

The Signs of Prophet-Hood

An Exposition on a Tablet by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

James B. Thomas

The veil hath fallen away, the curtain is lifted, the clouds have parted, the Lord of Lords is in plain sight - yet all hath passed the sinners by.

It is He Who hath made for you the new creation, (Qur’an 29:19) and brought on the woe that surpasseth all others, (Qur’an 79:34) and gathered the holy together in the realm on high. Verily in this are signs for those who have eyes to see. (SWAB 14)

To “have eyes to see” is the great challenge of the twenty first century! It is an old challenge; 2000 years ago Christ asked His audience “Having eyes see ye not?” (Mark 8:18) He was referring to spiritual eyes of course. Now in the mélange of cacophonous distractions and material temptations there lies confusion in the minds of many folks who seek purpose in their lives beyond immediate gratification. It is especially disadvantageous to people of faith who have sincerely clung to belief systems that have been surreptitiously corrupted by unscrupulous religious leaders past and present. On the other hand, when things go consistently bad people will begin to question what’s going on around them and hopefully become open to new truths that may have been staring them in the face all the while. New seekers are thus born and the potential for the opening of spiritual eyes becomes apparent. What are the signs of truth, of a new Prophet?

In three steps this paper elaborates upon the ramifications of the extraordinary evidence of the signs of a Manifestation of God as articulated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and is corroborated with excerpts from the *Dalá’il-i-Sab’ih* (The Seven Proofs) by the Báb. It is also reinforced by Bahá’u’lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* and additional comments by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in *Some Answered Questions*. And references from the distinguished Bahá’í scholar Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl are presented as he builds on criteria from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s writing with references to past dispensations. The interesting feature of these passages by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is that they are in the past tense with respect to things accomplished whereas signs of Prophet-hood are normally mentioned in future tense within prophetic utterances.

First, reliable criteria for proofs are defined. Second, in the sequence of signs there are shown those that are obviously self-evident whereas others are more subtle and require probing to deeper levels of meaning. Third, emphasis is placed on historical confirmation.

Proof Criteria

Proofs are of four kinds: first, through sense perception; second, through the reasoning faculty; third, from traditional or scriptural authority; fourth, through the medium of inspiration. That is to say, there are four criteria or standards of judgment by which the human mind reaches its conclusions. (PUP 253-6)

In His argument regarding the first kind of proof, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá holds that the senses are held to be unreliable. For example He refers to sight as being subject to aberrations and inaccuracies. We see a mirage as a body of water and reflections in a mirror as reality. We see the earth as a fixed object with the stars moving across the night sky whereas it is really the earth that is rotating on its axis. Many examples may be drawn about the uncertainty of the senses.

The second kind of proof based on the intellect or ‘reasoning faculty’ is also faulty and insufficient by virtue of the differences among men of learning when analyzing identical subjects of investigation. Even the great philosophers and scientists are often contradictory in their conclusions revealing that human judgment tends to be subjective or opinionated and therefore unreliable.

The third kind of proof is dependent on scripture whereof every conclusion is supported by traditions, which are recorded in holy books. But understanding these books requires the authority of human reason for explanation. However, as previously shown, human reason is unreliable so it follows that interpretation based on it is inaccurate.

The fourth type of proof according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá depends upon inspiration. He refers to the “philosophers of the illuminati” of past centuries who claimed that truth came to them through revelation. But He points out that inspiration is prompted by the human heart, which is sometimes satanic in its expression. Therefore this type of proof is also insufficient.

What kind of proof can we rely on? ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answers:

Consequently, it has become evident that the four criteria or standards of judgment by which the human mind reaches its conclusions are faulty and inaccurate. All of them are liable to mistake and error in conclusions. But a

statement presented to the mind accompanied by proofs which the senses can perceive to be correct, which the faculty of reason can accept, which is in accord with traditional authority and sanctioned by the promptings of the heart, can be adjudged and relied upon as perfectly correct, for it has been proved and tested by all the standards of judgment and found to be complete. When we apply but one test, there are possibilities of mistake. This is self-evident and manifest. (PUP 254-5)

In summary, the criterion of proof must simultaneously satisfy sensory perception, analysis by reasoning, traditional knowledge and intuitive inspiration.

Signs

In the dawning days of the Bahá'í Dispensation a principle emerged that profoundly changed the perspective on religion forever. Although Muḥammad discoursed on some of the Prophets that preceded Him it was the Báb, twin Prophet of this latest dispensation, Who first explicitly presented proofs and characteristics of Divine Messengers that form the basis of the principle of progressive revelation. This principle is fundamental to the Bahá'í Faith.¹ In The Seven Proofs the Báb begins by defining the source of divine knowledge. *“And know thou that in this world of being the knowledge of God can never be attained save through the knowledge of Him Who is the Dayspring of divine Reality.”* (SWB 117) Is He referring to only one Manifestation of God? If not who are they? At the conclusion of the tablet He states:

In the time of the First Manifestation the Primal Will appeared in Adam; in the day of Noah It became known in Noah; in the day of Abraham in Him; and so in the day of Moses; the day of Jesus; the day of Muḥammad, the Apostle of God; the day of the 'Point of the Bayán'; the day of Him Whom God shall make manifest; and the day of the One Who will appear after Him Whom God shall make manifest. Hence the inner meaning of the words uttered by the Apostle of God, 'I am all the Prophets', inasmuch as what shineth resplendent in each one of Them hath been and will ever remain the one and the same sun. (SWB 126)

This is in complete accord with Christ's statements “For if you had believed Moses you would have believed me” (John 8:58) and “Before Abraham was I am.” (John 5:46) In addition, Bahá'u'lláh mentioned two more Divine Messengers Who preceded Abraham but are not readily known in the West. The first was Húd, a cousin of 'Ád, whose name was associated with the people that occupied a

large area in southern Arabia. According to tradition they were fourth generation descendents of Noah.²

And after Noah the light of the countenance of Húd shone forth above the horizon of creation. For well-nigh seven hundred years, according to the sayings of men, He exhorted the people to turn their faces and draw nearer unto the Ridván of the divine presence. What showers of afflictions rained upon Him, until at last His adjurations bore the fruit of increased rebelliousness, and His assiduous endeavours resulted in the wilful blindness of His people. (KI 9)

Their demise was recited by Muḥammad: “And as for ‘Ád, they were destroyed by a roaring and violent wind.” (Q 69:6)

The second Prophet was Ṣálih of the people of Thámud who were the successors to the culture of ‘Ád. He like HÚD tried to convince the people to stop worshipping idols and to turn their reverence to God. But the people said they could not find in Him the signs of prophethood.³

For over a hundred years He admonished them to hold fast unto the commandments of God and eschew that which is forbidden. His admonitions, however, yielded no fruit, and His pleading proved of no avail. (KI 9-10)

When Ṣálih asked them to attend to a she-camel with a warning that if they did not comply with God’s wish they would be struck with a calamity and seized for a grievous punishment,⁴ they responded:

Those who were haughty said: Surely we are disbelievers in that which you believe.

Then they strung the she camel and revolted against their Lord’s commandment, and said: O Ṣálih, bring us that with which thou threatenest us, if thou art of the messengers.

So the earthquake seized them, and they were motionless bodies in their abodes. (Q 7:76-78)

The question is, how can we recognize Divine Messengers and know for sure that They are Who They say They are? What about signs and proofs of the foregoing Divine Messengers? The inference by the Báb is that They are all equal in Their essence. This concept is unequivocally confirmed by Bahá’u’lláh:

These sanctified Mirrors, these Day-springs of ancient glory are one and all the Exponents on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose. From Him proceed their knowledge and power;

from Him is derived their sovereignty. The beauty of their countenance is but a reflection of His image, and their revelation a sign of His deathless glory. They are the Treasuries of divine knowledge, and the Repositories of celestial wisdom. Through them is transmitted a grace that is infinite, and by them is revealed the attributes of God. (KI 99-100)

Bahá'u'lláh further explains that all Divine Messengers equally embody “light that can never fade.”

They only differ in the intensity of their revelation, and the comparative potency of their light... That a certain attribute of God hath not been outwardly manifested by these Essences of Detachment doth in no wise imply that they Who are the Daysprings of God's attributes and the Treasuries of His holy names did not actually possess it. (KI 103-4)

The eminent Bahá'í scholar Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl states

But of these Manifestations, those who appear later or nearer to the Great ‘Resurrection’ and the Glorious ‘Hour,’ are of a greater brilliancy and splendor, and their proofs and arguments are clearer and stronger, on account of the law of progression.⁵

And regarding their proof, he states that the adherents of religions actually follow four types of proof: (1) Revelation, (2) Logic or Argument, (3) Signs and Miracles and (4) Prophecies and Records.⁶ These actually fall into the categories of proof that ‘Abdu'l-Bahá listed, namely sense perception (signs and miracles), reasoning faculty (logic or argument), traditional or scriptural authority (prophecies and records) and inspiration (revelation).

With these criteria one can easily confirm, even with the limited information available, that the Prophet Founders of the great religions of the past are true Manifestations of God for Their day. Noah, even back to Adam through Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muḥammad and others are so verified.

What about ‘The Great Resurrection’ and ‘the Glorious Hour’ mentioned above? This began with the advent of the Báb in 1844 when He announced that He was the Qá'im that the people of Shí'ih Islam had been waiting for one thousand years. As a Manifestation of God in His own right He also can be readily verified based on extensive knowledge of His life and His Writings.

We come then to Bahá'u'lláh, The World Redeemer, The Prophet of this age. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá begins His treatise on the signs that define a Divine Messenger as they pertain to Bahá'u'lláh:

And among His signs is the appearance of omens and joyous prophecies, of hints and clues, the spreading of many and various tidings, and the anticipations of the righteous, they who have now attained their goal. (SWAB 15)

A profound ‘omen’ emerged when Bahá’u’lláh wrote the Tablet of The Holy Mariner. A deep sense of foreboding gripped a multitude of Bábís and friends at all levels of society just prior to His departure from Baghdád in 1863 after hearing the reading of that tablet. The worst fears expressed in that mysterious tablet came true as Bahá’u’lláh’s exile took Him from Baghdád to Constantinople, Adrianople and finally the prison city of ‘Akká. He and His small band of followers were subjected to a series of extreme tests and difficulties that ultimately ended in remarkable victories for His Cause.⁷

The ‘joyous prophecies’ of Bahá’u’lláh are numerous and they are expressed in tablets of great variety. For example, in the famous Tablet of Carmel He referred to the holy mountain of Carmel as the seat for the Universal House of Justice when He wrote *“Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names.”* (GWB 16) Seventy two years after this utterance the Universal House of Justice was elected in 1963 and now resides in an elegant edifice at the center of an arc of buildings on the face of Mount Carmel. This “Ark”, the highest administrative institution in the Bahá’í world has been endowed by Bahá’u’lláh with “inferred infallibility” which will last until the next Manifestation of God appears. Only as a body in session does this special endowment exist, whereas the nine individual members of the Universal House of Justice do not have personal ‘infallibility’.

The Book of Names (the Kitáb-i-Asmá’) mentioned above was written by the Báb wherein He admonishes His followers to embrace “Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest” and that even His own Bayan should not “keep them from recognizing the Promised One when He should Appear.”⁸

Another example of prophecy by Bahá’u’lláh in a different form was expressed to the first western scholar to make contact with the Bahá’í Faith, distinguished Orientalist Professor E. G. Brown of Cambridge: *“Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the “Most Great Peace” shall come ...”*⁹ By the close of the 20th century this process was in its last stage. In the year 2004 the last hotbeds of war were being resolved and the prospects for a “great war” remain most unlikely. In regard to this there were some astonishing prophetic utterances by Bahá’u’lláh to the rulers of the world that will be noted later.

Clues of Prophet-hood are abundant in Bahá'í literature. They are sprinkled throughout with references to events of Bahá'u'lláh's childhood, and to His ancestry. More clues are related to His character as a young man and to certain miracles attributed to Him though He admonished His followers not to dwell on them.

His ancestry included Abraham through His wife Katurah, through Zoroaster the Divine Messenger of Persian antiquity, through Jesse the forerunner of David and through the last king of the Sasanian dynasty, Yazdigird.¹⁰ His character as a youth was exemplary.

From earliest childhood He was distinguished among His relatives and friends. They said, "This child has extraordinary power. In wisdom, intelligence and as a source of new knowledge, He was advanced beyond His age and superior to His surroundings. All who knew Him were astonished at His precocity..." During the period of youth the Blessed Perfection did not enter school. He was not willing to be taught. This fact is well established among the Persians of Tíhrán. Nevertheless, He was capable of solving the difficult problems of all who came to Him. In whatever meeting, scientific assembly or theological discussion He was found, He became the authority of explanation upon intricate and abstruse questions presented. (PUP 25)

"The anticipations of the righteous" referred to the first teachers who alerted their students to the coming of the Promised One. In Persia they were Shaykh Aḥmad-i-Aḥsá'í and his chosen successor Siyyid Kázim who had accurately anticipated the coming of the Báb prior to His declaration in 1844...¹¹ For ten years a parallel effort actually occurred in the West but from a Christian perspective with the talks given by Reverend Miller and others in the United States who fully expected the return of Christ in 1843. In Germany the Templars¹² who were also disappointed after awaiting "The Great Expectation" sent a group to settle in the Holy Land at the foot of Mount Carmel in 1868, the same year that the Glory of God entered 'Akká in the Holy Land. He was the very one they had been waiting for, though they remained forever blind to His presence.

As to tidings there were many given in various forms by Bahá'u'lláh in His writings but in the Tablet of Bishárát (Glad-Tidings), Bahá'u'lláh specifically lists fifteen elements pertaining to world rebirth. In the first He states that "*the law of holy war hath been blotted out from the Book.*" (TAB 21) Here He is referring to "*the Mother Book*" (Book of Laws) of His "*Most Great Revelation...*" Historically, the Middle East has been plagued with holy wars for fourteen hundred years that were motivated by a lust

for power of corrupt leaders. For similar reasons in medieval times, the West became forever blighted spiritually by the Christian Crusades the only benefit being contact with Islam and its high learning, which reputedly sparked the Renaissance. Priests and monks of the world's great religions have increasingly taken on a militant stance in various regions of the world during the last half century. Even Buddhists have immolated themselves for political reasons on a number of occasions in the far east. It is no wonder then that Bahá'u'lláh "*blotted out*" holy war from "the Book."

His second Glad-Tidings brings the prospect of peace full circle with His admonition "*O people! Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship.*" (TAB 22) Imagine what long reaching consequences this would have for society to exist for the first time in a condition of harmony with complete absence of acrimony. If the great religions claim that their followers are worshiping the one true God then we must all be worshiping the same God yet we seem to hate each other for doing so.

The third Glad-Tidings is concerned with divisiveness resulting from the profusion of various tongues in the world. Bahá'u'lláh resolves this with a formal decree:

It behoveth the sovereigns of the world - may God assist them - or the ministers of the earth to take counsel together and to adopt one of the existing languages or a new one to be taught to children in schools throughout the world, and likewise one script. Thus the whole earth will come to be regarded as one country. (TAB 22)

In another tablet He further insists that we cannot have universal peace until a secondary language finds common usage among all the earths populace.

The fourth Glad-Tidings pertains to the oppressed people of the world:

Should any of the kings - may God aid them - arise to protect and help this oppressed people, all must vie with one another in loving and in serving him. This matter is incumbent upon everyone... (TAB 22)

In this instance kingship is exalted by Bahá'u'lláh for a good king is a rare gift to the world. He has more to say on this later.

The fifth Glad-Tidings puts one's relationship with government into perspective. That is, citizens of every country "*must behave towards the government of that country with loyalty, honesty and truthfulness...*" He then appeals to the people of the world with:

We cherish the hope that through the earnest endeavours of such as are the exponents of the power of God - exalted be His glory - the weapons of war throughout the world may be converted into instruments of reconstruction and that strife and conflict may be removed from the midst of men. (TAB 23)

The sixth Glad-Tidings is “*the establishment of the Lesser Peace.*” The Lesser Peace is a political peace that shall be established in order to eliminate war and to prepare for the Most Great Peace, which will be established upon a spiritual foundation.¹³ When the rulers of the world rejected Bahá'u'lláh's summons He responded: “*Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents.*” (GWB 254) Humanity is currently trying to achieve that goal.

The seventh Glad-Tidings is particularly appropriate for today but with a warning.

The choice of clothing and the cut of the beard and its dressing are left to the discretion of men. But beware, O people, lest ye make yourselves the playthings of the ignorant. (TAB 23)

In other words, vanity is to be avoided.

The eighth Glad-Tidings announces a profound but massive change in the Christian world of religion. Priests and monks are admonished to give up the life of the cloister and to rejoin the world to become productive members of society. Moreover, celibacy is no longer required:

We have granted them leave to enter into wedlock that they may bring forth one who will make mention of God, the Lord of the seen and the unseen, the Lord of the Exalted Throne.” (TAB 24)

The ninth Glad-Tidings declares that confession belongs to God alone and that the humiliation and abasement resulting from confessing to another individual is not to be suffered by His servants for

Confession of sins and transgressions before human beings is not permissible, as it hath never been nor will ever be conducive to divine forgiveness... When the sinner findeth himself wholly detached and freed from all save God, he should beg forgiveness and pardon from Him. (TAB 24)

Bahá'u'lláh then revealed a prayer about forgiveness for the sinner to recite. Following is the first paragraph of that prayer:

O God, my God! I implore Thee by the blood of Thy true lovers who were so enraptured by Thy sweet utterance that they hastened unto the Pinnacle of Glory, the site of the most glorious martyrdom, and I beseech Thee by the mysteries which lie enshrined in Thy knowledge and by the pearls that are treasured in the ocean of Thy bounty to grant forgiveness unto me and unto my father and my mother. Of those who show forth mercy, Thou art in truth the Most Merciful. No God is there but Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the All-Bountiful... (TAB 24-5)

The remaining paragraphs express humility and remorse on the part of the sinner. And an intense appeal is made for permission to approach the “Court of Thy holiness” with the appeal for mercy and grace. No suggestion is made for one to stand before another and ask forgiveness.

The tenth Glad-Tidings pertains to book burning, a phenomenon that is very old. Indeed the first library to develop a ‘book’ concept became the first victim of this disparaging practice. The Library of Alexandria, “the most famous library of classical antiquity” was established by Ptolemy after the conquest of Egypt in 332 B.C by his leader Alexander The Great, and was managed by a president-priest. A “daughter library” was later established in the Temple of Sarapis by Ptolemy III. The great library actually survived a fire set in Alexandria in 47 BC by Julius Caesar but was destroyed in a civil war in the late 3rd century CE. Later, Christians destroyed the “daughter library” in 391 CE. In modern times the Nazis of the Third Reich had massive public burning of books that expressed any religious or political thoughts that would even slightly infer disagreement with Nazi philosophy during Hitler’s rise to power. To all this Bahá’u’lláh states:

As a token of grace from God, the Revealer of this Most Great Announcement, We have removed from the Holy Scriptures and Tablets the law prescribing the destruction of books. (TAB 25)

The eleventh Glad-Tidings resolves the long lasting conflicts between science and religion: “It is permissible to study sciences and arts, but such sciences as are useful and would redound to the progress and advancement of the people...” In another place He carries it one step farther by emphasizing that we must have harmony between science and religion. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

The highest Praise is due to men who devote their energies to science, and the noblest center is a center wherein the sciences and arts are taught and studied... (PUP 348)

The twelfth Glad-Tidings gives new meaning to human enterprise:

It is enjoined upon every one of you to engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like. We have graciously exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship unto God, the True One... Waste not your time in idleness and sloth. Occupy yourselves with that which profiteth yourselves and others... The most despised of men in the sight of God are those who sit idly and beg. Hold ye fast unto the cord of material means, placing your whole trust in God, the Provider of all means... (TAB 26)

The thirteenth Glad-Tidings cannot be overemphasized.

The men of God's House of Justice have been charged with the affairs of the people. They, in truth, are the Trustees of God among His servants and the daysprings of authority in His countries.

O people of God! That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the sources of life to the world. Inasmuch as for each day there is a new problem and for every problem an expedient solution, such affairs should be referred to the Ministers of the House of Justice that they may act according to the needs and requirements of the time... (TAB 26-7)

He further states that all should be obedient to them but that worship should be observed according to His Book.

Integral to this Glad-Tiding is a strong admonition against backbiting with this corollary:

O people of Bahá! Ye are the dawning-places of the love of God and the daysprings of His loving-kindness. Defile not your tongues with the cursing and reviling of any soul, and guard your eyes against that which is not seemly. Set forth that which ye possess. If it be favourably received, your end is attained; if not, to protest is vain. Leave that soul to himself and turn unto the Lord, the Protector, the Self-Subsisting. Be not the cause of grief, much less of discord and strife. The hope is cherished that ye may obtain true education in the shelter of the tree of His tender mercies and act in accordance with that which God desireth. Ye are all the leaves of one tree and the drops of one ocean. (TAB 27)

The fourteenth Glad-Tidings relieves one of a costly duty.

It is not necessary to undertake special journeys to visit the resting-places of the dead. If people of substance and affluence offer the cost of such journeys to the House of Justice, it will be pleasing and acceptable in the presence of God. Happy are they that observe His precepts. (TAB 27-8)

The fifteenth Glad-Tidings offers clues to the future world order.

Although a republican form of government profiteth all the peoples of the world, yet the majesty of kingship is one of the signs of God. We do not wish that the countries of the world should remain deprived thereof. If the sagacious combine the two forms into one, great will be their reward in the presence of God ... (TAB 28)

Bahá'u'lláh made further mention of kingship in a different light with respect to the maturity of man.

One of the signs of the maturity of the world is that no one will accept to bear the weight of kingship. Kingship will remain with none willing to bear alone its weight. That day will be the day whereon wisdom will be manifested among mankind. (KA notes 250-2)

But until that time, under the right circumstances, kingship can be a bounty according to Bahá'u'lláh's earlier reference.

Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave credence to His splendors:

And among His signs are His splendours, rising above the horizon of oneness, His lights streaming out from the dayspring of might, and the announcement of the Most Great Glad-Tidings by His Herald, the One, the Incomparable. Verily in this is a brilliant proof for the company of those who know. (SWAB 15)

The horizon of oneness signifies the realm of the one true God from whence all creation emanates. It also characterizes the stations of Divine Manifestations of God as being the same. Bahá'u'lláh, the Daystar of this age, is often compared to the Sun of our solar system with its life sustaining radiance. His splendors stream out as spiritual soul sustaining radiance with omnipotent power. The Herald of course is the Báb, the 'Primal Point' who announced the coming of One greater than Himself.

Among His signs is His being manifest, being seen by all, standing as His own proof, and His presence among witnesses in every region, among peoples who fell upon Him even as wolves, and compassed Him about from every side. (SWAB 15)

Long before the Báb's declaration, Bahá'u'lláh became known as the "The Father of the Poor" and His young wife Ásiyih Khánum was called "The Mother of Consolation" due to their constant assistance given by them to the downtrodden of Ṭíhrán.¹⁵ Later He became the great pillar of strength to the Bábís when the Báb was incarcerated. From that time forward He was the center of concern to the Persian and Ottoman leadership. In spite of their continuous persecution of Him and His company, at no time did He compromise one iota of His message to the people for the remainder of His earthly life.

There were no hidden agendas in the life of Bahá'u'lláh and the holy ones that accompanied Him. Those in His presence were often overwhelmed by His spiritual majesty and those with evil intent that rose to challenge Him sank into quiet submission without uttering a word. The highest authorities could not squelch His spirit, they actually increased the fire of His rhetoric and ultimately lost their purpose.

Among His signs is His withstanding powerful nations and all-conquering states, and a host of enemies thirsting for His blood, intent at every moment upon His ruin, wheresoever He might be. Verily this is a matter deserving the scrutiny of those who ponder the signs and tokens of God. (SWAB 15)

In 1853 Bahá'u'lláh emerged from the Black Pit of Ṭíhrán in such a state of physical degeneration that He was almost unrecognizable. Nine year old 'Abdu'l-Bahá fainted upon seeing His Father in such a condition.¹⁶ That was the beginning of a forty-year exile initiated by The Sháh of Iran. He and His small band of family and followers were ordered to Baghdád, a journey of extreme hardship, as they had to walk without proper clothing through the icy passes of the Zagros Mountains in the dead of winter. The authorities thought that He would expire and be gone forever. Instead His majestic influence not only reunited the bedraggled Bábí community, it also brought great respect from the authorities in Baghdád. Far worse for Him was the insidious disruption caused by the covenant breakers led by Mírzá Yahyá and Siyyid Muḥammad.

In 1863, out of fear for His growing influence, the Sultán of Turkey sent Bahá'u'lláh across the desert and mountains of northern Iraq, thence by ship to Constantinople. Less than a year later He was sent to Adrianople and in 1868 by sea to "The Most Great Prison" of 'Akká. With respect to these journeys Bahá'u'lláh fulfilled one of the numerous prophecies of past holy books that are distinctly related to Him.

In that day also he shall come even to thee from Assyria, and from the fortified cities, and from the fortress even to the river, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain. (Micah 7:15)

The duration of His earthly ministry, forty years, is also given.

According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvelous things. (Micah 7:15)

Another of His signs is the marvel of His discourse, the eloquence of His utterance, the rapidity with which His Writings were revealed, His words of wisdom, His verses, His epistles, His communes, His unfolding of the Qur'an, both the abstruse verses thereof and the clear. By thy very life! This thing is plain as day to whoever will regard it with the eye of justice. (SWAB 15)

The marvel of His discourse and the eloquence of His Utterance is self evident. One has only to read a few lines of His writings to readily see the truth of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement.

The rapidity of His writings were witnessed by His own amanuenses, the ones doing the actual writing from Bahá'u'lláh's dictation. At times He would have as many as six secretaries writing simultaneously.

His words of wisdom are contained in the hundred tablets or books that He wrote and dictated, the Most Holy Book being the Kitáb-i-Aqdas (Book of Laws). One of the most informative books on religion, the Kitáb-i-Íqán (Book of Certitude) was written by Bahá'u'lláh in the incredible span of forty-eight hours.

Again among His signs is the dawning sun of His knowledge, and the rising moon of His arts and skills, and His demonstrating perfection in all His ways, as testified by the learned and accomplished of many nations. (SWAB 15)

His knowledge was innate and extensive beyond human understanding. With no formal education He confounded His elders as a youth.

O King! I was but a man like others, asleep upon My couch, when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been. This thing is not from Me, but from One Who is Almighty and All-Knowing. And He bade Me lift up My voice between earth and heaven, and for this there befell Me what hath caused the tears of every man of understanding to flow. The learning current amongst men I studied not; their schools I entered not. Ask of the city

wherein I dwelt, that thou mayest be well assured that I am not of them who speak falsely. This is but a leaf which the winds of the will of thy Lord, the Almighty, the All-Praised, have stirred. Can it be still when the tempestuous winds are blowing? Nay, by Him Who is the Lord of all Names and Attributes! They move it as they list. The evanescent is as nothing before Him Who is the Ever-Abiding. His all-compelling summons hath reached Me, and caused Me to speak His praise amidst all people. I was indeed as one dead when His behest was uttered. The hand of the will of thy Lord, the Compassionate, the Merciful, transformed Me. (ESW 11-12)

And from 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Briefly, all His adversaries in the Orient acknowledged His greatness, grandeur, knowledge and virtue; and though they were His enemies, they always spoke of Him as 'the renowned Bahá'u'lláh.' (SAQ 35)

And again among His signs is the fact that His beauty stayed inviolate, and His human temple was protected as He revealed His splendours, despite the massed attacks of all His foes, who came against Him in their thousands with their darting arrows, spears and swords. Herein is verily a wonder and a warning to any fair judge. (SWAB 15-16)

The fact that Bahá'u'lláh survived the S^íyáh-Ch^ál had to be a miracle of Divine intervention. The same can be said about His trek to Baghdád and to the other journeys in exile. He was not only fraught with the persecutions to His Faith and His being; He also faced constant threats from the seditious acts of the covenant breakers. He was actually poisoned by Mírzá Yaḥyá yet survived to fulfill the mission that God had given Him. Even near the end of His life His Doctor was awed by the steady rhythm of His heart.

His 'human temple' was mysteriously protected at every juncture beginning with the early uprisings against the Bábís. The defenders at Fort Tabarsi were in imminent danger and needed all the help they could get.

Bahá'u'lláh's intention to throw in His lot with the defenders of the fort of Shaykh Ṭabarsí was destined to remain unfulfilled. Though Himself extremely desirous to lend every possible assistance in His power to the besieged, He was spared, through the mysterious dispensation of Providence, the tragic fate that was soon to befall the chief participators in that memorable struggle. Had He been able to reach the fort, had He been allowed to join the members of that heroic band, how could He have played His part in the great drama which He was destined to unfold? How could He have consummated

the work that had been so gloriously conceived and so marvelously inaugurated? He was in the heyday of His life when the call from Shíráz reached Him. At the age of twenty-seven, He arose to consecrate His life to its service, fearlessly identified Himself with its teachings, and distinguished Himself by the exemplary part He played in its diffusion. No effort was too great for the energy with which He was endowed, and no sacrifice too woeful for the devotion with which His faith had inspired Him. He flung aside every consideration of fame, of wealth, and position, for the prosecution of the task He had set His heart to achieve. Neither the taunts of His friends nor the threats of His enemies could induce Him to cease championing a Cause which they alike regarded as that of an obscure and proscribed sect.¹⁷

His real beauty on the other hand is manifest through the constant, steadfast outpouring of His Revelation to a hostile world in spite of the difficulties that were heaped upon Him. It is through His writings that His splendors streams forth.

And among His signs is His long-suffering, His tribulations and His woes, His agony in His chains and fetters, and His calling out at every moment: 'Come unto Me, come unto Me, ye righteous! Come unto Me, come unto Me, ye lovers of the good! Come unto Me, come unto Me, ye dawning points of light!' Verily the gates of mystery are opened wide - but still do the wicked disport themselves with their vain cavillings! (Q 6:91, 52:12) (SWAB 16)

From the moment that Bahá'u'lláh was thrown into the Black Pit of Tíhrán until His last days on earth, a period of forty years, He was tormented by enemies from without and from within the Faith that He founded. Even before His incarceration in the Síyáh-Chál He was subjected to cruel indignities at the hands of His captors. The events of the nineteen years that followed were so difficult, so dramatic that He wrote the famous Fire Tablet in which He poured out the heartache that wrenched His soul. Yet it was not for Himself that He lamented. It was always for the friends, the lost souls of the world and even His worst enemies that He offered the healing balm of the love of God if only they would open their spiritual eyes to see its radiance and the hope for the next world.

Yet another of His signs is the promulgation of His Book, His decisive Holy Text wherein He reproved the kings, and His dire warning to that one (Napoleon III) whose mighty rule was felt around the world – and whose great throne then toppled down in a matter of brief days – this being a fact clearly established and widely known. (SWAB 16)

Historical Confirmation

His Book of Laws, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, sometimes called 'The Crimson Book,' is the most essential of all His writings. It contains the blueprint for the unification of man and the future world order. Its potential impact extends for a thousand years in the life of the planet and with it will come The Most Great Peace.

Brief mention has already been made about prophecies of Bahá'u'lláh that have been fulfilled or are in the process of being fulfilled. From this juncture verification can be made by witnesses or by historical records on the remaining content of this paper.

The most audacious of Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic warnings were the letters to the leaders and divines of the world in the late 1860's. The colonial powers of Europe ruled the world in the middle of the 19th century such that their bickering, machinations, political intrigue and warlike tendencies impacted everyone else in the world. In the Middle East the Ottoman Empire and its vassal Persia had reached the lowest level in their long histories as a result of endless corruption. This was compounded by the corruption of the religious leaders in Christendom and in Islam. Bahá'u'lláh addressed the most powerful leaders of these domains and brought them to task for the grave error of their ways with warnings that they would be met with utter failure if they did not obey the commands of God given through His Messenger. One by one they received their summons, Napoleon III, Pope Pius IX, Czar Alexander II, Queen Victoria, the Sulṭán of Turkey and other Ministers then one by one, with the exception of the Queen, each rejected the claim and admonitions of Bahá'u'lláh with disastrous results. Each of them lost their power and died in ignominy. By virtue of Queen Victoria's response, the Monarchy of Britain is the only one remaining to this day.¹⁸

Perhaps the most pathetic was Pope Pius IX. A few abbreviated statements from Bahá'u'lláh's declaration are as follows:

O Pope! Rend the veils asunder. He Who is the Lord of Lords is come overshadowed with clouds, and the decree hath been fulfilled by God, the Almighty, the Unrestrained... Beware that thou dispute not with Him even as the Pharisees disputed with Him (Jesus) without a clear token or proof... Leave now the world behind thee, and turn towards thy lord, through Whom the whole earth hath been illumined. (SLH 54-5)

The Pope rejected the call of Bahá'u'lláh and instead, declared Papal Infallibility in 1869. A few months later the consequences that Bahá'u'lláh warned him about followed quickly.

On September 20, 1870, Italian troops occupied Rome, and in October a plebiscite was held in which an overwhelming majority of the votes cast were for the incorporation of Rome in the kingdom of Italy. Pius remained for the rest of his days a prisoner, as he regarded himself, in the Vatican... In the rest of Italy, church and state were to be separated...¹⁹

And among His signs is the sublimity of His grandeur, His exalted state, His towering glory, and the shining out of His beauty above the horizon of the Prison: so that heads were bowed before Him and voices lowered, and humble were the faces that turned His way. This is a proof never witnessed in the ages gone before. (SWAB 16)

Wherever Bahá'u'lláh was forced to go He would sway not only the people but the highest authorities in that region. 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains:

Only through the honor of entering His presence, many souls became confirmed believers; they had no need of other proofs. Even those people, who rejected and hated Him bitterly, when they had met Him, would testify to the grandeur of Baha'u'llah, saying, "This is a magnificent man, but what a pity that he makes such a claim! Otherwise, all that he says is acceptable..." (SAQ 36)

The Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh are many. The precepts and teachings they contain are universal, covering every subject. He has revealed scientific explanations ranging throughout all the realms of human inquiry and investigation - astronomy, biology, medical science, etc. In the Kitáb-i-Íqán He has given expositions of the meanings of the Gospel and other heavenly Books. He wrote lengthy Tablets upon civilization, sociology and government. Every subject is considered. His Tablets are matchless in beauty and profundity. Even His enemies acknowledge the greatness of Bahá'u'lláh, saying He was the miracle of humanity. This was their confession although they did not believe in Him. He was eulogized by Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians and Muslims who denied His claim. They frequently said, "He is matchless, unique." A Christian poet in the Orient wrote, "I do not believe him a manifestation of God, yet his miracles are as great as the sun. (PUP 155)

Again among His signs are the extraordinary things He continually did, the miracles He performed, the wonders appearing from Him without interruption like the streaming down of His clouds - and the acknowledgement,

even by unbelievers, of His powerful light. By His own life! This was clearly verified, it was demonstrated to those of every persuasion who came into the presence of the living, the self-subsisting Lord. (SWAB 16)

The many miracles attributed to Bahá'u'lláh that were witnessed by those in His presence were minimized by Him as being important only to those events of the time. Once Bahá'u'lláh was challenged to perform a miracle for a group of religious leaders in spite of their acceptance that He had no peer in learning. Bahá'u'lláh replied that they had no right to ask this for only God can test His creatures not the opposite. He consented with the understanding that it would not be considered a theatrical display.

The 'ulamás must, therefore, assemble, and, with one accord, choose one miracle, and write that, after the performance of this miracle they will no longer entertain doubts about Me, and that all will acknowledge and confess the truth of My Cause. Let them seal this paper, and bring it to Me. This must be the accepted criterion: if the miracle is performed, no doubt will remain for them; and if not, We shall be convicted of imposture. (SWAB 35)

Thirty 'ulamás consulted and decided that Bahá'u'lláh would probably defeat them with an enchantment so they did not dare to push the matter further. Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

At the time when this great Light suddenly arose upon the horizon of Persia, all the people, the ministers, the 'ulamá and men of other classes rose against Him, pursuing Him with the greatest animosity, and proclaiming "that this man wishes to suppress and destroy the religion, the law, the nation and the empire." The same was said of Christ. But Bahá'u'lláh alone and without support resisted them all, without ever showing the least weakness. At last they said, "As long as this man is in Persia, there will be no peace and tranquility; we must banish him, so that Persia may return to a state of quietude. (SWAB 27)

And yet another of His signs is the wide-spreading rays of the sun of His era, the rising moon of His times in the heaven of all the ages: His day, which standeth at the summit of all days, for its rank and power, its sciences and its arts, reaching far and wide, that have dazzled the world and astonished the minds of men.

Verily is this a matter settled and established for all time. (SWAB 17)

Conclusion

The emergence of the Bahá'í era with the declaration of the Báb in 1844 coincided with "The Great Expectation" but quickly changed to "The Great Disappointment" when religionists were unable to recognize the Promised One. But remarkable things occurred in the world beginning with that date. Knowledge exploded and the second industrial revolution began to accelerate and continues to father generations of higher technological revolutions (Air Age, Electronics, Telecommunications, Computer age, Space Age, Medical Breakthroughs etc.) Today many of the principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh have been adopted such as equality of men and women, universal standards, universal education, elimination of racism and an emerging secondary universal language, perhaps English. There are many more but the most important is the unity of humankind under a world assemblage.

A new cycle was born with the Báb and when Bahá'u'lláh revealed Who He was, the very dust of the earth took on new life. A radiance of spiritual and physical bounty was showered upon the world of man and remains in its plenitude in our own time. For this is the day not followed by night, the Day of God and, though the general public is not yet aware of it, we now have the great privilege of participating in its early stages.

NOTES

¹ GPB 100.

² Taherzadeh: *Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh* Volume IV, 425.

³ Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh IV, 426

⁴ Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh IV, 426.

⁵ Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl: *The Bahá'í Proofs*, 158.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ GPB 147.

⁸ *Bahá'í Dictionary*, 133.

⁹ Bahá'u'lláh, quoted in *Selections from the Writings of E. G. Browne*, Browne's interview with Bahá'u'lláh (pre-introduction).

¹⁰ GPB 94.

¹¹ DB, 1.

¹² *Bahá'í Dictionary*, 223.1

¹³ *Bahá'í Dictionary*, 174.

¹⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 2001, Alexandria, Library of.

¹⁵ Bahá'u'lláh: *Call to Remembrance*, 9.

¹⁶ 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in SW Sep. 1914-Mar. 1917, Vol. VII, No. 4, page 32.

¹⁷ DB, 376.

¹⁸ GPB, 211.

¹⁹ Encyclopedia Britannica 2001, CD-ROM, *The Roman Question*.