

Lights of 'Irfán



Papers Presented
at the 'Irfán Colloquia
and Seminars

Book One

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Lights of ‘Irfán
Papers Presented at the ‘Irfán Colloquia and Seminars
Book One
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O My servants! My holy, My divinely ordained Revelation may be likened unto an ocean in whose depths are concealed innumerable pearls of great price, of surpassing luster. It is the duty of every seeker to bestir himself and strive to attain the shores of this ocean, so that he may, in proportion to the eagerness of his search and the efforts he hath exerted, partake of such benefits as have been pre-ordained in God's irrevocable and hidden Tablets.

*—Bahá'u'lláh
Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 326*

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Haj Mahdi Arjmand

(1861-1941)



Haj Mehdi Arjmand was born to a Jewish family in the city of Hamadan, Iran. He embraced the Faith of Baha'u'llah at a young age. His yearning for reading and understanding the Baha'i holy scripture moved him to master Farsi and Arabic languages. His fame for his exemplary knowledge of the Bible and the Qur'an had also spread throughout the country. All the way to the last moments, Haj Mehdi was engaged in teaching the Faith. The most notable teaching event of his life is his two year long debate with the American Dr. Holmes of the Presbyterian denomination who had traveled to Iran as part of a missionary effort. At the end Dr. Holmes confessed that Haj Mahdi's knowledge of the Bible was so deep that it felt as if he had written it himself. Haj Mahdi became recipient of several tablets from Abdu'l-Baha.

Descendants of Haj Mahdi Arjmand, in honor of his services, established a memorial fund which became responsible for the launch and continuation of Irfan Colloquium programs since 1993.

Houshang Arjmand

(1930 - 2015)

Houshang Arjmand, grandson of Haj Mehdi Arjmand, founder and the main benefactor of Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund, who was the main supporter of the Irfan Colloquium project, passed away in La Jolla, California on 20 August 2015. He was born in Tehran, Iran on March 20th, 1930.

After completing his High School education in Tehran, Houshang pursued higher education in Engineering in Germany, France and the United States. Upon his return to Iran, together with his brother-in-law Mr. Yadollah Mahboubian founded "Iran Electric Company," which became the largest importer, distributor and manufacturer of electrical cables and equipment in Iran. After the revolution in 1979, Houshang's life changed drastically when his partner was arrested, imprisoned and ultimately martyred in Tehran by the government of Islamic Republic for his beliefs in the Baha'i Faith. Tragic loss of brother-in-law and partner severely affected Houshang. He, with unconditional love, assumed the guardianship of his sister, the widow of Mr. Mahboubian, and their two daughters.

To immortalize the memory of his grandfather, Haj Mehdi, and in consultation with the Treasurer's office of the Baha'i National Center of the United States, Houshang established the Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund in 1992. Main purpose of this fund is to promote the study of Baha'i and other religious scriptures as they relate to teaching the Baha'i Faith. His encouragement resulted in involvement of other members of the Arjmand family in this undertaking. The first to join was Houshang's sister, Mrs. Parvin Mahboubian, who became a major partner in supporting that Fund. This was followed by joining of his elder sister Mahboubeh and his brother Sohrab who together have been instrumental in maintaining this memorial fund over the past two decades.

Following message was sent by the Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice and conveyed to Arjmand family by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of the United States: "The Universal house of Justice regretted to learn of the passing of dedicated follower of Baha'u'llah, Houshang Arjmand. His generous support for a wide range of Baha'i activities bears testimony to his magnanimity and ardent desire to promote the interests of the Cause. Kindly convey to his family and loved ones the heartfelt sympathy of the House of Justice and assured them of its supplication in the Holy Shrines for the progress of his noble soul in the heavenly kingdom. Prayers will also be offered for their comfort and solace in their bereavement."

The 'Irfan Colloquium started in 1993 and has continued to be held annually in North America and Europe. 'Irfan activities aim at fostering systematic studies of the scriptures of the world's religions from the Baha'i perspective and promoting scholarly studies in the sacred writings, verities, and fundamental principles of the belief system of the Baha'i Faith. The programs of these colloquia also include presentations of the interface between the Baha'i Faith and various religions and schools of thought. Annual colloquia and seminars are held separately in the English, German and Persian languages at the Center for Baha'i Studies, Acuto, Italy; Louhelen Baha'i School, Michigan, USA; Bosch Baha'i School, California, USA; and the Tambach Conference Center in Germany.

'Irfan Colloquia provide an opportunity for dialogue, networking and team-building among those engaged in Baha'i studies. It is also a unique occasion for all those attending these gatherings to meet and associate with researchers and scholars and benefit from their presentations. A lighter program including poetry, music and song is offered in the evenings. Participants receive a set of 'Irfan publications. 'Irfan is a Persian-

Arabic word referring to mystical, theological, and spiritual knowledge. `Irfan Colloquium was launched, and the colloquia are being held, with the sponsorship of Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund in memory of Haj Mehdi Arjmand (1861-1941). `Irfan Colloquia are organized under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Baha'is of the countries where they are held.

Preface

The *Lights of 'Irfán* is a new series of the 'Irfán publications in the English language, containing the text of the papers presented at the 'Irfán Colloquia and Seminars, sponsored by the Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund. 'Irfán is a Persian-Arabic word referring to mystical, theological, and spiritual knowledge. Haj Mehdi Arjmand (1861–1941) was a distinguished Bahá'í scholar of Biblical studies and a prominent teacher of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran.

The 'Irfán Colloquia started in 1993 and have continued to be held annually in North America and Europe. The aim and purpose of the 'Irfán activities is to foster systematic studies of the scriptures of the world's religions from a Bahá'í perspective and to promote scholarly studies in the sacred writings, verities, and theological principles of the Bahá'í Faith. Annual colloquia and seminars are held separately in the English and Persian languages.

Beginning in 1996, a series of annual seminars was added to the 'Irfán colloquia for the purpose of presenting studies on the writings of the Bahá'í Faith, starting with the study of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder-prophet of the Bahá'í Faith. In the seminars, each year selected writings from one of the main periods of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry have been presented and discussed in chronological order.

In 1999, more than forty topics were presented at the 'Irfán colloquia and seminars, which were held at the Trent Park Campus of Middlesex University in London, England, and at the Louhelen and Bosch Bahá'í Schools in Michigan and California in the United States. Book One of the *Lights of 'Irfán* contains a dozen papers that were presented at those colloquia and seminars in 1999. We hope and intend to continue publishing the *Lights of 'Irfán* series in the years to come.

One of the main themes of the 'Irfán Colloquia in 1999 was "World Religions and the Bahá'í Faith." Papers on "Pilgrimage and Religious Identity in the Bahá'í Faith," "Common Teachings in Chinese Culture and the Bahá'í Faith: From Material Civilization to Spiritual Civilization," "The New Age Phenomenon and the Bahá'í Faith," "A Study of the Meaning of the Word 'Al-Amr in the Qur'án and in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh," and "The Book of Revelation Revealed in Glory: A Summary of *Glorious Revelation*," "The Development of Humankind," and "The Concept of Sacred Justice in Hebrew Eschatology" are related to that theme.

"The Bedrock of Bahá'í Belief: The Doctrine of Progressive Revelation" and "Abdu'l-Bahá's Explanation of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh: Tablets and Talks Translated into English (1911-1920)" are related to the other theme of the colloquia—"Fundamental Verities and the Principles of the Bahá'í Belief System." "Kitáb-i-Aqdas as Described and Glorified by Shoghi Effendi," "The Seven Valleys of Bahá'u'lláh and Farid ud-Din Attár," and "Some Chronological Issues in the Lawḥ-i-Hikmat of Bahá'u'lláh" are papers that were presented at the 'Irfán Seminars.

The present volume contains the papers that were received for publication before the end of December 1999. The texts of these papers are published as provided by their authors without further editing; therefore, they do not follow the same style or scholarly approach. In addition, there may be errors of transliteration, which were not corrected due to time constraints related to publication. The papers represent the views and understandings of the authors. They are published in this volume according to the alphabetical order of the names of the authors. Abstracts of all the presentations made at the colloquia and seminars are published in separate booklets. The papers presented at the first and second sessions of the 'Irfán Colloquia, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, in December 1993 and Wilmette, Illinois, in March 1994 are published by George Ronald, Oxford, England, 1997 under the title *Scripture and Revelation*.

Iraj Ayman

Pilgrimage and Religious Identity in the Bahá’í Faith

by Per-Olof Åkerdahl

The Importance of Pilgrimage in the Bahá’í Faith

There are a number of ways to build religious identity, but in revealed religions it could hardly be done without creating a strong bond to the founder of that religion, the prophet himself. There is not just a single way of accomplishing this, and in this paper one of these means, the pilgrimage, will be studied. I will start with a general discussion on pilgrimage as such and on different kinds of places of pilgrimage. I will then continue with a discussion of the “World Order of Bahá’u’lláh” as the world view in the Bahá’í Faith and how this takes its expression in the international center of the Bahá’í Faith in Haifa and the ‘Akká area in Israel.

Building on the relationship between willingness to accept martyrdom and the creation of the strong bond between the believer and the prophet, I will come to the nature of the concept of martyrdom. In the Bahá’í Faith the willingness to accept martyrdom is strongly related to the relationship of the believer as a servant and Bahá’u’lláh as the manifestation of God, a spiritual king paralleling Christ as the Messiah.¹ The ideal relationship between Bahá’u’lláh and the believer is given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the position he points toward in his talks, his writings and his life was the role of a servant. The martyr in the Bahá’í Faith is thus a believer who accepts the role of a servant to such a degree that he or she gives up life itself. The difference between the individual that works with the Bahá’í administration and the martyr is a matter of degree, not of principle. Both are servants of Bahá’u’lláh and both have ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as their ideal.

The general discussion of the relationship between East and West, that is so important in order to understand the persecution of the Iranian Bahá’ís, must be supplemented with another discussion. To understand the context of the persecutions, the East and West relationship must be discussed. To understand the reaction of the Bahá’ís, however, the discussion of the relationship between the center and the periphery is more important, as the foundation of Bahá’í identity is an individual acceptance of Bahá’u’lláh as a prophet of God. This makes the dimension of center-periphery being crucial, as the believers have not been encouraged to physically gather around the leader of the community, but have been encouraged to spread to as many places as possible in order to spread the message of Bahá’u’lláh to as many places as possible.

The East-West dimension within the Bahá’í Faith has given a special role to the Bahá’í communities in Iran and the United States. The Bahá’í communities in other countries have had their own role, but these two countries have had a special importance and have formed separate platforms for spreading the Bahá’í Faith to other countries. The East-West dimension has no doubt existed as a problem within the Bahá’í community. This problem has, however, never resulted in a split in two or more separate communities as it has been balanced by an active effort to bridge over this difference and to create a united global Bahá’í community, based on a common religious identity: the ideal of the servant. The Bahá’í pilgrimage has, as an institution, been central to this solution.

Pilgrimage and Religious Identity

To go on pilgrimage is a common way to express religious belief and to create and strengthen religious identity. In the prophetic religions, it is common to go on pilgrimage to places related to the prophet, most notably the prophet grave. This is, however, far from the only kind of place for pilgrimage. Every place for pilgrimage has its own theophany and is a point of attraction of its own to the believers. The strongest position that pilgrimage has as a religious institution is probably within Islam, where pilgrimage is a religious law. In this way pilgrimage becomes closely connected to religious identity among Muslims.

Islam is a good example of the revitalizing power of pilgrimage. This came about with the increased possibility of Muslims to go on pilgrimage to Mecca, due to renewed possibilities with modern transportation. What had happened before was that the distance to Mecca was a major factor to decide whether a person could go on pilgrimage. Today there are increasing numbers of Muslims coming from all over the world on pilgrimage and return home as committed upholders of the cause of Islam. This modern trend is an important part of the background to the awakening of the Muslim world in the latter part of the twentieth century.

The Concept of Pilgrimage

The word pilgrimage comes from peregrinus (lat.) which means stranger. The pilgrim is travelling to a place that is holy to his or her religion. Travelling for religious reasons has been connected with a number of different religious movements all through history, although not with all. In Indian context pilgrimage is very well established and has been practiced by many of the existing religious traditions. In Christian context pilgrimage was mainly done to the Holy Sepulchre of Jesus Christ during the first millennium. At the end of the first millennium this possibility was denied to Christian pilgrims, a situation that resulted in the Crusade movement. This resulted in Europeans instead making pilgrimages to places in Europe that were holy to them, especially to the tombs of the saints.

In many religions it has been considered meritorious to make pilgrimages, but it has not been compulsory. In Islam pilgrimage—hajj—was emphasized by making it a law and thereby also defining it. By giving the hajj such a special station, other kinds of pilgrimage have been discouraged. Another kind of pilgrimage did, however, come into being and this kind of pilgrimage, the *zíarat*, became especially important to twelver Shí'a. The word itself is an Arabic word and means "visit." In the Shí'a context it was used especially for visits to the holy graves of the twelve Imáms. After visiting such a grave the Shí'a believer is given a title, parallel to *hájj*, depending upon which Imám shrine was visited, such as *Karbilá'í*, *Najaf'í* and *Mashhad'í*.

Both of these concepts are found in the Bahá'í Faith. The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* mentions two places of pilgrimage, the house of the Báb in Shiráz and the house of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad, and in the Arabic original, the word being used is *hajj*. When the believers go on pilgrimage to the Bahá'í World Center to visit the tombs of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the word *zíarat* is used and at these shrines a tablet of visitation is read—*zíarat-námeh*² (the tomb of the Báb) and *munáját-i-laqá*³ (the tomb of 'Abdu'l-Bahá). *Zíarat-námeh* is also read in the tomb of Bahá'u'lláh. *Zíarat-námeh* is written by Bahá'u'lláh and *munáját-i-laqá* by 'Abdu'l-Bahá.⁴

Is it possible to go on a pilgrimage to a living person? The definition of pilgrimage is to visit a place that is holy to one's religion, and not to visit a person. Often the goal of the pilgrimage is a shrine of a holy person or a place that is connected with divine revelation. Traditionally the *zíarat* is made to a shrine and it is connected to such a ritual. When the Bahá'ís visited Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá they did it as a way of showing a great respect and reverence. Even when it was not possible for the Bahá'ís to see Bahá'u'lláh in person during those periods when he was held in very strict imprisonment in 'Akká, they would still travel the long way from Iran in order to stand outside the prison, only to see a quick glimpse of the face of Bahá'u'lláh.⁵ These visits should, however, also be seen as a way to show a willingness to serve and it was not uncommon for them to actually be asked to do a certain kind of service.

One such example is Bádí’ who was asked to deliver a letter to the Shah, which he did. After delivering that letter, he was killed and became one of the well-known martyrs in the Bahá’í Faith.⁶

Places of Pilgrimage

In Israel there are a number of places of pilgrimage that are visited by Jews, Christians and Muslims. If the area of discussion is extended to the other countries in that region, the most central places of pilgrimage of all these religions will be included. These places have been the focus of these religions for centuries and the source of renewal of the personal faith of generations of believers. In the following discussion regarding the role of pilgrimage in the process of the creation and development of a religious identity, these places of pilgrimage will be grouped under three headings: prophet-grave, axis mundi and symbol of theocracy. My suggestion is, however, not that all places of pilgrimage can be put under these headings. It is simply a help to make a comparative discussion regarding these three different kinds of pilgrimage places. Its main purpose is, however, to form a background to the discussion about the importance of pilgrimage in the Bahá’í Faith for the development of a Bahá’í identity.

Table 1

	Prophet grave	Axis mundi ⁷	Symbol of theocracy
Judaism	Shrine of Abraham	Temple	Temple
Christianity	Shrine of Jesus	Place of crucifixion	Different places, depending on the theology of each church
Islam	Shrine of Muhammad in Medina	Mecca	Different places, depending upon which school and time intended
Bahá’í	Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh	Shrine of the Báb	Universal House of Justice

Are these places comparable? Yes, but certain comments have to be added. Abraham is a legendary person and it is most uncertain if he ever lived. There is, however, a holy place called the shrine of Abraham and it is recognized as such. It is, however, not underlined. There is no grave of Moses at hand and even if the grave of Abraham in Hebron is important to Judaism, it can in no way be compared in importance to the Temple in Jerusalem. The Jewish Temple is a part of a ideal past and was replaced by the Scrolls of the Law in the synagogue during the time of the Diaspora. The formation of the state of Israel and its control of the city of Jerusalem has, however, again put the focus more on the Temple. I have chosen the Temple as Axis mundi and the symbol of theocracy in the table as it is a natural goal of pilgrimage to the believers.

To Christian pilgrims, there are two places of pilgrimage that are of major importance: the church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the church of the Holy Sepulchre⁸ in Jerusalem. The Christian pilgrim to Jerusalem who walks through Golgata and passes all its stations would probably include the system of stations and not only the Sepulchre itself. Although there are traditions that point towards the place of the crucifixion being the axis mundi, there is no such place that is accepted by all Christians or even the majority. Regarding symbol of theocracy the situation is similar. To Catholics the Pope or the Vatican would be a common answer. To many Protestant churches it would instead be the Bible itself, and in other Protestant churches it would be the king that symbolized theocracy.

To Christianity, the pattern given in the table might not be seen as very well fitted. In Christianity there is a long tradition of pilgrimage to the shrines of martyrs and saints and, in the history of Christian churches, there are periods when these kind of pilgrimages have been very common. This situation, however, has not been prevalent during the entire history of Christianity; rather it has been the effect of pilgrim roads to Jerusalem being closed by Muslim rulers.

With this as a background, it seems that this typology is not a tool that can be used in all religions. Pilgrimage has been of great importance in Christian history, which can be exemplified by the Crusades. Today however, the importance of pilgrimage to Palestine is not so important, although there are great differences between different churches.

In Islam, both Mecca and Medina have been underlined, as they are a part of the same pilgrimage. There is a difference between Sunni and Shi‘a in the relationship to the tomb itself. Believers from both schools, however, visit the mosque that includes the tomb. It is not possible, though, to find an outer symbol of theocracy that can be visited during pilgrimage and that is universally accepted today.

Pilgrimage in the Bahá’í Faith

The Bahá’í Faith has in common with Islam that pilgrimage is a religious law. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas it is stated: “The Lord hath ordained that those of you who are able shall make pilgrimage to the sacred House, and from this He hath exempted women as a mercy on His part. He, of a truth, is the All-Bountiful, the Most Generous.”⁹ Regarding the “sacred House,” there are two places that are referred to: the house of the Báb in Shiraz and the house of Bahá’u’lláh in Baghdad.¹⁰ After the passing of Bahá’u’lláh, his shrine, called Bahjí, outside of ‘Akká was designated as a place of pilgrimage by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.¹¹ Regarding the exemption of women from pilgrimage, it was a part of the Bayán, written by the Báb, and Bahá’u’lláh kept this principle. The comment from the Universal House of Justice is that it “has clarified that this exemption is not a prohibition, and that women are free to perform the pilgrimage.”¹² When referring to pilgrimage as a way of creating a Bahá’í identity today, it is zíarat that is intended. Belief in Bahá’u’lláh as a manifestation of God is the most central part of the Bahá’í Faith and by making a zíarat, the believer is strengthening his or her personal tie with the prophet. It is not possible for Bahá’ís to undertake the hajj today for reasons of security. Also, the house of the Báb in Shíráz has been destroyed, which makes this pilgrimage impossible for now. Yet detailed information about the planning of this house exists, which means that it could be rebuilt in the future.

Regarding the spirit in which pilgrimage should be made, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá talked about this to the pilgrims on the 27th of October 1914, as reported by Mu‘ayyad in his book *Khátirát-i-Habib*: “Pilgrimage should be carried out in a state of utter humbleness and devotion. Otherwise it is not true pilgrimage; it is a form of sightseeing.... Many people used to come and attain the presence of Bahá’u’lláh. They saw His virtuous character, His blessed smile, His magnetic attraction and His infinite bounties, yet they remained unaffected by Him. Some others were instantly transformed by attaining His presence. Jamál-i-Burújirdí attained the presence of Bahá’u’lláh in Adrianople. With him were two men from Burújird. One of them was called Mírzá Abdu’r-Rahím. He was so influenced by the magnetic person of Bahá’u’lláh that he was completely transformed. The Blessed Beauty¹³ stated that this man within ten minutes took one step from this mortal world and placed it in the realms of eternity. It is therefore necessary to acquire spiritual receptiveness. A deaf ear will not enjoy the melody of a beautiful song, and a diseased nostril will be insensible to the perfume of the rose. The sun shines, the breeze is wafted, and the rain falls, but where the land is a salt marsh nothing grows but weeds.”¹⁴

Bahá’í Pilgrimage in the Time of Bahá’u’lláh

Bahá’u’lláh was one of the leading Bábís in Iran when he was imprisoned and banished to Baghdad. It was in Baghdad where he proclaimed himself as “Him whom God will make manifest,” which was done just before he was sent to Istanbul, and later banished to Adrianople and ‘Akká. Although it is not correct to technically call it a pilgrimage, still to Bahá’ís there was only one proper pilgrimage (zíarat) to make—to visit Bahá’u’lláh, wherever he happened to live. As he was a prisoner, it was not easy to see him and at periods it was very difficult. The majority of the Bahá’ís lived in Iran and they had to travel the long way to ‘Akká without indicating in their hometown what they were doing. One way of hiding this was to give the impression that they were going on a business trip to Bombay. Another way was to first travel to Mecca and from there to continue to ‘Akká.

There is very little written by these pilgrims to show their impressions of Bahá’u’lláh from these meetings. It was not seen proper, or possible, to formulate these experiences in words. Therefore the

best description from a meeting with Bahá'u'lláh is the one made by Professor E.G. Browne. This description was included in the most commonly used introductory book to the Bahá'í Faith, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, and this description has been much used in Bahá'í literature. The meeting with Bahá'u'lláh during pilgrimage was very important in order to create the Bahá'í identity among the Iranian Bahá'ís. The lack of descriptions from the Iranian Bahá'ís has probably more to say about their extreme reverence for him than the description that the British scholar has left to posterity, important as it is. To a certain degree it can, perhaps, be understood if one studies the reaction of the early Western Bahá'ís to 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Bahá'í Pilgrimage at the Time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Pilgrimage was, in the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, properly defined in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and the additional statement by 'Abdu'l-Bahá that the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh should be included in this list. The pilgrimages from Iran continued and going on pilgrimage to Bahjí outside 'Akká became just as much a part of Bahá'í identity as it had been in the time of Bahá'u'lláh. The major change came as the Bahá'í Faith was spread to the Western world and the western pilgrims started to come. To this pilgrimage was now added the visit to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in his function as the pronounced leader of the Bahá'í Faith.

Early Bahá'ís in the West

The first Bahá'ís in the West became initiated by Dr. Khayru'lláh¹⁵, who was sent by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to North America to spread the Bahá'í teaching. He did this in a very effective way, but the teachings were not entirely those teachings that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was teaching. He was a part of the first pilgrim group from the West. At this pilgrimage the difference became obvious to other Bahá'ís in this group. Some years after this pilgrimage, the early Western Bahá'ís found out that they had to choose between him and 'Abdu'l-Bahá as he did not accept 'Abdu'l-Bahá as a religious authority any more. In contact with the western Bahá'ís, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was not very strict in dogmatic matters and the fact that Dr. Khayru'lláh had been teaching reincarnation seems not to have been a major problem to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, although this teaching is not a part of the Bahá'í Faith¹⁶. The problem was rather that of authority. All the Bahá'ís had to accept the authority of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Center of the Covenant, and this also included Dr. Khayru'lláh. This personal acceptance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was central to their identity as Bahá'ís and it took its outer form by the writing of a personal letter to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which was sent to him.

First Pilgrims from the West

The first pilgrim group from the West left the United States on September 22, 1898¹⁷ and arrived in Haifa, Israel, about three months later. One of the members of this group, Lua Getsinger, had an overwhelming experience during that pilgrimage in such a way that her acceptance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Center of the Covenant became not only a mere acceptance but a central part of her religious identity. She describes a meeting with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, her last in this pilgrimage, in one of her letters:

"It was nearly dark, so we went to the apartment of the Holy Leaf,¹⁸ where we had tea and then sat talking, waiting for the 'King' to come. At last a servant announced that He was coming, so the two youngest daughters and myself ran out in the court to meet Him. I reached Him first and knelt down before Him, kissing the hem of His robe. He thereupon took my hand, and, saying in Persian 'Daughter, welcome' helped me to my feet, and keeping my hand, walked with me into the house, where I sat down beside Him while He drank some tea,—and asked me if I was 'well, happy and content'—to which I could only reply that to be in His presence was health, happiness and contentment itself."¹⁹

This extremely devotional behavior of Lua Getsinger towards 'Abdu'l-Bahá was not shared by all the western Bahá'ís. It would however, be common to show him great respect and devotion, although there is no indication that he demanded this behavior among the Bahá'ís. Her behavior was, however, not only devotional. For a westerner to behave like this for devotional reasons could hardly have been natural, considering the socially accepted behavior of devoted Christians in North America. The role she had accepted was rather the role of a servant, not in Western countries but in the East, and it shows her complete readiness to serve in whatever way he wished.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's Visit to North America

In 1912 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited the growing numbers of Bahá'ís in North America. Before this period it had not been possible as he was still a prisoner. On this journey he also visited Bahá'ís in Europe, and he spent some time especially in Paris where he held the speeches that were later published as *Paris Talks*.²⁰ There were other collections of talks by 'Abdu'l-Bahá that came out from this travel, but no other collection of talks has been used by the Bahá'í community as much as *Paris Talks*.

The Bahá'ís in North America and Europe were converts from different Christian churches and brought this identity with them into the Bahá'í Faith. They depended upon this Christian identity, which, for example, can be seen in the correspondence of Lua Getsinger. Their development of a Bahá'í identity came gradually and is much related to their personal contact with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In North America 'Abdu'l-Bahá had a wider field of contact with these Bahá'ís and had the possibility to continue this development. He also had contact with news media and other non-Bahá'ís. The themes around which he was concentrating could well be summarized in some headlines: *New York City Evening Mail*: "BANISHED FIFTY YEARS, LEADER OF BAHAI HERE: PERSIAN PHILOSOPHER FAVORS WOMAN SUFFRAGE AND WILL TALK PEACE..."; *New York Evening World*: "PERSIAN TEACHER OF WORLD-PEACE IS HERE"; *New York Herald*: "ABDUL BAHÁ HERE TO CONVERT AMERICA TO HIS PEACE DOCTRINE."²¹ These contacts had more than one function and, among other things, they were related to how the American Bahá'ís looked upon their own religion. In this respect, 'Abdu'l-Bahá did what was expected by an international leader of a religious community. The American Bahá'ís, who no doubt were the ones informing news media, could see their leader in a position where he was welcomed with open arms by different institutions in North America. This was perhaps not so important for the Bahá'í identity of Bahá'ís such as Lua Getsinger and other deepened Bahá'ís, but it was probably crucial to the Bahá'í identity of the North American Bahá'í community at large. Even more important, obviously, was to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá in person and to hear his explanation of the Bahá'í Faith.

The Pilgrim Program

The aim of a pilgrimage is to make a visit to a holy place—to travel from the profane to the holy. This travel is a spiritual travel as well as a physical travel and this aspect of holiness takes different forms in different religions. In the Bahá'í Faith the dimension of time is important also in the pilgrimage and a part of this travel. The Bahá'í World Center is, to the pilgrim, also a symbol of the future vision of the Bahá'í Faith – the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Bahá'u'lláh was a prisoner in the 'Akká area between 1868, when he arrived from Edirne in Turkey until he passed away in Bahjí, outside 'Akká city in 1892. Because of this there are a number of places for the pilgrims to visit. The most important place is the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in Bahjí and the residential area beside the shrine. Around this has been developed a large area of gardens. The shrine of Bahá'u'lláh is the Qiblih of the Bahá'í world, its spiritual center, as well as a very important historical place in the Bahá'í history.

When the Báb had been executed in 1850 his body was hidden by the Bábís for many years and then transported to 'Akká for burial. 'Abdu'l-Bahá started to build a shrine on the slopes of Mount Carmel, which was completed with a superstructure by Shoghi Effendi. It was Bahá'u'lláh who in 1891 pointed out the place for that shrine to be built.²² The remains of the Báb were buried in the shrine in 1909 and the superstructure was completed in 1953.²³ In the same shrine 'Abdu'l-Bahá also is entombed.

When going on pilgrimage to the Bahá'í World Center, the believer is made a member of a pilgrim group upon arrival in Haifa. This group takes part in a special program with guided visits to a number of holy places in the 'Akká-Haifa area. The pilgrim program has shifted over the years as holy places have been acquired and restored by the Bahá'í community and made ready for pilgrimage. The pilgrim program presented below is thus only one example of possible pilgrim programs, but it is possible to get an idea of the main parts of a Bahá'í pilgrimage.

The program that the pilgrims normally take part in today is organized in such a way that pilgrims are able to see most of the interesting sites. There are groups from different parts of the world; in the following example from 1982,²⁴ when the present writer took part, there were four groups. Before the

Iranian revolution there could be two groups, one Persian-speaking group, coming from Iran, and an English-speaking one with Bahá'ís from the rest of the world. The system with a Eastern pilgrim group that was Persian-speaking and a Western pilgrim group that was English-speaking had been the normal situation since the time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. At the Bahá'í World Center there is a house close to the Shrine of the Báb called the Pilgrim House. This used to be an Eastern pilgrim house, used as residence for the Bahá'ís from Iran; elsewhere there was a Western pilgrim house for the European and North American Bahá'ís. The Western pilgrim house is not used by the pilgrims today. Today the pilgrims stay in hotels in Haifa and the Eastern pilgrim house is used by the World Center as a general Bahá'í pilgrim center.

The pilgrim program was a nine-day program in 1982. The first day all four groups visited the Shrine of the Báb and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for prayer and meditation. The second day the pilgrims visited the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí outside of ‘Akká; the program included a guided tour of the mansion building as well as prayer and meditation in the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. In the afternoon the pilgrims could meet the Universal House of Justice in the Western pilgrim house, which was then the site of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice. On the third day, the pilgrims could meet the members of the International Teaching Center. On the fourth day, the pilgrims could meet the members of the International Archives building, where the original writings of the Bahá'í Faith are kept, together with Bahá'u'lláh's clothes, personal utensils, and so on. Here are also three portraits of Bahá'u'lláh (two paintings and a photo) and a painting of the Báb. These portraits should be the only ones existing in the Bahá'í community,²⁵ which means that the only possibility for a Bahá'í to see these portraits is to go on pilgrimage. The other two groups visited the prison cell of Bahá'u'lláh in ‘Akká and the house of Abbúd where Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned for some time, also in ‘Akká. The tour continued to Mazra'ih, a place outside ‘Akká where Bahá'u'lláh lived for some time, after leaving the house of Abbúd. The fifth day was a copy of the fourth day, but the four pilgrim groups took part in the program that they had not taken part in on the fourth day. Back in Haifa the pilgrims saw a slide show. The seventh day the pilgrims visited the Monument Gardens and the Temple Land, the site of a future Bahá'í Temple. The eighth day they visited Bahjí once more and the ninth day they visited the house of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Haifa. Today the pilgrims visit the Seat of the Universal House of Justice close to the Monument Gardens, which was finished at the end of 1982 but was not ready when my pilgrimage was performed. Pilgrims also visit other houses in ‘Akká that were not open in 1982.

The pilgrim program is centered upon the life of Bahá'u'lláh as a prisoner in the ‘Akká area and on visits to the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh and the shrine of the Báb. At each place there would be time for prayer and meditation.

The Holy Land

In the Bahá'í writings, Israel is referred to as the Holy Land,²⁶ but without any aspect of exclusiveness. According to Shoghi Effendi, the holiness of Israel is related to its long and diversified religious history—the birthplace of Judaism and Christianity, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, the place where Bahá'u'lláh stayed for thirty-four years and where his remains rest today, and also where the remains of the Báb rest. Thus it is not the Holy Land, promised by God. It is rather holy in another sense, as it is considered the center of the world. I will expand on this theme in the chapter called “Axis mundi.”

Iran also has a special place in the Bahá'í writings. It is the place where three manifestations of God²⁷ were born and it is also the birthplace of three religions. There are a number of writings related to Iran written by Bahá'u'lláh. The following passage, addressed to Teheran,²⁸ can be seen as a typical example: “O Land of Tá! Thou art still, through the grace of God, a center around which His beloved ones have gathered. Happy are they; happy every refugee that seeketh thy shelter, in his sufferings in the path of God, the Lord of this wondrous day!”²⁹

The history of the Bahá'í Faith in Iran has also left behind many places of interest. The persecution of the Iranian Bahá'ís has always put Iran in focus for the Bahá'ís around the world. This focus has been given dimension through *The Dawn-Breakers* and other martyrologies. It is not, however, the Promised Land that could serve as a refuge from persecution. It has rather been the place where persecutions have been most intense.

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

The public perception of the Bahá'í Faith tends to emphasize either of two perspectives: a broadly humanistic movement or an international religious organization that has a high moral expectation on its members with a well-defined membership. Neither of these perspectives is completely wrong. There are some broad humanistic traits in the Bahá'í Faith and these traits were emphasized especially by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and especially in contact with westerners. The same version of the Bahá'í Faith is presented in E.G. Browne's interview. Another perspective is equally true. It was emphasized in Iran and was more and more emphasized also in the West as the Bahá'í administration took its form and demanded that those who would work within that administration accepted the discipline that was necessary to keep the organization together. The first step for the individual to accept this second perspective is to accept Bahá'u'lláh as a manifestation of God with all that it means in following the laws and principles of the Bahá'í Faith.

These two perspectives are not usually parallel, at least not today. The perspective of the Bahá'í Faith as a general humanistic movement is usually what a person first meets before he or she gets a deeper understanding of the Bahá'í Faith and perhaps becomes a member. When a person investigates the Bahá'í Faith more closely, he/she will meet an organized religion, which includes active participation in the Bahá'í administration. As there are no personal leaders in the Bahá'í Faith, but rather a form of collective leadership on local, national and international levels, most active members take part in the administration. They will often be involved in this work to such an extent that it will be a part, perhaps a large part, of their identity as Bahá'ís.

The Nature of Bahá'í Administration

When the Bahá'í community had to cooperate in a practical way when trying to stop the persecution of the Iranian Bahá'ís, it obviously had to be done through the Bahá'í administrative system, which is the means of practical cooperation in the Bahá'í Faith.

To the Western student it is natural to ask the question whether or not the Bahá'í administrative system should be considered a democratic system. Regarding this question, Shoghi Effendi has written: "The Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh must in no wise be regarded as purely democratic in character inasmuch as the basic assumption which requires all democracies to depend fundamentally upon getting their mandate from the people is altogether lacking in this Dispensation."³⁰

The Bahá'í administration should, according to Shoghi Effendi, rather be described as a theocratic system. "What the Guardian was referring to was the Theocratic systems, such as the Catholic Church and the Caliphate, which are not divinely given as systems, but man-made and yet, having partly derived from the teachings of Christ and Muhammad are, in a sense, theocracies. The Bahá'í theocracy, on the contrary, is both divinely ordained as a system and, of course, based on the teachings of the Prophet Himself."³¹

Bahá'í Theocracy

When Shoghi Effendi describes Bahá'í administration as a theocracy, he obviously already has some kind of theocracy in mind, but how should this kind of theocracy be described? In order to get a perspective to this question, I will start by searching for different kinds of theocracies.

In his article on theocracy,³² Dewey D. Wallace Jr., has made an overview of different kinds of theocracies and he describes four main types: Hierocracies, Royal theocracies, General theocracies and Eschatological theocracies. Of these four types, it is possible to omit the eschatological theocracy immediately, as this kind of theocracy is "centering on visions of an ideal future, in which God will rule." It is true that this kind of vision exists in the Bahá'í Faith in the concept of the "Most Great Peace," but in Bahá'í theocracy God is ruling already and has done so from the moment the Báb appeared on May 23, 1844. Seen from the Bahá'í perspective, it is rather mankind that has failed to accept this divine rule.

Hierocracy has been described as "pure" theocracy and Wallace finds a distinction between two kinds of hierocracies: one kind that is priestly and another that is prophetic-charismatic. During the time in

Bahá'í history that is called the "Heroic age" by Shoghi Effendi, 1844-1921, there is no doubt that the Bahá'í faith is best described as a prophetic-charismatic theocracy. During the time of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh the Bahá'í Faith was led by two prophets who functioned in a charismatic way. 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not accept to be described as a prophet, but he was promised direct divine guidance in the Kitáb-i-Ahd (Will and Testament of Bahá'u'lláh)³³ and his way of exercising his task must be seen as charismatic in character. Therefore, he must also be described as a prophetic-charismatic leader.

Still, this period is probably not what Shoghi Effendi was referring to. He was concerned with describing the nature of the administrative system in the Bahá'í community, the system that he, himself, was building up and which was based on the teachings of the prophet himself. This administrative system is not a prophetic-charismatic theocracy, as there is no person who can be described as a prophetic-charismatic leader. Whether the period of the leadership of Shoghi Effendi (1921-1957) should be considered prophetic-charismatic is a matter of how this term is defined, but this period is a period of transition, as is the period 1957-1963. It is rather the period from 1963 onwards that should be studied, from the year of the first election of the Universal House of Justice.

The second version of hierocracy is the one ruled by priestly functionaries. This could hardly have been the kind of theocracy that Shoghi Effendi was referring to, as no priesthood exists in the Bahá'í Faith. Naturally this is dependent upon how the term "priesthood" is defined, but it is very difficult to apply it to Bahá'í administration as the members in its institutions have no priestly functions. Bahá'í administration is characterized by the existence of elected assemblies composed of nine members. These members have no special education that could characterize them as priestly functionaries and they have no special initiation that separates them from other Bahá'ís. They are elected individually with secret ballots and there is no effective system to influence the voters. There also are no guarantees that the members of the assemblies will be re-elected.

The next type of theocracy is what Wallace calls Royal theocracy.³⁴ Dewey Wallace mentions a number of examples of this kind of theocracy, but the most important of these examples are from ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. The most important feature of this kind of theocracy is that the king has a sacral role in the society. It is also taken for granted that the nation is the base. No king exists in the Bahá'í administration and the administration is of a global extension. In Egypt the king was a god himself and in Mesopotamia the king was a representative of the god. In this there is a parallel to the Universal House of Justice. As the Bahá'í administration is in some respects a theocratic system, the leading institution is divinely guided and the election of its members is considered being guided by God in a process of election where the voting delegates turn to God in prayers and supplicate to be guided by God when casting their votes. The Universal House of Justice is also promised infallibility in its decisions as an institution, which gives it a high degree of authority. The individual members of the Universal House of Justice, however, have no formal authority.

Considering this discussion, it might still be the royal theocracy that Shoghi Effendi was referring to, but it would be a royal theocracy cast in a new mould. If this background is what Shoghi Effendi was referring to, it would probably be the royal theocracy in the version of ancient Iran, as it is rather the Iranian culture that forms a background to the Bahá'í Faith than the culture of Mesopotamia or ancient Egypt.

The description of general theocracy is also applicable to the Bahá'í Faith. The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are manifestations of God who left a vast number of revealed writings. Also the life and writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi are, to a certain degree, considered to be revelations, as they are believed to be inspired by God. Other examples of general theocracy are connected to divine law, like the Sharia law in Islam. The center of Bahá'í law, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, is called the "Most Holy Book" and to follow Bahá'í law is an important aspect of being a Bahá'í. It is a duty of Bahá'í institutions to make sure that the members of the Bahá'í community respect and obey these laws. If a certain individual has broken one of these laws in a way that it is affecting the Bahá'í community and has been warned a number of times, the Bahá'í institution can give some kind of punishment to that individual. One such punishment is loss of voting rights.³⁵

The judicial duties of the Bahá’í administration are not, however, its most central function. When Shoghi Effendi called the Bahá’í administration a theocracy, he probably was not thinking primarily of its potential to uphold a divine law, but more of its potential to lead the Bahá’í community in accordance to the will of God. The Universal House of Justice is bound by Bahá’í law and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, yet it is still the Universal House of Justice that must apply the law and, if necessary, make additional laws. The judicial aspect of general theocracy is, no doubt, a part of the Bahá’í theocracy, but it does not cover the total meaning of theocracy in the Bahá’í Faith. It only explains in what ways the divine law affects the life of the Bahá’í community. It does not explain the development that has taken place. The question that has to be answered is how the Bahá’í Faith could develop into an international organization that could become part of the international community and affect different parts of the international community with the effect that the issue of the Iranian Bahá’ís was taken up by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

God is King

A central concept in the Bahá’í Faith is “bahá”—glory—and Bahá’u’lláh is the glory of God. The word bahá carries the name of the religion itself—Bahá’í—meaning the religion of Bahá’u’lláh and a follower of Bahá’u’lláh. It is connected to Bahá’í administration as well: “The Lord hath ordained that in every city³⁶ a House of Justice be established wherein shall gather the counselors to the number of bahá³⁷ and should it exceed this number it doth not matter.”³⁸

Related to this is the older concept of *khvarenah*, which was later described as *farr*.³⁹ Ulla Olsson discussed this concept in her doctoral dissertation on princely mirrors in Iranian tradition: “Vem är hjálte?” A part of her discussion is *khvarenah*—the divine radiance emanating from the king in the pre-Islamic kingship ideology in Iran. She points out that Ghazali uses the concept *farr-i-Izadí*. He asks the question whether any man could be called king or if this is worthy only of God “...because great men (*buzurgán*) owe their greatness to the divine effulgence, (*farr-i-Izadí*) and to their radiance of soul, pureness of body, and breadth of intellect and knowledge, as well as the dominion which has long been in their family.”⁴⁰

This pattern has its parallel in the administrative system of the Bahá’í Faith. There are a number of passages where God is described as king or king of kings. The promise to the Universal House of Justice that it will have divine support in its decisions also implies that God rules through the Universal House of Justice: “And now, concerning the House of Justice which God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error, it must be elected by universal suffrage, that is, by the believers. Its members must be manifestations of the fear of God and daysprings of knowledge and understanding, must be steadfast in God’s faith and the well-wishers of all mankind.”⁴¹

In the tablet of Ahmad, Bahá’u’lláh refers to the idea of God as the king, as it starts with the words: “He is the King, the All-knowing, the Wise!” It continues further on: “...informing the severed ones of the message which hath been revealed by God, the King, the Glorious...” “O Ahmad! Bear thou witness that verily He is God and there is no God but Him, the King, the Protector, the Incomparable, the Omnipotent.”⁴² In the tablet of ‘Ishráqát he refers to God as “the King of Eternity”;⁴³ in the tablet Tajalliyát as “King of everlasting days,”⁴⁴ in Lawḥ-i-Burhán as “King of all Names,”⁴⁵ these being only a few examples.

A Global Perspective

The geographical perspective of kingship is the nation and therefore there is a connection between kingship and nationalism. The relationship between nationalism and the Bahá’í Faith is expressed in the much-used quotation from Bahá’u’lláh: “The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.”⁴⁶ When the concept of nation is used in the Bahá’í Faith, like in the National Spiritual Assembly, it is primarily a level between the local town or village and the global perspective. It does, however, also relate to the concept of nation, as normally understood. In the words of Shoghi Effendi regarding the “world-wide law of Bahá’u’lláh”: “It can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men’s hearts, nor to abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of excessive centralization are to be avoided.”⁴⁷

This global aspect is one reason why it is not possible to call the Bahá’í Faith a “sacral kingship” or,

in the words of Wallace, a “royal theocracy.” The other one is that there is no king in the Bahá’í Faith. The theocracy in the Bahá’í Faith cannot, however, be separated from the concept of the covenant, a concept that in the Bible exists parallel to sacral kingship. In the Bible these two concepts are combined in the covenant of David, which in the New Testament is developed into the belief of a messiah. The covenant of David⁴⁸ is in this way developed from a concept with a national focus to a concept with a universal focus.

The global perspective is, in this way, already existing in Abrahamitic tradition as both Christianity and Islam go beyond the perspective of nation and turn to the whole of mankind. The basis of this is that God had created all mankind and offered a covenant to all peoples, hence the striving to missionize.

The Bahá’í Covenant

The covenant in the Bahá’í Faith is a relationship between God and humanity, running through the history of mankind up to the present age. This concept is inherited from the Bible and the Qur’án and in this way the Bahá’í Faith stands in the tradition of the Abrahamitic religions.⁴⁹ In the covenant of the Bahá’í Faith is mentioned names from the Bible and the Qur’án, such as Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Yet Buddha and Zoroaster are also mentioned, and Shoghi Effendi refers to “the Bhagavad Gita of the Hindus.”⁵⁰ The covenant is based on seven religions: Sabeism [sic], Hinduism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. To these are added Bábism [sic] and the Bahá’í Faith, making the list of nine complete.⁵¹

There is no central idea of reconciliation that has to be done by sacrifice. The history of mankind is seen instead as a long period of development through a number of manifestations of God and not as a primordial state of order that was brought into chaos and that has to be brought back to order through reconciliation. The order is brought to men through the manifestations of God, and chaos comes into being when men deviate from this order. Order is restored when God sends a new manifestation with a new message. The covenant between man and God describes this balance, but it is not only a balance. It is also a development where humankind is growing and maturing like a child becoming a youth then finally an adult.⁵²

This covenant is extended to a minor covenant, as Bahá’u’lláh in his Will appointed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the Center of the Covenant. To be a Bahá’í is also to accept this part of the covenant. In the will of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi is named as the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith, thus making it a part of the minor covenant. Finally, the authority of the Universal House of Justice is established as part of this covenant.

Kingship and Servanthood

A special aspect of sacral kingship is the idea of the faithful slave or helper. Ulla Ohlsson has touched upon this theme in her study on princely mirrors. The example that she dwells upon from the Iranian tradition is the example of relationship between the king and the servant in Sultan Mahmoud and Ayaz. This is pictured as the ideal example of servanthood, which is of great value to the king.

In the Bible, this is not a central theme. The king, especially king David, is called the servant of God, but others are also given this name.⁵³ These are, however, not examples of kingship and servanthood as a relationship between two persons, as in the case of Sultan Mahmoud and Ayaz. When studying the special relationship between Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the personal relationship is very important and so the best parallel to study is probably this Iranian example, in order to get more light and understanding to the theme.

In Mathnáví, Rumi dwells on this theme. Rumi describes Ayaz as being the most appreciated person of all, close to the king. He was richly rewarded and the other envied him.

There are a number of stories showing Ayaz’s faithfulness to Sultan Mahmoud. One example is when Sultan Mahmoud has a priceless pearl that he asks his vazír to evaluate. When he had done this, Sultan Mahmoud asked him to smash the pearl. The vazír could not make himself do that, as the pearl was much too valuable. The same question was put to different other ministers with the same result. When finally Ayaz was asked that question, he also estimated the pearl as priceless. When asked to destroy it, he took

two stones and crushed it. When receiving the reaction of the others, he said: "O renowned princes, is the King's command more precious or the pearl? In your eyes is the command of the sovereign or this goodly pearl superior..."⁵⁴ There is more to this story, but the message that is most interesting to this study is the exemplary obedience of Ayaz.

Relationship Between Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá

The relationship between the lord and the true servant, as described in the story about Sultan Mahmoud and Ayaz is mirrored in the relationship between Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. 'Abdu'l-Bahá acted as the representative of Bahá'u'lláh in his contact with the authorities of 'Akká. Shoghi Effendi describes him as "the Center and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant,"⁵⁵ but in his relation to Bahá'u'lláh he describes himself as a servant.

'Abdu'l-Bahá was born on May 23, 1844 into the family of Bahá'u'lláh, which was economically very well off. The situation changed for the close family of Bahá'u'lláh when he was put into prison and later exiled to the Ottoman Empire. It is from this time that one is able to see this kind of relationship between Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. During his lifetime, Bahá'u'lláh often used the services of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Taherzadeh mentions 'Abdu'l-Bahá as one of the transcribers of the revelation writings of Bahá'u'lláh⁵⁶ and Balyuzi⁵⁷ dwells on the role of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 'Akká, where he took care of the affairs of the Bahá'í community, related to officials, and had other external contacts. At the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'u'lláh's Will made 'Abdu'l-Bahá the leader of the Bahá'í community. It was after this that he took the title 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He emphasized this in the following letter: "You have written that there is a difference among the believers concerning the 'Second Coming of Christ.' Gracious God! Time and again this question hath arisen, and its answer hath emanated in a clear and irrefutable statement from the pen of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that what is meant in the prophecies by the 'Lord of Hosts' and the 'Promised Christ' is the Blessed Perfection⁵⁸ (Bahá'u'lláh) and His holiness the Exalted One (the Báb). My name is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. My qualification is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. My reality is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. My praise is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Thralldom to the Blessed Perfection is my glorious and refulgent diadem and servitude to all the human race my perpetual religion.... No name, no title, no mention, no commendation have I, nor will I ever have, except 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This is my longing. This is my greatest yearning. This is my eternal life. This is my everlasting glory."⁵⁹

Authority and Servanthood

The example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá has emphasized the principle of servanthood for the individual and the guiding authority of the elected institution. "...the local assemblies should inspire confidence in the individual believers, and these in their turn should express their readiness to fully abide by the decisions and directions of the local assembly."⁶⁰

In the *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, the basis of Bahá'í administration, the relationship between the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice is explained. In the years to follow, the holder of the institution of guardianship, Shoghi Effendi, developed both institutions. Today the institution of guardianship is represented by the International Teaching Center, but not as an independent institution. That institution is subordinated the Universal House of Justice.

Bahá'í Martyrs: Servants and Witnesses

The Persian and Arabic word for martyr, used in Islam and in the Bahá'í Faith is shahíd, meaning "witness." This is a link to the New Testament word for witnesses, as "witness" is the meaning of the Greek word "martyreín."⁶¹ The concept of martyrdom in Christianity has its roots in the Gospel, where the apostles are promised help from the Holy Spirit, when interrogated at court.

The meaning of the word shahíd does not, however, mean that martyrs primarily are considered witnesses in the Bahá'í Faith, as martyrdom also includes the aspect of servanthood. The martyr should rather be considered a servant of Bahá'u'lláh who gives up the most valuable thing that one can give: his or her life. Whether a person should be considered a martyr is decided by the Universal House of Justice. If the death of a Bahá'í is accepted as martyrdom, it will be written in a letter that is sent to the Bahá'í world. Martyrdom is therefore always tied to obedience to the Universal House of Justice.

The Fundamentals of Bahá'í Administration

When Shoghi Effendi described the Bahá'í Faith as a theocracy, he was describing a kind of theocracy that does not fit perfectly into the pattern, given in the article on theocracy. It was a system, based upon a divine government with some similarities of sacral kingship but without a king and without a nation. It is moreover a system, based on a prophet, but without a charismatic leader after the formation of the first Universal House of Justice in 1963, and without a system of priestly functionaries.

This theocracy is lead by an assembly of nine people, elected through a process that has many similarities with democracy. According to Shoghi Effendi it is, however, not a democracy because it is not responsible to its voters, but to God. At the time of election the members of the institutions in Bahá'í administration still have to give the initiative to the members of the Bahá'í community, who give their ballots in secret elections. In this way the elections are carried out according to the same basic principles as elections in democratic systems.

The way of working in the Bahá'í administrative system can be described in terms of both the basic pattern of both the theocratic and the democratic systems. Its fundamentals are equally complex. The Bahá'í administrative system is built on three fundamentals and two have been described in this chapter: theocracy and the Biblical concept of the covenant. These two system were not all the time compatible even in the Bible. In order to get a more complete picture of the Bahá'í administrative system, it is necessary to continue with the third fundamental, which is also an instrument to integrate the other two fundamentals—the World Center of the Bahá'í Faith.

Mount Carmel as Axis Mundi

The holy mountain as a symbol in the history of religions is a well-known motif, as for example Mount Ararat to the Armenians and Mount Zion in Jewish and Christian traditions. In the latter case it even serves as the name of a political ideology. To the Bahá'ís, Mount Carmel in Israel has the same function.

In the Tablet of Carmel, Bahá'u'lláh has related Carmel and Zion with the following words: "Call out to Zion, O Carmel, and announce the joyful tidings: He that was hidden from mortal eyes is come! His all-conquering sovereignty is manifest; His all-encompassing splendor is revealed."⁶² In this way he proclaims that the prophecies of the Bible have been fulfilled. He does not say exactly which prophecies, but his aim is obviously to connect it to biblical tradition. In the same letter he refers to a number of religious traditions. The tradition of sacral kingship is referred to with the following words. "Rejoice, for God hath in this Day established upon thee His throne, hath made thee the dawning-place of His signs and the day spring of the evidences of His Revelation."⁶³ Islamic tradition is reflected in "...the celestial Kaaba..."⁶⁴ and from Jewish tradition mention is made of "...the Burning Bush..."⁶⁵

The status of the Tablet of Carmel is to be the foundation of the Bahá'í World Center on Mount Carmel, its charter. The other two texts that are called charters are 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets of the Divine Plan and the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.⁶⁶

Mount Carmel—The Vineyard of God⁶⁷

To a visitor to the city of Haifa, Israel, it is obvious that Mount Carmel is of central importance to the Bahá'í Faith. On this mountain the Bahá'ís have erected an international administrative center, a shrine for the remains of the Báb and a center of pilgrimage. Surrounding these edifices there are gardens to such an extent that a citizen of that city once expressed to this author that when she was a child, growing up in Haifa, she thought the Bahá'ís worshipped gardening. To the numerically small Bahá'í community,⁶⁸ the building of this area has been a major undertaking and a proportionally large part of its economic resources have been invested in this project.

'Abdu'l-Bahá started the development of the area owned by the Bahá'ís by transporting soil to the barren land of Carmel and building the first part of the shrine of the Báb.⁶⁹ This work was continued by Shoghi Effendi and by the Universal House of Justice. The projects now going on emphasize this on a grand scale with the plan to make the group of administrative buildings complete and to build a series

of nine terraces from the top of Mount Carmel down to the shrine of the Báb and a further nine down to the foot of Mount Carmel. This project is described by Shoghi Effendi in the following vision: "The opening of a series of terraces which, as designed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, are to provide a direct approach to the Báb's Tomb from the city lying under its shadow; the beautification of its precincts through the laying out of parks and gardens, open daily to the public, and attracting tourists and residents alike to its gates—these may be regarded as the initial evidences of the marvelous expansion of the international institutions and endowments of the Faith at its world center."⁷⁰

Axis Mundi

In his book, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Mircea Eliade has discussed holy mountains as axis mundi—the center of the world—standing in the middle of the world, binding it together with heaven. This theme can be found in many religions, Zion being one example from Judaism. Also in Iranian religion, there are references to holy mountains.⁷¹

Shoghi Effendi has described the importance of Mount Carmel and the shrine of the Báb in the following text: "The outermost circle in this vast system, the visible counterpart of the pivotal position conferred on the Herald of our Faith, is none other than the entire planet. Within the heart of this planet lies the 'Most Holy Land,' acclaimed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as 'the Nest of the Prophets' and which must be regarded as the center of the world and the Qiblih of the nations. Within this Most Holy Land rises the Mountain of God of immemorial sanctity, the Vineyard of the Lord, the Retreat of Elijah, Whose Return the Báb Himself symbolizes. Reposing on the breast of this Holy Mountain are the extensive properties permanently dedicated to, and constituting the sacred precincts of, the Báb's holy Sepulcher. In the midst of these properties, recognized as the international endowments of the Faith, is situated the Most Holy Court, an enclosure comprising gardens and terraces which at once embellish, and lend peculiar charm to, these Sacred Precincts. Embossed in these lovely and verdant surroundings stands in all its exquisite beauty the Mausoleum of the Báb, the Shell designed to preserve and adorn the original structure raised by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Tomb of the Martyr-Herald of our Faith. Within this Shell is enshrined that Pearl of Great Price, the Holy of Holies, those chambers which constitute the Tomb itself, and which were constructed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Within the heart of these Holy of Holies is the Tabernacle, the Vault wherein reposes the Most Holy Casket. Within this Vault rests the alabaster Sarcophagus in which is deposited that inestimable Jewel, the Báb's Holy Dust. So precious is this Dust that the very earth surrounding the Edifice enshrining this Dust has been extolled by the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant,⁷² in one of His Tablets in which He named the five doors belonging to the six chambers which He originally erected after five of the believers associated with the construction of the shrine, as being endowed with such potency as to have inspired Him in bestowing these names, whilst the Tomb itself housing the Dust He acclaimed as the Spot round which the Concourse on high circles in adoration."⁷³

Does this necessarily mean that it is the shrine of the Báb that should be considered the Axis Mundi of the Bahá'í Faith? In Islam it is the Kaaba that is considered the Axis Mundi and the Kaaba is also the Qiblih in Islam. This function is bound to the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in the Bahá'í Faith. The cited text by Shoghi Effendi is, however, central to this question and this means that in the Bahá'í Faith the Axis Mundi and the Qiblih are separated from each other.

Dedicated by Bahá'u'lláh

When revealing the Tablet of Carmel, Bahá'u'lláh was standing on the top of Mount Carmel, reading out the tablet in a loud voice as a proclamation. The place he chose for this proclamation was just above the Carmelite monastery, which in that moment came to symbolize the religions of old⁷⁴ and the prophecy of the Bible that is interpreted as Mount Carmel being the place where Jesus would return. Mircea Eliade⁷⁵ has written about this kind of consecration of holy places. He points out that those holy places were often known earlier as holy places.

Mount Carmel is best known from the Old Testament as the mountain of Elia,⁷⁶ who in the New Testament is recognized as John the Baptist. This could be seen as a background to the spiritual center on Mount Carmel, the shrine of the Báb, parallel to John the Baptist in the Bahá'í Faith. His remains have

been placed at that spot by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá under the instruction of Bahá’u’lláh. The shrine of Bahá’u’lláh is situated across the Bay of ‘Akká. During pilgrimage it is a part of the program to visit both shrines.

A Microcosm

In Bahá’í teaching the number nine symbolizes totality: “The number nine, which in itself is the number of perfection, is considered by the Bahá’ís as sacred, because it is symbolic of the perfection of the Bahá’í Revelation which constitutes the ninth in the line of existing religions...”⁷⁷ In Persian/Arabic thinking, a number could be expressed by adding the numeric value of the letters in a word. The word for nine is “bahá” in this abjad system. When Bahá’u’lláh instructs in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas that “in every city a House of Justice be established wherein shall gather counselors to the number of Bahá,”⁷⁸ it is obvious to the reader how many persons that should be elected to that assembly. He is, however, not only giving a number. He is also relating that assembly to the complete number of the Bahá’í Faith. In this way He gives this assembly a role as a microcosm, representing the whole world. An expression to this is that every assembly should, in its decisions, try to serve not only the group that has elected its members, but the totality of mankind.⁷⁹

Another number that has a symbolic meaning in the Bahá’í Faith is nineteen. The Bahá’í calendar has nineteen months with nineteen days in each month. The most important religious service is the Nineteen Day Feast. The number of delegates in a national convention is nineteen, two times nineteen, three times nineteen, etc., depending upon the size of the community. This relation to number nineteen began in the Bábí religion, which started by eighteen persons who accepted the Báb independently. These eighteen, together with the Báb himself, made up the first unit or váhid. The word váhid comes from the Arabic, meaning “one” in the feminine tense. In the abjad system the sum of váhid is nineteen. Váhid can also mean unity and is used in the Bahá’í Faith to mean the unity of God. Number nineteen of the Bahá’í Faith has a parallel in Manicheism where number nineteen has a relationship to Daéná, the maiden that waited to accompany the soul into paradise.⁸⁰ The Daéná motif is also referred to in the writings of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh as the “Maid from Heaven” speaks to the Báb in “Muntakhabát-i Ayát”⁸¹ and to Bahá’u’lláh in the Tablet of ‘Ishráqát.⁸²

Mount Carmel as a Universal Symbol

In his description of the holy mountain, Mircea Eliade, also emphasizes the need to rebuild the holy mountain in the local village and even in the homes of people. There is no example of this that is described in the Bahá’í writings. There are, however, some traits that relate to this idea in the Bahá’í House of Worship. Mircea Eliade has described the holy mountain as the place where earth and heaven meet and that this is repeated in the local temple. The Bahá’í Houses of Worship are reflecting this by their dome structure, resembling the canopy of heaven.⁸³ The House of Worship itself has nine entrances, nine pathways leading up to each entrance and nine gardens surrounding it. The idea is that each village, town and city should be built around a House of Worship, which would emphasize the idea of each temple being a symbol of the holy mountain, the center of the world. Around the House of Worship will be built dependencies like schools, libraries etc. making the institution of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár complete.

“The first part to be built is the central edifice which is the spiritual heart of the community. Then, gradually, as the outward expression of this spiritual heart, the various dependencies, those ‘institutions of social service as shall afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to the ignorant’ are erected and function. This process begins in an embryonic way long before a Bahá’í community reaches the stage of building its own Mashriqu’l-Adhkár, for even the first local center that a Bahá’í community erects can begin to serve not only as the spiritual and administrative center and gathering place of the community, but also as the site of a tutorial school and the heart of other aspects of community life.”⁸⁴

The Spiritual Center

The most holy place, however, is not Mount Carmel. It is the shrine of Bahá’u’lláh, outside the city of ‘Akká, and especially where his remains are resting.⁸⁵ This is also the Qiblih of the Bahá’í world, the point towards which the Bahá’ís turn when praying. During pilgrimage the Bahá’ís always will visit this place at least on one occasion and to most pilgrims it is the highlight of their pilgrimage each time they

can visit this spot. At the time of larger gatherings, like at international conventions,⁸⁶ there will be too many to enter into the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. Instead the delegates will circumambulate this building, following a pathway that goes in a circle with the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in its center.

In this way there might seem to be a tension between Mount Carmel as the center of the world and the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. This is, however, not the case. The two places have separate roles to the Bahá'ís, which are better thought of as complementary than competing. The shrine of Bahá'u'lláh is the most holy spot and Mount Carmel could be seen more as an outer symbol of the world order of Bahá'u'lláh.

Conclusion

Pilgrimage is a way for the individual believer to strengthen his/her religious belief and to form a religious identity. This is true in many religions and also in the Bahá'í Faith. Strengthening the ties with the founder of a religion—for Bahá'ís to strengthen the ties with Bahá'u'lláh as a manifestation of God—makes a person ready to take on different kinds of religious services and for the Bahá'ís this would be to work in the Bahá'í administration. In extreme situations, like religious persecutions, this religious identity will be tested to its utmost and this has happened to the Bahá'ís in Iran.

The Bahá'í administration is founded on two concepts, well known in the history of religion: sacral kingship and the covenant. The Bahá'í World Center makes the means whereby the weaving together of the idea of sacral kingship and the idea of the covenant has been made.

The kingship of God is represented by the Bahá'í administration, headed by the Universal House of Justice. The outer symbol of this institution is the Seat of the Universal House of Justice, surrounded by complementary buildings. The symbol of the covenant is the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, as this institution is first and foremost connected to Bahá'u'lláh himself. The binding together of the idea of these two concepts is done through the idea of Mount Carmel as axis mundi, which is represented by the shrine of the Báb.

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Notes

- 1) In the meaning that Messiah (the anointed one) is referring to the king.
- 2) This can be translated to “letter of visitation.”
- 3) This can be translated as “prayer of visitation.”
- 4) The words *ziárat* and the less common word *laqá* both mean “visit” and are also used in a more general sense, meaning to visit a person that one has a great respect for. Both words are Arabic, but *ziárat* has been more integrated in the Persian language.
- 5) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, sixth printing 1970, (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1944), p. 188
- 6) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 199
- 7) The center of the world.
- 8) This is the place referred to in the table as the Shrine of Jesus. As it is central to Christian Faith that the Tomb of Jesus was empty, it can be seen as disrespectful to call it the shrine of Jesus. It is, however, not my intention to discuss this dogma. I simply use this term in order to be able to discuss pilgrimage as a phenomenon.
- 9) Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, (Wilmette, Illinois 1992, reprinted 1993, Bahá’í Publishing Trust), p. 30.
- 10) These two places are the only places where the term *hajj* is used in the Bahá’í writings. In English speaking Bahá’í literature there is no difference made between *hajj* and *ziárat*.
- 11) The Most Holy Shrine is the shrine of Bahá’u’lláh in Bahji, outside ‘Akká in Israel. Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 191.
- 12) Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 191-192.
- 13) Bahá’u’lláh.
- 14) Taherzadeh, Adib, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1983) vol. 3, p. 64.
- 15) A Christian Arab who came from Lebanon. The idea of initiation is not common in the Bahá’í Faith. It seems that he did not get this idea from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, but included it himself.
- 16) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, No year of publication), Chapter LXXXI
- 17) V. Piff Mettelman, *Lua Getsinger—Herald of the Covenant*, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997), p.7.
- 18) Bahá’u’lláh’s eldest daughter.
- 19) Velda Mettelman, *Lua Getsinger—Herald of the Covenant*, p. 24-25.
- 20) This collection was first published under the title *The Wisdom of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*.
- 21) Ward, Allan L., *239 Days, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Journey in America*, (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1979), p. 17-18
- 22) Ruhe, David S., *Door of Hope*, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1983), p. 136.
- 23) David S. Ruhe, *Door of Hope*, p. 143
- 24) *Program of Pilgrimage*, (Haifa: Bahá’í World Center, no year of publication). This booklet is undated and no author is given. Each pilgrim receives a copy at the time of confirmation of the pilgrimage.
- 25) It is possible that portraits exist in private homes as well, but if so, they are not available to the Bahá’í community.
- 26) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 183
- 27) Zarathustra, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh.
- 28) According to the Bahá’í transcription system, the spelling is Tihrán.
- 29) Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, Second revised edition 1976, (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1939), p. 109, 110.
- 30) Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, Second revised edition, third printing 1969, (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1938), p. 153.
- 31) Shoghi Effendi, *Directives of the Guardian*, (New Dehli, Bahá’í Publishing Trust, no year of publication) p. 71.
- 32) D. D. Wallace, Jr., “Theocracy,” *Encyclopaedia of Religions*, Ed. M. Eliade, (New York: MacMillan Publ. 1987), vol. 14, pp. 427-430.
- 33) Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, (Haifa: Bahá’í World Center, 1978), p. 221. In this tablet ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is referred to under the title, given by Bahá’u’lláh: the Most Mighty Branch.
- 34) I use “Royal theocracy” and “sacral kingship” as synonyms.
- 35) *Lights of Guidance*, Compiled by Helen Bassett Hornby, third revised edition 1994, (New Dehli: Bahá’í Publishing Trust,

- 1983), pp. 50–51. Quotation from Shoghi Effendi. This punishment means that this person cannot take part in the Bahá’í administration.
- 36) The Arabic word being used by Bahá’u’lláh for city is *Medíneh*, which does not imply that the meaning of the word should be connected to a certain size of the city or any special definition of a city as opposed to a village. There are today a number of villages around the world with such an assembly.
 - 37) The numerical value of Bahá in the abjad system is 9. This is the traditional system whereby each letter gets a number and the sum of the letters in a word gets a symbolic value.
 - 38) Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 30.
 - 39) The meaning of *khvarenah* is light, glory in the meaning of farr-i-Izadí, which is the glory of God, the same as the meaning of the title Bahá’u’lláh.
 - 40) Ohlsson, Ulla, *Vem är hjálte?*, (Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet, Institutionen för Religionsvetenskap, nr. 17, 1995), p. 95f.
 - 41) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, (Manchester: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1950), p. 7.
 - 42) *Bahá’í Prayers*, (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970), p. 129-130.
 - 43) *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 123.
 - 44) *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 50.
 - 45) *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 206.
 - 46) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. xvi.
 - 47) Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 41.
 - 48) Ringgren, Helmer, *Israel’s Religion*, (Lund: Doxa, 1970), p. 161f.
 - 49) Shoghi Effendi writes that Bahá’u’lláh derived His descent, on the one hand, from Abraham through his wife Katurah, and on the other hand from Zoroaster, as well as from Yazdigird, the last king of the Sásánsián dynasty. *God Passes By*, p. 94.
 - 50) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 95.
 - 51) Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 52.
 - 52) Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 114.
 - 53) Helmer Ringgren, *Israel’s Religion*, p. 155.
 - 54) Ulla Ohlsson, *Vem är hjálte?*, p. 188.
 - 55) Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 134.
 - 56) The revelation writings of Bahá’u’lláh are notes taken at the time of the revelation of the tablets. As Bahá’u’lláh could not be disturbed at those times, the secretary taking notes had to write very quickly. This had the consequence that this text was only possible to read directly after the revelation and had to be transcribed directly. Taherzadeh, Adib, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*, vol. 1, revised edition (Oxford: George Ronald, 1976), p. 24.
 - 57) Balyuzi, Hasan, *Bahá’u’lláh: The King of Glory*, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1980), index on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 501–502.
 - 58) Bahá’u’lláh.
 - 59) Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 139.
 - 60) Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, 1969 edition, (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1939), p. 28.
 - 61) *Encyclopedie des Islam*, p. 281.
 - 62) Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 16.
 - 63) *ibid*, p. 15.
 - 64) *ibid*, p. 16.
 - 65) *ibid*, p. 16.
 - 66) *Tablets of the Divine Plan: ‘propagation of the Faith; Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: administration*. Adib Taherzadeh, *Trustees of the Merciful*, (London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1972), p. 57.
 - 67) Engnell, Ingvar (ed), *Svenskt Bibliskt Uppslagsverk*, second edition, (Stockholm: Esselte, 1962), p. 1302.
 - 68) About 5 million members today. When the first buildings on Mount Carmel were built in the beginning of the twentieth century, the number of Bahá’ís was much smaller. Homepage of the Bahá’í World Center, Internet, 97-03-2.
 - 69) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 275–277.
 - 70) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 346.
 - 71) Eliade, Mircea, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Reprinted 1971, (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1958), p. 100.
 - 72) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.
 - 73) *The Bahá’í World*, xii, reprinted 1981, (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1956), pp. 349–350, contribution by Shoghi Effendi.
 - 74) See chapter with the title “Bahá’í covenant.”
 - 75) Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, p. 369.
 - 76) *Svenskt Bibliskt Uppslagsverk*, p. 1302.
 - 77) Shoghi Effendi, *Directives of the Guardian*, (New Dehli: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, no year of publication), pp. 51–52.
 - 78) Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 30.
 - 79) Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá’í Administration*, 1974 edition., (Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1928), p. 21.

- 80) Ekbal, Kamran, “Daéná-Dén-Dín: The Zoroastrian Heritage of the ‘Maid of Heaven’ in the Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh.” Moojan Momen (Ed.) *Scripture & Revelation*, (Oxford: George Ronald, 1997), p. 141f.
- 81) Báb, The, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, Chatham, Great Britain, 1978, p. 54.
- 82) Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh, revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 122.
- 83) The dome structure is a symbol of heaven. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (Chicago: 1975). “Religious Symbolism and Iconography.”
- 84) Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, Compiled by Helen Bassett Hornby, third revised edition 1994., (New Dehli: Bahá’i Publishing Trust, 1983), p. 556.
- 86) David S. Ruhe, *Door of Hope*, p. 118.
- 87) International conventions are held once every fifth year. The number of delegates present might be more than 1,000 persons. The delegates are the members of each national spiritual assembly and during the 1990s there have been up to 175 national spiritual assemblies. (Homepage of the Bahá’i World Center on the Internet)

Kitáb-i-Aqdas as Described and Glorified by Shoghi Effendi

Cyrus Alai

Introduction

“Kitáb-i-Aqdas,” meaning the “Most Holy Book,” is not an ordinary work. It is not about a single topic, nor merely about the laws and ordinances of the Bahá’í Faith. It cannot be compared with any other book, including the Holy Bible or the Holy Koran. Therefore, it can hardly be reviewed in a single article, whatever its extent, or be explored in a single lecture, whatever its length.

The Aqdas has various aspects. These aspects seem, on one hand, to be quite independent from each other, each of them requiring a lengthy discussion for a satisfactory coverage. On the other hand, these aspects are so interrelated that none of them can be correctly understood unless the whole content of the Book is thoroughly studied. Only in this way can the spiritual power contained in this mighty work be released, guiding the reader to a better comprehension and digestion of its meaning and appreciation of its significance and force.

The writer of a short article about the entry “Aqdas” in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (v.2, 1987, pp.191-92) states: “According to a general evolutionary principle that can be seen to underlay the Bahá’í teachings, the Aqdas constitutes an energetic impulse rather than a rigid canonical code. It foresees the future abrogation of its own dispensation, but not before a thousand years.”

Since the Kitáb-i-Aqdas has been revealed (1873), numerous papers and several books have been published either debating the Most Holy Book as a whole or discussing its different facets and various topics. Some of the more recent ones are as follows:

Asráru’l-Ásár (Secrets of the Scripts), a shorter Bahá’í encyclopaedia in Persian by A. Fázil-i-Mázandarání, volume 1, entry Aqdas, pp.161-169, first published by Bahá’í Publishing Trust in Tehran, 1968

Taqrírát Dar Bári-yi Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Utterances about the Most Holy Book), a book in 420 pages in Persian by ‘Abdu’l-Hamid Ishráq-Khávarí, 1969, edited by Vahid Ra’fatí, Bahá’í Verlag, Hofheim-Germany, 1997, ISBN 3-87037-966-9

Ganjíni-yi Hudúd va Ahkám (Treasures of Laws and Ordinances), by A. H. Ishráq-Khávarí, first published in Teheran 1946 with many later reprints, the latest in New-Delhi 1980, 466 pages, Persian

“Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Mother Book of the Bahá’í Faith,” an article by A. Rabbani, *Payám-i-Bahá’í*, a monthly periodical published in France, issue 150, May 1992, pages 12-24, Persian

“The Mother Book and the Adolescence of Mankind,” an article by A. F. Imani, *Payám-i-Bahá’í*, issue 150, May 1992, pages 25-28, Persian

“A Glance at the Laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas,” an article by N. Mohammad-Hosseini, *Payám-i-Bahá’í*, issue 150, May 1992, pages 29-34, Persian

“Kitáb-i-Aqdas in respect of the Bahá’í Administrative Order and the Bahá’í World Order,” an article by Cyrus Ala’i, *Payám-i-Bahá’í*, issue 150, May 1992, pages 35-50, Persian

“*Kitáb-i-Aqdas in Bahá’í Literature*,” an article by V. Ra’fatí, *Payám-i-Bahá’í*, issue 150, May 1992, pages 51-62, Persian

“A Glance at the Literary Style of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas,” an article by Vahíd Behmardí, *Payám-i-Bahá’í*, issue 150, May 1992, pages 69-76, Persian

“Juridical Aspects of the Mother Book,” an article by G. Khávarí, *Payám-i-Bahá’í*, issue 150, May 1992, pages 77-81, Persian

“Scholarly Works by Bahá’í Writers on the Kitáb-i-Aqdas,” B. Furqání, *Payám-i-Bahá’í*, issue 150, May 1992, pages 84-92, Persian

“Ethical Teachings of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas,” S. Rassekh, *Payám-i-Bahá’í*, issue 150, May 1992, pages 92-94, Persian

“Remarks on Sentences in Criminal Cases ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas,” an article by Udo Schäfer, translated from original German into Persian by D. Máání, *Payám-i-Bahá’í*, issue 161, April 1993, pages 16-22, German/Persian

“Historical Hints, Warnings and Promises in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas,” an article by S. Mawlaví-Nezhád, *Payám-i-Bahá’í*, issue 163, June 1993, pages 29-34, Persian

“Applicability of the Laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas,” by Universal House of Justice, May 1993, *Bahá’í Journal*, July 1993, English

“The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, its place in Bahá’í literature,” a statement by World Center Publications, February 1993, English

“The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá’u’lláh’s Most Holy Book,” an article by K. Fanánápazír, *Bahá’í Journal*, June 1993, English

Unfortunately, little effort has been made to translate any of these—or indeed any other well-researched and useful works about the Kitáb-i-Aqdas—from Persian, German and other languages into English, a task worth undertaking.

However, I believe that one should, first and foremost, refer to the commentaries made on this subject by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith and the appointed interpreter of the Bahá’í holy texts. Only his explanations can constitute a sound foundation for any other commentary or research about the Most Holy Book.

Based on the above reasoning, I have chosen one of the most important works of Shoghi Effendi, entitled *God Passes By*, which appeared in 1944 on the occasion of the first centennial of the Báb’s declaration. This work is distinguished from his other writings by being in the form of a book rather than an open letter.

In his foreword, Shoghi Effendi writes: “It is not my purpose...to write a detailed history of the last hundred years of the Bahá’í Faith...It is my purpose, on the occasion of an anniversary of such profound significance, to attempt in the succeeding pages a survey of the outstanding events of the century that has seen this Spirit burst forth upon the world...”

Indeed, the revelation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas may be considered as the most outstanding event of the first Bahá’í century, and nothing better than the survey carried out by the Guardian can enlighten the manifold facets of the Most Holy Book.

God Passes By was first published in 1944 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the USA [sic]. In 1974 a revised edition appeared, a copy of which—second imprint 1979—is in my possession. It comprises four chapters in 412 pages. According to the index attached to this edition, the term “Kitáb-i-Aqdas” or the “Most Holy Book” has been referred to in eleven pages, whereas according to my own count, these terms appear in forty-eight different pages. Neither is the reason for such an obvious mistake known to me, nor is the blunder so minute and unimportant as to be ignored. According to my count, one or more ref-

erences to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas can be found in about 12 percent of the total number of pages, which in itself demonstrates the significance of the Most Holy Book in the view of Shoghi Effendi.

A Few Facts About the Most Holy Book

Before referring to the Guardian’s commentaries, a few basic facts about the Most Holy Book should be established:

1) “The Most Holy Book” is the translation of the Arabic/Persian title “Kitáb-i-Aqdas” and the term “Most Holy” should here be considered as part of a proper name rather than as an adjective. It is also called in some—mainly non-Bahá’í—literature, “The Book of Aqdas” or “The Aqdas.”

2) The Kitáb-i-Aqdas was revealed by Bahá’u’lláh in the House of Údí-Khammar in ‘Akká, the Holy Land. It is neither an open letter nor a tablet, addressed to an individual or a group. It is a small book in Arabic, containing some ten thousand words (the English translation contains nearly twenty-thousand words—see English edition, pp.19-88— since Arabic, unlike English, is a very concise language). It was uttered by Bahá’u’lláh and was taken down by a few scribes, in particular Zaynu’l-Muqarrabín. The clear copy, which was made later by Zaynu’l-Muqarrabín from his notes and seen by Bahá’u’lláh, is preserved in the Bahá’í international archive. It is considered as the most authentic first copy of the Most Holy Book. The Book was certainly not revealed without interruptions, but very little is known about the duration of its revelation. The only known fact is that the Book was completed in 1873.

3) A reader unfamiliar with theological terms and some detailed historical events may not easily or fully comprehend some of the passages of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas except by referring to a number of indispensable notes. These notes have been carefully prepared in 194 sections by the Universal House of Justice and included in the English edition (see pp.165-251).

4) The original manuscript of the Aqdas, the numerous subsequent manuscript copies, and the early printed editions are in the form of a continuous text without punctuation or division into verses or paragraphs. Only later did the Persian Bahá’í scholar Ishráq-Kháverí divide the Holy Text into 463 verses, leaving out the opening phrase “In the Name of Him Who is the Supreme Ruler over all that hath been and all that is to be.”

In the English edition, the division of the Holy Text into verses has been ignored. Instead, it is divided into 190 paragraphs, each comprising of one or a few of the verses. However, there are exceptions to this rule. For example, verse 366 is divided into two sentences, forming two separate paragraphs 152 and 153 (see page 75), whereas verse 439 is split into two sentences, forming the closing sentence of paragraph 181, and the opening sentence of paragraph 182 (see page 85).

In the newly published Arabic/Persian edition—which is in the same format as the English edition—the verses are separated by the insertion of a star between them, but are not numbered. However, the number of each paragraph is noted in the margin. Consequently, finding a particular verse by its number would be a time-consuming exercise. It is noteworthy that in the Bahá’í literature in Persian and Arabic, when a reference was made to a passage of the Most Holy Book, until recently only the numbers of the related verses were mentioned to enable the reader to identify the given verses easily and establish their authenticity. A table matching the numbers of the verses with the numbers of the paragraphs of the Most Holy Book has been prepared but not yet published.

5) There are a number of passages by the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh made before the revelation of the Aqdas, heralding the forthcoming of the Most Holy Book. In addition, many later tablets by the Author of the Book and by the Center of His Covenant have been considered as addenda to the Aqdas. Some of these supplementary texts, to which we will later refer, are included in the English volume, pages 91-102.

6) After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas was revealed, Bahá’u’lláh instructed His learned and trusted scribe, Zaynu’l-Muqarrabín, to peruse the Book to see if there were any ambiguities, in which case he would come back with pertinent questions to be answered by Bahá’u’lláh. As a result of this exercise, the treatise “Questions and Answers” was created, the translation of which from the original Persian is included in the English volume, pages 105-140.

7) After the revelation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, it has been copied by hand time and again. Human error in transcription may have been the main reason for any occasional slight differences between these manuscripts and consequently any printed editions based on them. The English translation, published in 1992, is based on the most reliable original manuscript—that of Zaynu’l-Muqarrabín, seen by Bahá’u’lláh. Therefore, it should be considered as authentic, and all other manuscripts and printed copies should be corrected accordingly.

8) Some years after the revelation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá’u’lláh had manuscript copies sent to Bahá’ís in Iran and, in 1890-91, towards the end of His life, He arranged for the publication of the original Arabic text of the book in Bombay. Thereafter, numerous printed editions of the book started appearing, based on different manuscripts, mostly ventured by a few individual Bahá’ís. However, upon the instructions of the Guardian, this process was stopped about five decades ago in anticipation of a new edition, which he was preparing, the release of which he had made a goal in the Ten Year Crusade (1953-63). Since the Guardian passed away in 1957, this duty remained for the Universal House of Justice for its completion.

In 1973, the Universal House of Justice issued an annotated summary with an introduction and selected translations by Shoghi Effendi on the centenary occasion of the creation of the Most Holy Book (1873), entitled *Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. This publication in English was presented to the third International Bahá’í Convention in Haifa in April 1973 and is included in the English volume of 1992 (pages 143-164).

In 1986, the UHJ decided that the time had come when the preparation of an English translation of the complete text of the Most Holy Book was possible and essential, and made its accomplishment a goal of the six years global plan (1986-1992). About a third of the text had already been translated by Shoghi Effendi, and published in his various Letters and Books, a complete list of which is included in the English Volume (pages 255-257). The UHJ states: “We are now satisfied that the translation has reached a point where it represents an acceptable rendering of the original. Nevertheless, it will undoubtedly give rise to questions and suggestions which may shed further light on its contents.”

The Guardian had adopted an elevated style for the translation of the Most Holy Book. Diana Maloof, a young Bahá’í, conducted a research on the translation norms employed by Shoghi Effendi for the Holy Bahá’í Writs and concluded that the following policies were applied by him:

Elevate the tone of the language to befit Holy Writ;

Beautify the English text;

Euphonize the translation;

Clarify and interpret the text.

The style adopted by Shoghi Effendi has been followed for the translation of the remainder of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. (See “The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh, Translation Norms Employed by Shoghi Effendi,” Diana Maloof, an article included in pages 129-139 of *The Vision of Shoghi Effendi*, Bahá’í Studies Publications, Ottawa, Canada, 1993, ISBN 0-920904-24-6)

It is noteworthy that Evgenii Eduardovich Bertels, the nineteenth century Russian scholar, was the first person who attempted to translate the Most Holy Book into a foreign language, namely Russian. There is also an incomplete Russian translation available by A. Tumanskij, published in 1899 in St Petersburg. The first English translation, by the Christian missionaries E. E. Elder and W. M. Miller, is entitled *Al-Kitáb al-Aqdas or The Most Holy Book* and was published in London in 1961 by the London Royal Asiatic Society, Oriental Translation Foundation. This rendering, although complete, is not always correct, especially in the notes. The older Russian version is more reliable.

9) The general religious inspiration of the Aqdas is monotheistic. As the first verse clearly states, even good works, if separated from the channel of the positive revelation, have only limited value: “The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the kingdom of His

Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed.”

A non-Bahá’í reader, or even a new convert, may be struck by the apparent lack of order in the sequence of precepts, exhortation, and warnings. The reason, in my view, is that the Aqdas is not a systematic code of law. It originated from divine revelations, which left its Author no time to think about the order of sequence. etc. He uttered His holy inspirations without any pauses for corrections or adjustments. Quite in contrary, a book of law is based on numerous sources and must be edited and re-written several times before completion. Therefore, there is no similarity between the two writings, and so they cannot and should not be compared.

Bahá’u’lláh could have re-arranged the Book later, but chose not to. Indeed, He kept His answers to the questions of His scribe separate from God’s Words, as He believed that the Holy Passages should remain intact.

10) Applicability of the laws of the Aqdas: The introduction to the English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas states that its publication does not increase the number of laws which are binding on Bahá’ís. Besides the previous binding laws—see the letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Iceland, dated June 9, 1974—the law of Ḥuqúqu’lláh was applied universally at Ridván 1992. In due course, the Universal House of Justice will announce further applications of the laws when the friends have had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the Most Holy Book, and when it is propitious to do so.

Indeed, some of these laws are meant for the Golden Age of the Bahá’í Era and may not be applicable within the near future.

Commentaries by Shoghi Effendi

The commentaries by Shoghi Effendi on the Kitáb-i-Aqdas can be found in forty-eight different pages of his work *God Passes By*. For our purpose, they are divided into nine categories according to the subject to which they refer:

1) How the Kitáb-i-Aqdas was created, and its rank and importance:

“Unique and stupendous as was this proclamation [referring to the Chapter of Temple—Súrih Haykal], it proved to be but a prelude to a still mightier revelation of the creative power of its Author, and to what may well rank as the most signal act of His ministry— the promulgation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Alluded to in the Kitáb-i-Íqán; the principal repository of that Law which the Prophet Isaiah had anticipated, and which the writer of the Apocalypse had described as the ‘new haven’ and the ‘new earth,’ as the ‘Tabernacle of God,’ as the ‘Holy City,’ as the ‘Bride,’ the ‘New Jerusalem down from God,’ this ‘Most Holy Book’ whose provisions must remain inviolate for no less than a thousand years, and whose system will embrace the entire planet, may well be regarded as the brightest emanation of the mind of Bahá’u’lláh, as the Mother Book of His Dispensation, and the Charter of His new World order.” (page 213)

“Revealed soon after Bahá’u’lláh had been transferred to the house of ‘Údí Khammár (circa 1873), at a time when He was still encompassed by the tribulations that had afflicted Him, through the acts committed by His enemies and the professed adherents of his Faith, this Book, this treasury enshrining the priceless gems of His Revelation, stands out, by virtue of the principles it inculcates, the administrative institutions it ordains and the function with which it invests the appointed Successor of its Author, unique and incomparable among the world’s sacred Scriptures. For, unlike the Old Testament and the Holy Books which preceded it, in which the actual precepts uttered by the Prophet Himself are non-existent; unlike the Gospels, in which the few sayings attributed to Jesus Christ afford no clear guidance regarding the future administration of the affairs of His Faith; unlike even the Qur’án which, though explicit in the laws and ordinances formulated by the Apostle of God, is silent on the all-important subject of the succession, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, revealed from first to last by the Author of the Dispensation Himself, not only preserves for posterity the basic laws and ordinances on which the fabric of His future world order must rest, but ordains, in addition to the function of interpretation which it confers upon His Successor, the necessary institutions through which the integrity and unity of His Faith can alone be safeguarded.” (page 213-214)

“...this Book [Kitáb-i-Íqán]...occupies a position unequalled by any work in the entire range of Bahá’í literature, except the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá’u’lláh’s Most Holy Book.” (page 139)

“...a Book designated by its Author as ‘the source of true felicity’ as the ‘Unerring balance,’ as the ‘Straight Path’ and as the quickener of mankind...” (page 215)

2) Shoghi Effendi refers to a number of tablets and passages from the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh written before the revelation of Aqdas, heralding the creation of the Most Holy Book:

“well it is with him, who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá’u’lláh, and rendereth thanks unto his Lord. For He will assuredly be made manifest. God hath indeed irrevocably ordained it in the Bayán.’ [a passage from the third Unit of Bayán] It is with that self-same Order that the Founder of the promised Revelation, twenty years later—incorporating that same term in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas—identified the System envisaged in that Book, affirming that ‘this most great Order’ had deranged the world’s equilibrium, and revolutionized mankind’s ordered life.” (pages 25–26, see also page 59)

“...the Prayers for Fasting, written in anticipation of the Book of His Laws;” (page 172)

“...Bahá’u’lláh instructed...Nabíl to recite on His behalf the two newly revealed Tablets of the Pilgrimage [Hajj], and to perform, in His stead, the rites prescribed in them, when visiting the Báb’s House in Shiráz and the Most Great House in Baghdad—an act that marks the inception of one of the holiest observances, which, in a later period, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas was to formally establish.” (page 177)

“...Súrih Ghusn [the Chapter of the Branch] was revealed...a Tablet which may well be regarded as the har-binger of the rank which was to be bestowed upon Him [‘Abdu’l-Bahá], in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas...” (page 177)

3) Shoghi Effendi refers to some later treatises and tablets of Bahá’u’lláh and Abdu’l-Bahá, included as an appendix or addendum to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas:

“The formulation by Bahá’u’lláh, in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas, of the fundamental laws of His Dispensation was followed, as His Mission drew to a close, by the enunciation of certain precepts and principles which lie at the very core of His Faith, by the reaffirmation of truths He had previously proclaimed, by the elaboration and elucidation of some of the laws he had already laid down, by the revelation of further prophecies and warnings, and by the establishment of subsidiary ordinances designed to supplement the provisions of His Most Holy Book. These were recorded in unnumbered Tablets, which he continued to reveal until the last days of His earthly life, among which the ‘Ishráqát’ (Splendours), the ‘Bishárát’ (Glad Tidings), the ‘Tarázát’ (Ornaments), the ‘Tajalliyát’ (Effulgence), the ‘Kalamát-i-Ferdawsíyyih’ (Words of Paradise), the ‘Lawh-i-Aqdas’ (Most Holy Tablet), the ‘Lawh-i-Dunyá’ (Tablet of the World), the ‘Lawh-i-Maqsúd’ (Tablet of Maqsúd), are the most noteworthy.” (page 216)

“The Document [the Will and Testament of Abdu’l-Bahá] establishing that Order [Administrative Order], the Charter of a future world civilization, which may be regarded in some of its features as supplementary to no less mighty a Book than the Kitáb-i-Aqdas;...” (page 328)

4) References to the rulers (kings and presidents etc.) and the learned (religious leaders):

“In this Charter of the future world civilization its Author—at once the Judge, the Lawgiver, the Unifier and Redeemer of mankind—announces to the kings of the earth the promulgation of the ‘Most Great Law’; pronounces them to be His vassals; proclaims Himself the ‘King of Kings’; disclaims any intention of laying hands on their kingdoms; reserves for Himself the right to ‘seize and possess the hearts of men’; warns the world’s ecclesiastical leaders not to weigh the ‘Book of God’ with such standards as are current amongst them; and affirms that the Book itself is the ‘Unerring Balance’ established among them.” (page 214)

“The significant summons issued to the Presidents of the Republics of the American continent to seize their opportunity in the Day of God and to champion the cause of Justice; the injunction to the members of parliaments throughout the world, urging the adoption of a universal script and language; His warnings to William I [Wilhelm I], the conqueror of Napoleon III; the reproof He administers to Francis Joseph [Franz Joseph], the Emperor of Austria; His reference to ‘the lamentations of Berlin’ in His apostrophe to ‘the banks of the Rhine’; His condemnation of ‘the throne of tyranny’ established in

Constantinople, and His prediction of the extinction of its ‘outward splendour’ and of the tribulation destined to overtake its inhabitants;” (page 215)

The essence of these passages are detailed and repeated in many other pages of *God Passes By*. One can refer to page 206 for Bahá’u’lláh’s further announcements to the kings; page 208 and 226 for His announcement to William I and to Francis Joseph; page 225 where Sultan ‘Abdu’l-Azíz is mentioned; pages 207, 254 and 396 where the Rulers of America and the West are referred to; and to page 395 where Queen Marie’s acknowledgement of the Divine Message are described as the first fruits of the vision which Bahá’u’lláh had seen long before in His captivity, and had announced in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

“In immortal passages of His Kitáb-i-Aqdas...He bids the entire company of the ecclesiastical leaders to ‘fear God,’ to ‘rein in’ their pens, ‘fling away idle fancies and imaginings, and turn them towards the Horizon of Certitude’...” (page 209)

5) The laws and ordinances:

One should refer to the other major Holy Books, in particular the Koran and the Bayán, in order to recognize the roots of some of the laws ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Although the mould of some of the ordinances prescribed in those Holy Books, such as fasting, obligatory prayers and pilgrimage, have been kept in the Most Holy Book, their form and content have been changed. The Báb had made the applicability of His laws dependent upon the approval of the One Whom God will make manifest. Bahá’u’lláh, being that promised Manifestation, confirmed some of those ordinances, such as the Nineteen Day Feasts and the new Calendar, and rejected or changed many others. Although this is a useful and desirable study, it is not a prerequisite for the understanding and absorption of the laws and ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

“The laws and ordinances that constitutes the major theme of this Book, Bahá’u’lláh, moreover, has specifically characterized as ‘the breath of life unto all created things,’ as ‘the mightiest stronghold,’ as the ‘fruits’ of His ‘Tree,’ as ‘the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples,’ as ‘the lamps of His wisdom and loving-providence,’ as ‘the sweet smelling savour of His garment,’ as the ‘keys’ of His ‘mercy’ to his creatures. ‘This Book,’ He Himself testifies, ‘is a heaven which We have adorned with the stars of Our commandments and prohibitions.’ ‘Blessed the man,’ He, moreover, has stated, ‘who will read it, and ponder the verses sent down in it by God, the Lord of Power, the Almighty.’” (pages 215-216)

“In it He formally ordains

the institution of the ‘House of Justice,’ defines its functions, fixes its revenues, and designates its members as the ‘Men of Justice,’ the ‘Deputies of God,’ the ‘Trusties of the All-Merciful,’ alludes to the future Center of His Covenant, and invests Him with the right of interpreting His holy Writ;

anticipates by implication the institution of Guardianship;

bears witness to the revolutionizing effect of His World Order,

enunciates the doctrine of the ‘Most Great Infallibility’ of the Manifestation of God;

asserts this infallibility to be the inherent and exclusive right of the Prophet;

and rules out the possibility of the appearance of another Manifestation ere the lapse of at least one thousand years.

In this Book He, moreover, prescribes the obligatory prayers;

designates the time and period of fasting;

prohibits congregational prayer except for the dead;

fixes the Qiblih [the center all must turn to for obligatory prayers];

institutes the Ḥuqúqu’lláh [Right of God];

formulates the law of inheritance;

ordains the institution of the Mashriqu’l-Adhikár [Bahá’í Temple];

establishes the Nineteen Days Feasts, the Bahá’í festivals and the Intercalary Days;

abolishes the institution of priesthood;

prohibits slavery,

asceticism,
mendicancy,
monasticism,
penance,
the use of pulpit
and the kissing of hands;
prescribes monogamy;
condemns cruelty to animals,
idleness and sloth,
backbiting
and calumny;
censures divorce;
interdicts gambling,
the use of opium, wine and other intoxicating drinks;
specifies the punishment for murder,
arson,
adultery,
and theft;
stresses the importance of marriage and lays down its essential conditions;
imposes the obligation of engaging in some trade or profession, exalting such occupation to the rank
of worship;
emphasizes the necessity of providing the means for the education of children;
and lays upon every person the duty of writing a testament
and of strict obedience to one's government.
Apart from these provisions Bahá'u'lláh exhorts His followers to consort, with amity and concord
and without discrimination, with the adherents of all religions;
Warns them to guard against fanaticism, sedition, pride, dispute and contention;
Inculcates upon them immaculate cleanliness,
strict truthfulness,
spotless chastity,
trustworthiness;
hospitality,
fidelity,
courtesy,
forbearance,
justice and fairness;
counsels them to be 'even as the fingers of one hand and the limbs of one body';
calls upon them to arise and serve His Cause; and assured them of His undoubted aid.
He, furthermore, dwells upon the instability of human affairs;
declares that true liberty consists in man's submission to His commandments;
cautions them not to be indulgent in carrying out his statutes;
prescribes the twin inseparable duties of recognizing the 'Dayspring of God's Revelation' and the
observing all the ordinances revealed by Him, neither of which, He affirms, is acceptable without
the other. (56 sections, pages 214-215)

Further references to *Mashriqu'l-Adhikár* (Bahá'í Temple) can be found on pages 255, 300 and 340; to
the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh on page 325; to the Houses of Justice on page 331; and to *Huqúqu'lláh*
(Right of God) on page 328.

6) Projections and prophecies:

"...the words of cheer and comfort He addresses to His native city [Teheran], assuring her that God
had chosen her to be 'the source of the joy of all mankind'; His prophecy that 'the voice of the heroes

of Khurásán' will be raised in glorification of their Lord; His assertion that men 'endued with mighty valour' will be raised up in Kirmán who will make mention of Him; and finally, His magnanimous assurance to a perfidious brother who had afflicted Him with such anguish, that an 'ever-forgiving, all-bounteous' God would forgive him his iniquities were he only to repent—all these further enrich the contents of a Book designated by its Author as 'the source of true felicity,' as the 'Unerring Balance,' as the 'Straight Path' and as the 'quickener of mankind'..." (page 215)

"The Sovereign who, as foreshadowed in Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy Book must adorn the throne of His native land and cast the shadow of royal protection over His long persecuted followers, is as yet undiscovered." (page 411)

"The conclusion of the terrible conflict [the first world war]...fulfilled the ominous predictions made by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas,..." (page 305)

7) The Bahá'í Faith is an independent religion:

"...dissociation of the System envisaged in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas from the Sunni ecclesiastical Law in Egypt [referring to the judgement of May 10, 1925 in Egypt], has paved the way for the recognition of that system in the Holy land itself,..." (page 34; see also pages 365 and 367)

Referring to the proclamation of the independence of the Bahá'í laws from other ecclesiastical systems, Shoghi Effendi wrote: "In the United States of America...the special stress laid on some of the fundamental laws contained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas regarding daily obligatory prayers...." (page 373; see also pages 370 and 374)

8) Covenant:

"... identifies Him (Abdu'l-Bahá) with 'the One Whom God hath purposed,' 'Who hath branched from this pre-existent Root,' referred to in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas..." (pages 239-240)

"On Him (Abdu'l-Bahá), at a later period, the Author of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, in a celebrated passage, subsequently elucidated in the 'Book of My Covenant,' had bestowed the function of interpreting His Holy Writ, proclaiming Him, at the same time, to be the One 'Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root'..." (page 242, also see pages 238 and 112)

9) Other subjects:

"His [the Báb's] well-known commentary on the Súrih of Va'l-Asr... which Bahá'u'lláh refers to in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas..." (page 14)

"As to the significance of the Declaration let Bahá'u'lláh Himself reveal to us its import. Acclaiming that historic occasion as the 'Most Great Festival,' the 'King of Festivals,' the 'Festival of God,' He has, in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas, characterized it as the Day whereon 'all created things were immersed in the sea of purification'..." (page 154)

"Bahá'u'lláh had thus addressed His followers in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas, 'and will assist whosoever will arise to aid My Cause with the hosts of the Concourse of high, and a cohort of the angles, who are nigh unto Me'..." (page 376)

At the end, it should be noted that the topics referred to in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas are not limited to what is mentioned in this paper. The purpose of this article has only been to provide some basic information about the Aqdas and whet the appetite of the reader to peruse the whole of the Most Holy Book.

The Seven Valleys of Bahá’u’lláh and Farid ud-Din Attar

Sheila Banani

“**Y**e are even as the bird which soareth, with the full force of its mighty wings and with complete and joyous confidence, through the immensity of the heavens, until, impelled to satisfy its hunger, it turneth longingly to the water and clay of the earth below it, and, having been entrapped in the mesh of its desire, findeth itself impotent to resume its flight to the realms whence it came. Powerless to shake off the burden weighing on its sullied wings, that bird, hitherto an inmate of the heavens, is now forced to seek a dwelling-place upon the dust.”¹

Introduction

While in Baghdad in exile, Bahá’u’lláh left the city for a period of two years (April 10, 1854 to March 19, 1856) to withdraw to the mountains of Kurdistan and the town of Sulaymaniyyih where His true identity as unknown but word of His sanctified character and mystical knowledge spread. After He returned to Baghdad, Bahá’u’lláh, who had not yet openly declared His mission, wrote a letter responding to questions posed to him by a sufi mystic, Shaykh Muhyi’d-Din, which has come to be known by the title *The Seven Valleys* (*Haft-Vadi*). This short mystical essay, written in the Persian language, traces the essence of the journey of the soul in its eternal approach towards its Creator, God. The seven stages (valleys) of this journey is a traditional Eastern mystical concept. The metaphor of the seven valleys is also found in the famous late twelfth century work of Farid ud-Din Attar, a narrative poem of more than four thousand lines, called “*The Conference of the Birds*” (*Manteq at-Tair*). *The Seven Valleys* of Bahá’u’lláh is an original commentary on that traditional mystical theme and alludes to His own impending proclamation in many subtle ways. With the threads of similarity of theme, stories, allegory, and especially bird imagery, Bahá’u’lláh weaves a new garment for the mystical path of humanity. The theme of bird imagery in both the work of Bahá’u’lláh and of Attar is the topic for this paper.

Imagery of the Bird—Sufism and Attar’s poem

The Conference of the Birds is the best known work of the mystical Persian poet, Farid ud-Din Attar, who was born in mid-twelfth century A.D. in north-east Iran (where Omar Khayyam also was born). His name, Attar, indicates a perfume seller or druggist/doctor which may have been his occupation as well as poet. He traveled widely, much as his counterparts in medieval Europe, the troubadours and wandering scholars. After his wanderings, he settled in his hometown of Nishapur although there is some evidence that later he was tried for heresy. He was banished and his property looted. However, at the time of his death he was back in Nishapur where he is buried.

Attar’s “*The Conference of the Birds*” is a poem about sufism, a doctrine of the mystics of Islam. Sufis were continually under threat of being accused of being heretics (by orthodox Islam) because their teachings were handed down from shaykh (spiritual leader) to pupil and they were forbidden to reveal their most important beliefs, although different sufis living at different times have clearly believed in different things.

Sufi doctrines include: only one God exists, all other things are an emanation of Him, or are His ‘shadow’; religion is useful mainly as a way of reaching to a Truth beyond the teachings of particular religions—however Islam is the most useful religion; man’s distinctions between good and evil have no meaning for God who knows only unity; the soul is trapped within the cage of the body but can, by looking inward, recognize its essential affinity with God; the awakened soul, guided by God’s grace, can

progress along a 'Way' which leads to annihilation in God. The doctrine received its most extreme expression in the writings of the Spanish Arab pantheist Ibn Arabi, a contemporary of Attar, who maintained that the being of creation and the Creator are indivisible. In "The Conference of the Birds," Attar frequently seems to be about to propound the same doctrine, only to step back at the last moment and maintain a final distinction between God and His creatures.²

Sufism was not simply a doctrine but was a discipline for living where its practitioners followed a carefully prescribed 'Way.' Attar's poem, "The Conference of the Birds," is a description of the stages encountered by the adepts of the sufis' Way in the form of an allegory of the "birds" of the world gathered together to seek their "king" (God). In their quest, the birds are led by one of them called the hoopoe bird (*hod-hod*, in Persian) who acts as their shaykh (spiritual guide) on their journey through the seven valleys: quest, love, insight into mystery, detachment, unity, bewilderment, and poverty/nothingness. The purpose of the discipline is to achieve purification.³

Although the stories are told by the hoopoe to birds they are in reality told by Attar to humanity. The hoopoe tells the birds that they indeed have their own king—called the Simorgh—but that he lives far away. The birds are at first enthusiastic to begin their search, but when they realize how difficult the journey will be they start to make excuses. The nightingale, for example, cannot leave his beloved; the hawk is satisfied with his position at court waiting on earthly kings; the finch is too afraid even to set out. The hoopoe counters each of their excuses with stories and anecdotes which show how their desires and fears are mistaken and gives advice for living. The birds fly a little way and then pause to ask the hoopoe about the length of the journey. In answer the hoopoe describes the seven valleys of the Way. The journey is quickly dealt with and, out of the thousands of birds who began the journey, only thirty birds have made it to the end where they arrive at the court of the Simorgh. At first they are turned back then, after each bird is asked to review its own misdeeds in life, with their spirits now refined, the birds are finally admitted and find that the Simorgh they have sought is none other than themselves reflected in the "face" of the Simorgh. The story depends on a pun in which the words in Persian *si* (30) and *morgh* (birds) remain at the end of the journey, and the *si morph* (30 birds) meet the Simorgh, the goal of their quest. Two sufi themes are diffused throughout the poem: the necessity for destroying the Self, and the importance of passionate love. The two are connected: the Self is seen as an entity dependent on pride and reputation; there can be no progress until the bird (pilgrim) is indifferent to both, and the commonest way of making him indifferent is the experience of overwhelming love.⁴

The hoopoe says to the birds:

I know our king—but how can I alone
Endure the journey to His distant throne?
Join me, and when at last we end our quest
Our king will greet you as His honoured guest.
How long will you persist in blasphemy?
Escape your self-hood's vicious tyranny—
Whoever can evade the Self transcends
This world and as a lover he ascends.
Set free your soul; impatient of delay,
Step out along our sovereign's royal Way:
We have a king; beyond Kaf's mountain peak
The Simorgh lives, the sovereign whom you seek,
And He is always near to us, though we
Live far from His transcendent majesty.
A hundred thousand veils of dark and light
Withdraw His presence from our mortal sight,
And in both worlds no being shares the throne
That marks the Simorgh's power and His alone—
He reigns in undisturbed omnipotence,
Bathed in the light of His magnificence—

No mind, no intellect can penetrate
The mystery of His unending state . . .⁵
And near the end of the poem Attar says:
You cannot hope for Life till you progress
Through some small shadow of this Nothingness.
First He will humble you in dust and mire,
And then bestow the glory you desire.
Be nothing first! And then you will exist,
You cannot live whilst life and Self persist—
Till you reach Nothingness you cannot see
The Life you long for in eternity.⁶

Imagery of the Bird—Bahá’í sources

One of the Apostles of Bahá’u’lláh, the famous calligrapher, Mírzá Ḥusayn-i-Isfahani (died in ‘Akká, 1912 AD) entitled *Mishkin-Qalam* (Musk-scented Pen), who is perhaps most well known as the designer of the “Greatest Name” symbol, was the first Bahá’í artist to use the Islamic cultural art of calligraphy and painting to express his Bahá’í religious and mystical feelings. Bird imagery, which appears so often in his calligraphic renderings, is a powerful expression of the theme of the “Nightingale of Paradise” announcing the bringing of the heavenly message of a new Faith to our earthly home. Numerous examples of his outstanding work are preserved in museums (including the Sackler Museum at Harvard University) and Bahá’í centers around the world.⁷

The Central Figures of the Bahá’í Faith have used the image of the bird to convey numerous spiritual conditions and states of being, drawing on a rich cultural heritage to express more vividly their message. A list of examples include:

From Bahá’u’lláh:

bird of utterance (*Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*); bird of the human heart, bird of the Throne, bird of the spirit, the bird which soareth (*Gleanings*); bird of Desire, bird of Eternity, bird of Heaven, bird of the human mind, mystic bird (*Kitáb-i-Íqán*); bird of thy soul, Persian bird, bird of the heavens of God, this mortal Bird (*Seven Valleys*); and celestial bird, broken bird (*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*).

From ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

broken-winged bird, bird of love and understanding (*Bahá’í Prayers*); divine bird, roving bird, bird of high flight (*Japan Will Turn Ablaze*); bird of joy, kingly bird (*Memorials of the Faithful*); wealth of a bird (*Some Answered Questions*); and bird of my mind, bird of clay, bird of faithfulness, soaring bird (*Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*).

From Shoghi Effendi:

the bird of human kind (*God Passes By*).

Bahá’u’lláh’s Uses of Bird Imagery in The Seven Valleys

In the letter’s preamble, Bahá’u’lláh addresses Shaykh Muhyi’d-Din with these loving words:

“Further, we have harkened to what the nightingale of knowledge sang on the boughs of the tree of thy being, and learned what the dove of certitude cried on the branches of the bower of thy heart.”⁸

“...and the bird of thy soul shall recall the holy sanctuaries of preexistence and soar on the wings of longing...”⁹

And in the form of a postscript at the end of His letter, Bahá’u’lláh answers a question from the Shaykh which may have been about one of the famous birds from Attar’s Conference of the Birds. Bahá’u’lláh writes:

“The thoughts thou has expressed as to the interpretation of the common species of bird that is called in Persian Gunjishk (sparrow) were considered. Thou appearest to be well-grounded in mystic truth. However, on every plane, to every letter a meaning is allotted which relateth to that plane. Indeed, the wayfarer findeth a secret in every name, a mystery in every letter. In one sense, these letters refer to holiness.”¹⁰

Bahá’u’lláh’s advice to the Shaykh challenge his spirit and questing soul with these words:

“Wert thou to harken to the melodies of this mortal Bird [Bahá’u’lláh], then wouldst thou seek out the undying chalice and pass by every perishable cup.”¹¹

The spiritual journey which Bahá’u’lláh describes passes through the seven valleys of search, love, knowledge, unity, contentment, wonderment and poverty/absolute nothingness.

To be able to pass through the second valley (love), Bahá’u’lláh writes:

“And, if confirmed by the Creator, the lover escapes from the claws of the eagle of love...”¹²

To leave the third valley (knowledge), Bahá’u’lláh writes:

“If thou be a man of communion and prayer, soar up on the wings of assistance from Holy Souls, that thou mayest behold the mysteries of the Friend and attain to the lights of the Beloved.”¹³

In the middle of the fourth valley (unity), Bahá’u’lláh refers to His own precarious condition, saying:

“And if a nightingale soar upward from the clay of self and dwell in the rose bower of the heart, and in Arabian melodies and sweet Iranian songs recount the mysteries of God—a single word of which quickeneth to fresh, new life the bodies of the dead, and bestoweth the Holy Spirit upon the moldering bones of this existence—thou wilt behold a thousand claws of envy, a myriad beaks of rancor hunting after Him and with all their power intent upon His death.”¹⁴

“Thus it hath been made clear that these stages depend on the vision of the wayfarer. In every city he will behold a world, in every Valley reach a spring, in every meadow hear a song. But the falcon of the mystic heaven hath many a wondrous carol of the spirit in His breast, and the Persian bird keepeth in His soul many a sweet Arab melody; yet these are hidden, and hidden shall remain.”¹⁵

In the fifth valley (contentment), Bahá’u’lláh writes:

“The tongue faileth in describing these three Valleys, and speech falleth short. The pen steppeth not into this region, the ink leaveth only a blot. In these planes, the nightingale of the heart hath other songs and secrets, which make the heart to stir and the soul to clamor, but this mystery of inner meaning may be whispered only from heart to heart, confided only from breast to breast.”¹⁶

And in the seventh valley (true poverty and absolute nothingness), Bahá’u’lláh concludes:

“Then, ere the nightingale of the mystic paradise repair to the garden of God, and the rays of the heavenly morning return to the Sun of Truth—make thou an effort, that haply that in this dust-heap of the mortal world thou mayest catch a fragrance from the everlasting garden, and live forever in the shadow of the peoples of this city. And when thou hast attained this highest station and come to this mightiest plane, then shalt thou gaze on the Beloved, and forget all else.”¹⁷

Conclusion

Bahá’u’lláh, in most of his writings, says that all we can “know” of the unknowable essence of God is what we understand through belief and worship of His Manifestation(s). There is a clear distinction between the three realms of the Creator, the Manifestations of God, and the creation. The closest we can come to God is living a life in God, “that every man may testify, in himself, by himself, in the station of the Manifestation of his Lord, that verily there is no God save Him, and that every man may thereby win his way to the summit of realities, until none shall contemplate anything whatsoever but that he shall see God therein.”¹⁸ The hoopoe bird in Attar’s poem which acts as a spiritual guide (shaykh) to the world of birds on their quest to reach their king, Simorgh, is not the same as a Manifestation of God, but his words of wisdom shed light on the journey’s Way.

In The Seven Valleys Bahá'u'lláh, speaking of His own Station as a Manifestation of God, warns:

“O My friend! Many a hound pursueth this gazelle of the desert of oneness; many a talon claweth at this thrush of the eternal garden. Pitiless ravens do lie in wait for this bird of the heavens of God, and the huntsman of envy stalketh this deer of the meadow of love....”

“[t]hey who soar in the heaven of singleness and reach to the sea of the Absolute, reckon this city—which is the station of life in God—as the furthestmost state of mystic knowers, and the farthest homeland of the lovers.”¹⁹

After bringing the “severed wayfarer” through the seven valleys, Bahá'u'lláh reveals that “to this evanescent One of the mystic ocean, this station is the first gate of the heart’s citadel, that is, man’s first entrance to the city of the heart” of which He cannot speak unless a “kindred soul” can be found.²⁰

Notes

- 1) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, 327.
- 2) Farid ud-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, translated by Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis, Penguin Books, 1984, pp. 11-12.
- 3) *ibid.*, 14.
- 4) *ibid.*, 15-19.
- 5) *ibid.*, 33-34.
- 6) *ibid.*, 221-222.
- 7) *Mishkin-Qalam: XIX Century Artist and Calligrapher*, Society for Persian Letters & Arts, Landegg Academy, Switzerland, 1992.
- 8) Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, 1991 edition, 2.
- 9) *ibid.*, 3.
- 10) *ibid.*, 42.
- 11) *ibid.*, 43.
- 12) *ibid.*, 11.
- 13) *ibid.*, 17.
- 14) *ibid.*, 20.
- 15) *ibid.*, 28-29.
- 16) *ibid.*, 30.
- 17) *ibid.*, 38.
- 18) *ibid.*, 1-2.
- 19) *ibid.*, 41.
- 20) *ibid.*, 41.

Common Teachings in Chinese Culture and the Bahá’í Faith From Material Civilization to Spiritual Civilization

Albert K. Cheung

Introduction

With five thousand years of history, the Chinese culture is one of the oldest civilizations. The Bahá’í Faith is the youngest independent world religion of just 156 years.¹ These two civilizations from different places and times have many teachings in common. Both the Bahá’í Faith and the Chinese culture speak to the process of transforming from material civilization to spiritual civilization. Indeed, the history of humankind demonstrates this process of spiritual transformation at various stages in our search for meaning in life in the arenas of family, tribe, nation, and finally in a global community. The reality of our common human experience is that we are spiritual beings going through the journey of a physical life on Earth. Yet, the majority of people are still struggling with the physical journey with very little regard for their own spiritual well being. Meanwhile, our world is now living through the process of a global transition to a spiritual age when all peoples from every nation will be gathered together into one human family.

The Bahá’í Faith has grown from a small movement in the Middle East to the second-most widespread of the independent world religions. It has been established in over 250 countries and territories. The international Bahá’í community embraces people from more than 2,100 ethnic, racial, and tribal groups. Bahá’u’lláh (1817–1892), the Prophet Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, brings the divine teachings for the spiritualization of the whole planet and proclaims, “The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.” The Bahá’í Faith promotes world peace and the unity of humankind. Abdu’l-Bahá (1844–1921), one of the central figures of the Bahá’í Faith, speaks of the Chinese people as “most simple hearted and truth-seeking” and of China as “the country of the future.”² There are many references to the Chinese and to China in statements from Bahá’í institutions, such as the following:

China—a land which has its own world and civilization, whose people constitute one-fourth of the population of the globe, which ranks foremost among all nations in material, cultural and spiritual resources and potentialities, and whose future is assuredly bright.³

China represents the largest element of this emerging global society and its culture one of the most precious resources possessed by the human race...China will play a unique role in shaping a new and universal civilization.⁴

Therefore, the Chinese culture and the Bahá’í Faith are relevant to one another and need to be considered in an atmosphere of the utmost co-operation and mutual understanding. There are obvious differences between them from both historical and developmental perspectives. However, their common teachings speak to the unity of their spiritual foundation. This paper is a simple attempt to show the harmony in the major teachings of both. There are social teachings such as: 1) the Great Unity (world peace); 2) unity of the human family; 3) service to others; 4) moral education; and 5) extended family values—the Golden Rule. These social teachings are based on fundamental spiritual teachings such as: 6) the investigation of truth; 7) the Highest Reality (God); 8) the common foundation of religions; 9) harmony in Nature; 10) the purpose of tests and sufferings; and 11) moderation in all things.

In addition, the Bahá’í teachings provide a new and inclusive value system to meet the needs of an

emerging global civilization. These new teachings are the harmony of science and religion; the abolition of prejudice; a spiritual solution to economic problems; universal education; universal auxiliary language; the equality of women and men; and world government. These new and global values are discussed in the books listed in the reference section of this paper. Here we want to emphasize that the Bahá'í teachings of "oneness of humankind" and "unity in diversity" can provide the universal framework for the Chinese and all other ethnic groups to participate fully in the global community.

Historical Perspective

No matter how far the material world advances, it cannot establish the happiness of mankind. Only when material and spiritual civilization are linked and coordinated will happiness be assured. Then material civilization will not contribute its energies to the forces of evil in destroying the oneness of humanity, for in material civilization good and evil advance together and maintain the same pace.⁵

There is a Chinese proverb which says: "History not forgotten is the teacher of things to come." The history of humankind is like a tree growing through the centuries and the Chinese culture is a branch on it. A culture and civilization would have more than a thousand years to grow and mature. The fruits of wisdom of the Chinese culture are in the written classics of teachings and philosophies such as those from Confucius and Lao-Tse about twenty-five centuries ago. They still remain as the foundation of the Chinese culture today. In the distant past, the "silk road" connected China with India, Persia, Greece and Rome through Central Asia. From time to time, religions and cultures from outside—such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam—would come into China. Once these foreign teachings were absorbed into Chinese culture, they all took on major Chinese characteristics.

Buddhism came to China during the Han dynasty (first century) and had a major influence on the Chinese culture. The Chinese took a thousand years to digest Buddhist philosophy. Buddhism underwent a process of assimilation. First, it developed along the Taoist teachings and was known as "Buddhist Tao." Later, it established its own standing as a separate religious tradition. By the end of the fifth century, there were more than three thousand Buddhist writings translated into Chinese.

This started a grand synthesis of ancient Chinese and Indian philosophies. By the Tang Dynasty (618-901), several Chinese branches such as the Tien Tai, Hua Yin, and Zen Buddhism appeared and were accepted as part of the mainstream Chinese culture.⁶

Hence, the Buddhist teachings have merged effectively with Confucianism and Taoism into one amalgamation in the Chinese traditions. All three have a major influence on Chinese daily life and are equally important and inseparable.

Christianity came to China with the Nestorian Christians from Persia during the Tang Dynasty in the seventh century. It did not have a significant impact until the Catholic Jesuits arrived in the late sixteenth century, bearing gifts of western sciences and personal salvation. The Jesuits, most notably Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), sought to create a synthesis between the Chinese teachings and the Catholic doctrines. They were known as the "accommodationists" and their early converts were from the Confucian scholars. However, the Jesuits would suffer a great setback in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and also at the hand of the Pope back in Rome. In 1724, the Qing Emperor proscribed Catholicism and listed it among the "perverted sects and evil doctrines." In 1742, as the result of the "rites controversy" about the compatibility of Catholicism and Confucianism, the Pope prohibited Chinese Catholics from participating in various Confucian rites. Therefore, Christianity did not integrate into Chinese culture and has retained its foreign identity to the present day. Chinese Christians are torn by the conflicts between their belief in a western "God" and their Chinese heritage. Unlike western culture, the Chinese have a way of living with contradictions. The key is to find a balance among them. However, Christianity did serve as a channel of westernization and modernization for China. Since the 1980s, the Chinese have rediscovered Christianity in mass with the opening of mainland China to the West again. Today, Christians are still a tiny minority of the population.

Islam also came to China during the Tang Dynasty. In 650, the Tang Emperor Kao Tsung sent an emissary to Caliph Osman at Madina to plead for the last Sassanian Prince Firuz who had sought refuge in the Chinese capital Cheng-An (Xian). The Caliph sent a general in return and established the first Muslim

Embassy in China. In the mid-eighth century, the Abbasid Caliph Abu Jaffar sent thousands of Muslim soldiers on two occasions (circa 757) to the Chinese capital to help the Tang emperors to suppress rebellions. These soldiers never returned home but married and remained in China. Other Muslims came to China for commerce and trade. In the Sung Dynasty (960-1279), Muslims dominated the foreign trade all over China. They were recognized as being fair, law-abiding, and self-disciplined. By the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), a period considered to be the golden age of Islam in China, Muslims finally assimilated into Chinese society after seven hundred years. They adopted Chinese names, language, and customs while retaining an Islamic mode of dress and dietary habits. By then, the Muslims could not be distinguished from Chinese, other than by their religious customs. Today, Muslims constitute the largest minority group in China with a population of over eighteen million.

Current Development

The interactions between the Chinese culture and outside influences would have both their blessings and struggles. In the last three centuries, scientific, industrial, democratic, and communist revolutions came and left distinctive marks. The Chinese are still trying to digest these more recent imports. However, they do not bring lasting happiness as they do not offer elements of sustainable social and spiritual development. As success would change to adversity, so would economic and material developments change to sufferings. In times of difficulties, the people would search for meanings in life, again and again.

In the last two centuries, the Chinese people have suffered continuous displacements, internal struggles and external threats. Their growth and development were retarded by a lack of future vision and disunity. In the last twenty years, the mainland Chinese people have been looking to other industrialized countries for models of economic development. Although they were aware of the importance of social and moral issues, the balance is overwhelmingly in favor of economic growth in the need to mobilize one billion people for modernization. The consequences are more confusion about the future. The lesson here is that modernization needs to develop not only in material progress but also with the spirit of the age. Moderation of the excesses of industrialization is needed together with approaches that harmonize with the aspirations of the people.

In the future, the Chinese culture will make major contributions to the emerging global civilization. The Chinese people, who constitute more than one-fifth of the world's population, have always worked towards peace and prosperity. Now, after long isolation, they are willing to look outside for meanings, for directions and transformations in a "global village." They are ready to join the world to build the "Great Unity" inscribed in the Chinese classics.

Common Teachings in Chinese Culture and the Bahá'í Faith

The Great Unity (Universal Commonwealth) and World Peace

The Chinese culture has long cherished the vision of Great Unity (Universal Commonwealth) from Confucius (551-479 BCE):

When the perfect order (Great Tao) prevails, the world is like a home shared by all. Virtuous and capable people are elected to public offices; trust and peace are the maxims of living among the people. All love and respect their own parents and children, as well as the parents and children of others. There are caring for the old; works for the adults; nourishment and education for the children. There are supports for the widows and the widowers; for all the people who are alone; and for the disabled. Every man and woman has an appropriate role to play in society and family. A sense of sharing displaces effects of selfishness and materialism. A devotion to public duty leaves no room for idleness. Intrigues and conniving for ill gain are unknown. Villains such as thieves and robbers do not exist. The door to every home need never be locked by day or night. These are the characteristics of the Great Unity. ⁷

The Bahá'í writings are filled with references to world peace. Professor Edward G. Browne of Cambridge University recorded his interviews with Bahá'u'lláh in 1890:

We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations...That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled - what harm is there in this? ...Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the "Most Great Peace" shall come... These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family... Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind...⁸

In 1985, the Universal House of Justice, the international governing council of the Bahá'í Faith, issued a statement on "The Promise of World Peace" to the people of the world:

The Great Peace towards which people of good will throughout the centuries have inclined their hearts, of which seers and poets for countless generations have expressed their vision, and for which from age to age the sacred scriptures of mankind have constantly held the promise, is now at long last within the reach of the nations. For the first time in history it is possible for everyone to view the entire planet, with all its myriad diversified peoples, in one perspective. World peace is not only possible but inevitable. It is the next stage in the evolution of this planet and the planetization of mankind.⁹

Unity of the Human Family

World peace can only be built on the foundation of the unity of the whole human race as a family. This is clearly emphasized in the Chinese classical writings.

All within the four seas are brothers. (Confucius, Analects, 12:5)

Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother, all people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions. Respect the aged, show deep love toward the orphaned and the weak. The sage identified his character with that of Heaven and Earth. Even those who are tired, infirm, crippled, or sick; those who have no brothers or children, wives or husbands, are all my brothers and sisters. In life I follow and serve Heaven and Earth, and in death I will be at peace. (Chang Tsai, 1020-77)

The Bahá'í writings provide further elaboration on this principle. Bahá'u'lláh states, "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."¹⁰ Also,

O ye children of men, the fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race.... The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.¹¹

‘Abdu’l-Bahá expounds on its meaning and that unity is organic as in a human body.

The second teaching of Bahá'u'lláh concerns the unity of mankind: All are the servants of God and members of one human family. God has created all, and all are His children. He rears, nourishes, provides for and is kind to all.... His sun bestows its effulgence unsparingly upon all; His clouds send down rain without distinction or favor; His breezes refresh the whole earth.... Some are imperfect; they must be perfected. The ignorant must be taught, the sick healed, the sleepers awakened. The child must not be oppressed or censured because it is undeveloped; it must be patiently trained. The sick must not be neglected because they are ailing; nay, rather, we must have compassion upon them and bring them healing. Briefly, the old conditions of animosity, bigotry and hatred between the religious systems must be dispelled and the new conditions of love, agreement and spiritual brotherhood be established among them.¹²

Man cannot live singly and alone...he is in need of cooperation and reciprocity...mankind has been created from one single origin, has branched off from one family. For example, a member of the human organism is the eye. If the eye should be affected that affliction would affect the whole nervous system.... If kindness had been shown to the members of this family surely all the members thereof would have enjoyed comfort and happiness.¹³

Service to Others

One of the best known writings of Confucius is the chapter on “The Great Learning.” There are eight steps in the Great Learning. They are: 1) investigate nature; 2) acquire knowledge; 3) sincere motive; 4) rectify heart; 5) self-cultivation; 6) harmonize the family; 7) service to country; and 8) establish peace. This is, in short, the summary of the purpose of life for the Chinese: to cultivate self, harmonize family, serve the country, and to establish peace.

The way to Great Learning is to illustrate illustrious virtue; to serve the people; and to persist until perfection.... To know what comes first and what follows will lead near to the way of the Great Learning.... The ancients who wished to illustrate illustrious virtue throughout the kingdom first administered well their own states...harmonized their families...cultivated their persons...rectified their hearts...sought to be sincere in their thoughts...extended to the utmost their knowledge. Such extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of the nature of things. Things being investigated, knowledge became complete...thoughts were sincere...hearts were then rectified...persons were cultivated...families were harmonized...states were rightly administered...the whole kingdom was made peaceful and happy.¹⁴

In the Bahá’í writings, the principle of service is the chief instrument to personal happiness and to the establishment of world peace. Bahá’u’lláh writes: “The essence of faith is fewness in words and abundance of deeds.”¹⁵

That one indeed is a man who dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth. In another passage He hath proclaimed: It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.¹⁶

Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to the countenance of truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the tree of humility.¹⁷

Moral Education

Chinese culture places moral education above all other aspects of education. The purpose of learning and self-cultivation is to develop virtues such as: loyalty, filial piety, compassion, love, propriety of conducts, justice, honesty, and sense of shame.

At fifteen I set my heart upon learning. At thirty, I had planted my feet firm upon the ground. At forty, I no longer suffered from perplexities. At fifty, I knew what was the Mandate of Heaven. At sixty, I heard them with docile ear. At seventy, I could follow the dictates of my own heart. My desire no longer overstepped the boundaries of propriety.” (Confucius, *Analects*, 5:27)

Likewise, Bahá’í teachings emphasize spiritual education which is the source of moral values. Spiritual education trains the human soul whereas material and human education train the body and society. “The aim of an educator is to so train human souls that their angelic aspect may overcome their animal side.”¹⁸

The purport is this, that to train the character of humankind is one of the weightiest commandments of God, and the influence of such training is the same as that which the sun

exerteth over tree and fruit. Children must be most carefully watched over, protected and trained;... Otherwise, the children will turn into weeds growing wild...knowing not right from wrong, distinguishing not the highest of human qualities from all that is mean and vile; they will be brought up in vainglory...¹⁹

The fear of God hath ever been a sure defense.... It is the chief cause of the protection of mankind, and the supreme instrument for its preservation. Indeed, there existeth in man a faculty which deterreth him from, and guardeth him against, whatever is unworthy and unseemly, and which is known as his sense of shame.... Religion is verily the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world and of tranquillity amongst its peoples. The weakening of the pillars of religion hath strengthened the foolish and emboldened them and made them more arrogant.²⁰

The greatest bestowal of God in the world of humanity is religion; for assuredly the divine teachings of religion are above all other sources of instruction and development to man. Religion confers upon man eternal life and guides his footsteps in the world of morality. It opens the doors of unending happiness and bestows everlasting honor upon the human kingdom. It has been the basis of all civilization and progress in the history of mankind.²¹

Extended Family Values—The Golden Rule

In Confucius' teachings, the family unit is the foundation of both the community and the state. The family unit values are thus extended to cover larger numbers of families in the community in the sense that the elders and children of other families are treated as the elders and children of one's own. These relationships are based on mutual support and reciprocity. Confucius teaches the Golden Rule as: "What you would not desire for yourself, don't do unto others."

The father is merciful, the son filial; the elder brother is good, the younger brother submissive; the husband upright, the wife complaisant; the adult is kind, the child obedient. (Book of Rites.)

The Bahá'í teachings on family are very similar but with more emphasis on unity of the family to meet the needs of present-day society. The Golden Rule in Bahá'u'lláh's writings is: "Ascribe not to any soul that which thou wouldst not have ascribed to thee, and say not that which thou doest not. This is My command unto thee, do thou observe it."²²

The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives... The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one, the honor of all.²³

Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world... And if we widen out the sphere of unity a little to include the inhabitants of a village who seek to be loving and united, who associate with and are kind to one another, what great advances they will be seen to make, how secure and protected they will be. Then let us widen out the sphere a little more, let us take the inhabitants of a city, all of them together: if they establish the strongest bonds of unity among themselves, how far they will progress, even in a brief period and what power they will exert. And if the sphere of unity be still further widened out, that is, if the inhabitants of a whole country develop peaceable hearts, and if with all their hearts and souls they yearn to cooperate with one another and to live in unity, and if they become kind and loving to one another, that country will achieve undying joy and lasting glory. Peace will it have, and plenty, and vast wealth.²⁴

Common Spiritual Teachings in Chinese Culture and the Bahá’í Faith

Investigation of Truth

Confucius teaches that the investigation of the nature of things is the first step in Great Learning. He specifies the requirements of sincere motive and rectified heart for “self-cultivation which is the foundation of everything. All must consider it carefully from the emperor to the mass of people.” The purpose is to harmonize family, serve the state and establish peace. On the other hand, Lao-Tse (c. sixth century BCE) teaches that one should be as innocent and uncontaminated as a newborn infant and a block of uncarved wood (Tao Te Ching—the book of Tao and Virtues, chapters 5 & 10). The Tao is far from the people of “useless learning” and how “the wise are not learned and the learned are not wise” (chapter 20, 81).

Lao-Tse teaches the purpose of life is to obtain the “Tao” and to follow the Tao. Here the word “Tao” means the way, the path, the direction, or the principle, the method, the truth, and the highest reality. The Tao operates according to spiritual laws.

It is the “mother” (ch. 1, 52) and “ancestor” (ch. 4) of all things. It exists before heaven and earth (ch. 25). It is the “storehouse” of things (ch. 62). It is at once their principle of being and their substance. “All things depend on it for life” (ch. 34). In its substance it is “invisible,” “inaudible,” “vague and elusive” (ch. 14, 35), indescribable and above shape and form (ch. 14, 41). It is One, a unity behind all multiplicity (ch. 14, 42). It is everlasting and unchangeable (ch. 7, 16, 25). It is all-pervasive and “flows everywhere” (ch. 34). “It operates everywhere and is free from danger.” (ch. 25) It is natural (ch. 25), for it comes into existence by itself and is its own principle for being. It is nameless (ch. 1, 32, 37, 41), unlimited in space and time (ch. 1, 25). It is not a concrete, individual thing or describable in particular terms. Above all, it is “non-being.” “All things in the world come from being. And being come from non-being” (ch. 40).²⁵

Bahá’u’lláh admonishes the seeker of truth to first cleanse his heart, so that no love or hate may linger, and be open-minded to forsake both imitations and adherence to hereditary forms of knowledge. The seeker must need patience and perseverance with an intense desire to investigate the truth.

The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor.²⁶

When a true seeker determineth to take the step of search...he must, before all else, cleanse his heart...from the obscuring dust of all acquired knowledge, and the allusions of the embodiments of satanic fancy. He must purge his breast...of every defilement, and sanctify his soul from all that pertaineth to water and clay, from all shadowy and ephemeral attachments. He must so cleanse his heart that no remnant of either love or hate may linger therein, lest that love blindly incline him to error, or that hate repel him away from the truth...how most of the people...have strayed far from the Embodiments of the Divine mysteries, and, shepherdless, are roaming through the wilderness of oblivion and error.²⁷

‘Abdu’l-Bahá emphasizes the importance of forsaking imitations and that reality is one:

The teaching of Bahá’u’lláh on the investigation of reality: Man must seek reality himself, forsaking imitations and adherence to mere hereditary forms. As the nations of the world are following imitations in lieu of truth and as imitations are many and various, differences of belief have been productive of strife and warfare. So long as these imitations remain, the oneness of the world of humanity is impossible. Therefore, we must investigate reality in order that by its light the clouds and darkness may be dispelled. Reality is one reality; it does not admit multiplicity or division. If the nations of the world investigate reality, they will agree and become united.²⁸

The Highest Reality (God) is the Unknowable Essence

The concept of the Highest Reality (God) appears in the earliest Chinese classical literature dating back two to three thousand years ago, in “The Book of History” and “The Book of Odes.” The Chinese concept of God appears in several different forms, each referring to God in a different context with specific meanings. There are several major forms for the attributes of God in Chinese writings:

1. The Chinese word “Tien,” which means Heaven literally, is often used to represent God the Celestial Power; God the Highest Authority; and God the Omnipresence.
2. The term “Shang Di,” which means the Sovereign Lord of Universe.
3. The term “Tien Di,” which means the Sovereign Lord in Heaven. (The Chinese emperors used the title “Son of Heaven” to symbolize they have the “Mandate of Heaven” to rule the country with absolute power.)
4. The word “Shen,” which means God the Mystical; God the Spiritual; God—the Unseen; and God—the Unknowable Essence.
5. The term “Shang Chang,” which means God the Creator of Universe.
6. The term “Chang Tien,” which means God the Creator in Heaven.
7. The word “Sheng,” which means God the Holy, the Divine.
8. The word “Tao,” which means “the way” literally, is used as God the Natural Order, God the Natural Way, God the Nameless, the Eternal Way that is unmentionable.
9. The term “Tien Tao,” which means God the Order of Heaven or Way of Heaven.

In the Tao Te Ching, Lao-Tse teaches the “essential unity of the universe—monism (ch. 39), of reversion (ch. 16, 28, 36, 40), polarization—yin and yang (ch. 2), and eternal cycles (ch. 16, 36), of the leveling of all differences (ch. 2, 10), the relativity of all standards (ch. 2), and the return of all to the Primeval One (ch. 65), the divine intelligence (ch. 41, 81), the source of all things (ch. 1, 25, 32, 34, 41, 52).”²⁹ The Tao is “nameless”—unknowable (ch. 1, 32, 37, 41), “non-being” (ch. 1, 40), “non-action” (ch. 3, 37, 81), “ever-present” (ch. 4, 34), “ever-lasting” (ch. 7, 16, 25), and “mysterious” (ch. 14, 25, 35). Here is some of the text:

*The Tao that can be Tao is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named is not the eternal Name.
Nameless, the beginning of heaven and Earth. Named, the mother of all things.
Ever desirous, unravels the secrets. Ever desiring, sees the manifested.
These two spring from the same source but differ in name; Both are called mystery;
Mystery upon mysteries; The gate to all the secrets.³⁰
Look, it cannot be seen—it is distant. Listen, it cannot be heard—it is beyond sound.
Grasp, it cannot be held—it is intangible. These three are indefinable; and fuse into one.
From above it is not bright; below it is not dark: unbroken thread beyond description.
It returns to nothingness. The form of the formless; the image of the imageless,
This is the elusive mystery.
Stand before it and there is no beginning. Follow it and there is no end.
Hold fast to the ancient Tao; So to guide the present.*

To know the ancient beginning is the path of Tao³¹

These Chinese concepts are in harmony with the Bahá’í writings, which mention numerous attributes of God such as the Almighty, the Innermost Spirit of Spirits, the Eternal Essence of Essences, the Invisible and Unknowable Essence, the Incomparable and All-Glorious, the Ruler of the Universe, the All-Merciful, the Self-Subsisting. The Bahá’í teaching on the Highest Reality is that God, the Creator, is the unknowable essence. The finite nature of creatures can never comprehend the infinite nature of the Creator.

From time immemorial He hath been veiled in the ineffable sanctity of His exalted Self, and will everlastingly continue to be wrapt in the impenetrable mystery of His unknowable Essence. Every attempt to attain to an understanding of His inaccessible Reality hath ended in

complete bewilderment, and every effort to approach His exalted Self and envisage His Essence hath resulted in hopelessness and failure.³²

To every discerning and illumined heart it is evident that God, the unknowable Essence, the divine Being, is immensely exalted beyond every human attribute, such as corporeal existence, ascent and descent, egress and regress. Far be it from His glory that human tongue should adequately recount His praise, or that human heart comprehend His fathomless mystery. He is and hath ever been veiled in the ancient eternity of His Essence, and will remain in His Reality everlastingly hidden from the sight of men.³³

The door of the knowledge of the Ancient of Days being thus closed in the face of all beings, the Source of infinite grace hath caused those luminous Gems of Holiness to appear out of the realm of the spirit, in the noble form of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable essence. From Him proceed their knowledge and power; from Him is derived their sovereignty. The beauty of their countenance is but a reflection of His image, and their revelation a sign of His deathless glory. They are the Treasuries of divine knowledge, and the Repositories of celestial wisdom. Through them is transmitted a grace that is infinite, and by them is revealed the light that can never fade. "...He hath known God who hath known himself."³⁴

Since all that we can comprehend of the nature of the Highest Realty is through the teachings of the prophets of God (the Manifestations of God) in history, our understandings are necessarily limited and relative to our individual capacity. Bahá'u'lláh states that:

All that the sages and mystics have said or written have ever exceeded, nor can they ever hope to exceed, the limitations to which man's finite mind hath been strictly subjected... such mind and heart can never transcend that which is the creature of their own thoughts.³⁵

Common Foundation of Religions

Throughout its history, the Chinese people have been open-minded in accepting all religious teachings that reached it. The Chinese have the fundamental belief that religions teach people to do good and that "Ye shall know them by their fruits." These can also be found in every holy book. "Taoism and Buddhism are equal in illuminating and transforming people. Different religions develop under a variety of conditions to meet the same end." (Ku Huan, c.392-453) "Confucius sought order and peace in society, and the Buddha sought enlightenment in the fundamental nature of existence, but their goals are the same." (Sun Ch'ò, 265-420) Confucius and Lao-Tse did not establish new religions, but renewed morals and ancient virtues. They all share the common foundation of unity and they all serve to advance the spiritual civilization among humankind.

Bahá'u'lláh states that all religions have come from the same source and that: "This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past and eternal in the future."³⁶ The Prophets in history, as founders of religions, are Divine Educators who have come to lead the people from the darkness of their own ignorance to the light of guidance of divine knowledge. They only differ in the intensity of their revelation:

These attributes of God are not and have never been vouchsafed specially unto certain Prophets, and withheld from others. Nay, all the Prophets of God, His well-favoured, His holy, and chosen Messengers, are, without exception, the bearers of His names, and the embodiments of His attributes. They only differ in the intensity of their revelation, and the comparative potency of their light. ...these illumined Souls, these beauteous Countenances have, each and every one of them, been endowed with all the attributes of God, such as sovereignty, dominion, and the like, even though to outward seeming they be shorn of all earthly majesty.³⁷

The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and

enmity. This is the straight Path, the fixed and immovable foundation. Whatsoever is raised on this foundation, the changes and chances of the world can never impair its strength, nor will the revolution of countless centuries undermine its structure.³⁸

Religion must be the source of fellowship, the cause of unity and the nearness of God to man. If it rouses hatred and strife, it is evident that absence of religion is preferable and an irreligious man better than one who professes it. According to the divine Will and intention religion should be the cause of love and agreement, a bond to unify all mankind, for it is a message of peace and goodwill to man from God.³⁹

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that there are two kinds of Prophets:

Universally, the Prophets are of two kinds. One are the independent Prophets Who are followed; the other kind are not independent and are themselves followers. The independent Prophets are the lawgivers and the founders of a new cycle.... They are like the sun which is luminous in itself: the light is its essential necessity; it does not receive light from any other star. These Dawning-places of the morn of Unity are the sources of bounty and the mirrors of the Essence of Reality.

The other Prophets are followers and promoters, for they are branches and not independent; they receive the bounty of the independent Prophets, and they profit by the light of the Guidance of the universal Prophets. They are like the moon, which is not luminous and radiant in itself, but receives its light from the sun.

The Manifestations of universal Prophethood Who appeared independently are, for example, Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. But the others who are followers and promoters are like Solomon, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. ...Buddha also established a new religion, and Confucius renewed morals and ancient virtues, but their institutions have been entirely destroyed. The beliefs and rites of the Buddhists and Confucianists have not continued in accordance with their fundamental teachings.⁴⁰

Harmony in Nature; Union with Nature (Tao)

One of the outstanding contributions of Taoist teaching is that human civilization should live in harmony with nature. Implicit in this belief is that all things are connected in unity (Tao). This is sometimes elevated to the mystical belief of seeking union with the universe. “The Universe came into being with us together; and all things are one with us.”⁴¹

*The Tao begot One (before-being). One begot Two (being).
Two begot Three (being/before-being). And Three begot all things.
All things carry Yin (the passive) and embrace Yang (the active).
They maintain harmony by keeping the vital Qi (spiritual energy).⁴²
It is mysteriously formed, Born before Heaven and Earth; In the silence and the void.
Standing alone and unchanging, Ever present and in motion.
It could be the Mother of all things. I know not its name so call it Tao.
Man follows Earth; Earth follows Heaven; Heaven follows Tao;
and the Tao is spontaneously so.⁴³
Empty yourself of everything; hold fast to the serene,
All things act in concert, and expectant of their cycle return.
Returning to the source is serenity, it is the way of Nature.
The way of Nature is constant decay and renewal.
Knowing this constancy is enlightenment; Not knowing it is to court disaster.⁴⁴*

In similar fashion, Bahá’u’lláh refers to nature as the embodiment of the Creator’s will manifested in diverse causes. When contemplating on the incomparable glory in nature, He reminds us of the highness and loftiness, the power and bounty, the majesty and grandeur, the ensign and standard of the Omnipotence of our Creator.

That which hath been in existence had existed before, but not in the form thou seest today. The

world of existence came into being through the heat generated from the interaction between the active force and that which is its recipient. These two are the same, yet they are different...

Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, and the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise. Were anyone to affirm that it is the Will of God as manifested in the world of being, no one should question this assertion. It is endowed with a power whose reality men of learning fail to grasp. Indeed a man of insight can perceive naught therein save the effulgent splendour of Our Name, the Creator. Say: This is an existence which knoweth no decay, and Nature itself is lost in bewilderment before its revelations, its compelling evidences and its effulgent glory which have encompassed the universe.⁴⁵

By Thy glory! Every time I lift up mine eyes unto Thy heaven, I call to mind Thy highness and Thy loftiness, and Thine incomparable glory and greatness; and every time I turn my gaze to Thine earth, I am made to recognize the evidences of Thy power and the tokens of Thy bounty. And when I behold the sea, I find that it speaketh to me of Thy majesty, and of the potency of Thy might, and of Thy sovereignty and Thy grandeur. And at whatever time I contemplate the mountains, I am led to discover the ensigns of Thy victory and the standards of Thine omnipotence.⁴⁶

Tests and Difficulties

Among the teachings of the religions is that there is purpose to tests and difficulties in this earthly life, in that they lead to many spiritual rewards. One of Confucius most well-known followers, Mencius (372-289, BCE), teaches that tests and difficulties are blessings from Heaven. The following beloved passage in his classic writings is well memorized by every Chinese student.

“Heaven, When it is about to place a great responsibility on a man, always first tests his resolution, wears out his sinews and bones with toil, exposes his body to starvation, subjects him to extreme poverty, frustrate his efforts so as to stimulate his mind, toughen his nature and make good his deficiencies. Men for the most part can mend their ways only after they made mistake. Only when they are frustrated in mind and in their deliberations can they stand up anew. Only when their intentions become visible on their countenances and audible in their voices can they be understood by others. As a rule, a state will perish without law-abiding families and trustworthy public servants on the one hand, and without the threat of external aggression on the other. Only then do we realize that anxiety and distress lead to life; and that ease and comfort end in death.”⁴⁷

Bahá'u'lláh re-affirms these teachings and calls us to be content and radiant in tests and difficulties. He further reminds us that fire and vengeance are really light and mercy; that adversity is followed by success and rejoicing follow woe, and that we should hold fast to what will profit mankind.

If adversity befall thee not in My path, how canst thou walk in the ways of them that are content with My pleasure? If trials afflict thee not in thy longing to meet Me, how wilt thou attain the light in thy love for My beauty?⁴⁸

My calamity is My providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy. Hasten thereunto that thou mayest become an eternal light and an immortal spirit. This is My command unto thee, do thou observe it.⁴⁹

‘Abdu’l-Bahá further explains:

Those who suffer most, attain to the greatest perfection. While a man is happy he may forget his God; but when grief comes and sorrows overwhelm him, then will he remember his Father who is in Heaven, and who is able to deliver him from his humiliations. Men who suffer not, attain no perfection. The plant most pruned by the gardeners is that one which, when the summer comes, will have the most beautiful blossoms and the most abundant fruit.⁵⁰

Moderation in All Things

Moderation is an essential principle in both Chinese and Baha'i teachings. Lao-Tse teaches the "impartial mean"(5), the "gentle way"(8), and moderation as the "Tao of Heaven"(9).

*Heaven and Earth are impartial; all things are equal.
The wise are impartial; the people are equal....
Excess of words bring emptiness;
better stay with the impartial Mean.⁵¹
The sage is like water; water benefits all things and softly follows Nature....
Be kind to others; be true in speech; be just in ruling; be competent; and
In action, be concerned of the time and season.
When one is gentle, there is no contention.⁵²
Better to stop in time than fill to the brim.
Over-sharpen the blade, it will soon be blunt.
Fill your house with gold and jade, no one can protect it.
Prideful of wealth and titles, disaster will follow.
Retire when the work is done. This is the Tao of heaven.⁵³
The world has its mysterious way; you can not influence it.
Try to change it and you will be ruined.
Try to hold it and you will lose it...*

Therefore the sage avoids extremes, excesses, and complacency.⁵⁴

Confucius establishes the "Tao of the Mean" as the guiding principle in our daily life:
What Heaven confers is called "nature." Accordance with this nature is called the Tao.

Cultivating the Tao is called "education." That which is called Tao cannot be separated from for an instant. What can be separated from is not the Tao. Therefore the Superior Man is cautious in the place where he is not seen, and apprehensive in the place where he is not heard. Nothing is more visible than the hidden, and nothing is more apparent than the subtle. Therefore the Superior Man is cautious when he is alone. When joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure have not yet arisen, it is called the "Mean" (in Chinese—ch'ung). When they arise to their appropriate levels, it is called "harmony." Mean is the great root of all-under-heaven. Harmony is the penetration of the Tao through all-under-heaven. When the mean and harmony are actualized, Heaven and Earth are in their proper positions, and the myriad things are nourished.⁵⁵

Bahá'u'lláh admonishes us to exercise moderation in all things:

In all matters moderation is desirable. If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a source of evil. Consider the civilization of the West, how it hath agitated and alarmed the peoples of the world. An infernal engine hath been devised, and hath proved so cruel a weapon of destruction that its like none hath ever witnessed or heard. The purging of such deeply-rooted and overwhelming corruptions cannot be effected unless the peoples of the world unite in pursuit of one common aim and embrace one universal faith.⁵⁶

It is incumbent upon them who are in authority to exercise moderation in all things. Whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence. Consider for instance such things as liberty, civilization and the like. However much men of understanding may favourably regard them, they will, if carried to excess, exercise a pernicious influence upon men...⁵⁷

Say: Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation. As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure. As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets.⁵⁸

Whoso cleaveth to justice, can, under no circumstances, transgress the limits of moderation. The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men. If carried to excess,

civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation.⁵⁹

Conclusion—“Oneness of Mankind” and “Unity in Diversity”

This paper aims to show the essential unity in the teachings from the Chinese culture and the Bahá’í Faith. They share the same spiritual foundation despite the millennia of history separating them. However, the social conditions of the present day world require many new and universally applicable principles to help unite the human family as one. The Bahá’í Faith brings new teachings for an emerging global civilization. These new teachings include the harmony of science and religion; abolition of prejudice; spiritual solution to economic problems; universal education; universal auxiliary language; equality of women and men; and world government. They are discussed in the referenced books such as: *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era*, *The Bahá’í Faith—the Emerging Global Religion* and *A Short Introduction to the Bahá’í Faith*.

In conclusion, the pivotal principle of the Bahá’í Faith is the “oneness of mankind” and the operating principle is “unity in diversity.” These principles are eloquently explained in the following passages.

The principle of the Oneness of Mankind is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations. Its implications are deeper... Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. It constitutes a challenge, at once bold and universal, to outworn shibboleths of national creeds.... It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units.⁶⁰

Unity in Diversity

The animating purpose of the world-wide Law of Bahá’u’lláh, far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, seeks to broaden its basis, to remold its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world. It can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men’s hearts, nor to abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of excessive centralization are to be avoided. It does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race. It insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is ‘unity in diversity.’

The call of Bahá’u’lláh is primarily directed against all forms of provincialism, all insularities and prejudices. If long-cherished ideals and time-honored institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution? For legal standards, political and economic theories are solely designed to safeguard the interests of humanity as a whole, and not humanity to be crucified for the preservation of the integrity of any particular law or doctrine.⁶¹

The Wider Inclusive Loyalty

A word of warning should, however, be uttered in this connection. The love of one's country has not, through this declaration, this clarion-call of Bahá'u'lláh, been either condemned or disparaged. It should not, indeed it cannot, be construed as a repudiation, or regarded in the light of a censure, pronounced against a sane and intelligent patriotism, nor does it seek to undermine the allegiance and loyalty of any individual to his country, nor does it conflict with the legitimate aspirations, rights, and duties of any individual state or nation. All it does imply and proclaim is the insufficiency of patriotism, in view of the fundamental changes effected in the economic life of society and the interdependence of the nations, and as the consequence of the contraction of the world, through the revolution in the means of transportation and communication.... It calls for a wider loyalty, which should not, and indeed does not, conflict with lesser loyalties. It instills a love which, in view of its scope, must include and not exclude the love of one's own country. It lays, through this loyalty which it inspires, and this love which it infuses, the only foundation on which the concept of world citizenship can thrive, and the structure of world unification can rest. It does insist, however, on the subordination of national considerations and particularistic interests to the imperative and paramount claims of humanity as a whole, inasmuch as in a world of interdependent nations and peoples the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole....

The world is, in truth, moving on towards its destiny. The interdependence of the peoples and nations of the earth, whatever the leaders of the divisive forces of the world may say or do, is already an accomplished fact. Its unity in the economic sphere is now understood and recognized. The welfare of the part means the welfare of the whole, and the distress of the part brings distress to the whole. The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh has, in His own words, "lent a fresh impulse and set a new direction" to this vast process now operating in the world. The fires lit by this great ordeal are the consequences of men's failure to recognize it. They are, moreover, hastening its consummation. Adversity, prolonged, worldwide, afflictive, allied to chaos and universal destruction, must needs convulse the nations, stir the conscience of the world, disillusion the masses, precipitate a radical change in the very conception of society, and coalesce ultimately the disjointed, the bleeding limbs of mankind into one body, single, organically united, and indivisible.⁶²

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Notes

- 1) See books in the reference section for further information on the Baha'i Faith.
- 2) Reported in "Star of the West", vol. 8, April 28, 1917, No. 3, p. 37.
- 3) Letter from Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Baha'i Faith, dated 23 January 1923.
- 4) Statement from the Baha'i International Community, 1 July 1999.
- 5) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1982, p. 109.
- 6) "The introduction of Buddhism from India to China—some perspectives on the development of Chinese Culture," Prof. Tong Yi-Jia (Beijing University) in *Chinese Traditional Culture Revisits in the First International Symposium on Chinese Culture* (in Chinese), Shanghai, 1986, Commercial Press, Hong Kong.
- 7) The Great Unity Chapter, Confucius, in *The Book of Rites, Book IX*.
- 8) *A Traveller's Narrative* (Episode of the Bab), pp. xxxix-xl.
- 9) *The Promise of World Peace*, Universal House of Justice, p1.
- 10) *Gleanings of the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 251.
- 11) *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 112.
- 12) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, by Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 180.
- 13) *Foundations of World Unity*, by Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 38.
- 14) The Great Learning Chapter from Confucius.
- 15) *Tablets of Baha'u'llah*, (Words of Wisdom), p. 156.
- 16) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 251.
- 17) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 285.
- 18) *Some Answered Questions*, by Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 235.
- 19) ‘Abdu'l-Baha, in *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. 1, p. 263.
- 20) *Tablet of Baha'u'llah*, pp. 63–64.
- 21) *Bahá'í World Faith*, by Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 270.
- 22) *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh* (Arabic), by Bahá'u'lláh, no. 29.
- 23) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, by Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 168.
- 24) *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 279.
- 25) *The Way of Lao Tzu*, W.T. Chan, chapter 7.
- 26) *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh* (Arabic), by Bahá'u'lláh, p. 1.
- 27) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 264.
- 28) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, by Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 180–181.
- 29) *The Wisdom of Laotse*, Lin Yutang, Random House, 1948, p. 14.
- 30) *Tao Te Ching*, Laotse, ch. 1. (author's own translation with adaptation from others.)
- 31) *Tao Te Ching*, Laotse, ch. 14.
- 32) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 62.
- 33) *The Book of Certitude*, by Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 97.
- 34) *The Book of Certitude*, by Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 97–100.
- 35) *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, no. 148, p. 316.
- 36) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 136.
- 37) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 140.
- 38) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 169.
- 39) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, by Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 180.
- 40) *Some Answered Questions*, by ‘Abdu'l-Baha, p. 165.
- 41) *Chuang-tsu*, Chapter 2.
- 42) *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 42—Tao begot One.

- 43) *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 25—The Tao is spontaneously so.
- 44) *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 16—The way of the Nature.
- 45) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 140-142.
- 46) *Prayers and Meditations*, by Bahá'u'lláh, p. 272.
- 47) *Mencius Book VI: Kao Tse*, Part II, 15.
- 48) *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh* (Arabic), by Bahá'u'lláh, no. 50.
- 49) *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh* (Arabic), by Bahá'u'lláh, no. 51.
- 50) *Paris Talks*, by Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 50.
- 51) *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 5—Impartial Mean.
- 52) *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 8—Gentle Ways.
- 53) *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 9—Moderation.
- 54) *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 29—Avoids Extremes.
- 55) *Doctrine of the Mean*, Confucius.
- 56) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 69.
- 57) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 169.
- 58) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 172.
- 59) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 342.
- 60) *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, Shoghi Effendi, p. 42-43.
- 61) *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, Shoghi Effendi, p. 41-42.
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The Bedrock of Bahá’í Belief: The Doctrine of Progressive Revelation

Zaid Lundberg

The British medieval Christian theologian and churchman St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) said that “Theology” which utilizes doctrines is “faith seeking rational self-understanding.”¹ Nine centuries later, Alister McGrath similarly states that “Doctrine may...be regarded as the intellectual self-expression of a living tradition....”² These passages could be interpreted on the one hand that through colloquia and seminars like this one on Principles of the Bahá’í Belief System or Bahá’í Theology, we, as Bahá’ís, have the rare and precious opportunity to, ultimately, develop a greater self-understanding and self-expression of the Bahá’í Faith itself. Yet, on the other hand, it is significant that in 1992 Udo Schaefer stated that:

if we compare the development of the doctrines of our Faith, the scholarly systematization and presentation of its teachings in terms of philosophy, theology, religious studies, with that of Islam, for instance, we must admit that we are still in our infancy...our research has mainly been focused on the history of our Faith.... The theological doctrines...which are at the very core of a religion, have not been stressed much in [Bahá’í] research...and] very little has been written on the metaphysical and theological aspects of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation.³

Jack McLean’s *Revisioning the Sacred: New Perspectives on a Bahá’í Theology* (1997) may be seen as a recent and serious attempt, involving several Bahá’í “theologians,” to investigate the theological dimension of the Bahá’í Faith. Nonetheless, McLean writes in the same work that:

The systematic “Bahá’í theologian” has yet to emerge...and a number of fundamental Bahá’í teachings have suffered from neglect ...there is still no major scholarly work in Bahá’í perspective on this most vital theme [the oneness of religion]4 which along with the oneness of humanity, is the most distinctive and characteristically Bahá’í teaching. Neither is there yet any major scholarly work on *progressive revelation*, one of the grand themes of Bahá’u’lláh’s pre-eminent doctrinal work the Kitáb-i-Íqán.⁵

Doctrine, Belief, Theology, and Religion

In a Western and a Christian traditional sense, the study of doctrines has been recognized as being intimately related to theology, or theological systems, and have therefore often labeled “systematic theology” and “dogmatism.”⁶ However, in a broader perspective, Ninian Smart argues that the doctrinal dimension is one of six central dimensions of religion.⁷ Similarly, Richard Comstock states that doctrine is “a category in the comparative study of religion that belongs with ritual, sacrament, mystical experience,”⁸ and he further writes that terms like *torah* in Judaism, *kalám* in Islam, *darshana* and *dharma* in Hinduism and Buddhism, and *chiao* in Confucianism and Taoism, all convey similar meanings of “doctrine” or “teaching.”⁹ Indeed, the very term doctrine can etymologically be derived from the Latin *docere* “teaching” (from *docere*, “to teach”)¹⁰ and it is commonly understood as “something that is taught,” “a principle,” “the whole body of principles in a branch of knowledge,” and a “system of belief.”¹¹ The term is therefore often found associated with other religious terms and concepts like belief, catechesis, creed, confession, dogma, and kerygma.¹²

In a general perspective on the nature of doctrine, Smart defines doctrines as “an attempt to give system, clarity and intellectual power to what is revealed through the mythological and symbolical language of religious faith and ritual.”¹³ Although Smart defines doctrines “as an attempt to give system,” in his later writings he points out that doctrines “are not rigidly systematic,” but that they “are more like

schemes than systems.” Moreover, he maintains that a “scheme is organic,” and he seems to imply a hermeneutic principle when he further argues that “to understand a scheme, it is important to see each part in the context of the whole.”¹⁴

Smart also enumerates five functions of doctrine, which are to:

- bring order to what is given by revelation
- safeguard the reference myths have to that which lies Beyond
- relate their claims to the current knowledge of the age
- reflect and stimulate a fresh vision of the world
- define the community¹⁵

These five points can finally be compared with R. M. Speight’s eight functions of creeds as:

- the basis of membership
- a test of orthodoxy
- a type of prayer
- a basis for religious instruction
- a corporate or individual response in faith to divine revelation
- an expression of self-understanding by the religious community
- an assertion and confirmation of the unity of the community
- a witness to the world, expressing the core of belief¹⁶

It is here noteworthy that Smart’s fifth and Speight’s sixth points include self-definition and self-understanding as functions of doctrines/creeds in that they “define the community” and that they are “an expression of self-understanding by the religious community.” Similarly, McGrath states that “Doctrine defines communities of discourse, possessing a representative character, attempting to describe or prescribe the beliefs of a community.”¹⁷ Speight’s last point, “expressing the core of belief,” is particularly illuminating since this paper argues that the Bahá’í doctrine of progressive revelation is “the bedrock of Bahá’í belief.”

In sum, the purpose of this paper is to show that the Bahá’í idea or concept of progressive revelation is explicitly¹⁸ described as a “doctrine,” “something that is taught,” “a scheme,” “a principle” and that it even is labeled as a “philosophy,” that it expresses “the core of belief,” and, ultimately, that it not only defines the Bahá’í community but the Bahá’í Faith itself.

THE DOCTRINE OF PROGRESSIVE REVELATION:

The Term Progressive Revelation in the Writings of the Central Figures

In order to determine if the concept of progressive revelation explicitly¹⁹ is a Bahá’í doctrine, it is first necessary to investigate the English technical term progressive revelation as it occurs in the Bahá’í writings.

Bahá’u’lláh

The technical term progressive revelation occurs in the English translations of the extant writings of Bahá’u’lláh only once and in the following passage of *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*:

Contemplate with thine inward eye the chain of successive Revelations that hath linked the Manifestations of Adam with that of the Báb. I testify before God that each one of these Manifestations hath been sent down through the operation of the Divine Will and Purpose, that each hath been the bearer of a specific Message, that each hath been entrusted with a divinely revealed Book and been commissioned to unravel the mysteries of a mighty Tablet. The measure of the Revelation with which every one of them hath been definitely fore-ordained ...And when this process of *progressive Revelation* culminated...He chose to hide His own Self behind a thousand veils, lest profane and mortal eyes discover His glory.²⁰

The original passage is in Arabic and was translated by Shoghi Effendi. However, it is important to note that an equivalent to the technical term progressive revelation never occurs in the original Arabic

text. However, it is significant that the term occurs in the internal context of the above passage and especially in connection with such key terms as the “chain of successive Revelations,”²¹ and the “Manifestations” (i.e., the Manifestations of God).

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Similarly, the technical term progressive revelation never occurs in any of the extant English translations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s oral or literary works, but a couple of close equivalents can easily be found. The following passages may serve to exemplify this:

*Religion is the outer expression of the divine reality. Therefore, it must be living, vitalized, moving and progressive. If it be without motion and non-progressive, it is without the divine life; it is dead. The divine institutes are continuously active and evolutionary; therefore, the revelation of them must be progressive and continuous.*²²

*Among the bounties of God is revelation. Hence revelation is progressive and continuous. It never ceases. It is necessary that the reality of Divinity with all its perfections and attributes should become resplendent in the human world. The reality of Divinity is like an endless ocean. Revelation may be likened to the rain.*²³

In the first passage religion itself is seen as progressive. Further, it is significant that in both passages the term progressive is directly coupled with the term continuous.

Shoghi Effendi

Of the three central Bahá’í figures,²⁴ Shoghi Effendi is the only one who ever applies the technical term progressive revelation, although, as shall be seen below, he apparently did not coin this term. In a letter, written in 1935, Shoghi Effendi states that he made a “tentative and incomplete list of the subjects referred to in these translations.”²⁵ Among the fifty-four subjects enumerated, Shoghi Effendi mentions the “Unity of Prophets” as the first subject. However, what is significant in this context is that, as subject forty-three, he briefly states that “*Divine Revelation is progressive.*” Generally, and similar to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement above, Shoghi Effendi repeatedly writes that “*Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process.*”²⁶ Further, writing on the topic of religions, Shoghi Effendi states that “*One cannot call one World Faith superior to another, as they all come from God; they are progressive, each suited to certain needs of the time.*”²⁷ Elsewhere he also refers to “*a series of progressive dispensations associated with Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad and other Prophets.*”²⁸

More specifically, Shoghi Effendi explicitly, directly, and frequently employs the technical term progressive revelation. For example, writing about the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh in both his *God Passes By* and *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, he refers to the Bábí and Bahá’í “Dispensation” as encompassing fifty years of “*continuous and progressive Revelation.*”²⁹ Once again it can be noted that the term progressive is coupled with the term continuous. Other expressions in the singular are:

- *the concept of progressive religion*³⁰
- *the principle of progressive revelation*³¹
- *the Bahá’í philosophy of progressive revelation*³²

Shoghi Effendi also uses plural terms of progressive revelations like:

- *series of progressive Revelations*³³
- *a series of successive, of preliminary and progressive revelations*³⁴
- *one link in the chain of continually progressive Revelations*³⁵
- *a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations*³⁶

Consequently, with regard to the three central Bahá’í figures and the technical term progressive revelation, it should now be clear that this term occurs only once (as translated by Shoghi Effendi) and implicitly in the writings of Bahá’u’lláh; it is implicitly, indirectly, and rarely stated in the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá;³⁷ but it is explicitly, directly, and frequently employed by Shoghi Effendi.³⁸

The Term Progressive Revelation in the Writings of Other Authors

However, Shoghi Effendi is apparently not the first Bahá’í author who uses this term, but it is highly interesting and significant that its first usage in a Bahá’í context is made by Shoghi Effendi’s close British friend, J. E. Esslemont (1874–1925), who also was his English language secretary.³⁹ Thus, the perhaps earliest dating of the English term progressive revelation in Bahá’í [usage] occurs as the subtitle of the eighth chapter on “Religious Unity” in Esslemont’s *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era*, published in 1923.⁴⁰ It is also important to note that in 1919, Esslemont sent chapters of his book for approval to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá who, before he died in 1921, revised the first nine chapters.⁴¹ Although Esslemont never elaborates on the term, he does refer to passages by Bahá’u’lláh⁴² and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.⁴³ Esslemont, however, may not be the first Bahá’í author to use the term progressive revelation, since William Collins writes that “From somewhere around 1900, American Bahá’ís had access to the biblical interpretations found in Bahá’í scriptures, upon which a sound concept of *progressive revelation* could be based.”⁴⁴ In addition, Samuel Wilson states that early English speaking Bahá’í writers (e.g., Kheiralla, Remey, Dealy, and Brittingham)⁴⁵ “refer[red] to Miller, Cummings, Seiss, Guinness, and others.”⁴⁶ This is a crucial statement, since the Guinness Wilson is referring to is most likely Henry Grattan-Guinness, who employed the technical term progressive revelation already in 1878.⁴⁷

Another person who frequently used the term progressive revelation was the former Anglican priest George Townshend⁴⁸ (1876–1957), who also was a close friend to Shoghi Effendi. In this context it is especially noteworthy since Shoghi Effendi greatly admired his command of English and therefore sent him his translations and manuscripts.⁴⁹

In 1954 the term progressive revelation makes a clear and definite appearance since John Ferraby used the term as the very title of a pamphlet. More recently, progressive revelation has, in English Bahá’í literature, variously been referred to as the:

- *idea of progressive revelation*⁵⁰
- *principle of progressive revelation*⁵¹
- *process of progressive revelation*⁵²
- *theme of progressive revelation*⁵³
- *Bahá’í thesis of Progressive Revelation*⁵⁴
- *Bahá’í notion of progressive revelation*⁵⁵
- *concept of progressive revelation*⁵⁶
- *basic Bahá’í teaching of progressive revelation*⁵⁷

Progressive Revelation as an Explicit Doctrine

The Doctrine of Progressive Revelation in the Writings of the Central Figures

Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

It should be clearly stated that from the extant English sources of the writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá neither author explicitly declared progressive revelation as a doctrine. However, quite a few Bahá’í scholars state that Bahá’u’lláh’s *Kitáb-i-Íqán* not only “enunciates the essential doctrinal principles of the Bahá’í revelation,”⁵⁸ but that it also has been referred to as “Bahá’u’lláh’s foremost doctrinal work.”⁵⁹ Other Bahá’í authors have argued that Bahá’u’lláh’s *Kitáb-i-Íqán* is the primary Bahá’í textbook on progressive revelation. Thus, for example, Adib Taherzadeh states that the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* has “unfolded the pattern and disclosed the meaning of progressive revelation,”⁶⁰ and similarly, William Hatcher states that it is “Bahá’u’lláh’s most important doctrinal work”⁶¹ and that it “discusses progressive revelation.”⁶² In addition, Seena Fazel & Khazeh Fananapazir state that Bahá’u’lláh’s *Súriy-i-Sabr* is “a tablet devoted to the exposition of the theme of progressive revelation.”⁶³

In the case of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, it is significant that he states:

*In every Dispensation the light of Divine Guidance has been focused upon one central theme.... In this wondrous Revelation, this glorious century, the foundation of the Faith of God and the distinguishing feature of His Law is the consciousness of the Oneness of Mankind.*⁶⁴

From this passage it would be possible to conclude that “the Oneness of Mankind” could be considered the “central theme” of Bahá’í [doctrine]. However, during his travels to Europe and America, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also formulated what has been referred to as “a core set of Bahá’í ‘principles’”⁶⁵ and which “could assume creedal formulation as a simple summary of the Bahá’í Faith.”⁶⁶ Foremost among these principles is the principle which states that “it is incumbent upon all mankind to investigate the truth.” It is significant that included in this first principle ‘Abdu’l-Bahá alludes to a central theme, or aspect, of progressive revelation - that of an essential religious unity—since he states that “The different religions have one truth underlying them, their reality is one.... All the divine Prophets and Messengers were the instruments and channels of this same eternal, essential truth.”⁶⁷

Shoghi Effendi

Earlier it was seen that only Shoghi Effendi utilize the technical term progressive revelation. Shoghi Effendi also refers to Bahá’í doctrines in general statements like “The principles” and “fundamentals of the Faith,”⁶⁸ “basic and sacred principles,”⁶⁹ “verities of the Faith,”⁷⁰ “the essential verities of the Faith,”⁷¹ “truths which lie at the basis of our Faith,”⁷² “the major beliefs of our Faith,”⁷³ and “*the principles and precepts constituting the bedrock of [the] Faith,*”⁷⁴ and “*the incontrovertible principles that constitute the bedrock of Bahá’í belief.*”⁷⁵ More specifically, he positively identifies “the oneness of the entire human race” as “*the pivotal principle and fundamental doctrine of the [Bahá’í] Faith.*”⁷⁶ Once again, the oneness of mankind may seem as the fundamental Bahá’í doctrine. The following paragraphs by Shoghi Effendi, however, can be used to directly ascertain that progressive revelation also is explicitly stated as a central Bahá’í doctrine, here referred as a principle:

*The fundamental principle enunciated by Bahá’u’lláh...is that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process.*⁷⁷

*Its [the Bahá’í Faith’s] teachings revolve around the fundamental principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is progressive, not final.*⁷⁸

*the fundamental principle which constitutes the Bedrock of Bahá’í belief, the principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is orderly, continuous and progressive and not spasmodic or final.*⁷⁹

*The Faith of Bahá’u’lláh should indeed be regarded...as the culmination of a cycle, the final stage in a series of successive, of preliminary and progressive revelations.*⁸⁰

It is possible to interpret the first three paragraphs above that “religious truth is not absolute but relative” as a separate principle from “Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process,” or that that “Divine Revelation is progressive.” Moreover, by the very fact that it is mentioned first, the principle of “religious relativity” could be considered as the fundamental principle of Bahá’í. It is also possible, however, to see the two sentences as inseparably related and as a more elaborate version of a single principle. Two other passages by Shoghi Effendi may clarify this relationship in determining whether they are to be treated as two separate principles, or as one single principle:

*Let none, however, mistake my purpose, or misrepresent this cardinal truth which is of the essence of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. The divine origin of all the Prophets of God—including Jesus Christ and the Apostle of God [Muhammed], the two greatest Manifestations preceding the Revelation of the Báb—is unreservedly and unshakably upheld by each and every follower of the Bahá’í-religion. The fundamental unity of these Messengers of God is clearly recognized, the continuity of their Revelation is affirmed.*⁸¹

Here Shoghi Effendi indirectly refers to the “continuity of their Revelation” as a “cardinal truth which is of the essence of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.” In the first sections above, one may also notice that the term continuous is directly coupled with the term progressive, whereas the last quote contains the term successive. In *The Promised Day is Come*, and in a chapter significantly entitled “The Continuity of Revelation,” Shoghi Effendi once again uses a similar expression:

Repudiating the claim of any religion to be the final revelation of God to man, disclaiming finality for His own Revelation, Bahá’u’lláh inculcates the basic principle of the rela-

*tivity of religious truth, the continuity of Divine Revelation, the progressiveness of religious experience.*⁸²

What is especially noteworthy in this passage is that Shoghi Effendi uses the singular “basic principle,” but, more importantly, he links not only the terms “relativity” and “continuity,” but he is in turn relating these to the expression “progressiveness.”

As a further support that the unity of the “Messengers of God” is seen as a central doctrine of Bahá’í, can be seen in the next passage by Shoghi Effendi:

*That all the Messengers of God should be regarded as “abiding in the same Tabernacle, soaring in the same Heaven, seated upon the same Throne, uttering the same Speech, and proclaiming the same Faith”⁸³ must...remain the unalterable foundation and central tenet of Bahá’í belief.*⁸⁴

In addition, Shoghi Effendi states in a similar context of the “unity of the Manifestations of God” that to regard Bahá’u’lláh “as essentially one of these Manifestations of God...is one of the major beliefs of our Faith.”⁸⁵

As a final support that Shoghi Effendi considers progressive revelation a central Bahá’í doctrine is that he states that:

*the Bahá’í philosophy of progressive revelation...should be thoroughly accepted and taught by every loyal...Bahá’í.*⁸⁶

In accordance with the definitions of doctrine reviewed above, it is significant to note that the philosophy of progressive revelation should not only be “thoroughly accepted,” but it should be taught as well.

The Doctrine of Progressive Revelation in the Writings of Other Authors

Although it is clear that is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and especially Shoghi Effendi have been most instrumental in systematizing various Bahá’í doctrines, other Bahá’í authors have used the term doctrine only recently. For example, in 1931 Mabel Hyde Paine recorded, in her “Pilgrims’ Notes” the following lines, attributed to Shoghi Effendi:

*Progressive revelation is the basis of Bahá’í Teachings.*⁸⁷

Although such a statement cannot be considered authoritative, it suggests a doctrinal status of progressive revelation. More recently, Schaefer states that the “theological pivot [of the Bahá’í Faith] is the teaching of the unity of the Manifestations [of God], and, hence, the unity of the religions.”⁸⁸ Stockman also refers to progressive revelation as “the fundamental Bahá’í teaching.”⁸⁹ Similarly, Michael Sours, who devotes a chapter to progressive revelation,⁹⁰ states that “At the core of Bahá’u’lláh’s teaching is the belief in the complete oneness and progressiveness of religion.”⁹¹ In like manner, under the heading “Basic Teachings,” William Hatcher & Douglas Martin refer to “three fundamental principles,” as: 1) The Oneness of God, 2) The Oneness of Humanity, and 3) Oneness of Religion. A description of progressive revelation is included in the third principle.⁹²

However, the first author to use the terms “*the Baha’i doctrine of progressive revelation*” was not a Bahá’í but a non-Bahá’í, Peter L. Berger, the famous sociologist of religion.⁹³ It would take more than thirty years [before] Robert Stockman would use the exact same terms.⁹⁴ In this context it is especially significant that in 1954 Berger also wrote that “*Progressive revelation is still held as a cardinal doctrine by the Baha’is to this day...*”⁹⁵

That the concept of an essential unity of religions is connected with progressive revelation and Bahá’í doctrine can be seen in a statement by Moojan Momen:

*The concept of the unity of religions is one of the key doctrines of the Bahá’í Faith. At its most basic level, this doctrine can be expressed as the belief that the different religious systems of the world merely reflect different stages in a single process, the progressive unfolding of religious “Truth.”*⁹⁶

Here one may notice the expression “key doctrines” and the statement “At its most basic level,” and that it is related to “the progressive unfoldment of religious ‘Truth.’” Similarly, when Dann May states that “The Bahá’í concept of religious unity...is one of the most fundamental doctrines of the Bahá’í Faith,” he continues to describe this doctrine as follows:

*This doctrine affirms the existence of a common transcendent source from which the world’s religious traditions originate and receive their inspiration. The Bahá’í writings view the religions of the world not as isolated and sporadic events, but as participants in a successively unfolding process called progressive revelation.*⁹⁷

Indirectly addressing the concept of progressive revelation, Alessandro Bausani succinctly states that “the whole Bahá’í Faith is centered on this theophanical idea [evolution in time, and unity in the present hour]” and that “*all of the doctrines of the Faith can be encompassed by the phrase ‘evolution in time.’*”⁹⁸ The three keywords here are: theophany (“the Manifestation of God”), evolution (“progress”), and unity, terms and concepts which all play primary roles in the Bahá’í doctrine of progressive revelation.

Progressive revelation has also been discussed in relation to Islam.⁹⁹ Heshmat Moayyad, for example, discusses progressive revelation in the context of the Islamic “Seal of the Prophet doctrine” and religious finality, and refers to it as “*the Bahá’í doctrine of continuing, progressive revelation.*”¹⁰⁰ Stephen Lambden writes that Bahá’í in some respects is “neo-Islamic” in that certain Bahá’í doctrines (e.g., *tawhíd*, *al-ism al-a’zam*, and progressive revelation) are “obviously Islamic.”¹⁰¹

Juan Cole is the first author who uses the term “The Babi-Baha’i doctrine of progressive revelation” and it is significant that he views this doctrine in terms of “a continuous sacred history.”¹⁰² Loni Bramson-Lerche states that progressive revelation is an “*important doctrine of the Bahá’í Faith.*”¹⁰³ Schaefer goes one step further and in a chapter entitled “The New Paradigm: Progressive Revelation,” since he refers to progressive revelation as a “*fundamental doctrine.*”¹⁰⁴ Most recently, in a review article of the earlier mentioned *Revisioning the Sacred*, it is notable that Susan Stiles Maneck uses the terms “the Bahá’í doctrine of Progressive Revelation.”¹⁰⁵

The one Bahá’í author who most clearly and elaborately states that progressive revelation is not only an important Bahá’í doctrine, but the central one, is Nader Saiedi. Although he also states that the doctrine of the Manifestation of God “is a fundamental, central, theological, philosophical, and sociological concept of the Bahá’í Faith,” he simultaneously states that the “*doctrine of progressive revelation can be characterized as the central theological principle of the Bahai Faith.*”¹⁰⁶ Moreover, even though Saiedi states that progressive revelation is “One of the most important principles of Bahá’í theology,”¹⁰⁷ he also points to its complexity when he declares that “the doctrine of progressive revelation” simultaneously is “a theory of knowledge, a metaphysics of being, a prophetology, a theology, an eschatology, a social theory, an ethical doctrine, and an aesthetic approach to life.”¹⁰⁸

Finally, it should also be mentioned that the term and concept of progressive revelation has been portrayed in the form of a video,¹⁰⁹ it has also found its way into various Bahá’í dictionaries, a Bahá’í encyclopedia, and is central to many Bahá’í home-pages.¹¹⁰ Most significantly, the official Bahá’í home-page, which includes various “Spiritual Truths” of Bahá’í, it is noteworthy that “The Oneness of Religion” is included, and that “The principle of the unity of religion” is described as being “at the center of Bahá’í teachings.”¹¹¹ That progressive revelation has acquired doctrinal status in Bahá’í is clear since the International Bahá’í Library (Israel) classifies progressive revelation under the heading “Doctrines, Theology.”¹¹² That the doctrines of manifestation and progressive revelation are intimately related and important, can be seen in that a graduate-course, developed and taught by Landegg Academy (Switzerland), entitled “Comparative Study of Religion and the Concepts of the Manifestation and Progressive Revelation.”¹¹³

A final, and very recent example, that the Bahá’í Faith can be understood in terms of progressive revelation may also be seen a non-Bahá’í source—the *Encyclopedia Britannica*:

The cornerstone of Baha’i belief is the conviction that Baha’ Ullah and his forerunner, who was known as the Bab, were manifestations of God, who in his essence is unknowable. The principal

*Bahá'í tenets are the essential unity of all religions and the unity of humanity. Bahá'ís believe that all the founders of the world's great religions have been manifestations of God and agents of a progressive divine plan for the education of the human race.*¹¹⁴

What is especially interesting with these introductory remarks of describing the Bahá'í Faith is that they immediately, albeit implicitly, identify progressive revelation as the “cornerstone of Baha’i belief” and that “the essential unity of all religions” is one of “principal Baha’i tenets.” The final sentence above connects the various points raised earlier since “the world’s great religions have been manifestations of God” (including the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh) are all part of “a progressive divine plan” i.e., progressive revelation.

Progressive Revelation Defined

To cite a few examples of Bahá'í definitions of progressive revelation, the following examples will suffice. In *Daybook—Passages for Deepening and Meditation*, the reader is asked the question “What is meant by the term progressive revelation?” whereupon the answer is given as:

*Progressive revelation refers to the belief that God has a great plan which He unfolds to man in different periods in history. Each Messenger of God (such as Moses, Christ, and Bahá'u'lláh) reveals a new stage of this plan.*¹¹⁵

A Basic Bahá'í Dictionary defines progressive revelation as:

The concept that Divine Revelation is not final, but continuing. The concept is founded on the belief that all the Greater Prophets of the past were Manifestations of God who appeared in different ages with teachings appropriate to the needs of the time....¹¹⁶

Similarly, in *A Resource Guide for the Scholarly Study of the Bahá'í Faith*, progressive revelation is defined as:

The Bahá'í belief that the major religions have been founded by Manifestations of God and that the Manifestations succeed one another, each bringing a greater measure of divine truth to humanity.¹¹⁷

Finally, the most elaborate attempt to concisely articulate progressive revelation has been made by Stockman, who, in a Bahá'í Encyclopedia article, states:

*Possibly the central principle behind the Bahá'í concept of the oneness of religion, progressive revelation asserts two important positions: 1) that all the major religions of the world are at least partially based on a divine revelation, conveyed to them by a Manifestation of God; and 2) that the revelations brought by the Manifestations are not contradictory, but constitute a single, ongoing divine educational process for humanity.*¹¹⁸

In this context it is notable that Stockman states that progressive revelation possibly is “the central principle behind the Bahá'í concept of the oneness of religion.”

From these four definitions a few recurrent themes emerge. First of all, it is evident that three of the definitions refer to progressive revelation as a belief, while one designates it as a central principle. Secondly, the notion of Manifestations of God occur in all four definitions, and thirdly, the inclusion of various key terms such as succession (“succeed”) and continuity (“continuing”) are significant.

Taken together, these examples strongly suggests that progressive revelation can indeed be understood as a “belief” and “something that is taught.”

The Process of Doctrinalization

In this context it is significant that E. G. Browne stated that the Bábí-Bahá'í teachings were “varying and unfixed,” and that he noted that it contained little doctrine “touching on questions of Metaphysics, Ontology, or Eschatology.”¹¹⁹ Although Ibrahim Kheiralla introduced many idiosyncratic and highly personal ideas into the early American Bahá'í community, he still emphasized “the Bahá'í doctrine of progressive revelation.”¹²⁰ Although his list of “Prophets” did include Abraham, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha,

Christ, and Muhammad, he also included such religious figures as Confucius¹²¹ and Haiwatha.¹²² With the advent of a few Persian Bahá’í teachers to America to clarify the Bahá’í Faith,¹²³ it is noteworthy that, for example, ‘Abdu’l-Karím-i-Tihirání may have discussed progressive revelation as early as 1890.¹²⁴

Moreover, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a dozen American Bahá’ís attempted to summarize lists of the Bahá’í teachings. An early example of such a list may be exemplified by Corinne True, who in 1902 entitled her list “Fundamental Points of Behaism.” What is especially interesting in this context is that the list was “dominated by points on progressive revelation and the central figures of the Bahá’í Faith.”¹²⁵ It is also significant that two years later, and what was called “the House of Spirituality” in Chicago, “added a note” to its Constitution “that demonstrated the fascination of the early American Bahá’ís with the Bahá’í principle of progressive revelation and with their Faith’s fulfillment of prophecy.”¹²⁶ Simultaneously, Peter Smith also states that in the American Bahá’í community, at the beginning of the twentieth century, “There was no credo to affirm” and that there was “the lack of any creedal formulation beyond the statement of universal principles” and further that there was even “opposition toward the idea of dogma.”¹²⁷ Thus, it is informative that in 1908 Thornton Chase writes the following lines about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “Unless questions of metaphysics, dogmas and doctrines are introduced, he seldom mentions them.”¹²⁸ It is also of interest that even as late as 1915 Wilson wrote that “Baháism has not a fixed body of doctrines.”¹²⁹ However, Peter Smith maintains that in 1917 (which was the centennial celebration of Bahá’u’lláh’s birth) some Chicago Bahá’ís had plans for teaching in the Central States in the U.S.A. and where “pure doctrine were asserted in no uncertain terms,”¹³⁰ and he further states that with Shoghi Effendi’s publication of *The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh* in 1934 the “doctrinal confusion” was ended.¹³¹

Conclusion

It should by now be evident that the term and concept progressive revelation has undergone what may be referred to as a “process of doctrinalization.” Starting with Bahá’u’lláh, neither the term nor the doctrine of progressive revelation were explicitly stated. Gradually, and most likely inspired by visiting Persian Bahá’í teachers to America, various attempts to make lists to summarize the Bahá’í teachings were made. A few years later ‘Abdu’l-Bahá formulated a set of core-principles during his travels to the West, among which the essential unity of religions was central. Subsequently, with Shoghi Effendi’s extensive correspondence with the globally expanding Bahá’í Faith, principles of administrations were set, and a variety of Bahá’u’lláh’s writings were translated. Although the technical term progressive revelation antedates Shoghi Effendi’s “Guardianship,” it is only during his administration that it became a central doctrine.¹³² Following the terminology introduced by Shoghi Effendi, later Bahá’í authors alternatively have referred to progressive revelation as an idea, concept, principle, theme, thesis, and basic Bahá’í teaching, and most importantly, as a belief and doctrine. The ultimate step in the process of doctrinalization can be seen when the very term progressive revelation not only entered Bahá’í pamphlets, dictionaries, encyclopedias, the International Bahá’í Library, and the official Bahá’í home-page, as a key term, concept, and doctrine, but, most significantly, that it also has been taught as a graduate course.

From this brief review it should by now be evident that it is possible to find direct and explicit support in various texts by the central Bahá’í figures and other authors, that the idea of progressive revelation is not just an idea or a concept, but that it is a central Bahá’í doctrine. If not the central doctrine, then at least, together with the doctrine of the oneness of humankind, one of the most central Bahá’í doctrines. Thus, any attempts to build a future Bahá’í theology—in order to define, understand, and express the Bahá’í Faith—must be solidly built on this, the “Bedrock of Bahá’í Belief.”

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Notes

- 1) Encyclopedia Britannica 1987:366.
- 2) McGrath 1997:197.
- 3) Schaefer 1992:26, italics added.
- 4) Dann May's MA thesis (1993) *The Bahá'í Principle of Religious Unity and the Challenge of Radical Pluralism* certainly qualifies as a scholarly work on the "oneness of religion."
- 5) McLean 1997:xv, clarification and italics added; Smith 1988:232. Far from claiming to be a systematic theologian, much less "the systematic 'Bahá'í theologian,'" I still hope that this paper (and especially my forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation) will be regarded as a preliminary academic attempt to address not only the topic of progressive revelation, but to simultaneously investigate areas like Bahá'í prophecy, the idea of progress, doctrine, rhetoric and root-metaphor. The forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation is currently entitled *The Emic Construction of Religion: The Bahá'í Doctrine, Rhetoric, and Root-Metaphor of Progressive Revelation*.
- 6) In this context it is interesting that Lindbeck 1984:76 notices that "Most of the books entitled 'church doctrine' or 'church dogmatics', . . . are in fact wide-ranging theological treatises rather than being concerned simply with doctrines of the churches in the narrow sense . . ." Erickson 1983:23 sees "Theological studies" as a general field of study where "Doctrinal studies" is but one subspecies which further can be divided into "Systematic theology."
- 7) Smart's 1983:96-158, 1984:6-12 six dimensions of religion are: 1) the Experiential Dimension; 2) the Mythic Dimension; 3) the Doctrinal Dimension; 4) the Ethical Dimension; 5) the Ritual Dimension; and 6) the Social Dimension.
- 8) Comstock 1987:386.
- 9) Comstock 1987:385-386.
- 10) The Latin *docere* may in turn be derived from the Greek *doke'in* (to seem, to teach) which again is the root for the Greek *dogma* (opinion, teaching) and *orthodox* (right opinion, teaching). See e.g., Skeat 1984. The Greek term *didaskalia* also gives a similar meaning of "basic teachings" and is used in I and II Timothy.
- 11) Longman 1978:322.
- 12) See Lindbeck 1974:243-246; 1984:88; New Catholic 1967:939.
- 13) Smart 1984:8, italics added; 1983:97.
- 14) Smart 1983:102. Cf. Shoghi Effendi's statement that "We must take the teachings as a great balanced whole, not to seek out and oppose each other two strong statements that have different meanings; somewhere in between there are links uniting the two. This is what makes our Faith to flexible and well balanced." (19 March 1945 to an individual believer)
- 15) Smart 1983:97-100, italics added; McGrath 1990:37.
- 16) Speight 1987, italics added.
- 17) McGrath 1997:11, italics added, 39, 80, 196-197; Christian 1987:14, 20; Smart 1996:56.

- 18) In my dissertation I also attempt to show that it is also implicitly part of a “whole body of principles,” and at that it is at the core of its “system of belief”.
- 19) With explicit statements of the Bahá’í doctrine of progressive revelation means statements where either the concept, or the term progressive revelation, occur together with the term “doctrine” or an equivalent.
- 20) Bahá’u’lláh 1983a:74-75; 1986:418-419, italics added.
- 21) For a discussion on the theme of “the chain of successive Revelations” see Lundberg (forthcoming). [22] ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982b:140, italics added.
- 23) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982b: 378, italics added
- 24) Although Shoghi Effendi 1991:131 refers to the Báb, Bahá’u’lláh, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the “Three Central Figures,” he simultaneously attests to “the independent character of the Bábí Dispensation” (102) and that the Báb “is fully entitled to rank as one of the self-sufficient Manifestations of God” invested with “independent Prophethood.” (123) Thus, the Báb is not considered here. For a discussion on this see Esslemont 1980:20; Smith 1988:228.
- 25) Dated May 13, 1935, addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada.
- 26) Shoghi Effendi 1980:v, italics added; 1991:58, 115.
- 27) Shoghi Effendi 1973:40, italics added.
- 28) Shoghi Effendi 1971b:154, italics added.
- 29) Shoghi Effendi 1974:223; 1991:143, italics added.
- 30) Shoghi Effendi 1981:451, italics added.
- 31) Shoghi Effendi 1991:102, italics added.
- 32) Shoghi Effendi 1981:432, italics added.
- 33) Shoghi Effendi 1965:82, italics added.
- 34) Shoghi Effendi 1991:103, italics added.
- 35) Shoghi Effendi 1974:100, italics added.
- 36) Shoghi Effendi 1991:163, italics added.
- 37) Esslemont 1980:257 is an example of an implicit statement since progressive revelation is stated in parenthesis.
- 38) Lundberg 1996.
- 39) Momen 1975:19, 32-33.
- 40) Esslemont 1980:122. The term occurs also indirectly on p. 257 where it is attributed to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.
- 41) Esslemont 1980:xiii; Momen 1975:11-19.
- 42) Esslemont quotes from a Tablet by Bahá’u’lláh which he labels a Tablet to a Zoroastrian. This passage can be found in A tablet by Bahá’u’lláh to the Persian Zoroastrian Bahais published in 1910 in *Star of the West* and reprinted in *Bahá’u’lláh* 1978: book 1. vol 1.
- 43) See Fazel 1993.
- 44) Collins 1995:61, italics added.
- 45) i.e., Ibrahim Kheiralla, Mason Remey, Paul K. Dealy, and Isabella D. Brittingham. For a reference of their lives and works see Stockman 1985, 1995; Collins 1990.
- 46) Wilson 1970:102.
- 47) Grattan-Guinness 1878.
- 48) See e.g., Townshend 1995:37, 68, 73, 76, 111, 116.
- 49) Whitehead 1976:211.
- 50) Ward 1960:112; Heggie 1986:vii; Smith 1988:223; Cole 1993:453, italics added.
- 51) Moayyad 1990:76, 82; Collins 1995:86, italics added.
- 52) Sours 1997:43, italics added.
- 53) Buck 1995:121, 281-82, italics added.
- 54) Saiedi 1998:76, italics added.
- 55) Smith 1988:223, italics added.
- 56) Ward 1960:40-41, 154, italics added; Smith 1988:223, Collins 1995:191; Buck 1998:6.
- 57) Stockman 1995:233, italics added.
- 58) Hatcher 1997:39, italics added; Buck 1995:281-82; McLean 1997:xv.
- 59) Buck 1998:5.
- 60) Taherzadeh 1987:vol. I:162; Buck 1995:281-82; McLean 1997:xv.
- 61) In the foreword of his translation of the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 1931, Shoghi Effendi refers to it as “this book of unsurpassed pre-eminence among the writings of the Author of the Bahá’í Revelation.”
- 62) Hatcher 1997:35-36.
- 63) Fazel & Fananapazir 1993:25.
- 64) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá quoted in Shoghi Effendi 1991:36, italics added; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982a:114.
- 65) Buck 1998:5; ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1979:131-175, 1982a:107-108, 1982b:105-110.
- 66) Smith 1982:128, 127

- 67) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982b:105-106.
- 68) Research Department 1983:21 (#73).
- 69) Shoghi Effendi 1991:123.
- 70) Shoghi Effendi cited in Hornby 1988:484, #1612.
- 71) Research Department 1983:27 (#90), 45-47; Shoghi Effendi 1965:76-77; 1971a:75-76, 93.
- 72) Shoghi Effendi 1991:99.
- 73) Shoghi Effendi 1991:114.
- 74) Shoghi Effendi 1974:158, italics added.
- 75) Shoghi Effendi 1980:110, italics added. From these two last quotes by Shoghi Effendi, it is evident that the phrase “the bedrock of Bahá’i belief” here occurs in other, but similar, contexts.
- 76) Shoghi Effendi 1974:281, italics and clarification added; 1991:42.
- 77) Shoghi Effendi 1980:v, italics added
- 78) Shoghi Effendi 1991:48, clarification and italics added.
- 79) Shoghi Effendi 1991:114-115, italics added; 57-58.
- 80) Shoghi Effendi 1991:103, italics added; 163; 1974:10.
- 81) Shoghi Effendi 1980:107-108, clarification and italics added.
- 82) Shoghi Effendi 1980:108, italics added
- 83) See Bahá’u’lláh’s *Kitáb-i-Iqán* 1983b:153-54.
- 84) Shoghi Effendi 1991:166, clarification and italics added.
- 85) Shoghi Effendi 1991:114, italics added.
- 86) Shoghi Effendi 1981:432, italics added.
- 87) Hyde Paine 1931:4, italics added.
- 88) Schaefer 1995:57, clarification added.
- 89) Stockman 1985:192.
- 90) Sours 1990:137-169, 6-7.
- 91) Sours 1997:42; Smith 1988:246.
- 92) Hatcher & Martin 1989:74-83.
- 93) Berger 1954:184, italics added.
- 94) Stockman 1985:58. The term has since been used by Smith 1987:73; Cole 1993:454; and Buck 1996:129, 133.
- 95) Berger 1954:31-32, italics added; Beckwith 1985:10.
- 96) Momen 1988:185, italics added.
- 97) May 1993:83, italics added.
- 98) Bausani 1985:ix-x, italics added.
- 100) Moayyad 1990:78, italics added.
- 101) Lambden 1991:9.
- 102) Cole 1996:45-46; Buck 1998:6.
- 103) Bramson-Lerche 1988:281, italics added.
- 104) Schaefer 1995:118, italics added, 132-33, 135, 144.
- 105) Stiles Maneck 1999:92.
- 106) Saiedi 1997:course description, italics added.
- 107) Saiedi 1998:83.
- 108) Saiedi 1997:course description.
- 109) Kolstoe 1995.
- 110) Virtual Study Course; The Bahá’i Faith; Progressive Revelation; The KnowMadz - Baha’i Faith.
- 111) The Bahá’i World.
- 112) International Bahá’i Library. Other subgroups under the heading “Doctrines, Theology” are e.g., “God,” “Manifestations of God,” “Oneness,” “Prophecy,” “Future Manifestations of God,” “Covenant,” etc.
- 113) Landegg 1997.
- 114) *Encyclopædia Britannica* Online, italics added.
- 115) Bahá’i Publishing Trust 1985:194, italics original.
- 116) Momen 1991:186.
- 117) A Resource Guide - Glossary. [
- 118) Stockman 1993:1, italics added.
- 119) Browne 1912:xxv-xxvi.
- 120) Stockman 1985:58, 192.
- 121) Confucius is not Manifestation of God according to Shoghi Effendi 1971a:41 who says that “Confucius was not a Prophet. It is quite correct to say he is the founder of a moral system and a great reformer.”

- 122) Stockman 1985:67. For a discussion on Native American religious figures and Manifestations of God see Buck 1996.
- 123) On this point Banani 1981:xiv writes that “The nascent community of Bahá’ís in America was in dire need of an authoritative and coherent understanding of the fundamentals of its Faith.” (italics added)
- 124) Stockman 1985:23. That Mírzá Abú’l-Fadl Gulpáygání clearly was aware of, and implicitly elaborated upon, the concept of progressive revelation is evident from his *A Letter to Tripoli* written in 1897. See Cole 1985:124-126.
- 125) Stockman 1985:92-93, italics added.
- 126) Stockman 1985:168, italics added.
- 127) Smith 1982:196-97, 168, 174.
- 128) Chase 1908:34.
- 129) Wilson 1970:77.
- 130) Smith 1982:134.
- 131) Smith 1982:102.
- 132) e.g., Bramson-Lerche 1982:265 writes that “Shoghi Effendi continued to push the community in the direction of better organization and more unity in doctrinal matters.”

The New Age Phenomenon and the Bahá’í Faith

Zaid Lundberg

The New Age phenomenon has received very little attention in the Bahá’í Faith and Bahá’í scholarship. Udo Schaefer, the great pioneer of Bahá’í scholarship, was probably the first to address this issue in 1992.¹ Two years later, in a special volume of *The Bahá’í Studies Review* devoted to the theme of Bahá’í scholarship, Stephen Lambden pointed out the need for Bahá’í scholars to study “The Age of Aquarius,” and further said that “Such Bahá’ís as are interested in this area should become acquainted with aspects of ‘new age’ philosophy and Bahá’í reactions to it through the study of sensible sources.”² Simultaneously, and equally importantly, he suggested that:

Bahá’ís need to spell out, in light of Shoghi Effendi’s writings and other scriptural texts, our concept of the new age and its full realisation of the future....³

Consequently, in order to spell out “our concept of *the new age*” it is, on the one hand, necessary to examine the very idea of a “new age” by studying “sensible sources” i.e., to draw upon the sources of academic scholarship. On the other hand, in order to obtain “our concept of the new age” it is crucial to study the “new age” in the light of the Bahá’í scriptures.

Since the pioneering work of Schaefer and the scholarly advice of Lambden, the author of this paper and Paul Dodenhoff have, independently of each other,⁴ recognized the importance of examining the relationship between the Bahá’í Faith and the New Age phenomenon (NAP).⁵ Yet, the study of the relationship between the Bahá’í Faith and the NAP has barely begun, but in order to satisfy Lambden’s two perspectives, the purpose of this paper, is to briefly introduce the NAP and the Bahá’í Faith by answering the following set of questions:

- 1) Why should the relationship between the NAP and the Bahá’í Faith be examined?
- 2) What is “New Age” and how is it defined?
- 3) What are some of the similarities and differences between the NAP and the Bahá’í Faith?
- 4) How may the NAP be evaluated from a Bahá’í perspective?

The Relationship Between the New Age Phenomenon and the Bahá’í Faith

First of all, some authors have associated the Bahá’í Faith with the NAP and have grouped it together with Theosophy, neo-Hindu reform movements, and neo-Sufism.⁶

Although, Kyle writes that “The Bahá’í faith has more tenuous connections with the New Age” he continues to state that:

While it [Bahá’í Faith] came out of Sufism [sic!] it has lost much of its mystical qualities. Yet *it does teach some ideas prevalent in the New Age*—oneness in world religions and the political order, and a coming new age.⁷

Secondly, it ought to be studied since some scholars of religion claim that the NAP has surpassed and outdated Christianity as a belief-system/world-view in the West.⁸ Thirdly, if the above statements are true, and if we as Bahá’ís, are to be successful in our proclamations and teachings, especially with “Entry by troops,” it is vital to understand this “new” belief-system or world-view. These three reasons, taken together, may suffice to persuade Bahá’í scholars to further examine the relationship between the NAP and the Bahá’í Faith more thoroughly.⁹

What is “New Age” and How is it Defined?

In a very real sense, humanity is approaching not only a new century but a new *millennium*. Hence, even from a secular and temporal perspective (which, in the West, is based on the birth of Christ) humanity is living at the threshold of a “new age.” It is also well known that millenarian and apocalyptic movements flourish at such critical turning points in history.¹⁰

Although the exact dating of the origin of the NAP is highly debated (as will be seen below), it has only recently caught the attention of scholars of religion. It has largely been ignored for two reasons: 1) it was seen as a “faddish” or appeared to be “shallow,” and 2) it has no clear boundaries (which will be discussed below),¹¹ and therefore, historically and methodologically, it has been much easier to study what has been labeled “New Religious Movements” (NRMs) since they are rather well defined and therefore more accessible for social and religious research. Furthermore, some scholars maintain that the NAP is a large “sub-culture” and that it is part of a much greater “paradigm shift” or “cultural shift” in the West, or that it is basically a “post-modern” phenomenon, while others state that it has by far surpassed and out-dated Christianity as a belief-system in the West and therefore should be evaluated as a “post-Christian” phenomenon.¹² Others still, predict that the NAP as a movement is a transient fad, that it is doomed, but that its ideas may continue to influence and transform the present society.¹³

The NAP has, by a number of scholars, admittedly been problematic to define and study. For example, it is on the one hand seen to have ancient historical roots¹⁴ (Hellenism 300 BCE, Gnosticism 100–300 CE, Hermetism 1500 CE), and, on the other hand, it is described as a phenomenon that began in the counterculture of the [19]60s–70s. These extreme perspectives can be seen by the descriptions by two leading scholars in this field. For example, Robert Ellwood sees the New Age as “a modern revival...of a long-standing tradition of what may be called the alternative spirituality of the west,” and that it can be traced to “the Greco-Roman world” via “Renaissance occultism...eighteenth century Freemasonry, and nineteenth-century Spiritualism and Theosophy,”¹⁵ while Gordon Melton writes that “the New Age movement is a relatively new phenomenon. It developed in the late 1960s and emerged as a self-conscious movement in the early 1970s.”¹⁶

The NAP has further been defined and/or described as:

- a movement,¹⁷ religion,¹⁸ and quasi-religion¹⁹
- non-occult/non-esoteric,²⁰ while others say that it is occult/esoteric²¹
- centering on the Self/narcissism,²² while others state that it is basically involved with social/global transformation²³

Moreover, the NAP has also been defined by its own adherents. For example, a leading New Age author, David Spangler,²⁴ discerns four levels of the NAP characterized as:

- 1) commercial (superficial)
- 2) glamour and popular culture (media attention)
- 3) “an image of change” (transformation/paradigm shift)
- 4) the birth of the sacred and a resacralizing of life on earth, the “new age is fundamentally a spiritual event”

From this brief overview it is possible to conclude and stress that the term “New Age” (like most religious terms and concepts) is multifaceted, highly ambiguous, and has many dimensions and levels, and therefore is rather difficult to describe and define.²⁵

Similarities and Differences Between New Age Phenomenon and the Bahá’í Faith

Despite the difficulties of defining the NAP, Lewis has enumerated some general characteristics of NRMs (as defined by Ellwood) which he also think are applicable to the New Age movement.²⁶ It is possible to compare these general characteristics of the NAP (in **bold**) to the Bahá’í Faith as follows:

- **Emphasis on Healing**

Healing is not emphasized in the Bahá’í Faith although the concept of healing does occur in the Bahá’í writings. e.g., the Manifestations of God are sometimes referred to as “Divine physicians” and the revelation of Bahá’u’lláh is symbolically compared to an “Elixir.”²⁷ It is also recognized that humans can heal through spiritual means, especially through prayer.²⁸

- **A Desire To Be “Modern” and Use Scientific Language**

The Bahá’í Faith is sometimes described as a “modern” religion,²⁹ especially suitable for this modern age, and that religion and science are seen as complementary is one of its fundamental principles.³⁰ It is the religious language, however, and not the scientific language, that dominates the Bahá’í writings.³¹

- **Eclecticism and Syncretism**

The Bahá’í Faith emerged historically in the Near- and Middle East, i.e., mainly within an Islamic religious context (both Shi’i and Sunni), although a variety of religions also coexisted (and still do) within this large area: Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and a variety of Sufi orders. It is quite clear, judging from the Bahá’í writings, that Bahá’u’lláh was familiar with especially Islam and Christianity, but also with Zoroastrianism and, to some extent, even Hinduism.³² It is possible to point out both eclecticism and syncretism within Bahá’í, but this is also the case for other religions.³³

- **A Monistic and Impersonal Ontology**

It is here where the Bahá’í Faith clearly differs from the NAP, since the Bahá’í Faith ontology basically is panentheistic, i.e., God permeates the cosmos, and His attributes are reflected in creation. Bahá’u’lláh, for example, states that:

The whole universe reflecteth His glory, while He is independent of, and transcendeth His creatures. This is the true meaning of Divine unity. He Who is the Eternal Truth is the one Power Who exerciseth undisputed sovereignty over the world of being, Whose image is reflected in the mirror of the entire creation.³⁴

Yet, God cannot be identified *with*, or reduced *to*, His creation since God is simultaneously seen as “independent of, and *transcendeth* His creatures.” Thus, God is ultimately transcendental which is clearly portrayed in another passage by Bahá’u’lláh:

Immeasurably exalted is He [God] above the strivings of the human mind to grasp His Essence, or of human tongue to describe His mystery. *No tie of direct intercourse can ever bind Him to the things He hath created*, nor can the most abstruse and most remote allusions of His creatures do justice to His being. . . He is and hath ever been veiled in the ancient eternity of His own exalted and indivisible Essence, and will everlastingly continue to remain concealed in His inaccessible majesty and glory.³⁵ [Emphasis mine]

Although God sometimes is described in agnostic or negative terms,³⁶ God is also described in personal and positive terms.³⁷ In other words, God is seen both as a *deus absconditus* (a hidden God) and a *deus revelatus* (a revealed God) described by Bahá’u’lláh as “the Visible and the Invisible” or even “the most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the hidden!”³⁸

- **Optimism, Success Orientation, and a Tendency to Evolutionary Views**

The Bahá’í Faith may in general be described in optimistic and progressive terms but yet, there are also notions of decline, crises and even “apocalyptic” scenarios.³⁹ The evolutionary views are particularly strong and Darwin’s theory of evolution is not denied, but rather reinterpreted in, what could be called, a “spiritual theory of evolution.”⁴⁰

- **Emphasis on Psychic Powers**

To develop psychic powers is not only de-emphasized in Bahá’í but even strongly discouraged.⁴¹ Rather, it is the spiritual attributes and powers that should be developed, and which, ultimately, are seen as a reflection of the attributes and powers of God. For example, Bahá’u’lláh writes that:

Upon the reality of man . . . He [God] hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self⁴²

Already here in this very brief overview and somewhat superficial comparison, it is possible to discern that it is very difficult to ascertain whether Bahá’í matches the NAP or not. On some points it certainly does, but on others it clearly does not.⁴³

It is also possible to compare the Bahá’í Faith to another scheme, developed by Hammer, and which he refers to as “An aerial view of the New Age movement.”⁴⁴

- **Cosmos is an Unbroken Whole**

There are a few passages in the Bahá’í writings that could support such a view. For example ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes that:

all parts of the creational world are of one whole...All the parts are subordinate to the whole. The contingent beings are the branches of the tree of life while the Messenger of God is the root of that tree.⁴⁵

- **There is a directionality in this wholeness**

This statement could be equated with a “Bahá’í teleology,” and teleological statements are readily found in the Bahá’í writings:

Thou didst wish to make Thyself known unto men; therefore, Thou didst, through a word of Thy mouth, bring creation into being and fashion the universe⁴⁶

According to these passages, God expresses a wish, or desire, from his side, to be known, and this is ultimately upheld as the generating impulse of creation.⁴⁷ Thus, God’s desire to be known, and God’s creation of human beings in order to be known, appear to be intimately complementary. From another perspective, Bahá’u’lláh states that “The purpose all creation is the revelation of this most sublime, this most holy Day, the Day known as the Day of God.”⁴⁸ Moreover, Bahá’u’lláh states that the existence and life of “the destiny of the true believer” is “to be regarded as the originating purpose of all creation.”⁴⁹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speaks of man as “part of the universal plan”⁵⁰ and that “The purpose the creation of man is the attainment of the supreme virtues of humanity through descent of the heavenly bestowals.”⁵¹ Similarly, Shoghi Effendi refers to:

a greater Plan, one and indivisible, whose Source is God, whose author is Bahá’u’lláh, the theater of whose operations is the entire planet, and whose ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all mankind.⁵²

- **This Wholeness is Permeated by a Power or Energy Which Connects Us with the Cosmos**

According to the Bahá’í view, the power or energy which permeates the cosmos is often referred to as the Holy Spirit. For example, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes that:

that both interaction and cooperation are evident and proven amongst all beings, whether large or small. In the case of large bodies interaction is as manifest as the sun, whilst in the case of small bodies, though interaction be unknown, yet the part is an indication of the whole. All these interactions therefore are connected with that all-embracing power which is their pivot, their center, their source and their motive power.⁵³

Elsewhere he also says that:

All created forms are progressive in their planes, or kingdoms of existence, under the stimulus of the power or spirit of life. This universal energy is dynamic. Nothing is stationary in the material worlds of outer phenomena or in the inner world of intellect and consciousness.⁵⁴

Although it was seen above that the universe is seen as an unbroken whole, there are numerous passages in the Bahá’í writings which makes it clear that the cosmos also is divided in “planes” or “kingdoms,” and consequently, that there exists a certain “spiritual hierarchy.”⁵⁵ The most crucial difference, however, is that the cosmos is viewed in neither monistic nor pantheistic terms, but that it is panentheistic.

- **Humanity has Mismanaged Its Own Wholeness (The Relationship Between Body–Soul)**

This is not emphasized in the Bahá’í Faith. It is rather humanity’s relationship with God, the Manifestations of God, and with the true nature of religion, that have been mismanaged.⁵⁶ For example, Bahá’u’lláh states that:

The vitality of men’s belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it?⁵⁷

Here one may recognize the metaphor of the Manifestation of God as the “Divine Physician” who, through his “wholesome medicine” is able to restore and revive human society from a disease, described as the “corrosion of ungodliness.” This may be interpreted as either “atheism,” or the lack of vitality in one’s belief, or spirituality. It is especially noteworthy that the terms “potent Revelation” is equated with the “Elixir.” Notice also that Bahá’u’lláh is referring to the downfall of religiosity “in every land,” which is suggestive of a global process of secularization. It is hence possible to equate the malaise of humanity with the decline of religion. This would accentuate the intimate and mutual relationship between religion and humanity.⁵⁸

- **The Planet Earth is a Wholeness**

This is clearly stated in the Bahá’í writings. The following passages by Bahá’u’lláh may exemplify such a view:

Regard ye the world as a man’s body, which is affected with diverse ailments, and the recovery of which dependeth upon the harmonizing of all of its component elements.⁵⁹

Regard the world as the human body which, though at its creation whole and perfect, hath been afflicted, through various causes, with grave disorders and maladies.⁶⁰

With regard to the former point, it is evident from these passages that humanity has mismanaged its relationship with the planet earth as well.

- **Every Human Being has a Unique Place in This Wholeness**

This can also be confirmed in the Bahá’í-writings. For example, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that:

man is but a part or member of that whereof nature is the whole.⁶¹

Continuing, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá further likens man with a drop and the universe with the ocean, and asks:

Is it conceivable that a drop should be imbued with qualities of which the ocean is completely deprived? The drop is a part; the ocean is the whole.⁶²

- **Human Beings Do Not Only Live This Life, But Have Transmigrated Through a Chain of Existences and Will Reincarnate Many More Times**

Here is another crucial difference between the NAP and the Bahá’í Faith, although the latter would be in agreement with the first two sentences in that: 1) there is life after death,⁶³ and 2) humanity, as a species, has transmigrated through a series of prior existences (the mineral, vegetable, and animal-kingdoms), but the Bahá’í writings do not harmonize with the concept of reincarnation,⁶⁴ since it is believed that the human soul is created at the moment of conception,⁶⁵ and that after this earthly existence, it evolves into a new dimension—the spiritual kingdom.⁶⁶

- **There Are Other, Perhaps Better Paths to Knowledge Than the Senses and The Rational Mind**

This is clearly confirmed in the Bahá’í writings. For example, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speaks of “four methods of acquiring knowledge”: 1) the senses, 2) reason, 3) tradition, and 4) the bounty of the Holy Spirit. If the first is considered “imperfect” the last is described as “infallible and indubitable.”⁶⁷

- **Various Non-Christian Religions Contain Such Ideas or an Ancient Wisdom Which Can Benefit Us Today**

This is more difficult to answer since the Bahá’í Faith on the one hand upholds all religions/cultures’ spiritual heritage originates, ultimately, with a Manifestation of God.⁶⁸ For example, Bahá’u’lláh states that:

The light which these souls [The Prophets and Messengers of God] radiate is responsible for the progress of the world and the advancement of its peoples. They are like unto the leaven which leaveneth the world of being, and constitute the animating force through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest.⁶⁹

Yet, on the other hand, the Bahá'í Faith also maintains that all religions/cultures decline and that they, eventually, become obsolete and malfunctioning.⁷⁰ In other words, although the various religions/cultures still contain an ancient wisdom, to some degree, they are, nonetheless, seen as inadequate to solve the world's current spiritual and global problems. However, the Bahá'í Faith also stresses "unity in diversity" and advocates the richness and preservation of the great variety of humanity's cultural heritage.⁷¹

• Humanity Faces a Spiritual and Societal Revolution, A New Age

This is probably one of the most fundamental features of the Bahá'í Faith and the very title of Esslemont's book—*Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*—clearly conveys this theme.⁷² The Bahá'í writings repeatedly emphasize that humanity is facing an unprecedented spiritual, societal, and global revolution, and that it is at the threshold of a new age, a new world order, the lesser- and the Most Great Peace, and ultimately, the Kingdom of God on Earth.⁷³

Once again similar problems of comparison emerge as with the previous review. The Bahá'í Faith seems to fit on a number of points, but then again, it clearly rejects such crucial categories as pantheism, monism, and reincarnation.

Consequently, since: a) the definition of the New Age is highly problematic and contains a variety of extreme positions, and b) that the Bahá'í Faith seems to both fit and not fit, it comes as no surprise that it is possible to both identify it with, and to separate it from, the NAP.

However, although such comparisons clearly are possible to make, they do not establish causation i.e., they do not clarify the problem of historical influences. For example, if one upholds that the NAP is a relatively new phenomenon ([19]60s-70s), then the Bahá'í Faith is a considerably older phenomenon, since it originated a century earlier (1844-63). If one states that NAP has its roots in the synthesis created by Theosophy during the nineteenth century, one is faced with yet another problem, since the Bahá'í Faith not only emerged several decades before the birth of the Theosophical Society (1875), but that it also arose outside a Euro-American context. In addition, if one maintains that the NAP has "a long tradition in the west," with roots in Hellenism, then one comes across still another problem, since Hellenism expanded not only to ancient Persia (where Zoroastrianism was a state religion at the time being), but all the way to India (where both Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism were already established). Hence, in order to explain some of the similarities and differences between the NAP and the Bahá'í Faith, one ought rather to trace its influences elsewhere, especially the Bábí Faith, Shaykhism, Shí'í Islam, Sufism, Neo-Platonism etc.

In the comparisons between the NAP and the Bahá'í Faith some crucial "theoretical" differences were noticed, but it should also be mentioned that there also are some "practical," "structural," or "organizational" differences. As was mentioned earlier, the NAP is a very loosely structured phenomenon. According to Heelas, it should

not be taken to imply that the New Age is in any sense an organized entity. Far from being centrally administered, it is comprised of diverse modes of operation: well-organized NRMs and communities...networks...one-to-one paths within...centers...the week-end training seminars, holiday homes...festivals...gatherings...shops...clubs...schools.⁷⁴

Thus, the NAP is structured in what has been labeled a "meta-network" (a net-work of net-works) rather than as a unified and hierarchical organization.⁷⁵ In other words, and taken as a whole, in the NAP there is:

- no founder
- no holy canon
- no central doctrine⁷⁶
- no myth or ritual⁷⁷

The Bahá’í Faith, on the other hand, which claims a new and unique revelation from God, clearly recognizes and exhibits:

- two specific founders (Báb/Bahá’u’lláh)
- a holy and vast canon
- a unified set of doctrines⁷⁸
- relatively few myths and rituals⁷⁹

In contrast to the NAP, the Bahá’í Faith moreover consists of:

- a well-defined organization and administration that is established on local, national, and international levels. Nevertheless, there is no priesthood, but individual Bahá’ís elect their representatives democratically.⁸⁰

In comparing the NAP with the Bahá’í Faith, the latter resembles more the so called “classical” religions (especially Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), and, to some degree, the NRMs, although such comparisons also are highly problematic. It is possible to in this context consider what Wittgenstein called “family resemblances”⁸¹ between various themes (as we have seen in the comparisons earlier), but such a resemblance can be found in, and between, other religions as well.

The New Age Phenomenon Evaluated From a Bahá’í Perspective

Since the NAP is so highly complex and elusive, it is not very easy to evaluate it. However, the most important points of agreements between the NAP and the Bahá’í Faith seem to be Spangler’s third and fourth levels of the New Age: i.e., that it is “an image of change” (transformation/paradigm shift),⁸² and that it may reflect the birth of the sacred and a resacralizing of life on earth and that the “new age is fundamentally a spiritual event”. Indeed, the very idea of “transformation” is central to the Bahá’í Faith. Thus, Bahá’u’lláh, for example, asks the following question:

Is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself both outwardly and inwardly, that shall effect both its inner life and external conditions?⁸³

Moreover, it is interesting that, according to Spangler, “the phrase *an emerging planetary culture* is replacing the phrase *an emerging new age*”⁸⁴ and similarly, that Kyle states that:

Global unity is central to New Age political thought and will receive further attention later. New Agers see the world as already unified by modern transportation and communication systems. But they also seek global political unification. There is to be a new world order characterized by internationalism.... The notion of global is basic to the New Age vision. Such a concept goes by a number of names: planetary unity, planetization, world order, planetary consciousness, and the new global society.⁸⁵

Such views are in complete harmony with the Bahá’í view.⁸⁶ However, a certain paradox with the NAP can be noticed, since on one hand the Western world has, especially since the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, become gradually more secularized, atheistic, and materialistic, and yet, on the other hand, the NAP seems to be an indication of an opposite trend—an increasing process of spiritualization.

It is possible that this paradox may be solved by the same token as the concepts of “an old” and “new world order,” and in this context, the term “order” may be seen as interchangeable with the term “age.” In the Bahá’í writings, however, the emergence of the two orders, or ages, are not seen as mutually exclusive, but are rather evaluated as two simultaneous and parallel processes. For example, according to Shoghi Effendi:

We stand on the threshold of an age whose convulsions proclaim alike the death-pangs of the old order and the birth-pangs of the new. Through the generating influence of the Faith announced by Baha’u’llah this New World Order may be said to have been conceived. We can, at the present moment, experience its stirrings in the womb of a travailing age—an age waiting for the appointed hour at which it can cast its burden and yield its fairest fruit.⁸⁷

This present age is seen as being on the “threshold of an age” i.e., between two world orders—the “death-pangs of the old order” and the “birth-pangs of the new.” A similar expression is found in the writings of Bahá’u’lláh where he says: “Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead.”⁸⁸ These and earlier passages by the Bahá’í authors indicate that the world, at present, is in a major phase-transition between two major cycles. Indeed, Shoghi Effendi also refers to this present age as the “Age of Transition.”⁸⁹

This age is furthermore represented not only by two opposing world orders, but also by two major concurring processes. Again, to quote from Shoghi Effendi:

A twofold process, however, can be distinguished, each tending, in its own way and with an accelerated momentum, to bring to a climax the forces that are transforming the face of our planet. The first is essentially an integrating process, while the second is fundamentally disruptive. The former, as it steadily evolves, unfolds a System which may well serve as a pattern for that world polity towards which a strangely-disordered world is continually advancing; while the latter, as its disintegrating influence deepens, tends to tear down, with increasing violence, the antiquated barriers that seek to block humanity’s progress towards its destined goal. The constructive process stands associated with the nascent Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, and is the harbinger of the New World Order that Faith must ere long establish. The destructive forces that characterize the other should be identified with a civilization that has refused to answer to the expectation of a new age, and is consequently falling into chaos and decline.⁹⁰

It is interesting to note that both processes are being described as “accelerating” and that they are reaching a climax which will be “transforming the face of our planet.” The first process is described as “integrating” and “constructive” whereas the latter is depicted as “disruptive” and “disintegrating.” Furthermore, the former process is associated with the “nascent Faith of Bahá’u’lláh” and the “New World Order.” The second process, although portrayed as “destructive,” is seen in a positive light in that it tears down the “antiquated barriers that seek to block humanity’s progress towards its destined goal.” This barrier is hence related to a civilization which has “refused to answer to the expectation of a new age.” This last sentence could refer to: 1) the revelation of Bahá’u’lláh in general, and/or 2) the reception of Bahá’u’lláh’s letters, sent to various religious and political leaders in the nineteenth century.⁹¹

Thus, rather than viewing the NAP as an isolated phenomenon, as a “faddish”, a “sub-culture,” a Western “post-modern” or “post-Christian” phenomenon, or even just a cultural shift or paradigm shift, it could be viewed within a much larger context—in the Bahá’í context of the transition of the old and new world orders, that mankind is coming of age, of religious cycles, and ultimately, within the context of progressive revelation.⁹²

That this age is unique in a Bahá’í perspective is clear since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says that “This age is indeed as a hundred other ages.”⁹³ It is therefore appropriate to end this paper, written at the end of this century, with a quote from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá who, at the beginning of this century, said:

Now the new age is here and creation is reborn. Humanity hath taken on new life. The autumn hath gone by, and the reviving spring is here. All things are now made new.... Renewal is the order of the day. And all this newness hath its source in the fresh outpourings of wondrous grace and favour from the Lord of the Kingdom, which have renewed the world. The people, therefore, must be set completely free from their old patterns of thought, that all their attention may be focused upon these new principles, for these are the light of this time and the very spirit of this age.⁹⁴

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Notes

- 1) Schaefer 1995:35–49 (originally published in German in 1992).
- 2) Lambden 1994:72.
- 3) Lambden 1994:72, italics added.
- 4) See Dodenhoff 1997. The author of this article and Dodenhoff produced a paper each on the topic of the NAP and the Bahá’í Faith for the 14th (Manchester, UK) and 15th (Wilmette, USA) Irfán Colloquia in 1997 respectively.
- 5) Rather than taking side in the debate whether “New Age” is to be labeled a “movement” or “religion” this author have decided to here use the more neutral term the “New Age Phenomenon,” henceforth abbreviated as the NAP.
- 6) Matson 1979:49–51; Figl 1993:78–89.
- 7) Kyle 1995:59, clarification and italics added.
- 8) See e.g., Hammer 1997:25, 83–84.
- 9) Lambden 1994:71–72 also mentions in a footnote that the LSA of Warwick produced a leaflet entitled *The New Age* in order to approach adherents of the ‘new age.’
- 10) See e.g., Cohn 1993 and McGinn 1979.
- 11) Lewis & Melton 1992:x.
- 12) Kyle 1995:6, 41, 66, 78, 214; Hammer 1997:302–305.
- 13) Kyle 1995: 198–201.
- 14) Hammer 1997:289–293.
- 15) Lewis & Melton 1992:59.

- 16) Lewis & Melton 1992:18, italics added.
- 17) Most scholars in Lewis & Melton’s book 1992 and Kyle 1995 categorize the New Age as “*The New Age Movement*” and compares it to New Religious Movements. Even Heelas uses the term “movement,” which also is the title of his book 1996 *The New Age Movement*.
- 18) Hanegraaff 1997 and Hammer 1997:274 are more consistently using the term “The New Age religion,” but Hammer also uses the term “The New Age movement” (p. 25). Rothstein alternates between the terms “movement” and “religion” and writes that “The New Age is . . . a religion of action” (p. 11, my translation). Both Hammer and Rothstein state that the New Age phenomena is a folktró “folk belief.”
- 19) Kyle 1995.
- 20) Hammer 1997:23.
- 21) Kyle 1995:13. Arlebrand 1995 even includes satanism in his definition of New Age! Moreover, in Germany the term “New Age” has largely been replaced by the term Esoterik “esotericism” or Ganzheitlich “holistic.” See Offermanns 1997:1.
- 22) e.g., Heelas 1996 describes New Age as the “religion of the Self.”
- 23) Lewis & Melton 1992:3; Kyle 1995:46.
- 24) Spangler 1984:80-81; Farrell Bednarowski 1992:167; Kyle 1995:5-7.
- 25) For a discussion on the difficulties of defining “religion” see e.g., Clarke & Byrne 1993.
- 26) Lewis & Melton 1992:7.
- 27) See e.g., Bahá’u’lláh 1983b:200.
- 28) See e.g., ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1981:254-259.
- 29) e.g., Horace Holley who in 1913 entitled one of his works Bahaism, the Modern Social Religion.
- 30) See e.g., ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1979:131-175, 1982a:107-108, 1982b:105-110; Aull 1988/89; Bartholomew 1989; Khursheed 1987
- 31) See e.g., Lewis 1997; Woodman 1997.
- 32) See e.g., Cole 1993.
- 33) For a more in-depth discussion on the theme of Bahá’í and syncretism see Stockman 1993.
- 34) Bahá’u’lláh 1983b:166.
- 35) Bahá’u’lláh 1983b:318, clarification added.
- 36) For a detailed analysis on the Bahá’í view on apophatic (negative) theology see Lambden 1997.
- 37) See e.g., Lundberg 1996.
- 38) Bahá’u’lláh 1986:113; Bahá’í Publishing Trust 1991:143.
- 39) For discussions on Bahá’í theology see e.g., Momen 1988; McLean 1992, 1997; Lundberg 1996. See e.g., Lundberg 1996; Stockman 1996.
- 40) For discussions on Bahá’í and the topic of evolution see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982a:358-359; Lundberg 1996; Brown 1998.
- 41) See e.g., Hornby 1988:513-522.
- 42) Bahá’u’lláh 1983b:65, clarification added, 177-178.
- 43) For another comparison of similarities and differences between the Bahá’í Faith and the NAP see Schaefer 1995:45-48.
- 44) Hammer 1997:18-19, italics added.
- 45) Bahá’í Publishing Trust 1976:364, italics added.
- 46) Bahá’í Publishing Trust 1991:123
- 47) Bahá’u’lláh 1986:414-415.
- 48) Bahá’u’lláh quoted in Shoghi Effendi 1990:77.
- 49) Bahá’u’lláh 1983b:141, italics added.
- 50) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982a:80, italics added.
- 51) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982a:4, 89.
- 52) Shoghi Effendi 1990:72-73, italics added.
- 53) Bahá’í Publishing Trust 1976:345.
- 54) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982a:140, italics added
- 55) See e.g., Bahá’u’lláh 1984:36-37; Cole 1984:12-13; Momen 1988:189-195; Lundberg 1996.
- 56) See e.g., Bahá’u’lláh 1983b:213. For a discussion on the decline of religion see Lundberg 1996.
- 57) Bahá’u’lláh 1983b:200.
- 58) See e.g., ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982a:363-364.
- 59) Bahá’u’lláh 1986:329; 498.
- 60) Bahá’u’lláh 1986:498.
- 61) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982a: 80.
- 62) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982a:80.
- 63) See e.g., Bahá’í Publishing Trust 1994.
- 64) Kyle 1995:90 writes that “Reincarnation and karma are bedrock New Age concepts.” For a Bahá’í view on the concept of reincarnation see e.g., ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1981:281-289; Hornby 1988:536-538.

- 65) See Shoghi Effendi 1976:71.
- 66) See e.g., ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982a; Lundberg 1996.
- 67) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1981:297-99.
- 68) Hornby 1988:543.
- 69) Bahá’u’lláh 1983b:156-157; Bahá’u’lláh 1986:455.
- 70) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982a:10, 161, 179, 363-364, 407, 412.
- 71) See e.g., Lalonde 1994.
- 72) See Esslemont 1980; Lundberg 1996.
- 73) See Lundberg 1996.
- 74) Heelas 1996.
- 75) Kyle 1995:73, 129. For a discussion on New Age and networks and metanetworks see Miller 1989; York 1995.
- 76) Kyle 1995:75. Yet, as had been shown in this paper, a few New Age scholars, e.g., Lewis & Melton 1992; Hammer 1997, do see a set of core-principles. Peters 1991:57-90 summarizes the New Age in eight teachings: 1) holism, 2) monism, 3) the higher self, 4) human potentiality, 5) reincarnation, 6) evolution/transformation, 7) gnosis, and 8) a New Age Jesus. Similarly, Kyle 1995:197 states that “What unifies the New Age is its worldview and assumptions regarding reality, God, human nature, and the basis of the human predicament.”
- 77) Kyle 1995:175-177, 197. Yet, scholars like Hammer 1997:17, 274-276 and Rothstein (in press) also see myths and rituals in the NAP.
- 78) For a discussion on one of these doctrines see e.g., Lundberg 1999.
- 79) MacEoin 1994; Walbridge 1996.
- 80) For a discussion on Bahá’í administration see Hornby 1988:1-43.
- 81) For a discussion on how Wittgenstein uses the term “family resemblance” see e.g., Wittgenstein. 1953; Fowler 1982.
- 82) Similarly, Kyle 1995:154 states that “Transformation is at the heart of the New Age.”
- 83) Bahá’u’lláh 1983a:240-241, italics added.
- 84) Spangler 1984:38, italics added.
- 85) Kyle 1995:120-121, 122-125, italics added.
- 86) For a discussion on the Bahá’í view of a global civilization see e.g., Shoghi Effendi 1991.
- 87) Shoghi Effendi 1991:169.
- 88) Bahá’u’lláh 1983b:7.
- 89) Shoghi Effendi 1991:171.
- 90) Shoghi Effendi 1991:170, italics added.
- 91) See Bahá’u’lláh 1972.
- 92) See e.g., Lundberg 1996.
- 93) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982b:111.
- 94) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 1982b:252-253, italics added.

A STUDY OF THE MEANING OF THE WORD “AL-AMR” IN THE QUR’ÁN AND IN THE WRITINGS OF BAHÁ’U’LLÁH

Moojan Momen

Summary: The word “amr” in Persian or “al-amr” in Arabic has a range of meaning that covers several words in English. In two instances the precise meaning has become a source of controversy and it is therefore necessary to examine this matter more carefully. In this paper, I will look in detail at the use of the word in the Qur’án in order to delineate the semantic range for this word in the Qur’án. This is in order to examine the assertion by Bahá’í apologists that the term “al-amr” in Qur’án 32:5 (“He establishes His Decree—al-amr—from heaven to earth and it will return to Him in a Day, the length of which is one thousand years in your reckoning”) refers to the appearance of a new religion one thousand years after the Prophet Muḥammad. I will also examine the semantic range of the occurrence of this word in the early writings of Bahá’u’lláh in order to assess the assertion of Prof. E.G. Browne that the phrase “maṣdar-i-amr” which appears in the Kitáb-i-Íqán is an acknowledgement by Bahá’u’lláh of the leadership of Azal at the time of the revelation of the Íqán in about 1861–62.

The purpose of this paper is to study the semantic range of the word al-Amr in two contexts: the Qur’án and the early writings of Bahá’u’lláh during the Baghdad period. The reason for this study is because this word has become controversial with respect to two particular passages, one occurring in the Qur’án and one in Bahá’u’lláh’s Kitáb-i-Íqán.

The first passage which we shall consider in this paper involves the fifth verse of the Suráh al-Sajdah in the Qur’án. In order not to prejudge the issue of the exact meaning of the word al-amr in this setting, I will here give Yusuf Ali’s translation but inserting the transliteration of al-amr:

He establishes al-amr from heaven to earth and it will return to Him in a Day, the length of which is one thousand years in your reckoning (32:5)

This verse is involved in a controversy in relation to the polemics between Islam and the Bahá’í Faith. Bahá’ís consider that the verse refers to the appearance of a new revelation from God one thousand years after the coming of Muḥammad. Because of the Muslim understanding of the concept of Muḥammad being the ‘Seal of the Prophets,’ Muslims interpret this verse without any implication of the coming of a further revelation from God.

The second passage which has involved controversy over the meaning of the word al-amr, is a statement made by Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Íqán, again merely transliterating al-amr at the point where it occurs in Shoghi Effendi’s translation:

By the righteousness of God! Our withdrawal contemplated no return, and Our separation hoped for no reunion. The one object of Our retirement was to avoid becoming a subject of discord among the faithful, a source of disturbance unto Our companions, the means of injury to any soul, or the cause of sorrow to any heart. Beyond these, We cherished no other intention, and apart from them, We had no end in view. And yet, each person schemed after his own desire, and pursued his own idle fancy, until the hour when, from the Source of al-amr, there came the summons bidding Us return whence We came. Surrendering Our will to His, We submitted to His injunction. (Bahá’u’lláh: *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 251)

This passage, in which Bahá’u’lláh relates the circumstances surrounding his return to Baghdad after his sojourn in Sulaymáníyyih, is involved in a controversy in relation to the polemics between Bahá’ís and the

supporters of Mírzá Yaḥyá Azal. Supporters of Azal's position, such as E.G. Browne, have translated this passage as referring to a summons by Mírzá Yaḥyá instructing Bahá'u'lláh to return to Baghdad.

His reason for altering this resolution was that 'the order to return emanated from the source of command', which clearly shows us that at this date (A.D. 1861-62) Bahá still recognized Ezel as his chief, and submitted to his authority, at least nominally.¹

Browne thus used this passage as evidence that at the time of the composition of the Íqán in 1861-2, Bahá'u'lláh still acknowledged the leadership of Azal. Bahá'is maintain that the 'source of command' (maṣḍar-i amr) which Browne considers to be Azal, in fact refers to God. In other words that it was on God's instructions that Bahá'u'lláh returned to Baghdad. Shoghi Effendi translates 'maṣḍar-i amr' as 'Mystic Source,'

A. Al-Amr in the Qur'án

Returning now to the first instance that we are examining in this paper, we must try to establish the meaning of the word al-amr in this verse of the Qur'án. We have various approaches to this question that we can utilize.

1. Dictionary definitions. In the first place it is useful to examine what is stated in the standard dictionaries. In Edward Lane's *Lexicon of the Arabic Language*, there are two series of meaning given for amr:

A. 'a command; an order; a bidding; an injunction; a decree; an ordinance; a prescript' with the plural of awámir and the antonym of nahy (prohibition).

B. 'a thing; an affair; a business; a matter; a concern; a state, of a person or thing, or of persons or things or affairs or circumstances; a condition; a case; an accident; an event' with synonyms of shan, ḥál, halah, ḥádithah, or fi'l and a plural of umúr.

In examining this Qur'anic verse in the light of Lane's definition of amr, there are two considerations. The first is: which meaning goes best with the preceding word "yudabbiru"? And the second is: which meaning goes best with the following phrase which refers to al-amr descending from heaven to earth and then ascending again. With regard to the first question, yudabbiru, which is the third person of the present/future tense of the II form verb of the root d-b-r, can be translated by a wide range of English words: to make arrangements, prepare plans, plan, organize, devise, arrange, bring about, contrive, direct, conduct, manage, run, regulate. It would appear that meanings in either range A or B above would fit with yudabbiru, although range B would be somewhat better. With regard to the second question, however, it is clear that meanings in range A fit much better: the picture of God sending down commands, orders, injunctions, decrees or ordinances from heaven to earth is one that is common to all of the religions of the Abrahamic line.

2. Qur'anic Commentary. It is also usual in trying to ascertain the meaning of a passage in the Qur'án to consult the various standard commentaries on the Qur'án. Most of the commentaries do not appear to give a direct opinion on the meaning of the word 'amr'. One exception is al-Kashshaf of az-Zamakhsharí (d.1144) which comments thus on this verse:

'Al-amr'—He causes the acts of obedience and pious deeds which are ordained (al-ma'múr bihi min at-tá'át wa'l-ámál as-ṣálihah) to be sent down in an organized manner (mudabbiran) 'from the heavens to the earth.' Then they are not acted upon and there does not arise to Him those things that are ordained in a pure form as He desires and wishes except in a very lengthy period of time on account of the fewness of numbers of the workers of God and of the paucity of pious souls among His servants. And the fewness of deeds that ascend is because only righteous deeds are described as ascending and the evidence for this is His words concerning its effect: 'little thanks do ye give' (23:78) or He establishes the amr of all of the world from heaven to earth for every day of the days of God; and this is one thousand years, just as He has said: 'Verily a day with your Lord is as one thousand years as you reckon.

'Then it will return to Him'—that is to say whatever is raised up of this amr and enters into being will go to Him and will be confirmed with Him and will be written down in the scrolls

of His angels every moment of this period of time until this period reaches its end. Then He will arrange also the last Day and so on until the [Last] Hour arises. And it is said that the revelation (al-wahy) is sent down with Gabriel (upon him be peace) from the heaven to the earth and then whatever acceptance or rejection of the revelation there was returns to Him with Gabriel. This occurs in a time that is in reality one thousand years because the distance of travel is one thousand years in descent and ascent inasmuch as the distance between heaven and earth is a journey of five hundred years and it becomes a day of your days on account of the speed of Gabriel, for he cuts through a journey of one thousand years in one day. And it is said: He establishes the amr of the world from the heaven to the earth until the [Last] Hour arises, then all of this amr will return to Him, that is to say it will go to Him in order that He may judge it.

'In a day, the length [miqdar, amount] of which is one thousand years'—and this is the Day of Resurrection (yawm al-qiýamah)²

From this lengthy extract from az-Zamakhsharí, the following interpretations may be derived. Zamakhsharí evidently interprets al-amr as the decree of God to human beings concerning what are correct and righteous actions that should be performed in obedience to God (at-ṭá'át wa'l-ámál as-ṣáliḥah). These are carried down by Gabriel and it appears from this passage that az-Zamakhsharí identifies what is sent down with al-wahy, the revelation that is sent down to the Messengers of God. This would be logical since the revelation of God's decrees concerning correct and righteous actions was the very purpose of the coming of the Messengers of God, such as the Prophet Muḥammad. And of course the revelation to Muḥammad was carried by the angel Gabriel. Lastly, az-Zamakhsharí describes this process as continuing until the Last Hour and he identifies the 'day' mentioned in this verse with the Day of Resurrection.

Al-Bayḏáwí (d. 1291) repeats much of az-Zamakhsharí, almost word for word in places. He does not give a specific interpretation of the word amr, but rather explains the first part of this verse as meaning: 'He organizes the amr of the world with heavenly instruments such as the angels and others, their effects going down to the earth.'³ Later in explaining the second half of the verse, al-Bayḏáwí repeats az-Zamakhsharí's phrase 'the acts of obedience which are ordained (al-ma'múr bihi min at-ṭá'át)' thus implicitly agreeing with the latter's gloss on al-amr. Al-Bayḏáwí repeats the identification of what is sent down as being revelation (al-wahy) and also the assertion that this process will go on until the Last Hour and will end when it returns to Him on the Day of Resurrection. Thus al-Bayḏáwí concurs in all of the main points that we have identified above in az-Zamakhsharí's commentary.

Other authors of commentaries on the Qur'án are not so helpful. Many of them seem to give most of their attention in commenting on this verse to statements about how long angels take in descending from heaven to earth. Thus for example Ibn Kathír (d. 1372):

'He establishes His Decree (al-amr) from heaven to earth and it will return to Him' that is to say, his amr comes down from the highest part of heaven to the furthest districts of the seventh earth, as He (exalted be He) has said: 'Allah is He Who created seven Firmaments and of the earth a similar number. Through the midst of them (all) descends His Command, (65:12)' And deeds rise up to their account books (i.e. each person's actions rise to heaven where they are entered into one's heavenly account), which is above the sky of the world, the distance between them and the earth being a journey of five hundred years and the thickness of heaven is five hundred years....⁴

In general, however, it is not useful to turn to the later commentators for interpretations of this verse in the context of our investigation. This is because once the doctrine of Muḥammad being the 'Seal of the Prophets' became a firm doctrine in Islam at about the beginning of the fourth Islamic century (late tenth century AD),⁵ all interpretations of verses such as this one were constrained by this doctrine and it became increasingly difficult to offer any interpretations that that could be seen as casting doubt on this doctrine. Since the Bahá'í interpretation of this verse does, as we shall see later, cast doubt on the traditional Muslim interpretation of the concept of the 'Seal of the Prophets,' we cannot expect to find support for it in the commentaries, except perhaps in the very earliest ones. Unfortunately, commentary

as a literary form in Islam arrived relatively late and so there is little commentary material available from the earliest period, before the concept of the ‘Seal of the Prophets’ became a firm doctrine in Islam.

3. Interpreting the Qur’án by means of the Qur’án. While the information that the dictionaries and commentaries give is useful, for our purposes, it is probably better to adopt the classical Islamic approach of ‘tafsír al-Qur’án bi’l-Qur’án’—interpreting the Qur’án by means of the Qur’án. This is not only because of the constraints imposed upon interpretation by later doctrine as mentioned above, but also because the Qur’án itself is almost the only document that we can reliably state stems from this period. And so if we want to know what a word meant at the time of the revelation of the Qur’án then really it is only the Qur’án that can act as documentary evidence.⁶

The word al-amr is extensively used in the Qur’án and has a range of meanings. There are 153 occurrences of the word al-amr alone and in combination with various pronouns and 13 occurrences of the plural, al-umúr, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Occurrences of the Noun “al-Amr” in the Qur’án

Amr/al-amr	72
amran	17
amrukum	3
amruná	16
amruhu	22
amruhá	3
amruhum	12
amrí	8
TOTAL	153
al-umúr	13

Source: This table shows all occurrences of the noun al-amr in its various cases as well as with various pronominal suffixes according to: Muḥammad Fu’ád ‘Abd al-Báqí, Mu’ajam al-Mufaris li-Alfáz al-Qur’án al-Karím, Cairo, 1364. Although the words are given above in nominative form, they include occurrences of other cases.

An analysis of these 153 references to the word amr shows that they may be divided into the two different meanings given by Lane and also according to whether the word amr relates in some way to God or not. Such an analysis gives the following result (excluding for the time being verse 32:5):

Table 2: Analysing al-amr in the Qur’án
in Relation to its Meaning and Context

	Related to God	Not related to God
Meaning A: command, decree, order	66	10
Meaning B: affair, state, event, matter	17	43
Could mean either A or B		16
Verse 32:5 itself		1
Total		153

J.M.S. Baljon has written a paper analyzing the appearance of the word *amr* in the Qur'án.⁷ Baljon's main intention in this paper is to discredit the earlier notion that the word *amr* was equivalent to the Christian *logos* concept (a Divine hypostasis). Nevertheless, Baljon makes a few points that are of interest to our discussion. He discerns the word *amr* in the Qur'án as meaning several stages in the process whereby God interacts with the world. In the first place, it relates to God's preparation or organization of the His decrees (*yudabbiru 'l-amr*); then He determines (*yaqḍiya*, 19:35, 39) the *amr*; then He sends it down to earth (*yatanazzalu*, 65:12). But the descent of *al-amr* can be either a positive or a negative factor. For those who have disobeyed God, such as the people of Lot, it is a fearful punishment (15:66); while for those who are God-fearing, *al-amr* is an easy matter (65:4).⁸ It should be noted that the stage of God's preparation of His decree has been inserted by Baljon in order to account for the very verse that we are considering here (Qur'án 32:5). Evidently, the statement that *al-amr* returns to God from earth puzzled Baljon and so in order to account for it, he postulated an initial stage when the decree is sent to earth as an "inquiry of the state of affairs in the world"; it then returns to God who determines the decree and it is then sent down a second time as a decree to be executed. It can be seen that in the interpretation of this verse given below, there is no need to postulate this initial stage of preparation because all references to the descent of *al-amr* refer to the same phenomenon and the returning of it is the completion of the cycle which is, in turn, the starting point for the next cycle. This would eliminate the need to postulate that God's knowledge is in some way deficient and so an initial enquiry into the state of the world is necessary. In those contexts where *amr* is attributed to or effected by humans, Baljon finds the following meanings: command (20:65, 92, 94), intentions (10:72), deeds or conduct (59:15, 65:9), and religion or rites (23:55, 22:66).⁹

In trying to understand the meaning of the verse in question (Qur'án 32:5), we can try to find verses in the Qur'án that most closely parallel this verse in structure and content. Thus we can see from the verse and its context that the whole passage is referring to Divine actions. We can therefore eliminate from our enquiry all of those 53 verses in Table 2 where the occurrence of the word *amr* is not related to God. Examining the remaining 99 verses, we can find several where there are structural and content similarities to this verse.

a. 'He establishes His Decree'. The verse that we are examining (Qur'án 33:5) begins with the phrase *yudabbiru 'l-amr*. This phrase occurs in several other places in the Qur'án.

10:3. Verily your Lord is Allah Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days and is firmly established on the Throne (of authority) regulating and governing all things (*yudabbiru 'l-amr*). No intercessor (can plead with Him) except after His leave (hath been obtained). This is Allah your Lord; Him....

10:31. Say: "Who is it that sustains you (in life) from the sky and from the earth? Or who is it that has power over hearing and sight? And who is it that brings out the living from the dead and the dead from the living? And who is it that rules and regulates all affairs (*yudabbiru 'l-amr*)?" They will soon say "Allah." Say "Will ye not then show piety (to Him)?"

13:2. Allah is He Who raised the heavens without any pillars that ye can see; is firmly established on the throne (of authority); He has subjected the sun and the moon (to His law)! each one runs (its course) for a term appointed. He doth regulate affairs (*yudabbiru 'l-amr*) explaining the Signs in detail that ye may believe with certainty in the meeting with your Lord.

Here the evident meaning is God regulating and ordering the affairs of heaven and earth. Since, however, God does this regulating through the decrees that He issues, it is difficult to decide whether *al-amr* here should be considered in its A or B range of meanings.

b. 'His Decree from heaven to earth.' Looking at the next part of Qur'án 32:5, it speaks of *al-amr* as being something that comes down from God. If we look in the Qur'án for other occasions in which we find *al-amr* coming down from God, we find:

16:2. He doth send down His angels with inspiration of His Command to (*yunazzila al-malá'ikah bi'r-rúḥ min amr-hi 'alá*) such of His servants as He pleaseth (saying): "Warn (Man) that there is no god but I: so do your duty unto Me."

44:3-5: We sent it down (*anzalná*) during a blessed night: for We (ever) wish to warn (against

Evil). In that (night) is made distinct every affair of wisdom (amrin hakímin). By a command (amran) from Our presence. For We (ever) send (revelations, mursilín).

65:12. Allah is He Who created seven Firmaments and of the earth a similar number. Through the midst of them (all) descends His Command (yatanazzalu 'l-amr bayna -hunna): that ye may know that Allah has power over all things and that Allah comprehends all things in (His) Knowledge.

The above verses which are the closest to Qur'án 32:5 in form and content give a clear indication of the probable meaning al-amr of 32:5. The use of verbs from the root n-z-l indicates that the process of revelation is involved, since this is also the verbal form that is used in connection with the coming down of verses of the Qur'án (2:23, 97, 176; 3:3, 93; 4:136, 140, etc). This is made clearest in the first of the above verses (16:2), where it is indicated that al-amr comes down to one of God's servants with the instruction to warn humanity (andhiru). This function of being a warner is one that is tied in the Qur'án to that of being a Messenger of God (see 5:19, 7:184, 188, 27:92, 29:50, 33:45, 34:44, 35:24, etc.). In the second example above (44:3-5), al-amr is clearly tied to the revelation of the Qur'án. Thus the coming down of al-amr in 33:5 appears from these parallel verses to be intimately connected with the coming down of revelation upon a Messenger of God. It was presumably such considerations that caused az-Zamakhsharí, in the passage quoted above, to connect al-amr with 'the revelation (al-wahy)' that 'is sent down with Gabriel (upon him be peace) from the heaven to the earth'. Further evidence for this is the following verses, the first of which connects al-amr to the process of revelation (al-wahy, here in the verbal form awḥayná) and second, more specifically links al-amr with the revelation to Moses on the west side of Mount Sinai:

42:52. And thus have We by Our command sent inspiration to thee (awḥay-ná ilay-ka ruḥan min amri-ná): thou knowest not (before) what was Revelation and what was Faith; but We have made the (Qur'án) a Light wherewith We guide such of Our servants as We will; and verily thou dost guide (men) to the Straight Way

28:44. Thou wast not on the Western Side when We decreed the commission to Moses (qaḍayná ilá Músá al-amr) nor wast thou a witness (of those events).

Al-amr may thus be likened to the commission which a king or government gives to a governor or an army officer; it is this commission which gives that person his authority and makes his authority the equivalent of the giver of the commission. Similar, the giving by God of al-amr to the Messenger of God gives him the authority of God.

There is an exact parallel to verse 16:2, analyzed above, in the following verse from the Qur'án in which al-amr is described as coming from God and where the context clearly denotes a descent. Here again this process of the descent of al-amr is linked to the function of warning (yundhiru), which as indicated above is part of the function of the Messenger of God:

40:15. Raised high above ranks (or degrees) (He is) the Lord of the Throne (of authority): by his command doth He send the spirit (of inspiration) to (yulqí ar-rúḥ min amri-hi 'alá) any of His servants He pleases that it may warn (men, yundhiru) of the Day of Mutual Meeting (yawm at-taláq)

Finally, we can look at a large number of other occasions in the Qur'án where al-amr is stated to have come from God to humanity. In many of these instances, the context is that of God having sent a Messenger of God as a warner to humanity. Humankind ignores the warning and al-amr issues from God in the form of a severe penalty. Here, al-amr can be translated as the 'decree' or 'command' of God. The whole of the Súrah of Húd in the Qur'án consists of instance after instance of this usage. In almost every case the word al-amr is used in conjunction with the verb já'á.- al-amr came or issued forth. The first instance cited is that of Noah who is described as being sent as a warner (nadhírun) to his people. They refused to believe in Noah and his message, nor did they help him with his Ark, until:

11:40. At length behold! there came Our Command (já'á amru-ná) and the fountains of the earth gushed forth!

11:43. The son replied: “I will be take myself to some mountain: it will save me from the water.” Noah said: “This day nothing can save from the Command of Allah (amri Alláh) any but those on whom He hath mercy!” and the waves came between them and the son was among those overwhelmed in the Flood.

The destruction continued until the waters abated and al-amr was ended:

11:44. When the word went forth: “O earth! swallow up thy water and O sky! withhold (thy rain!)” and the water abated and the matter (al-amr) was ended. The Ark rested on Mount Judi and the word went forth: “Away with those who do wrong!”

Similarly, Húd was sent to the people of Ád and šáliḥ was sent to the people of Thamúd to warn them, but they ignored them and then:

11:58. So when Our decree issued (jáʾ amru-ná) We saved Húd and those who believed with him by (special) Grace from Ourselves: We saved them from a severe Penalty.

11:66. When Our Decree (jáʾ amru-ná) issued We saved Saleh and those who believed with him by (special) Grace from Ourselves and from the Ignominy of that Day. For thy Lord He is the Strong One and Able to enforce His Will.

Next mention is made of Abraham. Abraham pleads with God against the penalty that was to be imposed upon the people of Lot:

11:76. O Abraham! seek not this. The decree of thy Lord hath gone forth (jáʾ amru Rabbi-ka): for them there cometh a Penalty that cannot be turned back!

11:82. When Our decree issued (jáʾ amru-ná) We turned (the cities) upside down and rained down on them brimstones hard as baked clay spread layer on layer...

The Súrah of Húd then reviews the fate of the people of Madyán, to whom Shuʿayb was sent:

11:94. When Our decree issued (jáʾ amru-ná) We saved Shuaib and those who believed with him by (special) Mercy from Ourselves: but the (mighty) Blast did seize the wrongdoers and they lay prostrate in their homes by the morning...

In reviewing all of these cases, the text of the Súrah of Húd states:

11:101. It was not We that wronged them: they wronged their own souls: the deities other than Allah whom they invoked profited them no whit when there issued the decree of thy Lord (jáʾ amra Rabbi-ka): nor did they add aught (to their lot) but perdition!

Other examples of this usage of al-amr are:

16:33. Do the (ungodly) wait until the angels come to them or there comes the Command of thy Lord (for their doom, aw yaʿtiya amra rabbi-ka)? So did those who went before them. But Allah wronged them not: nay they wronged their own souls.

57:14. (Those without) will call out “were we not with you?” (The others) will reply “True! but ye led yourselves into temptation; ye looked forward (to our ruin); ye doubted (Allah’s promise); and (your false) desires deceived you; until there issued the Command of Allah (ḥattá jáʾ amr alláh). And the Deceiver deceived you in respect of Allah.

Thus these examples and the whole of the Súrah of Húd bears witness to this meaning of al-amr—that it represents the decree of God imposing a severe penalty on those who fail to obey the Messenger of God when he comes.

c. ‘and it will return to Him.’ Continuing with our analysis of verse 33:5, we go on to the next phrase which refers to al-amr returning to God (thumma yáruju ilay-hi). The verse that come closest in paralleling this is also of great interest because it is the last verse of the Súrah of Húd, which, as demonstrated above, is full of references to al-amr as the decree coming from God and penalising those who oppose the Messengers of God. Here, at the end of this Súrah, we see that al-amr returns to God.

11:123. To Allah do belong the unseen (secrets) of the heavens and the earth and to Him goeth back every affair (wa ilay-hi yurjáu al-amr kull-hu): then worship Him and put thy trust in Him: and thy Lord is not unmindful of aught that ye do.

There are several other verses in the Qur’án that have some similarities but in each case what is recorded as going back to God is al-umúr, the plural of al-amr.¹⁰

d. ‘in a Day.’ Verse 40:15, quoted above and also the contents of the Súrah of Húd, described above, have important implications also when we come to consider the next two words of Qur’án 33:5—‘in a Day,’ (fí yawmin). We have seen how in the Súrah of Húd, whenever the people turned away from the Messenger of God, a severe penalty was visited upon them. In two verses of this súrah, it is implied that this fate that befell them was their Day of Judgement. In both of these verses, however, Yusuf Ali and other translators have changed things somewhat to make it appear that the reference to a Day of Judgement is to a future event. In reference to ‘Ád’s rejection of their Messenger of God, Húd, Yusuf Ali translates:

11:60. And they were pursued by a Curse in this Life and on the Day of Judgment. Ah! behold! for the ‘Ad rejected their Lord and Cherisher! Ah! behold! removed (from sight) were ‘Ad the people of Húd!

And similarly in relation to the rejection of Moses by Pharaoh and his people, Yusuf Ali translates:

11:99. And they are followed by a curse in this (life) and on the Day of Judgment: and woeful is the gift which shall be given (unto them)!

The literal word for word translation of the opening words of both of these verses is, however (the only difference between the two is that the word ad-dunyá appears in 11:60 and not in 11:99):

Wa utbí‘ú fí hádhihi [ad-dunyá] lánah wa yawm al-qiyámah

And they were followed in this [world] by a curse and the Day of Judgement (actually probably more accurately translated as Day of Resurrection)

Thus the Arabic text places ‘curse’ and ‘Day of Judgement’ side-by-side as that by which the people were pursued—the tense being the past tense. In other words, it regards what happened to the people of ‘Ád and the people of Pharaoh as being the Day of Judgement for them. This would support az-Zamakhsharí in his assertion that the Day that is referred to in 33:5 is the Day of Judgement (see above). This then takes us back to Qur’án 40:15, which links the coming of al-amr from God to earth with the coming of a revelation to a Messenger of God and to the Day of Mutual Meeting. Az-Zamakhsharí, in his commentary on verse 40:15, states that the Day of Mutual Meeting is the same as the Day of Judgement and other commentaries agree.¹¹

40:15. Raised high above ranks (or degrees) (He is) the Lord of the Throne (of authority): by his command doth He send the spirit (of inspiration) to (yulqí ar-rúḥ min amri-hi ‘alá) any of His servants He pleases that it may warn (men, yundhiru) of the Day of Mutual Meeting (yawm at-taláq)

e. ‘the length of which is one thousand years in your reckoning’. The next phrase in 33:5—the length of which is one thousand years in your reckoning—has one close parallel in the Qur’án. Interestingly, this parallel passage can be considered as a summary of the Súrah of Húd that we have already discussed at length:

22:42-7: If they treat thy (mission) as false so did the Peoples before them (with their prophets) the People of Noah and ‘Ad and Thamud; Those of Abraham and Lut; And the Companions of the Madyan people: and Moses was rejected (in the same way). But I granted respite to the Unbelievers and (only) after that did I punish them: but how (terrible) was My rejection (of them)! How many populations have We destroyed which were given to wrong-doing! They tumbled down on their roofs. And how many wells are lying idle and neglected and castles lofty and well-built! Do they not travel through the land so that their hearts (and mind) may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not their eyes that are blind but

their hearts which are in their breasts. Yet they ask thee to hasten on the Punishment! But Allah will not fail in His promise. Verily a day in the sight of thy Lord is like a thousand years of your reckoning.

Here the period of one thousand years is closely linked to a future day of punishment. In other words the same overall scheme as is suggested in az-Zamakhsharí's commentary is confirmed—that the Day that is mentioned is the Day of Judgement and this is linked to a one thousand year period.

4. The Collections of Traditions. While it is true, as stated above, that there are few other sources that we can consult that reliably contain usage of Arabic words contemporaneous to the Qur'an, it is useful to look also at the collections of Prophetic Traditions. Although these were not written down until 150 years or more after the time of the Qur'an and doubts have been raised about whether they can reliably be traced back to the Prophet Muḥammad, it is nevertheless true that they do represent a early stratum of the usage of Arabic words. In looking at those collections of Islamic Traditions that are considered among the earliest and most reliable, we can find a number of these Traditions where the word al-amr is used in a way that sheds light on its use in Qur'an 33:5.

In the collection by al-Bukhārī, which is one of two collections that have been given the name as-ṣaḥīḥ (the correct) by Muslims on account of their reputation for authenticity, the following two Traditions occur which generally support the above interpretations of al-amr:

God brings about whatever he wishes of His amr.¹²

God says: The son of Adam hurts me when he curses Time (ad-Dahr), for I am Time; in my hands is al-amr and I cause the revolution of night and day.¹³

By far the most interesting of these is a Tradition that occurs in slightly varying forms in almost all of the major collections of Traditions, including al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Ibn Májah, and at-Tirmidhí. The following is the form in which it is recorded by Ibn Ḥanbal:

The Messenger of God (PBUH) said: A group of my followers will continue victorious upon the path of truth and they will not be harmed by those who desert them until the amr of God shall come.¹⁴

This Tradition seems to be the natural corollary of Qur'an 33:5, stating that in future, after al-amr returns to God, it will come once again to earth.

5. Ancient Arabic poetry. It is customary for Islamicists in considering the meaning of words in the Qur'an to turn to ancient Arabic poetry for clues. Although the authenticity and exact relationship of this poetry to the Arabic of the Qur'an is a matter of some dispute, it cannot be denied that, whether genuinely pre-Islamic or written after the advent of Islam, it is some of the closest literature to the Qur'an in time that is available to us.

There are several instances where there are close parallels between the Qur'anic use of amr and that of ancient Arabic poetry. Umayya ibn Abí's-šalt, for example writes in one of his poems of the King of Heaven and His angels who are elected for His amr and descend to earth with it and ascend again.¹⁵

The idea that at some time in the future, al-amr of God will descend again and that this is the Day of Judgement finds strong contemporary support in the poetry of Ḥassán ibn Thábit, a Muslim poet who was a companion of the Prophet Muḥammad. He wrote:

That the amr of God may descend upon us hastily this very night or tomorrow

Then we shall stand in the [Last] Hour and participate in the pure good¹⁶

6. Summary. In summary then, we can say that on the basis of a survey of other parallel passages in the Qur'an and taking into account the early commentators such as az-Zamakhsharí and al-Bayḏáwí, the collections of Traditions, and ancient Arabic poetry, the meaning of verse 33:5 can be reconstructed thus:

He establishes (yudabbiru): establishes, organizes, orders,

His Decree (al-amr): command, decree of God

- that which God send down with the angel (especially the Angel Gabriel) as a revelation (al-wahy) to the Messenger of God

- the commission which God gives to the Messenger of God, charging him with a mission on earth

- the decree of God ordaining a severe punishment for people who have ignored or opposed the Messenger of God

from heaven to earth (min as-samá’ ilá ‘l-arḍ): this appears to function as an equivalent of a verb from the root nazala (coming down, descent, revelation) which is used in the Qur’án to describe the revelation of verses to the Messengers of God

and it will return to Him (thumma yáruju ilay-hi)—al-amr—the decree or commission delegated to the Messenger of God—returns to God

in a Day (fí yawmin)—this Day is the Day of Judgement—on which the previous amr returns to God and a new decree is issued—a new amr comes

the length of which is one thousand years in your reckoning (kána miqdár-hu alf sinah min má táuddún)—the duration of time in which the decree is in effect before its return to God is completed is a period of one thousand human years. Each of these is a Day of God—a Day of Judgement

7. The Bahá’í Interpretation. The discussion above has yielded a number of possible interpretations of the word al-amr in Qur’án 33:5. Two of these appear to be very different from one another: the revelation or commission that is given to a Messenger of God and the penalty imposed by God upon a people when they reject a Messenger of God. It is interesting to note that the Bahá’í interpretation of al-amr in Qur’án 33:5 has the ability to link these two meanings so as to refer to one event. The Bahá’í interpretation of this verse would be that it refers to the coming of a Messenger of God one thousand years after the Islamic revelation. In the Bahá’í interpretation, the coming of any Messenger of God is a Day of Judgement, for the followers of the previous religions. It is their Day of Judgement to see if they have been faithful to the teachings of the previous Messenger of God. If they fail this test and do not accept these teachings then God sends down upon them a severe penalty or chastisement. The day of judgement is also called the Day of Resurrection (because those who believe are spiritually revitalized) and the Day of God. Thus, in the Bahá’í interpretation, both of the interpretations of al-amr, whether as revelation/mission or as penalty/Day of Judgement, refer to the same phenomenon, the coming of the Messenger of God.

The Bahá’í interpretation of this verse is thus that God sent down from heaven the revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad. This was also the Day of God, the Day of Judgement, for the followers of previous religions such as Christianity and Judaism. As they failed to respond to Muḥammad’s message, they suffered a severe penalty. The Islamic Day of Judgement lasted one thousand years. Since Bahá’ís accept the Shi’i account of the true nature of authority after the Prophet Muḥammad, this one thousand year period began in AH 260, with the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, at which time, authoritative, divinely-guided interpretation of the Islamic revelation was ended. After one thousand years, in AH 1260 (AD 1844), the period in which the Divine commission (al-amr) was entrusted to the Prophet Muḥammad ended and al-amr returned to God. In 1844, God once more sent Divine revelation to earth, once more, through the Báb.

B. Al-Amr in Bahá’u’lláh’s Kitáb-i-Íqán

The Kitáb-i-Íqán is one of Bahá’u’lláh’s early works from the Baghdad period. It was written in response to a number of questions posed by one of the maternal uncles of the Báb regarding why the signs accompanying the coming of the Mahdí did not appear to have been fulfilled with the coming of the Báb.

At one point in the is work, Bahá’u’lláh refers to his two-year sojourn in the mountains around Sulaymáníyyih in Kurdistan. Dealing then with his return from that self-imposed exile, he states that, although he himself had no thought of return, the command for this issued from maṣḍar-i-amr and so he returned. E.G. Browne has argued that this reference to maṣḍar-i-amr in fact indicates that Bahá’u’lláh

at this date still deferred to Azal as leader of the Bábí movement. Shoghi Effendi has translated maṣḍar-i-amr as “the Mystic Source.”

In the early days of Our arrival in this land, when We discerned the signs of impending events, We decided, ere they happened, to retire. We betook Ourselves to the wilderness, and there, separated and alone, led for two years a life of complete solitude.... Many a night We had no food for sustenance, and many a day Our body found no rest. By Him Who hath My being between His hands! notwithstanding these showers of afflictions and unceasing calamities, Our soul was wrapt in blissful joy, and Our whole being evinced an ineffable gladness.... Our withdrawal contemplated no return, and Our separation hoped for no reunion. The one object of Our retirement was to avoid becoming a subject of discord among the faithful, a source of disturbance unto Our companions, the means of injury to any soul, or the cause of sorrow to any heart. Beyond these, We cherished no other intention, and apart from them, We had no end in view. And yet, each person schemed after his own desire, and pursued his own idle fancy, until the hour when, from the Mystic Source, there came the summons bidding Us return whence We came. Surrendering Our will to His, We submitted to His injunction. (Bahá'u'llah: The Kitáb-i-Íqán, pages 250-251)

In order to clear this matter up, it is clearly necessary to examine Bahá'u'lláh's use of the word amr in detail particularly his use of the word in the Íqán itself since it is conceivable that Bahá'u'lláh's usage of the word may have changed over the years. I have looked at 154 instances of the noun amr in the Kitáb-i-Íqán. The details of these instances are to be found in Table 3.

Table 3: Occurrences of the Noun Amr in the Kitáb-Iqán.

amr	105 (103 Persian, 2 Arabic)
amrí	25 (Persian)
amr-ash	5 (Persian)
amr-and	1 Persian
amrí-rá	1 (Persian)
amru-há/amr-há	2 (1 Arabic, 1 Persian)
amran	1 (Arabic but used in Persian context)
al-amr	9 (Arabic)
amru-hu	1 (Arabic)
amru-ná	2 (Arabic)
bi amri-hi	2 (Arabic)
Total	154

In looking at the meaning of the word amr in this context, it is necessary to add a meaning which is additional to those derived above from Lane's Dictionary, but which has already been discovered in our consideration of the Qur'anic meaning of this word. Most frequently in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, al-amr means the mission given to the Messenger or Manifestation of God. Thus amr Alláh means the Cause of God, or the commission given by God to the Messenger of God. This meaning is closely linked to the decree, command, order range of meanings of amr, and may be considered as part of that group but it has been given separately in Table 4 for clarity.

Unfortunately the phrase maṣḍar-i amr does not appear elsewhere in the Kitáb-i-Íqán and so this cannot be used directly to derive the meaning. The word maṣḍar is the noun of place (nomina loci) derived from the verb ṣadara, which means to go out, issue forth, originate or emanate. Maṣḍar thus comes to mean: point of origin, source, or origin. It is clear that with the preceding word, maṣḍar, the word amr in this context is more likely to have either meaning A or C from Table 4, rather than meaning B. Table 4 indicates that the most likely meaning for amr in this context is that it means the “Divine commis-

sion or Cause.” The following are a few examples of its use in the Kitáb-i-Íqán that demonstrate this meaning of the “Divine commission or Cause.”

Moreover, the more closely you observe the denials of those who have opposed the Manifestations of the divine attributes, the firmer will be your faith in the Cause of God [dar dín-i khud va amr Alláh muḥkamtar va rasikhtar shavíd]. (Íqán, p. 6)

When He was invested with the robe of Prophethood, and was moved by the Spirit of God to arise and proclaim His Cause [bar amr qiyám farmúd], whoever believed in Him and acknowledged His Faith, was endowed with the grace of a new life. (Íqán, p. 154)

Among the utterances that foreshadow a new Law and a new Revelation [shar‘-i jadíd va amr-i badí‘] are the passages in the “Prayer of Nudbih....” (Íqán, p. 240)

Table 4: Analysing Amr in the Kitáb-i-Íqán
in Relation to its Meaning and Context

	Related to God	Not related to God
Meaning A: command, decree, order	21	10
Meaning B: affair, state, event, matter	2	43
Meaning C: the Divine commission or Cause	77	
Reference to maṣḍar-i-amr itself	1	
Total	154	

Thus, maṣḍar-i amr is most likely to mean the “Source of the Divine commission or Cause.” Since the “the Divine commission or Cause” can only come from God through a Manifestation of God, the “Source” referred to can only be either God or the Manifestation of God. Indeed with the frequent recurrence (ten occasions in the Kitáb-i-Íqán) of the phrase amr Alláh, the Cause of God, it becomes clear that the Source of amr is most likely to be God. In the circumstances surrounding the writing of the Kitáb-i-Íqán in Baghdad, the meaning that E.G. Browne tries to give to this phrase thus becomes very unlikely. In speaking of the Source of Command, Bahá’u’lláh could only really be speaking about God or possibly about a Manifestation of God. The Báb had previously been martyred in 1850 and Azal was not at this time claiming to be a Manifestation of God. Indeed the claim to be a manifestation of God equated within the Bábí context to a claim to be Man Yuṣṭhiruhu’lláh—He whom God shall make manifest, which Azal did not claim during this Baghdad period. Later during the Edirne period, it seems that he briefly put forward such a claim in response to Bahá’u’lláh’s open proclamation of his claim,¹⁷ but it does not appear to have been accepted by any substantial group of people and seems to have later been withdrawn, as Browne does not report any such claim on the part of Azal during the period of his contacts with him. Thus in the context of the Baghdad period, this leaves only the interpretation of this phrase as a reference to God. Bahá’u’lláh is in effect saying that the cause of his return to Baghdad was a Divine summons.

One further approach to elucidating this issue which helps us to a certain extent is to look for other occasions where the term maṣḍar-i amr appears in the writings of Bahá’u’lláh. I have only been able to trace a few other instances of the use of this term and none of these can be definitely stated to belong to the Baghdad period of Bahá’u’lláh’s writings. In the first of these, the context makes it more likely that God is meant, in the second and third, the Manifestation of God appears to be intended.

These words were sent down from the Source of the Revelation (maṣḍar-i-amr) of the All-Bounteous, and were addressed to Siyyid Javád, known as Karbilá’i. (*Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 160–61)

I yield Thee thanks that Thou hast made known unto me Him Who is the Day-Spring of Thy mercy, and the Dawning-Place of Thy grace, and the Repository of Thy Cause (maṣḍar amri-ka). (*Prayers and Meditations*, no. 137, p. 225)

...in such wise that the changes and chances of the world will be powerless to hinder me from recognizing Him Who is the Manifestation of Thine own Self, and the Revealer of Thy signs, and the Day-Spring of Thy Revelation, and the Repository of Thy Cause (maṣḍar amri-ka). (*Prayers and Meditations*, no. 139, p. 228)

There are also two occurrences of similar terms that are worth noting here. The first has the word maṣḍar (maṣádir) in the plural and clearly refers to the Manifestations of God:

They, verily, are the manifestations of the power of God, and the sources of His authority (maṣádir-i amr), and the repositories of His knowledge, and the daysprings of His commandments. (*Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 90)

The second has the word amr in the plural. Since the form of the plural is awámir, this confirms that in this phrase, maṣḍar-i amr, the word amr is present in its meaning of decree, command, order (i.e. meanings A or C in Table 4 above; since it is the plural for this range of meanings that is awámir). This passage is from the *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, the last major work of Bahá'u'lláh. Here, Bahá'u'lláh is challenging Shaykh Muḥammad-Taquí the recipient of this epistle, to go to Cyprus and meet Mírzá Yaḥyá and ascertain for himself the truth of the matter—that Mírzá Yaḥyá is not “the source of the Divine laws” (maṣḍar-i awámir):

In this day, this Wronged One requesteth thee and the other divines who have drunk of the cup of the knowledge of God, and are illumined by the shining words of the Day-Star of Justice, to appoint some person, without informing any one, and despatch him to these regions, and enable him to remain a while in the island of Cyprus, and associate with Mirza Yahya, perchance he may become aware of the fundamentals of this Faith and of the source of the Divine laws (maṣḍar-i awámir) and commandments. (*Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 120-21)

Perhaps more pertinent than these examples however, is the occurrence of a variant of maṣḍar-i-amr in the Kitáb-i-Íqán itself. This the phrase maṣádir-i amriyyih, which appears in the following context:

Know verily that the purpose underlying all these symbolic terms and abstruse allusions, which emanate from the Revealers of God's holy Cause (maṣádir-i amriyyih), hath been to test and prove the peoples of the world. (Íqán p. 49)

Here again the word maṣḍar is in its plural form while instead of the genitive construct, the word amr appears in adjectival form as amriyyih. Here again, it seems clear from the context that the Manifestations of God are meant.

In summary, this analysis shows that the term maṣḍar-i-amr is always used with the meaning of amr relating the word to “Divine decree, command or commission.” The word maṣḍar means source or origin. Thus the phrase masdar-i-amr cannot have a meaning related to earthly leadership or even the leadership of a religious movement, such as Azal claimed. The “source of the Divine command or decree” can only be God or a Manifestation of God who has been given the authority (amr) to carry out the decree of God. Azal was not claiming any such station at this time and thus Browne's understanding of this phrase in the Kitáb-i-Íqán is incorrect. It was in fact an assertion by Bahá'u'lláh that he returned from Sulaymáníyyih in response to a Divine summons.

Notes

- 1) “The Bábís of Persia-II”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 21, 1889, p. 946; reprinted in M. Momen (ed.), *Selections from the Writings of E.G. Browne on the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987), p. 252.
- 2) Az-Zamakhsharí, Abū'l-Qásim Maḥmūd. *Al-Kashsháf*, 2nd printing, al-Maṭbá' al-Kubrā al-Amriyyah, 3 vols., Cairo, 1318, vol. 2, p. 418.
- 3) Al-Bayḍáwí, ‘Abd Alláh. *Anwár at-Tanzíl*. 8 vols. Dār al-Kutub al-‘Arabí al-Kubrā, Cairo, 1330/1912, vol. 4, p. 155.

- 4) Abu'l-Fidá Ibn Kathír, *Tafsír al-Qur'án al-'Aẓím*, Dar at-Turáth al-'Arabí, Cairo?, n.d., vol. 3, p. 457.
- 5) See Yohanan Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous*, University of California, Berkeley, 1989, pp. 50-58, 70-71.
- 6) Considerable doubt has been thrown on whether certain other items of Arabic poetry, such as the Mu'allaqát poetry really do represent pre-Qur'anic Arabic literature.
- 7) J.M.S. Baljon, "The 'Amr of God' in the Koran," *Acta Orientalia*, vol. 23 (Copenhagen, 1959) pp. 5-18.
- 8) Baljon, "Amr of God," pp. 9-11.
- 9) Baljon, "Amr of God," p. 8.
- 10) See Qur'án 2:210; 8: 44; 22:76; 35:4; 57:5.
- 11) 'The Day of Mutual Meeting—the Day of Judgement for on this Day spirits and bodies will meet and also the people of heaven and earth, and the worshipped and the worshippers, and deeds and the doers.' Az-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashsháf*, vol. 5, p. 36. See also Yusuf Ali's commentary in his translation.
- 12) Al-Bukhárí, *ṣaḥíḥ*, Bk. 93—Tawḥíd, ch. 42, vol. 9, p. 460.
- 13) Al-Bukhárí, *ṣaḥíḥ*, (Kazi Publications, Chicago, 1979), Bk. 93—Tawḥíd, ch. 35, no. 583, vol. 9, p. 433.
- 14) Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 5, p.279. See also Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 4, p. 101; vol. 5, p.278; al-Bukhárí, *ṣaḥíḥ*, 93—Kitáb at-Tawḥíd, ch. 29, no. 551-2, vol. 9, pp. 414-5; Muslim, *ṣaḥíḥ*, Kitáb al-Imára, ch. 1306, Nos. 4715-6 and 4719, vol. 3, p. 1061-2; at-Tirmidhí, *Sunan*, Kitáb al-Fitan, ch. 51; Ibn Májah, *Sunan*, Kitáb al-Fitan, ch. 9; al-Hákím, *al-Mustadrak*, Kitáb al-Fitan wa al-Maláḥim, vol. 4, p. 550; al-Muttaqí al-Hindí, *Kanz al-'Ummál*, vol. 14, no. 38224, p. 158.
- 15) Umayya ibn Abiṣ-ṣalt 55: 10, 16-17 (ed. Schulthess), quoted in Baljon, "Amr of God," p. 13
- 16) Hasan ibn Thabit 133:7-8 (ed. Hirschfeld), quoted in Baljon, "Amr of God," p. 114
- 17) Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 167.

The Book of Revelation Revealed in Glory:
A Summary of *Glorious Revelation*

William Ridgers

A man once asked God, “How long is a million years?” God replied, “By my timing, a minute.” Then the man asked, “God, how much is a million dollars?” God replied, “For me, a penny.” Next, the man said, “Please God, give me a penny.” So God replied, “In a minute!”

In the same way, the Book of Revelation measures days as years and years as millennia. In the 1950s, time itself was in question where I grew up in England’s East Anglia under the shadow of the Armageddon. Nuclear holocaust ever loomed large, with England a lot closer than the USA to the USSR! There, I grew up under two sets of shields connected with the Book of Revelation. The first set of heraldic school chapel shields, showing its four Living Beings, was mundane enough. But the second set was nuclear. At Polebrook village, three miles from school, some hundred rockets planted in a field pointed eastwards. Their direction varied with the latest cold war crisis—sometimes Moscow, sometimes Odessa or Leningrad, we guessed. Later I studied medicine at Cambridge University only fourteen miles from the USAF-RAF Alconbury base that housed the planet’s biggest arsenal of nuclear bombs, with plans and planes to deliver them.

Today, however, the Book of Revelation marks a millennial end to this bloody century and ushers in a warless Millennium. Swift, awesome, material progress, which flew warplanes and aimed missiles in our own lifetimes, can now conquer causes of war and stop it wasting lives and resources. History will celebrate how human awareness awoke from this unique twentieth century of both discovery and warfare, and converted swords into plowshares. Therefore, this millennial moment of the end of the twentieth century is timely for revisiting St. John’s vision of global unity. *Glorious Revelation* grasps 2000 AD as a convenient cusp of history for its accurate interpretation of the Book of Revelation of St. John. *Glorious Revelation* primarily sets out to bring its moving meaning to readers to a broadly traditional Christian readership. While *Glorious Revelation* is based as fully as possible on the revealed Bahá’í sources, its intent, nonetheless, is mainly to benefit the non-converted, rather than preach to the converted.

These Bahá’í sources credibly interpret the two main time prophecies of the Book of Revelation. This is to their credit, for timing is the key to prophecy. The first time prophecy, 391 years, interprets as the period running from 1453 AD through 1844 AD, and the second time prophecy of 1,260 years interprets to end in 1844 AD as well. These specific dates form the time base of interpretation for all the events coursing through the palace of the Book of Revelation. St. John’s compelling tale of an evolving Law (or Religion) of God echoes through the rooms and passages of “Revelation palace,” playing out from 95 AD to unite the Faiths. *Glorious Revelation* turns its prophetic pages to reveal it as a pre-history of the Faiths advancing the Law of God, the Religion of God, since 95 AD. Nor is it by chance that the Book of Revelation is the Bible’s most united book. As the highway bridges of US-1 link the Florida Keys, so the Book of Revelation connects monotheistic faiths, and focuses specifically on the three most recent. The first faith was Christianity, while the next two faiths came into being after the time of St. John.

The Bahá’í sources reveal, in piecemeal fashion, both many symbols of the Book of Revelation, and of its 394 verse total, an additional core 15% that repetition expands to 30%. The good news is that the long-awaited golden Millennium of the Book of Revelation coincides closely with our new millennium. In particular, the events prophesied by Chapters 1-16 are over. They already took place from 95 AD through 2000 AD. This includes the afflictions of Chapters 15 and 16 and even the last worst affliction

of Armageddon that began in the nineteenth century, next exploded in 1914 AD, then continued as warfare and cold war across the globe throughout the now ended twentieth century. You can hear the passing of Armageddon in Chapter 16, watch the collapse and recovery of the Greatest Depression in Chapters 17-19, and relish the blossoming golden Millennium in Chapters 20-22.

Inspired by these newly-revealed interpretations, I began writing *Glorious Revelation* in 1995 as a personal retirement plan for a year at most. After all, the readily accessible newly-revealed writings insert the patches of color and edge-pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of the mosaic floor of “Revelation palace.” All I had to do was identify the best version of the Book of Revelation available—many translations exist—and complete a parallel interpretation based on these revealed interpretations. But this was not to be. Ultimately, the very power of the interpretations themselves clarified translation of many tough, tricky Greek words and phrases too effectively to be ignored. So I had to learn Koine Greek and translate the Greek of the Book of Revelation myself. Fortunately its Koine street Greek lies somewhere between my proficient school Latin of five years and my fluent Hebrew from living eight years in Israel. Both my translation and interpretation strictly honored the warning against change of the Book of Revelation’s verses 22:18-19.

As a result, the challenge of *Glorious Revelation* steadily grew to keep me fascinated, continually clicking at the keyboard into the early hours. Translating and interpreting formed a continual, creative, instructive feedback loop. The actual interpretation I began by first faithfully inserting the newly revealed symbols and verses. Thus the landscape of *Glorious Revelation*’s jigsaw puzzle shines its symbols in the leafy greens of forests, the rippling blues of lakes, and the masonry browns of buildings, and its 30% revealed verses as edge-pieces and bridges between its landscaped regions. Subsequently, steadily pursuing the clues cast by St. John like lines and hooks throughout the crossword of his Book of Revelation, and applying sensitive logic connected interpretive jigsaw pieces and the closed gaps, step by step. Here and there, a rare flash of personal inspiration helped interpretation too. Now *Glorious Revelation*’s mosaic jigsaw puzzle extends as the floor of the palace of Revelation through all of its twenty-two chapter rooms.

St. John has kept readers of his Book of Revelation guessing for two millennia and has safeguarded its prophetic events. Its light of cloaked truth has continued to burn through spiritually dark ages. The Bahá’í sources name St. John as the author of the Book of Revelation, presumably as the apostle who wrote the Gospel in rather different Greek. It was he who, as bishop at Ephesus, was deported to Patmos Island as late as 95 AD at the age of ninety years, accompanied by his young disciple Prochorus. They lived in a particular cave across whose mouth the vision of St. John appeared, and from whose wall its voices spoke.

The different Greek of St. John’s Gospel and Book of Revelation can be medically explained by his brain aging in the interim, and by their very different subject matters. He published his Gospel as a logical young man to record the life and teachings of Jesus. In contrast, he dictated his Book of Revelation about the sights and sounds of his out-of-body vision at the age of ninety years. His brain surface processing language and logic had almost certainly shrunk, while more resilient deeper nerve cells and fibers could still formulate the emotive language for the sights, sounds, and feelings of his vision. Such change in his brain would mean his thinking language had probably regressed back to his native Aramaic and religious Hebrew. This would explain his quick-speak condensed Semitic Greek in the Book of Revelation. Perhaps he dictated the sights and sounds of his vision real-time to Prochorus in Aramaic or Hebrew, and he wrote it down in Koine Greek as fast as he could, joining 74% of its phrases with “and,” the ubiquitous conjunction *Kai*.

Shrewd St. John would relish the result—a Semitic stew cooked in a spicy pot of street Greek—as useful fate that keep his readers fascinated and guessing. Just translating, not even interpreting, lets him laugh you along and challenge you with his odd riddles, peppery puns, tantalizing tenses, and discerning word order. You discover his literary crossword codes that he cast as lines and hooks to connect twenty-two chapters in a web of discovery. In the process, your taste for this old wise prophet grows and deepening rapport with him helps you tease out his methods, meanings, and messages.

In childhood I always had to know the truth, however painful, which probably helped me study medicine, garner degrees, and pursue a fulfilling career in intensive care. Yet over the years I needed to find higher spiritual truths to balance the logic and art of medicine. In this regard, religious prophecies fulfilled over millennia, or even just centuries, held me in awe. Then, learning about its new interpretations, the Book of Revelation, this mother of prophecy, drew me along its spiritual path. These Bahá’í sources open its palace gate and introduce its Angel messenger of the first chapter room. He greets and escorts us through the rest of “Revelation palace,” through his seven Faiths of Chapters 2 and 3, his throne-room of Chapter 4 with its courtiers, and into his library of Chapter 5 to meet the Ram. Next, we read histories and hear heralds in its East wing of Chapters 6 through 10. Then we reach its great central hall of Chapter 11, from where the brilliant seven-fold light of 1844 AD illuminates its whole palace. There we witness a fresh execution of the Ram of Jesus. Subsequently, we pass on through troubled Muslim histories and afflictions, including Armageddon, in its West wing of Chapters 12 through 16. The seal histories, trumpet herald angels, and bowl afflictions act out in sets of seven in Chapters 6, 10, and 15, and recall the riddle of St. Ives: “As I was going to St. Ives, I met a man with seven wives. Each wife had seven sacks, each sack had seven cats, and each cat had seven kittens. How many were going to St. Ives?” The answer “One” is the poser of the riddle, here is the Angel of the Glory of God of Chapter 1 who reappears in many guises through the remaining Chapters.

Brevity is blessed, and to this end the direct parallel layout of *Glorious Revelation* presents a concise best interpretation as its single united agenda. Verso (left-side) pages first secure the translation of the original Book of Revelation of St. John, then the facing recto (right-side) pages display its matching interpretation. This parallel recto interpretation matches St. John’s verso original—paragraph by paragraph, verse by verse, phrase by phrase, conjunction by conjunction, and even comma by comma. The interpretation’s length and phrase order remain close to the original. It is written to be read from recto page to recto page, with the facing verso original opposite and ready as the authoritative source reference, even for readers who know the Book of Revelation. Further, this layout creates a built-in glossary of symbols accessible via the Index. Of necessity, chapters start unconventionally on verso pages. In addition, the interpretation tenses are set to 1995 and stagger time across the nineteen centuries of the Book of Revelation from its 95 AD publication year to its nineteenth centennial year, 1995 AD. This literary device drives the interpretation in vivid real time, distinguishes the interpretation even more from the original, and generates useful dialectic tension that catalyzed interpretation.

This translation of the original Book of Revelation diligently reviewed, compared, and revised previous translations based on Majority, Receptus and Critical Texts.^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7} The most exhaustive, Aune’s three-volume work,⁸ was invaluable, as was the concise Barclay Newman dictionary listing meanings by frequency of usage.⁹ The limited vocabulary of the Book of Revelation’s street (Koine or Common) Greek is like both quick-speak blunt Cockney English and the first Basic English vocabulary of the minimum of eight hundred words needed to define all words in a standard Oxford dictionary, that even renders Shakespeare quite well. The very limited vocabulary of street Greek has inherent inspirational depth. In addition, the act of translation strives for harmonious loyalty to both the Greek original and modern English meaning. For example, the literal “his voice was like a sound of many waters” renders as “his voice rushed like a waterfall.” Certain liberties kept a few sentences brief, for example, by changing a mid-sentence “saying” to an opening “They said,” or a “so that” to a “So....” And that wonderful wild-card conjunction, *Kai*, opening 74% of the Book of Revelation’s verses, generated a wealth of legitimate meaning. For *Kai* may stand as an introductory *And*, or simply breathe silence ahead of a new sentence, or translate from a wide range of English conjunctions.^{8†} Regardless of all this, the notorious street Koine Greek of the Book of Revelation is tough to translate. Indeed, one eminent translator privately admits that even he has often wavered over a word.

Inevitably, translations of the Book of Revelation are biased, usually conspicuously. Certainly, *Glorious Revelation* is. But its bias derives from source interpretations that prove themselves by markedly easing the translation of its fifty-odd tough, tricky Greek words and phrases that have tested translators and translations for nineteen centuries. Extensive footnotes detail many of them. The resulting translation is far closer to the original Greek than others. This very easing of translation boosts the cred-

ibility of the Bahá’í sources guiding it. A telling example is the phrase found in verse 10:7, “God proclaimed his servant prophets,” indicating that God’s proclamation was his prophet Manifestations themselves. But check any Bible and you will read, “God proclaimed to his servant prophets,” inserting a notional “to” before the word “prophets.” Yet creating this non-existent dative case proves inaccurate and unnecessary.

Meanings of prophecy vary, yet its song sings eternal. For the main purpose of prophecy is spiritual—which should be no surprise. Spiritual writings agree: “We speak one word and by it intend one and seventy meanings,”¹⁰ and “This is one of the meanings of the biblical story...reflect until you discover the others.”¹¹ You can thus interpret the single spiritual principle of a prophetic vision as separate valid histories recurring in different times and diverse places, all with the same spiritual purpose.¹² This concept transforms the popular notion that you can interpret prophecy “any way you want” to another plane. Indeed, over nineteen centuries, the multiple interpretations of the quintessential Book of Revelation have generated a whole classification of prophetic interpretation into *historicist*, *preterist*, *futurist*, *spiritual*, and now *revealed* categories. *Glorious Revelation* falls into, nay defines, the revealed category of interpretation by the Bahá’í sources, yet still projects its interpretations through historicist and futurist lenses.

Thus the beast of the Book of Revelation spiritually symbolizes beastly rulers and regimes. Through their own prophetic lens, Christians tend to view this beast as the Roman Empire persecuting Christianity. While through the lens of the later Faiths of *Glorious Revelation*, this same beast looms as the Umayyad Empire. Just as the Roman Empire once plagued Christianity, so, six centuries later, the Umayyad Empire plagued initially virtuous Islam. Lens by lens, prophecy’s spiritual telescope focuses on various valid interpretations. Its red lens may portray first-century Rome while its green lens displays seventh-century Arabia. Its beast dons period costumes from two eras and areas, one Roman marching uniform, the other Umayyad cavalry colors. Functionally, the dining room of “Revelation palace” lets you meet as well as eat, and its library lets you daydream as well as read. In this same context, Christians typically interpret the seven congregations of Chapters 1, 2, and 3 as specific congregations where they were and also as the whole Church in general. These two harmonious layers of interpretations are free of contradiction. Here, adding a third harmonious layer that interprets for and welcomes these congregations also as the religious faiths that they are, remains free of contradiction.

Yet, in spite of the validity of multiple meanings, *Glorious Revelation*’s layout deliberately commits to a single, concise, united, best interpretation. It shelves many sound, but less-preferred, alternatives and is especially influenced by the Middle East setting of the Book of Revelation. After all, St. John’s home turf was the Middle East—not only the central Holy Land home of monotheism but also the surrounding broader region. Further, the newly-revealed interpretations set the Book of Revelation firmly in the monotheistic Middle East. It was this same Middle East that saw the evolution of Christianity and two more monotheistic Faiths after 95 AD. The first was Islam in all its forms, for both better and worse, and it should be no surprise that this major Middle East faith, Islam, should prominently feature in the Book of Revelation.

For St. John in 95 AD, Islam was more than a twinkle in the eye, but still a fetal Faith, whose due date was 622 AD, five centuries later. Islam’s thunderous fast descent across the Middle East was important prophetic news about which St. John indeed prophesied. Indeed, his Book of Revelation prophesies Islam as one successor of the faith of Christianity, sheds fascinating insight into the spiritual and warrior character of Islam, and provides natural closure for the New Testament. Some historicist interpreters did discover warrior Islam in Chapter 9,¹ catching sight of its Umayyad locust cavalries swarming across the Middle East and Mediterranean world after 633 AD. They heard its cannons conquer Constantinople in 1453 AD. But they still stayed blind to the appearance of Muḥammad in the Book of Revelation, since they were deaf to his Islam. Nor did they identify Islam as the “beast trying to change times and laws for three and a half times” in Daniel 7:25, or realize that the recurring 1,260-day time prophecy of the Book of Revelation ran on the Muslim calendar.

Continuing with multiple Middle East meanings, Jerusalem and Babylon represent spiritually noble and destructive ideologies in any area or era. Jerusalem, once Christianity, here shines as a new *Faith of Glory*.

Babylon, once Rome, is here interpreted as cancerous materialism, while an alternative interpretation would also see Babylon as the general loss of spirituality by humanity itself. Likewise, “the image of the beast” in verses 13:11-16 portrays any ruler or regime duplicating a bestial predecessor’s systematic tax extortion and discrimination against minorities. Here, writ large for Empires dominating the Middle East, the bestial Ottoman Empire of 1299 through 1918 AD succeeds the Umayyad of 661 through 749 AD. Yet in St. John’s era the bestial Roman Emperor Domitian (82-96 AD also followed Nero (54-68 ad), and ruling the Middle East, the bestial Umayyad Empire also succeeded the Roman. Then just within Islam, Caliph Yazid poisoned his father Mu’awiyeh in 680 ad, the Abbasids overthrew the Umayyads in 749 ad (which means the second beast of verse 13:11 has a serious alternative to the Ottoman regime in this Abbasid regime), and in addition, the nineteenth century Persian Qajar regime imitated the Ottoman regime.

On a smaller scale, verse 9:4’s grass, plants, and trees of the territories occupied by the seventh century Umayyads portrayed both the benevolent standing orders reining in their cavalries to limit how much they hurt people and property, and also the Sabaeen, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and Christian congregations, houses of worship, and clergies under their occupation. Likewise, verse 13:1’s ocean of the Umayyads displayed both their Arabian seacoast of origin, and also the heretical ocean of their collective mind. In a similar vein, listings of people and subjects may assume other valid sequences. Thus Chapters 2 and 3’s Pergamos, Thyatira, and Sardis can be Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism in another credible order. Verses 6:2-3’s calf and human *Living Beings* or *Primary Figures* can be reversed as the *Servant of Glory* and the *Door to Glory*. Likewise, verses 14:6-11’s three herald messengers, verses 14:14 and 14:17’s two judges, and verse 21:2’s fifth and sixth Commandments, can be acceptably reordered—for, regardless of sequence, the guiding spiritual concept of each list remains true.

Glorious Revelation relies upon revealed year dates for time prophecies in the Book of Revelation. The Bahá’í sources use the tested year-for-a-day biblical principle of Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6. Expanding, a *month* (defined as 30 days by Genesis 7:11, 24, and 8:3-4) represents 30 years, and a *year* represents 360 years. The two time prophecies already mentioned ring in 1844 AD and toll the knell of Islam. Verse 9:15 sounds the first 391-day time prophecy (a *day*, a *month*, and a *year*) echoing amidst canons booming Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in the 1453 AD. Count these 391 days as years from 1453 AD, and you reach 1844 AD. Chapters 11 and 12 broadcast the second 1,260-day time prophecy loud and clear, four ways, seven times, amid proclamations of spiritual and military Islam and its successor faith. Count these 1,260 days as Islamic years from the first Islamic year of 1 AH (*Anno Hijrah*), or 622 AD, and you obtain 1260 AH, that was 1844 AD.

Historically, the prophetic year 1844 AD signaled the taking of effect of 1839 AD’s Ottoman *Tanzimat* reforms in Palestine. These general reforms attempted a revival of the Ottoman Empire, but too late and too little. Yet the freedoms they brought improved the lot of Palestinian Jews and Christians. Thus 1844 AD was the spiritual conception of the State of Israel, which sparked Jewish settlement of Palestine over a complicated century-long gestation before Israel’s birth in 1948 CE.

Many time prophecies outside the Book of Revelation identify 1844 AD, too. Counting the “2,300 days to the end of desolation” of Daniel 8:14 as years from the decree of Artaxerxes of 457 BC that finalized the consecration of the rebuilt Jerusalem Temple renders 1844 AD (no 0 AD/BC year existed). This decree was the most important of four—the first of Cyrus of 536 BC (Ezra 1), the second of Darius of 519 BC (Ezra 6), the third of Artaxerxes of 457 BC (Ezra 7) and the fourth of Artaxerxes of 444 BC (Nehemiah 2). An entirely Muslim time prophecy predicted the return of the Shi’i Twelfth Imam a thousand years after his disappearance in 260 AH (873 AD), namely in 1260 AH, that is, 1844 AD. Even more time prophecies for 1844 AD appear in Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Islam.

Such remarkable inter-Faith agreement prophesying 1844 AD supports a compelling case for both inter-Faith unity and also prophecy¹³ in general. Further, the timing of *Glorious Revelation* is ahead of many other interpretations because 1844 AD guides it. Specifically, prophetic events up to the end of Chapter 16 have already been fulfilled, including the last, the Battle of Armageddon.

The word *Armageddon* transliterates as *Har Megiddo*, which is Hebrew for *Mount Megiddo*. Megiddo alone, once a military settlement stabling war horses, is now just a ten-acre tel, an uninhabited archeo-

logical 200-foot hillock. In Hebrew, *tel* is a small hill, usually man-made, a *giva'* is a hill, and *har* is a real mountain. Any map shows Mount Carmel is the sole mountain above Megiddo, and for this and other reasons *Glorious Revelation* identifies Mount Carmel as Mount Megiddo or Armageddon. Chapter 16 develops its sequential "Armageddon series" of historically connected interpretations, all symbolized by the spiritual spot of Mount Carmel. Verse 14 narrates the "warfare of the greatest day of God," then verse 16 names "Armageddon," but ahead of verses 17-21 that actually explode its warfare.

The first history in this Armageddon series was spiritual warfare when the Persian clergy and government tried to extinguish the Faith of Glory after 1844 AD, martyring 20,000 followers, and continuing persecutions through the twentieth century. Eighteen centuries earlier, Christianity underwent similar persecutions. The second Armageddon, around 1870 AD, was the *Proclamation to the Kings* from the region of Mount Carmel, an extensive systematic correspondence methodically urging world leaders to make peace, but they chose war. The outcome was the third Armageddon of the Balkans, where World War I started in 1914 AD. The fourth Armageddon was the decisive final battle ending World War I in 1918 AD, literally at Mount Carmel and Megiddo. British General Allenby decisively routed the army of the Ottoman Empire that was also enemy to the Faith of Glory. [Earlier in Jerusalem, my great uncle had been shot down from a balloon and my aunt and uncle-in-law-to-be were Jerusalem children presenting flowers to victorious Allenby.] Finally, the fifth most massive Armageddon, writ large in *Glorious Revelation*, was manifest as this whole twentieth century of worldwide warfare and cold war since 1914 AD.

In summary, Mount Carmel, for the Faith of Glory, symbolizes an Armageddon battle series that started as Middle East inter-Faith persecution, continued through appeals for peace, then opened as World War I in the Balkans, included the British defeat of the Ottoman Empire, and ultimately became the global war lasting this whole twentieth century. Now, at century and millennium end, increasingly effective global initiatives against warfare augur enough global wisdom, power, and hope for a new charter of nations to extinguish warfare and guide humanity towards its millennium of peace.

However, 2000 AD only puts us at the start of Chapters 17-19 that bode a pending Greatest Depression first. Chapter 17 identifies Babylon as systematic cancerous materialism, narrating how empire after empire have thereby abused humanity for three millennia. Cancerous materialism controlled, in particular, a series of ancient Empires: Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, Rome and Byzantium. These seven were ethically the biggest and worst, the most imposing ones that dominated the Middle East before, during, and after St. John's time. Aptly, Chapter 17 also explains prophetic interpretation, using the whore, waters, beast, and city as its examples in the context of cancerous materialism. Next, Chapter 18 describes a Greatest Depression, worse than the 1930s, that destroys cancerous materialism, and spiritually corrects the Dow-Jones and similar indices, ringing and wringing out cancerous materialism to stop it persuasively and obsessively putting things before people. Verses 11-13 indicate sequential market crashes—gold early, goods next, transport later, and labor last (giving workers some respite). This is an unpopular subject to broach at a relatively prosperous time in the West, and its exact timing cannot be known. Suffice it to say that according to this interpretation of *Glorious Revelation*, it will start suddenly and surprise everybody, and lasts a full chapter! Then Chapter 19 describes its outcome of spiritual awakening and sharing of God's material bounty. Later, spiritual economics features as one positive new commandment of Chapter 21's Twelve Commandments of the advancing Law of God. Last, the golden Millennial light of Chapters 20-22 dawns as the glorious garden of "Revelation palace," blossoming in unity and peace.

We have already seen how the time prophecies of the Book of Revelation synchronize with those of other faiths. Indeed, the influence of the Book of Revelation extends far beyond its strictly Christian origin. Its central sacrificial figure, the Ram, leads the way. This *arnion*, the diminutive of *arnen*, meaning sheep, appears in verse 5:6 and translates as "young Ram." The traditional translation, "Lamb," is a misnomer, since right from verse 5:6 the arnion possesses horns and is angry in verses 6:16-7—both typical of a ram, not a lamb. Rams were also sacrificial animals just like lambs. This Ram, the Door of Jesus, was his prophesied Second Coming, not his First. For this Ram prophesying Jesus in hindsight has little point. In any case, Jesus is named simply Jesus in many verses. Instead, this Ram is the Door of Jesus who was his also-sacrificed Second Coming.

This Door or Ram of Jesus was a Persian Manifestation of God in Persia named the Báb. He was born in 1819 AD, proclaimed in 1844 AD, and was executed in 1850 AD. His name, the Báb, translates as “Door” or “Gate” as interchangeably *thura* does in Greek. This name lets *Glorious Revelation* interpret the *thura* or Door of verses 3:8, 3:20, and 4:1 as him. In 1850 AD it was Persian rulers and Muslim clergy executing him by firing squad. But his followers and Western observers reported that the 750 bullets of the first firing squad missed him. He vanished but was found miraculously unscathed in his cell completing his last, previously interrupted, dictation. Then the 750 bullets from the Muslim squad, replacing the first now-deserted Armenian squad, killed him. Bullets pierced this Second Coming of the Ram as crucifixion nails pierced his First Coming as the Lamb of Jesus. In 1899 AD the Báb’s hidden remains were taken to Mount Carmel for burial, entombing him as another Elijah beside the tomb of the first Elijah. (In Christianity John the Baptist had fulfilled this same role).

Yet, in 1844 AD, Millennialists,¹⁵ who had tracked down biblical prophecies in order to greet the Second Coming of Jesus, missed him. They got the time right, but neither his place nor identity. For they assumed that, somehow, Jesus would simply appear, miraculously, with the clouds, in the sky, for everyone, no matter where, to see. Such literal Christian expectations for the Second Coming of Jesus were not met by the Báb, any more than similar literal Jewish Messianic expectations had been met by Jesus eighteen centuries before. For orthodox religion insists that prophecies be fulfilled literally,¹⁶ thereby hiding the sequential dawning of Messiahs and Second Comings. As a result, the Messiah who comes is never the one expected!

Therefore the Book of Revelation is a unique pre-history, describing the evolving Law or Religion of God that its temple represents, advancing since its publication as event advancing in Christianity, Islam, and now the latest Bahá’í Faith, which together form the Law of God. In *Glorious Revelation* the Bahá’í Faith, which reveals its symbols and verses,^{12,17,18,19} is named the “Faith of Glory.” In this context, the Book of Revelation recognizes the earlier monotheistic Faiths of Sabaeism, Judaism, Zarathustrianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

This latest Bahá’í Faith was born when the Báb proclaimed in 1844 AD, its first calendar year, 1 BE (Bahá’í Era). In Persian its name derives from *bahá*, meaning “glory,” and the Faith’s foremost Manifestation of God is named Bahá’u’lláh, meaning “Glory of God.” Further, the grand global birth cry of the Bahá’í Faith announces two Manifestations of God instead of just one, and twenty-four founding disciples instead of just the twelve sons of Israel, disciples of Jesus, or Imams of Muḥammad. The Bahá’í Faith declares that the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh are the twin Manifestations whom God has promised to every Faith—not least Christianity and Islam. The Báb preceded, and opened his Door, to his greater successor Manifestation of God, Bahá’u’lláh, who was a contemporary Teheran nobleman born in 1817 AD.²⁰ The Báb and Bahá’u’lláh are the most recent of a series of Manifestations of God including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Zarathustra, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, and Muḥammad, who, from age to age, have successively taught our species the Law of God now advancing to global status. Today, its latest Bahá’í Faith stands historically where Christianity stood around 156 AD.

Bahá’u’lláh proclaimed himself in 1863 AD and led the Bahá’í Faith forward in spite of being in prison most of his life. In 1892 AD he died and was buried in Ottoman Palestine, now Israel. Bahá’u’lláh was the Angel of the exalted Jesus in Chapter 1 of the Book of Revelation, with white hair, flaming eyes, and a radiant face. These descriptions in verses 14–16 accurately reflect his physical features. Further, his known genealogy fits both lineages, the “root” and “offspring of David,” of verses 5:5 and 22:16. The Book of Revelation’s title “Father” also applies to Bahá’u’lláh.^{21,22,23,24} For this title only once applied to Jesus,²⁵ whom the title “Son” suits best.

Another Book of Revelation title, *Christos*, equivalent to the Hebrew *Mashiach*, has the exact literal meaning “anointed” and derives from ceremonial anointing of kings and prophets by Jews, and of political and religious leaders by Greeks. Yet, writ large, the title *Anointed* describes all the Manifestations of God passing through the millennia, including, but not limited to, Jesus. *Christos* is Jesus Christ for Christians, *Mashiach* is the awaited Messiah for Jews, and Bahá’u’lláh is this era’s Millennial Messiah for Bahá’ís, with Jesus and Muhammad Messiahs of previous cycles of the Law of God. *Glorious Revelation* therefore applies context to translate *Christos* as either “Christ” or “Messiah.” Again, the cluster of titles

“First and Last,” “Beginning and End,” “Alpha and Omega”^{20,26,27,28} defines Manifestations of God as first beginners and final enders of the religious cycles that steadily advance the Law of God through the millennia. These titles first describe God in verse 1:8, next introduce the 95 AD Angel of the exalted Jesus in verses 1:11 and 17, then proclaim him as the exalted Bahá'u'lláh eighteen centuries later in verses 21:6 and 22:13.

The writings of altogether four Bahá'í primary figures are authoritative. The foremost are Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb, and the others, the Faith's *Servant of Glory*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and its *Guardian*, Shoghi Effendi. Other interpretations of the Book of Revelation based on the Bahá'í sources,^{29,30,31,32,33,34} like *Glorious Revelation*, are simply regarded as opinion. Such strictness boosts the very authority of the interpretations that the primary figures reveal. The Epilogue lists their available interpretations for the Book of Revelation, verse by verse, on pages 145–48.³⁵ Bahá'u'lláh's 1862 AD Book of Certitude [Kitáb-i-Íqán] reveals symbols in the Book of Revelation in extensive detail.³⁵ Subsequently 'Abdu'l-Bahá interprets the core 15% of its 394 verses; that repetition expands to 30%.^{17,35,‡} He writes further, “The Book of Revelation produces wonderful effects in minds, and causes hearts to be attracted.”³⁶ Then the Guardian expands the interpretations for key verses.^{18,19,35} All their relevant writings are scattered piecemeal across a century in sacred publications. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has also interpreted other prophecies piecemeal: Daniel, but only verses 8:13–17, 9:24–26, and 12:6–7, 11–12;³⁷ and Isaiah, but only verses 9:6–9, 11:1–10, 43:1, 48:12, and 55:12.³⁸ Bahá'í revealed writings do not interpret the Book of Revelation from beginning to end. For its interpretation has helped teach this Bahá'í Faith, but has not been an end in itself. Instead, the interpreted symbols and verses have helped people like Moffett,²⁹ Riggs,³⁰ Sears,³¹ Motlagh,³² Sours,³³ Tai-Seale,³⁴ and me fill the gaps. *Glorious Revelation*, for its part, faithfully incorporates revealed symbols and verses as cornerstones from which to build its interpretation of the rest. Bahá'í “pilgrim notes,” also exist as hearsay reports, and the few that interpret the Book of Revelation were written by western Bahá'ís who met 'Abdu'l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi.

One such report by Ruth Moffett identifies the Angel of Jesus of Chapters 1 as Bahá'u'lláh, and the congregations as faiths. Fortunately a letter that Shoghi Effendi wrote to her supports her, in that it states, “He is the Father and all previous dispensations led up to him.”³⁹ She further quotes him unsubstantiated, saying, “The Book of Revelation is the Master Bridge revealed by Christ for the followers of all religions, leading to the Kingdom of God upon the earth; and Bahá'u'lláh holds the seven in his right hand...”⁴⁰

Then, Shoghi Effendi writes for Chapter 4 that the twenty-four Elders around the throne in verse 4:4 were the twenty-four founders [sic] of the Bahá'í Faith of whom at least nineteen were known as the Letters of the Living.⁴¹ The odd but accurate Greek defining the throne positions helps considerably. Verse 4:6 places the four Living Beings both upon and also around the throne. Not to be outdone, verse 5:6 places the Lamb or Ram simultaneously both at the center of the throne and Living Beings and also among the Elders. Then verse 7:17 has the Ram partly sharing the throne. In fact, these three verses spell out a Bahá'í *Who's Who* for the overlap of the Persons Enthroned, the Living Beings, and the Elders of Chapter 4. When read in the light of the interpretation, the odd Greek wording is seen to be accurate and becomes clear. For the four Living Beings are the primary Bahá'í figures and also four of the twenty-four Elders. Verses 4:2–3's and 5:6's God's two Manifestations on the throne are Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb, who are also two of the four Living Beings. Seen in reverse, the twenty-four Founders include the four primary Bahá'í figures and another twenty founders, and the four primary Bahá'í figures include Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb as well as 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi.

The patches of color and edge pieces of *Glorious Revelation's* jigsaw mosaic of the Book of Revelation, namely the revealed symbols and verses, join other verses in its crossword puzzle and decode their meanings, too. Repetition already expands the revealed core 15% of the 394 verse total to 30%. For example, two of the three revealed “Woes” of verse 11:14 also appear in verses 8:13 and 9:12. Then St. John's extensive crossword clues, the literary lines and hooks he cast throughout his Book of Revelation, are trigger-phases and link-words like the ones Friedman discovered in Genesis,⁴² and they connect the other 70% of verses in various ways. Date prophecies join together mathematically, small differences in repeating phrases become leads, symbols reveal meanings at both spiritual and material levels, and Hebraisms make new sense.

For example, the “mighty” angel appearing in verses 5:2, 10:1, and 18:21, simply interprets as one person, Bahá’u’lláh. Four horses that neigh differently in verses 6:1–8, 14:20, and 19:18, still gallop throughout true to character as corrupt theology, widespread warfare, economic injustice, and wanton death, wherever they are. The 391-year prophetic period of verse 9:15 ends exactly in the 1844 AD of Chapters 11 and 12. Clouds double as glory and opposition, horses as harmful spiritual and military forces, and earthquakes as doubts and warfare. The Hebraism, “curse of war” of verse 22:3 reveals meaning for the otherwise solitary bare word “curse”—thanks to Aune. St. John’s literary lines and hooks join his hitherto concealed 70% of verses in a web of discovery of *Glorious Revelation*’s single united agenda. Once you recognize and catch your first line, grasping the others comes more easily....

In summary, *Glorious Revelation* turns the prophetic pages of the Book of Revelation and reveals it as a pre-history of Christianity, Islam, and the Bahá’í Faith of Glory serially advancing one Law of God, the Religion of God, since 95 AD. I take sole responsibility for *Glorious Revelation*. It was conceived, incubated, hatched, and nurtured to fly on balanced wings of scholarship and spirituality as an independent investigation of truth. Encouragement and help from friends, well-wishers, and fellow truth seekers in all Faiths made it possible.

† additionally, along with, also, alternatively, as, as for, as well as, at this, because, behold, but, certainly, consequently, continuing, especially, even, even so, exactly, for, further, hereupon, however, in addition, in other words, in particular, including, inclusive of, in other words, indeed, instead, just, last, like, meaning, meanwhile, moreover, namely, next, nonetheless, notwithstanding, now, nevertheless, or, particularly, rather, regardless, specifically, so, so that, still, subsequently, such as, that, that is, that is to say, then, thereupon, together with, though, throughout, when, whereas, which, while, who, or with!

‡ Verses 1:6, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17, 20; 2:7, 17, 28; 3:3, 5, 12, 21; 4:1, 4; 6:14; 7:15, 17; 8:5, 13; 9:1, 11, 12; 11:1–19 (full chapter); 12:1–6; 13:11, 12, 17, 18; 14:1, 8, 14; 15:5, 6, 8; 16:1–21 (full chapter); 15–21; 17:12, 14; 18:2; 19:1, 11, 15, 16; 21:1–7, 9–17, 19, 22, 23; 22:1, 2, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19.

Notes:

- 1) Gregg (1997), *Revelation, Four Views*, pp. 174–201.
- 2) Farstad (1994), *Greek English Interlinear New Testament*.
- 3) Caird (1966), *Revelation of Saint John*.
- 4) Lamsa (1968), *Holy Bible: Aramaic of the Peshitta*.
- 5) *New English Bible with the Apocrypha* (1970).
- 6) *New American Bible* (1991).
- 7) *Hebrew Bible* (1962).
- 8) Aune (1997), *Biblical Commentary, Revelation*.
- 9) Barclay Newman (1993), *Concise Greek-English Dictionary*.
- 10) Bahá’u’lláh (1976), *Kitáb-i-Íqán (Book of Certitude)*, p. 255.
- 11) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1984), *Some Answered Questions* (abbreviated SAQ), p. 126.
- 12) Bahá’u’lláh (1976), *Kitáb-i-Íqán (Book of Certitude)*, pp. 33, 68, 72.
- 13) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1984), SAQ, p. 71.
- 14) Bahá’u’lláh (1976), *Proclamation to the Kings*.
- 15) See separate bibliography of Millennialists Writings, p. 153.
- 16) Bahá’u’lláh (1976), *Kitáb-i-Íqán (Book of Certitude)*, pp. 18, 26, 80–82.
- 17) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1984), SAQ, pp. 45–61, 67–72, 219.
- 18) Shoghi Effendi (1974), *God Passes By* (abbreviated GPB), pp. 7–8, 53–58, 69, 92–95, 169, 195, 213, 239, 249.
- 19) Shoghi Effendi (1996), *The Promised Day Come*, pp. 75, 53, 202, 302.
- 20) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1982), *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 12–13.
- 21) Bahá’u’lláh (1988), *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 57.
- 22) Bahá’u’lláh (1978), *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 11, 14–15.
- 23) Shoghi Effendi (1980), *The Promised Day Come*, pp. 32–33, 45, 103.
- 24) Shoghi Effendi (1974), GPB, p. 94–95.
- 25) Gospel of St. John 14:7–11.
- 26) Bahá’u’lláh, (1976), *Kitáb-i-Íqán (Book of Certitude)*, pp. 161–164.
- 27) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, (1984), SAQ, p. 219.
- 28) Shoghi Effendi, (1974), GPB, p. 95.

- 29) Moffett, Ruth, (1977), *New Keys to Book of Revelation* (abbreviated NKBR).
- 30) Riggs, Robert, (1981), *Apocalypse Unsealed*.
- 31) Sears, William, (1980), *Thief in the Night: The Case of the Missing Millennium*.
- 32) Motlagh (1992), *I Shall Come Again*.
- 33) Sours, Michael, (1997), *Understanding Biblical Prophecy*.
- 34) Tai-Seale, Thomas, (1992), *Thy Kingdom Come*.
- 35) See the Epilogue of revealed interpretations of symbols and verses on pages 145-148.
- 36) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, (1984), SAQ, p. 253.
- 37) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1984), SAQ, pp. 36-44.
- 38) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1984), SAQ, pp. 62-66.
- 39) Shoghi Effendi, June 8 1952, letter to Ruth Moffett.
- 40) Moffett (1977), NKBR, p. xvii and p. 7.
- 41) Shoghi Effendi (1974), GPB, p. 7-8.
- 42) Friedman (1998), *Hidden Book in Bible*.

The Development of Humankind

Julio Savi

Human beings may be considered as the most perfect creatures originating from the evolutionary process. They have in themselves all the perfections of all other creatures. They share with the mineral world the power of attraction, with the vegetable world the power of growth, with the animal world the power of sense perception, voluntary motion, memory, and natural emotions or instincts. The similarities between human beings and animals, especially apes, are such that many consider human beings to be animals themselves. However, unique among all the creatures, human beings also have the power of rational perception. This power enables them to investigate reality and to perceive what is true, both in the inner and in the outer worlds. This power is innate in them as a potentiality, but for its fuller actualization the guidance and cooperation of other human beings are required, through a process of education.

The cognitive asset acquired through the process of education includes the knowledge of both the outer and the inner worlds. Knowledge of the outer world concerns, in a broad sense, science and technology. As to knowledge of the inner world, first of all, human beings know their own bodies and all those behaviors that are required for certain physical goals to be achieved—preservation, reproduction and regulation. These behaviors, common to human beings and animals, are usually termed instincts or natural emotions. In the course of the process of their education human beings learn a certain control over both their bodies and instincts, a control which is particularly precious for social life. In this respect, human beings are different from the animals. Whereas the animals are completely subjected to their instincts, human beings have the capacity of shaping their behaviors on the ground of the results of their rational investigation of reality. In other words, they also have the capacity of throwing off the yoke of nature, whereas all animals are always and wholly subjected to it. We can therefore distinguish in human beings a lower, material nature, which they have in common with animals, i.e. their bodies and instincts, and a higher, specifically human nature, which distinguishes them from the animals, i.e. their power of rational perception.

Through their power of rational perception, human beings become conscious of a third aspect of their nature. Initially, this consciousness may be perceived as a love of exaltation, a desire to reach a greater world than the world in which one is, and to mount to a higher sphere than that in which one is. This love of exaltation, which seems not to exist in the animals, is the simplest expression of that which may be defined as the divine or spiritual nature of human beings. Yet while human beings begin to perceive this love of exaltation, they continue to be pressed by their instincts and thus to perceive natural emotions typical of their material nature. Their natural emotions drive them toward the satisfaction of their instincts and, therefore, toward self-centered behaviors, basically connected with the plane of physical existence and conducive to inevitable conflicts with other human beings. The love for exaltation, on the contrary, leads them to long, albeit obscurely, for an inner harmony with themselves and the outer world, a harmony which requires reverse qualities like detachment from the self and the material world.

Therefore a tension arises in them between their emotions, born from their material nature, and the love of exaltation, born from their divine or spiritual nature. This tension is often perceived as a feeling of inner disharmony, discontent, loneliness, and vanity. At the same time their material nature dictates self-centered behaviors conducive to conflicts with other human beings, which aggravate that feeling. This condition of inner and outer conflict is so unpleasant, in itself and in its consequences, that human beings want to escape from it.

Human beings pursue this goal in different ways, according to their individualities and the ideas they have acquired through their educational process and from their experiences. In the personal sphere, often the path of amusement, in its archaic meaning of 'diversion of the attention (as from the truth or one's real intent)' (Webster, 74), is instinctively chosen. Human beings try to divert their attention from that inner feeling of discomfort and to occupy themselves with other activities: not only play activities in the exact meaning of the word, but also certain kinds of active works and even certain philosophical thoughts, in which a refuge is, more or less unconsciously, sought. However, amusements, whatever they are, do not solve conflicts; they only conceal and postpone them. In the social sphere, sometimes human beings look for meeting points, sharing of ideas, centers of aggregation—such as family, nation, political ideals—that may help in overcoming conflicts. However, such efforts invariably prove themselves to be conducive to limited results and not to satisfactory solutions of those problems.

The humanistic philosophies prevailing in the contemporary world maintain that the development of the power of rational perception, i.e. intellectual development, is the highest stage of maturity which human beings can attain and that this growth is all they have and need so that they may gradually solve any problem. However, history demonstrates that the power of rational perception is not able to formulate comprehensive views of reality, to elaborate standards of values, to discover and understand metaphysical or spiritual reality, to find effective motivations for human struggle against natural emotions, to bestow upon human beings the required forces and energies so that they may conquer in themselves the binding power of nature and manifest their potential divine or spiritual nature, or to conceive and create a society functioning according to the reality of that divine nature. So much so, that contemporary societies are characterized on the one hand by a great development of the power of rational perception and on the other by widespread feelings of anxiety and restlessness, by strong tensions between individuals and peoples who seem to be confronted with enormous difficulties in their relations and communications. Savater, the Spanish philosopher, writes in this regard: "...the only thing we agree about is that we do not all agree" (*Ética per un fillio*, 6). In view of these facts, how can we believe intellectual maturity to be the last stage in human development and thus in the whole evolution? Will such a fascinating and rich adventure end in this disturbing condition of disharmony and conflict or, at best, in the apathy of skepticism, in the *carpe diem* of epicurism, in the *ataraxy* of cynicism? Will all these disquieting inner and outer tensions remain unsolved or ignored?

Religions are unanimous in their answer to these questions. Beyond their development on the material and intellectual level, human beings can go through a further transformation: the attainment of spirituality, something that draws them closer and closer to a longed-for inner and outer harmony.

Spirituality may be defined as the consciousness of the Divine, which human beings can attain with the assistance of the Divine itself. It may be also defined as a deliberate and conscious process whereby a human being becomes conscious, through the instrumentality of his rational perception, of the divine qualities with which he is endowed by birth (for example: equity and honesty; charity and selflessness; courtesy and patience; chastity and holiness; faithfulness and loyalty; joy and radiance, etc.), qualities which constitute his divine or spiritual nature.

The acquisition of this consciousness, i.e. spiritual growth, implies a passage from an inferior to a superior plane of existence. Human beings are born from the world of creation: it is their first or material birth. Through their spiritual growth, they learn how to actualize on the physical plane of their existence the potential qualities of their divine or spiritual nature, which do not belong to this world but to the worlds of Spirit. Therefore, in the Gospels, man's spiritual transformation is often defined as second birth (cf. John 3:1-8). Such a transformation cannot occur through mere human powers; an external contribution is required from the superior worlds of Spirit, just as the transformation of a seed into a tree requires the energies emanating from the sun, the mineral substances absorbed from the air and soil, and the care of a farmer.

All religions explain that man receives this assistance from God Himself through the guidance of His Revelation. God proposes a very important and meaningful Covenant to humankind: If you want to be assisted in your efforts toward the solution of your inner and outer, personal and collective conflicts, learn how to know and love the guidance of Revelation which God Himself sends to you from the worlds

of Spirit. At the same time, put in practice its counsels, following the guidance of this knowledge and using the power of your own love. In this way you will become aware of your potential spiritual qualities by practical experience. You will learn how to live in the world of matter, according to the laws of the worlds of Spirit and thus you will learn how to solve your own conflicts.

Divine revelation is sent through spiritual Leaders who manifest to humankind as much of their Creator as people can understand. History has handed down a record of some of them. They are the founders of the world revealed religions: Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muḥammad, Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. These spiritual Masters guide human beings in their spiritual progress in two ways. On the one hand, they reveal the laws of the worlds of Spirit, whose knowledge is required so that a person may live according to the laws of those worlds. On the other, they bestow upon us the required spiritual forces so that the instruments of our material nature may be bent to the purposes of our divine or spiritual nature.

This concept will be more easily understood through a metaphor. The worlds of Spirit can be compared to the world of matter and spiritual laws to the physical ones. We must know the reality and the laws of the material universe so that we may properly employ our bodies. Matter is weighty—left by itself, it falls down. Water does not permit breathing. Fire burns. Walking blindly is dangerous; and so on. If a person were deprived of these simple notions, he could not survive. In the worlds of Spirit it is just the same. Spirit is love. Any soul who is not able to love experiences pain. Envy and jealousy deprive the soul of the forces of Spirit. Lying burns as a fire. A spiritually blind man, i.e. a man who ignores spiritual reality and laws, cannot advance in the worlds of Spirit. The Founders of religions reveal to humankind this reality and these laws in a comprehensible way. The language used by the Founders of the past religions, while accomplishing their task of assisting a still infant humankind in its difficult spiritual journey, has been interpreted throughout the centuries in such a way that today it is sometimes an obstacle in some people's understanding of the spiritual verities. Those spiritual laws were presented as codes, whose disobedience—"sin"—involved the torments of hell. Today we can understand that such words have a metaphorical meaning and, therefore, the idea that the Founders of the world religions revealed oppressive codes is a misinterpretation of their intentions. They have been careful parents willing to guide us along our difficult journey toward the attainment of that conscious maturity that they wish for us and for which we have been created. In fact, our final and most important transformation, the spiritual one, is much easier if we let ourselves be guided by the light of our awareness of the reality and the laws of Spirit as revealed by them.

As to the forces required to bend the capacities and qualities of our material nature toward the superior purposes of our spiritual nature, an analogy will be useful. Life is possible upon the earth because of the energies released by the sun and used by the creatures of the earth for their survival. In the spiritual worlds the Founders of religions are like a sun. Spiritual forces emanate from them, of which anyone can partake by exposing himself to their influence. The awareness of the great gift vouchsafed upon humankind by those Masters binds human hearts to them in a feeling of gratitude and love, often called faith. This feeling is in itself a force of priceless value in the struggle to overcome material nature and attain spiritual growth.

Thus human life is a school. The teacher is the spiritual Master, the text is the revealed book, the pupil is each human being, the lessons are the facts themselves from which each human being can learn how to discover in himself the qualities required to meet those lessons according to spiritual laws. Very often pain is the feeling of inadequacy a human being experiences when confronted by a situation that he has not yet learned how to meet spiritually. Further consequences of spiritual immaturity are interpersonal conflicts, since human beings that have not yet learned how to overcome selfishness through selflessness are likely to come into conflict with one another.

Religions may thus be considered as the instruments through which God bestows upon humankind this precious guidance: concepts through whose knowledge and enforcement human beings are enabled to overcome many of their limitations. Therefore, ethical teachings are a fundamental part of all religions. And in this respect religiousness can be defined as obedience to God's commandments.

If we study the spiritual and ethical teachings of all religions, we may discover a gradual improvement of ethical standards in the succeeding religions and a simultaneous widening of the spheres within which men are required to abide by those standards.

Let us consider, for instance, that group of religions that flourished in the so-called Near and Middle East. The story of Adam and Eve can be seen as referring to the first time when human beings began to understand the difference between good and evil, right and wrong. Moreover, the figure of Adam-Eve could be seen as a primal human psycho-physical unity, whereby Adam symbolizes the spirit and Eve the soul. The soul is bound to the material world, whereof it is conscious, and ignores the spirit, wherefrom it comes, although at the beginning it is unaware of it. The world, in the form of a devil-snake, tempts her through the fruits of its tree and incites her to infringe the (psychological-spiritual) space her Creator has forbidden, exploiting her curiosity and ignorance. Thus soul-Eve enslaves spirit-Adam to the material world. The unhappy condition of exile and remoteness from a heavenly (spiritual) world, wherefrom Eve comes, in which she finds herself after her transgression, teaches her the difficult consequences of breaking the law and indirectly encourages her not to break the law in the future. The story of Noah teaches that when a society fails to act on the distinction between good and evil, right and wrong, it must face great difficulties. It also may suggest the idea that the remedy to such a plight and the method whereby a balance may be restored and preserved within society is to obey to a covenant whose contents is typically ethical. The Noachid Covenant has been defined by Küng as “*an ethic for humankind*” and described “*as a minimum basic order of reverence for life: not to murder*” (‘since God has made human beings in his image’ [Genesis 9:6]) and not to eat the flesh of animals who are still living...prohibitions against theft, fornication, idolatry and blasphemy and the commandment to observe the law (to set up courts). (Judaism, p. 33) According to Küng, Abraham is understood by the three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) as a model respectively of “*loyal obedience to the law...unshakable faithfulness...unconditional submission (= Islam)*” (Judaism, p. 14), which he showed through his willingness to sacrifice his son, on the altar of God. These virtues may be considered as the kernel of the ethics of Abraham’s religion and the foundation of the ethics taught by all the religions of this group. The same Küng describes the Decalogue as the divine “*guidance for a truly human life which was made possible and demanded by God.*” (Judaism, p. 42) In the meantime, independently from Judaism, Zoroastrism flourished in a not very distant land. Campbell describes it as a “*potent mythical formula for the reorientation of the human spirit...summoning man to an assumption of autonomous responsibility for the renovation of the universe in God’s name....*” (Occidental Mythology, p. 190) This renewal implies the establishment of peace, order and justice in the world through human action. Jesus may be considered as the founder of the highest ethics of personal sanctification of the whole world history. Jesus Himself synthesizes His own ethical teachings thus: “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*” (Matthew 22:37-40) Muḥammad stressed the concepts of each human being’s responsibility for his own actions, and the equality of all before God. A list of prescriptions and prohibitions very similar to the Decalogue may be easily identified in the Qur’ān, in Surih 17 (Children of Israel):

Set not up another god with God, lest thou sit thee down disgraced, helpless.
Thy Lord hath ordained that ye worship none but him; and, kindness to your parents, whether one or both of them attain to old age with thee: ...
And to him who is of kin render his due, and also to the poor and to the wayfarer; yet waste not wastefully,
And let not thy hand be tied up to thy neck; nor yet open it with all openness, lest thou sit thee down in rebuke, in beggary. ...
Kill not your children for fear of want: for them and for you will we provide. Verily, the killing them is a great wickedness.
Have nought to do with adultery; for it is a foul thing and an evil way:
Neither slay any one whom God hath forbidden you to slay, unless for a just cause: ...
And touch not the substance of the orphan, unless in an upright way, till he attain his age of

strength: And perform your covenant; verily the covenant shall be enquired of:
And give full measure when you measure, and weigh with just balance. ...
And follow not that of which thou hast no knowledge; because the hearing and the sight and
the heart, —each of these shall be enquired of:
And walk not proudly on the earth, for thou canst not cleave the earth, neither shalt thou reach
to the mountains in height:
All this is evil; odious to thy Lord. (17:23–39)

Thus Küng's ideas may be agreed upon, when he concludes that "*we can speak of a common basic ethic of the three prophetic religions.*" (*Judaism*, pp. 43–44)

In this succession of religions a number of levels of widening circles wherein spiritual laws, which may be summarized in the law of love, are expected to be enforced may be identified. Adam gave the laws of the individual; Noah the laws of the tribe; Abraham the laws of the group; Moses the laws of a people. Muḥammad gave a law whereby the mere racial bonds of the Chosen people are substituted by the membership in a common supra-racial nation, the ummah or community of brothers, whereas any other local or tribal bond is broken off.

A study of all the world religions will demonstrate that the same "common basic ethic" and the same progress toward a universal enforcement of the spiritual law is also evident in their teachings and history. This advancement toward a deeper understanding of the reality, and of the universal enforcement, of the spiritual law of love is the essence of spiritual evolution. Our age, the age of the global village, seems ripe for a great step forward in human spiritual evolution, i.e., the adherence to a religious teaching which may unite all the peoples of the world in the same understanding and practice of the law of love: to love means to serve all humankind.

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The Concept of Sacred Justice in Hebrew Eschatology

Gary Selchert

It is a curious fact that while Bahá'í students of prophecy have paid considerable attention to Biblical references to "Glory" as a motif in end-of-the-age imagery, they have devoted noticeably less printed space to discussions of references to "Justice" and "Judgment." Often the relationship between Christian and Bahá'í teachings has been depicted preeminently as a contrast between Christian concern with the salvation of the individual soul and the Bahá'í program to transform the social order of the planet. Admittedly this schema is in accordance with Shoghi Effendi's comments on the role of Christianity in the progress of religion. Reducing the relationship solely to this dimension of comparison, however, does not fully account for the range and scope of social prescriptions strewn throughout the Bible, and especially prominent in the ancient Hebrew scriptures. Centuries before Jesus, Peter, and Paul ventured forth to bring personal spiritual salvation to the inhabitants of the Roman Empire, the social order of the Israelite tribes was legislated, adjudicated, and enforced in accordance with the Covenant and Law of Moses. While not world-embracing in its vision, the Mosaic order is certainly our original example of a divine standard of justice. The notion of justice as a divinely ordained pattern of social organization does not begin with Bahá'u'lláh.

That justice is one of the central organizing concepts of Bahá'u'lláh's order is clear from even a cursory examination of Bahá'í introductory material and stands out as a dominant theme in many in-depth studies of the Bahá'í scriptures. "The essence of all that We have revealed for thee is Justice," Bahá'u'lláh asserts unequivocally.¹ And elsewhere He emphasizes: *"that the essence of justice and the source thereof are both embodied in the ordinances prescribed by Him who is the Manifestation of the Self of God amongst men, if ye be of them that recognize this truth. He doth verily incarnate the highest, the inflexible standard of justice unto all creation."*²

It is therefore all the more startling that Bahá'ís isolate ourselves from the common universe of western theological discourse by generally ignoring the truth that justice, understood as an aspect of obedience to God's will, is a fundamental organizing principle which pervades the Hebrew scriptures and is by no means absent from the New Testament. This principle is well known to Old Testament scholars,³ and has a determining role in the formation of social ethics both for Jews and for progressive Christians. It is the bedrock upon which the theological trend known as "Social Gospel" is erected. It even appears from time to time in the literature of theologically conservative, evangelical Protestants.⁴ Indeed, this scriptural norm is available to Bahá'ís as a common meeting ground for discussion and fellowship with many progressive and educated Christians.

At the same time it is the very familiarity of the scriptural concept of Sacred Justice which paradoxically inhibits migration of Christian intellectuals from their Christian social and organizational milieu. Justice as a focal point of religion is not a revelation to them. Christians thoroughly familiar with the Bible and holding to a liberal, rather than literal, interpretation need not adopt the eccentric customs and settings of what is viewed as a tiny if amiable sect (the Bahá'í community) in order to propagate (and certainly not to finance the application of) religious sentiments of peace, tolerance, justice, equality, and charity.

And while many of our tolerant, progressive, and reformist social principles are shared by Christians of many denominations, both the precepts in which the Bahá'í revelation shows its continuity with clas-

sic scriptural morality, as well as in the clearest examples of its originality, can serve to alienate, respectively, theological liberals and conservatives. In its advocacy of a global theonomous commonwealth, hewing tenaciously to the encompassing principle of Divine Revelation and holding liberal social principles of justice alongside very strict personal and sexual mores, the Bahá'í community may fairly be said to be unique, even radical in its own way, viewed from the perspectives of Christian or secular liberalism. Yet amidst a post-communist intelligentsia, skeptical of all institutional authority and reluctant even to hold privately, much less enforce publicly, moralistic views of sexuality in almost any form, a community subject to an infallible House of Justice and unyielding in its refusal to institutionally embrace late twentieth-century standards of alternative family commitments can easily be viewed as authoritarian on the one hand and puritanical on the other. It is, in fact, viewed on occasion as elitist and reactionary.

Likewise, from the perspective of conservative Christian literalism, there is nothing commonplace in the Bahá'í contention that an allegorical reading of prophecy in conjunction with enlightened human reason can adequately substantiate a claim to post-Biblical revelation on a level with Moses or Jesus. But neither is there *prima facie* anything acceptable in such a claim.

So lest we claim modern originality for ancient ideas, and before we can say with assurance exactly what original and constructive contributions Bahá'u'lláh has made to the planetary discussion, and which of those original ideas can be implemented only within the context of a the Covenant-bound Bahá'í community, we must know with clarity what has been said and done in times past. To sift through what has been agreed upon and taught by prophets and theologians before us, in order to clarify the new issues which we raise and upon which the world must yet decide for or against, falls within the purview of Bahá'í scholarship. For so long as the Bahá'í community remains ill-informed concerning the biblical origins of the concept of Sacred Justice, we will be unable to discuss intelligently with our Jewish, Christian, and Islamic fellows what course the application of that ideal ought to take through the tempests of future centuries.

I.

The first problem we encounter when treating the role of justice as an element of Hebrew, or Old Testament, teaching is the question of exactly with which Hebrew concept are we dealing. Where the word "justice" appears in the King James Version of Hebrew scripture, it nearly always translates the word *tsediqah*. This word, however, and other derivatives of the root *tsediq* are more commonly translated "righteous" or "righteousness," and its denotations and connotations are closer to the general concepts of goodness, fairness, morality, and innocence than to the more formal and even judicial connotations of the English word "justice." Presumably for this reason modern Bible translations have tended to abandon the use of "justice" to translate *tsediqah*, which is now typically rendered as "righteousness."

At the same time, the word "judgment," which is the King James' rendering of the Hebrew noun *Mishpat*, has come to be seen by translators as too narrow and perhaps too negative in connotation for modern speakers of English to capture the conceptual richness and the intrinsically positive importance of the Hebrew word. The word *Mishpat*, then, is now conventionally translated as "justice." In point of fact, both concepts are of preeminent importance to the overall motivation and purpose of Hebrew religion, as witnessed by the comment which God makes to his angelic escort in Genesis 18:19 (RSV): "*I have chosen [Abraham], that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way (d'rek) of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice (tsediqah va mishpat).*"

One sense of the meaning intended by justice or *mishpat*, as it appears in the law of Moses, is conveyed by Exodus 23:6-9: "*You shall not pervert the justice (mishpat) due to your poor in his suit (rib). Keep far from a false charge, and do not slay the innocent (nahqí) and righteous (tsediq), for I will not acquit (tsadaq) the wicked (rahshahg). And you shall take no bribe, for the bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause (debiri) of those who are in the right (tsediqím). You shall not oppress the stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*" In the nineteenth chapter of Leviticus, the concern for justice is extended into such issues as charity for the indigent and the wayfarer, fair wages for the day laborer, and impartiality towards rich and poor alike in the courts of law.

God's justice, however, is not the ill-defined social and judicial good which is the goal of social striving in our secular age. Rather it constituted the objective standard of justice and social order existing in the mind of God and exemplified among His people by the commandments (*mitzva'ot*) and ordinances (*mishpatím*) of the Torah. Nor is the concept of *mishpat* confined to issues strictly regulated by law. It also encompassed such elements of the social order as may be translated by "order," "manner," "fashion," or "custom" (cf. Table 1). And while it can refer to what is strictly speaking "lawful," it can also refer to the order of a "ceremony" or to an individual's "charge" or responsibility.

Morphologically, *mishpat* (M-SH-P-T) is derived from the root verb *shephat* (SH-P-T), "to judge" or "to govern." The logical independence of *mishpat* from written law (*torah*) is implied by the fact that Moses, after the suggestion of his father-in-law, Jethro, appointed judges (*shephatím*) to govern the daily affairs of the Israelites prior to the revelation of the Law on Sinai (Exodus 18:1-27). This implies the existence of an existing body of tradition, custom, and "common law," which was understood to reflect God's will, and according to which prosecutions and lawsuits could be decided.

II.

Throughout the book of Deuteronomy, God's expectations of kindness, justice, and righteousness are reiterated, and in Deut. 32:3-4 justice is revealed as intrinsic to the nature of God's own greatness and perfection: "*I will proclaim the name of the LORD, Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the rock, His works are perfect, and all his ways (d'reki) are just (mishpat). A faithful God who does no wrong, upright (tsediq) and just (yshar) is he.*" In the twenty-sixth chapter of Leviticus, God lays out the Promise and the Threat. To the nation, God promises peace, strength, freedom, and prosperity if His commands are observed. And again to the nation, God threatens the most extreme punishments of famine, plague, military defeat, exile and destruction if his commands go unheeded.

The written books of *torah* however are not overwhelmingly devoted to noble ideals and social legislation. Lengthy portions of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers are devoted to regulations concerning tabernacle/temple ritual, ornamentation, and furnishings, priestly vestments, behavior, and purification, clean and unclean foods, persons, and situations, animal blood sacrifices, Sabbaths, festivals, and Holy days, and the quarantine of persons with noxious and degenerative diseases. These seem to have been scrupulously kept, at least by the priesthood, from very ancient times. But through His servants the prophets, God warns Israel in dire terms that without careful adherence to *mishpat*, scrupulous obedience to ritual prescriptions of the *torah* may be of no value. Although ritual requirements seem, within the text of the books of *torah*, to be as integral to covenant faithfulness as social and moral requirements, the prophets often treat the rituals as ultimately offensive to God when offered in a context of social injustice. Indeed, the essential entailment of correct worship was submission and obedience to God's *mishpat*.

Isaiah, believed by some to be the first of the literary prophets,⁵ makes clear in Isaiah 1:10-28, the nature of God's plan: "*Hear the word of the LORD...I have had enough of burnt offerings...I do not delight in the blood of bulls...incense is an abomination to me...your appointed feasts my soul hates...cease to do evil...learn to do good...seek justice, correct oppression.*" Amos, believed by many others to be the earliest of the prophets, proclaims a similar message: "*I hate, I despise your feasts...though you offer me your burnt offerings...I will not accept them...But let justice (mishpat) roll down like waters, and righteousness (tsediqah) like an ever-flowing stream*" (Amos 5:21-24).

While often paired in this manner with the concept of *tsediqah*,⁶ or Righteousness, *mishpat* is also paired with the concept of *hesed*, variously translated as "kindness," "goodness," "mercy," and "steadfast love." Hosea rejects empty ritual in favor of genuine and heartfelt obedience motivated by *hesed*. "*I desire hesed, not sacrifice,*" says Hosea, "*the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings.*" (Hosea 6:6) In Matthew, Jesus twice quotes this passage as a rebuke to Pharisees when they criticize His ritual laxness, and He, in turn, upbraids them for over-strict rigidity. Micah explicitly conjoins the two concepts in Micah 6:8: "*He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do mishpat and to love hesed, and to walk humbly with your God?*" Here again, in a stinging rebuke to the religious leaders of His day, Jesus echoes this conjunction, *mishpat* and *hesed*, in Matthew 23:23: "Woe

to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier issues of the law, justice [krisin(Gk)=mishpat(Hb)] and mercy [eleos(Gk)=hesed(Hb)] and faithfulness [NIV]; these you ought to have done without neglecting the others.” Justice in this larger sense is clearly an important value not only in the Hebrew scriptures, but in the Christian Testament as well.

For Isaiah, *mishpat* is an integral part of God’s greatness: “Man will be brought low and mankind humbled, the eyes of the arrogant humbled. But the LORD Almighty is exalted by his *mishpat*, and the holy God will show Himself holy by His *tsediqah*.” (Is. 5:16) In fine, Jeremiah links all three concepts and their pivotal importance in Jer. 9:23-24: “This is what the LORD says: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises *hesed*, *mishpat*, and *tsediqah* on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the LORD.”

III.

Of course anyone with the most cursory knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures knows that the nation of Israel did not live up to the standards which God had set in the books of the Torah. Idolatry, the abandonment of the worship of the one true God for the superstitious worship of many, injustice, and the abandonment of God’s systematic plan of a just social order strained the relationship between Israel and its God to the very breaking point. By the time of the earliest literary prophets, God’s message already bore the repetitious burden of imminent disaster.

Already in his second chapter, Isaiah begins to develop this theme. “The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the pride of men shall be humbled; and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. For the LORD of Hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and high.” (Isaiah 2:11-12) Then in chapter thirteen: “The day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come...Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it...I will punish the world for its evil.” (Isaiah 13:6-11) God’s fury appears to be absolute and cosmic: “The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched, and few men are left.” (Isaiah 24:5-6) “The earth is utterly broken, the earth is rent asunder, the earth is violently shaken. The earth staggers like a drunken man, it sways like a hut; its transgression lies heavy upon it, and it falls, and it will not rise again. On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth. They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished.” (Isaiah 24:19-23)

Amos also gives us evidence that the threat of “The Day” is an early theme of the prophets. Indeed it seems to have already had its place in the common beliefs of the Israelites as a time when their God would defeat their enemies, a time to be wished and prayed for. But Amos tells us however that the suffering will be universal. “Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness and not light; as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house and leaned with his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him.” (Amos 5:18-19)

The prophet Zephaniah again emphasizes the time frame: “The great day of the LORD is near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter, the mighty man cries aloud there.” (Zeph. 1:14) Historically, this might seem to indicate he is referring in an allegorical manner to the Babylonian conquest and exile, which was indeed near and hastening fast. His description, though, is at least as extreme as his fellow prophets. God, says Zephaniah, “will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth.... In the fire of his jealous wrath, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full, yea, sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.” (Zeph. 1: 2, 18) Obadiah and Joel both reiterate the nearness of the day (Obadiah 16 and Joel 1:5) but they do so after the defeat and exile to Babylon have already occurred. As such, it was understood from then on as a prophetic warning of the time of the End, an end which could occur at any time. Thus, when John the Baptist asks the Pharisees in Matthew 3:7, “Who told you to flee from the wrath to come?”, the question is purely rhetorical; the prophets told them.

The litany of doom repeats itself throughout the prophets, and of course historically we know that the people of Israel and Judah did go into exile, prison, and death. But God does not seem prepared to leave the issue there. The trauma of exile and dispersion did excite the Israelite nation to repentance and religious revival. After 70 years, as the story goes, God inspired the conquering Persian king Cyrus, and later his successor Artaxerxes, to decree permission for the Israelites to return to their homeland and rebuild their capital and their temple. But God has a larger grievance, not only with Israel, but with the nations of the world. God punishes Israel as a parent punishes a child, but God's anger toward Israel's neighbors is the fury of a parent toward people who have unjustly mistreated her child. One by one, and then collectively, God decries the evils committed by the nations which surround Israel and which extend across the face of the earth. God declares himself ready to crush them and annihilate their peoples, to utterly dislocate and destroy the sun, the moon, the stars, and the entire earth itself. And then He waits.

What then is the meaning of His threat? Is God a braggart, engaging in childish hyperbole? Is His sense of time so vast that human time frames are meaningless? Just what does God mean when He speaks of "*The Day*"? And how exactly does "*the Day*" lead to the establishment of *mishpat* on the earth?

IV.

What God wishes, of course, is not the destruction of what He has created. In Jer 18:5-11, God is most explicit concerning the point of the great threat. "*If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will...destroy it, and if that nation...turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil that I intended to do to it.... Return, every one from his evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.*" And what does God ask that will induce Him to revoke the sentence? "*Execute mishpat in the morning, and deliver from the oppressor him who has been robbed, lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of your evil doings.*" (Jer. 21:11)

But while *mishpat* can, in some circumstances, be an accomplishment of an ordinary individual, first and foremost it is a social virtue, and like most social policy, it is seldom under the control of the poor and the powerless. Rather it is for the poor and the powerless that God and His prophets speak out to warn the wealthy and the powerful.

Just as the theme of justice often appears as a salient point in lists of God's expectations, its absence likewise appears prominently in lists of Israel's offenses. "*You have turned mishpat into poison,*" Amos rails, "*and the fruit of tzediqah into wormwood.*" (Amos 6:12) Isaiah reminds Israel that they are the "*vineyard of the LORD*" where he "*looked for mishpat, but behold...Bloodshed!*" (Isaiah 5:7-10) Isaiah continues by indicting the wealthy "*who join house to house, who add field to field*" and warning them that "*many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses, without inhabitants.*" Isaiah even plays on the meaning of *mishpat* to make his point in Is. 3:13-15: "*the LORD takes His place in court; He rises to judge the people. The LORD enters into judgment (mishpat) against the elders and leaders of His people: 'It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?'*" declares the Lord Almighty." (Jer. 21:12)

Again Isaiah reminds the Judeans that He has punished them for their injustices and disobedience in the past and will not hesitate to chastise them further if they continue in evil. "*Therefore,*" he says, "*as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will be as rottenness, and their blossom go up like dust; for they have rejected the torah of the LORD of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.*" (Isaiah 5:24) "*Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees, and the writers [of judgments] who keep writing oppression, to turn aside the needy from mishpat, and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be their spoil and that they may make the fatherless their prey! What will you do on the day of punishment, in the storm which will come from afar?*" (Isaiah 10:1-3)

"*No one enters suit justly,*" Isaiah charges, "*and no one goes to law honestly; they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies....*" (Isaiah 59:4) Therefore, he says, "*your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you....*" (Isaiah 59:2) "*There is no mishpat in their paths,*" he emphasizes. (Isaiah 59:8) "*Mishpat is far from us...we look for light and behold, darkness.*" (Isaiah 59:9) "*We look for mishpat, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us....*" (Isaiah 59:11)

“Mishpat is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth has fallen in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter.” (Isaiah 59:14) And what again does Isaiah say will result? *“According to their deeds, so will He repay, wrath to His adversaries, requital to His enemies...so they will fear the name of the LORD...for He will come like a rushing stream.”* (Isaiah 59:18-19).

In anguish, Jeremiah pleads with God, asking him *“O Lord...I would speak with you concerning your justice (mishpat): Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?”* Answering his own question, Jeremiah excoriates the people and especially their leaders: *“They have become rich and powerful and have grown fat and sleek. Their evil deeds have no limit; they do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it, they do not defend the rights (mishpat) of the poor. Should I not punish them for this?” asks the LORD. ‘Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?’”* (Jer. 5:27-29) And finally the LORD has had enough: *“They have followed other gods to serve them. Both the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken the covenant I made with their forefathers. Therefore this is what the LORD says, ‘I will bring on them a disaster they cannot escape.’”* (Jer. 11:10-11)

V.

Surely the craving for untrammelled liberty is strong in a potentially rational yet immature human being. Such has been the individual condition of humanity for long ages. Integral to the glorious breakthrough into collective adulthood is a willingness to humble oneself with fitting moderation and submit to the wholesome discipline and regulations which befit human dignity. Just as Israel was once punished by death, exile, and national uprooting, so in the latter days, all nations are defeated and uprooted by their own injustice and idolatry. And just as the decree of the Persian royalty returned Israel to its homeland twenty-four centuries ago, so, the prophet Isaiah proclaims, *“In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and His dwellings shall be glorious. In that day the LORD will extend His hand yet a second time to recover the remnant which is left, from...the nations...the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.”* (Isaiah 11:10-12).

The globally visible signal of the advent then of the global efflorescence of divine mishpat is the reassembling of the Jewish people in their ancient homeland. But the Root of Jesse: Who is he and what is his role in the drama of the latter days? Micah 2:12-13 seems to suggest he is the LORD and their king and that *“He who opens the breach will go up before them...their king will pass on before them, the LORD at their head.”* The true King, guided by God Himself, precedes Israel into the Holy land.

Historically, of course, Jesse is the father of King David, and therefore, in a sense, he is the root of the Davidic house and dynasty. God makes no secret of the unbreakable loyalty he holds for this house. In Jeremiah 33:20-21 He vows, *“If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he will not have a son to reign on his throne.”* So the one who comes to inherit the sovereignty of David is the Messiah, *“the shoot from the stump of Jesse”* (Isaiah 11:1-5) the “branch” which *“shall grow out of his roots. And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see [i.e. with partiality] or decide by what his ears hear [i.e. bias and persuasion]; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.”*

“Behold,” says Isaiah 32, *“a king will reign in righteousness (tsediqah), and princes will rule with justice (mishpat)...the fool will no more be called noble, nor the knave said to be honorable...Then mishpat will dwell in the wilderness and tsediqah abide in the fruitful field, and the effect of tsediqah will be peace (shalom), and the result of tsediqah, quietness and trust forever.”*

It is at this point that the issue of interpretation comes to a head. Broadly speaking, Christian attitudes are split between two world views. The liberal camp of Christianity, both Protestant and Catholic, leans toward seeing most prophecy as a collection of allegories, a symbolic tale which holds up a grand ideal of justice, righteousness and compassion toward which believers should strive. Jesus is Lord and king largely in the sense of an example of a life worthy of emulation, a life led in pure holiness, jus-

tice, and righteousness. Justice advances incrementally as the body of believers works to infuse justice into the world.

Literalists, and many conservative Christians generally, anticipate a time when the resurrected Jesus will return bodily to the earth and establish an earthly kingdom. Living as an immortal and incorruptible body, Jesus will dwell physically on earth and as monarch of the world; assisted by his resurrected apostles, he will act as global supreme judge.

Less popular in the Christian world, but advanced by such an intellectual luminary as Martin Buber [*The Prophetic Faith* (New York and Evanston: Harper Torchbooks, 1960) pp. 138-154, 224-235], is the contention that the Messiah who will establish universal peace and justice is a Prophet, on a level with Moses, who, like Moses, will establish a new social order, a new *mishpat*, this time world-encompassing and world pacifying, and then He will depart this mortal world as have the prophets before Him, while heavenly providence upholds the integrity and potency of His *New World Mishpat*. I contend that a full appreciation of the richness of the concept of *mishpat*, discussed above and documented in Table 1, powerfully impels us toward this interpretation. Most Bahá'ís, I suspect, will be quick to grasp the significance of such an interpretation, and of its widespread acceptance, to the Bahá'í apologetic mission and proclamation effort.

In addition to the connotations of the word *mishpat*, the patterns which emerge from further Messianic prophecies tend to bolster this position and to flesh out the vision of the Messianic age and the New Mishpat. A brief survey of those passages shows us specifically the texts upon which Buber builds his scenario and which set forth the principles held in common by Biblical and Bahá'í expectation.

1) Messianic virtues are key to the New Order: “*When the oppressor is no more and destruction has ceased, and he who tramples underfoot has vanished from the land, then a throne will be established in hesed and on it will sit in faithfulness in the tent of David one who judges and who seeks mishpat and is swift to do tsediqah.*” (Isaiah 16:4-5)

2) God’s servant, the Messiah, institutes God’s *mishpat* in the world; this is his preeminent goal: “*Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice (mishpat) to the nations (or gentiles), He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth mishpat. He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established mishpat in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.*” (Isaiah 42:1-4)

3) A new *mishpat* enacted by a new Law (*torah*) will enlighten the nations of the earth: “*the torah will go out from me; my mishpat will become a light to the nations.*” (Isaiah 51:4)

4) God supports earthly Justice and Righteousness from the seat of His heavenly throne: “*The LORD is exalted; for He dwells on high [i.e. in Heaven] he will fill Zion with mishpat and tsediqah; He will be the sure foundation of your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge.*” (Isaiah 33:5-6, NIV)

5) God’s *mishpat* will be administered by righteous human agents: “*I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the city of tsediq, the faithful city. Zion will be redeemed with mishpat and her penitent ones with tsediqah.*” (Isaiah 1:26-27)

6) God will spiritually inspire the human agents of the New Order: “*In that day the of LORD of Hosts will be a crown of Glory and a diadem of beauty...and a spirit of justice (mishpat) to him who sits in judgment (mishpat)... I will make mishpat the line and tsediqah the plummet.*” (Isaiah 28:5-6, 17)

7) God himself is the supreme exemplar of *mishpat*: “*He is the rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways (d’reki) are mishpat.*” (Deuteronomy 32:4)

8) The ordered system of justice instituted by God’s servant the Messiah is centralized at the Mountain of the LORD’s temple where all nations will come to learn God’s ways (*d’reki*). The Word (*debir*) of God and the Law (*torah*) of God are sent out from Zion and international disputes will be resolved at this Temple. (Isaiah 2:1-4, Micah 4:1-5) “*In the latter days, the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains and all the nations shall flow to it that He may teach us his*

ways (d’reki) for out of Zion shall go forth the Law (torah), and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations.”

9) “The Ark of the Covenant shall not be rebuilt all nations gather to Jerusalem, the throne and the Presence of the LORD.” (Jeremiah 3:15-18)

In this context of messianic prophecy, there is no descent of angelic hosts from the physical heavens, and there is no instantaneous supernatural conquest of the physical planet. Yet there is far more than a bland evolution toward social justice, cheered on by a network of compassionate, supportive, liberal churches. Onto the stage of messianic expectation walks Bahá’u’lláh, claiming equality with Moses, with Jesus, with Muḥammad. He reveals new *torah*. He founds new institutions. He appoints new *shephatím*. He ordains a central locus of governance and pilgrimage. He establishes new standards, new customs, a New Order.

We can see clearly that no concept is quite so crucial to God’s ultimate plan for this planet as *mishpat*. About this few scholars of any faith would disagree. The challenge for Bible scholarship in a Bahá’í context is, and will continue to be, defense of the notion of a centralized, international, theonomous, covenant-bound, institutional embodiment of that ideal.

Table 1: Some Translations of Mishpat not Involving Justice Specifically

Reference	KJV	RSV	NIV
Gen. 40:13	Manner	As (formerly)	As [custom]
Ex. 21:9	Manner	(deal with her)	(grant her the)
Ex. 26:30	Fashion	Plan	Plan
Num. 15:16	Manner	Ordinance	Regulation
Num. 15:24	Manner	Ordinance	Prescribed
Num. 29:6-39	Manner	Ordinance	As specified;
Josh. 6:15	Manner	Manner	Manner
Judges 13:12	Order(v.)	Manner(of	Rule
Judges 18:7	Manner(of the	Manner	Like [custom]
I Sam. 2:13	(priest’s)	Custom (of the	(the) Practice
I Sam. 8:9, 11	Manner (of the	The Ways (of	[Leadership]
I Sam. 10:25	Manner (of the	Rights and	Regulations
I Sam. 27:11	(his [David’s])	(his) Custom	(his) Practice
I Kings 6:38	Fashion	Specifications	Specifications
II Kings 1:7	(What) manner	(what) kind (of	(what) kind
II Kings 11:14	Manner	Custom	Custom
II Kings	Manner(of the	Law	(what the
I Chron. 6:32	Order(n.)	Due order	Regulations
I Chron. 15:13	(the due) order	The way that	The prescribed
I Chron. 23:31	(according to	(according to	(in the) way
I Chron. 24:19	(according to	Procedure	Regulations
II Chron. 4:7	(according to	As prescribed	Specifications
II Chron. 4:20	(after the)	As prescribed	As prescribed
II Chron. 8:14	(according to	(according to	(following the)
II Chron. 30:16	(after their)	Accustomed	Regular as
Ezra 3:4	Custom	Required	prescribed
Neh. 8:18.	Manner	Ordinance	Regulation
Jeremiah 30:18	(after the)	(Where it used	(in its proper
Ezekiel 11:12	Judgments,	Ordinances	Laws,
Ezekiel 11:20	Ordinances	Ordinances	Laws
Ezekiel 23:24	Judgment	Judgment	Punishment
Ezekiel 42:11	Fashions	Arrangements	Dimensions

Notes

- 1) Bahá'u'lláh, Asl-i-Kullu'l-Khay (Words of Wisdom) in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Center, 1978), p. 157.
- 2) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 175.
- 3) See, for example, Weinfeld, Moshe, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, and Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).
- 4) See especially Scott, Waldron, *Bring Forth Justice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).
- 5) See, for example, Peckham, Brian, *History and Prophecy* (New York, etc.: Anchor Bible Reference Library/Doubleday, 1993).
- 6) Weinfeld., pp. 35-36. Weinfeld contends that when conjoined in this way *mishpat* and *tsediqah* refer to God's specific interest in justice administered by the wealthy and powerful and aimed at the protection of the poor, weak and vulnerable. Weinfeld maintains that this conjoint meaning is also entailed by the by the complex Hebrew concept of *hesed*, sometimes translated "kindness." Interestingly, the Greek word *chrestoteti*, also translated as "kindness," is mentioned by Paul in Romans 11:22 as the quality in which the believer must diligently continue in order not to be "cut off" from the divine tree, i.e. to lose one's salvation.

Some Chronological Issues in the Lawḥ-i-Hikmat of Bahá'u'lláh

Peter Terry

The student of sacred history finds that every major Manifestation of God, be He called Avatar, Buddha, Messenger, Prophet or Savior, changes history. There are of course many ways in which He changes history, including the following: He reveals principles and commandments which transform those who follow Him and which significantly influence those who reject Him as well. For examples of this influence upon non-believers, the reader may consider the impact of Judaism upon the Samaritans; of Christianity on Jews and pagans; of Buddhism on Hindus and Confucians; and of Islám on Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Hindus, Buddhists, pagans. The Manifestation of God envisions and prophesies a future that His followers are committed to realizing; He interprets the past in a manner distinct and often markedly divergent from the conventional modes of historical perception. It is this last-mentioned creative act, the Manifestations' revisioning of history, that we will examine in this paper.

The reader may be accustomed to thinking of history as composed of facts and therefore, he might think that history does not stand in need of interpretation, even by a Manifestation of God. Some years ago a colleague opined to the present author that history is fiction, or, to put it another way, history is fictive. Over the years the author has given much thought to this statement, and has found it difficult to refute. He has noted that every historian chooses what to include in his historical lectures and writings—and what to exclude. What he includes becomes “history,” for “history” as we know it is that portion of history which is remembered. The unremembered history has no place in our lives; it serves no function. The historian who is convinced that Western civilization is the most advanced and meritorious of all will marshal evidence in support of that conviction through his selective depiction of past events. Naturally, almost inevitably, it will appear to his readers that he is correct in coming to that conclusion. Likewise, the Muslim historian, the Christian historian, the Jewish historian, the Marxist historian, the feminist historian, the racist historian—each one will invariably select such historical events and personalities, influences and forces as he or she deems important to be featured in an historical work. This process of selection will exclude a great mass of “facts” which have been judged by that historian to be insignificant (or, at best, non-essential).

It may be argued that “modern academic” historians make every effort to be objective, to follow scientific method. However, many careful readers have noted that “modern academic” historians are, in many regards, among the most selective in the history of history, called upon by the ever-increasing fragmentation and specialization which characterizes their profession, to focus on very narrow interests. They are preoccupied with writing papers, articles, monographs and tomes which are presumed by the reader to be objective when in actuality they are invariably shot through with the extremely limited egocentric and often ethnocentric vision of the author. If one is prepared to enjoy reading the views of the “modern academic” historian without supposing them to be altogether reliable, then there is no harm done. If, on the other hand, the reader believes that this historical “expert” is somehow magically exempt from subjectivity, and if that reader takes in whatever the historian writes and believes implicitly in its literal truth, in this case the reader has been duped. The writings of the “modern academic” historian are no more inherently truthful than the pronouncements of the “traditional dogmatic” theologian, the speculations of the philosopher, or the imaginations of the poet.

Is the author suggesting that the reader remain in a state of perpetual disbelief, of profound and unalterable skepticism? Not at all. It is into this breach that the Manifestation of God steps, with commanding authority, for He alone can lead us all to the Straight Path, and replace our confusion and ignorance with understanding and truth. The Manifestation of God changes history, and one of the ways in which

He effects that change is through His creative interpretation of the past. His re-creation of the past, and His creation of the present and future become, for His followers and for their unbelieving neighbors as well, the standard by which reality can be distinguished from unreality, true history from fictive history.

In another essay, the present author has examined the doctrine of the Most Great Infallibility [‘iṣmat al-kubrā], which designates the Manifestation of God as the foremost interpreter of historical events. Briefly, Bahá’u’lláh makes the following claim, in various of His Tablets:

Know thou that the term ‘Infallibility’ hath numerous meanings and divers stations. In one sense it is applicable to the One Whom God hath made immune from error. Similarly it is applied to every soul whom God hath guarded against sin, transgression, rebellion, impiety, disbelief and the like. However, the Most Great Infallibility [‘iṣmat al-kubrā] is confined to the One Whose station is immeasurably exalted beyond ordinances or prohibitions and is sanctified from errors and omissions. Indeed He is a Light which is not followed by darkness and a Truth not overtaken by error.

Were He to pronounce water to be wine or heaven to be earth or light to be fire, He speaketh the truth and no doubt would there be about it; and unto no one is given the right to question His authority or to say why or wherefore. Whosoever raiseth objections will be numbered with the froward in the Book of God, the Lord of the worlds...¹

He Who is the Dawning-place of God’s Cause hath no partner in the Most Great Infallibility [‘iṣmat al-kubrā]. He it is Who, in the kingdom of creation, is the Manifestation of “He doeth whatsoever He willeth.” God hath reserved this distinction unto His own Self, and ordained for none a share in so sublime and transcendent a station. This is the Decree of God, concealed ere now within the veil of impenetrable mystery. We have disclosed it in this Revelation, and have thereby rent asunder the veils of such as have failed to recognize that which the Book of God set forth and who were numbered with the heedless.²

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained this principle and the actual verse (K47) of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in *Some Answered Questions*,³ of which a short excerpt is cited here:

It is said in the holy verse: ‘There is no partner for Him Who is the Dayspring of Revelation in His Most Great Infallibility [‘iṣmat al-kubrā]. He is, in truth, the Exponent of ‘God doeth whatsoever He willeth’ in the kingdom of creation. Indeed the Almighty hath exclusively reserved this station for Himself and to none is given a share in this sublime and highly exalted distinction.’

Know that infallibility [‘iṣmat] is of two kinds: essential infallibility [‘iṣmat-i-dhātiyyih] and acquired infallibility [‘iṣmat-i-safātiyyih]. In like manner there is essential knowledge [‘ilm-i-dhátí] and acquired knowledge [‘ilm-i-safátí]; and so it is with other names and attributes. Essential infallibility [‘iṣmat-i-dhātiyyih] is peculiar to the universal Manifestation [mazhar-i-kullí], for it is His essential requirement, and an essential requirement cannot be separated from the thing itself...

In short, the meaning of “He doeth whatsoever He willeth” is that if the Manifestation says something, or gives a command, or performs an action, and believers do not understand its wisdom, they still ought not to oppose it by a single thought, seeking to know why He spoke so, or why He did such a thing. The other souls who are under the shadow of the supreme Manifestations are submissive to the commandments of the Law of God, and are not to deviate as much as a hairsbreadth from it; they must conform their acts and words to the Law of God. If they do deviate from it, they will be held responsible and reproved in the presence of God. It is certain that they have no share in the permission “He doeth whatsoever He willeth,” for this condition is peculiar to the supreme Manifestations.

Shoghi Effendi has further explained the essential nature of this doctrine of the Most Great Infallibility of the Manifestation of God, as found here in a letter written on his behalf to an individual Bahá’í:

Regarding your Bahá’í friend who does not fully understand the infallibility of the Manifestation of God: You should influence that person to study the matter more deeply, and to realize that the whole theory of Divine Revelation rests on the infallibility of the Prophet, be He Christ, Muhammad, Bahá’u’lláh, or one of the others. If They are not infallible, then They are not divine, and thus lose that essential link with God which, we believe, is the bond that educates men and causes all human progress.⁴

Of course, it could be claimed that the Most Great Infallibility of the Manifestation of God does not cover questions of history. Let us begin with what Bahá’u’lláh has written in reference to this matter. In two passages from *Lawḥ-i-Hikmat* [Tablet of Wisdom] Bahá’u’lláh describes the manner in which He has become informed of historical personalities and events reported in that Tablet:

Thou knowest full well that We perused not the books which men possess and We acquired not the learning [‘ulúmi] current amongst them, and yet whenever We desire to quote the sayings of the learned [al-‘ulamá’] and the wise [al-hukamá’], presently there will appear before the face of thy Lord [rabbaka] in the form of a tablet [lawḥ] all that which hath appeared in the world [al-‘álam] and is revealed in the Holy books [al-kutub] and Scriptures [al-zubur]. Thus do We set down in writing that which the eye perceiveth. Verily His knowledge [‘ilmuhu] encompasseth the earth and the heavens.

This is a Tablet wherein the Pen of the Unseen hath inscribed the knowledge of all that hath been and shall be—a knowledge that none other but My wondrous Tongue can interpret. Indeed My heart as it is in itself hath been purged by God from the concepts of the learned and is sanctified from the utterances of the wise. In truth naught doth it mirror forth but the revelations of God. Unto this beareth witness the Tongue of Grandeur in His perspicuous Book.

Say, O people of the earth! Beware lest any reference to wisdom debar you from its Source or withhold you from the Dawning-Place thereof. Fix your hearts upon your Lord, the Educator, the All-Wise.

In every land We have set up a luminary of knowledge, and when the time foreordained is at hand, it will shine resplendent above its horizon, as decreed by God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. If it be Our Will We are fully capable of describing for thee whatever existeth in every land or hath come to pass therein. Indeed the knowledge of thy Lord pervadeth the heavens and the earth.⁵

In another of His Tablets, published in a compilation entitled *‘Ishráqát* (not to be confused with His Tablet called *Ishráqát*), Bahá’u’lláh specifically refers to the Most Great Infallibility in relation to the characterization of an historical event in the Writings of the Báb:

qulná itaqi alláh va lá ta’tarid ‘alá man zayanahu’lláh bi-al-’iṣmat al-kubrâ va ismâât al-husná va sifâtât al-‘uluyâ mizâvár ‘ibád ánkîh mashariq-i-amr ilâhî rá tasdiq namáyand dar ánchîh az ú zahir shavad chîh kih bih muqtasiyât-i-hikmat-i-bálighîh ahadí juzz-i-haqq ágáh nah yaf’álu máyishá’ va yahkumu má yuríd va huva al-muqtadîrûl-qadír⁶

A provisional translation of these verses, attempted by Dr. Iskandar Hai and the present author, in collaboration with Dr. Robert Stockman, Dr. Mu’in Afnani, and other Bahá’í scholars attending the 1999 ‘Irfán Colloquium at the Louhelen Bahá’í School is as follows:

We said unto them: Fear ye God, and contend not with the One Whom God hath adorned with the Most Great Infallibility, [with] Excellent Names and Exalted Attributes! It behooveth the servants [mankind] to testify to the truth of whatsoever proceedeth from the Dawning-place of the Cause of God, for none save God knoweth the exigencies of consummate wisdom. He doeth whatsoever He willeth, and decreeth whatsoever He desireth. He is the Almighty, the Most Powerful.

In one of His Tablets, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has affirmed the same principle, that is, the accuracy of the historical witness of the Manifestation of God:

Nevertheless, Holy Writ [nass-i-iláhiyyih] is authoritative [amr-i-mahtúm ast], and with it no history of the world can compare, for experience hath shown that after investigation of the facts [taharri haqíqat] and a thorough study of ancient records and corroborative evidence, all have referred back to the Holy Scriptures [nusús-i-iláhiyyih]. The most important thing is to establish the validity of God’s universal Manifestation [mazhar-i-kullí-yi iláhí]; once His claim proveth true, then whatsoever He may choose to say is right and correct.⁷

Shoghi Effendi, in reference to the historical views set forth in the writings of the eminent Bahá’í scholar, Mírzá Abú’l-Faḍl Gulpaygání, and in comparison with the statements of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (here called, the Master), has given the following interpretation:

Shoghi Effendi wishes to emphasize that what is truly authoritative are the Master’s words. In all such cases we should try and find out what He has said and abide by His words, even though they seem conflicting with the findings of modern scholars.⁸

Finally, the Universal House of Justice directed its Secretariat to write the following letter with reference to this very topic:

We have been asked to say that there is nothing in the Bahá’í writings to support the conclusion that the revelation of a Manifestation of God is confined to an exposition of ‘values’ or that the infallibility of the Prophets does not extend to and include the area of historical and scientific ‘fact.’ On the contrary, in *Some Answered Questions*, pp. 28–29, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá points out that when the Qur’án was revealed, it contained verses explaining the movement of the stars and planets in the universe. Because these statements disagreed with the established theories of the time, the verses were ridiculed by all the mathematicians who “attributed the theory to ignorance.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá goes on to say that it was not until 900 years later, when the telescope was invented, that the validity of Muḥammad’s statements on this subject was proven.⁹

Now that the relevancy of the Bahá’í doctrine of the Most Great Infallibility in relation to history has been established, we will begin our study of the specific chronological issues under consideration. The *Lawḥ-i-Hikmat* was addressed by Bahá’u’lláh to Áqá Muḥammad Qá’íní, surnamed Nabíl-i-Akbar, an eminent teacher of the Bahá’í Faith memorialized by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.¹⁰ *Lawḥ-i-Hikmat* was recently published in the original Arabic¹¹ and in an English translation prepared under the auspices of the Universal House of Justice.¹² This Tablet covers a wide selection of topics, and will be studied for many centuries to come. In this paper we will be concerned with a very brief excerpt from *Lawḥ-i-Hikmat*, pertaining to the influence of two divinely-inspired Hebrew prophets upon two ancient Greek philosophers. We will begin with the following verses, as they establish the context for the excerpt under examination:

When the eyes of the people of the East were captivated by the arts and wonders of the West, they roved distraught in the wilderness of material causes, oblivious of the One Who is the Cause of Causes, and the Sustainer thereof, while such men as were the source and wellspring of Wisdom never denied the moving impulse behind these causes, nor the Creator of the origin thereof. Thy Lord knoweth, yet most of the people know not.¹³

In this brief statement, Bahá’u’lláh has described the basic methodology of all Western academic and scientific scholarship, including “modern academic” historiography. This approach to scholarship roves “distraught in the wilderness of material causes, oblivious of the One Who is the Causer of Causes” while Bahá’u’lláh’s vision of history affirms the divine origin of all those progressive phenomena which we in the West have identified as distinctively human and civilized. Bahá’u’lláh then explains the purpose which animates His subsequent references to historical personages:

Now We have, for the sake of God, the Lord of Names, set Ourselves the task of mentioning in this Tablet some accounts of the sages [al-hukamá’], 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 [al-hakímu].¹³

Immediately following these verses, Bahá’u’lláh refers to the influence of these “sages” upon the “contemporary men of learning.” Hence, He begins this section of the Tablet with two general statements

regarding “the sages” and follows these up with specific statements about individual Greek philosophers. His purpose in mentioning these accounts, 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.” And Who is “the Maker, the Omnipotent, the Creator, the Originator, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise”? He is what Bahá’u’lláh called, in the previous paragraph, “the One Who is the Cause of Causes, and the Sustainer thereof.”

He proceeds in a systematic manner with the gradual unveiling of that reality which underlies appearances:

Although it is recognized that the contemporary men of learning [hukamá’] are highly qualified in philosophy [al-hikmat], arts and crafts [al-saná’i], yet were anyone to observe with a discriminating eye he would readily comprehend that most of this knowledge [‘ilm] hath been acquired from the sages of the past [hukamá’ al-qabli], for it is they who have laid the foundation of philosophy [asása’l-hikmat], reared its structure and reinforced its pillars. Thus doth thy Lord, the Ancient of Days, inform thee.¹⁴

At the conclusion of this paragraph, Bahá’u’lláh informs His reader of the source of His words: “Thus doth thy Lord, the Ancient of Days, inform thee.” This is not a human voice telling stories, which the listener or reader can take with a grain of salt or disbelieve altogether. This is the voice of God speaking. From the divine perspective, the fundamentals of present-day philosophy, arts and crafts were established by the Greek sages, hence credit for “arts and wonders of the West” should go to them rather than to their heirs, the Western Europeans. If He had stopped here, we might have concluding that Bahá’u’lláh was affirming the value of an old-fashioned aristocratic Western European education in the Greek and Roman classics. However, in this Tablet, Bahá’u’lláh gradually reveals the pattern, the warp and woof of a vast and magical carpet which is utterly unfamiliar to us in the West. That carpet is not an Oriental fantasy; it claims to be nothing less than the true nature of things in themselves.

At this point in the Tablet, Baha’u’llah introduces a link which explains why He has set Himself “the task of mentioning in this Tablet some accounts of the sages” and how this may fulfill His purpose, “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 sages aforetime acquired their knowledge [al-‘ulúm] from the Prophets [al-anbiyá’], inasmuch as the latter were the Exponents of divine philosophy [al-hikmat al-iláhiyyat] and the Revealers of heavenly mysteries. Men quaffed the crystal, living waters of Their utterance, while others satisfied themselves with the dregs. Everyone receiveth a portion according to his measure. Verily He is the Equitable, the Wise [al-hakímu].¹⁵

This statement, coming not from a mere mortal, but rather, according to Bahá’u’lláh, from the voice of God Himself (as the previous paragraph proclaims: “Thus doth thy Lord, the Ancient of Days, inform thee”), firmly establishes the source and foundation of divine philosophy, implying this divine knowledge was first revealed by God to His Manifestations, and affirming that it was then taught by the Prophets to the philosophers. That is, true “metaphysics” originated not in the philosophers themselves, but in the effulgences of God’s truth, received by the Manifestations. After establishing this, Bahá’u’lláh states that while every person perceives the real according to his own personal measure and capacity, the truth itself is from God and is independent of the measure of men. He reiterates both themes in the following verses, which bracket the short paragraph we will shortly examine:

The essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets [al-anbiyá’]. That the people differ concerning the inner meanings and mysteries thereof is to be attributed to the divergence of their views and minds.¹⁶

In this passage it seems that Bahá’u’lláh has broadened His assertion, claiming in these verses that the foundations of the entire field of philosophy—not just divine philosophy, but material philosophy as well—were revealed to the Prophets and taught by them to the philosophers. Previously in this Tablet Bahá’u’lláh has affirmed that present-day “philosophy, arts and crafts” are based upon the foundations

of philosophy established by the “sages.” Hence it can be seen that His statement here, about the entirety of philosophy, has very broad implications for our understanding of the history of the sciences, arts and crafts, as well the field of philosophy.

Bahá’u’lláh identifies the “Father of Philosophy” in yet another passage from Lawḥ-i-Hikmat:

I will also mention for thee the invocation voiced by Balínús who was familiar with the theories put forward by the Father of Philosophy regarding the mysteries of creation as given in his chrysolite tablets...¹⁷

The Father of Philosophy, according to Islamic historical tradition, is Idrís, who is also called Hermes.¹⁸ In the Lawḥ-i-Basítu’l-Haqíqat (Tablet on the Uncompounded Reality), Bahá’u’lláh refers to this Father of Philosophy, this time by name:

The first person who devoted himself to philosophy was Idrís. Thus was he named. Some called him also Hermes. In every tongue he hath a special name. He it is who hath set forth in every branch of philosophy thorough and convincing statements.¹⁹

And who is Idrís? He is a Prophet of God, according to the Qur’án (as well as Islamic historical tradition, cited in Keven Brown’s article):

Commemorate Idrís in the Book; for he was a man of truth [siddíqan], a prophet [nabiyyan]; And We uplifted him to a lofty station.²⁰

Hence, the first philosopher in every branch of philosophy is a Prophet. This statement, that the Father of Philosophy was a Prophet of God rather than a Greek sage, has revolutionary potential for the interpretation of history and philosophy alike. This is particularly true with reference to Greek philosophy, which has hitherto been almost universally acclaimed as the “leaven” which enabled the magnificent achievements of Western civilization to “rise up” from the midst of a motley collection of illiterate and blood-thirsty “barbarians.” It transfers the glory from man to God, or, to be precise, from certain aristocratic Greek males to the Unknowable Essence. Bahá’u’lláh lays considerable stress on this provenance, and, as elsewhere in His Writings, upon man’s dependence upon the Revelation of God for all true knowledge and wisdom:

For every land We have prescribed a portion, for every occasion an allotted share, for every pronouncement an appointed time and for every situation an apt remark. Consider Greece. We made it a Seat of Wisdom [kursíyya’l-hikmat] for a prolonged period. However, when the appointed hour struck, its throne was subverted, its tongue ceased to speak, its light grew dim and its banner was hauled down. Thus do We bestow and withdraw. Verily thy Lord is He Who giveth and divesteth, the Mighty, the Powerful.²¹

Now that the overall context of Bahá’u’lláh’s references to the history of philosophy has been discussed, we will turn our attention to the specific verses which are the subject of this particular paper. In between His statement that the Prophets “were the Exponents of divine philosophy” and His affirmation that the “essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets” Bahá’u’lláh refers to two Greek philosophers and two Hebrew prophets as examples of this mode of transmission:

inna abídaqílisa’l-ladhiyi-shtahara fí’l-hikmat kána fí zamani dáúda wa-fíthághúritha fí zamani sulay- mána ibni dáúda wa akhadha’l-hikmata min ma’dini’l- nubuwwati wa huwa’l-ladhí zanna annahu sami’a hafífa’l-falaki wa-balagha maqáma’l-malaki inna rabbaka yufassilu kulla amrinn idhá sháá innahu lahuwa’l-‘alímu’l-muhítu²²

Empedocles, who distinguished himself in philosophy, was a contemporary of David, while Pythagoras lived in the days of Solomon, son of David, and acquired Wisdom from the treasury of prophethood. It was he who claimed to have heard the whispering sound of the heavens and to have attained the station of angels. In truth thy Lord will clearly set forth all things, if He pleaseth. Verily, He is the Wise, the All-Pervading.²³

Abídaqílisa (also written Anbaduqlís, Banduqlís, Abíduqlis, Abídhūqlís, and Anbáduqlis in the sources consulted) is the Arabic transcription for the name of a famous Greek philosopher, known to Western

readers as Empedocles. The opening phrase of this section indicates that Empedocles was renowned in “philosophy” [hikmat] and that he lived in the “time” [zaman] of David. Which David? This is clarified in the second sentence. The second sentence states that Pythagoras (transcribed into Arabic as Fithághúris and here as Fithághúritha), another Greek philosopher—whose Pythagorean theorem and music of the spheres have preserved his memory for schoolchildren throughout the world—was living in the “time” [zaman] of Solomon, the son of David. History has a record of only one Solomon, son of David, these together being two kings of Israel, described in the Books of Kings (I, II) and Books of Chronicles (I, II), as found in both the Hebrew and the Greek versions of the Bible. Another record of these two kings, in which they are described as prophets of God, is found in the Qur’án.

Before we proceed any further with this analysis, we must examine the meaning of “time” [zaman]. In general, the Arabic word is translated as “time; period; stretch of time; duration,”²⁴ and as used by Persians the word means “time; season; fortune; calamity.”²⁵ Inasmuch as a particular Greek philosopher is associated in time with David, and then another Greek philosopher with Solomon, the son of David, it seems that Bahá’u’lláh was using [zaman] in the sense of “generation”—relating Empedocles to David’s generation and Pythagoras to Solomon’s generation. In a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi and dated 15 February 1947,²⁶ the Guardian gave his definition of [zaman], as follows: “We must not take this statement too literally; contemporary may have been meant in Persian as something far more elastic than the English word.” Other than this brief reference, there does not seem to be an authorized interpretation of this term in the Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the letters of Shoghi Effendi.

Before we proceed any further with this inquiry, let us consider what is at issue. First of all, Bahá’u’lláh has affirmed that Empedocles preceded Pythagoras, even as David preceded his father, Solomon. According to “modern academic” historians, the correct dating of Empedocles is circa 445–441 B.C.E., and Pythagoras circa 540–536 B.C.E., with Pythagoras preceding Empedocles by nearly a century. While Bahá’u’lláh has not indicated the historical epoch in which Empedocles and Pythagoras lived, He has Empedocles preceding Pythagoras by a generation. These two visions of history are in contradiction to each other. Secondly, Bahá’u’lláh has stipulated that Empedocles lived during the time of David, and Pythagoras in the time of Solomon. According to the chronologies accepted by most “traditional” Jewish and Christian historians, as well as the calculations of “modern academic” historians, David and Solomon lived in the 11–10th centuries B.C.E. A sampling of contemporary historical chronologies is as follows: David lived circa 1040–970 B.C.E. and Solomon lived circa tenth century B.C.E.;²⁷ David lived circa 1001–986 B.C.E., and Solomon in 965–931 B.C.E.;²⁸ David ruled 1055–1015 B.C.E.,²⁹ and ruled Solomon starting either in 1025, 1015, 1009 or 990 B.C.E. for a period of forty years.³⁰ While Bahá’u’lláh does not identify the epoch in which David and Solomon reigned, if it were to agree with that which is almost universally adhered to by all historians of the East and the West, then it would obviously disagree with the “modern academic” historians on another score, inasmuch as Empedocles is dated by them to the sixth century, and Pythagoras to the fifth century B.C.E.

These contradictions between the chronology of Bahá’u’lláh on the one hand and “modern academic” historians on the other would not be troubling to Bahá’ís if Bahá’u’lláh had not claimed to be divinely inspired with the Most Great Infallibility [‘iṣmat al-kubrā], and if ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi had not interpreted this to mean that every word written by Bahá’u’lláh is unerring and infallibly guided. Nevertheless, if ‘Abdu’l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi had allowed for a symbolic interpretation of this passage from Lawḥ-i-Hikmat, this contradiction could be resolved without challenging Bahá’í scholars to reconsider the “traditional” chronologies and the conclusions of “modern academic” historians as they relate to the ancient history of Greek philosophers and Hebrew prophets.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written at least two Tablets in explanation of some of the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh contained in Lawḥ-i-Hikmat. One is a commentary on certain verses of this Tablet which pertain to cosmological questions, and is entitled Sharh Lawḥ-i-Hikmat.³¹ The second, entitled Lawḥ-i-Mubáarak dar bárih-yi tavárikh-i-falásifah (shortened here to Lawḥ-i-Falásafih), was authored in 1906, in response to the questions of Miss Ethel J. Rosenberg, an early British believer, and this Tablet is almost entirely taken up with an explanation of Bahá’u’lláh’s chronology of philosophers and prophets in Lawḥ-i-

Hikmat (7). For the purposes of our close examination of this topic, a portion of Lawḥ-i-Falásifah will be cited in its published English translation:

As to what thou didst ask regarding the history of the philosophers: history, prior to Alexander of Greece,³² is extremely confused, for it is a fact that only after Alexander did history become an orderly and systematized discipline...

Wherefore ye should not be surprised that the Tablet of Wisdom is in conflict with the historical accounts. It behoveth one to reflect awhile on the great diversity of opinion among the historians, and their contradictory accounts: for the historians of East and West are much at odds, and the Tablet of Wisdom [Lawḥ-i-Hikmat] was written in accordance with certain histories of the East...

Nevertheless, Holy Writ [nass-i-iláhiyyih] is authoritative [amr-i-mahtúm ast], and with it no history of the world can compare, for experience hath shown that after investigation of the facts [taharri haqíqat] and a thorough study of ancient records and corroborative evidence, all have referred back to the Holy Scriptures [nusús-i-iláhiyyih]. The most important thing is to establish the validity of God’s universal Manifestation [mazhar-i-kullí-yi iláhi]; once His claim proveth true, then whatsoever He may choose to say is right and correct.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá affirms two points in this Tablet in reference to Lawḥ-i-Hikmat: first, that “the Tablet of Wisdom was written in accordance with certain histories of the East” (it is not stated that it was written in accordance with all Eastern histories); and second, that “Holy Writ [nass-i-iláhi] is authoritative, and with it no history of the world can compare; they can never hold their own against Holy Writ [nass-i-iláhi].” Lawḥ-i-Falásifah is written in Persian, and although “nass” is an Arabic word, we have sought its meanings in Persian. One of those meanings of “nass” is “the Qur’án”³³ and “nusús” is the plural of “nass.”³⁴ However, inasmuch as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to “historical accounts” in Lawḥ-i-Falásifah using the term “nasús-i-tárikhiyyih” it seems that “nass-i-iláhi” should be translated employing a different meaning of “nass,” namely “text, wording,”³³ and hence as “divine text” or, as rendered by the Research Department, “Holy Writ.” It is clear, from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s choice of words, that He is not referring here to the authority and truthfulness of the Hebrew Scriptures, which He denominates “tawrá” (Torah) in the same Tablet, or even to the Qur’án (which He would have referred to by name), but to the Writings of all the Prophets of God. Inasmuch as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (and Miss Rosenberg, the recipient of this Tablet) recognized Bahá’u’lláh as a Prophet of God, and His Writings as “Holy Writ” [nass-i-iláhi], it is then evident that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá regarded the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh as “authoritative” [amr-i-mahtúm ast], and therefore “whatsoever He may choose to say is right and correct.” In short, we may infer from this general statement, that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated categorically (although not word for word) that the pairing of Empedocles with David and Pythagoras with Solomon, son of David “is right and correct” even though it conflicts with the views of all Western historians and indeed with those of some Eastern historians as well.

In Lawḥ-i-Falásifah we find ‘Abdu’l-Bahá affirming the following: “The most important thing is to establish the validity of God’s universal Manifestation [mazhar-i-kullí-yi iláhi]; once His claim proveth true, then whatsoever He may choose to say is right and correct.” This statement presupposes that it is possible, nay, essential, to “establish the validity” of the Prophet, and in so ruling, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá links this Tablet with His many talks and Tablets which refer to the objective proofs of prophethood, and the fulfillment of those proofs by Bahá’u’lláh, as well as by Moses, Jesus, Muhammad and other universal Manifestations of God. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserts that these proofs and evidences are in agreement with science and reason, indeed, that they constitute elements of a divine science, a divine philosophy, which is the complement of physical science and material philosophy, and the help-meet of revealed religion. It is eminently reasonable to assert, the author would suggest, that a Prophet has access to innate knowledge which enables Him to see things as they are and in themselves, rather than to remain limited to the kinds of knowledge available to normal human beings, and that He should be recognized as being endowed with this superhuman gift if He fulfills the proofs of prophethood which have been established as applying to all authentic Prophets of God. Hence, on this point as well, it seems to the present author that the Bahá’í principle of the harmony of religion with science and reason has been affirmed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Lawḥ-i-Falásifah rather than compromised in the least detail.

The present paper will not discuss the proofs and evidences of prophethood, or investigate the claims of Bahá'u'lláh and His fulfillment of those proofs and evidences. Nor will it explore His prophetic faculty of innate and infallible knowledge and understanding. However, it will identify some of the “Eastern histories” to which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá referred in *Lawḥ-i-Falásifah* when He indicated that certain of those histories were in agreement with the chronology of philosophers and Prophets found in Bahá'u'lláh's *Lawḥ-i-Hikmat*. ‘Abdu’l-Hamíd Ishráq Khávarí reported in his book, *Muhádirát*,³⁵ that what Bahá'u'lláh revealed regarding Empedocles and Pythagoras in *Lawḥ-i-Hikmat* was mentioned in “*Al-Milal wa’l-Nihal*” of [1] Abu-Fath al-Shahrastání (1076-1153) and in the “*Ta’ríkh Mu’tabar wa Shahúr*” [apparently the same work as “*Kitáb al-Mukhtasar fí akhbar al-bashar*”] of [2] ‘Imámu’d-Dín Abú’l-Fida’ (1273-1331). Ishráq Khávarí quotes passages from Abú’l-Fida’ (pp. 154, lines 3-5; 152, lines 15-17) which pertain to Empedocles and Pythagoras, and in the second of these two citations Abú’l-Fida’ is quoting Al-Shahrastání. Ishráq Khávarí does not state that Bahá'u'lláh quoted Al-Shahrastání or Abú’l-Fida’ in *Lawḥ-i-Hikmat*. Apparently, he was leaving his reader to draw his own conclusions.

In his article, “Problems of Chronology in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom,”³⁶ J.R.I. Cole noted a connection between the historical accounts of Al-Shahrastání and Abú’l-Fida’ and the *Lawḥ-i-Hikmat* of Bahá'u'lláh. J.R.I. Cole stated that Al-Shahrastání and Abú’l-Fida’ were the sources for Bahá'u'lláh's references to Empedocles and Pythagoras, but went on to indicate that other Muslim historians had made similar statements, including: [3] Sá’id ibn Ahmad Sá’id Al-Andalusi (1029-1070 CE) in “*Kitáb Tabaqát al-Umam*”; [4] Jamálu’d-Dín al-Qiftí (1172-1248), in “*Ta’ríkh al-Hukumá*”; and [5] Muwaffaqu’d-Dín ibn Abí Usaybi’ah (1194-1270), in “*Tabaqát al-Atbá*.”³⁷ The author of this paper found other Muslim historians who made similar statements in their historical works, including [6] Shams al-Dín al-Shahrázúrí (d. 1200), in “*Nuzhat al-arwáh wa-rawdat al-afráh*” (36); and [7] Hájjí Khalífah (d. 1609), in “*Kashf al-zunún fí asámí al-kutub wa’l-funún*.”³⁸ In an independent search for the writings of these medieval Muslim historians, the author was very fortunate in discovering the Arabic texts of all of the above in the holdings of the New York Public Library.

We will demonstrate the similarity between the words of Bahá'u'lláh and those of the seven Muslim historians studied by citing the original Arabic:

inna abídaqlísa’l-ladhiyi-shtahara fí’l-hikmati kána fí zamani dáúda (Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ-i-Hikmat*, MG, p. 124)

banduqlís fakána fí zamani dáúd al-nabí ‘alayhi al- salám ‘alá má dhikru’l-‘ulamá’ bi-tawáríkhi al-umam wa kána akhadha’l-hikmata ‘an luqmání bi’l-shám (Al-Andalusi, “*Kitáb Tabaqát al-Umam*,” p. 666)

anbáduqlis...kána fí zamani dáúd al-nabí ‘alayhi al- salám madaya ilayhi wa talqiya minhu al-‘ilm wa akhtalafa ilá luqmání al-hakím (Al-Shahrastání, “*Al-Milal wa’l-Nihal*,” p. 359; Cole edition, vol. II, p. 132)

anbáduqlis...wa kána fí zamani dáúd wa kána akhadha’l- hikmata ‘an luqmání bi’l-shám wa qíla ‘an sulaymání (Al-Shahrázúrí, “*Nuzhat al-arwáh wa-rawdat al-afráh*,” folio 13)

abídhūqlís hadha fakána fí zamani dáúd al-nabí ‘alayhi al- salám ‘alá má dhikrahu’l-‘ulamá’ bi-tawáríkhi al-umam wa qíla anahu akhadha’l-hikmata ‘an luqmání al-hakím bi’l-shám (Al-Qiftí, “*Ta’ríkh al-Hukamá*,” pp. 12-13)

banduqlís kána fí zamani dáúd al-nabí ‘alayhi al-salám ‘alá má dhikrahu’l-‘ulamá’ bi-tawáríkhi al-umam wa kána akhadha’l-hikmata ‘an luqmání al-hakím bi’l-shám (Ibn Abí Usaybi’ah, “*Tabaqát al-Atbá*,” p. 61)

abíduqlis kána fí zamani dáúd al-nabí (Abú’l-Fida’, “*Al-Mukhtasar fí akhbar al-bashar*,” p. 152; Cole edition, pp. 84-85)

banduqlís kána fí ‘asri dáúd ‘alayhi al-salám (Hájjí Khalífah, “*Kashf al-zunún fí asámí al-kutub wa’l-funún*,” p. 17)

A study of these passages seems to indicate a certain consistency between all eight accounts, and direct quotation of two of the accounts in others sources. Sá'id al-Andalusi, in “Kitáb Tabaqát al-Umam” is directly quoted in Jamálu'd-Dín Ibn al-Qiftí, “Ta'ríkh al-Hukamá” (pp. 12-13; 15-16) and in Ibn Abí Usaybi'ah, “Tabaqát al-Atbá” (p. 61). The wording of al-Shahrastání's account, in “Al-Milal wa'l-Nihal” (p. 359) is markedly different from that found in Sá'id al-Andalusi, although he likewise writes “kána fí zamani dáúd al-nabí 'alayhi al-salám” and he agrees with Sá'id that Empedocles (whom he styles “Anbáduqlís” rather than “Banduqlís”) learned from “Luqmán”—something which is not attested by Bahá'u'lláh in Lawḥ-i-Hikmat. Al-Shahrastání's account is cited and quoted by Shams al-Dín al-Shahrazúrí in “Nuzhat al-arwáh wa-rawdat al-afráh,”³⁹ and by Abú'l-Fida' in “Al-Mukhtasar fí Akhbar al-Bashar” (p. 152). Al-Shahrazúrí also cites al-Qiftí in “Rawdat al-Afráh.”⁴⁰ While all of these historians write that Empedocles “kána fí zamani dáúd” (Empedocles lived in the time of David), none of them cite the origin of this historical statement. Al-Andalusi and al-Qiftí quote the Andalusian writer, Muhammad bin 'Abdu'lláh Ibn Masarra al-Jabalí Ibn Masarra (883-931), and al-Shahrastání quotes a mysterious work entitled “Árá' al-Falásifah.”⁴¹ According to S.M. Stern, Al-Andalusi also seems to follow “Al-Abad 'Ala'l-Ahmad” by al-'Amirí,⁴² and Stern also states that al-Shahrastání uses the “Siwán al-Hikmat” of Muhammad ibn Tahír ibn Bahrám al-Sijistání.⁴³ The last historian cited, Hájjí Khalífah, “Kashf al-zunún fí asámí al-kutub wa'l-funún” (p. 17) alters one word in the sentence referring to the lifetime of Empedocles, replacing [zaman] with [‘asr], which is defined as “age, era, time; period; epoch.”⁴⁴ Hájjí Khalífah does not indicate his sources. In Lawḥ-i-Hikmat, Bahá'u'lláh uses the same terminology as most of the historians cited, “kána fí zamani dáúd” rather than using the term [‘asr] found in Khalífah (“kána fí ‘asri dáúd”).

At this point in time, it seems that we do not know any more than has been reported in this paper about the sources for these statements by the Muslim historians. What is clear is that Bahá'u'lláh referred to these histories in general, although it is by no means clear from His specific phrasing that He was citing any of these histories in particular. Later in Lawḥ-i-Hikmat Bahá'u'lláh writes that “whenever We desire to quote the sayings of the learned and of the wise, presently there will appear before the face of thy Lord in the form of a tablet all that which hath appeared in the world.”⁴⁵ It is clear that Bahá'u'lláh deliberately chose to cite the general wording of these historical accounts.

To continue with the passage from Lawḥ-i-Hikmat, where Bahá'u'lláh refers to Pythagoras, in Arabic:

wa-fíthághúrítha fí zamani sulaymána ibni dáúda wa akhadha'l-hikmata min ma'dini'l-nubuwwati wa huwa'l-ladhí zanna annahu sami'a hafífa'l-falaki wa-balagha maqáma'l-malaki inna rabbaka yufassilu kulla amrinn idhá shá'a innahu lahuwa'l-álímu'l-muhítu (Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Hikmat, MG, p. 124)

Al-Shahrazúrí's text on Pythagoras was inaccessible to the author of this paper; however, S.M. Stern states (43) that Al-Shahrazúrí quotes Al-Shahrastání and Al-Qiftí as well as other sources. Six of the seven Muslim historians cited above are once again brought in for comparison:

fíthághúris fakána ba'da bandaqlís bi-zamán wa akhadha'l- hikmat 'an ashábi sulaymán bani dáúd 'alayhumá al-salám (Al-Andalusi, “Kitáb Tabaqát al-Umam,” p. 667)

fíthághúris...kána fí zamani sulaymán al-nabí ibn dáúd 'alayhá al-salám qad akhadha'l-hikmata min ma'dini'l- nubawwati wa huwa'l-hakímu al-fádilu dhú al-ra'ayu al-matínu wa al-'aqlu al-rasínu yad'í innahu sháhada'l- 'awálíma al-'uluwiyyata bihissihi wa hadsihi wa balagha fí al-riyádati ilá an sami'a hafífa'l-falaki wa wasala ilá maqámi'l-malak (Al-Shahrastání, “Al-Milal wa'l-Nihal,” p. 365; Cole version, vol. II, p. 132—cited in Cole, p. 31, n. 24)

fíthághúris...kána ba'da abídhūqlís al-hakím bi-zamán wa akhadha'l-hikmata 'an ashábi sulaymáni bni dáúd al-nabí (Al-Qiftí, “Ta'ríkh al-Hukamá,” pp. 15, 258)

inna fíthághúris kána ba'da banduqlís bi-zamán wa akhadha'l- hikmata 'an ashábi sulaymáni bni dáúd 'alayhamá al-salám (Ibn Abí Usaybi'ah, “Tabaqát al-Atbá,” p. 62)

fíthághúris fí zamani sulaymáni bni dáúd 'am wa akhadha'l- hikmata min ma'dini'l-nubawwati wa kánat wafáti sulaymáni bni dáúd li-madiyya khamisa máyata (Abú'l-Fida', “Al-Mukhtasar fí

akhbar al-bashar,” p. 152; Cole edition, pp. 84–85) thumma fíthághúris thumma suqrát thumma aflátún (Hájji Khalífah, “Kashf al-zunún fí asámí al-kutub wa’l-funún,” pp. 17–18)

In a comparative reading of these texts we notice immediately that al-Andalusi indicates that Pythagoras “learned wisdom” [akhadha’l-hikmat] “from the companions of Solomon” [‘an asháb sulaymán] and that al-Qiftí and Ibn Abí Usaybiáh quote Al-Andalusi’s statement to this effect almost verbatim. This wording is not found in Bahá’u’lláh’s Lawḥ-i-Hikmat but it does appear in a treatise written by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, entitled “Risáliy-i-Madaniyyih”:

va dar taváríkhi muta’addadih madhkúr kih falásifih-yi yúnán mithli fíthághúritih akthari mas’ili hikmatí iláhiyyih va tabí’iyyih rá az talámidhih-yi hadrat-i sulaymán iqtibás nimúd⁴⁶

Marzieh Gail, in her English translation of this work has worded this passage in the following manner:

It is furthermore a matter of record in numerous historical works that the philosophers of Greece such as Pythagoras, acquired the major part of their philosophy, both divine and material, from the disciples of Solomon.⁴⁷

Louis Cheikho, the editor of Al-Andalusi’s “Kitáb Tabaqát al-Umam” in the published version consulted,⁴⁸ in a note appended to this account has referred to the “learned ones of Israel” [‘ulamá’ al-isrá’iliyín]. This interpretation of the phrase “disciples of Solomon” seems to be favored by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as He makes mention of a connection between the “learned ones of Israel” in at least three of His public talks:

In the splendor of the reign of Solomon their sciences and arts advanced to such a degree that even the Greek philosophers journeyed to Jerusalem to sit at the feet of the Hebrew sages and acquire the basis of Israelitish law. According to Eastern history this is an established fact.⁴⁹ Even the celebrated philosophers of Greece journeyed to Jerusalem in order to study with the Israelitish sages, and many were the lessons of philosophy and wisdom they received.⁵⁰

Even the philosophers of Greece went to Palestine to drink from the fountains of their wisdom and sit at the feet of their sages. All these facts prove that Moses was a Prophet and a Teacher.⁵¹

As we return to our study of Lawḥ-i-Hikmat, we find that Bahá’u’lláh’s description of Pythagoras uses wording which is almost identical to that found in Al-Shahrastání (“Al-Milal wa’l-Nihal,” p. 365), who is quoted in Abú’l-Fida (“Al-Mukhtasar fí Akhbar al-Bashar,” p. 152): Pythagoras “lived in the time of Solomon the son of David” [fí zamani/zamáni sulaymán bin dáúd] “and he learned wisdom” [wa akhadha’l-hikmat] “from the treasury of prophethood” [min ma’dini’l-nubuwwat]. Bahá’u’lláh continues with verses that are found neither in Al-Shahrastání nor in Abú’l-Fida. In fact, these verses do not seem to be found in any of the other five sources either. There are at least four possibilities which present themselves: first, that Bahá’u’lláh was “quoting” Al-Shahrastání in this passage; second, that He was “quoting” Abú’l-Fida; third, that He was quoting Al-Shahrastání’s source; and fourth, that He was citing another historian, who, like Abú’l-Fida, had derived this historical account from Al-Shahrastání. If His intention had been to cite the exact words of specific historians, surely He would not have introduced so many variations in His text. It seems that His purpose was to quote the words of various historians which, taken together, would more nearly satisfy the mind of the recipient of this Tablet, the learned Áqá Muhammad-i-Qá’íní, surnamed Nabíl-i-Akbar.

We now have some idea of which “Eastern” histories Bahá’u’lláh may have cited in this particular passage of Lawḥ-i-Hikmat. We might now ask the question, “But why these particular sources?” If we consider the Most Great Infallibility of the Manifestation of God as proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh, it appears that one answer to this question is that Bahá’u’lláh considered these historical accounts to be accurate. By quoting them He certainly seems to invest them with authority. Prior to this investiture, they were but the statements of individual historians, no more privileged in status than those of any other historians. Inasmuch as they are, nonetheless, at extreme variance with “modern academic” histories, we may well ask whether or not there are other “Eastern” historians who have reported these events and personalities in this manner, and if the only “Eastern” histories which can be cited are authored by Muslim

writers. J.R.I. Cole has furnished much information on this question in his article, cited earlier. The author of this paper has also consulted a number of other sources, all of which will be discussed here.

Let us begin with the chronological order which places Empedocles before Pythagoras. As we have noted, Bahá'u'lláh indicates that Empedocles preceded Pythagoras, apparently by as much as a generation. A number of Muslim writers have cited such an order, which is, as has already been established, the opposite of what Western historians maintain. The Muslim authors will be listed here in order of their antiquity: [1] Sá'id ibn Ahmad Sá'id al-Andalusi (1029-1070), in "Kitáb Tabaqát al-Umam"⁵² counts five great ancient Greek philosophers—Empedocles, then Pythagoras, then Socrates, then Plato and finally, Aristotle; [2] Abu-Fath al-Shahrastání (1076-1153), in "Al-Milal wa'l-Nihal"⁵³ lists Pythagoras after Empedocles and before Socrates and Plato; [3] Yahya al-Suhrawardí (d. 1191), in "Hikmat al-Ishráq"⁵⁴ cites Pythagoras as the disciple of Empedocles; [4] Shams al-Dín Al-Shahrazúrí (d. 1200), in "Nuzhat al-arwáh wa-rawdat al-afrah" (37) lists Pythagoras after Empedocles and before Socrates in what seems to be a chronological listing of Greek philosophers; [5] Jamálu'd-Dín al-Qiftí (1172-1248), in "Ta'rikh al-Hukamá"⁵⁵ lists the order of the five great ancient philosophers as follows: Empedocles, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle; [6] 'Imádu'd-Dín Abú'l-Fida' (1273-1331), in "Al-Mukhtasar fí Akhbar al-Bashar"⁵⁶ likewise places Pythagoras after Empedocles and before Hippocrates, Socrates and Plato; [7] Hájjí Khalífah (d. 1609), in "Kashf al-zunún fí asám al-kutub wa'l-funún"⁵⁷ has also listed "divine philosophers" [falásafata'l-iláhiyyún] "the greatest of whom were Empedocles, then Pythagoras, then Socrates, then Plato, then Aristotle." Consequently, we find that this order was not uncommon among Muslim writers—J.R.I. Cole and Ilai Aloni have, between them, cited seven such writers, and there may have been others.

"Eastern" histories, apart from those authored by Muslims, which refer to Empedocles and Pythagoras have been difficult to locate. To date, the earliest recorded reference to Empedocles which the present author has discovered is found in a work written by Philo Judaeus (BCE 30?-45 CE). Philo Judaeus lived in Alexandria, Egypt, and he was Jewish, and on both counts he may be regarded as an "Eastern" historian. He was a copious author who seems to have written exclusively in the Greek language. His writings survive in Greek, Latin and Armenian manuscripts. In his book entitled "On the Life of Moses," Philo Judaeus stated that Empedocles, among other Greek philosophers, "used the Old Testament writings"⁵⁸ in arriving at some of his metaphysical doctrines. Those doctrines included, according to other scholarly sources, a "doctrine of emanations"⁵⁹ and a science of "four elements."⁶⁰ Philo Judaeus does not identify the epoch in which Empedocles lived. Thus far, he is the only "Eastern" historian, other than the seven Muslim historians already cited, who identified a connection between Empedocles and the writings of the Hebrew prophets. Nevertheless, the existence of Philo Judaeus' testimony indicates that these Muslim historians did not fabricate this historical anecdote in the Middle Ages.

We now come to consider historical accounts of contact between Pythagoras and Solomon which are found in various "Eastern" histories. The earliest known reference to a connection between Pythagoras and the Hebrew prophets is found in "An Interpretation of the Law of Moses" (also titled "Exegetical Commentaries on the Books of Moses") by Aristobulus of Paneas (also known as Philobulus), who flourished in the second century B.C.E. According to the first book of Maccabees (chapter I, verse 10), Aristobulus was the teacher of the Alexandrian monarch Ptolemy VI (also known as Philometer), who died in 146 B.C.E.⁶¹ or 145 B.C.E.⁶² The second book of Maccabees, apparently written in 124 B.C.E. (according to the text, chapter I, verse 10), includes a letter from the people of Judaea, the city of Jerusalem, the Judaeans council of elders and Judas Maccabaeus addressed to Aristobulus, the teacher of Ptolemy VI, and to the Egyptian Jews. Fragments of Aristobulus' commentaries on the Torah are preserved in the writings of Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius,⁶³ in which he contends that the doctrines of Pythagoras, among other Greek philosophers, were derived from the Hebrew Scriptures. The teachings of Aristobulus are discussed by Valckenaer.⁶⁴ Christian apologists often cited Aristobulus in their attempts to answer the arguments of their Roman pagan opponents.⁶⁵ Philo Judaeus (B.C.E. 30?-45 C.E.) employs some of the same arguments as Aristobulus, in his work "On the Life of Moses" and other books. Pythagoras is one of the Greek philosophers whom he most admired, and, according to Professor Zeller,⁶⁶ Philo Judaeus "assumed that the Hellenic sages used the Old Testament writings" in arriving at

their metaphysical positions. Philo's writings had a tremendous impact upon Christian theological and philosophical literature, and there is a vast scholarly corpus dedicated to the study of his writings and their influence upon subsequent thinkers. Hence, we see that there were at least two Jewish writers residing in Egypt and writings about the connections between civilizations (hence, "Eastern" historians) who attested to some kind of link between Pythagoras and the Hebrew prophets. Once again, this is not a medieval fabrication...Aristobulus lived circa 150 B.C.E. while Philo Judaeus lived about a century and a half later, both of them hundreds of years before the Muslim historians we have cited.

The early Christian writer Clement of Alexandria (150-211/215 C.E.), in "Stromateis"⁶⁷ likewise asserted that the Greek philosophers, including Pythagoras acquired their metaphysical wisdom from the Hebrew Scriptures. However, he denies any direct connection between Pythagoras and Solomon.⁶⁸ Another Christian writer, although not "Eastern" by any definition, the Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614-1687) wrote⁶⁹ that "Pythagoras drew his knowledge from the Hebrew Fountains" and asserted that to this "all Writers, Sacred and Prophane, do testifie and aver." Of the Islamic writers who refer to Pythagoras as a contemporary of Solomon, we have seen that the first of these (among those cited in this study) is Abu-Fath al-Shahrastání (1076-1153), in "Al-Milal wa'l-Nihal"; followed by Shamsu'd-Dín al-Shahrastání (d. 1200), in "Nuzhat al-arwáh wa-rawdat al-afráh"; and 'Imádu'd-Dín Abú'l-Fida' (1273-1331), in "Al-mukhtasar fí akhbar al-bashar." Mullá Lutfi'l-Maqtúl⁷⁰ states that divine wisdom was transmitted from Solomon to Pythagoras. Three Islamic historians—Sá'id al-Andalusi (1029-1070), in "Kitáb tabaqát al-umam"; Jamálu'd-Dín al-Qiftí, in "Ta'rikh al-Hukamá"; and Ibn Abí Usaybi'ah, in "Tabaqát al-atbá"—report that Pythagoras learned wisdom from the disciples or companions of Solomon.

Now that we have examined some of the "Eastern" histories to which Bahá'u'lláh seems to have been referring in the Lawḥ-i-Hikmat, we will take under the consideration the sources which "Western" historians have cited as fundamental to their account of these events. We will begin with the chronology of the ancient Greek philosophers. Luis E. Navia, in Socratic Testimonies,⁷¹ his exhaustive study of the life of Socrates, has indicated that the principal source for the chronology of the pre-Socratic philosophers is found in The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers,⁷² by Diogenes Laertius. Navia writes⁷³ that there "is hardly any definite knowledge concerning Diogenes Laertius himself, and there are even doubts as to his correct name: he has been also called Laertius Diogenes or simply Laertius." Navia continues regarding this historical source⁷⁴: "It has been assumed that he lived around the year A.D. 250, and that his original work was more extensive than its extant form." Navia reports⁷⁵ that "Diogenes Laertius makes it clear that the great majority of documents written about Socrates between the middle of the fourth century B.C. and the second century A.D. also perished." It would be reasonable to conclude that most of the documents which might have pertained to Empedocles and to Pythagoras would also have perished. Navia characterized Laertius' "Lives of the Philosophers" as an historical source as follows: "revealing not so much with respect to the biography and ideas of Socrates, but with respect to the sorts of accounts and anecdotes about him which had been developed during the first five centuries after his death";⁷⁶ "to some, for instance, it is nothing but a collection of gossip reports of little historical worth and of no philosophical consequence, while according to others, it is an important contribution that gathers within a few pages valuable information about the popular conception of Socrates developed in ancient times."⁷⁷ In reference to both Plato and Socrates in Laertius' book, Navia wrote⁷⁸: "Diogenes Laertius' biography while indeed the most extensive Platonic biography of ancient times, contains such an extraordinary array of anecdotal information, that, just as in the case of his biography of Socrates, it can at most give us an adequate idea, not so much of the actual biography of Plato, but of the kinds of reports that circulated about him during the first five centuries after his death." We might note that Aristobulus lived around four hundred years prior to Diogenes Laertius, and that Philo Judaeus died some two hundred years before Laertius was born. Perhaps they were informed of reports about Empedocles and Pythagoras which did not survive in the Greek libraries to which Laertius apparently had access.

What then did Diogenes Laertius actually write about Empedocles and Pythagoras in his "Lives of the Philosophers"? Laertius wrote that Empedocles "flourished in the 84th Olympiad,"⁷⁹ which the famous classicist and editor and translator of Laertius, Professor R.D. Hicks (Oxford University) renders as 444-441 B.C.E.⁸⁰ Laertius quotes Timaeus (of whom we have no independent record) to the effect

that Empedocles was a pupil of Pythagoras,⁸¹ and also Neathes (whose writings have not survived except where cited by Laertius) that Empedocles studied with the Pythagoreans but was excommunicated when he publicly revealed certain of their secret teachings in his poem.⁸² Laertius wrote that Pythagoras “flourished in the 60th Olympiad,”⁸³ which is rendered by Professor Hicks as 540–536 B.C.E.⁸⁴ Laertius described the travels of Pythagoras, and we should note that there is no reference to a visit to the land of Israel:

While still young, so eager was he for knowledge, he left his own country and had himself initiated into all the mysteries and rites not only of Greece but also of foreign countries. Now he was in Egypt when Polycrates sent him a letter of introduction to Amasis; he learnt the Egyptian language, so we learn from Antiphon in his book *On Men of Outstanding Merit*, and he also journeyed among the Chaldaeans and Magi.⁸⁵

While Bahá’u’lláh has not specifically addressed the accuracy and reliability of Greek historical records, He has addressed the question of “conflicting tales and traditions” in one of His Tablets:

Furthermore, among existing historical records differences are to be found, and each of the various peoples of the world hath its own account of the age of the earth and of its history. Some trace their history as far back as eight thousand years, others as far as twelve thousand years. To any one that hath read the book of Juk is clear and evident how much the accounts given by the various books have differed. Please God thou wilt turn thine eyes towards the Most Great Revelation, and entirely disregard these conflicting tales and traditions.⁸⁶

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has specifically addressed this same topic, that is, the accuracy of ancient historical records, and in reference to Greek history, in *Lawḥ-i-Falásafih* (7):

As to what thou didst ask regarding the history of the philosophers: history, prior to Alexander of Greece (32), is extremely confused, for it is a fact that only after Alexander did history become an orderly and systematized discipline. One cannot, for this reason, rely upon traditions and reported historical events that have come down before the days of Alexander. This is a matter thoroughly established, in the view of all authoritative historians. How many a historical account was taken as fact in the eighteenth century, yet the opposite was proved true in the nineteenth. No reliance, then, can be placed upon the traditions and reports of historians which antedate Alexander, not even with regard to ascertaining the lifetimes of leading individuals...

The histories prior to Alexander, which were based on oral accounts current among the people, were put together later on. There are great discrepancies among them, and certainly they can never hold their own against Holy Writ [nass-i-iláhí]. It is an accepted fact among historians themselves that these histories were compiled after Alexander, and that prior to his time history was transmitted by word of mouth.

It is clear that Empedocles and Pythagoras lived prior to Alexander the Great, and hence, in the estimation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the historical records pertaining to these two Greek philosophers are not to be trusted, particularly if they conflict with what has been written in “Holy Writ” (nass-i-iláhí)—which has already been demonstrated to include, nay, to be crowned by, the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, including *Lawḥ-i-Hikmat*.”

Now that we have briefly surveyed the principal source for the Western chronology of the ancient Greek philosophers, we will turn our attention to the principal source for both the traditional Jewish and Christian and the Western “modern academic” chronology of the ancient Hebrew prophets—the Hebrew Scriptures. The Bible has been studied by so many scholars as to make its introduction to the reader entirely superfluous. However, the statements of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi regarding the historical accuracy and reliability of the Biblical text are not nearly as well known, and hence these will be cited here, beginning with this statement by Bahá’u’lláh:

...the Torah that God hath confirmed consists of the exact words that streamed forth at the bidding of God from the tongue of Him Who conversed with Him (Moses).⁸⁷

On the other hand, Bahá'u'lláh affirmed in Kitáb-i-Íqán that the text of the Bible was not perverted by the Jewish people:

Verily by “perverting” the text is not meant that which these foolish and abject souls have fancies, even as some maintain that Jewish and Christian divines have effaced from the Book such verses as extol and magnify the countenance of Muhammad, and instead thereof have inserted the contrary. How utterly vain and false are these words! Can a man who believeth in a book, and deemeth it to be inspired by God, mutilate it? Moreover, the Pentateuch had been spread over the surface of all the earth, and was not confined to Mecca and Medina, so that they could privily corrupt and pervert its text. Nay, rather, by corruption of the text is meant that in which all Muslim divines are engaged today, that is the interpretation of God’s holy Book in accordance with their idle imaginings and vain desires. And as the Jews, in the time of Muhammad, interpreted Those verses of the Pentateuch, that referred to His Manifestation, after their own fancy, and refused to be satisfied with His holy utterance, the charge of “perverting” the text was therefore pronounced against them. Likewise, it is clear, how in this day, the people of the Qur’án have perverted the text of God’s holy Book, concerning the signs of the expected Manifestation, and interpreted it according to their own inclination and desires.⁸⁸

Also, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written regarding the reliability of the Torah as a testimony to the Revelation of God, and as a source of historical accounts:

Know ye that the Torah is that which was revealed in the Tablets to Moses, may peace be upon Him, or that to which He was bidden. But the stories are historical narratives and were written after Moses, may peace be upon Him.⁸⁹

Know ye that the Torah is that which was revealed in the Tablets to Moses, may peace be upon Him, and in that which He was commanded to do.... The glorious Book, the Mighty Decree, is what was in the Tablets which Moses, upon Him be peace, brought from Mount Sinai, and that which He proclaimed unto the children of Israel, in accordance with the explicit text of those Tablets.⁹⁰

Shoghi Effendi has confirmed and expanded upon this assessment of the contents of the Bible, as indicated in the following letters written by Shoghi Effendi and by his secretary on his behalf:

The Bible is not wholly authentic, and in this respect is not to be compared with the Qur’án, and should be wholly subordinated to the authentic writings of Bahá'u'lláh.⁹¹

When ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states we believe what is in the Bible, He means in substance. Not that we believe every word of it to be taken literally or that every word is the authentic saying of the Prophet.⁹²

We cannot be sure of the authenticity of any of the phrases in the Old or the New Testament. What we can be sure of is when such references or words are cited or quoted in either the Qur’án or the Bahá’í writings.⁹³

We have no way of substantiating the stories of the Old Testament other than references to them in our own teachings, so we cannot say exactly what happened at the battle of Jericho.⁹⁴

‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Lawḥ-i-Falásafih has discussed the relative unreliability of the Bible as a source of historical facts, citing the problem of the various versions of the Scriptures:

Furthermore, the Torah, held to be the most ancient of histories, existeth today in three separate versions: the Hebrew, considered authentic by the Jews and the Protestant clergy; the Greek Septuagint, which is used as authoritative in the Greek and the other Eastern churches; and the Samaritan Torah, the standard authority for that people. These three versions differ greatly, one from another, even with regard to the lifetimes of the most celebrated figures.

In the Hebrew Torah, it is recorded that from Noah’s flood until the birth of Abraham there was an interval of two hundred and ninety-two years. In the Greek, that time-span is given as

one thousand and seventy-two years, while in the Samaritan, the recorded span is nine hundred and forty-two years. Refer to the commentary by Henry Westcott, for tables are supplied therein which show the discrepancies among the three Torahs as to the birth dates of a number of the descendants of Shem, and thou wilt see how greatly the versions differ one from another.

Moreover, according to the text of the Hebrew Torah, from the creation of Adam until Noah's flood the elapsed time is recorded as one thousand six hundred and fifty-six years, while in the Greek Torah the interval is given as two thousand two hundred and sixty-two years, and in the Samaritan text, the same period is said to have lasted one thousand three hundred and seven years.

Reflect thou now over the discrepancies among these three Torahs. The case is indeed surprising. The Jews and Protestants belittle the Greek Torah, while to the Greeks, the Hebrew version is spurious, and the Samaritans deny both the Hebrew and the Greek versions.

Our purpose is to show that even in Scriptural history, the most outstanding of all histories, there are contradictions as to the time when the great ones lived, let alone as to dates related to others. And furthermore, learned societies in Europe are continually revising the existing records, both of East and West. In spite of this, how can the confused accounts of peoples dating from before Alexander be compared with the Holy Text of God? If any scholar expresses astonishment, let him be surprised at the discrepancies in Scriptural history. (7)

Since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote this Tablet, Biblical scholarship has recognized even a greater variety of Biblical versions. In addition to the three noted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in *Lawḥ-i-Falásafih* there is a version of the Bible in Ethiopic, also called Coptic; there is another in Armenian; one in Syriac, the language of the Peshitto; yet another in Aramaic. The most ancient manuscripts of the Bible which have yet to be discovered are those which were found in the 1940s and 1950s in the Qumran caves overlooking the Dead Sea. These include texts in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. This collection has yet to be translated into English in its entirety and much of it has not been published in such manner as to make it accessible to non-specialist readers of the Bible. The task of comparing the Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Samaritan, Ethiopic, Armenian, Syriac and other versions has occupied Biblical scholars for well over a century now, but the Qumran cave manuscripts will require that any definite conclusions be postponed for decades or even for generations to come. Computer technology may speed up the process somewhat, but funding cuts may retard it, and there is no telling how long it will be before lay readers will be able to compare the various versions of the Bible and come to their own conclusions regarding the reliability of its historical accounts.

In *Lawḥ-i-Falásafih*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá frankly discusses the “contradictions” between three versions of the Bible. Many “modern academic” historians would agree with His assessment and then go on to state that due to these “contradictions” the text of the Bible is not a reliable source for the understanding of ancient history. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reaches an entirely different conclusion, which will be cited for the third time in this paper:

Nevertheless, Holy Writ [*nass-i-iláhiyyih*] is authoritative [*amr-i-mahtúm ast*], and with it no history of the world can compare, for experience hath shown that after investigation of the facts [*taharri haqíqat*] and a thorough study of ancient records and corroborative evidence, all have referred back to the Holy Scriptures [*nusús-i-iláhiyyih*]. The most important thing is to establish the validity of God's universal Manifestation [*mazhar-i-kullí-yi iláhí*]; once His claim proveth true, then whatsoever He may choose to say is right and correct.

The histories prior to Alexander, which were based on oral accounts current among the people, were put together later on. There are great discrepancies among them, and certainly they can never hold their own against Holy Writ [*nass-i-iláhí*]. It is an accepted fact among historians themselves that these histories were compiled after Alexander, and that prior to his time history was transmitted by word of mouth. (7)

Hence, although there are “contradictions” between the various versions of the Bible, nevertheless, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá affirms that the testimony of the “Holy Writ” is more reliable than the “ancient records” of pre-Alexandrian history. As has been noted earlier, “Holy Writ” in this case does not refer exclusively to the Bible, but embraces all of the Scriptures, including the Qur’án, the Bayán, and the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh. Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi indicate that these more recent Scriptures are much more reliable than the Bible. Bahá’u’lláh refers to the Qur’án in Kitáb-i-Íqán:

Although many traditions had been revealed by that Source of Prophethood and Mine of divine Guidance, yet He mentioned only that Book, thereby appointing it as the mightiest instrument and surest testimony for the seekers; a guide for the people until the Day of Resurrection.⁹⁵

With unswerving vision, with pure heart, and sanctified spirit, consider attentively what God hath established as the testimony of guidance for His people in His Book, which is recognized as authentic by both the high and lowly. To this testimony we both, as well as all the peoples of the world, must cling, that through its light we may know and distinguish between truth and falsehood, guidance and error.⁹⁶

Consider, how He hath appointed and decreed this selfsame Book, the Qur’án, as a guidance unto all that are in heaven and on earth. He, the divine Being, and unknowable Essence, hath, Himself, testified that this Book is, beyond all doubt and uncertainty, the guide of all mankind until the Day of Resurrection.⁹⁷

And yet, the unfailing testimony of God to both the East and the West is none other than the Qur’án.⁹⁸

Shoghi Effendi has also expressed his views regarding the authenticity of the Qur’án, and of the Bábí and Bahá’í Writings, in the following letters written on his behalf:

In regard to your question concerning the authenticity of the Qur’án. I have referred it to the Guardian for his opinion. He thinks that the Qur’án is, notwithstanding the opinion of certain historians, quite authentic, and that consequently it should be considered in its entirety by every faithful and loyal believer as the sacred scriptures of the Muhammadan Revelation.⁹⁹

As to ...’s claim that the Qur’án is not wholly authentic, the Bahá’ís refuse to share such a belief, as they are convinced that that Holy Book is entirely the words of the Prophet Himself. Even Western historians and Orientalists agree that the Qur’án is an authentic book.¹⁰⁰

They must strive to obtain, from sources that are authoritative and unbiased, a sound knowledge of the history and tenets of Islám—the source and background of their Faith—and approach reverently and with a mind purged from preconceived ideas the study of the Qur’án which, apart from the sacred scriptures of the Bábí and Bahá’í Revelations, constitutes the only Book which can be regarded as an absolutely authenticated Repository of the Word of God.¹⁰¹

The Bible is not wholly authentic, and in this respect is not to be compared with the Qur’án, and should be wholly subordinated to the authentic writings of Bahá’u’lláh.¹⁰²

In conclusion, while “modern academic” historians may be inclined to regard the pairing of Empedocles with David and Pythagoras with Solomon as fictive rather than truthful to the historical record, Bahá’u’lláh, endowed with the Most Great Infallibility, and His appointed Interpreters, with conferred infallibility have alike asserted that it is they would are mistaken. He challenges believers in God and in the Prophets to weigh His Writings in the Balance of the Holy Scriptures, the Bible and the Qur’án among them:

In mine hand I carry the testimony of God, your Lord and the Lord of your sires of old. Weigh it with the just Balance that ye possess, the Balance of the testimony of the Prophets and Messengers of God. If ye find it to be established in truth, if ye believe it to be of God, beware, then, lest ye cavil at it, and render your works vain, and be numbered with the infidels.¹⁰³

And to those “modern academic” historians and other secular scholars who would apply the standards and methodologies of their various disciplines to determine the truthfulness and reliability of His Writings, Bahá’u’lláh writes:

Set before thine eyes God’s unerring Balance and, as one standing in His Presence, weigh in that Balance thine actions every day, every moment of thy life.¹⁰⁴

Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men.¹⁰⁵

Give ear unto the verses of God which He Who is the sacred Lote-Tree reciteth unto you. They are assuredly the infallible balance, established by God, the Lord of this world and the next.¹⁰⁶

This is the infallible Balance which the Hand of God is holding, in which all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth are weighed, and their fate determined, if ye be of them that believe and recognize this truth.¹⁰⁷

In the context of all of the statements cited in this paper, the author would suggest in conclusion that the discrepancies between the verses referring to Empedocles and David, Pythagoras and Solomon the Lawh-i-Hikmat of Bahá’u’lláh on the one hand, and the views of Western “modern academic” historians on the other hand, can be resolved through the recognition of certain overall principles which suggest the direction of a new historiography. This distinctively Bahá’í historiography cites the unreliability of ancient historical sources; the special status of Scripture as a witness to actual persons and events; the all-embracing Most Great Infallibility of the Manifestations of God, reaching their culmination in the appearance of Bahá’u’lláh; the divinely-guided interpretations of history which have issued from His pen and from His appointed Interpreters, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. As Bahá’í historiography develops, the entire field of ancient history will undergo a radical transformation. The penetrating insights of Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi into the processes, events and personalities of the past will provide a leavening and chastening influence, guiding humanity to an appreciation of our forebears more attuned to reality than to the flawed reconstructions of the historians and theologians of the past and present. We are not doomed to repeat history, nor to live in a man-made world, a world of fiction. We can know the real, the true, and distinguish it from the unreal, the false. The first step towards such a knowledge is not the rejection of religion, as so many of our contemporaries have supposed, but rather, it is the recognition of the Manifestation of God, He Who, to cite His own words:¹⁰⁸

Indeed He is a Light which is not followed by darkness and a Truth not overtaken by error. Were He to pronounce water to be wine or heaven to be earth or light to be fire, He speaketh the truth and no doubt would there be about it; and unto no one is given the right to question His authority or to say why or wherefore.

Bibliography and Notes

- 1) Majmú‘at min alwáh hadrat-i-Bahá’u’lláh (MB), Belgium:1980, pp. 8-9; *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (TB), Wilmette:1988, p. 108
- 2) Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (KA): a)Arabic, Haifa:1995, K47, p. 45; b)English translation, Haifa:1992, K47, pp. 36-37.
- 3) An-Núru’l-Abhá, Mufawadat ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (AM), pp. 129-131; *Some Answered Questions* (SAQ), chapter XLV, pp. 171-173).
- 4) Letter written to an individual Bahá’í on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, dated 11 January 1942 (supplied to the author by the Research Department of the Bahá’í World Centre in a letter dated 15 December 1994).
- 5) TB, pp. 149, 150
- 6) *Ishráqát*, Bombay, n.d., p. 18—cited in “Áhang-i-Badí,” sál 32, shamárih 344, pp. 22-23.
- 7) Lawh-i-Mubárák dar bárih-yi tavárikh-i-falásifah (shortened here to Lawh-i-Falásafih), was written by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in 1906, in response to the questions of Miss Ethel J. Rosenberg. This Tablet is found in its original Persian text in Má’idiy-i-Ásmání (volume II, pp. 64-67/68-71), and in English translation, by the Research Department of the Bahá’í World Center, in *Ethel Jenner Rosenberg: The Life and Times of England’s Outstanding Bahá’í Pioneer Worker*, Robert Weinberg (George Ronald, Oxford, 1995, pp. 78-81). A provisional translation of this Tablet by the Research Department at the Bahá’í World Centre was sent with a letter, dated 15 December 1994, to the present author prior to its publication in the aforementioned biography of Miss Rosenberg. Also, Keven Brown provided the author with his provisional translation of this Tablet. It was in comparing these two translations with the Persian original that the present author came to his conclusions regarding the import of this text.

- 8) From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi; cited in a letter dated 17 January 1978, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer (www.bahai-library.org/uhj/resurrection.bible.html).
- 9) Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, cited in “Selected Extracts to Guide Bahá’í Scholars,” citation #5, p. 2.
- 10) Nabil-i-Akbar in “Tadhkirat al-Wafá’ fí Tarjamat Hayát Qudamá’ al-Ahibbá,” Haifa, 1924 (translated into English by Marzieh Gail as *Memorials of the Faithful*).
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- 13) MB, p. 123; TB, p. 144.
- 14) MB, p. 124; TB, p. 144.
- 15) MB, p. 124; TB, pp. 144-145.
- 16) MB, p. 124; TB, p. 145.
- 17) MB, p. 126; TB, p. 147.
- 18) Keven Brown, “Hermes Trimesgistus and Apollonius of in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh,” in *Revisioning the Sacred, New Perspectives on a Bahá’í Theology*, Jack McLean, editor, Kalimat Press, 1997, pp. 153-154, 166, 167-168.
- 19) Lawḥ-i-Basitu’l-Haqíqat, pp. 105-116 in Iqtidárát; and volume VII, pp. 140-147, Má’idiy-i-Ásmání; TB, p. 148, n. 1.
- 20) Qur’án, Súrat Maryam, 19:57-58.
- 21) MB, p. 128; TB, pp. 149-150.
- 22) MB, p. 124.
- 23) TB, p. 145.
- 24) Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Wehr) 4th edition, Otto Harrassowitz, 1994, p. 444.
- 25) F. Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* (Steingass) Oriental Books, 1981, p. 622.
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- 27) Geoffrey Wigoder, *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, New York: Macmillan, 1989, pp. 191 (David), 663 (Solomon).
- 28) Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Judaism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, pp. 107 (David), 514 (Solomon).
- 29) H.T. Peck, editor, *International Cyclopaedia*, New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1898, volume IV, pp. 624-625.
- 30) Ibid., volume XIII, pp. 628-629.
- 31) “Sharh Lawḥ-i-Hikmat,” published in Persian in *Má’idiy-i-Ásmání* (volume II, pp. 68-70) and *Amr va Khalq* (volume I, pp. 168-169).
- 32) Alexander the Great is reported in all Western standard historical works to have lived circa 356-323 B.C.E.
- 33) Steingass, p. 1405.
- 34) Steingass, p. 1407.
- 35) ‘Abdu’l-Hamid Ishráq Khávarí, *Muhádirát*, Irán: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1964, volume I, pp. 164-166.
- 36) J.R.I. Cole, “Problems of Chronology in Bahá’u’lláh’s Tablet of Wisdom,” Spring 1979 issue of *World Order* (periodical published by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States of America. Inasmuch as J.R.I. Cole makes no reference to Ishráq Khávarí in his *World Order* article, it seems likely that he was unacquainted with the former’s previously published reference to this theme in *Muhádirát*.
- 37) Shams al-Din al-Shahrazúrí, “Nuzhat al-arwáh wa-rawdat al-afráh,” Ms. 1488 Leiden—cited in Miguel Asín Palacios, *Ibn Masarra y su escuela*, Apendice 4; reprint in *Obras Escogidas*, Madrid 1946, pp. 192-194; and Ms. 23365 British Museum, edited by ‘Abd al-Karím ‘Umar Abú Shuwayrí (Tripoli, 1988)—cited in *Ilai Alon*, Socrates Arabus (Ilai Alon), Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1995, pp. 24, 98, 17 (Arabic).
- 38) Muwaffaqu’d-Dín Ibn Abí Usaybiáh, *‘Uyún al-Anbá fí Tabaqát al-Atbá’*, Beirut: Maktabat al-Hayah, 1965, pp. 61-62.
- 39) Hájjí Khalífah, “Kashf al-zunún fí asámí al-kutub wa’l-funún” (HK), edited by G. Flügel (Lexicon bibliographicum et encyclopaedicum, London, 1858)—cited in *Ilai Alon*, pp. 24-25, 98-99, 17-18 (Arabic).
- 40) Palacios, p. 192, entitled “Rawdat al-Afráh” and cited in *Encyclopedia Islamica*, 2nd edition (EI2), volume I, pp. 483-484.
- 41) Palacios, pp. 192-194, cited in EI2:I:483-484.
- 42) Ms. Aya Sofiya 2450: see EI2:I:483.
- 43) EI2:I:483-484.
- 44) Wehr, p. 721.
- 45) TB, p. 149.
- 46) Written in 1875, and first published in Bombay in 1882, *Risáliy-i-Madaniyyih* has been reprinted by Bahá’í-Verlag, in Germany, 1984. This quotation is found on p. 91.
- 47) *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970, p. 77. The author offers the following literal rendering of these verses from the Persian: “And in many historical chronicles it is recorded that the philosophers of Greece similar to Pythagoras generally acquired their knowledge of the propositions of divine and natural philosophy from the disciples of His Eminence Solomon.”
- 48) Sá’id ibn Ahmad Sá’id Al-Andalusi, “Kitáb Tabaqát al-Umam” (AA) published in “Al-Machriq, Revue Catholique Orientale Mensuelle,” Beyrouth: *Imprimerie Catholique*, no. 14, Septembre 1911, p. 667, n. 4.

- 49) Talk on 12 October 1912, at Temple Emmanu-El, San Francisco; Persian transcription in “Majmú’ih Khitábát Hadrat-i ‘Abdu’l-Bahá,” p. 612; English translation reported in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (PUP), Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982, pp. 362-363.
- 50) Talk on 8 November 1912, at Eighth Street Temple, Washington, D.C.; English translation recorded in PUP, p. 406.
- 51) Talk on 9 November 1912, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Parsons, Washing-ton, D.C.; English translation recorded in PUP, p. 412.
- 52) AA, p. 666.
- 53) Abu-Fath al-Shahrastání, “Al-Milal wa’l-Nihal,” *Qahirah: Maktabat al-Anjlu al-Misriyah*, 1977, pp. 359, 365; edited by ‘Abdu’l-Azíz al-Wakíl, Cairo: Halabí and Co., 1968, volume II, pp. 119-120.
- 54) Yahya al-Suhrawardí, “Hikmat al-Ishrâq,” in Henry Corbin, *Oeuvres philosophiques et mystiques de Sohrawardi*, Teheran-Paris, 1952, II, 300, 13—cited in Ilai Aloni, *Socrates Arabus*, Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1995, p. 24, n. 71.
- 55) Jamálu’d-Dín al-Qiftí, *Ta’ríkh al-Hukamá’*,’ edited by Dr. Julius Lippert, Leipzig: Dieterich’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1903, p. 12.
- 56) ‘Imádu’d-Dín Abú’l-Fida’, “Al-Mukhtasar fí Akhbar al-Bashar, in *Historia Anteislamica, Arabice*, edited by Henry O. Fleischer, Leipzig, 1831, pp. 152, 154; and Al-Mukhtasar fí Akhbar al-Bashar, Cairo: al-Husayniyyah Egyptian Press, n.d., volume I, pp. 84-85.
- 57) HK, I:72,1; cited in *Ilai Alon*, *Socrates Arabus*, Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1995: in English: p. 98, n. 81 and in Arabic: p. 17, n. 80.
- 58) Professor Eduard Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy* (EZ), 13th edition, revised by Wilhelm Mestle, translated by L.R. Palmer, New York: Meridian Press, 1955, p. 279-280.
- 59) *International Cyclopaedia*, volume V, p. 416.
- 60) *Ibid.*, p. 415.
- 61) *Ibid.*, volume XII, p. 259.
- 62) *Ibid.*, volume I, p. 682; and *Webster’s Biographical Dictionary*, p. 1219.
- 63) EZ, p. 278; *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971, volume III, p. 444) identifies the survivals of Aristobulus’ commentary in Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*” (1:22; 6:3); and in Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* (7:32) and *Praeparatio evangelica* (7:14; 8:10; 13:12).
- 64) Valckenaer, *De Aristobulo Judaeo*, Leyden, 1806.
- 65) *International Cyclopaedia*, volume I, p. 682.
- 66) EZ, pp. 279-280.
- 67) Clement of Alexandria, “Stromateis,” in *Miscellanies*, V:14, quoted in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, 1956, pp. 325, 329, 466: cited in J.R.I. Cole, p. 33, n. 30-32.
- 68) *Ibid.*, cited in J.R.I. Cole, p. 33.
- 69) Henry More, quoted in C.A. Patrides, *The Cambridge Platonists*, London, 1969, p. 7—cited in J.R.I. Cole, pp. 33-34, n. 35.
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- 74) *Ibid.*, p. 324.
- 75) *Ibid.*, p. 321.
- 76) *Ibid.*, p. 323.
- 77) *Ibid.*, p. 325.
- 78) *Ibid.*, p. 197.
- 79) DL, volume II, book VIII, chapter ii, paragraph 74, p. 388-389.
- 80) *Ibid.*, p. 389, n. a
- 81) *Ibid.*, paragraph 54, pp. 368-371.
- 82) *Ibid.*, paragraph 55, pp. 370-371.
- 83) *Ibid.*, chapter i, paragraph 45, pp. 360-361.
- 84) *Ibid.*, p. 361, n. e
- 85) *Ibid.*, paragraphs 2-3, pp. 320-323.
- 86) Bahá’u’lláh, Lawḥ-i-‘Abdu’l-Razzáq, translated into English by Shoghi Effendi in *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh* (GL), Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1971, LXXXVII, pp. 174-175.
- 87) From a recently translated Tablet of Bahá’u’lláh; cited in letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 1 January 1981 (www.bahai-library.org/uhj/resurrection.bible.html)
- 88) Bahá’u’lláh, *Kitáb-i-‘Iqán* (KI), translated into English by Shoghi Effendi; Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1970, pp. 86-87.
- 89) From a recently translated Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; cited in letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 1 January 1981 (www.bahai-library.org/uhj/resurrection.bible.html)

- 90) From a recently translated Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (www.bahai-library.org/uhj/resurrection.bible.html)
- 91) From a letter dated 28 July 1936 to a National Spiritual Assembly, written by Shoghi Effendi www.bahai-library.org/uhj/resurrection.bible.html)
- 92) From a letter dated 11 February 1944 to an individual believer, written by Shoghi Effendi www.bahai-library.org/uhj/resurrection.bible.html)
- 93) From a letter dated 4 July 1947 to an individual believer, written by Shoghi Effendi www.bahai-library.org/uhj/resurrection.bible.html)
- 94) From a letter dated 25 November 1950 written by Shoghi Effendi www.bahai-library.org/uhj/resurrection.bible.html)
- 95) KI, pp. 201-202.
- 96) Ibid., p. 202.
- 97) Ibid., p. 203.
- 98) Ibid., p. 210.
- 99) From a letter dated July 6, 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer.
- 100) From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi.
- 101) Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1990, p. 49.
- 102) From a letter dated July 28, 1936 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly.
- 103) Bahá’u’lláh, Súrat al-Bayán, translated into English by Shoghi Effendi, in GL, CXXIX, p. 281.
- 104) Bahá’u’lláh, Súrat al-Mulúk, translated into English by Shoghi Effendi, in GL, CXIV, p. 236.
- 105) KA, K99.
- 106) KA, K148.
- 107) KA, K183.
- 108) TB, p. 108.

**‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Explanation of the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh:
Tablets and Talks Translated into English (1911–1920)**

Peter Terry

‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844–1921), Sir ‘Abbás Effendi, eldest son of Bahá’u’lláh, gave a great number of private and public talks during His sojourn in Europe and North America, in the years 1911–1913. Subsequent to this journey, He authored many letters, usually denominated “Tablets” by Bahá’ís, inasmuch as the spiritual nature of their subject matter and the divine inspiration believed to reside in their contents set these letters apart from all others. Virtually all of these talks and letters were expositions of one or more of the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. Some of them contained surveys of several of these teachings, and of these, a number included lists of such teachings, sometimes numbered and at other times sequenced without numeration. In several of His talks ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stated that Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings were innumerable:

This is a short summary of the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. (*‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London*, p. 30)

The Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh are many. The precepts and teachings they contain are universal, covering every subject. He has revealed scientific explanations ranging throughout all the realms of human inquiry and investigation—astronomy, biology, medical science, etc. In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* He has given expositions of the meanings of the Gospel and other heavenly Books. He wrote lengthy Tablets upon civilization, sociology and government. Every subject is considered. (5/29/1912, talk in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Kinney, NYC; *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 155)

These [eleven numbered] are a few of the principles proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh. He has provided the remedy for the ailments which now afflict the human world, solved the difficult problems of individual, social, national and universal welfare and laid the foundation of divine reality upon which material and spiritual civilization are to be founded throughout the centuries before us. (9/5/1912, talk at St. James Methodist Church, Montreal; PUP, p. 318)

The teachings of Bahá’u’lláh are boundless, innumerable; time will not allow us to mention them in detail. (10/25/1912, talk at Hotel Sacramento, California; PUP, pp. 375–376)

The teachings of Bahá’u’lláh embody many principles; I am giving you only a synopsis. (11/6/1912, talk at Universalist Church, Washington, D.C.; PUP, p. 394)

The teachings of Bahá’u’lláh are boundless and illimitable. You have asked me what new principles have been revealed by Him. I have mentioned a few only. There are many others, but time does not permit their mention tonight. (12/2/1912, talk in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Kinney, NYC; PUP, p. 457)

These are some of the teachings in the religion of Bahá’u’lláh—all of which would take a great deal of time to expound. (*Star of the West*, III:17, p. 9)

Just as the rays of the phenomenal sun are infinite, likewise the rays of the Sun of Reality are infinite. The above summary only contains a few of its rays. (*Star of the West*, XI:1, p. 11)

This study will not seek to give an accounting of all of the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh; nor will it even seek to identify all of the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh to be found in the talks and letters of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Such projects would require volumes to explore in befitting detail. The aim of this study is to examine the enumerated lists and sequences of Bahá’í teachings found in the talks and letters of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

which were translated into English and published during His lifetime. The texts of these sources are identified in the first appendix to this paper, in chronological order of their composition (whenever it was possible to ascertain the date of their provenance). It will then compare these numbered lists and sequences with the teachings which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá indicated were new and distinctive to the Revelation and Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh.

The original words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in these talks and letters, were Persian and Arabic, not English. They have been translated into English by a number of individuals, including Aminu’llah Farid, Ahmad Sohrab, Azizu’llah Bahadur, Zia Bagdadi, Shoghi Effendi, and perhaps others who are not identified by name. Only those for which the Persian original texts have been found, and which were approved for publication by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself, can be considered as authoritative statements of Bahá’í doctrine. This study will not examine each of these accounts in order to determine its status in the Bahá’í canon, or to compare the contents of non-canonical with canonical accounts.

Rather, we will seek to become better acquainted with the substance of what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seems to have regarded as among the most important teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, not in the Persian language sources, but, rather, as they were encountered by North Americans and other readers of English during ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s lifetime.

All together thirty-seven sources were consulted. Thirteen were for enumerated teachings and the remaining twenty-four represented sequenced teachings. The sources of these principles are cited here, in brackets [...]. Please consult **Appendix One** for a full description of these sources. The listing of principles (including both the numbered and the sequenced teachings) ranged from one [2, 29] to seventeen [9], but also including two [20], three [16, 18, 32], four [11,19,33], five [21, 28], six [30], seven [22, 25], eight [8, 14], nine [4, 5, 17, 26, 31], ten [10, 24,3 4], eleven [13, 15, 23, 27, 37], twelve [1, 6], thirteen [6, 35], fourteen [7], and fifteen [3,12]. In much Bahá’í introductory literature in English we find a fairly standard list of ten or twelve Bahá’í principles. We might note that only two of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talks or letters features a list of twelve teachings, and that in neither case are they numbered. In the thirty-seven sources studied we find forty-five separate Bahá’í teachings. Only one of these teachings is found in virtually every one of those sources (32 out of 37), and twenty-three of these teachings are only found in one of the sources. Here are these principles, beginning with those mentioned the most frequently and ranging to those which are mentioned in only one source (the number of sources each principle is cited in is found to the right of that principle, in parentheses):

1. Oneness of humanity (32)
2. Religion must be in agreement with science and reason (27)
3. Religion must be conducive to love and unity (26)
4. Equality of men and women (23)
5. Abandonment of prejudices (23)
- 6 Independent investigation of reality/search for truth (21)
7. Universal Peace (20)
8. Universal education and curriculum (17)
9. Humanity must depend upon the Holy Spirit (13)
10. Economic readjustment (13)
11. Foundation and reality of all religions are one (13)
12. Equal rights for all (11)
13. Universal language (10)
14. International Tribunal (5)
15. Universal justice (4)
16. Spiritual brotherhood (4)
17. Training in useful craft, art, science or profession (3)
18. Material civilization must be combined with divine civilization (3)
19. Heavenly morals and spiritual civilization (3)
20. Work to the best of one’s ability is worship (2)
21. Religion must be free from dogma and imitation (2)

22. Reconciliation of religious systems (2)
23. Oneness of God (2)
24. Religion must not mix with politics (2)
25. Religion is a mighty bulwark (2)
26. Universal employment: all must work, work for all (1)
27. Religion must be a factor for human progress (1)
28. Oneness of reality (1)
29. Reconciliation of science and religion through science and art (1)
30. Love for animals (1)
31. Love for all men (1)
32. Education of women (1)
33. Agreement of the peoples of the world (1)
34. Inter-racial peace (1)
35. Voluntary sharing of property with humanity (1)
36. Demonstration of Divinity and inspiration (1)
37. Power of the influence of Bahá'u'lláh (1)
38. True freedom for man is from the world of nature (1)
39. Establishment of the House of Justice (1)
40. Social classes reformed but ranks preserved (1)
41. Establishment of the Center of the Covenant
42. Dawn of the Sun of Reality from Persia (1)
43. Religion is the divine remedy (1)
44. International unity (1)
45. Find a common point of agreement; those who insist they are right are wrong (1)

The location of these teachings in the thirty-seven sources are cited in Appendix Two. Chart One features a subdivision of these principles into four groups of nine each. In Appendix Three are the rankings of these principles, those which are numbered and those which are sequenced. There are considerable differences between the numbered and sequenced rankings, which might lead us to the conclusion that the actual order of the presentation of these teachings does not indicate its relative importance in the constellation of Bahá'í values. For example, if we consider those teachings of Bahá'u'lláh which are cited first in each of these thirty-seven sources, we find that the numbered lists feature “The Independent Investigation of Reality/Search for Truth” as the first teaching of Bahá'u'lláh in twelve out of seventeen such sources, and “The Oneness of Humanity” in this first rank in five out of the same seventeen sources. On the other hand, if we consult sequences of teachings in the remaining twenty sources, we find one reference to “The Independent Investigation of Reality” (12), and twelve [references] to “The Oneness of Humanity” as well as other first rankings, including “Oneness of God” (20, 21), “Universal Peace” (7), “Abandonment of Prejudices” (2), “Universal Education” (4), “The Unity of the Religion of God” (30), and “Agreement among the peoples of the world” (32). Hence, while the reader of the numbered lists of Bahá'í teachings might come to the conclusion that “The Independent Investigation of Reality” is the first and foremost of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, this inclusion of sequenced teachings seems to indicate that “The Oneness of Humanity” is at least as important and that it was cited even more often, in the limited context we are surveying, as the first Bahá'í principle.

The overarching importance of this teaching of “The Oneness of Humanity” is indicated by the fact that it is ranked most often as the second teaching of Bahá'u'lláh in the numbered lists, in fully ten out of fourteen numbered lists, and also in five out of twenty of the sequences. This compares to three second-place rankings of “The Independent Investigation of Reality” in the numbered lists, and likewise three out of the twenty sequences. Only one other principle is listed in second place in the numbered lists, “Universal Peace” (37), while eleven other principles are found in the sequences in this ranking: “The Unity of the Religion of God” (12, 25, 26), “Religion must be the cause of love and unity” (14, 30, 33), “Universal Peace” (2,6), “Universal brotherhood” (5), “International Unity” (32), “Dependence upon the Holy Spirit” (35), and “Religion must be in agreement with science and reason” (24). It is evident from studying these sequences that two other principles tied with “The Independent Investigation of Reality”

for second place well behind “The Oneness of Humanity” as the second Bahá’í principle. In one of His talks (29), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is reported to have said: “the fundamental principle of Bahá’u’lláh is the oneness of the world of humanity_.”

We may also view the presentation of “The Independent Investigation of Reality” and “The Oneness of Humanity” at the forefront of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talks and letters describing the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh as intended to facilitate the understanding of the listener and reader. “The Independent Investigation of Reality” seems to many as an appropriate beginning—we begin by each of us thinking for ourselves, assuming responsibility for our own learning, and coming to our own conclusions. Likewise, “The Oneness of Humanity” is a fundamental principle, to which all the other Bahá’í teachings can be related. For example, if humanity is one, then it is eminently reasonable that religion should be conducive to love and unity, that women and men should be equal, that we should abandon our prejudices, that universal peace should be established, and so forth. Hence, the ordering of presentation may perform the function of creating an associative map in the mind of the listener or reader, enabling him to connect and therefore to understand and relate to this diversity of principles. Each mind and heart is unique, and it is telling that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has not cited the same list of Bahá’í teachings in any two talks or letters—the order of presentation varies, and I am suggesting that it varies because ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was adapting His remarks to the particular collection of minds and hearts which He was addressing on those various occasions. Context is important, and here is a lesson for those who would teach in the footsteps of the Master. On the other hand, the consistency of the teachings presented by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is likewise notable. He does not talk a lot about Bahá’í laws or Bahá’í institutions, nor does He insist, in these talks, upon the prophecies fulfilled by the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. Indeed, He rarely mentions the Persons of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh in these thirty-seven sources, or, for that matter, in most of His other talks and letters written for Western audiences and readers. His emphasis seems to be on giving clear and concise descriptions of certain fundamental teachings of Bahá’u’lláh.

We have earlier noted the front-rank status of “The Oneness of Humanity” as a Bahá’í principle, but let us now consider what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has said about various other principles found in these sources. In His Tablet to Mrs. Crump Cone (2), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes that “the most important teaching of Bahá’u’lláh, is to leave behind racial, political, religious, and patriotic prejudices—it is impossible to strike at the root of these racial, political, religious and patriotic prejudices unless the inhabitants of the world come under the shadow of Bahá’u’lláh.” Here ‘Abdu’l-Bahá relates this principle to another teaching of Bahá’u’lláh, and while He has affirmed that the abandonment of prejudice is “the most important teaching of Bahá’u’lláh” nevertheless He asserts that “it is impossible to strike at the root of these racial, political, religious and patriotic prejudices unless the inhabitants of the world come under the shadow of Bahá’u’lláh”—which we take to mean: until they follow the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh as a whole. Another statement which places “The Oneness of Humanity” in context is found in a talk (20), as follows: “The great and fundamental teachings of Bahá’u’lláh are the oneness of God and the unity of mankind.” In that talk ‘Abdu’l-Bahá appeals to the Bahá’ís to translate these ideas into realities: “Now must we, likewise, bind ourselves together in the utmost unity, be kind and loving to each other, sacrificing all our possessions, our honor, yea, even our lives for each other. Then will it be proved that we have acted according to the teachings of God, that we have been real believers in the oneness of God and unity of mankind.” It is hence in the context of actualizing these teachings that they are “great and fundamental teachings of Bahá’u’lláh...”

While ‘Abdu’l-Bahá calls “the oneness of the world of humanity” in another talk (36) “a fundamental teaching of Bahá’u’lláh” we should note that He follows this assertion in that same talk with this statement (PUP:455): “As to the most great characteristic of the revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, a specific teaching not given by any of the Prophets of the past: It is the ordination and appointment of the Center of the Covenant.” In another talk (10/31/1912, Hotel Plaza, Chicago, Illinois; PUP, pp. 381–383), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, in confirmation of the importance of this principle (p. 381): “Today the most important principle of faith is firmness in the Covenant, because firmness in the Covenant wards off differences. Therefore, you must be as firm as mountains.” There are many ways to understand these statements. For example, while ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stresses the fundamental nature of “The Oneness of Humanity” in many of His talks,

He has spoken of the Center of the Covenant in talks addressed specifically to the Bahá'ís. Also, while He affirmed "The Oneness of Humanity" a "fundamental teaching of Bahá'u'lláh," the language He uses in reference to the Covenant is "most great characteristic" and "most important principle of faith"—both of which phrases clearly affirm rank and value. Furthermore, in the context of the establishment of the Center of the Covenant, we may understand that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's exaltation of the principle of "The Oneness of Humanity" is far from an affirmation of Western humanist or democratic ideals, either as they were understood during His lifetime or during our own epoch. On the contrary, it indicates that Bahá'u'lláh's vision of "The Oneness of Humanity" requires recognition of and obedience to a divinely-inspired and prophetically-authorized Center, in effect, to a heavenly King. Also, we might note another of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh that 'Abdu'l-Bahá cited often (thirteen times) in these sources, and in many other talks and letters which were translated into English during this period, a teaching which is described eloquently in the following excerpts from His talks (13,15,17,23,25,27):

It is only by the breath of the Holy Spirit that spiritual development can come about. No matter how the material world may progress, no matter how splendidly it may adorn itself, it can never be anything but a lifeless body unless the soul is within, for it is the soul that animates the body; the body alone has no real significance. Deprived of the blessings of the Holy Spirit the material body would be inert. (*Paris Talks*, p. 133)

We understand that the Holy Spirit is the energizing factor in the life of man. Whosoever receives this power is able to influence all with whom he comes into contact...

An humble man without learning, but filled with the Holy Spirit, is more powerful than the most nobly-born profound scholar without that inspiration. He who is educated by the Holy Spirit can, in his time, lead others to receive the same Spirit.

I pray for you that you may be informed by the life of the Divine Spirit, so that you may be the means of educating others. (PT, p. 165)

Bahá'u'lláh teaches that the world of humanity is in need of the breath of the Holy Spirit, for in spiritual quickening and enlightenment true oneness is attained with God and man. (PUP, pp. 108-109)

The world of humanity cannot advance through mere physical powers and intellectual attainments; nay, rather, the Holy Spirit is essential. (PUP, p. 182)

The spirit of man is not illumined and quickened through material sources. It is not resuscitated by investigating phenomena of the world of matter. The spirit of man is in need of the protection of the Holy Spirit. Just as he advances by progressive stages from the mere physical world of being into the intellectual realm, so must he develop upward in moral attributes and spiritual graces. In the process of this attainment he is ever in need of the bestowals of the Holy Spirit. (PUP, p. 288)

True distinction among mankind is through divine bestowals and receiving the intuitions of the Holy Spirit. If man does not become the recipient of the heavenly bestowals and spiritual bounties, he remains in the plane and kingdom of the animal. (PUP, pp. 316-317)

The citation of these passages was not effected in order to advance a claim as to the relative importance of one Bahá'í teaching over another. Rather, these statements have been included in order to demonstrate, by example, the impact which a single Bahá'í principle can have upon our understanding of all other Bahá'í principles. For example, the Bahá'í principle which calls for "The Independent Investigation of Reality" might imply, for some readers, that Bahá'u'lláh encourages each one of His followers to find his own way to the truth, relying only upon his own personal judgment. However, in the context of the establishment of the Center of the Covenant, and the teaching that man must "become the recipient of the heavenly bestowals and spiritual bounties" vouchsafed by the Holy Spirit, it is clear and evident that Bahá'u'lláh is calling His follower to discovery of that spiritual reality which is beyond his human understanding, for the apprehension of which he requires a divinely-inspired guide, the Center of the Covenant, and continuous dependence upon "the intuitions of the Holy Spirit" rather than

reliance upon his five senses, his rational faculty and his human learning. Hence, it is in the overall interplay and interpenetration of these various principles that the one truth may be recognized which transcends particularity and the distortions of human perception.

A Comparison of these Enumerated and Sequenced Teachings with the Principles which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Specifically Identified as New and Distinctive to the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh

In some of His talks, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá indicated that there were various teachings of Bahá’u’lláh that have never before appeared from the Prophets of God:

Thus when hatred and animosity, fighting, slaughtering, and great coldness of heart were governing this world, and darkness had overcome the nations, Bahá’u’lláh, like a bright star, rose from the horizon of Persia, and shone with the great Light of Guidance, giving heavenly radiance and establishing New Teaching. (Talk at Theosophical Society, 30 September 1911; published in *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London*:27)

At such a time as this Bahá’u’lláh appeared among them like a luminary in the heavens. He flooded the East with light. He proclaimed new principles and teachings. He laid a basis for new institutions which are the very spirit of modernism, the light of the world, the development of the body politic and eternal honor. (Talk at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Parsons, Washington, D.C., 7 November 1912; translated by Dr. Aminu’llah Farid, transcribed by Joseph H. Hannen; published in PUP:402)

Some who could find no other pretext have said, “These teachings are not new; they are old and familiar; we have heard them before.” Therefore, I will speak to you upon the distinctive characteristics of the manifestation of Bahá’u’lláh and prove that from every standpoint His Cause is distinguished from all others. (Talk at the home of Miss Juliet Thompson, New York City, 15 November 1912; translated by Dr. Aminu’llah Farid, transcribed by Mr. Hooper Harris; published in PUP:431)

I will speak to you concerning the special teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. All the divine principles announced by the tongue of the Prophets of the past are to be found in the words of Bahá’u’lláh; but in addition to these He has revealed certain new teachings which are not to be found in any of the sacred Books of former times. I shall mention some of them; the others, which are many in number, may be found in the Books, Tablets and Epistles written by Bahá’u’lláh—such as the Hidden Words, the Glad Tidings, the Words of Paradise, *Tajallíyát*, *Tarázát* and others. Likewise, in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* there are new teachings which cannot be found in any of the past Books or Epistles of the Prophets. (Talk at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Kinney, New York City, 2 December 1912; translated by Dr. Aminu’llah Farid, transcribed by Miss Esther Foster; published in PUP:453–454)

I am going to quote you some of Bahá’u’lláh’s instructions for this day and you will show me in which sacred book they are to be found.... These precepts were proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh many years ago. He was the first to create them in the hearts as moral laws.” (Talk in Paris, n.d.; published in ABDP:82, 85)

In some of His talks ‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserted that the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh are in keeping with the “spirit of the Age.” As He paired this statement, in two separate talks, with affirmations that those teachings which constitute the “spirit of the Age” were new teachings, we may conclude that these teachings are also distinctive to the Bahá’í Revelation:

...all have conceded that the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh are superlative in character, acknowledging that they constitute the very essence or spirit of this new age and that there is no better pathway to the attainment of its ideals. (Talk at the home of Miss Juliet Thompson, New York City, 15 November 1912; translated by Dr. Aminu’llah Farid, transcribed by Mr. Hooper Harris; published in PUP:431)

His teachings, which embody the divine spirit of the age and are applicable to this period of maturity in the life of the human world, are... (Talk at Genealogical Hall, New York City, 17

November 1912; translated by Dr. Aminu’llah Farid, transcribed by Mrs. Edna McKinney; published in PUP:440)

Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings are the health of the world. They represent the spirit of this age, the light of this age, the well-being of this age, the soul of this cycle. The world will be at rest when they are put into practice, for they are reality. (Talk in Paris, n.d.; published in ABDP:85–86)

One more, it is imperative that we distinguish between those teachings identified as new and constituting the “spirit of this Age” on the one hand, and those teachings which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá regarded as essential and central to the Bahá’í Revelation. In other words, in His terminology, new does not necessarily imply “most important.” While further study of these principles may indeed indicate that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá regarded the new teachings as being among the most important principles of the Bahá’í Faith, the present author is not prepared to make such an assertion at this time. Hence, we seem to have five separate sources of “new” teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, and all of them are represented among the sources for this study—they are, consecutively, sources (12), (14), (34), (35) and (36). Of these five talks, two (14,34) are numbered, and the other three are sequenced. In three out of five lists, the first principle is the independent investigation of reality/search for truth; in the other two, the first principle is the oneness of the world of humanity, and the independent investigation of truth is in the sixth (35) and the second place (36). The order of presentation of these “new” principles follows the same patterns as the other lists studied. Taken as a group, these five sources represent nineteen teachings, listed below and on Chart Two (with the number of sources represented in parentheses):

Independent investigation of reality/search for truth (5)

1. oneness of the world of humanity (5)
2. religion must be the cause of love and unity (5)
3. religion must be in agreement with science and reason (5)
4. elimination of prejudices (4)
5. reality of the divine religions is one (4)
6. equality of men and women (4)
7. compulsory universal education (4)
8. universal auxiliary language will be adopted (3)
9. Universal Peace will come (3)
10. International Tribunal (2)
11. everyone must learn a useful profession, art or trade (2)
12. work done in the spirit of service is the highest form of worship (2)
13. protection and guidance of the Holy Spirit (1)
14. the different social classes are preserved (1)
15. work for all (1)
16. destroy antagonism by finding a point of agreement
17. if two dispute about religion both are wrong (1)
18. House of Justice (1)
19. Center of the Covenant (1)

Hence, we find that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá identified at least 19 “new” and “distinctive” teachings in five of His talks and that He affirmed some twenty-six other teachings in other talks and in Tablets written to Western believers during His ministry as Center of the Covenant. Of these, how many are featured in Bahá’í pamphlets and leaflets? Many pamphlets and leaflets do not list any of these teachings, while others focus on one or two, such as the oneness of humanity, the equality of men and women, or the elimination of prejudices. Those which feature lists of Bahá’í principles typically cite ten teachings, usually in this general order:

1. oneness of mankind
2. independent investigation of reality
3. one foundation of all religions

4. essential harmony of science and religion
5. equality of men and women
6. elimination of prejudices
7. universal compulsory education
8. spiritual solution to the economic problem
9. universal auxiliary language
10. universal peace upheld by a world government

Some pamphlets also feature Bahá'u'lláh's affirmation that there is but one God, and a recent leaflet also features "protection of cultural diversity" as a Bahá'í principle. While well-read Bahá'ís understand that by "spiritual solution to the economic problem" we are referring to a number of Bahá'í teachings—including (12) everyone must learn a useful profession, art or trade; (13) work done in the spirit of service is the highest form of worship; (15) the different social classes are preserved; and (16) work for all—this is not understood by the reader of these pamphlets. Indeed, this "spiritual solution to the economic problem" could mean nothing more than "be nice to people"—whereas the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh pertaining to work are much more detailed and challenging to the status quo. It is evident that these pamphlets and leaflets are not featuring almost half of the teachings which 'Abdu'l-Bahá specifically identified as "new" and "distinctive" to the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh in certain of His talks. Nor do they mention, taking into account the reference to the oneness of God in one pamphlet, some thirty-five other Bahá'í principles that 'Abdu'l-Bahá enumerated or sequenced in His talks and Tablets.

The extant introductory literature on the Bahá'í Faith in the English language includes the classic written by Dr. John E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, first published in 1923, and revised in 1937, 1950 and 1970 and two recent works, *The Bahá'í Religion*, by Peter Smith (George Ronald, 1988) and *The Bahá'í Faith*, by Joseph Sheppherd (Element, 1992). These three books will be given abbreviated titles for the duration of this paper, respectively—BNE, BR and BF. The most recent edition of BNE features two chapters, Chapter 9, entitled "True Civilization" and Chapter 10, entitled "The Way to Peace" which, between them, feature most of the "new" teachings of Bahá'u'lláh cited by 'Abdu'l-Bahá; the "new" teachings not discussed in these chapters are introduced in other chapters of this book. BNE is so comprehensive that it features all or virtually all of the 45 principles found in the talks and tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. BR devotes Chapter 2 to "Religious Doctrines" and Chapter 3 to "Social Doctrines." In Chapter 2 we find none either of the "new" teachings or of the numbered and sequenced teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. In Chapter 3 we find the following:

international order: which seems to correspond to the "new" teachings—"universal peace": (10) and "international tribunal": (11)

oneness of humanity: (2)

economic justice: including Bahá'í teachings on this subject which have some overlap with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's articulation of "economic readjustment": (10) among the listed principles

political order: featuring none of the "new" teachings noted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá but including the following "listed" teachings—universal justice: (15), and equal rights: (12)

sexual equality: (7)

universal education: (8), however, education is described as a "right" rather than as a "responsibility" incumbent upon every human being; reference is made to another of the "new" teachings of Bahá'u'lláh—everyone must learn a useful profession, art or trade: (12); and to one of the listed principles as well—education of women: (32)

spiritual and material civilization: (18) among the listed principles

All in all, BR features six of the nineteen "new" teachings of Bahá'u'lláh in Chapter 2, as well as introducing the Universal House of Justice and the Center of the Covenant in Chapter 6, "Bahá'í Administration," for a total of eight. We also found some of the teachings listed in sources studied—equal rights (12), universal justice (15), education of women (32). This introduction is much less comprehensive in its depiction of "new" and "listed" Bahá'í teachings than BNE.

BF features various Bahá’í teachings in its “Part III: The Basic Teachings,” including the following (mostly found in Chapter 13):

oneness of God (Chapter 10 and Chapter 13): (23) [in listed teachings]

oneness of humanity: (2)

elimination of prejudices: (5)

universal justice: (15) [in listed teachings]

elimination of poverty: included in (10) [in listed teachings]

universal education: (8), however, without use of the authoritative term “compulsory” which carries more weight than “duty”

religion and science should be recognized as different ways of describing the same phenomena: with some resemblance to (4), but without the requirement that religion be in agreement with science and reason (which is what “distinguishes” this teaching from other attempts to reconcile religion with science and reason)

world peace: (10)

international tribunal: (11)

international auxiliary language: (9)

In Chapter 15 we find a two-page reference to “Bahá’í Administration” which mentions the Universal House of Justice in the midst of a single sentence, but not the Center of the Covenant. In fact, the Center of the Covenant is never mentioned at all, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes a short appearance in two sentences, Chapter 9.

BR and BF do not include all of the “new” teachings of Bahá’u’lláh that were singled out for mention by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in five of His talks. Nor do they treat a number of the Bahá’í teachings enumerated and sequenced in the 37 sources studied for this paper. For a comprehensive introduction to these “new” and “listed” teachings, it is evident that we would have to turn to BNE rather than to either of these more recent introductions to the Bahá’í Faith. While the presentation and ordering of these teachings in BNE may not suit every reader, and may not be as conducive to memory recall as the enumeration and sequencing of principles by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, nevertheless, BNE is distinctive in being the longest-lived and simultaneously the most comprehensive of all introductions to the Bahá’í Faith. Not one of these three introductory books repeats ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s assertion that these teachings are “new” and “distinctive” to the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh. Not one of these books states that Bahá’u’lláh revealed innumerable teachings which touch upon every aspect of individual and communal life, notwithstanding ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reiterated affirmation of this truth in some of the sources cited above. Nor do they indicate where the reader may next turn in order to become better informed about these teachings, and the many other principles of Bahá’u’lláh which are not included in these talks and Tablets, notwithstanding ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reference to specific tablets revealed by Bahá’u’lláh as sources for those teachings.

The primary purpose of this paper was to introduce its readers to the wide range of principles that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá included in His talks and letters addressed to the Western believers in the Bahá’í Faith. It has been demonstrated that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá cited at least forty-five different Bahá’í teachings in the thirty-seven sources examined. Inasmuch as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá did not standardize His listing of Bahá’í principles, but seems to have adapted His presentation to a variety of audiences, it is nevertheless evident that He introduced the teachings He chose to describe in a relatively consistent order and ranking. Bahá’ís who aspire to follow His example in presenting the Bahá’í teachings to the general public might benefit from a close study of the range and order of those principles which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sought to convey to His Western audience. Also, inasmuch as He expected that His Western followers would spearhead the propagation of the Bahá’í Faith throughout the planet, as evidenced by His authorship of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, it likewise seems evident that He intended that these principles be emphasized by Bahá’í teachers outside of the Occident, indeed, in addressing all of humanity. This is also confirmed by His authoring of a Tablet addressed to Miss Mochizuki of Japan, source (9), which was translated by Mirza

Azizu’llah Bahadur on 12/9/1920 and published in *Star of the West* (SW XII:2, p. 41), which features a list of Bahá’í principles very similar to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s lists of “new” teachings, from talks delivered in London, Paris and New York City. However, there is no indication, at least from these sources, that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wished that the presentation of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings be standardized according to a fixed formula, or that any of these teachings, which He so painstakingly explained in His talks and letters, were to be brushed aside in the interests of “economy” or “simplicity” of presentation.

Hence, it is also the aim of this paper to suggest that the Bahá’í principles found in the talks and letters of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are not necessarily ranked, in the numbered and sequenced lists, in the order of their importance to the Cause of God. Rather, these lists seem to represent a kind of associative map that enables the reader or listener to follow from general principles to related teachings, and ultimately to arrive at a wholistic understanding of certain fundamentals revealed by Bahá’u’lláh. Hence, they often begin with “The Independent Investigation of Reality” or with “The Oneness of Mankind,” as both of these principles lead by association to the other teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. Perhaps, if Bahá’í teachers were to study the method followed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, they would learn to more effectively transmit the Bahá’í teachings to those millions who are as yet unacquainted with the most recent Manifestation of God. There may be all sorts of creative ways in which Bahá’í speakers and authors can apply this web technique to the spiritual edification of humanity. This approach may also facilitate the application of Bahá’í principles to social and economic development projects in communities of all sizes and sorts.

Furthermore, it seems that the substance and order of presentation of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings found in these thirty-seven sources correspond very closely to “new” teachings of Bahá’u’lláh which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has “distinguished” from earlier Scriptures and Dispensations. On the one hand, not all of the Bahá’í teachings are entirely “new” and more research is needed to identify those which are also found in previously-revealed Scriptures. The purpose of such a study would be to point out those essential teachings which the Bahá’í Faith has in common with all other divinely-revealed religions. But that is another paper altogether! There has been a natural tendency for Bahá’ís to regard the teachings set forth in these numbered and sequenced lists—whether in the talks and Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá or in the pamphlets and introductory books at our disposal—as the most important, the essential, the fundamental Bahá’í teachings. It has been pointed out that this is not necessarily an accurate reading of the intentions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, or, through Him, the purpose of Bahá’u’lláh. This has been demonstrated in reference to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talks on the establishment of the Center of the Covenant, and His insistence upon our human necessity for and dependence upon inspiration from the Holy Spirit. Perhaps this limited paper will inspire other students of the Bahá’í Revelation to undertake more thorough and comprehensive examinations of the breadth and depth of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings, which will ever be “boundless and illimitable” (PUP:457).

Bibliography

- ABDP: *‘Abdu’l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy*, talks collected by Isabel Fraser; Boston: Tudor Press, 1918
ABL: *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in London*; London: Bahá’í Publishing Trust (BPT), 1987
KH: *Majmū‘at-i-Khitābāt-i-Hadrat-i-‘Abdu’l-Bahá*; reprint of the original edition, Germany: Bahá’í-Verlag, 1984
PT: *Paris Talks*, talks collected by Lady Blomfield; London: BPT, 1970
PUP: *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*; Wilmette: BPT, 1982
SW: *Star of the West, The Bahá’í Magazine*, March 1910–March 1924; Oxford: George Ronald, reprint, 1984

Appendix One: The Talks and Letters of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Letters

- (1) n.d., “The Asiatic Quarterly,” published in SW XI:1, pp. 10–11 (unidentified translator)
- (2) 2/24/1912 (translation), Tablet to Mrs. Antoinette Crump Cone of Chicago; published in SW XII:6, p. 121 (translation by Mirza Ahmad Sohrab)
- (3) 3/5/1914, Tablet to Mr. Charles Mason Remey; SW IX:15, p. 172 (unidentified translator, probably Mirza Ahmad Sohrab)
- (4) 1914–1918, Tablet; SW XIII:6, p. 131 (unidentified translator, probably Mirza Ahmad Sohrab)
- (5) after 1918, Tablet; SW XIV:12, p. 370 (unidentified translator, probably Mirza Ahmad Sohrab)

- (6) 7/23/1919, Tablet to the Persian believers in Paris; SW X:12, p. 226 (unidentified translator, probably Mirza Ahmad Sohrab)
- (7) 12/17/1919 (translation), Letter and Tablet to the Office of the Secretary, Central Organization for a Durable Peace, The Hague; SW XI:8, pp. 125-127, 129-134 (translation by Shoghi Effendi, Dr. Zia Bagdadi, Mirza Lotfullah Hakim, Dr. J.E. Esslemont) [partial reprint in SWAB #227, pp. 296-307]
- (8) 1/28/1920, Tablet; SW XIV:12, p. 356 (translated by Shoghi Effendi)
- (9) 12/9/1920 (translation), Tablet to Miss Mochizuki of Japan; SW XII:2, p. 41 (translation by Mirza Azizu’llah Bahadur)
- (10) circa 1921, Tablet; SW XIV:8, p. 229 (unidentified translation)

Talks

- (11) n.d., talk; SW XIII:8, p. 218 (unidentified translator)
- (12) n.d., talk; ABDP, pp. 82-85
- (13) n.d., talks; PT, pp. 129-134
- (14) 9/30/1911, Farewell address to England; SW II:18 Persian; ABL, pp. 27-30 (unidentified English translation, probably Dr. A. Farid)
- (15) 11/10--8/1911, talks in private quarters, Paris; KH, pp. 143-148; PT, pp. 135-166
- (16) 4/25/1912, talk in home of Mrs. Agnes Parsons, Washington, D.C.; KH, pp. 357-360; PUP, pp. 61-64 (translation by Dr. A. Farid)
- (17) 5/7/1912, talk at Hotel Schenley, Pittsburgh; PUP, pp. 105-110 (trans. by Ibid.)
- (18) 5/13/1912, talk at New York Peace Society; PUP, pp. 124-125 (trans. by Ibid.)
- (19) 5/19/1912, talk at Church of the Divine Paternity, NYC; PUP, pp. 126-129 (Ibid.)
- (20) 5/29/1912, talk in home of Mr. and Mrs. Kinney, NYC; PUP, p. 156 (Ibid.)
- (21) 6/2/1912, talk at Church of the Ascension, NYC; PUP, pp. 163-171 (Ibid.)
- (22) 6/9/1912, talk at Unitarian Church, Philadelphia; KH, pp. 432-441; PUP, pp. 172-176 (Ibid.)
- (23) 6/9/1912, talk at Baptist Temple, Philadelphia; KH, pp. 441-454; PUP, pp. 176-182 (Ibid.)
- (24) 7/14/1912, talk at All Souls Unitarian Church, NYC; PUP, pp. 228-235 (Ibid.)
- (25) 8/27/1912, talk at Metaphysical Club, Boston; PUP, pp. 284-289 (Ibid.)
- (26) 9/1/1912, talk at Church of the Messiah, Montreal; KH, pp. 527-535; PUP, pp. 297-302 (Ibid.)
- (27) 9/5/1912, talk at St. James Methodist Church, Montreal; PUP, pp. 312-319 (Ibid.)
- (28) 9/25/1912, talk at Second Divine Science Church, Denver; PUP, pp. 337-342 (Ibid.)
- (29) 10/8/1912, talk at Leland Stanford Junior University, Palo Alto; PUP, p. 349
- (30) 10/8/1912, talk at Leland Stanford Junior University, Palo Alto; PUP, p. 354
- (31) 10/25/1912, talk at Hotel Sacramento, California; PUP, pp. 370-376 (Ibid.)
- (32) 11/5/1912, talk at Grand Hotel, Cincinnati, Ohio; PUP, p. 388 (Ibid.)
- (33) 11/6/1912, talk at Universalist Church, Washington, D.C.; PUP, pp. 390-397 (Ibid.)
- (34) 11/15/1912, talk in home of Miss Juliet Thompson, NYC; PUP, pp. 431-437 (Ibid.)
- (35) 11/17/1912, talk at Geneological Hall, NYC; PUP, pp. 437-442 (Ibid.)
- (36) 12/2/1912, talk in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Kinney; PUP, pp. 453-457 (Ibid.)
- (37) 12/20/1912, talk at Westminster Hotel in London; SW III:17, pp. 6-9 (reported by Isabel Fraser; translator unidentified, probably Mirza Ahmad Sohrab)

Appendix Two: The Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh According to Their Sources

Letters

- (1) n.d., “The Asiatic Quarterly,” published in SW XI:1, pp. 10-11 (unknown translator: hitherto, un. trans.)
 - 1. oneness of the world of humanity
 - 2. establishment of universal peace
 - 3. investigation of truth
 - 4. promulgation of universal fellowship
 - 5. inculcation of divine love through the power of religion
 - 6. conformity of religion with science and reason
 - 7. abandonment of religious, patriotic and political prejudices
 - 8. universal spread of education
 - 9. organization of the arbitral court of justice, or Parliament of Man
 - 10. equality of the sexes
 - 11. solution of the economic problems of the world
 - 12. spread of an auxiliary world language
- (2) 2/24/1912 (translation), Tablet to Mrs. Antoinette Crump Cone of Chicago; published in SW XII:6, p. 121 (translation by Mirza Ahmad Sohrab)
 - 1. the most important teaching of Bahá’u’lláh is to leave behind racial, political, religious, and patriotic prejudices
- (3) 3/5/1914, Tablet to Mr. Charles Mason Remey; SW IX:15, p. 172 (un. transl., probably Mirza Ahmad Sohrab: numbered)
 - 1. oneness of the world of humanity
 - 2. investigation of reality

3. essential unity of the Religions of God
4. abandonment of religious, denominational, racial and patriotic prejudices
5. conformity of divine Religion with reason and science
6. Religion of God must become the cause of amity and love amongst mankind
7. Equality between man and woman
8. Essential necessity of the confirmation of the Holy Spirit
9. demonstration of divinity and inspiration
10. power of the influence of Bahá'u'lláh
11. underlying unity of all existing faiths
12. dawn of the Sun of Reality from the horizon of Persia
13. universal peace
14. universal language
15. education of the children of all the Religions, under a universal standard of instruction and a common curriculum

(4) 1914-1918, Tablet; SW XIII:6, p. 131 (un. transl., probably Mirza Ahmad Sohrab)

1. highest efficiency in the educational system
2. oneness of the world of humanity
3. conformity of religion with science and reason
4. equality of rights among the children of men
5. breaths of the Holy Spirit
6. equality of men and women
7. sweeping away of the prejudices existing among the various religions
8. heavenly morals
9. universal peace

(5) after 1918, Tablet; SW XIV:12, p. 370 (un. transl., probably Mirza Ahmad Sohrab)

1. oneness of humanity
2. universal brotherhood
3. unity of science and religion
4. investigation of truth
5. religion must be the cause of amity, union and harmony among men
6. equality of both sexes
7. economic principles, i.e., the welfare of every individual
8. universal education
9. abrogate and nullify religious, racial, political and economic prejudices

(6) 7/23/1919, Tablet to the Persian believers in Paris; SW X:12, p. 226 (un. transl., probably Mirza Ahmad Sohrab)

1. unity of mankind
2. establishment of universal peace
3. establishment of universal right
4. establishment of universal justice
5. religion must be conducive to harmony amongst men
6. religion must conform to reason and science
7. equality of men and women
8. freedom and liberty for all
9. enlightenment of heavenly morals
10. love for all men
11. love for animals
12. universalization of general knowledge
13. profession, trade, agriculture are worship of God

(7) 12/17/1919 (translation), Letter and Tablet to the Office of the Secretary, Central Organization for a Durable Peace, The Hague; SW XI:8, pp. 125-27, 129-134 (translation by Shoghi Effendi, Dr. Zia Bagdadi, Mirza Lotfullah Hakim, Dr. J.E. Esslemont) [partial reprint in SWAB #227, pp. 296-307]

1. declaration of Universal Peace
2. independent investigation of reality
3. oneness of the world of humanity
4. religion must be the cause of fellowship and love
5. religion must be in conformity with science and reason
6. religious, racial, political, economic and patriotic prejudices destroy the edifice of humanity
7. origination of one language that may be spread universally among the people
8. unity of women and men...not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they ought to be
9. voluntary sharing of one's property with others among mankind

10. man's freedom, that through the ideal power he should be free and emancipated from the captivity of the world of nature
11. religion is a mighty bulwark
12. although material civilization is one of the means for the progress of the world of mankind, yet until it becomes combined with Divine civilization the desired result, which is the felicity of mankind, will not be attained
13. promotion of education
14. justice and right

(8) 1/28/1920, Tablet; SW XIV:12, p. 356 (translation by Shoghi Effendi)

1. first teaching is the search after truth
2. second teaching is the oneness of mankind
3. third teaching is that religion is the most mighty stronghold
4. religion should be conducive to unity, rather than the cause of enmity and hate
5. religious, racial, national and political prejudice, all are subversive of the foundation of human society
6. universal peace
7. establishment of a supreme Tribunal
8. equality in rights of men and women

(9) 12/9/1920 (translation), Tablet to Miss Mochizuki of Japan; SW XII:2, p. 41 (translation by Mirza Azizu'llah Bahadur)

1. first principle of Bahá'u'lláh is independent investigation of truth
2. oneness of the world of humanity
3. religion must be the cause of concord
4. religion should agree with science and reason
5. religion must be a factor of progress to the world of humanity
6. religion should be free of blind imitations
7. all prejudices are destructive to the foundation of the world of humanity
8. equality of men and women
9. universalization of knowledge (education)
10. creation of one universal language
11. justice and righteousness
12. economic facilities among mankind
13. need of the world of humanity of the breaths of the Holy Spirit
14. establishment of universal peace
15. institution of the Supreme Court of Arbitration
16. freedom and equality of all mankind
17. brotherhood of the world of humanity

(10) circa 1921, Tablet; SW XIV:8, p. 229 (un. transl.)

1. first...the investigation of truth
2. second is the oneness of mankind
3. third is universal peace
4. fourth, the conformity of religion with science
5. fifth, the abandonment of racial, denominational, worldly and political prejudices
6. sixth, right and justice
7. seventh, the betterment of morals
8. eighth, equality of both sexes
9. ninth, the diffusion of knowledge and education
10. tenth, economic questions

Talks

(11) n.d., talk; SW XIII:8, p. 218 (un. transl.)

1. oneness of the world of humanity
2. independent investigation of truth
3. abandonment of prejudice
4. universal peace

(12) n.d., talk; ABDP, pp. 82-85 (un. transl.)

1. free their minds from the superstitions of the past and seek independently for truth putting aside all dogmas
2. religions are one
3. the hour of unity which has dawned on all mankind
4. banish prejudice
5. religion must be the cause of affection
6. religion which does not conform with the postulates of science is mere superstition
7. absolute equality of the sexes
8. education of each child is compulsory

9. child must learn profession, art or trade
10. work done in the spirit of service is the highest form of worship
11. the different social classes are preserved
12. work for all
13. universal auxiliary language will be adopted
14. destroy antagonism by finding a point of agreement...if two dispute about religion both are wrong

(13) n.d., talks PT, pp. 129-134 (un. transl)

1. first...the search for truth
2. second...the unity of mankind
3. third...religion should be the cause of love and affection
4. fourth...the unity of religion and science...any religion that contradicts science or that is opposed to it, is only ignorance...any religion contrary to science is not the truth
5. fifth...prejudices of religion, race, or sect destroy the foundation of humanity
6. sixth...equal opportunity of the means of existence
7. seventh...the equality of men—equality before the law
8. eighth...universal peace
9. ninth...that religion should not concern itself with political questions
10. tenth...education and instruction of women
11. eleventh...the power of the Holy Spirit, by which alone spiritual development is achieved

(14) 9/30/1911, Farewell address to England; SW II:18 Persian; ABL, pp. 27-30 (uni. transl., probably Dr. A. Farid)

1. firstly...search for Truth
2. secondly...oneness of humanity
3. thirdly...religion is the chief foundation of love and unity
4. fourthly...religion and science are intertwined
5. fifth...reality of the divine religions is one
6. sixthly...equality and brotherhood must be established
7. seventhly...arrangements so that poverty shall disappear
8. eighthly...Most Great Peace shall come, Great Board of Arbitration
9. ninthly...receive the bounty of the Holy Spirit

(15) 11/10-18/1911, talks in private quarters, Paris; KH, pp. 143-148; PT, pp. 135-166 (un. transl.)

1. first...the search after truth
2. second...the unity of mankind
3. NOT FEATURED
4. fourth...the acceptance of the relation between religion and science...when a religion is opposed to science it becomes mere superstition
5. fifth...the abolition of prejudices
6. sixth...means of existence
7. seventh...equality of man...all men are equal before the law, which must reign absolutely
8. eighth...universal peace...Supreme Tribunal...establishment of a universal language
9. ninth...the noninterference of religion with politics
10. tenth...equality of sex
11. eleventh...the power of the Holy Spirit

(16) 4/25/1912, talk in home of Mrs. Agnes Parsons, Washington, D.C.; KH, pp. 357-360; PUP, pp. 61-64 (translation by Dr. A. Farid)

1. first...duty incumbent upon all to investigate reality
2. second...oneness of the world of humanity
3. third...religion and science are in complete agreement. Every religion which is not in accordance with established science is superstition

(17) 5/7/1912, talk at Hotel Schenley, Pittsburgh; PUP, pp. 105-110 (Ibid.)

1. first, it is incumbent upon all mankind to investigate truth
2. second...the oneness of the world of humanity
3. third...the oneness of religion and science...Any religious belief which is not conformable with scientific proof and investigation is superstition
4. fourth...readjustment and equalization of the economic standards of mankind
5. fifth...abandoning of religious, racial, patriotic and political prejudice
6. sixth...equality of man and woman
7. the education of all members of society
8. the world of humanity is in need of the breath of the Holy Spirit if the moral precepts and foundations of divine civilization become united with the material advancement of man, there is no doubt that the happiness of the human world will

be attained and that from every direction the glad tidings of peace upon earth will be announced

(18) 5/13/1912, talk at the New York Peace Society; PUP, pp. 124-125 (Ibid.)

1. oneness of humanity
2. prejudice—religious, racial, patriotic, political—is the destroyer of the body politic
3. universal peace

(19) 5/19/1912, talk at Church of the Divine Paternity, NYC; PUP, pp. 126-129 (Ibid.)

1. first, that the oneness of humanity shall be recognized and established
2. second, that truth or reality must be investigated
3. third, that religion is in harmony with science. The fundamental principles of the Prophets are scientific, but the forms and imitations which have appeared are opposed to science
4. fourth, that religion must be conducive to love and unity among mankind

(20) 5/29/1912, talk in home of Mr. and Mrs. Kinney, NYC; PUP, p. 156 (Ibid.)

1. oneness of God
2. unity of mankind

(21) 6/2/1912, talk at Church of the Ascension, NYC; PUP, pp. 163-171 (Ibid.)

1. first, investigate reality
2. second, the oneness of humanity
3. third, religion must be conducive to love of all, the cause of fellowship, unity and light
4. fourth, equality between men and women
5. fifth, spiritual brotherhood...fraternity in the Holy Spirit—for patriotic, racial and political fraternity are of no avail...the world of humanity must be confirmed by the breath of the Holy Spirit

(22) 6/9/1912, talk at Unitarian Church, Philadelphia; KH, pp. 432-441; PUP, 172-176 (Ibid.)

1. oneness of God
2. unity of the world of humanity
3. men and women are equal in the sight of God...there is no distinction to be made between them
4. adoption of the same course of education for man and woman
5. fundamental oneness of religion
6. reality is one and not multiple
7. harmony of science and religion...Religion must stand the analysis of reason. It must agree with scientific fact and proof so that science will sanction religion and religion fortify science

(23) 6/9/1912, talk at Baptist Temple, Philadelphia; KH, pp. 441-454; PUP, pp. 176-182 (Ibid.)

1. first...the investigation of reality
2. second...the unity of mankind
3. third...religion must be the source of fellowship, the cause of unity and the nearness of God to man
4. fourth...the agreement of religion and science...If religious beliefs and opinions are found contrary to the standards of science, they are mere superstitions and imaginations
5. prejudices—whether religious, racial, patriotic or political—are destructive to the foundations of human development
6. sixth...economic readjustment
7. seventh...equal standard of human rights must be recognized and adopted
8. eighth, education is essential, and all standards of training and teaching throughout the world of mankind should be brought into conformity and agreement; a universal curriculum should be established, and the basis of ethics be the same
9. ninth, a universal language shall be adopted and be taught by all the schools and institutions of the world
10. tenth...the equality of man and woman
11. the world of humanity cannot advance through mere physical powers and intellectual attainments; nay, rather, the Holy Spirit is essential

(24) 7/14/1912, talk at All Souls Unitarian Church, NYC; PUP, pp. 228-235 Ibid.)

1. first...the oneness of mankind
2. religion is in complete harmony with science and reason. If religious belief and doctrine is at variance with reason, it proceeds from the limited mind of man and not from God
3. unity of religion...removal of disagreement and dissension caused by the formation of religious sects and denominations
4. abandon hearsay and investigate the reality and inner significance of the heavenly teachings
5. we desire religion to be the cause of amity and fellowship
6. political, racial and patriotic prejudices are sources of human dissension...these have been removed by Bahá'u'lláh
7. one language should be sanctioned and adopted by all governments
8. universal peace
9. equality between man and woman
10. divine plan for the reconciliation of the religious systems of the world

(25) 8/27/1912, talk at Metaphysical Club, Boston; PUP, pp. 284–289 (Ibid)

1. first...the oneness of the world of humanity
2. foundations of the divine religion are one reality which does not admit of multiplicity or division...the commandments and teachings of God are one
3. religion must be conducive to love and unity
4. religion must conform to science and reason; otherwise, it is superstition
5. prejudices of all kinds—whether religious, racial, patriotic or political—are destructive of divine foundations in man
6. the foundation of international peace
7. no matter how far the world of humanity may advance in material civilization, it is nevertheless in need of spiritual virtues and the bounties of God...the spirit of man is in need of the protection of the Holy Spirit...he is ever in need of the bestowals of the Holy Spirit

(26) 9/1/1912, talk at Church of the Messiah, Montreal; KH, pp. 527–535; PUP, pp. 297–302 (Ibid)

1. oneness of the world of humanity
2. the revelations of all the Prophets of the past have been in perfect unity and agreement
3. the religion or guidance of God must be the means of love and fellowship in the world
4. religion must be in accord with science and reason. If it does not correspond with scientific principles and the processes of reason, it is superstition
5. all religious, racial, patriotic and political prejudice must be abandoned
6. all must receive training and instruction
7. equality of the sexes
8. adoption of a universal language
9. international peace

(27) 9/5/1912, talk at St. James Methodist Church, Montreal; PUP, pp. 312–319 (un. transl.)

1. first, man must independently investigate reality
2. second, the oneness of the world of humanity shall be realized
3. third, religion must be the mainspring and source of love in the world
4. fourth, religion must reconcile and be in harmony with science and religion. If the religious beliefs of mankind are contrary to science and opposed to reason, they are none other than superstitions and without divine authority
5. fifth, prejudice—whether it be religious, racial, patriotic or political in its origin and aspect—is the destroyer of human foundations and opposed to the commands of God
6. sixth, the world of humanity is in need of the confirmations of the Holy Spirit
7. seventh, the necessity of education for all mankind is evident
8. eighth, universal peace will be established among the nations of the world by international agreement
9. ninth, there must be an equality of rights between men and women
10. tenth, there shall be an equality of rights and prerogatives for all mankind
11. eleventh, one language must be selected as an international medium of speech and communication

(28) 9/25/1912, talk at Second Divine Science Church, Denver; PUP, pp. 340–42 (translation by Dr. A. Farid)

1. first...the oneness of the world of humanity
2. second...investigation of reality
3. third...oneness of the foundations of the divine religions
4. reconciliation of religion with science and reason
5. no trace of religious, racial, patriotic or political prejudice

(29) 10/8/1912, talk at Leland Stanford Junior University, Palo Alto; PUP, p. 349 (Ibid.)

oneness of the world of humanity

(30) 10/8/1912, talk at Leland Stanford Junior University, Palo Alto; KH, pp. 570–582; PUP, p. 354 (Ibid)

1. fundamental basis of all religion is on essence of religion is human fellowship
2. if investigate reality underlying religious teaching all religious would be unified
3. religion intended as divine remedy and panacea for all the ailments of humanity...if proves to be the cause of discord and dissension, its absence would be preferable
4. international peace
5. all mankind is the one progeny of Adam and members of one great universal family

(31) 10/25/1912, talk at Hotel Sacramento, California; PUP, pp. 372–375 (Ibid.)

1. first...man should investigate reality
2. second...oneness of the world of humanity
3. third...universal peace among the nations, among the religions, among the races and native lands
4. removal of prejudice—whether religious, racial, patriotic, political or sectarian
5. religion must be the cause of love and fellowship
6. religion must be in conformity with science and reason; otherwise, it is superstition

7. equality between man and woman
8. material civilization is incomplete and insufficient and divine civilization must be established
9. extraordinary and praiseworthy progress bestowed by the breaths of the Holy Spirit

(32) 11/5/1912, talk at Grand Hotel, Cincinnati, Ohio; PUP, p. 388 (Ibid.)

1. establishment of agreement among the peoples of the world
2. proclaimed international unity
3. summoned religions of the world to harmony and reconciliation

(33) 11/6/1912, talk at Universalist Church, Washington, D.C.; PUP, pp. 392, 394 (Ibid.)

1. oneness of the world of humanity
2. religion must be the cause of unity and love amongst men
3. religion must conform to reason and be in accord with the conclusions of science...If religious teaching, however, be at variance with science and reason, it is unquestionably superstition
4. equality between men and women

(34) 11/15/1912, talk in home of Miss Juliet Thompson, NYC; PUP, pp. 431-437 (Ibid.)

1. first...the investigation of reality
2. second...recognition of the oneness of the world of humanity
3. religion must be in conformity with science and reason
4. religion must be the source of unity and fellowship in the world
5. all forms of prejudice among mankind must be abandoned
6. perfect equality between men and women
7. necessity for a universal language
8. all mankind shall be educated and no illiteracy be allowed to remain
9. all mankind to become fitted for some useful trade, craft or profession by which subsistence may be assured
10. work is considered as an act of worship

(35) 11/17/1912, talk at Geneological Hall, NYC; PUP, p. 440 (Ibid.)

1. oneness of the world of humanity
2. protection and guidance of the Holy Spirit
3. foundation of all religions is one
4. religion must be the cause of unity
5. religion must accord with science and reason
6. independent investigation of truth
7. equality between men and women
8. abandoning of all prejudices among mankind
9. universal peace
10. universal education
11. universal language
12. solution of the economic problem
13. international tribunal

(36) 12/2/1912, talk in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Kinney; PUP, pp. 453-457 (Ibid.)

1. oneness of the world of humanity
2. investigate truth—that is to say, no man should blindly follow his ancestors and forefathers
3. foundations of all the religions of God is one
4. religion must be the cause of unity, harmony and agreement among mankind
5. religion must be in harmony with science and reason
6. equality of man and woman
7. prejudice and fanaticism—whether sectarian, denominational, patriotic or political—are destructive to the foundation of human solidarity
8. universal peace
9. all mankind should attain knowledge and acquire an education
10. the remedy for the economic question
11. House of Justice
12. ordination and appointment of the Center of the Covenant

(37) 12/20/1912, talk at Westminster Hotel in London; SW III:17, pp. 6-9 (reported by Isabel Fraser; untransl., probably Mirza Ahmad Sohrab)

1. first...oneness of the human family
2. second...international peace
3. limitations and dogmas must be done away with inter-racial peace; religion must ever be the means of love
4. fourth...conformity of science and reason with true universal religion
5. fifth...prejudice must be abandoned

6. equality of men and women
7. seventh...universal education...all the children should study and acquire a profession, that there should not remain a single individual without a profession whereby he can earn his livelihood
8. through the equipment of science and art the misunderstandings which have prevailed between religion and science will become reconciled
9. international tribunal will be the court of appeals between the nations

Appendix Three: The Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh According to their Order of Transmission by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

FIRST: Numbered:	Independent investigation of reality (12 out of 17) Oneness of humanity (5/17)
Sequenced:	Independent investigation of reality (1/20) Oneness of humanity (13/20)
Combined:	Oneness of humanity (17/37) Independent investigation of reality (13/37)
SECOND: Numbered:	Oneness of humanity (10/14) Independent investigation of reality (3/14) Universal peace (1/14)
Sequenced:	Oneness of humanity (5/20) Independent investigation of reality (3/20) Universal peace (2/20)
Combined:	Oneness of humanity (15/34) Independent investigation of reality (6/34) Universal peace (3/34)
THIRD: Numbered:	Religion must be the cause of love and unity (4/12) Religion must agree with science and reason (3/12) Unity of the religions of God (2/12) Universal peace (2/12)
Sequenced:	Religion must be the cause of love and unity (4/21) Religion must agree with science and reason (5/21) Unity of the religions of God (3/21) Universal peace (1/21)
Combined:	Religion must be the cause of love and unity (8/33) Religion must agree with science and reason (8/33) Unity of the religions of God (5/33) Universal peace (3/33)
FOURTH: Numbered:	Religion must agree with science and reason (6/10) Religion must be the cause of love and unity (1/10) Abandonment of all prejudices (1/10)
Sequenced:	Religion must agree with science and reason (4/22) Religion must be the cause of love and unity (6/22)

Lights of ‘Irfán

	Abandonment of prejudices (3/22)
Combined:	Religion must agree with science and reason (10/32) Religion must be the cause of love and unity (7/32) Abandonment of prejudices (4/32)
FIFTH: Numbered:	Abandonment of prejudices (7/9) Religion must agree with science and reason (1/9) Spiritual brotherhood (1/9)
Sequenced:	Religion must be the cause of love and unity (6/19) Abandonment of prejudices (5/19) Religion must agree with science and reason (3/19) Spiritual brotherhood (1/19)
Combined:	Abandonment of prejudices (12/28) Religion must be the cause of love and unity (6/28) Religion must agree with science and reason (4/28) Spiritual brotherhood (2/28)
SIXTH: Numbered:	Divine economy (3/8) Equality of men and women (2/8) Religion must be the cause of love and unity (1/8)
Sequenced:	Divine economy (1/18) Equality of men and women (3/18) Religion must be the cause of love and unity (0/18) Religion must agree with science and reason (4/18)
Combined:	Equality of men and women (5/26) Religion must agree with science and reason (4/26) Divine economy (4/26) Religion must be the cause of love and unity (1/26)
SEVENTH: Numbered:	Equality of rights of all men before the law (3/7) Universal education (2/7) Equality of men and women (1/7)
Sequenced:	Equality of rights of all men before the law (0/18) Universal education (1/18) Equality of men and women (5/18) Abandonment of prejudices (4/18) Universal language (3/18)
Combined:	Equality of men and women (6/25) Abandonment of prejudices (4/25) Equality of rights of all men before the law (3/25) Universal education (3/26) Universal language (3/26)

Lights of ‘Irfán

EIGHTH: Numbered:	Universal peace (3/8)
	Dependence upon the Holy Spirit (2/8)
	Universal education (1/8)
	Equality of men and women (1/8)
Sequenced:	Universal peace (2/15)
	Dependence upon the Holy Spirit (1/15)
	Universal education (4/15)
	Equality of men and women (3/15)
Combined:	Universal peace (5/23)
	Universal education (5/23)
	Equality of men and women (4/23)
	Dependence upon the Holy Spirit (3/23)
NINTH: Numbered:	Religion does not interfere in politics (2/7)
	Universal education (1/7)
	Equality of men and women (1/7)
	Universal language (1/7)
Sequenced:	International Tribunal (1/7)
	Religion does not interfere in politics (0/14)
	Universal education (4/14)
	Equality of men and women (1/14)
Combined:	Universal language (0/14)
	International Tribunal (1/14)
	Universal peace (3/14)
	Universal education (4/21)
TENTH: Numbered:	Universal peace (3/21)
	Religion does not interfere in politics (2/21)
	International Tribunal (2/21)
	Equality of men and women (2/6)
Sequenced:	Education of women (1/6)
	Divine economy (1/6)
	Equality of rights of all men before the law (1/6)
	Equality of men and women (1/10)
Combined:	Education of women (0/10)
	Divine economy (3/10)
	Equality of rights of all men before the law (0/10)
	Divine economy (4/16)
ELEVENTH: Numbered:	Equality of men and women (3/16)
	Education of women (1/16)
ELEVENTH: Numbered:	Dependence upon the Holy Spirit (3/5)

Lights of ‘Irfán

	Unity of the religion of God (1/5)
	Universal language (1/5)
Sequenced:	Dependence upon the Holy Spirit (0/8)
	Unity of the religion of God (0/8)
	Universal language (1/8)
Combined:	Dependence upon the Holy Spirit (3/13)
	Universal language (2/13)
	Unity of the religion of God (1/13)
TWELFTH: Numbered:	Sun of Reality has dawned from Persia (1/1)
Sequenced:	Divine Economy (2/7)
	Universal language (1/7)
	Appointment of Centre of the Covenant (1/7)
	Preservation of social classes (1/7)
Combined:	Divine Economy (2/8)
THIRTEENTH: Numbered:	none
Sequenced:	Divine economy (2/6)
	Universal education (1/6)
	Dependence upon the Holy Spirit (1/6)
	International Tribunal (1/6)
	Universal peace (1/6)
FOURTHEENTH: Numbered:	none
Sequenced:	Universal language (2/4)
	Justice and right (1/4)
	Universal peace (1/4)
FIFTEENTH: Numbered:	none
Sequenced:	Universal education (1/3)
	International Tribunal (1/3)
	If two dispute both are wrong (1/3)
SIXTEENTH: Numbered:	none
Sequenced:	Freedom and equality of all mankind (1/1)
SEVENTEENTH: Numbered:	none
Sequenced:	Brotherhood of the world of humanity (1/1)

