

The Tablet of the Bell (*Lawḥ-i-Náqús*) of Bahá'u'lláh

or The Tablet of “Praised Be Thou, O ‘He’!”

(*Lawḥ-i-Subhánaka yá Hu[wa]*)

introduced and translated by Stephen Lambden

Introductory note

Miscellaneous Bahá'í sources indicate that the wholly Arabic *Lawḥ-i-náqús* (“Tablet of the Bell”) or (after the constant refrain) *Lawḥ-i-subhánaka yá-hú* (“Tablet of Praised be Thou, O He!) is to be dated to 1280/1863 CE or to the period of Bahá'u'lláh's residence in Istanbul (Constantinople). The title *Lawḥ-i-náqús* derives from the words “Strike the Bell” (*sing. náqús*) in the opening (post introductory) line (see below). Bahá'u'lláh wrote this work in his own hand on the evening of the (lunar) celebration of the declaration of the Báb on the 5th of *Jumádí al-Awwál* 1280 AH = October 19th 1863 CE. It was apparently on that occasion that Áqá Muhammad 'Alí Tambaku Furush-i-Işfahání precipitated this revelation through the intermediary of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (letter of Shoghi Effendi to Mírzá Badí'u'lláh Ágahabadihi. cited *Ganj*, 71; *Revelation of Bahá'u'llah* 2:18).

The non-qur'anic Arabic loan-word *náqús* derives from (Christian) Aramaic-Syriac (*naposha/naqqús*) and indicates a pierced wooden clapper-board which had a gong or bell-like function in making a noise when hit with a stick. It was used in Eastern Christian regions for calling the faithful to worship or to other religious functions. Around (Eastern) Christian churches the *naqús* was sounded or clapped and, like the Islamic *mu'adhhdhin*, called the faithful to assemble for prayer. Perhaps this sound was heard by Bahá'u'lláh around Christian churches in Istanbul.

In Bábí-Bahá'í scripture and Shí'í/Shaykhí literatures there are various references to the eschatological *náqús*. In a number of His Writings Bahá'u'lláh personifies Himself as the “Bell” (*náqús*) which summons the faithful to enter the Abhá paradise or Kingdom of God (the Bahá'í Faith). His Revelation is the ringing of the “Bell” of his Person which invites humankind to the assemblage of paradise. One may recall, for example, the following opening lines from the second Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to Napoleon III:

O King of Paris! Tell the priest to ring the bells (lit. 'strike the clapper-boards' = nawáqís) no longer. By God, the True One! The Most Mighty Bell (al-náqús al-afkham = Bahá'u'lláh) hath appeared in the form of Him Who is the Most Great Name (al-ism al-á'zam), and the fingers of the will of Thy Lord, the Most Exalted, the Most High, toll it out in the heaven of Immortality, in His name, the All-Glorious (al-abhá) . . .

trans. Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day is Come*, 29

In making the following tentative provisional translation I have consulted the Arabic texts of the *Lawḥ-i-náqús* published in *Adí'ah-yi hadrat-i-mahbúb* (Cairo 1339/1920-1) 141-153 and *Risálih-yi ayyám-i-tis'ih* (rep. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1981) 100-106 as well as various

unpublished manuscripts. I have also benefited from consulting the previous translations of ‘Alí Kuli Khan and Marzieh Gail (unpublished) and that of Denis MacEoin (*Rituals in Bábism and Bahá’ism* [London 1994] App. XXVI, pp. 169-172). The following translation is not, however, based upon a critically established text nor is it in any way superior to those just mentioned. As the translation is fairly literal it will at times be virtually identical to previous renderings.

In diverse ways and in cryptic, mystical, Sufistic language Bahá’u’lláh celebrates the power of His recently, Ridván-intimated (late April early May 1863) theophanic status. As the secreted “Monk of the Divine Unicity”, He is bidden by God to go some way toward disclosing His being a supreme heavenly Maiden possessed of the power of divine revelation.

In line [3] and elsewhere in the *Lawḥ-i-náqús*, Bahá’u’lláh alludes to that portion of the *Súrat al-huriyya* (‘Súra of the Maiden,’ the 29th sura of the *Qayyúm al-asmá’* mid. 1844 CE) in which the Báb makes reference to the partial yet stunning theophanic disclosure of a veiled, silken clad houri characterised by resplendent beauty (*al-bahá*). Both lines 4 and 5, furthermore seem to allude, for example, to the person of Bahá’u’lláh as a conjunction or incarnation of the letters “B and “H” which constitute that Beauty-Splendour (*Bahá*) which, according to a well-known prophetic *hadíth* (greatly beloved of Rúzbihán Baqlí Shírází d.1209 CE) is his pre-existent Reality—the Prophet Muhammad is reckoned to have said “The Red Rose is expressive of the Beauty-Splendour of God” (*al-ward al-aḥmar min bahá’ Alláh*).

The Tablet of the Bell

Lawḥ-i-Náqús*

[0]

He is the Almighty

[1]

This [Tablet] is the Meadow of Paradise
wherein the melody of God,
the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting,
hath been exalted.

[2]

Therein hath Houris [Maidens] of Eternity (*huriyyát al-khuld*)
been empowered whom none hath touched save God,
the Almighty, the Sanctified.

[3]

Therein doth the Nightingale of Eternal Subsistence
warble upon the branches of
the Lote-Tree of the Extremity (*sidrat al-muntahá*)
with such a melody as hath
bedazzled discerning souls (*al-‘uqúl*).

[4]

Therein is that through which the poor and needy (*al-fuqará’*)
are made to approach
the shore of independent self-sufficiency (*shatí al-ghaná’*)
and the people obtain guidance unto the Word of God (*kalimát Alláh*). [5]

[5]

Such, indeed, is the certain Truth!

[1]

In Thy Name “He”
for Thou, verily, art “He,” O “He”!
O Monk of the Divine Unicity! (*ráhib al-aḥadiyya*)
Strike the Bell! (*al-náqús*)

* This is a provisional translation for presentation and discussion at 'Irfán Colloquia. It is not to be reproduced or further distributed in any form or medium.

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for the Day of God hath been realized
and the Beauty of the Divine Might (*jamál al-‘izz*)
been enthroned upon a Throne of Luminous Holiness.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[2]

O Húd of the Verdict! (*al-ḥukm*)
Sound the Bugle (*al-náqúr*)
in the name of God, the Mighty, the Noble,
for the Embodiment of Sanctity (*ḥaykal al-quḍs*)
hath been established upon a Mighty,
Transcendent Seat (*kursí*).

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[3]

O Countenance Eternally Subsistent! (*ṭal‘at al-baqá’*)
Pluck with the Fingertips of the Spirit (*anámil al-rúḥ*)
upon a wondrous, holy Rebec (*rabáb*)
for the Beauty of the Divine Ipseity (*jamál al-huwiyya*)
is manifested in resplendent silken attire.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[4]

O Angel of Light! (*malak al-núr*)
Sound the trumpet (*al-súr*)
in this theophany (*al-zuhúr*)
for the letter “H” (*al-há’*) rideth
upon a mighty, pre-existent letter [“B”] (*bi-harf ‘izz qadím*).

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!

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O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[5]

O Nightingale of Resplendence! (*‘andálib al-saná’*)
Warble upon the twigs in this Riḍwán
according to the Name of the One Beloved (*al-ḥabíb*)
for the Roseate Beauty (*jamál al-ward*)
hath been manifested from behind a thick curtain.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[6]

O Nightingale of Paradise! (*bulbul al-firdaws*)
Sing out upon the branches in this wondrous era (*zamán badí’*)
for God hath divulged himself (*tajalla Alláh*)
unto all that inhabit the created dominion (*al-mulk*).

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[7]

O Bird of Eternity! (*ṭayr al-baqá’*)
Speed in this expanse (*al-hawá’*)
for the Bird of Fidelity (*ṭayr al-wafá’*)
hath flown in a munificent, divinely intimate firmament (*fada’*).

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[8]

O Denizens of Paradise! (*ahl al-firdaws*)
Hallow ye and chant with the most beautiful,
sweet voice for the melody of God (*naghmat Alláh*)
hath been uplifted from beyond an elevated,
sanctified Pavilion (*surádiq*).

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So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[9]

O Denizens of the Kingdom! (*ahl al-malakut*)
Chant ye in the Name of the Beloved One (*al-maḥbúb*)
for the Beauty of the Cause (*jamál al-amr*)
hath sparkled forth from behind
ornamented, luminous veils.

So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[10]

O Denizens of the Kingdom of Divine Names! (*malakút al-asmá'*)
Ornament ye the very uttermost Heights (*rafárif al-aqsá'*) [of Paradise]
for the Greatest Name hath ridden upon
a sanctified, mighty Cloud.

So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[11]

O Denizens of the Omnipotent Kingdom of Divine Attributes (*ahl jabarút al-sifát*)
in the Abhá horizon! (*ufuq al-abhá'*)
Be ye prepared for the Encounter with God (*liqá' Alláh*)
for the sanctified breezes (*nasmát al-quds*)
hath wafted from the Hidden Retreat of the Divine Essence (*makman al-dhát*)
which is indeed a manifest Bounty.

So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[12]

O Riḍwán of the Divine Unicity! (*riḍwán al-ahadiyya*)
Be enraptured within thyself

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for the Riḍwán of God (*Riḍwán Alláh*),
the Exalted, the Powerful, the All-Knowing
hath been made manifest.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[13]

O Heaven of Might! (*samá’ al-‘izz*)
Render thanks unto God in thy very being
for the Heaven of Sanctity (*samá’ al-quds*)
hath been raised up in that Firmament (*hawá’*)
which is a subtly refined heart (*qalb latíf*).

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[14]

O Sun of the worldly dominion! (*shams al-mulk*)
Eclipse thy countenance
for the Sun of Eternal Subsistence (*shams al-baqá’*)
hath shed splendor from a horizon
which is a brilliant Dawn.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[15]

O Earth of gnosis! (*ard al-ma’rifa*)
Engulf thy mystic learning (*ma’árif*)
for the Earth of Gnosis (*ard al-ma’rifa*)
hath been expanded through the Logos-Self of God (*nafs Alláh*),
the Transcendent, the Mighty, the Munificent.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!

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O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[16]

O Lamp of the worldly dominion! (*siráj al-mulk*)
Extinguish thy very self, for the Lamp of God (*siráj Alláh*)
hath radiated within the Niche of Eternity (*mishkat al-baqá'*)
illuminating thereby the inhabitants of the heavens and of the earth.

So Praised be Thou O "He"!

O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[17]

O oceans of the earth!
Be stilled of thy tempestuous waves
for the Crimson Sea (*al-bahr al-ahmar*)
surgeth through an innovative directive (*bi-amr badí'*)

So Praised be Thou O "He"!

O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[18]

O Peacock of the divine Oneness! (*táwús al-ahadiyya*)!
Shriek out within the thicket of the divine realm (*ajamat al-láhút*)
for the melody of God (*naghmat Alláh*)
hath become evident from every divinely proximate locale.

So Praised be Thou O "He"!

O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[19]

O Bird of Perpetuity! (*dík al-şamadiyya*)!
Be muted in the thicket of the Omnipotent Realm (*ajamat al-jabarút*)
for the Crier of God (*munádí Alláh*)
crieth out from every unassailable locale (*shatr maní'*).

So Praised be Thou O "He"!

O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!

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O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[20]

O Concourse of enraptured lovers! (*malá’ al-ushsháq*)
Good news for thy selves
in that the separation (*al-firáq*)
is completed and the promised Testament (*al-mitháq*)
hath come to pass;
the Loved One (*al-ma’shúq*) hath been manifested
with a mighty, transcendent Beauty (*jamál ‘izz maní’*).

So Praised be Thou O “He”!

O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[21]

O Concourse of Gnostic initiates! (*malá’ al-irfán*)
Rejoice within thine inner realities for era of Renunciation (*al-hijrán*) is terminated,
certitude (*al-íqán*) is realized
and the Beauty of the Youth (*jamál al-ghulám*)
hath beamed forth with an holy ornament (*bi-taraz al-quds*)
in a Paradise of matchless name (*firdaws ism makín*).

So Praised be Thou O “He”!

O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[22]

Praised be Thou, O my God,
I supplicate Thee by Thy [eschatological] Day (*yawm*)
through which all [previous] Days have been raised up
and in view of the fact that through It
[matters rooted in] primordial (*al-awwalín*) and latter day
[eschatological] (*al-akharín*) eras
have been brought to account.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!

O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!

O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[23]

And by Thy Name which Thou didst make a Sovereign
in the Omnipotent sphere of Names (*jabarút al-asmá'*)
as well as a Judge (*hákim*) over
whomsoever are in the heavens and on the earth[s].

So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

By this means make Thou such persons to be independent (*aghniyá'*)
of all except Thee, associated with Thee
and detached from whatsoever is other than Thee
for Thou indeed art One Powerful, Mighty, Compassionate.

So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[24]

Do Thou make them, O my God,
to be such as give assent to Thy Singleness (*wahdáníyya*)
and who willingly concede Thy Uniqueness (*firdáníyya*)
in such wise that they shall witness nothing but Thine Own Logos-Self
and envision none but Thee.
In this respect Thou, verily, art One Powerful, Mighty.

So Praised be Thou O "He"!
O Thou Who art "He" Who is "He"!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than "He."

[25]

Establish then in their hearts, O my Beloved,
the fiery warmth of Thy love
in such measure that it may burn away
the remembrance of all save Thee.
This such that they may witness within themselves
that Thou hath ever been in the Sublime Apex of Eternity,

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that there hath never been anything alongside Thee,
and that Thou art now the like of what Thou hath ever been.
No god is there except Thee, the Munificent.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[26]

If such of Thy servants as desire to scale
the heights of Thy Divine Unity (*tawhíd*)
should content themselves with the mention of aught besides Thee,
confirmation of their realization of the Divine Oneness (*hukm al-tawhíd*)
would never be ratified
neither would the mode of the Divine Uniqueness (*simat al-tafríd*)
be truly affirmed within their being.

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

[27]

So praised be Thou, O our God! O my God!
given this situation do Thou send down from the clouds of Thy Mercy
that which will purify the breasts of Thy lovers
and that which will sanctify the hearts of such as are enraptured by Thee.
Then exalt them through Thy loftiness
and render them triumphant over such as inhabit the earth.
This indeed is what Thou promised Thy beloved ones
through Thine indubitable utterance,
“We desire to shower Our favour (*mann*) upon
such as are enfeebled on earth
and to make them leaders [Imams] (*a’imma*)
and to make them Our heirs (*al-wáarithín*)” (Qur’án 28:5).

So Praised be Thou O “He”!
O Thou Who art “He” Who is “He”!
O Thou besides Whom there is none other than “He.”

