

An Exposition on the Fire Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh:  
(Lawh-i-Qad Ihtaraqa'l-Mukhlisún)

by James B. Thomas

Preface

To understand Bahá'u'lláh's famous Fire Tablet it is essential to know about the events and conditions regarding the state of the Bahá'í Faith that preceded the time of its revelation. The emotion expressed is so plaintive that the human station of Bahá'u'lláh seems to dominate His soul yet His divine station wells up with such reverence for God that a mystical intercourse between these two stations of His being produces a profound message for all Bahá'ís and those yet unborn. It is a message of victory, of steadfastness, and of great promise.

The Fire Tablet's full title, taken from its opening lines, is "Lawh-i-Qad Ihtaraqa'l-Mukhlisún." The literal translation of this is "Tablet of 'The Faithful Ones [*mukhlisún*] have Burned [*qad ihtaraq*]," which Shoghi Effendi translated as "the hearts of the sincere are consumed in the fire of separation."<sup>1</sup> The Fire Tablet is often recited by Bahá'ís at times of suffering and difficulties and it was revealed when great afflictions and sorrows had surrounded Bahá'u'lláh. However, many believers, even those who are deeply moved by its tone, often state that they do not entirely understand it. This celebrated Tablet therefore deserves study with respect to its real and mystical implications.

In the closing days of the exile of Bahá'u'lláh and His followers in Adrianople, certain catastrophic events occurred within the fragile Bahá'í community that deeply affected Bahá'u'lláh. The divisiveness inculcated by Siyyid Muhammad that had begun earlier in Constantinople, which was in fact the cause of further exile to Adrianople, struck at the very heart of the embryonic Faith established by Bahá'u'lláh. Mírzá Yahyá, Bahá'u'lláh's half brother, was a victim of his own vanity, probably due to the Báb's appointment of him as the nominal leader of His followers, for reasons not pertaining to his capacities.<sup>2</sup> Yahyá developed an insatiable lust for power and recognition within the very community of Bahá'ís that Bahá'u'lláh had so miraculously regenerated. It was during this time that the followers of the Báb, the Herald and precursor of Bahá'u'lláh, began to identify themselves as Bahá'ís rather than Bábís.<sup>3</sup>

Introduction

For the purpose of reviewing The Fire Tablet, it is important to appreciate the depth of the extraordinary phenomenon of regeneration that occurred in an earlier time of the first exile to Baghdad after Bahá'u'lláh's terrible incarceration in the Síyáh-Chál, the "dark pit" in Tehran. Indeed this phenomenon would recur on a greater scale in His fourth and final exile to the inhospitable prison city of 'Akká. In each instance of repression experienced by the fledgling Bábí community it was the resplendent figure of Bahá'u'lláh that would inspire them, and ultimately the world, through numerous tablets that were revealed even during the time of His own severe duress.

The cowardice Yahyá exhibited innumerable times going back to the Baghdad exile now turned into arrogance under the influence of the "Anti-Christ" of the Bahá'í Dispensation, Siyyid Muhammad. A pattern of insurrection unfolded that culminated in an attempt on the life of a Divine Messenger of God. Bahá'u'lláh had always protected and nurtured His half brother, and for him to turn on Bahá'u'lláh in this way was heart-rending. Moreover, Yahyá rent so deep a schism on the most basic tenet of the Faith, the principle of unity, that it would prove to be the most damaging thing that Bahá'u'lláh would ever face in spite of great personal and physical ordeals exacted by outside enemies of the Faith.

The machinations of Siyyid Muhammad and Mírzá Yahyá provoked such consternation with the Turkish authorities that a further final exile was ordered, to the prison-city of 'Akká, Palestine. Ultimately the party was divided, one group would go with Bahá'u'lláh to 'Akká and the other group would go with Mírzá Yahyá to Cyprus. On August 31, 1868 Bahá'u'lláh and seventy followers arrived at "the most great prison," 'Akká.

Unfortunately, some followers of Yahyá were put in the group with Bahá'u'lláh, including Siyyid Muhammad, and four followers of Bahá'u'lláh were put in the group with Yahyá. This was most distressing for the believers, for whom separation from their Beloved was unbearable. For Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the Bahá'ís, the presence of Siyyid Muhammad would provide endless torment during the early years in 'Akká. One loyal follower actually attempted suicide to avoid separation from his Beloved.

Conditions in the prison were harsh and very unhealthy, so much so that three persons died while suffering extreme fever. All the prisoners were subjected to strict confinement by their captors. But the worst aspect of life in the barracks was brought on by the covenant breakers. The Siyyid and three others campaigned with lies to defame Bahá'u'lláh. Then they colluded with the authorities to prevent pilgrims, some of whom traveled great distances on foot, from seeing or even communicating with Him.<sup>4</sup> This meant that the persecuted believers in Persia were left bereft of guidance from their Lord; indeed, many did not know whether He was alive or dead. Then something happened that utterly devastated Bahá'u'lláh and His family.

Shoghi Effendi describes this tragic event:

To the galling weight of these tribulations was now added the bitter grief of a sudden tragedy—the premature loss of the noble, the pious Mírzá Mihdí, the Purest Branch, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's twenty-two year old brother, an amanuensis of Bahá'u'lláh and a companion of His exile from the days when, as a child, he was brought from Tíhran to Baghdad to join his Father after His return from Sulaymáníyyih. He was pacing the roof of the barracks in the twilight, one evening, wrapped in his customary devotions, when he fell through the unguarded skylight onto a wooden crate, standing on the floor beneath, which pierced his ribs, and caused, twenty-two hours later, his death, on the 23rd of Rabí'u'l-Avval 1287 A.H. (June 23, 1870). His dying supplication to a grieving Father was that his life might be accepted as a ransom for those who were prevented from attaining the presence of their Beloved.<sup>5</sup>

This poignant episode provides the clearest example of the great suffering endured by Bahá'u'lláh throughout His long ministry. Bahá'u'lláh revealed a prayer in memory of His son that is reminiscent of Abraham's intended sacrifice of His son:

Glorified art Thou, O Lord, my God! Thou seest me in the hands of Mine enemies, and My son blood-stained before Thy face, O Thou in Whose hands is the kingdom of all names. I have, O my Lord, offered up that which Thou hast given Me, that Thy servants may be quickened and all that dwell on earth be united.<sup>6</sup>

It must be noted that Bahá'u'lláh, having the power of life and death, suffered an enormous sacrifice by acquiescing to His son's wish to ransom his life for the opening of the gates of the prison.<sup>7</sup>

### Profundity of Suffering

When reviewing the dispensations of the past it becomes readily apparent that all Divine Messengers suffered greatly in various ways simply because They were bringing the teachings of God to mankind. Bahá'u'lláh, perhaps because of His longevity and because of the scope of His Revelation, seemed to bear an inordinate burden throughout His earthly life.

In a tablet, He encapsulates these phenomena while identifying Himself with the Messengers of the past:

At one time Thou didst deliver me into the hands of Nimrod; at another Thou hast allowed Pharaoh's rod to persecute me. Thou alone canst estimate, through Thine all-encompassing knowledge and the operation of Thy Will, the incalculable afflictions I have suffered at their hands. Again Thou didst cast me into the prison-cell of the ungodly for no reason except that I was moved to whisper into the ears of the well-favored denizens of Thy kingdom an intimation of the vision with which Thou hadst, through Thy knowledge, inspired me and revealed to me its meaning through the potency of Thy might. And again Thou didst decree that I be beheaded by the sword of the infidel. Again I was crucified for having unveiled to men's eyes the hidden gems of Thy glorious unity, for having revealed to them the wondrous signs of Thy sovereign and everlasting power. How bitter the humiliations heaped upon me, in a subsequent age, on the plain of Karbilá! How lonely did I feel amidst Thy people; to what state of helplessness I was reduced in that land! Unsatisfied with such indignities, my persecutors decapitated me and carrying aloft my head

## An Exposition on the Fire Tablet

---

from land to land paraded it before the gaze of the unbelieving multitude and deposited it on the seats of the perverse and faithless. In a later age I was suspended and my breast was made a target to the darts of the malicious cruelty of my foes. My limbs were riddled with bullets and my body was torn asunder. Finally, behold how in this day my treacherous enemies have leagued themselves against me, and are continually plotting to instill the venom of hate and malice into the souls of Thy servants. With all their might they are scheming to accomplish their purpose. . . .<sup>8</sup>

It was in this milieu of despair, tragedy and torment that Bahá'u'lláh revealed the Lawh-i-Qad Ihtaraqa'l-Mukhlisún, or the "Fire Tablet" as it is known in the West. The Tablet was revealed in 1871 for a young devoted follower named Hájí Siyyid 'Alí-Akbar.<sup>10</sup> It may be studied in three parts. (1) First, Bahá'u'lláh, in His human station, describes conditions of abject sorrow followed by invocations to God pertinent to those conditions in such poignant terms that it is reminiscent of the plaintive call by Christ during His crucifixion when He asked "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"<sup>9</sup> Then He reverently addresses God by His attributes. (2) God, speaking through His Messenger, responds to the call of Bahá'u'lláh with omnipotent authority, explaining why such conditions exist, and then addresses Him in most endearing terms. (3) The call of God is answered by Bahá'u'lláh, in His station of Divine Messenger, in a most provocative way bursting through the ashes of despair like a phoenix rising with the triumph of sacrifice.

I have attempted to associate specific conditions with each invocation. There were many incidents, feeding one into another, which occurred over a number of years that were related to this Tablet. Only a few are represented here. The Súriy-i-Mulúk (Súrih of Kings) contains some elements of Bahá'u'lláh's experience prior to His banishment to "The Most Great Prison" that influenced the writing of the Fire Tablet. This famous Tablet expresses, in a sense, the culmination of emotions and truths associated with the tribulations experienced by Bahá'u'lláh and His company for a period that spanned nineteen years. All of this has since been transformed miraculously into ultimate victory for His cause.

In the following passages, text in italics is from the Fire Tablet, unless otherwise identified.

### Despair and Invocation

Bahá'u'lláh begins by addressing God in terms of ultimate respect for His station such as the "First Cause" and the "Supreme Being."

In the Name of God, the Most Ancient, the Most Great.

He then begins His plaintive calls:

Indeed the hearts of the sincere are consumed in the fire of separation: Where is the gleaming of the light of Thy Countenance, O Beloved of the worlds?

This refers to the heart-rending fact that the closest the followers of Bahá'u'lláh could approach was the city gate of 'Akká, and then only His hand would be visible waving in the distance. Within the prison, forced separation between members in His company created a sense of isolation and they began to feel spiritually bereft, deprived of the resplendent presence of Bahá'u'lláh. Some were expelled from 'Akká due to the machinations of Siyyid Muhammad.

Separation, the opposite of unity, was perhaps the most grievous of any condition experienced by the Bahá'ís. The beloved Guardian quotes Áqáy-Kalím on the occasion of the final rupture between Bahá'u'lláh and Mírzá Yahyá in Adrianople: "All the companions lamented in their separation from the Blessed Beauty. 'Those days,' is the written testimony of one of those companions, 'were marked by tumult and confusion. We were sore-perplexed, and greatly feared lest we be permanently deprived of the bounty of His presence.'"<sup>11</sup>

Again He calls:

Those who are near unto Thee have been abandoned in the darkness of desolation: Where is the shining of the morn of Thy reunion, O Desire of the worlds?

Bahá'u'lláh is referring to the conditions in 'Akká, which were abominable. Also, the authorities were

required to treat the believers harshly while others had been forced to remain behind along the path of exile.

He cries out:

The bodies of Thy chosen ones lie quivering on distant sands: Where is the ocean of Thy presence, O Enchanter of the worlds?

Here He speaks about the remnants of the Bábí community, which remained devastated in their homeland and thirsted for spiritual guidance, and a few of whom were forced to travel to the island of Cyprus with the archenemy of the Faith, Mírzá Yahyá.

Earlier, when the exiles were still in Adrianople, ominous events began to occur. Shoghi Effendi describes the events that transpired:

Emboldened by the recent ordeals with which Bahá'u'lláh had been so cruelly afflicted, these enemies, who had been momentarily quiescent, began to demonstrate afresh, and in a number of ways, the latent animosity they nursed in their hearts. A persecution, varying in the degree of its severity, began once more to break out in various countries. In Ádharbáyján and Zanján, in Nishápúr and Tihrán, the adherents of the Faith were either imprisoned, vilified, penalized, tortured or put to death. Among the sufferers may be singled out the intrepid Najaf-'Alí-i-Zanjání, a survivor of the struggle of Zanján, and immortalized in the "Epistle to the Son of the Wolf," who, bequeathing the gold in his possession to his executioner, was heard to shout aloud "Yá Rabbíya'l-Abhá" before he was beheaded. In Egypt, a greedy and vicious consul-general extorted no less than a hundred thousand tumans from a wealthy Persian convert, named Hájí Abu'l-Qásim-i-Shírází; arrested Hájí Mírzá Haydar-'Alí and six of his fellow-believers, and instigated their condemnation to a nine year exile in Khartúm, confiscating all the writings in their possession, and then threw into prison, Nabil, whom Bahá'u'lláh had sent to appeal to the Khedive on their behalf. In Baghdad and Kázimayn indefatigable enemies, watching their opportunity, subjected Bahá'u'lláh's faithful supporters to harsh and ignominious treatment; savagely disemboweled 'Abdu'r-Rasúl-i-Qumí, as he was carrying water in a skin, at the hour of dawn, from the river to the Most Great House, and banished, amidst scenes of public derision, about seventy companions to Mosul, including women and children.<sup>12</sup>

Then He laments:

Longing hands are uplifted to the heaven of Thy grace and generosity: Where are the rains of Thy bestowal, O Answerer of the worlds?

Despair had gripped the company of Bahá'u'lláh and many felt that they were near the end of their endurance.

Again He cries:

The infidels have arisen in tyranny on every hand: Where is the compelling power of Thine ordaining pen, O Conqueror of the worlds?

Unbelievers in very high places of power across the Ottoman Empire had colluded to destroy the infant Faith promulgated by Bahá'u'lláh by imposing unbearable conditions upon His followers. Repression extended throughout the realm as well.

In *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* He writes:

Twenty years have passed, O kings, during which We have, each day, tasted the agony of a fresh tribulation. No one of them that were before Us hath endured the things We have endured. Would that ye could perceive it! They that rose up against Us have put us to death, have shed our blood, have plundered our property, and violated our honor. Though aware of most of our afflictions, ye, nevertheless, have failed to stay the hand of the aggressor. For is it not your clear duty to restrain the tyranny of the oppressor, and to deal equitably with your subjects, that your high sense of justice may be fully demonstrated to all mankind?<sup>13</sup>

He exclaims:

The barking of dogs is loud on every side: Where is the lion of the forest of Thy might, O Chastiser of the worlds?

## An Exposition on the Fire Tablet

---

This multiple metaphor includes a follower, Mírzá Ridá-Qulí, who had been dismissed by Bahá'u'lláh after disgracing the Faith by committing shameful deeds. He joined forces with his sister Badrí Ján, Mírzá Yahyá, and Siyyid Muhammad in a campaign of calumnies against Bahá'u'lláh. Their efforts were so devastating that the citizens of 'Akká began to show enmity and malice toward the believers. All of them were as "barking dogs."

He includes the world in His lament:

Coldness hath gripped all mankind: Where is the warmth of Thy love, O Fire of the worlds?

The pain that Bahá'u'lláh is bearing at this time is exacerbated by events far beyond the "Most Great Prison." The corruption and perversion of religion in Persia and Turkey were always of deep concern to Bahá'u'lláh, both with regard to His followers and ultimately to the populace in general.

He then exclaims:

Calamity hath reached its height: Where are the signs of Thy succor, O Salvation of the worlds?

Sedition caused by the Azalís had reached a fevered pitch. The venom of their hostility had endangered the very life of Bahá'u'lláh yet He admonished His small company to be patient and forbearing.<sup>14</sup>

He expresses deep concern:

Darkness hath enveloped most of the peoples: Where is the brightness of Thy splendor, O Radiance of the worlds?

Though a few were still steadfast in their faith, the spiritual light in most countries was flickering out in a sea of disbelief. This condition is clarified when He addresses the rulers in Constantinople:

We behold in thee the foolish ruling over the wise, and darkness vaunting itself against the light. Thou art indeed filled with manifest pride. Hath thine outward splendor made thee vainglorious? By Him Who is the Lord of mankind! It shall soon perish, and thy daughters and thy widows and all the kindreds that dwell within thee shall lament. Thus informeth thee the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.<sup>15</sup>

The pattern continues; He rephrases exclamatory statements of despair, followed by variations of His questions. These are repeated in cadence as He appeals to God with exalted titles and attributes.

The necks of men are stretched out in malice: Where are the swords of Thy vengeance, O Destroyer of the worlds?

Only God can wreak vengeance. Bahá'u'lláh constantly restrained His followers against punishing the oppressors of the Faith. Whenever they went against His will, tragedy followed.

Abasement hath reached its lowest depth: Where are the emblems of Thy glory, O Glory of the worlds?

There are two conditions of abasement referred to by Bahá'u'lláh: one is related to Himself and the other to the people and rulers. The first is actually of greater importance because it concerns the abasement that was forced upon the person of Bahá'u'lláh, an abasement which He considered His glory!

Sorrows have afflicted the Revealer of Thy Name, the All-Merciful: Where is the joy of the Dayspring of Thy Revelation, O Delight of the worlds?

The Guardian identifies the rebellion of Mírzá Yahyá as the greatest source of sorrow for Bahá'u'lláh: "This supreme crisis Bahá'u'lláh Himself designated as the Ayyám-i-Shidád (Days of Stress), during which *the most grievous veil* was torn asunder, and the *most great separation* was irrevocably effected. It immensely gratified and emboldened its external enemies, both civil and ecclesiastical, played into their hands, and evoked their unconcealed derision. It perplexed and confused the friends and supporters of Bahá'u'lláh, and seriously damaged the prestige of the Faith in the eyes of its western admirers. It had been brewing ever since the early days of Bahá'u'lláh's sojourn in Baghdad, was temporarily suppressed by the creative forces which, under His as yet unproclaimed leadership, reanimated a disintegrating community, and finally broke out, in all its violence, in the years immediately preceding the proclamation of His Message. It brought incalculable sorrow to Bahá'u'lláh, visibly aged Him, and inflicted, through its repercussions, the heaviest blow ever sustained by Him in His lifetime."<sup>16</sup>

## Lights of ‘Irfán

---

Anguish hath befallen all the peoples of the earth: Where are the ensigns of Thy gladness, O Joy of the worlds?

Militant materialism had taken the reins of power in Europe, and would threaten peace far beyond that continent. In the Orient a despotic empire, centered in Constantinople, brought unbearable pressure on the Faith that was destined to save mankind from its spiritual self-destruction.

Thou seest the Dawning Place of Thy signs veiled by evil suggestions: Where are the fingers of Thy might, O Power of the worlds?

Siyid Muhammad and Áqá Ján wrote anonymous letters which perverted the writings of Bahá’u’lláh, and which accused Him of having conspired with Bulgarian leaders and certain ministers of European powers to achieve, with the help of some thousands of His followers, the conquest of Constantinople. Government officials were alarmed by this, and determined to isolate Bahá’u’lláh and reduce Him to powerlessness. He was in seclusion during these events.<sup>17</sup>

In a broader sense, Bahá’u’lláh makes mention:

My face hath come forth from the veils, and shed its radiance upon all that is in heaven and on earth; and yet, ye turned not towards Him, notwithstanding that ye were created for Him, O concourse of kings!<sup>18</sup>

Sore thirst hath overcome all men: Where is the river of Thy bounty, O Mercy of the worlds?

A spiritual vacuum permeated the world that left humans in a state of confusion beyond their own awareness or understanding.

Greed hath made captive all mankind: Where are the embodiments of detachment, O Lord of the worlds?

Lust for power, corruption at all levels of society, gluttony for wealth, and an insatiable appetite for prestige or fame had brought what was once the most civilized of nations to the lowest level of spiritual poverty. The kings of the earth are admonished for what they pride themselves in, especially ornaments and treasures.

Thou seest this Wronged One lonely in exile: Where are the hosts of the heaven of Thy Command, O Sovereign of the worlds?

The Beloved Guardian describes the restrictions imposed on Bahá’u’lláh and His family: “Explicit orders had been issued by the Sultán and his ministers to subject the exiles, who were accused of having grievously erred and led others far astray, to the strictest confinement. Hopes were confidently expressed that the sentence of life-long imprisonment pronounced against them would lead to their eventual extermination. The farmán of Sultán ‘Abdu’l-‘Azíz, dated the fifth of Rabi ‘u’th-Thání 1285 A.H. (July 26, 1868), not only condemned them to perpetual banishment, but stipulated their strict incarceration, and forbade them to associate either with each other or with the local inhabitants.”<sup>19</sup>

I have been forsaken in a foreign land: Where are the emblems of Thy faithfulness, O Trust of the worlds?

Bahá’u’lláh, in His human station of “the wronged One,” is desirous of a sign of reassurance.

The agonies of death have laid hold on all men: Where is the surging of Thine ocean of eternal life, O Life of the worlds?

He is deeply disturbed by the spiritual sickness of mankind.

The whisperings of Satan have been breathed to every creature: Where is the meteor of Thy fire, O Light of the worlds?

The divisiveness caused by Mírzá Yahyá and his agents is so devastating that it seems to permeate the world. Shoghi Effendi explains: “It was engineered throughout by the tortuous intrigues and incessant machinations of that same diabolical Siyyid Muhammad, that vile whisperer who, disregarding Bahá’u’lláh’s advice, had insisted on accompanying Him to Constantinople and Adrianople, and was now redoubling his efforts, with unrelaxing vigilance, to bring it to a head.”<sup>20</sup>

The drunkenness of passion hath perverted most of mankind: Where are the day springs of purity, O Desire of the worlds?

Greed, zeal for fame, and lust for power on the part of the bulk of mankind lay at the root of the problems

## An Exposition on the Fire Tablet

---

facing the early Bahá'ís, both in the immediate vicinity of 'Akká and in the Ottoman Empire as a whole.

In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* Bahá'u'lláh asks the people of Constantinople: "Hath the drunkenness of passion laid hold upon you, or is it that ye are sunk in heedlessness? O Spot that art situate on the shores of the two seas! The throne of tyranny hath, verily, been established upon thee, and the flame of hatred hath been kindled within thy bosom. . . ."21

Thou seest this Wronged One veiled in tyranny among the Syrians: Where is the radiance of Thy dawning light, O Light of the worlds?

The "dawning light" emanated from those lands that had been introduced to the Faith by early believers, first in Persia, then Iraq and Turkey. Added to them during Bahá'u'lláh's sojourn in Adrianople were the Caucasus and Syria. Nabíl had converted a number of those early pioneers. 'Akká was part of the province of Syria.<sup>22</sup>

Thou seest Me forbidden to speak forth: Then from where will spring Thy melodies, O Nightingale of the worlds?

Bahá'u'lláh has now withdrawn from all contact with others.

Most of the people are enraptured in fancy and idle imaginings: Where are the exponents of Thy certitude, O Assurance of the worlds?

Bahá'u'lláh addressed the kings of Christendom in no uncertain terms when He questioned them about the sayings of Jesus regarding the many signs of the Christ's return:

"When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth." And yet, behold how, when He did bring the truth, ye refused to turn your faces towards Him, and persisted in disporting yourselves with your pastimes and fancies.<sup>23</sup>

Bahá is drowning in a sea of tribulation: Where is the Ark of Thy salvation, O Savior of the worlds?

Shoghi Effendi describes a fresh danger that clearly threatened the life of Bahá'u'lláh: "Though He Himself had stringently forbidden His followers, on several occasions, both verbally and in writing, any retaliatory acts against their tormentors, and had even sent back to Beirut an irresponsible Arab convert, who had meditated avenging the wrongs suffered by his beloved Leader, seven of the companions clandestinely sought out and slew three of their persecutors, among whom were Siyyid Muhammad and Áqá Ján. The consternation that seized an already oppressed community was indescribable. Bahá'u'lláh's indignation knew no bounds."<sup>24</sup>

After this horrendous act "Even the children of the imprisoned exiles, whenever they ventured to show themselves in the streets during those days, would be pursued, vilified and pelted with stones. . . . The cup of Bahá'u'lláh's tribulations was now filled to overflowing . . ."<sup>25</sup>

If we pause a moment and visualize a vast reservoir that may be likened to the great capacity that Bahá'u'lláh possessed for sensitivity, compassion, love and suffering, we can sense the enormous despair that befell Him after nineteen long years of relentless attack from without and from within the embryonic community of believers. That reservoir of pain had been fed by rivers and streams of tribulation, flowing in from every direction beginning with His incarceration in the "black pit" of Tehran in August 1852. The level of duress had finally reached its capacity and began flooding over the "dam" until it literally broke and released a cataract of power and emotion that became this, the Fire Tablet.

Thou seest the Dayspring of Thine utterance in the darkness of creation: Where is the sun of the heaven of Thy grace, O Lightgiver of the worlds?

Jealousy became one of the motivating factors in the multifarious complicities purportedly involving Bahá'u'lláh. Mírzá Husayn-Khán, the Muṣhíru 'd-Dawlih, and his associates arose to take full advantage of the recent troubles that had been experienced by Bahá'u'lláh and to assure His destruction. In Constantinople, the esteem shown Bahá'u'lláh by the governor Muhammad Páshá-i-Qibrisí and his successors incensed the authorities. Aware of the instabilities prevailing in their own countris, they were disturbed by the constant comings and goings of pilgrims in Adrianople and by the exaggerated reports of Fu'ád Páshá. They were further provoked by petitions of Mírzá Yahyá that reached them through his agent, Siyyid Muhammad.<sup>26</sup>

The lamps of truth and purity, of loyalty and honor, have been put out: Where are the signs of Thine aveng-

ing wrath, O Mover of the worlds?

When Bahá'u'lláh went into seclusion after the rebellion of Mírzá Yahyá, He found even more perplexities resulting from the collusion of Siyyid Muhammad and Mírzá Yahyá. They had written calumnious letters about Bahá'u'lláh and had them disseminated in Persia and Iraq. They also wrote petitions couched in obsequious language and sent them to the governor of Adrianople. Mírzá Yahyá then “dispatched one of his wives to the government house to complain that her husband had been cheated out of his rights and that her children were on the verge of starvation.” Meanwhile, Siyyid Muhammad had journeyed to the capital and, speaking to the Persian Ambassador, accused Bahá'u'lláh of sending an agent to assassinate Násiri'd-Dín-Sháh.<sup>27</sup>

Canst Thou see any who have championed Thy Self, or who ponder on what hath befallen Him in the pathway of Thy love? Now doth My pen halt, O Beloved of the worlds.

Consternation within the mind of Bahá'u'lláh had now reached its zenith. It is reminiscent of Lot who long ago tried to save the cities of Sodom and Gomorra but failed in his attempt to identify people of virtue. But with Bahá'u'lláh there were such individuals.

The branches of the Divine Lote-Tree lie broken by the onrushing gales of destiny: Where are the banners of Thy succor, O Champion of the worlds?

The human side of Bahá'u'lláh had become utterly devastated by events. He is likened to a lote tree that in ancient times was planted at the end of a road beyond which there is no passing.<sup>28</sup>

This Face is hidden in the dust of slander: Where are the breezes of Thy compassion, O Mercy of the worlds?

Regarding Mírzá Yahyá, Bahá'u'lláh admonishes: “Thou hast perpetrated against thy Brother what no man hath perpetrated against another.” “What hath proceeded from thy pen,” He, furthermore, has affirmed, “hath caused the Countenances of Glory to be prostrated upon the dust, hath rent in twain the Veil of Grandeur in the Sublime Paradise, and lacerated the hearts of the favored ones established upon the loftiest seats.”<sup>29</sup>

The robe of sanctity is sullied by the people of deceit: Where is the vesture of Thy holiness, O Adorner of the worlds?

Siyyid Muhammad, Áqá Ján, and Mírzá Ridá-Qulí had indulged in a campaign of abuse, calumny and intrigue against Bahá'u'lláh which exceeded that of the campaign launched in Constantinople earlier by Siyyid Muhammad, the “Anti-Christ” of the Bahá'í Faith.<sup>30</sup>

The sea of grace is stilled for what the hands of men have wrought: Where are the waves of Thy bounty, O Desire of the worlds?

The manner in which the prisoners were treated from the first days in 'Akká had remained so egregious, so flagrantly abusive, and under such abominable conditions that it was designated “The Most Great Prison.” Worse, Bahá'u'lláh was isolated in the prison. Later He would withdraw for the sake of unity.

The door leading to the Divine Presence is locked through the tyranny of Thy foes: Where is the key of Thy bestowal, O Unlocker of the worlds?

Periodically the evil machinations conducted by the foes of the Faith from within produced such intractable divisiveness that Bahá'u'lláh would withdraw into solitude for a time. This occurred in Baghdad, Adrianople, and finally in 'Akká.

The leaves are yellowed by the poisoning winds of sedition: Where is the downpour of the clouds of Thy bounty, O Giver of the worlds?

The insidious, relentless acts of deceit and subversion by Siyyid Muhammad and his cohorts had affected friends of the Faith in negative ways and had bolstered its enemies.

The universe is darkened with the dust of sin: Where are the breezes of Thy forgiveness, O Forgiver of the worlds?

The devastating impact of Mírzá Yahyá's rebellion was so significant that it overwhelmed the infant Faith for

## An Exposition on the Fire Tablet

---

a time. Bahá'u'lláh expands His lamentation to include all of the spiritual reality of man.

This Youth is lonely in a desolate land: Where is the rain of Thy heavenly grace, O Bestower of the worlds?

In His seclusion Bahá'u'lláh was utterly alone and He had to bear this in order to eventually restore unity in the Bahá'í community.

Among the forgoing Bahá'u'lláh has, in a spiritual sense, referred to extreme cold, calamity, the wicked, stirrers of sedition, confinement of prisoners, loneliness, banishment, abasement, affliction, and hearts full of hate.

### Another Voice

God now answers Bahá'u'lláh in most endearing Terms:

O Supreme Pen, We have heard Thy most sweet call in the eternal realm: Give Thou ear unto what the Tongue of Grandeur uttereth, O Wronged One of the worlds!

One by one He answers the questions that had been put to Him by Bahá'u'lláh.

Were it not for the cold, how would the heat of Thy words prevail, O Expounder of the worlds?

Were it not for calamity, how would the sun of Thy patience shine, O Light of the worlds?

Lament not because of the wicked. Thou wert created to bear and endure, O Patience of the worlds.

How sweet was Thy dawning on the horizon of the Covenant among the stirrers of sedition, and Thy yearning after God, O Love of the worlds.

By Thee the banner of independence was planted on the highest peaks, and the sea of bounty surged, O Rapture of the worlds.

By Thine aloneness the Sun of Oneness shone, and by Thy banishment the land of Unity was adorned. Be patient, O Thou Exile of the worlds.

We have made abasement the garment of glory, and affliction the adornment of Thy temple, O Pride of the worlds.

Thou seest the hearts are filled with hate, and to overlook is Thine, O Thou Concealer of the sins of the worlds.

When the swords flash, go forward! When the shafts fly, press onward! O Thou Sacrifice of the worlds.

Dost Thou wail, or shall I wail? Rather shall I weep at the fewness of Thy champions, O Thou Who hast caused the wailing of the worlds.

### Triumph and Certitude

Bahá'u'lláh, speaking now as a Divine Messenger, responds to the admonitions of God:

Verily, I have heard Thy Call, O All-Glorious Beloved; and now is the face of Bahá flaming with the heat of tribulation and with the fire of Thy shining word, and He hath risen up in faithfulness at the place of sacrifice, looking toward Thy pleasure, O Ordainer of the worlds.

Then as Bahá'u'lláh addresses the recipient of this potent tablet, we may also consider that He is addressing the Bahá'ís of the world!

O 'Alí-Akbar,<sup>31</sup> thank thy Lord for this Tablet whence thou canst breathe the fragrance of My meekness, and know what hath beset Us in the path of God, the Adored of all the worlds.

Finally, His confirming certitude:

Should all the servants read and ponder this, there shall be kindled in their veins a fire that shall set aflame the worlds.

—Bahá'u'lláh<sup>32</sup>

### Notes

- 1) Taherzadeh: *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 3, p. 226.
  - 2) *Ibid.*, Vol.1, p. 53
  - 3) Balyuzi: *Bahá'u'lláh The King Of Glory*, p. 250.
  - 4) Shoghi Effendi: *God Passes By*, p. 187.
  - 5) *Ibid.*, p. 188.
  - 6) Shoghi Effendi: *Messages to America*, p. 34.
  - 7) Taherzadeh: *Rev. of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol 3, p. 208.
  - 8) Shoghi Effendi: *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 118-119.
  - 9) Matthew 27:46.
  - 10) Taherzadeh: *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol 3, p. 226.
  - 11) Shoghi Effendi: *God Passes By*, p. 167-168.
  - 12) *Ibid.*, p. 178.
  - 13) Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings*, p. 247.
  - 14) Balyuzi: *Bahá'u'lláh: The King Of Glory*, p. 321.
  - 15) Bahá'u'lláh: *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 53.
  - 16) Shoghi Effendi: *God Passes By*, p. 163-164.
  - 17) *Ibid.*, p. 178-179.
  - 18) Shoghi Effendi: *The Promised Day Is Come*, p. 22.
  - 19) Shoghi Effendi: *God Passes By*, p. 186.
  - 20) *Ibid.*, p. 164.
  - 21) Bahá'u'lláh: *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 52-53.
  - 22) Shoghi Effendi: *God Passes By*, p. 176.
  - 23) Bahá'u'lláh: *Gleanings*, p. 246.
  - 24) Shoghi Effendi: *God Passes By*, p. 189.
  - 25) *Ibid.*, p. 191.
  - 26) *Ibid.*, p. 178-179.
  - 27) *Ibid.*, p. 167-168.
  - 28) *A Basic Bahá'í Dictionary*, p. 141.
  - 29) Shoghi Effendi: *God Passes By*, p. 169-170.
  - 30) *Ibid.*, p. 189.
  - 31) Taherzadeh, *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. 2, p. 275.
- 'Alí-Akbar was a young devoted believer for whom Bahá'u'lláh had great affection. He had a "sweet melodius voice" which had a profound effect upon the listener when he chanted prayers.
- 32) Bahá'u'lláh: *Bahá'í Prayers* (US), p. 214-220.

---

### Bibliography

- Cameron, Glenn, with Wendi Momen. *A Basic Bahá'í Dictionary*, Oxford, UK: George Ronald, 1989.
- Bahá'u'lláh. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, London, UK: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1949.
- Bahá'u'lláh. *Selections revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991.
- Bahá'u'lláh. *Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Book of Laws)*, Haifa, Bahá'í World Center, 1992.
- Balyuzi. *Bahá'u'lláh The King of Glory*, Oxford, UK: George Ronald, 1980.
- Shoghi Effendi. *God Passes By*, Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1970.
- Taherzadeh. *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vols. 1, 2 and 3, Oxford, UK: George Ronald, 1984.
- The Holy Bible, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.



