

Preface

Bahá'u'lláh

Original English



Preface

“At one time We spoke in the language of the lawgiver”, Bahá'u'lláh writes in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, “at another in that of the truth-seeker and the mystic”.¹ The present volume brings together a selection of His Tablets which were revealed in the language of the mystic. Some are widely known; others are published here for the first time in English translation.

Although most of the Tablets in this collection were revealed during Bahá'u'lláh's sojourn in 'Iráq (1853–1863), the first, the poem known as “Raṣḥ-i-'Amá”, was written in 1852 in the Síyáh-Ḥál and is among the few He revealed while in His native land of Persia, and in verse. Bahá'u'lláh recounts: “During the days I lay in the prison of Ṭihrán, though the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result, be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear.”² The poetic reflection of that experience, as conveyed in Raṣḥ-i-'Amá, can perhaps never be adequately rendered into another language, yet the present translation is an initial attempt to impart a glimpse of its power and momentous themes.

¹ Epistle to the Son of the Wolf (trans. Shoghi Effendi, Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), p. 15.

² Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, p. 22.



ORIGINAL



AUDIO

In 'Iráq, during the two years Bahá'u'lláh sought seclusion in the mountains of Kurdistán, far from the malice and dissension that had blighted the Bábí community in Baghdád, word of His presence in Sulaymáníyyih attracted religious scholars and mystics of the region, including several prominent Şúfí shaykhs, to seek out the One Who dwelt as a humble dervish yet evinced a wisdom that was profound and a power of expression unequalled: "Through His numerous discourses and epistles", Shoghi Effendi writes, "He disclosed new vistas to their eyes, resolved the perplexities that agitated their minds, unfolded the inner meaning of many hitherto obscure passages in the writings of various commentators, poets and theologians ... 'In a short time,' is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own testimony, 'Kurdistán was magnetized with His love. During this period Bahá'u'lláh lived in poverty. His garments were those of the poor and needy. His food was that of the indigent and lowly. An atmosphere of majesty haloed Him as the sun at midday. Everywhere He was greatly revered and loved.'"³

When Bahá'u'lláh returned to Baghdád, His Kurdish admirers followed. The sight of 'ulamá and Şúfí shaykhs flocking to visit Bahá'u'lláh astonished the religious leaders of the city, who also began to seek His presence — and became enthralled. Their esteem for Him in turn attracted others, from poets and mystics to government officials, and further spread His fame.

This period, Shoghi Effendi tells us, saw an "enormous expansion in the scope and volume of Bahá'u'lláh's writings ... The verses that streamed during those years from His pen, described as 'a copious rain' by Himself, whether in the form of epistles, exhortations, commentaries, apologies, dissertations, prophecies, prayers, odes or specific Tablets" revived and transformed the Bábí community. It was a period so prolific that, on average, the unrecorded verses He would reveal in a single day and night equalled in number those of the Qur'án. "As to those verses which He either dictated or wrote Himself, their number was no less remarkable than either the wealth of material they contained, or the diversity of subjects to which they referred."⁴

Among the "priceless treasures cast forth from the billowing ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation" in those days is Bahá'u'lláh's "greatest mystical composition", the Seven Valleys, which "describes

³ God Passes By (Wilmette, IL: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1974, 2018 printing), pp. 192–93.

⁴ God Passes By, p. 216.

the seven stages which the soul of the seeker must needs traverse ere it can attain the object of its existence.”⁵ Writing years later in ‘Akká, He explained:

This treatise was revealed in the language of the people, in the days prior to Our Declaration. The occasion for its revelation was the receipt of a letter addressed to the Most Holy Court in ‘Iráq from a man of Sunní persuasion, who was both a scholar and a mystic. This treatise was therefore revealed, in accordance with divine wisdom, in the manner that was current amongst the people. However, in this day, every soul who hath fixed his gaze upon the Supreme Horizon, and hath recognized the one true God, hath verily attained unto every one of the seven valleys or seven stations mentioned therein.⁶

Like the twelfth-century poem by ‘Aṭṭár, *Mantiqú’ṭ-Ṭayr* (The Conference of the Birds), the Seven Valleys describes a journey through seven stations in quest of the Divine. However, the quest in the Seven Valleys is also one undertaken in a context defined by the imminent dawning of the new Revelation — and indeed the presence of the Beloved Himself.

That the mystic journey cannot be reduced to a fixed scheme, nor the search for the Divine Beloved to a series of discrete stages, is highlighted in a number of other Tablets, four of which are included here. The volume closes with the Four Valleys, an epistle addressed to one of Bahá’u’lláh’s devoted admirers from Kurdistán. Rather than describing a progression through stages, it elaborates four different paths of approach to the Divine.

The current renderings of the Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys are based on the translations by Marzieh Gail, in consultation with ‘Alí-Kuli K̄hán, published in 1945. While those earlier translations contain many exquisite, inspired passages, some changes were required for clarity and accuracy.

May the publication of this volume contribute to a deeper appreciation of the mystical dimensions of Bahá’u’lláh’s Message and inspire a greater zeal and fervour in raising the celestial call of the Divine Beloved: “For whereas in days past every lover besought and searched after his

⁵ *God Passes By*, pp. 217 and 220.

⁶ From a previously untranslated Tablet.

Beloved, it is the Beloved Himself Who now is calling His lovers and is inviting them to attain His presence.”⁷

⁷ Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, CLI.