (3.4.101–107). The character of King Lear presents a sobering example of how painfully difficult is the human challenge to personally transform ourselves into the "better angels of our nature" (Lincoln). However, a ray of light penetrates this bleak play about parents and offspring. As a counterpoint to the comfortless king, Lear's

godson Edgar labors mightily through his own travails and painfully rebirths himself as a true child of God.

At the outset of their mutual journeys of transformation, both Edgar and Joseph are thrown down the social ladder to its lowest rung. Through the machinations of their envious brothers, each becomes nameless and homeless. After his brothers leave him for dead, Joseph is sold into slavery. He next becomes a household servant, then an overseer of servants. Next, he is a prisoner falsely accused of rape (for refusing to commit adultery—and stripped naked a second time!), then an overseer in prison. He moves ever upward in the ranks, gaining the position of second in command to Pharaoh—and finally de facto ruler of Egypt. On his own personal odyssey, after being betrayed by his brother, Edgar also moves through many personas: as a disinherited son, a fugitive, Poor Tom the mad beggar, a disgraced servant, a peasant, a messenger, a masked knight all in black, and, finally, king of Britain. Thus, Joseph and Edgar come to embody the true crown of human creation—as role models of re-birth and transformation. Throughout the course of their many trials and tribulations, both characters do not merely survive or make do; they achieve a sovereignty of self through service to others:

On account of [the human soul's] progression to the stages of nearness and reunion and its descent into the regions of perdition and error, it is clothed in each

stage and station in clothes that are different from the previous. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, qtd. in Dunbar 48)

DESERT TIME

"The worst is not,
So long as we can say, 'This is the
worst.'"

— *King Lear* 4.1.27–28

The details of Joseph and Edgar's painful evolutions into exemplary human beings both instruct and encourage us. After all, most of us have had to re-invent ourselves many times in the course of our lives. We all have had dreams dashed (like Joseph) and hopes deferred (like Edgar). And many of us have had to start over again—in another career, country or household. So how did these two formerly favorite sons pull off so difficult a transformation? That's the real story.

Many people initially react to unjust adversity with self-pity accompanied by accusatory blame. Both are justified reactions to injustice. However, both responses are also obstacles to personal growth. Anger too, in such situations, can be justified. After all, Joseph and Edgar were innocent victims of their own brothers' betrayal; they have a right to be angry. That said, they both wisely choose to be fulfilled, rather than to be right. As way stations on the path of life, self-pity, blame and anger make miserable places to live. Resentment often proves to be the root of corruption (Peterson, *Cain and Abel*). It renders both self and society worse off.

Evidently aware of this truth, Joseph and Edgar navigate the narrow straits of self-pity and blame without beaching on either deadly shoal.

The Bible says it is a pit into which Joseph's brothers toss him (Genesis 37:24); the Qur'án (12:10) says it is an empty well. In any event, Joseph finds himself down in a hole, "deep and dark, a place where all differentiations and distinctions are obliterated—the unfathomable realm of utter effacement and nothingness" (Saiedi 149). But "when you ain't got nothing," as Bob Dylan sings, "you got nothing to lose" ("Like a Rolling Stone"). All is possible. Like Jonah in the belly of the whale or an entombed Christ, Joseph is in the darkness of a womb. Therefore, consciously or not, he and Edgar both grope toward rebirth. Neither bemoans the darkness. Moving toward the light, they not only accept the roles thrust upon them, but also evince an attitude that transforms their straitened circumstances into opportunities. Both characters have an aptitude for adapting. Fugitive Edgar not only varies his disguise, but also alters his voice and dialect. Joseph directs scenes, utilizes props and, feigning ignorance of his native tongue, speaks to his brothers through an interpreter. Both young men amaze us with their ability to create various personas to survive. Moreover, they avoid the pitfall of defining themselves by these social roles. They intuitively seem to know that "career" is derived from the Latin word for "road" not "profession," and that career paths entail diverse social and occupational

roles. At the same time, they exemplify how one's "vocation"—from the Latin for the verb "to call"—is a singular calling to fulfill one's unique purpose and personal potential:

O Lord! Whether traveling or at home, *in my occupation or in my work*, I place my whole trust in Thee . . . Bestow upon me my portion, O Lord, as Thou pleasest, and cause me to be satisfied with whatsoever Thou hast ordained for me. (The Báb, *Bahá'í Prayers* 56; emphasis added)

Both the Bible (1 Corinthians 10–13) and the Qur'án (2:286) maintain with Bahá'u'lláh that "God hath never burdened any soul beyond its power" (Gleanings 52:2). However, many of us have a lower estimation of our "power" to endure life's violent tests than God does. Both Joseph and Edgar amaze us not only with their endurance, but also with their acceptance of suffering. Like the oyster shell embracing an irritating grain of sand and transforming it into a pearl, Joseph and Edgar accept their unjust and unfortunate "desert time" as a necessary stage on their road ("career") toward the Promised Land of personal spiritual fulfillment. So even though Edgar reminds his despairing father (and himself) that, "Men must endure their going hence, even as their coming hither; ripeness is all" (Shakespeare 5.2.9–11), Edgar does more than merely endure. Like Joseph, he gallantly wills his way through the dark of the birth canal toward "ripeness."

Even if at times he seems to know better what not to do (despair, complain, get angry) than what to do, he always acts. He pays attention to—and gives intention to—his attitude. Both Edgar and Joseph personify why "Men must [embrace] their going hence, even as their coming hither; [response] is all!" (Shakespeare 5.2.10–12).

If anger, self-pity and blame are inadequate reactions to adversity, what then is the most productive response? After the 9/11 tragedy in New York, the Dalai Lama advised, rather than to lay blame, to "seek cause" (*Reflection on 9/11*). Such a meditation requires an opening of the heart as well as of the mind. Again Joseph and Edgar model such a response. When his brothers show up in Egypt, Joseph embraces his youngest brother and then has to turn away to hide his tears. When Edgar sees what a piteous condition his recently blinded father has been reduced to by treacherous Edmund, he also hides his tears. Whether we view Joseph as a prophet gradually unveiling his potentiality or Edgar as a fictional character undergoing growth, they both demonstrate empathetic compassion rather than indulging in resentful anger.

His brothers have come to Egypt begging, so Joseph could easily send them off empty-handed in retaliation. Edgar, too, could take his unwise father to task. Gloucester not only rashly and falsely accuses him, but also misjudges his son's essential character. If Joseph were the hero of a modern action film, he would seek revenge on his brothers.

Instead he seeks spiritual growth—not only his, but theirs as well. First, he falsely accuses his youngest brother Benjamin (his father’s new favorite) of stealing, and then insists on taking him as ransom. Joseph is purposely testing his brothers to see if they are once again willing to dispose of a sibling receiving their father’s preferential treatment. Later, when he bestows gifts upon his brothers, Joseph gives Benjamin more in quality and quantity than he gives the others. Will they once again act out vilely with envy? Given the chance to grow, his brothers pass both tests with flying colors. Thus, during his odyssey of becoming, Joseph has put not only his own self in order—as well as Egypt and Palestine by saving them from famine—but also his family. Having nurtured self and society to fruition by fostering the “utmost love and harmony,” he attains, according to Bahá’u’lláh, “the *monarch* of all aspirations (*Gleanings* 132:4; emphasis added). Pharaoh has made Joseph proxy king (*Genesis* 41:39–44), but Bahá’u’lláh will make him—and all who demonstrate such spiritually sovereign qualities—“*monarchs* in the realms of My Kingdom” (*Summons* 64; emphasis added).

Likewise, Edgar, by eschewing resentment, revenge, and any personal agenda, utilizes various disguises and dialects in order to serve his exiled father’s needs. He literally and metaphysically eases Gloucester back from the brink of despair. “I do trifle thus with his despair,” he says in an aside, “to cure it” (Shakespeare

4.6.34–35). Moreover, when Edgar appears masked as a black knight to duel his brother Edmund, his motive is not personal revenge. His faceless disguise is not a ploy of deception as much as a statement of negation. Not only is Edgar nameless—“My name is lost” (5.3.122)—but so too is Britain without a king. “Who is it,” wonders Lear without his crown, “that can tell me who I am?” (1.4.235). Without a sovereign on the throne, chaos is loosed in the kingdom; without a sovereignty of self, chaos is loosed within.

UNVEILING THE SELF

“Off, off, you lendings! Come unbutton here.”

— *King Lear* 3.4.106–107

Upon slaying Edmund, Edgar not only gives a new birth of freedom to Britain as he saves it from the self-serving reign of Edmund and Goneril, but he also, in effect, becomes born again: “My name is Edgar,” he declares, “and thy father’s son” (Shakespeare 5.3.169). Moreover, with the same magnanimity that Joseph displays toward his brothers, Edgar tells his dying brother, deemed “illegitimate” by law: “I am no less in blood than thou art, Edmund” (5.3.167). Unlike their father, Edgar sees beyond the bounds of biology. He regally affirms the one true brotherhood—of all humanity. Such sovereignty (over limited and limiting views of human nature) embraces both shadow and light—within one’s self and within society.

Tellingly, Joseph and Edgar remain in disguise throughout their initial re-encounters with their families. Joseph does so in order to discern if his brothers have evolved beyond their deceitful and deadly ways. Only then, weeping with human compassion, does he reveal himself—with more than human insight:

I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. . . . God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God. (Genesis 45:4–8)

Joseph unveils himself not just as a brother, but as a prophet, immediately foretelling future events. Yet, with the most human show of affection “he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them” (Genesis 45:14–15). With such a moving denouement, the story of Joseph proves indeed to be “the most beautiful of stories” (Qur’án 12:3).

For his part, Edgar conceals his identity from his forlorn father lest the shock of recognition drive blind Gloucester deeper into despair. A resentful, vengeful son would have self-righteously reveled in throwing the true facts into his father’s face.

But Edgar, selflessly more concerned with comforting his father, guides him step by step away from despondency toward hope. Eventually he succeeds in helping him to see—not physically, but metaphysically. “You ever-gentle gods,” Gloucester then prays. “Let not my worser spirit tempt me again/To die before you please!” (Shakespeare 4.6.213–15). Only at this juncture, when his father can bear self-recognition, does Edgar, after having “wait[ed] patiently for that naked hour of self-revelation,” reveal his identity (Bloom, *Lear* 109).

Somehow, both Joseph and Edgar manage to foil their family members from seeing through their disguises. Such masterful deception may seem incongruous, but it is not incidental. One must will to be seen as one’s true self. We may choose when and to whom we reveal ourselves (or not), but we ourselves must do the unfolding. “I myself am a question which is addressed to the world, and I must communicate my answer, for otherwise,” warned Carl Jung, “I am dependent upon the world’s answer” (318).

Meanwhile, as the Fool reminds Lear, the clock is ticking: “Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise” (Shakespeare 1.5.46–47). While we dally and delay, “our pleasant vices/Make instruments to plague us” (5.3.170–71). Thus, our life’s chief work is the art of becoming—of manifesting our sovereign self—before it is too late and we are too “canker-bit” (5.3.122) to flower. The fruit of such unfolding is the

saving/serving of self and society, even if our “little world of man” (3.1.10) is confined to a household or workplace. The cost of not unfolding one’s potential is imprisonment—in the mask of social roles, postures and personas that protect the ego but fail to fulfill the self.

The book of Genesis has somewhat of a “happily ever after” ending, as Joseph assumes his rightful place in the lineage of Abraham, destined, as it is, to birth numerous Manifestations of God as descendents. Shakespeare’s mythic tale is darker. On his “pilgrimage” of becoming, (Shakespeare 5.3.196) Edgar loses both his father and godfather to death—and to regret’s dark abyss. Although at play’s end he restores order to Britain and prepares to ascend its throne, Edgar does not appear eager to rule. However, his reluctant yet willing acceptance of the burden of kingship makes him all the more heroic and prophet-like. Of those who have responsibility thrust upon them, and accept such pains for the good of society, rather than for fame or gain, Shakespeare says:

They rightly do inherit heaven’s
graces,

And husband nature’s riches
from expense;

They are the lords and owners
of their faces,

Others, but stewards of their ex-
cellence. (Sonnet 194)

Such personal sacrifice “makes sacred”—as the word’s Latin root indicates—and “upon such sacrifices,”

Lear eventually learns, “the gods themselves throw incense” (Shakespeare 5.3.20–21).

In brief, the story of Joseph is the tale of a dream and its ultimate fulfillment through the agency of character, consciousness, and compassion. Edgar’s story reads more like a nightmare—from which he awakes through the agency of character, consciousness, and compassion. However, the dreamscape in both stories represents ultimate reality—the coming of age into one’s true self. In Joseph’s case, it is the unveiling of himself as a prophet, before whom, his brothers in fact—as in his dream—“bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth” (Genesis 42:6).

The story of Joseph was the story of a dream and its subsequent fulfillment . . . Thus it is the dream that represents the supreme reality—the realm of divine creative Action—while the historical realization of the dream in the world is a mere phenomenal reflection of that eternal truth. (Saiedi 159)

Significantly, both Edgar and Joseph’s stories remind us that such fulfillment can only occur if we leave our father’s house; that is, if we transcend inherited tradition and heed our personal calling (“vocation”). After all, parents (representing the past) often are blind to who we might become (the future). No matter how much they love us—or we love them—they cannot hear for us that intuitive “still, small

voice within" (1 Kings 19:12) that whispers only privately:

Cleanse thy heart from every blasphemous whispering and evil allusion thou hast heard in the past, that thou mayest inhale the sweet savours of eternity from the Joseph of faithfulness, gain admittance into the celestial Egypt, and perceive the fragrances of enlightenment. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gems* 23)

Likewise, just as both sons in these two stories must forsake their childish outer selves in order to discover (or unveil) their mature inner selves, both their fathers must forsake their outward eyes in order to open the eyes of insight:

O My Brother! Until thou enter the Egypt of love, thou shalt never gaze upon the Joseph-like beauty of the Friend; and until, like Jacob, thou forsake thine outward eyes, thou shalt never open the eye of thine inward being." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Call of the Divine Beloved* 19)

After bestowing "changes of raiment" (Genesis 45:22) upon his brothers (symbolic of their rebirth as more enlightened beings), Joseph gives them his own garment.³ "Go with this my shirt, and cast it over the face of my father," he instructs them, "and he will come to see again" (Qur'án 12:93).

3 The ritual changing of garment marks the passage from one world to another" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 316).

Now that Joseph has donned the vesture of his true self, such raiment becomes transformative for others as well. By inhabiting our potential self, we become capable of giving vision to others—even opening the eyes of a parent who may not have seen us—or our potential—clearly. With the unfolding of the shirt of one's true self, the father's gift of life to the son (the many-colored coat of many possibilities) becomes the son's gift of a happy death to the father:

O my God . . . divest the bodies of Thy servants of the garments of mortality and abasement, and attire them in the robes of Thine eternity and Thy glory. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations* 184:11)

Likewise, the grieving Lear admits at the end of his drama, "Mine eyes are not o'th' best" (Shakespeare 5.3.277). However, in truth, his inner vision is sharp for the first time. As he holds his dead daughter in his arms, like an inverse *Pietà*, Lear visually echoes blind Gloucester's words of recognition about Edgar: "I stumbled when I saw . . . Might I live to see thee in my touch, I'd say I had eyes again!" (4.1.19–23). Recognition of his daughter's selfless love awakens Lear from "the heaviness of sleep" and allows him to don "fresh garments" (4.7.20–12). "'Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him'," writes Jesuit scholar Milward, quoting the parable of the Prodigal Son, while comparing Lear to "the Pauline image of putting on 'the new man'" (194). Fittingly,

humbled Lear's final command is a polite request: "Pray you, undo this button" (Shakespeare 5.3.307). His last words express a willingness to shed the physical garment of his body. However, like Jacob, Lear now is open-eyed as he embraces death:

We find that at the very end, his sorrow—like that of Gloucester in the parallel story—changes to sudden joy as he looks on the lips of his child; and in that joy he dies. What he sees on her lips is no longer the darkness of death but a light that shows him what Shakespeare elsewhere [*Measure for Measure* 5.1.398] calls a "better life past fearing death." (Milward 157–58)

After the death of his father Gloucester, Edgar speaks magnanimous words to his dying, deceitful brother. Personal revenge has no place in an ordered society. "Let's exchange charity," he says, "The gods are just" (Shakespeare, 5.3.170). Such selfless, heroic stature gives vision, however belatedly, even to malevolent Edmund: "This speech of yours hath mov'd me / And shall perchance do good" (5.3.199–200), he says while dying. "Some good I mean to do/Despite of mine own nature" (5.3.242–43). Similarly, after the death of his father, Joseph ends *Genesis* with comforting words to his brothers, as they once again fear his vengeance. "Ye thought evil against me," he tells them, "but God meant it unto good... to bring to pass," he adds prophetically,

"the saving of many people" (*Genesis* 50:20). Joseph, like Edgar, speaks not only as a man of faith, but also as one with conscious knowledge, born of experience.

How a person can come to have such penetrating and expansive vision—so as to even glimpse divine purpose behind the shifting shapes of this nether world? Shakespeare's play gives hint. "If thou canst serve where thou dost stand condemn'd"—even unjustly, even by your own brother—and, having willingly "razed" the "likeness" of your former self-concept, still manage to maintain your "good intent," then you "may carry through to that full issue," which is the birth of your sovereign self (1.4.1–5).

And then—to emend poets Kipling and Frost—you'll be a king, my son, and that will make all the difference:

Were the dominions of the whole,
entire earth to be thine, it would
not equal this great dominion . . .
[T]hou hast established an eternal
and everlasting throne through the
guidance of God, and hast become
crowned with a diadem, the gems
of which scintillate throughout the
centuries and ages; nay, rather, for
cycles and periods!
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets* 254–55)

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What to Pack in Case of Exile

ANDRÉANA E. LEFTON

Tehran, 1982

Grandmother, help me pack
the two persimmon trees
in our backyard.

Help me wrap the branches
in soft white cloth,
concealing the fruit,
each one a hand-held sunset.

Those trees make millions of red-orange suns
that we eat, squelching the skin and flesh
between our teeth, drinking down
the light turned rich and syrupy,
summer after summer.

I want to take the golden plum trees too,
and the picnic table humming with ants;
the cicada shells and birthday songs.

Help me pack the persimmon trees
and a hammock to rock to sleep in,
so that wherever I am, the wind from the Alborz
mountains will find me.

“What to Pack in Case of Exile” is based on the true story of a Bahá’í woman, Lida, who escaped Iran during the Revolution in the 1980s.

White Roses

ANDRÉANA E. LEFTON

Tehran 1982

Grandmother kisses my eyelids.
I kick awake. Where is she?

Embroidered roses scratch my cheek,
Maman's handiwork.

I'm in bed. It's hard to sleep.
The homemade funeral was yesterday.

Grandmother died weeks ago, but
the hospital, the morgue, rejected her.

Even our dead bodies have no freedom here.

So we took Sultan home,
laid her in the bathtub, and covered her with ice.
No one but family entered the house.

If a dead body was found in a Baha'i home,
the Guards could accuse us of murder,
haul us off to prison on false charges.

Baba finally found a spot.
A nameless grave, marked with a number.

First, we washed her body,
perfumed her with rose essence,
wrapped her in white silk.

Then we laid her on the dining room table,
surrounded by white flowers.

We drew the lace curtains, lit candles,
and prayed the prayer for the dead.

We all, verily, worship God.

We all, verily, bow down before God.

We all, verily, are devoted unto God.

We all, verily, give praise unto God.

We all, verily, yield thanks unto God.

We all, verily, are patient in God.

Biographical Notes

JOHN S. HATCHER is Emeritus Professor in English Literature at the University of South Florida and editor of the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies* and the Wilfrid Laurier University Press Bahá'í Series. He has published over twenty books—some of which have been translated into more than five different languages—and more than one hundred poems and articles. He has received various awards for his work, and his comparative study of theodicy *The Purpose of Physical Reality* was reviewed in the prestigious *Encyclopédie Philosophique Universelle* Vol III, a dictionary of the world's philosophical works published by the Presses Universitaires de France.

AMROLLAH HEMMAT is the co-author of four volumes of poetry with John S. Hatcher and books and educational material on Arabic grammar. He has authored articles on translation, hermeneutics, and discourse. His education includes a graduate degree from the Johns Hopkins University in Applied Behavioral Science and a PhD in Communications from the University of South Florida. His doctoral dissertation focuses on the interpretation and translation of religious and mystical texts. He is currently the Vice President of Global Discourse Society, academic consultant to universities, and a frequent keynote speaker at academic conferences. His current research

includes translation studies, hermeneutics, and intercultural communication.

EHSANOLLAH HEMMAT received his education in Sociology and Social and Economic Development. He has authored articles and books in Persian, Spanish, and English and is currently coauthoring the last four volumes of the largest existing Arabic-Persian dictionary (*Riáz-u'l-Lughát*). He has served on the Bahá'í International Translation Panel for Persian to English translations and on the Associated Global Faculty Desk of the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education. After pioneering in South America for forty years and serving in a National Spiritual Assembly, as an Auxiliary Board member, and as a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors of America, he moved to the Bahá'í World Center, where he currently serves.

ANDRÉANA E. LEFTON is a writer, traveler, researcher, and educator. She has an BA in International Relations and Education from American University in Washington DC, and an MSc in Philosophy & Public Policy from the London School of Economics. She is also interested in finding connections between education, social justice, and creativity. Andréana has lived and traveled throughout the United States, UK, Europe and the Middle East. She has worked with Ashoka, the Institute for Educational Leadership, Eastside Educational Trust, the European Press Prize, and The Guardian. She has also worked on documentaries for broadcast

on National Public Radio and the BBC. She recently designed and taught course at Central European University on “Voice and World” exploring the intersection of self-expression and social justice.

Harvard graduate TOM LYSAGHT has written thirty plays—published by Samuel French and produced Off-Broadway, on the main stage of 1992 Bahá'í World Congress and in Andean villages of Peru (where he was Manager of Radio Bahá'í) with his El Teatro de Pan y Paz. In 2004-06 on behalf of the World Centre's OSED he made three trips to rural India to supplement the Institute Process with puppet theater, indigenous dance and story telling. His website, Social Drama/Sacred Space, serves as resource for grassroots community building. A member of the Dramatists' Guild, Lysaght has received a dozen writing fellowships. For twenty years he taught script writing at Brentwood School in Los Angeles.

Dr. MISAGH ZIAEI, BSc (Hons), MSc, MD, CCFP, is a physician specializing in Family Medicine who works in private practice, on hospital wards, and in urgent care/emergency departments. He holds a bachelor's degree (with honors) in Biochemistry from the University of Ottawa, as well as a Master of Science degree in Physiology from the University of Alberta, where he also completed his medical degree and specialty training. He has published on

scientific and medical topics, and was the winner of the 2006 Association for Bahá'í Studies of North America Essay Contest. He lives in Calgary, Canada, with his wife and son.