

Twelve Table Talks given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in ‘Akká

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The Three Kinds of Prophets

1 QUESTION: HOW MANY kinds of divine Prophets are there?

2 Answer: There are three kinds of divine Prophets. One kind are the universal Manifestations, which are even as the sun. Through Their advent the world of existence is renewed, a new cycle is inaugurated, a new religion is revealed, souls are quickened to a new life, and East and West are flooded with light. These Souls are the universal Manifestations of God and have been sent forth to the entire world and the generality of mankind.

3 Another kind of Prophets are followers and promulgators, not leaders and law-givers, but they are nonetheless the recipients of the hidden inspirations of God. Yet another kind are Prophets Whose prophethood has been limited to a particular locality. But the universal Manifestations are all-encompassing: They are like the root, and all others are as the branches; they are like the sun, and all others are as the moon and the stars.

– 2 –

Two Kinds of Prophecy

1 QUESTION: IN THE books of the Prophets there are tidings of the future; that is, certain events and incidents have been explicitly or implicitly announced and unseen matters foretold, which in this day are witnessed to have come true in their entirety. How were these events of the present day foreseen in the past?

2 Answer: The Prophets of God draw upon both His boundless universal grace and His particular grace, that is, upon divine revelation and inspiration. They foretell certain events through revelation and inspiration, which are the heavenly splendours, the intimations of the heart, and the scattering rays of the light of the Day-Star of Truth. This grace is like the resplendent rays of the sun, and the hearts of the Prophets are even as mirrors. Thus They affirm that Their words have proceeded from revelation and inspiration.

3 The second kind of discovery is due to the fact that the Prophets are able Physicians and informed of the mysteries of the universe. They have Their finger on the pulse of the world, and They diagnose and foresee the ailments and illnesses which are to come. It is from the appearance, signs, and conditions of the universe itself that They infer these mysteries. Thus, when an able physician notes certain signs and symptoms in the body of a patient, he diagnoses future ailments, illnesses, and conditions. This proceeds from his knowledge, skill, and power of inference.

4 But the tidings of the Prophets are all founded upon the scattering rays of the light of truth and proceed from pure inspiration and revelation. For past, present, and future apply only to the world of creation, not to the world of God. In the realm of Truth, past, present, and future are one and the same: The beginning is even as the end and the end even as the beginning. For in the eternal and everlasting realm of God, time holds no sway and no distinction can be made between past and future, as past and future are contrary to that which has neither beginning nor end. In a realm that has no beginning and no end, how can past, present, and future even be imagined? Observe that even in an outward sense time has no sway in the world of the intellect, even though it holds sway in the mind of an intelligent person, for the power of the mind has ever apprehended and encompassed all things and will forever continue to do so.

5 Consider for example the sun itself: It knows neither morning, nor noon, nor evening—all times are one; all moments are the same. But on account of the rising and setting of the sun, the

inhabitants of the earth see mornings and evenings and reckon the days and nights. Thus all these times are one in the sun and all these days are identical and indistinguishable.

- 6 Likewise, in the realm of truth, past, present, and future are the same, and future events are even as past and present occurrences. From the perspective of that realm, all events and incidents take place in the present and are witnessed by the Prophets and the chosen ones. And so it is that the Prophets herald events that will transpire two or three thousand years hence, for they abide in the realm of truth, wherein the mysteries of the universe are revealed and laid bare. Infer from this statement the truth of the spiritual discoveries of the Holy Ones and reflect and ponder thereon—the matter is indeed clear and manifest.

– 3 –

The Meaning of Speaking in Tongues¹

- 1 QUESTION: WHAT IS meant by the Apostles' speaking in tongues?

2 Answer: The meaning is that the Apostles taught in a spiritual tongue, a tongue that embraces all tongues. For the Word of the Kingdom comprises spiritual meanings and divine mysteries, and whoso attains to this Word will find the realities and mysteries of creation to be clear and evident. The divine inner meanings are the all-encompassing reality of all tongues.

- 3 Therefore, the Holy Spirit endowed the Apostles with the tongue of the Kingdom, and they spoke with all peoples as if in their own tongue; that is, whenever they conversed with a person of any faith or nation, it was as though they were speaking his own tongue. Were it otherwise, there are at present more than a thousand known languages and it would be fair to expect that the Apostles would have written at least one Gospel in the language of one of the other nations. It is, however, well established that the Gospel was written only in Hebrew and in Greek. No Gospel was even written in Latin, though that was at the time the official language of the land. Yet, as the Apostles were not proficient in Latin, no Gospel was written in that language.

– 4 –

The Invocation "He Is God"²

- 1 QUESTION: WHY IS the expression "He is God" used at the beginning of the Tablets and Epistles?

2 Answer: This is a common practice in the East among the Muslims, and their intent is that one must begin all things with the mention of God. But what is intended in the divine Tablets is that the reality of the divine Essence is sanctified above all understanding, exalted beyond all imagination. For whatsoever man may imagine is encompassed by him, and that which encompasses is without a doubt greater than that which is encompassed. It is therefore clear that what is imagined is the creation, not the Creator. For the reality of Divinity is sanctified above all human fancy. In this day all people are worshippers of idle fancies, for they conceive a god in the realm of imagination and worship him. Thus if you were to ask someone who is engaged in prayer: "Whom are you worshipping?" he would say: "God." "What God?" "God as I imagine Him." Whereas that which is in his imagination is not God. All people are therefore worshippers of their own thoughts and fancies.

- 3 Thus for man there is no path to tread and no place to turn save unto the holy Manifestations. For, as already mentioned, the reality of Divinity is transcendent, sanctified, and beyond all imagination. All that can be imagined are the holy and divine Manifestations. There is nowhere else for man to direct his gaze, and should he pass beyond this he will fall prey to delusion. Thus what is meant by the words "He is God" is that that manifest Being is the promised Beauty and the Day-Star of Truth, the Exponent of the secrets of Lordship and Divinity, the Repository of the mysteries of the All-Merciful, and the Source of the signs of His Singleness; and that I have begun my discourse with His blessed Name.

The Wisdom of Fasting³

1 QUESTION: WHAT IS the divine wisdom of fasting?

2 Answer: There is many a divine wisdom in fasting. Among them is this: that, in the days when He Who is the Dayspring of the Sun of Truth engages, through divine inspiration, in revealing the verses of God, in establishing His religion, and in setting forth His teachings, He is so enraptured and enkindled as to find no time for food or drink. For example, when Moses went up to Mount Sinai to establish the religion of God, He fasted for forty days; and fasting was therefore enjoined upon the Israelites to awaken and admonish them. Likewise Christ, at the beginning of the foundation of His divine religion, the establishment of His teachings, and the formulation of His admonitions, disregarded for forty days all physical necessities and refrained from food and drink. The Apostles and early Christian believers also fasted, but this fast was changed by the Church Councils to abstinence from certain foods. Similarly, the Qur’án was revealed during the month of Ramaḍán⁴ and therefore the fast was enjoined during that period. In the same way, in the beginning of His manifestation, the Báb would be so overcome with emotion at the revelation of the divine verses that for days He would confine himself to drinking tea. Likewise, in the days when He was instituting the divine teachings, and when the divine verses would be sent down continuously, Bahá’u’lláh would be so overwhelmed with the intensity of their influence and the emotions surging within His heart that He would take but little food.

3 Our meaning is that it has been enjoined upon the generality of the people to fast likewise for a few days, that they might follow the example of the divine Manifestations and call to mind Their state and condition. As history records, the Christians would in the early days observe a complete fast. For every sincere soul who has a beloved aspires to whatever condition his beloved is experiencing: If the beloved were sad he would wish for sorrow, and if joyous he would aspire to joy; if the beloved were at ease he would seek comfort, and if troubled he would desire the same. Now, since in those days the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh would abstain from food and drink, or would partake of only the least amount, it became incumbent upon Their loved ones to follow Their example. Even as it is said in the Tablet of Visitation: “... who, for love of Thee, have observed all whereunto they were bidden”.⁵ This is but one of the wisdoms of fasting.

4 The second wisdom is that fasting is conducive to spiritual awareness. One’s heart grows more tender, one’s spirituality is increased, and as a result one’s thoughts become purely focused on the remembrance of God. Such awareness and awakening leads inexorably to spiritual progress.

5 The third wisdom is this. There are two kinds of fast: material and spiritual. The material fast consists in abstaining from food and drink, that is, refraining from satisfying the physical appetites. But the true and spiritual fast is for man to forsake covetous desires, heedlessness, and evil and animalistic attributes. The material fast is therefore a symbol of that spiritual fast. It is like saying: “O Divine Providence! As I am abstaining from bodily desires and from all occupation with food and drink, even so purify and sanctify my heart from the love of anyone save Thyself, and shield and protect my soul from corrupt inclinations and satanic qualities, that my spirit may commune with the breaths of holiness and fast from the mention of all else besides Thee.”

The Rejection of the Manifestations of God in Every Age⁶

1 When Abraham was sent forth, however much He expounded the truth, established the religion of God, disseminated new teachings, and explained the divine mysteries, the Assyrians and the Chaldeans would say, “This is but an idle fancy and an empty tale, a mere figment of the imagination. It will never come to pass.” Even more, they called it sheer ignorance and counted themselves among the exponents of reason and understanding. But before long it became clear that what Abraham had proclaimed was indeed the truth, and that it was their own thoughts that were the idle fancies. For after a short time the teachings of Abraham were realized in the world: The Holy Land was given to His descendants; the foundations of the religion of God were

established; Isaac and Jacob came into the world; Joseph became ruler in Egypt; Ishmael was blessed and illumined Mount Paran; Moses the Interlocutor appeared, beheld in the desert of Sinai the blazing fire of God in the Burning Bush, rescued the Israelites from their oppression and captivity at the hands of the Egyptians, led them to the Holy Land, and, through His teachings and His religion, which were consonant with the needs of the age, founded a mighty nation. Thus did the deniers fully experience their error, yet they were not chastened or admonished.

2 On the contrary, when Moses appeared they erred anew, for Pharaoh's people regarded the teachings and the law of Moses as mere fancy and accorded them no importance, considering their own ideas to represent the truth. But after a short time it became clear and evident that what Moses had proclaimed was indeed the truth and had come to pass, that the religion of God had been put into full effect and had secured the honour and advancement of all Israel, and that it was the thoughts and imaginations of the Egyptians that were the idle fancies. This was the second experience and yet the people were still not admonished and awakened, but rather persisted in their ignorance until Jesus appeared with a beautiful countenance and an eloquent tongue, and spread abroad the sweet savours of the rose-garden of divine mysteries and imparted the grace of the Holy Spirit.

3 The people, notwithstanding their two previous experiences wherein their error had been established, claimed again that the teachings of the glorious Gospel were idle fancies—that they were mere thoughts and imaginations, that they were devoid of all reality, and that they lacked in philosophical substance. “These are but vain and idle thoughts,” they would say, “whereas we possess true knowledge and lofty ideas, we have wisdom and discernment, and we know the ways of sound governance.” But before long their error was exposed, for what Jesus had said was sound and true: It was heavenly thoughts and divine teachings, whereas the prevailing thoughts of the tribes and nations of the earth were the vain and idle fancies. This was the third error and yet another experience which was later also repeated upon the appearance of Muḥammad and the Báb.

4 Now Bahá'u'lláh has appeared, the divine teachings and admonitions have been unveiled, the call of the oneness of humanity has been sounded, the banner of the kingdom of peace is flying, and the tabernacle of love and harmony amongst all mankind has been raised in the very heart of the world and is summoning all people. And yet again some ignorant souls imagine that these divine teachings are without foundation and regard their own imaginations as lofty thoughts. But before long it will become manifest that what He has proclaimed is sound, proven, and compelling, and that all other thoughts are vain and idle.

– 7 –

The Meaning of “Mysteries”⁷

1 QUESTION: WHAT IS meant by “mysteries” in the blessed Tablets?

2 Answer: By “mysteries” is meant such matters and questions as are remote and hidden from the minds and understandings of the people, but which can later be grasped by fair-minded souls if a perfect Individual unravels and explains them. Thus, the reality of the advent of Christ was one of God's mysteries in the Mosaic Dispensation, which was later disclosed and witnessed through the manifestation of Christ.

– 8 –

The Transformation of Matter across the Kingdoms of Existence

1 Throughout this endless universe, the greatest means for the progress and renewal of existence is that all things are eaters and eaten. This is a condition that applies to all the particles of the universe, and it is through this means that created things are renewed, transformed into one another, and endowed with a new reality unlike the previous one. And this indeed is the means of renewal.

For instance, in the mineral kingdom the soil absorbs the air and the water and decomposes the creatures within it, and thus enables the existence of plants. The more microscopic animals exist in the soil, the better the plants will grow. And when the plant has grown, it is consumed by the animal, is incorporated in its body, and is endowed with a new existence. Thus it progresses further and assumes a higher reality than that which it initially possessed. This indeed is the means of progress and renewal from the mineral to the vegetable, from the vegetable to the animal, and from the animal to the human world. For as plants grow they are eaten by the animal and replace those elements which have been depleted in the latter's body. In this manner the plants enter the animal kingdom. The microscopic organisms in the air, water, and food enter in turn the body of man and replace that which has been assimilated therein.

Thus there is progress in these passages and renewals: The mineral passed from the mineral to the vegetable, then to the animal, and finally to the human realm. And were it not for the cycle of the eater and the eaten, no renewal would take place. Such a renewal, however, is one of the inherent requirements of existence, and all contingent things are bound to pass from one condition to another.

The pain and sting of death consists in the dissolution of what was composed and its passage from one condition to another. When one is accustomed to composition, then decomposition is a painful torment; when one is used to a certain degree and station, it is difficult to take leave of it. It is therefore clear that death is merely the passage from one condition to another. Thus if a predatory animal devours another animal, the latter has in reality not been abased but has been decomposed and recomposed, found a renewed existence, and passed from one body to another. This motion and renewal of beings gives rise to the orderly arrangement and interconnectedness of all things, and were it not for these passages across the vegetable, animal, and human realms, the chain of being would be broken and the innate order of nature would be disrupted.

– 9 –

Ṭáhirih and the Conference of Badasht

- 1 QUESTION: CAN YOU provide an account of Ṭáhirih's deliverance from Qazvín, her arrival in Ṭíhrán, her departure for Badasht, and the events that transpired there?
- 2 Answer: In brief, what happened is the following. Those were the early days of the Cause and no one was informed of the divine teachings. All followed the law of the Qur'án and regarded warfare, retribution, and retaliation as permissible. In Qazvín, Ḥájí Mullá Taqí⁸ launched an attack from the pulpit and condemned those two resplendent stars, Shaykh Aḥmad-i-Aḥsá'í and Siyyid Kázim-i-Rashtí. He cursed and reviled them vehemently, saying: "This affair of the Báb, which is unmitigated error, is a hellish fire that has blazed forth from the grave of Shaykh Aḥmad and Siyyid Kázim." In sum, he uttered the most brazen words and repeatedly hurled insults and invective at them.
- 3 A believer from Shíráz⁹ was present at his sermon and heard it with his own ears. As he was unaware of the divine teachings that were yet to be promulgated and the principles upon which the religion of God was to be established, he concluded that it behoved him to act according to the law of the Qur'án, and thus he set out to settle the score. He went before dawn to the mosque of the said Ḥájí Mullá Taqí and concealed himself in an alcove. When at dawn Ḥájí Mullá Taqí came to the mosque, that individual stabbed him in the back and in the mouth with a spear-tipped cane. Ḥájí Mullá Taqí fell to the ground and his assailant fled. When the people arrived, they saw the cleric lying dead.
- 4 A great tumult erupted and throughout the city a hue and cry was raised. The dignitaries of the town decided in concert that the assassins were Shaykh Rasúl-i-'Arab and two other individuals, whom they viewed as being among the associates of Ṭáhirih. They immediately arrested these three individuals, and Ṭáhirih herself was subjected to severe restrictions. When that man from Shíráz saw that others had been apprehended in his place, he felt it unfit to remain silent and came of his own accord to the seat of the government to declare that Shaykh Rasúl and his friends were entirely innocent of the wrongful accusations levelled against them, and that he

himself was the murderer. He described in full detail what had transpired, and confessed, saying: “These people are innocent: Set them free, for I am the guilty one and it is I who must be punished.” They arrested him but kept the others captive.

5 Briefly, they brought these four people from Qazvín to Tīhrán. No matter how much that man from Shíráz protested that it was he who was guilty and that the others were entirely innocent—explaining that he had committed the crime because the victim had openly cursed and reviled his master from the pulpit and that, outraged and unable to contain himself, he had therefore stabbed him in the mouth with a spearhead—no one listened. To the contrary, Hájí Mullá Taqí’s son clamoured before the ministers of the government for the death of all four. Şadru’l-‘Ulamá, who was the head of the clergy, sought an audience with the Sháh and said: “Hájí Mullá Taqí was an illustrious man, highly renowned in the eyes of all and deeply revered by the people of Qazvín. In avenging the murder of such a man, a single individual is of no consequence. All four men must be turned over to the heirs of Mullá Taqí and delivered to Qazvín, that they may be executed in that city and that its inhabitants may thus be placated.” Out of regard for Şadru’l-‘Ulamá and the people of Qazvín, the Sháh gave word that all four could be executed.

6 The man from Shíráz, seeing that the others had not been released in spite of his own arrest, escaped on a snowy night and went to the house of Ridá Khán. Together they made a pact and departed for Shaykh Ṭabarsí, where they both met with martyrdom. As to Shaykh Rasúl and his friends, they were taken to Qazvín, where the populace fell upon them and killed them in the most horrendous manner.

7 As a result, Ṭáhirih met with the greatest hardship. No one would associate with her, and all her relatives—even her husband and two sons—showed the greatest enmity and would oppress and revile her. Bahá’u’lláh dispatched Áqá Hádiy-i-Qazvíní from Tīhrán and, by an elaborate stratagem, arranged for Ṭáhirih to be rescued from Qazvín and brought directly to the private quarters of His house. At first no one knew of this, but when some within the inner circle of the believers were informed, they came to see her. I was a child, sitting on her lap and being held in her arms. The curtain was drawn, and those believers were seated in an adjoining room while she was speaking. The purport of her discourse, which was supported by a range of arguments, as well as by the Qur’án and the traditions of the Prophet, was that in every age an illustrious and distinguished Individual must be the focal Centre of the circle of guidance, the Pole Star of the firmament of the most excellent Law of God, and a perspicuous Leader; that all may defer to Him; and that in this day that illustrious and distinguished Individual is the Báb, Who has manifested Himself. Although her speech was eloquent, yet when she perceived that Bahá’u’lláh was to raise another call and shine forth with another radiance, she became even more enkindled and reached a state that can hardly be described. She forsook all patience and composure and well-nigh rent asunder the veil of concealment. Night and day she would at turns speak forth and cry out, laugh aloud, and weep bitterly.

8 Later Bahá’u’lláh sent her with a number of believers towards Badasht. Their first stop was a beautiful and verdant garden. Ṭáhirih and the friends arrived there and were later joined by Bahá’u’lláh, Who rested the night there. In the morning He sent Ṭáhirih and the friends with ample provisions to Badasht. After a few days, Bahá’u’lláh Himself went there. When He reached Badasht, Quddús had returned from Khurásán and he, too, came to Badasht, but he remained concealed.

9 In Badasht there was a field with a stream running through it and gardens to either side. Quddús remained concealed in one of the gardens, and Ṭáhirih resided in the other. A tent had been pitched for Bahá’u’lláh on that field, and the other believers were also housed in tents erected on the same field. In the evenings Bahá’u’lláh, Quddús, and Ṭáhirih would meet. Bahá’u’lláh made a solemn agreement with them that the truth of the Cause would be proclaimed at Badasht, but no specific day was designated.

10 Then, by chance, Bahá’u’lláh fell ill. As soon as he was informed, Quddús emerged from his concealment and entered Bahá’u’lláh’s tent. Ṭáhirih sent a message saying: “Either bring Bahá’u’lláh to the garden where I reside or I will come myself.” Quddús said: “Bahá’u’lláh is unwell and cannot come”, which was a signal. Ṭáhirih, seizing upon the opportunity, arose and,

unveiled, came forth from the garden. She proceeded towards the tent of Bahá'u'lláh crying out and proclaiming: "I am the Trumpet-blast; I am the Bugle-call!"—which are two of the signs of the Day of Resurrection mentioned in the Qur'án. Calling out in this fashion, she entered the tent of Bahá'u'lláh. No sooner had she entered than Bahá'u'lláh instructed the believers to recite the Súrih of the Event from the Qur'án, a Súrih that describes the upheaval of the Day of Resurrection.

11 In such wise was the Day of Resurrection proclaimed. The believers were seized with such fear and terror that some fled, others remained bewildered and dumbfounded, and still others wept and lamented. Some were so dismayed that they fell ill, and Hájí Mullá Ismá'íl was so overcome with fear and terror that he cut his own throat. But after a few days, peace and composure were regained and the confusion and anxiety were dispelled. Most of those who had fled became steadfast again, and the episode of Badašht drew to a close.

– 10 –

Shaykh Aḥmad and Siyyid Kázim

1 QUESTION: WHAT IS the story of Shaykh Aḥmad-i-Aḥsá'í and Siyyid Kázim-i-Rašhtí, the journey of their disciples to Shíráz, and their declaration of allegiance to the Báb, and how did these events unfold?

2 Answer: Know that in the latter days the Shí'íhs of Persia had forgotten the truth of the religion of God and had become entirely devoid and deprived of the morals of the spiritually minded. They were cleaving to empty husks and remained entirely heedless of the pith and substance. They had nothing to show but outward observances, such as prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, almsgiving, and the commemoration of the blessed Imáms. The people of true knowledge would therefore call them "Qishrí" (superficial), for amongst them the inner truths and meanings were absent, spiritual perceptions were non-existent, and heavenly morals had become but an idle matter.

3 When the night of separation approached the dawn—that is, when the concealment of the True One ran its course and the dawn of the morn of God drew nigh—Shaykh Aḥmad-i-Aḥsá'í appeared. He guided the people to inner truths and meanings and expounded the secrets and mysteries of the Qur'án. The Shí'íhs then became divided into two camps: Some followed the august Shaykh and became known as Shaykhís, while others kept to their prior condition and were called "Qishrí".

4 The illustrious Shaykh began to invite the people to anticipate the advent of God's revelation and the blazing of the Fire of Sinai. He proclaimed, in his writings and in his lessons, that the dawn was fast approaching and that the appearance of the promised Manifestation was imminent. Thus did he seek to instil receptivity in the hearts of the people and admonish them to await day and night the advent of the divine Manifestation. He became most renowned for his knowledge and perfections, not only in Persia but throughout the Shí'íh world. He was mentioned at every gathering and was sought after by all.

5 During his lifetime he trained and instructed Siyyid Kázim-i-Rašhtí, and before he died he appointed him as his successor. Siyyid Kázim followed in the footsteps of the illustrious Shaykh and occupied himself night and day with elucidating the inner truths and meanings and in disseminating the secrets and mysteries of the Qur'án. He so imbued the people with anticipation for the coming Revelation that his disciples, in their eagerness, forsook all patience and repose and dispersed in every direction until they found the Promised One.

6 Moreover, Siyyid Kázim explicitly specified, in the preamble of his book "Sharḥ-i-Qašidih",¹⁰ the name of Bahá'u'lláh: "Praise be to God Who hath adorned the preamble of the book of His Essence with the mystery of distinction, the ornament of that Point wherefrom the Há is manifested, with neither assimilation nor separation, through the Alif." To fully explain this expression to you would take a long time, since you are unfamiliar with such words and expressions, and were I to do so it would fill an entire book. But since time is short I will briefly provide a word-for-word translation¹¹ so that you will understand the general meaning. He says:

Praise be to God who has adorned the book of existence with the mystery of distinction through degrees, for it is through such differences that the world of existence is adorned. If all things were of one kind and there were no distinctions, existence would be imperfect. The realm of God and the realm of creation, the realm above and the realm below, the realm of truth and the realm of illusion: All these distinctions are among the inherent requirements of existence. He then says that the book of existence is adorned with that Point wherefrom the letter Há' appears and the letter Alif is manifested. And in the same book he explains in numerous passages that the Point is the letter Bá'. And when the letters Bá', Há', and Alif are brought together it makes "Bahá'."

7 Siyyid Kázim also spoke of trilaterals and quadrilaterals. A trilateral is a word comprising three letters, such as "Alí", and a quadrilateral is a word comprising four, such as "Muḥammad".¹² When these two are combined it makes "Alí-Muḥammad", which is the blessed name of the Báb. In numerous passages of the same book he explicitly refers to the Báb and extols Him with boundless laudations and attributes, saying that the mysteries of all that has been and all that shall be are found in Him. He also says that all the inner truths and meanings of the Sacred Scriptures are enfolded and allusively expressed in the verse "Bismi'lláhi'r-Raḥmání'r-Raḥím" (In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate), that all the meanings of "Bismi'lláh" (in the name of God) are encapsulated and comprehended in the letter Bá', which is the sum total of all truths and mysteries, and that the Bá' refers to Bahá'u'lláh.

8 The late Siyyid had asked the illustrious Shaykh to expound in some way that Hidden Mystery. The Shaykh wrote in reply: "There must needs be a Seat for this Cause and a Place for every Announcement." That is, this Cause upon which we have embarked has a designated Seat and Centre, and every Announcement must be established from a given place, meaning a centre wherein it is realized. Then he said: "I can say no more; I can appoint no time. 'His Cause will be made known after a while (Ḥín)'"¹³ That is, I cannot specify that determined Centre and cannot explicitly say Who He is. Then he cites this verse of the Qur'án: "His Cause will be made known after a while (Ḥín)".¹⁴ The preceding verse is "He, verily, is naught but a Remembrance unto all the worlds." In the Commentary on the Súrih of Joseph, the Báb refers to Himself as "the Remembrance of God". The august Shaykh intimates here that that "Seat and Centre" is "the Remembrance of God", and that the verse "His Cause will be made known after a while (Ḥín)" means that you will grasp whatsoever that intended Centre will announce and proclaim after "Ḥín". Now, according to the abjad reckoning, "Ḥín" is equivalent to sixty-eight and "after Ḥín" is sixty-nine, the year of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation.¹⁵ The substance of these words is that whatsoever that Remembrance of God will announce and intimate will become clear and manifest in the year after Ḥín, that is, in the year sixty-nine.

9 As a result of the passionate encouragement of the illustrious Shaykh to anticipate the advent of God and of his assertion of its imminence, and likewise as a result of the utterances of the illustrious Siyyid who night and day proclaimed the approach of that advent—going so far as to instruct his disciples one day to go forth and seek after their Master—Mullá Ḥusayn and some of the Siyyid's other disciples set themselves to the search. And since a tradition had been reported that the Promised One would go to the mosque of Kúfih, they also went to that mosque and stayed there for a time, awaiting His advent. Even the illustrious Siyyid himself, at the close of his life, left Karbilá for a visit to Kázimayn and Samarra and returned. In the course of his journey to Samarra, and in the village of Musayyib he spoke to his disciples of his own death. When his disciples began to weep and lament, crying out and beseeching him, he asked them: "Would ye not wish that I pass from this world, that your Master may appear?"

10 In brief, our meaning is that these two illustrious souls endowed their followers with the greatest receptivity. That is why after the passing of the late Siyyid his disciples sought with all their might after the Promised Beauty. Mullá Ḥusayn and some of his disciples departed from Iraq, made for Persia, and were taken up with the search till they entered the city of Shiráz. As Mullá Ḥusayn had met the Báb before in Karbilá and knew Him, he became His guest. On the night of the fifth of Jamádiyu'l-Avval,¹⁶ Mullá Ḥusayn was seated in the presence of the Báb, who was preparing the tea. As the Báb was serving the tea, He recited certain verses. Mullá Ḥusayn was amazed and astonished to hear a young man, with no religious education or training in the Arabic

tongue, recite verses of the utmost eloquence and power, a feat which he could have never thought possible. This led to his awakening and allegiance. The following day he told his disciples and others that he had found the Object of their search and proceeded to describe and portray Him, but he concealed His identity and did not divulge His name. However, he so extolled His attributes that his disciples and the others were enthralled with this news and with unrelenting thirst continued to search for the life-giving waters. Finally, after a few days, he specified His blessed Name. A great commotion ensued. Seventeen people bore allegiance to Him, and the letter of Ṭáhirih, which was with a certain Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí, was presented to the Báb. For Ṭáhirih had given him this letter and asked him to present it to the Promised One when once they had found Him. In that letter she had included the following ode, the opening of which reads:

11 The effulgence of Thy face flashed forth,
 And the rays of Thy visage arose on high.
 Then speak the word, ‘Am I not your Lord?’
 And ‘Thou art, Thou art!’ we will all reply.¹⁷

12 Thus Ṭáhirih became the eighteenth believer. The Shi’ihs believed in fourteen immaculate Souls and four Gates. The fourteen immaculate Souls are Muḥammad, Fáṭimih, and the twelve Imáms. The four Gates are the four individuals who succeeded one another as the leaders of the Shi’ihs after the twelfth Imám. Thus these eighteen souls were appointed to match those eighteen—the main intent was the number. The Báb Himself was the nineteenth. Such is the basis of the number nineteen that has been mentioned in all the Books and Tablets of the Báb. The names of the Letters of the Living are as follows:

1. Mullá Ḥusayn
2. Muḥammad-Ḥasan, his brother
3. Muḥammad Báqir, his nephew
4. Mullá ‘Alí-i-Baṣṭámí
5. Mullá Khudá-Bakhsh-i-Qúchání, later named Mullá ‘Alí
6. Mullá Ḥasan-i-Bajistání
7. Siyyid Ḥusayn-i-Yazdí
8. Mírzá Muḥammad Rawḍih-Khán
9. Sa‘íd-i-Hindí
10. Mullá Maḥmúd-i-Khu’í
11. Mullá Jalíl-i-Urúmí
12. Mullá Muḥammad-i-Ibdál-i-Marághí‘í
13. Mullá Báqir-i-Tabrízí
14. Mullá Yúsuf-i-Ardibílí
15. Mírzá Hádí, son of Mullá ‘Abdu’l-Vahháb-i-Qazvíní
16. Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí-i-Qazvíní
17. Ṭáhirih
18. Quddús

14 The greatness and glory of most of these Letters of the Living resides solely in the fact that they professed their faith at the very beginning. Among them and in terms of importance, a few souls occupy a primary position—Mullá Ḥusayn, Quddús, and Ṭáhirih; a few other blessed souls occupy a secondary position; and the rest are honoured solely for having believed in the very beginning—two of them even, like Judas Iscariot, recanted their faith later.

15 After the blessed person of the Báb came to light and His fame spread, Mullá Ḥusayn unloosed his tongue and openly taught the Faith, and was charged to go to other provinces and teach. These in short are the events surrounding the declaration of allegiance of Mullá Ḥusayn and the other Letters of the Living.

1 QUESTION: ON WHAT date did the dawning of the Sun of Truth and the advent of the Blessed Beauty take place?

2 Answer: From the beginning of His childhood Bahá'u'lláh was possessed of such astonishing qualities, signs, and utterances as to amaze every soul. All the dignitaries of Persia would say: "This youth is wrought of a rare substance", and everyone, even the enemies and the envious, bore witness to His knowledge, grace, wisdom, understanding, intelligence, and perception. Among other things, it was acknowledged by all that He had neither entered a school nor received a religious education. Nonetheless, His knowledge and perfections were well recognized. The learned men of Persia would submit to Him the difficult questions that perplexed their minds, and He would resolve them. To this day, and in spite of their hostility, the dignitaries of Persia bear witness to this matter.

3 In sum, no one, whether in Persia or even throughout the East, denies Bahá'u'lláh's knowledge, perfection, greatness, and ability. At most they claim that this Man subverted the foundations of the Law of God, that by means of His shrewdness, intelligence, knowledge, wisdom, eloquence, and sagacity He led astray a vast multitude, and that He thus undermined the perspicuous religion of God. But they do not deny His greatness.

4 Thus, from the very beginning of the Revelation of the Báb, the believers were humble and lowly before Bahá'u'lláh, looked to Him for guidance, and were drawn to Him with a heartfelt attraction. But at Badasht the greatness and majesty of Bahá'u'lláh were manifested to a further degree. There, a number of believers developed a particular devotion and became wholly attracted to Him. Whoever met Him and heard His words would be transformed and enthralled, and could do naught but surrender his will and become aflame with the fire of the love of God.

5 During His final days in Tíhrán, prior to the journey to Baghdád, some of the believers, such as Muḥammad Taqí Khán, Sulaymán Khán, Jináb-i-'Azím, Mírzá 'Alí-Muḥammad, Mullá 'Abdu'l-Fattáh, and Mírzá 'Abdu'l-Vahháb—all of whom were to be later martyred—as well as Mírzá Ḥusayn Kirmání and many other souls, perceived that Bahá'u'lláh occupied a transcendent station and became convinced that He was a Manifestation of God. Bahá'u'lláh had composed an ode from which the fragrance of a heavenly station could be perceived, the opening of which reads: "'Tis from Our rapture that the clouds of realms above are raining down." All the friends would recite that ode with the utmost fervour and attraction, and all accepted its purport—not a soul voiced an objection. That ode was indeed most enthralling.

6 The first person who recognized the sublimity and holiness of Bahá'u'lláh and became certain that He would manifest a momentous Cause was Mullá 'Abdu'l-Karím-i-Qazvíní, whom the Báb had named Mírzá Aḥmad. He was the intermediary between the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and was aware of the truth of the matter.¹⁸

7 After coming to Baghdád from Persia, Bahá'u'lláh declared to a certain extent the nature of His mission in the ninth year after the appearance of the Báb, and became known among the friends as the appearance of Ḥusayn. For the people of Persia believed that the appearance of the promised Mahdi must be followed by that of Ḥusayn, that is, of Imám Ḥusayn the martyr, to whom they are indeed most attached and bear the greatest allegiance.

8 Now, in all His Books and Scriptures, the Báb heralded that which was to transpire in the year nine. Among them, there abound expressions such as: "In the year nine ye shall attain unto all good." And such statements as "In the year nine ye shall ...", and "Then ye shall ...", and "Then ye shall ..." are numerous. Likewise, He says: "Wait thou until nine will have elapsed from the time of the Bayán. Then exclaim: 'Blessed, therefore, be God ...'" In sum, the tidings of the Báb regarding the year nine are such as to defy all description. Nevertheless certain souls faltered, among them Mírzá Yaḥyá, Siyyid Muḥammad-i-Iṣfahání, and a few others. The Sermon of Salutations (Khuṭbiy-i-Ṣalavát) was revealed in the year nine, and likewise the commentary on the verse of the Qur'án "All food was allowed to the children of Israel except what Israel forbade itself" (Lawḥ-i-Kullu'ṭ-Ṭa'ám) issued forth in that same year.

9 Perceiving the covert rebellion of Mírzá Yaḥyá and others, Bahá'u'lláh journeyed alone to Sulaymáníyyih and was absent for two years. During that time, Mírzá Yaḥyá was acting with utmost caution behind a veil of concealment and, fearing the attention of the General Consul of

Persia in Bagh̄dád, disguised himself, took the name of Hájí ‘Alí, and engaged in selling shoes and plaster in Baṣrah and in Súqu’sh-Shuyúkh in the vicinity of Bagh̄dád. The Cause became entirely quiescent, the Call ceased to be heard, and all name and trace thereof well-nigh vanished.

10 During His sojourn in Sulaymáníyyih, Bahá’u’lláh penned a number of works, among them certain prayers of which copies are still extant, and certain epistles on mystical wayfaring addressed to the doctors and the learned men of Islam, which are likewise still extant. In those epistles certain teachings are expounded, among them words to this effect: “Were it not contrary to the perspicuous Law of God, I would have given my would-be murderer to be my heir. But what am I to do—I have no worldly possessions, nor hath it been thus decreed by His sovereign will.”

11 In any event, all the doctors and learned men of Sulaymáníyyih attested to the knowledge, attainments, and perfections of Bahá’u’lláh and developed an affection for His person; that is, they would say that this Man was unique and ranked among the chosen ones of God.

12 When Bahá’u’lláh returned from Sulaymáníyyih, He illumined Bagh̄dád with His light: The call of God was raised anew and a tumult arose in Persia. In Bagh̄dád Bahá’u’lláh stood firm before all peoples. The government of Persia was extremely hostile in those days, and all were seeking by every means to cause Him suffering and to bring Him to harm. At last the Persian government, having grown alarmed at His influence, said: “Bagh̄dád is close to Persia and is a place of passage for the Persians. Thus, in order to put out this fire Bahá’u’lláh must be banished to a distant land.” The Persian government then petitioned the Ottoman government, and Bahá’u’lláh was as a result transferred with all due honour out of Bagh̄dád. Leaving the city, Bahá’u’lláh went to the garden of Najíb Páshá and resided there for twelve days. During that time many people, both high and low, and even the Governor and a number of other officials, attained His blessed presence. These are the twelve days of Ridván.

13 In any event, it was by means of hints and allusions that Bahá’u’lláh first declared His mission during those twelve days. Certain among the friends grasped His intent, but others did not fully understand. At last Bahá’u’lláh came to Constantinople and the Súrih of pilgrimage was revealed, wherein the instruction is given to circumambulate the House of Bagh̄dád. In that Súrih the Cause is openly manifest, but the phrase “He Whom God shall make manifest” does not appear.

14 Subsequently, the Persian government caused Bahá’u’lláh to be further banished to Adrianople. From there numerous Tablets were revealed day and night to the effect that “Since We have been expelled from our homeland and banished from Bagh̄dád to a remote place, that the fire of the love of God might be quenched, the lamp of guidance extinguished, the banner of God hauled down, and the call of the True One silenced, We have therefore chosen to fully reveal the Cause, manifest the proof, raise the call, and hoist the banner of the Cause of God, that all may see that this persecution, enmity, banishment, and exile has only deepened the influence of the Word of God, that the fame of the Cause has been noised abroad, and that the tidings of the advent of the Kingdom of God have reached unto both East and West.” This universal declaration took place in the year 1280. All the friends, with the exception of Yaḥyá and a few of his followers, became firm and devoted believers, and from Adrianople Tablets would ceaselessly flow to Persia.

15 This is an account, in summary form, of the Declaration of Bahá’u’lláh.

– 12 –

Christ and Bahá’u’lláh

1 Some have asserted that, while mighty signs and marvellous deeds have appeared from Bahá’u’lláh, through which His greatness shines forth as resplendent as the sun, yet the Revelation of Christ is superior to and incommensurate with His.

2 Indeed the signs of greatness in Christ are beyond the ken of mortal mind and the grasp of human imagination. And indeed we are most humble and lowly before His sweet and beautiful countenance, and we love Him with all our heart and soul; nay, should it be called for and should divine confirmations assist us, we would readily lay down our lives for His sake. For we regard

Him in the light of true greatness and bear allegiance to His truth. But should attention be drawn to this assertion, we will, in all sincerity and love, reply to their objection in the following manner.

3 Christ was raised among the people of Israel, who lived under Roman rule. Now, in those days the Romans were world-renowned for their attainments in every field of human civilization, and so it would not be a cause of great wonder if an eloquent utterance or a novel teaching were to issue from Christ. Bahá'u'lláh, by contrast, appeared in Persia, where useful sciences were entirely lacking, except insofar as religious laws and theological studies were concerned. And thus the appearance of these divine teachings, of these mighty and momentous signs, from such an individual and in such a land, is indeed cause for wonder.

4 Moreover, the words and verses of Christ, when taken altogether, would comprise at most ten pages, whereas if the verses of Bahá'u'lláh were gathered together from beginning to end, they would fill several trunks. Aside from this, the utterances of Christ in the Gospel are solely concerned with spiritual admonitions and with the improvement and rectification of human character, whereas the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh encompass manifold expressions of wisdom and inner meaning, realities and sciences, counsels and admonitions, and explanations and exegeses of the Sacred Scriptures of old.

5 At the time of His ascension, Christ had raised up twelve men and four women. There were to be sure a few others beside these, but they had not reached the station of certitude. And among these twelve men, one became His sworn enemy: Judas Iscariot, who, notwithstanding his position as the chief of the Apostles, arose to have Him killed. The most prominent among the remaining eleven was Peter, and even he failed to stand firm in the face of trials, since, according to the explicit text of the Gospel, he thrice denied Christ at the hour of His martyrdom, to the point of entirely recanting his faith in the last instance. It was only after the cock crowed that he was reawakened and made contrite and repentant. Whereas from the inception of this Cause to the present day, perhaps close to twenty thousand men, women, and children have offered up their lives in the path of God. Many of them, under the threat of the sword, raised the cry of “Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá!” Many were told that, if they publicly recanted their faith, they would keep both their lives and their possessions, and yet they answered with the cry of “Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá!” Thus, at the time of Bahá'u'lláh's ascension, more than two hundred thousand souls had taken shelter beneath His blessed shadow and had attained the station of certitude. The renown of Christ did not even reach, in His own lifetime, Assyria, Chaldea, Asia Minor, or the regions of Syria, whereas Bahá'u'lláh's renown, in His own lifetime, had spread throughout East and West.

6 Christ was not widely known among the people—most would not recognize Him—and He would travel from village to village and from wilderness to wilderness; and so it was that when they set out to arrest Him they knew not where to find Him or how to recognize Him. Judas Iscariot came to them and said: “I will show Him to you.” They said: “When we enter that place, how will we know who is Christ?” Judas said: “The one whom I will kiss is Christ.” Bahá'u'lláh, however, was standing visibly and openly before His foes, was known to all, and withstood the onslaught of a mighty nation. The enemy arrayed against Christ was the feeble Jewish nation which suffered under Roman rule and which, like the present-day Jews of Tiberias and Safed, was a subjugated people. Bahá'u'lláh's enemies, however, were the adherents of one of the most powerful nations of the world. When Christ was taken before the court, He was asked: “Art thou the King of the Jews?” And He replied in all meekness: “Thou sayest it.”¹⁹ But, in the great assemblage of Ṭihrán, the voice of Bahá'u'lláh was raised in address to the highest heaven.²⁰

7 This is the truth of the matter. Consider it and ask the deniers to judge with fairness, to forsake blind prejudice, and to apprehend the truth by inference from the Sacred Scriptures. For instance, were you to tell the Christian clergy today that Christ was not known to the people during His own lifetime, they would be most astonished and deny it—whereas it is explicitly recorded in the Gospel that Judas Iscariot accepted what indeed was a paltry sum to reveal the whereabouts of Christ, and that since none among the crowd could recognize Him, he said that whoever he would kiss was Christ and was to be arrested. And so it came to pass.

Notes

- 1 An early translation published in Corinne True, *Notes Taken at Acca* (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1907). ←
- 2 An early translation published in Corinne True, *Notes Taken at Acca* (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1907). ←
- 3 An early translation published in Corinne True, *Notes Taken at Acca* (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1907) and *Star of the West*, volume 4, number 18, page 305. ←
- 4 See Qur'án 2:185. ←
- 5 *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh*, CLXXX. ←
- 6 An early translation published in Corinne True, *Notes Taken at Acca* (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1907). ←
- 7 An early translation published in Corinne True, *Notes Taken at Acca* (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1907). ←
- 8 The uncle and father-in-law of Ṭáhirih. ←
- 9 Mullá 'Abdu'lláh; see *The Dawn-Breakers*, p. 276. ←
- 10 See *God Passes By*, p. 97. ←
- 11 That is, from Arabic into Persian. ←
- 12 In Arabic, only consonants and long vowels are written, and the word “Muḥammad” is therefore spelled with the letters M, Ḥ, M, and D. ←
- 13 See *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 17–18, and *God Passes By*, p. 97. ←
- 14 Qur'án 38:88. ←
- 15 The Islamic year 1269 began on 15 October 1852, the midpoint of Bahá'u'lláh's four-month imprisonment in the Síyáh-Chál. It was in this prison that Bahá'u'lláh received His Prophetic Mission. ←
- 16 23 May 1844. ←
- 17 See *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 81–82. ←
- 18 See *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 162–69. ←
- 19 Matt. 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3. ←
- 20 Cf. *The Dawn-Breakers*, pp. 648–49. ←