

Three Other Tablets

Bahá'u'lláh

Original English



Three Other Tablets

4

In the name of our Lord, the Most Exalted, the Most High!

O friend! Many a day hath passed, and still the sweet fragrance of thy faithfulness hath failed to reach Us. Hast thou forgotten the One Who forgetteth thee not, and forsaketh thee not, and neglecteth thee not, even as thou hast forgotten, forsaken, and neglected Him?

We have heard that sorrows have compassed thee round in these days. Thy sorrow hath grieved Us, and that which hath befallen thee hath touched Us with bitter pain and anguish. But at this moment, O friend, the Herald of eternity announceth unto thee, by the robe of faithfulness, His joyful tidings and bestoweth upon thee this emerald-green Tablet. Set out, then, from thine abode, take thou seven steps upon the earth, and with each step complete a stage of the journey.

With the first, enter the ocean of search and seek God, thy Lord, with thine inmost heart and soul.

With the second, enter the ocean of love and make mention of God, thy Lord, in the transports of thy longing and the ecstasies of thy rapture.



ORIGINAL



AUDIO

With the third, tread the paths of detachment; that is, sever thyself from thine idle fancies and walk in the ways of thy Lord.

With the fourth, enter the fathomless depths of oneness and the billowing seas of eternity. Cover thy face in the dust before the Lord of Lords, and sanctify thy self and thy spirit from all departure and return, that thine inmost heart may be freed from all things in the kingdoms of creation.

With the fifth, ascend unto the heaven of wonderment, that thou mayest taste the goodly fruits of this blessed realm, lose thyself in bewilderment before the power of thy Beloved and the dominion of thy Creator, and proclaim that which the King of existence and the Goal of all desire hath proclaimed: "Increase my wonder and amazement at Thee, O God!"¹

With the sixth, soar upon the wings of submission and contentment unto the cities of the Unseen, that thou mayest enter the expanses of utter nothingness wherein thou shalt die to thy self and live in Him Who hath fashioned thee.

With the seventh, drown thyself in the depths of eternity, that death may not overtake thee, and that thou mayest abide forever in the shadow of the everlasting Face of God. Thereupon shall the fragrance of the All-Glorious be diffused from the realm of the All-Merciful, and thy heart shall grieve no more over the vicissitudes of a fleeting life and the turns of a transient fortune.

When once thou hast privily completed these journeys, place this robe upon thy sightless eyes, that the eye of thine inmost heart may be opened. By God, O My friend! Wert thou to attain unto this station, thou wouldst find wondrous worlds; discover heavenly bowers, celestial gardens, and transcendent realms; and unravel the secrets of the progress of the souls of men through the atmosphere of eternal holiness and the heavens of imperishable glory. Thou wouldst so rejoice within thy soul as to cause the signs of joy and gladness to appear throughout the whole earth. Thereafter, sorrow would never again hold sway over thee, nor would grief ever seize thee in its grasp, for thou wouldst abide in the heaven of holiness amidst the concourse of the blissful.

¹ From a Ḥadīth.

Know thou, moreover, that in the sight of God thou holdest a lofty rank and an exalted station. Remove not thyself from the company of His servants; rather do thou gather them together in the Cause of God and admonish them in His days. Rely upon God in all thine affairs. He, verily, shall suffice thee in all things, shall protect thee from the followers of the Evil One, and shall cause thee to enter the everlasting Paradise, wherein thou shalt be numbered with the blessed. Convey, then, Our greetings unto those who follow thee in the Cause of thy Lord, and summon them unto the Straight Path.

5

In the name of the peerless and ever-loving Lord!

O Shams! Hearken with all thy heart unto the nightingale song of the Beloved, that perchance thou mayest abandon the habitation of self and desire and step into the placeless realm of eternal glory, forsake thine own life, and commune with Him Who is the life of thy life. Wert thou to traverse the limitless reaches of the spirit, thou wouldst of a certainty rend asunder the garment of patience and forbearance, hasten to offer up thy soul, renounce the dross of this fleeting world, and find repose upon the throne of ancient glory.

Each thing must needs have an effect and each sign reveal a secret. Not until the world-illuminating sun hath shone can the east be distinguished from the west, nor the blooming garden discerned from the barren waste. Heavenly strains compare not with earthly clamours, and the croaking of the raven can in no wise be confounded with the song of the nightingale. For the latter bespeaketh the land of the Beloved and increaseth life, whereas the former telleth only of the city of the blind and causeth faith to wither.

One must step forth and raise aloft the banner of earnest striving. By God! Wert thou to hearken unto the heavenly words of this evanescent Servant that have been raised in this mystic Tablet, thou wouldst assuredly take to the desert of self-surrender, turn aside from thine own heart and soul, and cast thy head at the feet of the Friend. How high is the soaring flight of the phoenix of love, and how low the requisite measure of our yearning! Strive but a little to soar, that, by the grace of Him Who is the eternal King, thou mayest ascend from the dust-heap of utter non-

existence unto the loftiest heights of ancient glory. Give wings to thy celestial spirit and lend strength to thy mystic soul, that haply it may take flight in the atmosphere of divine nearness and attain the ultimate and invisible goal.

This profitless world produceth naught save deadly poison, and its ephemeral dregs can never yield the everlasting cup. Were the Jesus of the spirit to give ear to the call of holiness from the Falcon of the realm above, He would assuredly cry out from His inmost being and be seized with fervid longing even as the lover's soul. It is through that call that the Moses of eternity was dumbfounded; it is by its virtue that the Abraham of faithfulness shattered the idol of the mortal body. Shatter then, in turn, this idol, that thou mayest take up thine abode in the land of the Beloved; and forsake all desire, that thou mayest take flight unto the Egypt of imperishable glory. Sanctify the city of thine heart, that thou mayest behold the beauty of the Divine Essence and be quickened to a new life through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

No melody remaineth that was not intoned upon this branch; no song remaineth that this Nightingale hath not warbled. A thousand Arabian ears are powerless to fathom this Persian lament — nay, none but an embodiment of divine virtues can grasp this subtle mystery. Well it is, then, with the one who attaineth this ocean and drinketh therefrom the draught of life!

6

O thou lion-hearted soul,
Even as a lion roar,
That thy roaring may perchance
To the seventh heaven soar!²

Praise be to Him Whose Essence is immeasurably exalted above the strivings of human hearts, however pure, to soar into the atmosphere of His nearness, and Whose Being is immensely sanctified beyond the exertions of human minds, however lofty, to ascend unto the heaven of His presence. From time immemorial He hath been exalted above the description of aught save Himself, and He will forever continue to be sanctified beyond the praise of all created things. The

² Rûmî.

hearts of them that have recognized Him are sore perplexed before the tokens of His everlasting handiwork, and the minds of them that have attained His court are bewildered by the wondrous evidences of the Revealers of His oneness. He, verily, is the All-Possessing, the Almighty, the Most Glorious, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

O friend! Thine epistle was received. It told of naught save the fire which hath been kindled in the tree of human reality, and bore no message but that which bestoweth a new life upon enlightened hearts. Well is it with him that hath been set ablaze by the fire of thy love, and who hath quaffed the water of life from the cup of thine affection. "The righteous shall drink of a cup tempered at the camphor fountain."³

To continue: Thy letter, which was a repository of the pearls of celestial knowledge, was brought before this Exile. God be praised, it rolled up the scrolls of separation and remoteness and spread out in their stead the realms of nearness and reunion. Methinks through the water of thy longing the fire of separation was changed into "coolness and safety".⁴ In truth, a perfect meeting was attained through thy letter, and, through thy mention of the stations of Divine Unity and the signs of pure abstraction and oneness, it lifted from the world the veils of limitation. And this, notwithstanding that even the limitations of the world of existence are praised and cherished by the wayfarer, for he seeth all things in the mirror of the verse "No defect canst thou see in the creation of the God of mercy", and at every moment he heareth with his inner ear the tongue of the Holy Spirit uttering the words "Seest thou a single flaw?"⁵ In faithlessness he beholdeth the secret of fidelity, and in deadly poison he tasteth the sweetest honey. Even vengeance is embraced in this state; nay more, the true lover welcometh the betrayal of the beloved.

Thy faithlessness I cherish more
Than every gift that life can give.

³ Qur'án 76:5.

⁴ Qur'án 21:69.

⁵ Qur'án 67:3.

To suffer at thy vengeful hand —
How much dearer than to live!⁶

Thus do the wayfarers in the wilderness of solitude and search experience events and conditions which, though to outward seeming be a mortal poison, are inwardly a wholesome draught, and though in appearance a passing mirage, are in reality pure and refreshing waters. Were I to attempt a full description of this station, neither could I express it nor the hearer grasp it. And whoso observeth with the eye of innate knowledge will confess, openly as well as privily, the selfsame truth.

As to perceived differences, these can be attributed to the divers stations that have been attained by them that tread the path of search and mystic knowledge. Thus, at one time the wayfarer beholdeth the lover hastening in search of the beloved through the wilderness of desolation, and at another he seeth the beloved yearning for the lover across the wilds of longing and devotion, or wandering, aimless and bewildered, the wastes of love in his pursuit.

“O for a drop to drink!” the thirsty soul doth groan;
“O for a thirsty soul!” the spring in turn doth moan.⁷

From yet another vantage he perceiveth that the lover and the beloved are one and the same, and that the seeker is himself the very object of his search. “How can the lover from the loved one ever part?”⁸ So it is that, at times, the lovers of the celestial Beauty sound the clarion of “Say: All things are of God”, while, at others, they raise the call of “It is from thyself.”⁹

Some have related the aforementioned stages to the inner and outer journeys of the soul, which is the station of “the knowledge of certitude”, whilst others that have quaffed the wine of

⁶ Rûmî.

⁷ Rûmî.

⁸ Rûmî.

⁹ Qur’ân 4:78–79.

reunion regard each and every stage as relating to that knowledge, and consider the two stations of “the eye of certitude” and “the truth of certitude” as being exalted above and sanctified beyond these realms and all that pertaineth unto them, even as hath been clearly affirmed by that mystic knower.¹⁰ For in all these stages the mirror of the wayfarer’s heart may bear the reflection of shadowy desires, wayward thoughts, and worldly attachments. Wherefore hath it been said that, in these stations, at one time the hosts of reason are triumphant and, at another, the armies of love prevail. At one time, the clouds of affliction and sorrow conceal the heavens of gladness and joy; at another, the eternal leviathan of love devoureth, in one fleeting moment, all manifestations of sadness, anguish, grief, and dejection, and the morn of divine guidance dawneth forth with the joyful tidings of “despair not of God’s mercy”,¹¹ and the gentle breezes of His providence dispel every vestige of torpor and estrangement. These tidings, however, are not constant and immutable in these stations, and the wayfarer remaineth confined between the right hand of faith and assurance and the left hand of denial and despair.

Some wayfarers remain forever veiled in these stages. Others are assisted by invisible aid from the Source of unfailing grace, whereat the hosts of the Realm on high raise the tabernacle of divine power, and the ascendancy of “and verily Our host shall conquer”¹² is manifested, obliterating the signs and standards of every worldly attachment and limitation, even as alluded to by some who have attained this station. At such times, the ascendancy of God’s names and attributes will so surround a soul as to leave it no place either to stay or to flee. This station, however, hath its own obscurities and impediments, for they that journey towards the land of Divine Unity and detachment are still wrapt within the confines of names and attributes, and take delight in their gardens and bowers. Thus it is that, in describing these stations, some have made reference to the “unity of existence” and the “unity of appearance”.¹³ By this is meant that the seeker will close his eyes to all save his Beloved and open them to naught but His beauty. He

¹⁰ A reference to the three levels of certitude in the Islamic mystical tradition.

¹¹ Qur’án 39:53.

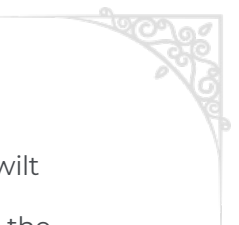
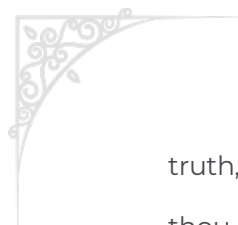
¹² Cf. Qur’án 37:173.

¹³ See note 71.

will pass beyond the mortal world and approach the everlasting realm. He will see no beauty but the Beloved's and hear no utterance but His praise; that is, he will avert his gaze from aught save His beauty and refuse to hearken to any melody but the sweet accents of His voice. Howbeit some are led astray even in this station; for no sooner do they inhale the fragrance of reunion, and hearken unto the voice of the doves of heavenly grace, than they imagine themselves to have attained perfection and wander lost in the wilderness of self-conceit, thus depriving themselves of the soft-flowing stream of divine providence and the ethereal cup of heavenly delight.

Yet others, assisted by the grace of the everlasting Friend, consume these veils with the fire of His love and step into the meads of ancient glory. That is, forsaking the wilderness of the "unity of existence", they attain unto the ultimate abode of the "true appearance of the Divine Unity". So clearly will they witness in this stage God's all-encompassing mercy that in every created thing, both in the world and in the souls of men, they will behold Him Who hath been interpreted as the Holy Outpouring. No longer will they close their eyes to any beauty, nor stop their ears from hearkening to any voice. For there is no prohibition in this stage and no debarment, inasmuch as in all things they will discern, with both their outer and inner eyes, the revelation of the signs of Him Who is the King of all names and attributes, and in every atom they will find a door that leadeth to the garden of Divine Unity and the city of pure abstraction. "Where'er I turn my gaze, 'tis Thee Whom I behold." So entirely will the hearts of the wayfarers be transported by longing for the ecstasies of this station that they will come to conceive no stage apart from this stage, to see themselves as abiding within the court of the Beloved and circling round His sanctuary, and to consider it as the ultimate abode of them that search and the uttermost station of such as have attained.

A myriad names and attributes have been ascribed to these degrees and stations, which I am disinclined to mention here. It is, indeed, solely because of thy longing and devotion that I have engaged in such ephemeral and limited topics. And this, notwithstanding that speech is the greatest evidence of the worth of the speaker and guideth unto the recognition of the source of guidance, for no more complete and enduring proof hath been or will be vouchsafed unto man from the empyrean of everlasting glory than words and utterance. This, verily, is a self-evident



truth, for the braying of the donkey can never compare with the cooing of the dove. Never wilt thou hear from the raven the melodies of the nightingale, nor inhale from the abject beetle the fragrance of eternity.