

A Tablet by Bahá'u'lláh¹

provisional translation by Julio Savi and Faezeh
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Last night the shaikh went all about the city, lamp in hand
crying, "I am weary of beast and devil, a man is my
desire."²

O loving friend, I render thanks unto God that thou art, on the whole, in good health, and that the stainless mirror of thine heart telleth of the tokens and ecstasies of thy soul. May, God willing, thine heart's purpose be attained and thy soul's wish be fulfilled, although it is preferred that we purify this luminous tablet, which is among the pages of illuminated breasts, from the allusions of both and that we hasten naked unto the wide plain of the spirit, as it was said by the divine sage:

Never the covetous heart shall come to the stealer of hearts,
Never the shrouded soul unite with beauty's rose. [FV 60]
One cannot advance in the path of oneness with two qiblas,
Either one will please the Beloved, or will consent to one's
passions.³

Not only the shirt but being itself becometh a veil, and otherness a curtain. The scholar of Shíráz hath said: "Ḥáfiz! thou thyself art thy own veil. From the midst, arise."⁴

Likewise, should the Jacob of love have cleansed the essence of his heart and soul from the foulness of water and clay, undoubtedly he would have not necessitated the Egyptian shirt, or an announcer bringing him the glad tiding, or an ambassador speaking to him. On the contrary, he would have perceived the pure and sanctified breezes from the north of the Spirit and he would have dwelt in perfect union with the Beloved.

He would have tasted the joy of the Divine Presence and the ecstasy of the flavor of subsistence from the fount of purity, and he would have obtained the eternal life and everlasting perpetuity, and he would have entered into the immortal Paradise after the spiritual resurrection. He would have seen a thousand Josephs circling in adoration without any voice of complaint and would have received the sweetness of the Egypt of fidelity from the City of the court of the Incomparable.

Yea, as long as the impurities of the world of multiplicity, whose only outcome is death, will not be destroyed and annihilated, the eternal countenance of His Face will not come out unconcealed from the veils, and the meaning of “Everything will perish except His own Face”⁵ will not become manifest from the lucid brow. What else can I write? One ought to perceive the perfume of the Beloved from Uways’ camel hair. As the *Mathnavi*’s author says:

The perfume of the Beloved exaleth from the camel hair.

This camel is of the herd of that pearl who is Lord Uways.

However, the musky fragrance of the Beloved and the breezes of the Merciful have ceased to waft from the Yemen of the Friend.

Yea, the casket of the white pearl is concealed within the sea shell, inasmuch as the untouched pearl, which bestows perfect power upon the inner powers of the heart and adds the light of vision to intelligence, is more acceptable and agreeable. May its concealment be conducive to revelation, and its occultation be followed by an unveiling, or a child clarify this symbolic language, or a power break this seal.

When seeds are hidden in the earth, their inward secret
becomes the verdure of the garden.⁶

Imagine what will the power of the Friend's arm do?

O dear one, thy Companion sayeth that one ought to be purified from the defilement of imitation, so that the Phoenix of the West may emerge from the Orient of the Beloved and wing its flight into the sanctified atmosphere of the Spirit, that is the city of the soul.

I swear by God! Even if the armies of death would ride at full gallop, they will not catch up with the dust lifted by this Horseman, and 'Isrá'íl, the angel of death, will stand as a servant at His door, ready to serve Him, and will implore favors from whoever is bound towards His sanctuary, that haply he may be accepted in the court of glory, and may circle in adoration in those lofty precincts, which are loftier than a shining star, and he may perceive.

Praise be to God! The breeze of love hath wafted and hath perfumed the assembly of intimacy. The Spirit hath intoned a new melody. The lovers of the desert of the intellect have swooned away because of the call from the Unseen. Such were the joy and the ecstasy and the delight and the happiness, that the breath of the Holy Spirit hath wafted from the moldering bones and Gabriel hath winged its flight on the wings of success. The Isráfil of life wondereth with which melody he could wake up these companions and beseecheth that haply he may share their swoon.

I will cease (from speech): the Sweetheart has begun to speak,
be (all) ear — *and God best knoweth the right course.*⁷

In this day life hath come out of my body, It sayeth to me:
*verily, unto Him shall we return.*⁸

NOTES

¹ Quoted in Ráfatí, *Má'akhidh* 3281-2. See also *Majmu'ih* 36:374-6.

² Rúmí, *Mystical Poems* 1:46, no. 51, v.14.

³ Saná'í, *Díván* (Furúzánfar) 253.

⁴ Háfiz, *Díván* 534, 308:9.

⁵ Koran 28:88, Yusuf Ali.

⁶ Rûmî, *Mathnavî* 1:177.

⁷ Rûmî, *Mathnavî* 3:3844.

⁸ Rûmî, *Mathnavî* 3:3906, Koran 2:156.

Ancient Poems as Means of Revelation, in an Early Tablet by Bahá'u'lláh

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Abstract

This paper offers a provisional translation of a Persian Tablet revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in the Iraqi period [above]. The Tablet is rich in quotations from ancient Iranian poets. Our paper examines the importance of poetry in the history of the Faith and in its Writings. It analyzes the quoted poems and the many poetical metaphors used in the Tablet. It ends with a short commentary on the contents of the Tablet: absolute detachment is a fundamental prerequisite for attaining “unto the divine Presence.”

The authors learned about this Tablet by Bahá'u'lláh through a publication by Vahid Rafati, *Má'akhidh* 3:281-2. This book is part of a set of four Persian volumes, commendably published by Rafati, in which he lists one by one all verses quoted by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Their Writings and examines them in their contexts. This Tablet, wholly written in Persian, is also published in *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár-Qalam-i-A'lá* 36:374-6. According to Rafati it was revealed in Baghdad. The Iranian Bahá'í scholar Mírzá Asadu'lláh Fáḍil *Mázandarání* (ca. 1880-1957) states that it was revealed in Kurdistan (*Asráru'l-Áthár* 5:15). Its mystical subject is certainly typical of the Writings composed by Bahá'u'lláh in that period.

We have been especially impressed by this Tablet, not only because of its contents, that emphasizes absolute detachment as an

indispensable prerequisite for the “attainment unto the Divine Presence” [KI 141, ¶149], but also because in the short space of two pages offers six quotations of verses by three different poets. And this has appeared to us as a sign of the importance that Bahá’u’lláh ascribed to poetry.

Poetry in the history of the Faith and in the Writings

Nabíl narrates that the Báb told him about a verse by Ḥáfiz which says: “O zephyr, shouldst thou pass by the banks of the Araxes, implant a kiss on the earth of that valley and make fragrant thy breath. Hail, a thousand times hail, to thee, O abode of Salma! How dear is the voice of thy camel-drivers, how sweet the jingling of thy bells!” [see *Díván* 537, no. 310, vv.1-2]:

It is the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit that causes words such as these to stream from the tongue of poets, the significance of which they themselves are oftentimes unable to apprehend. The following verse is also divinely inspired: ‘Shíráz will be thrown into a tumult; a Youth of sugar-tongue will appear. I fear lest the breath of His mouth should agitate and upset Baghdád.’¹ The mystery enshrined within this verse is now concealed; it will be revealed in the year after Him.” The Báb subsequently quoted this well-known tradition: “Treasures lie hidden beneath the throne of God; the key to those treasures is the tongue of poets. [DB 258-9]

Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá were both refined poets. One of “the first fruits of ... [Bahá’u’lláh’s] Divine Pen” that arrived into our hands is a Persian poem entitled *Rashḥ-i-‘Amá*, that was “revealed in Tīhrán” [GPB 121]. And *Rashḥ-i-‘Amá* is just one among many Persian and Arabic poems revealed by Bahá’u’lláh. Bahá’u’lláh praised Mírzá Maqṣúd, one of the believers who lived in Damascus and Jerusalem, because of a number of poems he sent to him, and described those poems as being “like unto a mirror in which the evidences of the devotion and love ... [he cherished] for God and His chosen ones ... [were] reflected” [TB 175, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd]. He wrote about poetry in general:

Blessed the poet who hath been filled with the spirit of the Day of God and from whose words hath wafted the sweet-smelling savour of the love of his Lord, the All-Merciful, over all created things. Such a one is, in truth, among the blissful. Woe betide the poet who hath drawn spears of sarcasm toward people and turned away from this Wondrous Remembrance. Keep in mind the grace of God in causing your tongues to unlock treasures and to reveal wisdom and mysteries. Let God be your fear and be not of the heedless. This is the day to celebrate His praise, the day in which the Creator of the heavens hath appeared with the kingdom of your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Praised. [provisional translation by Omid Ghaemmaghami]²

‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself wrote various poems both in Persian and Turkish. He pointed out the special value of words in poetry when He said: “*Poetry is much more effective and complete than prose. It stirs more deeply, for it is of a finer composition*” [CC 2:78]. And reportedly said: “*All Art is a gift of the Holy Spirit. When this light shines through the mind of a musician, it manifests itself in beautiful harmonies. Again, shining through the mind of a poet, it is seen in fine poetry and poetic prose. When the Light of the Sun of Truth inspires the mind of a painter, he produces marvelous pictures. These gifts are fulfilling their highest purpose, when showing forth the praise of God*” [CH 167]. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá expressed His admiration for those among His fellows-prisoners who, like Nabíl-i-Zarandí, Darvish Şidq-‘Alí, Áqá Muhammad-Ibráhím, Ustad ‘Alí-Akbar and Jináb-i-Muníb [MF 32-6, 36-8, 81-2, 102-3, 145-7] had a fine poetical vein. He received poems from a number of Western Bahá’ís, which He often acknowledged with words of approval. To James Simpson, He wrote that his poems showed that he was “*ablaze with the burning fire of the love of God,*” that he had “*secured a share and portion from the bounty of the Spirit and ... purposed to render a distinguished service to the divine Kingdom and to be the cause of the promulgation of the oneness of mankind*” [Tablets Received 166]. To Marie Watson He wrote that her poems were “*in the utmost sweetness and delicacy*” [Tablets to Bahais 307]. To Louise R. Waite, who was both a poetess and a musician, and to whom He conferred the title of Shahnáz – which is the name of a musical mode – He wrote that her poems were “*in the utmost eloquence and sweetness*” [Recent Tablets 318], “*wonderful*

... fluent ... and ... most thrilling” [Tablets revealed 198], “*sweet melodies in the Rose garden of the love of God*” [Tablets to Bahais 276], “*the cause of the gladness of their hearers*” [Recent Tablets 318], and that their “*vibration*” would “*forever, give pleasure to the ears of the children of the Kingdom*” [Tablets to Bahais 276]. He advised her, to strive “*in the composition of such pieces, so that at all times the river of pure poesy may flow from ... [her] tongue*” [Tablets revealed 198]. To other poets, whose names have not been identified, He wrote: “*I chanted thy poem. Its significance was beautiful, its composition eloquent and its words excellent. It was like the melody of the birds of holiness in the paradise of El-Abha ... Blessed art thou for uttering forth such an excellent poem and brilliant pearl*” [Tablets 1: 57]. And also: “*Verily, I read thy poem, which contained new significances and beautiful words. My heart was dilated by its eloquent sense*” [Tablets 1:58]. And moreover: “*Thy little book of poems, which were very sweet, was read. It was a source of joy, for it was a spiritual anthem and a melody of the love of God*” [Tablets 1:59]. And finally: “*Thy poetry was received. The context was elegant. The words were eloquent and the theme, the Manifest Light. Consequently, it was highly appreciated*” [Tablets 3:546]. He openly encouraged some of those poets. He wrote to one of them: “*Verily, these verses shall be sung in the divine meetings and in the assemblages of the spiritual in the course of ages and centuries to come, for thou hast uttered the praise of thy Lord and expressed significant meanings in eulogy of thy Lord, the Merciful, the Clement*” [Tablets 1:58]. And to another one: “*Endeavour your utmost to compose beautiful poems to be chanted with heavenly music; thus may their beauty affect the minds and impress the hearts of those who listen*” [Tablets 1:59]. And finally: “*finish the poem which thou art composing and send it here, that through reading it the breast of the believers may be refreshed and dilated with joy*” [Tablets 3:669].

The earliest believers wrote poems and Shoghi Effendi describes “[t]he joyous feasts which these companions, despite their extremely modest earnings, continually offered in honor of their Beloved; the gatherings, lasting far into the night, in which they loudly celebrated, with prayers, poetry and song, the praises of the Báb, of Quddús and of Bahá’u’lláh” [GPB 135] in the late Baghdád period. No wonder then that both Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá drew from the poetic Arabic and Persian legacy in the Writings which They revealed. Western

readers are especially familiar with the Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys, as works comprising many poetical quotations.

Poems quoted in this Tablet

In this Tablet Bahá'u'lláh quotes Khájih Shamsu'd-Dín Muḥammad Ḥáfiz-i-Shirází (ca. 1318–1390), Mawláná Jalálu'd-Dín Rúmí (1207–1273) and Majdúd Saná'í (ca. 1045–ca. 1141). As to Ḥáfiz He quotes an hemistich from a ghazal, “a shorter, sonnet-like, lyrical form, observing mono-rhyme, the conventional meters and other prosodic rules” [Lewis, “Short Poem” 83]. As to Rúmí, He quotes a distich from a known ghazal at the beginning of the Tablet; and a distich of another ghazal, which has not yet been identified, in the context of the Tablet; He also quotes a distich from the Mathnaví in the context of, and two different distiches from the same Mathnaví, at the end of the Tablet. As to Saná'í, He quotes two distiches from a ghazal in the context of His Tablet.

The hemistich by Ḥáfiz says: “Ḥáfiz! thou thyself art thy own veil. From the midst, arise.” The whole ghazal has been translated into English by Henri Wilberforce-Clark (1840–1905), an officer in the British India corps, first translator of the *Bústán* of Sa'dí (1257) and of the *Sikandar Námih* by Nízamí (ca. 1202) [Ḥáfiz, *Díván* 534, no. 308]:

Ravished is my heart by one like a singing girl, clamour-
exciter,
False of promise, slayer by nature, and colour (of deceit)-
mixer.
A ransom for the rent garment of those of moon-face, be
A thousand garments of piety and the khirka of austerity!
In thanks for that that, in beauty, thou tookest from the
(glorious) angel the ball of superiority,
The cup, demand; and on Adam's dust, a little water
sprinkle.
Poor and shattered, to Thy court, I have come. A little pity,
For, save attachment to Thee, attachment, mine is none.
The slave, I am of that word that enkindleth the fire (of
love):

Not (the slave of that word, that), in speech, dasheth cold
water on the fierce fire (of love).

Come; for last night, to me, the invisible messenger spake,
Saying: "In contentment's stage, be; from destiny, flee
not."

Of thy own arm, be not proud; for in record it is:
"In (by, under) the order of the king-maker a thousand
arrayings."

In my coffin, put up the cup; so that, on the morning of
rising,

I may, with wine, take from my heart the terror of the day
up-rising and springing.

Between the lover and the Beloved, veil is none:

Hafiz! thou thyself art thy own veil. From the midst, arise;
and attain unto the Beloved.

It is a beautiful love poem, in which the "one like a singing girl" is the Beloved, with capital B. The poet sings His beauty, His cruelty, and his own dependence on Him. He concludes with a distich of high mysticism, whose second hemistich is quoted by Bahá'u'lláh, in which he mentions that he should be annihilated, so that he may be united with the Beloved. It is the usual concept of *faná*, which Bahá'u'lláh later on described in such Writings as the Seven Valleys, in the Valley of True Poverty and Utter Nothingness [SV 36-9], and Gems of Divine Mysteries, in the City of Absolute Nothingness [GDM 70-1, ¶101-4].

As to Rúmí, Bahá'u'lláh gives preference to him over other poets in this Tablet, as in other Writings, as for example the Seven Valleys. And thus He quotes Him five times, comprising at the beginning and at the end of the Tablet. His love towards Rúmí is demonstrated by an episode of His life, recorded by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The Master narrates in His description of the life of Ustád Ismá'il, one of the companions who followed Bahá'u'lláh in the Holy Land, that:

At one time, Bahá'u'lláh had written down an ode of Rúmí's for him, and had told him to turn his face toward the Báb and sing the words, set to a melody. And so as he wandered through the long dark nights, Ustád would sing these lines:

*I am lost, O Love, possessed and dazed,
 Love's fool am I, in all the earth.
 They call me first among the crazed,
 Though I once came first for wit and worth.
 O Love, who sellest me this wine,
 O Love, for whom I burn and bleed,
 Love, for whom I cry and pine -
 Thou the Piper, I the reed.
 If Thou wishest me to live,
 Through me blow Thy holy breath.
 The touch of Jesus Thou wilt give
 To me, who've lain an age in death.
 Thou, both End and Origin.
 Thou without and Thou within -
 From every eye Thou hidest well,
 And yet in every eye dost dwell. [MF 30-1]³*

The verse by Rûmî quoted at the opening of the Tablet reads as follows:

Last night the shaikh went all about the city, lamp in hand
 crying, 'I am weary of beast and devil, a man is my
 desire.'

This ghazal has been entirely translated into English by both Reynold A. Nicholson (1868-1945), an expert in Sufism and especially in the work of Rûmî [*Selected Poems* 65-9, no. 16], and Arthur John Arberry (1905-1969), the well-known British orientalist [*Mystical Poems* 1:46, no. 51, v. 14]. It comprises 24 verses, and thus like many of Rûmî's ghazal is quite longer than usual ghazals, which according to the Italian Iranist Alessandro Bausani (1921-1988) comprise "generally not less than five and no more than twelve" ["Ghazal. ii. In Persian literature"]. The Bahá'í world knows its verse 20, "In one hand the wine-cup, in one hand the tresses of the Friend. Such a dance in the midst of the market-place is my desire!", because Shoghi Effendi adds this note to the *Dawn Breakers* [DB 620n1]:

The extraordinary heroism with which Sulaymán Khán bore these frightful tortures is notorious and I have repeatedly heard it related how he ceased not during the long agony which he endured to testify his joy that he should be accounted worthy to suffer martyrdom for his Master's cause. He even sang and recited verses of poetry, amongst them the following: "I have returned! I have returned! I have come by the way of Shíráz! I have come with winsome airs and graces! Such is the lover's madness!" "Why do you not dance," asked the executioners mockingly, "since you find death so pleasant?" "Dance!" cried Sulaymán Khán. "In one hand the wine-cup, in one hand the tresses of the Friend. Such a dance in the midst of the market-place is my desire!" [Browne, "A Traveller's Narrative," Note T, pp. 333-4]

Its central theme is the quest after the Perfect Man. But it also can be interpreted as the quest after a human being that has made great progress on the path of spiritual quest, among many other spiritual immature human beings. This is the whole poem in Arberry's translation:

Show your face, for the orchard and rosegarden are my
 desire; open your lips, for abundant sugar is my
 desire.

Sun of beauty, come forth one moment out of the cloud,
 for that glittering, glowing countenance is my
 desire.

Out of your air I heard the sound of the falcon-drum; I
 returned, for the sultan's forearm is my desire.

You said capriciously, "Trouble me no more; be gone!" That
 saying of yours, "Trouble me no more," is my desire,
 And your repulse, "Be gone, the king is not at home," and
 those mighty airs and brusqueness of the
 doorkeeper, are my desire.

In the hand of every one who exists there are filings of
 beauty; that quarry of elegance and that mine are my
 desire.

This bread and water of heaven's wheel are like a
treacherous torrent; I am a fish, a leviathan, Oman is
my desire.

Like Jacob I am crying alas, alas; the fair visage of Joseph
of Canaan is my desire.

By Allah, without you the city is a prison for me; I wander
abroad, mountain and desert are my desire.

My heart is weary of these weak-spirited fellow-travellers;
the Lion of God and Rustam-i Dastán are my desire.

My soul is sick of Pharaoh and his tyranny; that light of the
countenance of Moses son of 'Imrán is my desire.

I am awary of these tearful people so full of complaining;
that ranting and roaring of the drunkards is my
desire.

I am more eloquent than the nightingale, but because of
vulgar envy a seal is on my tongue, and lamentation
is my desire.

Last night the shaikh went all about the city, lamp in hand,
crying, "I am weary of beast and devil, a man is my
desire."

They said, "He is not to be found, we too have searched."
He answered, "He who is not to be found is my
desire."

Though I am penniless, I will not accept a small carnelian,
for that rare, precious carnelian is my desire.

Hidden from every eye, and all things seen are from Him –
that hidden One manifest in works is my desire.

My state has gone beyond every desire and yearning; from
mine and place to the elements is my desire.

My ear heard the tale of faith and became drunk; where is
the portion of sight? The form of faith is my desire.

In one hand the winecup, in the other the Beloved's curl –
to dance so in the midst of the arena is my desire.

That rebeck says, "I am dead of expectation; the hand and
bosom and plectrum of 'Uthmán are my desire."

I am at once Love's rebeck, and Love is my rebeck-player;
 those favours of the plucking of the All-merciful are
 my desire.

Cunning minstrel, number the rest of this ode after this
 fashion, for it is after this fashion I desire.

Show your face from the east, Sun of the Pride of Tabriz; I
 am the hoopoe, the presence of Solomon is my
 desire.

The second quoted ghazal by Rûmî is as follows:

The perfume of the Beloved exaleth from the camel hair.

This camel is of the herd of that pearl who is Lord Uways.

Rafati writes that he did not find this distich in the edition of the *Díván* by Rûmî edited by Şafî 'Alî Sháh in 1361 or 1982-83 AD [*Má'akhidh* 2:275]. We too could not find it in the edition of Rûmî's *Díván* published by the website RíRÁ, the Free Persian Digital Library, providing access to Persian literature in public domain. This distich will be commented upon in the part of this paper devoted to the poetical language of the Tablet.

The first distich from Rûmî's *Mathnaví* quoted by Bahá'u'lláh in our Tablet is as follows:

When seeds are hidden in the earth, their inward secret
 becomes the verdure of the garden. [*Mathnaví* 1:177]

This distich is part of a story that narrates of a great king who saw a slave girl, fell in love with her, and bought her, but the girl became sick and none of the king's physicians could heal her. Finally, one day the king found a doctor, who was well known for his special skill. He brought him to his slave and the physician asked to be left alone with her. In his interview with the slave he discovered that the cause of her sickness was that she was in love with a goldsmith from Samarkand. The doctor promised the girl that he would help her, but asked her not to reveal her secret to anyone else. And Rûmî comments upon this advice as follows:

The Prophet said that any one who hides his inmost thought
 will soon attain to the object of his desire.

When seeds are hidden in the earth, their inward secret
becomes the verdure of the garden.

If gold and silver were not hidden, how would they get
nourishment (grow and ripen) in the mine? [ibid.
1:176-8]

Two verses from this long story are quoted in the Four Valleys:

Let us write, some other way,
Love's secrets – better so. [*Mathnaví* 1:136, SV 64]

Leave blood and noise and all of these,
And say no more of Shams-i-Tabriz. [*Mathnaví* 1:142, SV 65]

The two distiches quoted at the end of the Tablet are as follows:

I will cease (from speech): the Sweetheart has begun to
speak, be (all) ear – *and God best knoweth the right
course.* [Rúmi, *Mathnaví* 3:3844]

In this day life hath come out of my body, It sayeth to me:
verily, unto Him shall we return. [see Rúmi, *Mathnaví*
3:3906, Koran 2:156]

The first distich repeats a typical *topos* of Persian lyrical poetry: at the end of a discourse the poet states that he has concluded his argument. In this case, he explains that whenever the Beloved speaks, any other voice becomes superfluous. The second one ascribes silence to the attainment unto annihilation.

Finally, Bahá'u'lláh quotes two distiches by Saná'í. The first one also is quoted in the Four Valleys:

*Never the covetous heart shall come to the stealer of hearts,
Never the shrouded soul unite with beauty's rose. [SV 60]
[which could also be translated: With that rose bud
no one sleeps with a shirt.]*

*One cannot advance in the path of oneness with two qiblas,
Either one will please the Beloved, or will consent to one's
passions.*

These verses are part of a ghazal which says:

Don the garb of faith, so that you may last forever; if
you won't die in this garb, you will become
rotten with your shroud.

Faith swallows this and the Other world in a breath, as
soon as the leviathan of its pain opens its mouth.

One cannot advance in the path of oneness with two
qiblas. Either one will please the Beloved or will
consent to one's passions.

Never the covetous heart shall come to the stealer of
hearts, Never the shrouded soul unite with
beauty's rose. [SV 60]

Do not lift the veil of continence and shame from the
face of belief, that you may not be bewitched by
the evil eye of the unworthy.

Walk by the Qur'án, 'cause whoever takes refuge in the
Qur'án escapes the torments of the Other world
and the temptations of this one.

[Saná'í, Díván [Furúzánfar] 253, translated from the
Persian by the authors, except the couplet marked SV 60,
translated by Gail; see Radmihir, *Samavát* 558].

These two distiches also suggest detachment. It is symbolized in the first one by the shirt, which the lower should take off, if he wants to be really close to the Beloved; in the second one by the two qiblihs, one of which – that of passion – should be abandoned, while preserving only that of the Beloved.

Images used in the Tablet

This Tablet is written in the imaginative language typical of Persian mystics, as most of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings revealed in the Iraqi period. Some of the images may prove less comprehensible for Westerners and thus some of them will be shortly explained.

The Tablet of the Heart

At the beginning of this Tablet Bahá'u'lláh writes: “*May, God willing, thine heart’s purpose be attained and thy soul’s wish be fulfilled, although it is preferred that we purify this luminous tablet (lawḥ-i-núr), which is among the pages of illuminated breasts (ṣafaḥát-i-af’adiy-i-munírih), from the allusions of both...*” This image is often used by the Sufis to describe the human heart, as the essence of the soul. These are three examples, one from Rúmí and two from Ḥáfiz, respectively:

Recite entirely this ode from the tablet of the heart; regard
not the tongue, for lips and tongue do not remain.
[Rúmí, *Mystical Poems* 1:83, no. 96, v.8]

From the tablet of my heart and soul, Thy image, ever goeth
not:
From my recollection, that proudly moving cypress ever
goeth not. [Ḥáfiz, *Díván* 462, no. 258, v.1]

On my heart’s tablet is naught save the (straight) alif of the
Friend’s stature:
What may I do? Me, recollection of other letter the teacher
(the murshid) gave not. [Ḥáfiz, *Díván* 703, no. 416, v.8]

Bahá'u'lláh Himself sometimes uses this image in other Writings. For example He writes: “*It behoveth every man to blot out the trace of every idle word from the tablet of his heart, and to gaze, with an open and unbiased mind, on the signs of His Revelation, the proofs of His Mission, and the tokens of His glory*” [GWB 11, sec.7, Súriy-i-Qamís]. He also writes: “*... O my brother, when a true seeker determineth to take the step of search in the path leading to the knowledge of the Ancient of Days, he must ... wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vainglory*” [KI 192-3, ¶213]. This image reminds us of the Aristotelian “*tabula rasa*” the *unscribed tablet* [see Aristotle, *De Anima* [On the soul], 3:4, 430-31). The soul seems described as a tablet upon which the beautiful features of the Face of the Lord can be drawn through the combined efforts of pure love and a purified intellect.

Dil-bar, the heart-ravisher

The image of the heart-ravisher or stealer of hearts (*dil-bar*), “Heart-ravishing; a lovely woman, a sweetheart” [Steingass 531], is very common in Persian mystical poetry. Javad Nurbakhsh (1926-2008), a Sufi master who published a 16 volume encyclopedia entitled *Sufi Symbolism*, explains that this locution, which he translates “heart-ravisher,” “is said to represent the attribute of contraction engendered in the heart through ‘anguish’ (*anduh*) and tribulation (*meḥnat*)” [2:40]. Ḥāfīz uses this image in the following distich:

If of the Sulṭán, I formed expectation, a fault it was:
 If of the Heart-Ravisher (*dil-bar*), I sought fidelity,
 tyranny he made. [*Díván* 242, no. 116, v.6; *Díván*
 136, “Ghazalyát,” no. 130, v.5]

This image also is included in the verse of Saná’í that Bahá’u’lláh quotes in this Tablet:

*Never the covetous heart shall come to the stealer of hearts
 (díl-bar),
 Never the shrouded soul unite with beauty’s rose.*
 [SV 60]

The stealer of hearts describes the cruelty of the Beloved, Who denies Himself to the absolute love of the lover, abandoning him to his pains in the desert of loneliness and remoteness. It is an allusion to God’s unknowability. In the Bahá’í Writings this *topos* is less important, because Bahá’u’lláh has come to bring a glad tidings:

*Behold how the manifold grace of God, which is being
 showered from the clouds of Divine glory, hath, in this day,
 encompassed the world. For whereas in days past every
 lover besought and searched after his Beloved, it is the
 Beloved Himself Who now is calling His lovers and is
 inviting them to attain His presence. Take heed lest ye
 forfeit so precious a favor; beware lest ye belittle so
 remarkable a token of His grace.* [GWB 319, sec. CLI, Lawḥ-i-
 ‘Áshiq va Ma‘shúq]

The day of sadness for lovers are ended, a new age of joy has begun.

The Beauty's rose

This image also belongs to Saná'í's verses quoted by Bahá'u'lláh. In the Sufi world the rose (*gul*) "symbolizes the result of the knowledge that appears in the heart of the gnostic" (Nurbakhsh 4:39). It may also be interpreted as "the supreme manifestation of Divine beauty or the symbol of the beloved cheek" [Schimmel, *Deciphering* 26]. Annemarie Schimmel (1922–2003) explains: "in the Islamic tradition, as elsewhere, the rose has pride of place. The Prophet kissed the rose and placed it on his eyes, for 'the red rose is part of God's glory, *kibriya*'. On the other hand, legend claims that the rose grew out of the drops of perspiration which fell from the Prophet's body during his nightly journey – therefore it carries his sweet fragrance" [*Deciphering* 20].

In the Bahá'í collective imagination the rose has come to be especially associated with the story of Bahá'u'lláh's Declaration in the Garden of Riḍván in Baghdad, as described by Nabíl. A famous passage by Bahá'u'lláh turns around the images of the rose-garden and the flower par excellence, the rose: "*In the Rose Garden of changeless splendor a Flower hath begun to bloom, compared to which every other flower is but a thorn, and before the brightness of Whose glory the very essence of beauty must pale and wither*" [GWB 320-1, sec. 151, ¶3, Lawḥ-i-'Áshiq va Ma'shúq].

Two qiblas

The above mentioned quotation by Saná'í goes on saying: "One cannot advance in the path of oneness with two qiblas." The Qiblih is "The 'Point of Adoration,' that is, the point to which the worshipper should turn when offering obligatory prayer, is called the Qiblih" ["Preface and Notes" 168n7] and Bahá'u'lláh has decreed: "*The Qiblih is indeed He Whom God will make manifest; whenever He moveth, it moveth, until He shall come to rest*" [KA 68, ¶137]. The poetical image is very clear: the qiblih "symbolizes the focus of the attention of the heart" [Nurbakhsh 3:101] and the heart cannot at the same time turn towards two goals. Either he loves the Beloved or he walks away from Him. The Gospel also states: "*No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to*

the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" [Luke 16:13, K JB].

The veils

Bahá'u'lláh quotes an hemistich by Ḥáfiz which says: "Ḥáfiz! thou thyself art thy own veil. From the midst, arise." The Sufis think that while living on this earthly world each person is separated from the Reality hidden behind everything by many obstacles, which they call "veils:" the veil of the flesh, the veil of passion, the veil of ignorance, the veil of heedlessness, the veil of human learning, the veil of attachment to the glories of the world, the veil of self, etcetera. This image often recurs in the Bahá'í Writings. Bahá'u'lláh mentions the "*veils of glory*" [KI 164, ¶175], the "*veils of learning*" [KI 214, ¶237], the "*veil of self*" [GWB 316, sec. 147, Lawḥ-i-Salmán] "*the veils of heedlessness*" [GWB 322, sec. 152, Lawḥ-i-Aḥmad bi Fársí], *the veils of desire* [SLH 31, sec. 1, ¶60. Súriy-i-Haykal], "*veils of light*" [TB 143, Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat), etcetera. 'Abdu'l-Bahá classifies the veils as follows:

Know thou, verily, there are many veils in which the Truth is enveloped: gloomy veils; then delicate and transparent veils; then the envelopment of Light, the sight of which dazzles the eyes, as doth the sun which is enveloped only in its own light and, as we look at it, the sight is blinded and eyes are dazzled.
[TAB1 71-2]

Joseph and Jacob

Bahá'u'lláh writes: "*Likewise, should the Jacob of love have cleansed the essence of his heart and soul from the foulness of water and clay, undoubtedly he would have not necessitated the Egyptian shirt, or an announcer bringing him the glad tiding, or an ambassador speaking to him.*" Joseph, who is presented in the Qur'án not only as a judicious, wise and pious man but also as a youth of such extraordinary beauty as to appear as "*a noble angel*" [12:31], is considered to be the symbol of absolute Beauty. Jacob is viewed as the human soul in search of that Beauty and turned blind because of the many tears it has shed in its remoteness from its Beloved.

The Egyptian shirt

This allusion to the Egyptian shirt may also be found in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: “*Say: From My laws the sweet-smelling savour of My garment can be smelled, and by their aid the standards of Victory will be planted upon the highest peaks*” [KA 20, ¶4]. This verse of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is commented as follows:

This is an allusion to the story of Joseph in the Qur’án and the Old Testament, in which Joseph’s garment, brought by his brothers to Jacob, their father, enabled Jacob to identify his beloved long-lost son. The metaphor of the fragrant “garment” is frequently used in the Bahá’í Writings to refer to the recognition of the Manifestation of God and His Revelation. [“Preface and Notes” 165 n1]

The Egypt of fidelity

Bahá’u’lláh mentions “*the Egypt of fidelity (Miṣr-i-vafá)*.” This image also belongs to the overall image of the story of Joseph. Interestingly, when Sufi poets refer to the story of Moses, Egypt, the reign of Pharaoh, the great oppressor of Moses and the Jews, mostly denotes materialism, the prison of the self and passions. This demonstrates the great fluidity of mystic symbolism, which defies the strict rules of the human mind.

The north of the Spirit (*shimál-i-rúh*)

Bahá’u’lláh writes: “*On the contrary, he would have perceived the pure and sanctified breezes from the north (shimál) of the Spirit and he would have dwelt in perfect union with the Beloved.*” The word *shimál* means both north and left. But when it means “left” it has a negative connotation, as in Koran 56:9, where it denotes the damned souls, as opposed to the right denoting the blessed ones. In this case the locution *shimál-i-rúh* is mentioned, that could be rendered as “the north of the Spirit.” The French Iranist Henry Corbin (1903-1978) writes about *shimál* as north what follows:

Now one of the *leitmotiv* of Iranian Sufi literature is the “Quest for the Orient,” but this is a Quest for an Orient

which, as we are forewarned (if we do not already realize), is not – and cannot be – situated on our geographical maps. This Orient is not comprised in any of the seven *climes* (*keshvar*); it is in fact the *eighth* clime. And the direction in which we must seek this “eighth clime” is not on the horizontal but on the vertical. This suprasensory, mystical Orient, the place of the Origin and of the Return, object of the eternal Quest, is at the heavenly pole; it is the Pole, at the extreme north, so far off that it is the threshold of the dimension “beyond.” That is why it is only revealed to a definite mode of presence in the world, and can be revealed only through this mode of presence. There are other modes to which it will never be revealed. It is precisely this mode of presence that characterizes the mode of being of the Sufi, but also, through his person, the mode of being of the entire spiritual family to which Sufism – and especially Iranian Sufism – belongs. The *Orient* sought by the mystic, the Orient that cannot be located on our maps, is in the direction of the *north*, beyond the north. Only an ascensional progress can lead toward this cosmic north chosen as a point of orientation. [*Man of Light* 2]

Corbin also points out that the north is “on the one hand... the *situs* of the angel Sraoshah (who thus would correspond to the angel Seraphiel); on the other hand this is the qualification given in Sufism to the great shaykh of a period (even the shaykh of a Sufi community, a *taríqat*, insofar as the latter is taken as the homologue of a microcosm) and for this reason is considered in Shí’ite Sufism as representing the hidden Imám” (ibid. 56). Ḥáfiz uses this metaphor in the two following verses:

O (cool) breeze of the north! the breeze of good news, thou art,
That, us, at union’s time, reacheth. [*Díván* 621, no. 360, v.1]

The breeze of love’s perfume, I perceived; and, expectant
of the flashing of the lightning of union, became:

O (cool) breeze of the north! come: for, for the perfume of
thy body, I die! [*Díván* 626, no.364, v.1]

The joy of the Divine Presence (*Shawq-i-Iqá*)

Bahá'u'lláh writes: “[*Likewise, should the Jacob of love have cleansed the essence of his heart and soul from the foulness of water and clay...]* he would have tasted the joy of the Divine Presence and the flavor of eternity.” Bahá'u'lláh Himself explains the spiritual meaning of the concept of the Divine Presence in the Kitáb-i-Íqán: “*by ‘attainment unto the divine Presence’ is meant attainment unto the presence of His Beauty in the person of His Manifestation*” [KI 170, ¶182].

The eternal life

Bahá'u'lláh writes: “[*Likewise, should the Jacob of love have cleansed the essence of his heart and soul from the foulness of water and clay...]* he would have obtained the eternal life...” This concept also is explained in the Kitáb-i-Íqán: “*whosoever, and in whatever Dispensation, hath recognized and attained unto the presence of these glorious, these resplendent and most excellent Luminaries, hath verily attained unto the ‘Presence of God’ Himself, and entered the city of eternal and immortal life*” [KI 142, ¶151].

Resurrection

Bahá'u'lláh writes: “[*Likewise, should the Jacob of love have cleansed the essence of his heart and soul from the foulness of water and clay...]* he would have entered into the immortal Paradise after the spiritual resurrection.” Resurrection can be seen in two different perspectives, personal and eschatological. As to the personal perspective, the key to read this metaphor is in the Kitáb-i-Íqán:

Such things have come to pass in the days of every Manifestation of God. Even as Jesus said: “Ye must be born again” [1 John 3:7]. Again He saith: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” [2 John 3:5-6]. The purport of these words is that whosoever in every dispensation is born of the Spirit and is quickened by the breath of the

Manifestation of Holiness, he verily is of those that have attained unto “life” and “resurrection” and have entered into the “paradise” of the love of God. And whosoever is not of them, is condemned to “death” and “deprivation,” to the “fire” of unbelief, and to the “wrath” of God. In all the scriptures, the books and chronicles, the sentence of death, of fire, of blindness, of want of understanding and hearing, hath been pronounced against those whose lips have tasted not the ethereal cup of true knowledge, and whose hearts have been deprived of the grace of the holy Spirit in their day. Even as it hath been previously recorded: “Hearts have they with which they understand not.” [Koran 7:178]. [KI 118-9, ¶125]

In this case it seems that resurrection is intended in its personal perspective.

“Everything will perish except His own Face (*kullu shay‘in hálíka illa vajhahu*)” [28:88, Yusuf Ali]

Yusuf Ali comments upon this verse as follows: “This sums up the lesson of the whole Surah. The only Eternal Reality is Allah. His ‘Face’ or Self, Personality or Being is what we should seek, knowing that it is the only enduring thing of which we can have any conception. The whole phenomenal world is subject to flux and change and will pass away, but He will endure forever” [*The Holy Quran* 1027 n3421]. This Koranic verse appears in a verse by Rúmi in the following context:

I died to the inorganic state and became endowed with
growth, and (then) I died to (vegetable) growth and
attained to the animal.

I died from animality and became Adam (man): why, then,
should I fear? When have I become less by dying?

At the next remove I shall die to man, that I may soar and
lift up my head amongst the angels;

And I must escape even from (the state of) the angel:
everything is perishing except His Face.

Once more I shall be sacrificed and die to the angel: I shall
become that which enters not into the imagination.

Then I shall become non-existence: non-existence saith to me, (in tones loud) as an organ, *Verily, unto Him shall we return.*

Know death to be (the thing signified by) what the (Mohammedan) community are agreed upon, namely, that the Water of Life is hidden in the (Land of) Darkness.

Grow from this river-bank, like the water-lily, greedy and craving for death as the sufferer from dropsy.

The water is death to him, and (yet) he is seeking the water and drinking it – and God best knoweth the right course. [*Mathnaví* 3:3901-9]

Human beings are here described in their ascending progress from the mineral world to the station of the angels, and then to their annihilation in their return to God.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote a Tablet in which He explained several meanings of the word “face (*vajh*)”:

The word “face” (vajh) hath many meanings, among which there is submissiveness to the Will of God (riḍá), as God, exalted be He, says: “Seeking His Face” [Koran 6:52], and also: “We feed you for the sake of God alone” [Koran 76:9], and moreover His good-pleasure (riḍá). And the face also means the Essence (dhát). God, exalted be He, says: “Everything ... will perish except His own Face” [Koran 28:88]. And the face (vajh) also means the unveiling (jilwat). God, exalted be He, says: “whithersoever ye turn, there is the Presence of God” [Koran 2:115]. And the face (vajh) hath various interpretations and allusions, beside what hath been said. However, due to lack of time, it hath been chosen not to expatiate the subject. On the ground of all this, submission (taslím) of the face is one thing of the special virtues of the righteous and of the greatest gifts of the free. Whosoever is so aided is graciously favored with absolute faith in the highest level of certitude and assurance. [Makátíb 1:396, provisional translation by the authors]

Uways and the camel

Bahá'u'lláh writes:

One ought to perceive the perfume of the Beloved from Uways' camel hair. As the Mathnaví's author says:

The perfume of the Beloved exaleth from the camel hair.

This camel is of the herd of that pearl who is Lord Uways.

Uwaysu'l-Qaraní is “a legendary or semi-legendary younger contemporary of Muḥammad said to have been killed at the battle of Şiffín in 37/657, fighting on the side of ‘Alí ... [The legend says that] Muḥammad and Uways corresponded by telepathy” [Bosworth, “Uways al-Qaraní”]. The morning breeze, according to the Tradition, brought to Muhammad the scent of the holiness of Uways al-Qaraní who lived in Yemen.

According to Nurbakhsh, the camel “is said to represent humanity (*ensáníyat*)” [4:153].

Breezes, scents and the Yemen

Bahá'u'lláh writes: “*However, the musky fragrance of the Beloved and the breezes of the Merciful have ceased to waft from the Yemen of the Friend.*” In the Sufi language breezes and winds have positive connotations. The breeze, “*nasím*,” is often described as a messenger of love, because at dawn it wafts the scent of the rose, the traditional metaphor of the Beloved, or the musk scent of the Friend. Breezes and winds are often associated with the idea of scent, a concept which has many connotations in the Sufi world. Among them, as in the Western world, a spiritual person may be described as a person in the odor of sanctity. In this case the Tabled alludes to the above mentioned legend of Uways. Yemen, the southern region of the Arabic Peninsula, is here mentioned because it was the place where Uways lived.

The pearl and the shell

Bahá'u'lláh writes: “*Yeah, the casket of the white pearl (lú-lú-i-baydá) is concealed within the sea shell (şadaf), inasmuch as the untouched pearl, which bestows perfect power upon the inner powers of the heart and adds the light of vision to intelligence, is more acceptable and agreeable.*” According to Nurbakhsh the symbol of the pearl refers to the perfect Man. Ebn ‘Arabi refers to it as the “white pearl” [4:240]. As to the shell, according to Nurbakhsh “*it is said to symbolize the form of the multiplicity of the existential names and Attribute*” [4:152]. As to the untouched pearls, they are reminiscent of the Koranic image of the *Hurís*, that are “*large-eyed ones with modest refraining glances, fair like the sheltered egg*” [37:48-9, Rodwell], girls “*with large dark eyes*” [44:54, Rodwell], beautiful “*like jacinths and pearls*” [55:58, Rodwell], “*whom no man nor spirit hath touched before*” [55:56, Rodwell], given as brides to the believers in the Heaven’s gardens of delight. Other meanings of this metaphor are explained in the following words by Bahá'u'lláh: “*How many the húrís of inner meaning that are as yet concealed within the chambers of divine wisdom! None hath yet approached them; – húrís, ‘whom no man nor spirit hath touched before’*” [KI 70-1, ¶78].

The arm of the Beloved

In the language of the Sufis the arm, *bázú*, “represents the Divine Will (*masheyat*)” [Nurbakhsh 1:14]. The image is commonly used in Persian mystical poems to describe strength and power. For example Háfiz writes:

O sky! Away from the purpose of king Manşúr,⁴ thy face
 turn not
 The keenness of his sword, behold: the power of his
 arm, behold. [*Díván* 761, no. 456, v.8]

Bahá'u'lláh uses this image in this Tablet when He says: “*Imagine what will the power of the Friend’s arm do?*”

The Phoenix of the West and the city of the soul

Bahá'u'lláh writes: “*O dear one, thy Companion sayeth that one ought to be purified from the defilement of imitation, so that the Phoenix of the West may emerge from the Orient of the Beloved and wing its flight into the sanctified atmosphere of the Spirit, that is the city of the soul.*” According to Nurbakhsh the Phoenix of the West “is said to represent the Perfect Man, the wayfarer who is in Union, and one who has gnosis of the Divine Essence” [4:148]. In this case we also have the symbolism of the two opposed directions of the West and the East. The West denotes occultation and the East theophany.

As to “the city of the soul (*madíniy-i-ján*),” this locution is reminiscent of a sentence in the Seven Valleys, which says: “*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*” [SV 41].

The desert of the intellect and the “swoon”

Bahá'u'lláh writes: “*The lovers of the desert of the intellect have swooned away because of the call from the Unseen.*” Nurbakhsh gives us an interesting background to understand the symbol of the desert:

We know that to reach Mecca, one must pass through cities and cross the desert. Sháh Ne‘matollah,⁵ in the following passage, has used the images of “city” and “desert” to symbolize the *nafs* and its inclinations along the way of the “Pilgrimage” to Reality:

“Love of women, property, status, food and drink, or whatever tempts the *nafs*, stands like cities along the way of the ‘Pilgrimage’ to Reality. Once these are passed, the blood-thirsty desert lies ahead and must be traversed for the sake of austerity, the caravan chief being the Prophet. If one is remiss in following him, one falls behind, and is destroyed by the *nafs*, which is like a desert thief.” [3:112]

As to the “swoon,” the Persian locution “*madhúsh shudand*” corresponds with the Arabic word “*šá’iq^{an}*.” Therefore this sentence seems to be a reference to the story of Moses, and specifically to Moses’s swoon when God showed Himself to Him on Mount Sinai described in the Koran as follows: “*And when God manifested Himself to the mountain he turned it to dust! and Moses fell in a swoon (šá’iq^{an})*” [Koran 7:139]. It is the annihilation of the human qualities of the seeker in front of the Manifestation of God. Similar ideas are explained by Bahá’u’lláh in the Four Valleys when He quotes this verse by Saná’í:

*Wouldst thou that the mind should not entrap thee?
Teach it the science of the love of God!* [SV 52]

In other words, the mind can be deceitful. Only a mind that has been educated and thus transformed through its perusal and internalization of Scripture is a reliable source of knowledge.

The moldering bones (‘*azm-i-ramím*)

Bahá’u’lláh writes. “*Such were the joy and the ecstasy and the delight and the happiness, that the breath of the Holy Spirit hath wafted from the moldering bones....*” This image comes from the Koran, which says. “*Who ... shall give life to bones when they are rotten?*” [36:78, Rodwell]. Bahá’u’lláh draws from this verse an attribute of God the “*Fashioner of moulderling bones*” [SLH 53, sec. 1, ¶118, Súriy-i-Haykal], and also “*God, Who fashioneth the crumbling and rotten bones*” [GWB 243, sec. 115, Lawḥ-i-Dhabíh].

‘Izrá’íl, Gabriel (*Rúḥu’l-Amín*), and Isráfíl

Interestingly in the last part of the Tablet three angels are directly or indirectly mentioned: ‘Izrá’íl, the angel of death, Gabriel, the angel of revelation, and Isráfíl, the angel of life.

As to ‘Izrá’íl, of the one who is “purified from the defilement of imitation” Bahá’u’lláh says: “*‘Izrá’íl, the angel of death, will stand as a servant at His door, ready to serve Him.*” The Koran says: “*Say: The angel of death, who is charged with you, shall cause you to die; then shall he be returned to your Lord*” (32:11). The name of this

angel is, according to tradition, ‘Izrá’íl or Azrá’íl (the servant of the Highest), in English Azrael. He may be compared to Ezrael, the angel of divine wrath of the Christian apocrypha. Rúmí defines him as “tyrannous and enraged” [*Mathnaví* 5:1571]. The tradition describes Izrá’íl as an enormous angel who appears in a different shape to believers and unbelievers. He appears to a dying believer as a pleasant and reassuring vision, but to an infidel as the most terrifying figure.

As to Gabriel, Bahá’u’lláh writes. “*Such were the joy and the ecstasy and the delight and the happiness, that the breath of the Holy Spirit hath wafted from the moldering bones and the Spirit of Faith hath winged its flight on the wings of success.*” Shoghi Effendi translates the locution *Rúḥu’l-Amín* [literally, the Trusted Spirit] “Gabriel” [GWB 103, sec. 50], and “*Spirit of God*” [KI 114, ¶121]. Rúmí Writes: “Since the Name of Ahmad became (to the Christians) an impregnable fortress, what then must be the Essence of that trusted Spirit?” [1:738]. According to Nurbakhsh “The trusted Spirit normally refers to Gabriel, although occasionally in Rumi’s *Mathnaví* it may represent the Moḥammadan Spirit” [9:100].

As to Isráfíl, Bahá’u’lláh writes: “*The Isráfíl of life wondereth with which melody he could wake up these companions and beseecheth that haply he may share their swoon (bí-húshí).*” Israfíl, whose etymology could be the same as Seraphim, corresponds to the English Seraphiel. In the Muslim tradition he is the angel who in the Day of Judgement will awake the dead “calling” them with his trumpet. The Qur’án [54:6-8] calls him “the summoner (*dá’í*)”. Rúmí describes him as the “life of the body,” whereas he describes Gabriel as the “life of the inspired spirit” [*Mathnaví* 5:1566, 1565]. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has reportedly said that the two angels ‘Izrá’íl and Isráfíl are symbols:

As by the will of God the power of composition exists, so, also by will of God the power of decomposition exists.

These two are expressed in scripture by “Isráfíl” the angel who gives life to men, and the Angel of Death who takes it away. The first is the power of composition or attraction, the other the power of decomposition. They are not angels. [qtd. in Goodall and Goodall Cooper 43-4]

and God best knoweth the right course

(w'alláhua'lambi's-şawáb)

This statement is frequently used by Rúmi in his *Mathnaví*. It comes from a Koranic verse which says: “*The Day that the Spirit and the angels will stand forth in ranks, none shall speak except any who is permitted by (Allah) Most Gracious, and he will say what is right (aş-şawában)*” [78:38, Yusuf Ali].

verily, unto Him shall we return [Rúmi, *Mathnaví* 3:3906, Koran 2:156]

This Koranic verse is often used in the Bahá'í Writings, as for example the Seven Valleys, The Four Valleys, and Javáhiru'l-Asrár. It is an allusion to the so called “second birth,” that is, that process whereby the human soul gradually detaches itself from the lower world, and actualizes its God-given spiritual attributes.

The contents of the Tablet

It is not certainly easy to summarize the contents of a Tablet revealed by Bahá'u'lláh. He quotes an Islamic tradition which says: “*We speak one word, and by it we intend one and seventy meanings; each one of these meanings we can explain*” [KI 255, ¶283]. And thus we will be satisfied with a very short review of this inspiring Text.

Bahá'u'lláh wishes that the most cherished desires of His addressee may be fulfilled. However, He suggests that the highest aspiration of a human heart, that is, the attainment unto His Holy Presence, will be fulfilled, only if the soul will forget anything else but its Lord. This overall concept is conveyed, in a language enriched by poetical images and quotations, through six different explanations.

First. The first quotation – “Last night the shaikh went all about the city, lamp in hand crying, ‘I am weary of beast and devil, a man is my desire’” [Rúmi, *Mystical Poems* 1:46, no. 51, v.14] – is in itself, as it often is the case with mystic writings, an epitome of the whole Tablet. The shaykh is tired to meet with people who may be compared to “beast and devil,” he wants to finally find a real human being. And Bahá'u'lláh wrote later in a Tablet: “*Lofty is the station of man, were*

he to hold fast to righteousness and truth and to remain firm and steadfast in the Cause. In the eyes of the All-Merciful a true man appeareth even as a firmament; its sun and moon are his sight and hearing, and his shining and resplendent character its stars. His is the loftiest station, and his influence educateth the world of being” [TB 219, Kitáb-i-Ahd]. Therefore the whole Tablet is about the quest for a man who has attained unto his divinely appointed lofty station.

Second. The second quotation emphasizes the importance of detachment in two different perspectives:

Never the covetous heart shall come to the stealer of hearts,
 Never the shrouded soul unite with beauty’s rose [SV 60].
 With that rose bud no one sleeps with a shirt.
 One cannot advance in the path of oneness with two
 qiblas,
 Either one will please the Beloved, or will consent to
 one’s passions. [Saná’i, *Díván* [Furúzánfar] 253]

The first verse recommends detachment through the language of erotic-mystical poetry: the closest intimacy with the Beloved requires that the lover takes off even his shirt. Soon after the Tablet suggests that the most important detachment is that from oneself, here described as a veil: “Háfiz! thou thyself art thy own veil. From the midst, arise” [Háfiz, *Díván* 534, 308:9]. The second verse uses the language of the ascetic. The ascetic cannot have two qiblihs. Nurbakhsh explains that the qiblih “symbolizes the focus of attention of the heart” [3:101]. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said on the subject of the attachment of the heart:

God has given man a heart and the heart must have some attachment. We have proved that nothing is completely worthy of our heart’s devotion save reality, for all else is destined to perish. Therefore the heart is never at rest and never finds real joy and happiness until it attaches itself to the eternal. How foolish the bird that builds its nest in a tree that may perish when it could build its nest in an ever-verdant garden of paradise.

Man must attach himself to an infinite reality, so that his glory, his joy, and his progress may be infinite. Only the spirit is real; everything else is as shadow. [ADP 133]

Third. Later on the Tablet explains that if Jacob would have been wholly purified from his attachment to the world, he would have found Joseph even without the assistance of his shirt. It is a reference to the story of Joseph, that has been explained above [Koran 12:93-96].

Fourth. The Tablet explains that only through detachment the meaning of the Koranic verse 28:88, “*Everything will perish except His own Face,*” will become apparent. In other words, only a detached person is able to look at the world “*with the eye of God*” [SV 17] and thus to behold “*the brilliant rays of the divine sun shining from the dawning-point of Essence alike on all created things, and the lights of singleness reflected over all creation*” [ibid.].

Fifth. A detached person recognizes the Perfect Man even in the smell of the hair of the camel of Uwaysu'l-Qarani. The Uways of the legend worked as the guardian of the camels of his tribe and wore a rough cloak made of camel hair [see Attár, *Tadhkiratu'l-Awlya*, Dhikr 2]. He was an ascetic and lived in loneliness, detached from all the things of the world. He was so poor and destitute, that no one would have thought him to be a true saint. This reference to Uways is followed by a passage, that is not easily comprehensible. It could allude to the fact that the time was not yet ripe for Bahá'u'lláh to announce His Manifestation.

Sixth. Only a detached seeker will see the Phoenix winging its flight and taking its place in the city of the soul. The Phoenix is the symbol of the Manifestation of God. The city of the soul is the symbol of the human heart. This image is reminiscent of one of the images of the Seven Valleys:

Whensoever the light of Manifestation of the King of Oneness settleth upon the throne of the heart and soul, His shining becometh visible in every limb and member. At that time the mystery of the famed tradition gleameth out of the darkness: “A servant is drawn unto Me in prayer until I answer him; and when I have answered him, I become the ear wherewith he heareth....” For thus the Master of the house hath appeared within His home, and all the pillars of the

dwelling are ashine with His light. And the action and effect of the light are from the Light-Giver; so it is that all move through Him and arise by His will. [SV 22]

In both cases the Manifestation of God takes His place in a human heart that approaches Him in a detached attitude of prayer and adoration.

The Tablet ends with a difficult passage, which could allude to Bahá'u'lláh's high station, here described as that of One to Whom angels promptly render service.

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NOTES

- ¹ A verse very similar to this may be found in a ghazal by Muşlihu'd-Dín Sa'dí (ca. 1184–1291). See Rafati, *Má'akhidh* 4:81-4. It says: “Shíráz will be thrown into a tumult by Thine upsetting and joyous gaze | I fear lest this turmoil may inflame Shíráz (*Shírázpur-ghawgháshud-ast az fitniy-i-chashm-i-khushat* | *tars-am kiháshúbí 'ajab bar ham zanad Shíráz-rá*).”
- ² Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in Rafati, *Yádnámih* 296, provisional translation by Omid Ghaemmaghani. The authors thank Mr. Ghaemmaghani for having given his permission to use it in this paper.
- ³ We did not find this *ghazal* in the collections of Rúmí's *ghazals* recorded on the Internet.
- ⁴ A Muzaffarid king of Iran, who reigned between ca. 1391 and ca. 1393.
- ⁵ Sháh Ni'matulláh Valí (1330-1431) was a Sufi master and poet.