

Elucidations

Designation of Mírzá Yahyá Azal in the Writings of the Báb

Part 1: Memorandum from the Research Department

Universal House of Justice

To: The Universal House of Justice

Date: 1 December 2004

From: Research Department

Tablet of the Báb; the Appointment of Azal and His Titles

The Research Department has considered the questions contained in the email message of 15 January 2004 from ... to the Universal House of Justice. As a context for his queries, ... appends a number of extracts from Web sites and email communications he has had with several individuals. ... appears to be particularly interested in “the nature of the designation of Azal” and to this end seeks information about the authenticity of the Lawḥ-i-Vaṣaya, which he understands is regarded by the Azal’s as the basis for Mírzá Yahyá’s titles and position. He also enquires about the meaning of a particular verse in the Persian Bayán. We provide the following response.

Tablet of the Báb

The Tablet of the Báb, which is described as “The Báb’s Lawḥ-i-Vasaya: The Will and Testament” on the Web site www.h-net.org/bahai/areprint/Báb/S-Z/vasaya/vasaya.htm,

referred to by ..., can be found on pages 95–102 in volume 64, published in the Iran National Bahá'í Archives (INBA) series. This volume was published in B.E. 133 and contains various Writings of the Báb. We attach for ... information a photocopy of the Tablet from that volume. It is important to call attention to the fact that, while in some quarters this Tablet has become known as the Will and Testament of the Báb, the Research Department has, to date, found no explicit evidence to suggest that the Báb, Himself, designated the Tablet as such. Indeed, from a perusal of the attached material, ... will see that the Tablet bears no title. He will also see that, while the Tablet is addressed to Azal, there is nothing in its contents pertaining to questions of successorship and authority. Rather, the recipient is enjoined to promote and protect the Faith and to invite people to follow what has been revealed in the Bayán. To date, no authorized English translation of the Tablet is available.

As to the circumstances of Mírzá Yahyá's nomination, it is interesting to note that in the Bábí Dispensation, the Lesser Covenant, that Covenant made by the Manifestation of God with His followers to accept His appointed successor, is, according to the Guardian, found interspersed in the Báb's Book of Laws, the Persian Bayán, in many passages, some of which were "designedly obscure," but mostly "indubitably clear and conclusive."¹ The Báb seems to have alerted His followers to the promised advent of Bahá'u'lláh, instead of designating an appointed successor. Indeed, the Guardian stated:

A successor or vicegerent the Báb never named, an interpreter of His teachings He refrained from appointing. So transparently clear were His references to the Promised One, so brief was to be the duration of His own Dispensation, that neither the one nor the other was deemed necessary. All He did was, according to the testimony of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in "A Traveller's Narrative," to nominate, on the advice of Bahá'u'lláh and of another disciple, Mírzá Yahyá, who would act solely as a figure-head pending the manifestation of the Promised One, thus enabling Bahá'u'lláh to promote, in relative security, the Cause so dear to His heart. ("God Passes By," pp. 28–29)

The following extract from a letter dated 4 August 1980, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, deals with the position of Mírzá Yaḥyá in the Bábí community:

Concerning the position of Mírzá Yaḥyá in the Bábí community, the Guardian has made it quite clear in “God Passes By” that Mírzá Yaḥyá was the Báb’s “nominee” and was the “recognized chief of the Bábí community” following the martyrdom of the Báb. He has also referred to him as “titular head” and “a mere figurehead” (see “God Passes By” page 90). The position occupied by Mírzá Yaḥyá was far different from being an appointed Successor of a Manifestation of God in the sense that St. Peter, the Imám ‘Alí or ‘Abdu’l-Bahá were appointed Successors with far-reaching authority. Obviously the Báb had no need to appoint such a Successor, for He knew that Bahá’u’lláh was already present and ready to be revealed at the appointed time. He seems, therefore, merely to have nominated a titular head for the Bábí community as a focal point of unity until such time as He Whom God will make manifest would decide to unveil Himself.

Additional details concerning the circumstances of Mírzá Yaḥyá’s nomination are contained in

- ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “A Traveller’s Narrative” (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1980), pp. 37–38;
- Adib Taherzadeh, “The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh,” volume I (Oxford: George Ronald, 1974), pp. 53–54;
- Adib Taherzadeh, “The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh,” volume II (Oxford: George Ronald, 1977), pp. 241–242 and 247.

Titles of Azal

As to whether Mírzá Yaḥyá’s titles were derived from Tablets of the Báb or fabricated by Azal and his followers, in his book, “Mustayqi,” Mírzá Yaḥyá attributes a number of divine names and attributes to himself, one of which is “Azal.”²

The title “Şubḥ-i-Azal” appears in an Islamic tradition which is called Ḥadīth-i-Kumayl (Kumayl was a devoted student of the first Imám, ‘Alí³), and a portion of the Ḥadīth is quoted by the Báb in “Dalá’il-i-Sab’ih” (Bábiyyih Publication, p. 58). Mírzá Yahyá and his followers erroneously have taken this term as a reference to Mírzá Yahyá.

In the book “Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahá’í Apologetics,”⁴ the following footnote provides additional information about the origin of Mírzá Yahyá’s attributing to himself the title “Şubḥ-i-Azal.”

Mírzá Yahyá Azal was evidently known also by the name Şubḥ-i-Azal. This is, at least, the title used by Browne, and it is probably through his works that this title was first made public. In Azalí works (such as “Hasht Bihisht”) and works written under Azalí influence (such as the “Kitáb-i-Nuqtatu’l-Káf” or Gobineau’s “Les Religions”) Mírzá Yahyá is referred to by the title “Ḥaḍrat-i-Azal,” not “Şubḥ-i-Azal.” The origin or first use of the title Şubḥ-i-Azal has not yet been identified. This title of honour was evidently not conferred on him by the Báb, who only called him “Thamaratu’l-Azalíyya” and “Ismu’l-Azal” (see Mírzá Yahyá, “Mustayqi,” pp. 391f.). However, the Báb did employ the title Şubḥ-i-Azal in reference to various other leading Báb’s (see the commentary on the Ḥadīth of Kumayl, Teheran Bahá’í Archives MS 6006 C., pp. 74ff.), so that it is quite possible that Mírzá Yahyá was occasionally thus designated.

Persian Bayán, passage 2:16

... requests assistance in understanding a passage from the Persian Bayán, 2:16, which, among other things, refers to the Mustagháth and the timing of the advent of the Promised One. Although ... specific question is not clearly stated, it would appear that he is unsure how the meaning of the verse in the Bayán is to be understood in light of a statement in H. M. Balyuzi’s “E. G. Browne and the Bahá’í Faith” concerning the Azalí view of the coming of the Promised One.

The Research Department has not, to date, been able to locate an authoritative interpretation of the particular passage from the Persian Bayán in the Writings. However, we attach for ... information a discussion of the prophesy in the Writings of the Báb concerning the advent of the Promised One that is published in “Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahá’í Apologetics.”⁵ This discussion may well assist ... in furthering his understanding of some of the themes in the passage in question.

NOTES

¹ See “God Passes By” (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1995), pp. 27–28.

² A section of this book containing the divine names and attributes appears in Rawhani Bushru’í’s “Risálih-i-Rawhání,” compiled by Vahíd Ra’fatí (Ontario: Association for Bahá’í Studies in Persian, 2000), pp. 108–109.

³ In “The Encyclopaedia of Islám,” New Edition, ed. H. A. R. Gibb, et. al. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), vol. I (A–B), p. 89, reference is made to “‘Risálat al-Kumayliyya,’ on the traditional answer by ‘Alí to the question of Kumayl b. Ziyád.”

⁴ Udo Schaefer, Nicola Towfigh and Ulrich Gollmer, “Making the Crooked Straight: A Contribution to Bahá’í Apologetics,” translated by Geraldine Schuckelt (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000), p. 631.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 601–604.

Part 2: Will and Testament of the Báb

رونیس وصیت نامه حضرت باب

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الم ذلك الكتاب حکم من بقية الله امام عدل مبين ان اقرؤا يا ايها الملا من ذوى القربى حکم البدع فانه لصراط حق يقين اذكر شكاً انه عيد من بقية الله ينزل الروح من اذن الله على قلبه ليكون على العالمين حجة وشهيداً. لا والقرآن انه لعبد من حجة الله بمثل ما كان الناس ينطقون افعير الله يقدر ان ينزل بمثل تلك الآيات لا والشهر الحرام فانه لحق مثل ما كنتم فى امرالله لتوثقون.

الا يا ايها الخال* ان اليوم لم يحل علىّ على قدر خردل من شئى الا ان ينفق فى سبيل الله و كان الله ريك لسميع عليم و انك لتعلم بان علىّ دين من امى* و من انت* تعلم حکمها و اننى الان لاهب كل ما كتب الله لى اليهما بعد الدين لتثبت فؤادى من حکم الله و لاكون فى عهد الله لمن القانمين ولاكنى اصرف فى المال اذا شئت لامرالله انه لا اله الا هو لعزیز حکيم و انى انا الضيف فى البيت الله لا اله الا هو لغنى شكور فيا ايها الخال فرق حسابى ان كان بينى و بين احد من الناس ثم انصف المال و اكتب لهما فان اليوم ما كنت مالك ذرة والله عزيز حکيم وان ما كتب الله لى من مال الدنيا تلك الآيات ذكر من الله على العالمين جميعاً و ان البيت* حرم العدل و ان له يوم بينى مثل الكعبة فى المسجد الحرام و انه حرم امن للخاضعين جميعاً و كذلك حکم الله لارض التى ولدت عليها* فسوف بينيها مثل البيت من كتب الله ذالك الحكم له و ان ذالك احسن الجزاء فى ام الكتاب لمسطور فيا ايها الخال فى البلد* ان اسئل من امى لو ترضى فامر لاحد ان يعمر ظاهر البيت ممّا يبدل باذن ريك من حجر البر فانه لبيت عتيق ثم امر لمن له خط نسخ ان يكتب بماء الذهب سورة الرضوان فى اثنى عشر ورقاً مذهبة فانى اردت ان تبدل ما يتعارف فى رجع الحج بآيات الحق و انا رجال من التجار نلاحظ نفع المال و ان ذاك لهو الفوز الكبير و ان حرفاً من آياتنا اعزّ عندنا من ملك الآخرة و الدنيا لانه ينزل من لدن امام مبين و اسئل البيت ان احتج بالمملوكة ترسل اليهن من تلك الجزيرة انشاءالله لمن قريب و سبحان الله رب العرش عما يصفون و سلام على المرسلين و الحمد لله رب العالمين*.

* منظور از کلماتی که با ستاره مشخص شده اند به ترتیب: حاج میرزا سید محمد خال اکبر، والده مبارک، حضرت حرم، بیت مسکونی واقع در کوچه شمشیرگرها، منزل آقا میرزا علی پسر حرم (محل ولادت حضرت باب) و حاج میرزا سید علی خال اعظم است. (نویسنده)

Part 3: The Prophecy concerning the advent of Man Yuzhiruhu'lláh¹

The Báb evidently foresaw the imminent advent of the Promised One whom He described in such glowing terms. This is clear from many of the statements He made to contemporaries, whom He exhorted to recognize both Himself and – as soon as He appeared – the promised *Man yuzhiruhu'lláh*. In a letter written to a Muslim clergyman named Sulaymán, for instance, He called upon the addressee to turn to Him (the Báb), since he would otherwise be accursed. If he failed to accept the Báb, God would forgive him only if he turned, by means of a letter, to '*Him whom God shall make manifest*' (SWB 1:9:7) – i.e. in the near future, during Sulaymán's lifetime. From another letter, written by the Báb to the Sharif of Mecca and others, it is again evident that the Báb expected the Promised One to appear during the lifetime of the Sharif. The Báb admonished the Sharif of Mecca

To embrace the Cause of God and to implore that the matter of thine allegiance be brought to the attention of Him Whom God shall make manifest, that He may graciously enable thee to prosper and cause thy fire to be transformed into light. (SWB 1:7:3, p. 30)

Furthermore, it is implied in the Persian Bayán that *Man yuzhiruhu'lláh* would appear during the 19 years following the Báb's declaration of His mission (1844); i.e., in the period up to the year 1863, although God alone would know the hour of His coming. (Bayán VI:3) The early Bábis, too, clearly expected the Promised One to arrive soon. Only this can explain the fact that during the years immediately following the martyrdom of the Báb so many proclaimed themselves to be the Promised One.

In contrast to this, the Azali doctrine that the Promised One was to appear only after 1511 or 2001 years was based on statements made by the Báb in the Persian Bayán concerning *Ghiyáth* (Help) and *Mustagháth* (He who is called upon for help) (Persian Bayán II:17, III:15), from which the numbers 1511 and 2001

¹ From *Making the Crooked Straight*, by Udo Schaefer, Nicola Towfigh, Ulrich Gollmer, trans. by Geraldine Schuckelt (Oxford: George Ronald, 2000).

are derived by means of the Abjad system. This is interpreted as an indication that the promised *Man yuzhiruhu'lláh* will not appear until this length of time has elapsed. This argument was probably developed by the Azalis in order to dismiss Bahá'u'lláh's claim. They certainly referred to this in their rejection of Bahá'u'lláh, as Browne confirms: "To these texts the Ezelis specially appeal in justification of their rejection of Bahá'u'lláh's [sic] claim to be the Promised Deliverer..." (*JRAS* April 1892, p. 299) It is clear from the words of the Báb in the Persian Bayán, however, that the Azali view does not conform to that of the Báb when the latter expresses the hope that the Promised One would come before the end of the *Mustagháth*:

None knoweth save God as to when the Manifestation shall be. Whenever it occurs all have to follow the Point of Truth and thank God. However, it is hoped of God's grace that it will arrive before the Mustagháth and the Word of God will be exalted by it. (Persian Bayán III:15)

It is obvious from these words that the Báb regards the *Mustagháth* as a period of time during which the Manifestation will appear. Bahá'u'lláh evidently shares the Báb's cyclical view and also sees *Ghiyáth* and *Mustagháth* as cycles within which the Promised One will appear. He speaks of the year 9 within the *Mustagháth* in which *Man yuzhiruhu'lláh* has appeared. (*Raḥíq-Makhtúm*, p. 514) In response to the Azali objection that He was already announcing the advent of the Promised One, Bahá'u'lláh argued:

Shake off, O heedless ones, the slumber of negligence, that ye may behold the radiance which His glory hath spread through the world. How foolish are those who murmur against the premature birth of His light. O ye who are inly blind! Whether too soon or too late, the evidences of His effulgent glory are now actually manifest. It behoveth you to ascertain whether or not such a light hath appeared. It is neither within your power nor mine to set the time at which it should be made manifest. God's inscrutable Wisdom hath fixed its hour beforehand. (GWB 50)

The Báb, too, was convinced that the Promised One 'might appear at any time,' (TN, intro, p. xvii) as Browne correctly observed.