



A Hymn to Love: A Poem Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh¹

Sáqí, bi-dih ábí is a 20 one rhymed (-*ání*) couplets poem. It is one among eight Persian poems composed by Bahá'u'lláh, signed “Dervish,” and published by the Iranian Bahá'í scholar ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamíd *Ishráq Khávarí* (1902–1972) in his multi-volume anthology of the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith *Má'idíy-i-Asmání* (4:176-211). The eight Persian poems quoted by *Ishráq Khávarí* are as follows:²

1. *Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí*, which may be paraphrased as “Come back and proffer a chalice” (qtd. in *Ishráq Khávarí* 186-7; see also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:158-59);³
2. *Sáqí az Ghayb-i-Baqá*, which may be paraphrased as “The Cupbearer of the hidden Realm” (qtd. in *Ishráq Khávarí* 209-11; see also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:157-58);⁴
3. *'Ishq az Sidriy-i-A'lá ámad*, which may be paraphrased as “Love came from the loftiest Tree” (qtd. in *Ishráq Khávarí* 179-80; see also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:172-74);
4. *Bi-Jánán ján hamí dar-yáft rah*, which may be paraphrased as “The soul hath found its way to the Beloved” (qtd. in *Ishráq Khávarí* 176-8; see also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:167-69);
5. *Sáqí, bi-dih ábí zán shu'liy-i-rúhání*, which may be paraphrased as “O Cupbearer, give me a drop of the mystic flame” (qtd. In *Ishráq Khávarí* 192-4; see also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:171-72);

Lights of 'Irfán 16 (2015):226-72 (revised), with the assistance of Faezeh Mardani Mazzoli.

¹ For a general introduction to this and other poems by Bahá'u'lláh, see Julio Savi, “Bahá'u'lláh's Persian poems written before 1863,” in *Lights of Irfan* 13 (2012): 317-361.

² The poems are listed according to their growing length.

³ See also excerpts in Mázandarání 142-43.

⁴ See also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 36:455 and excerpts in Mázandarání 141-42.

6. *Mast-and bulbulán*, which may be paraphrased as “Nightingales get drunk” (qtd. in *Ishrâq Khávarí* 194-6; see also *Majmú’iy-i-Áthár* 30:169-71);⁵
7. *Saḥar ámad bi bistar-am yár*, which may be paraphrased as “At dawn the Friend came to my bed” (qtd. in *Ishrâq Khávarí* 181-84; see also *Majmú’iy-i-Áthár* 30:163-65);
8. *But-i-má ámad bá baṭṭí-u bádiḥ*, which may be paraphrased as “Our Charmer came with a glass and wine” (qtd. in *Ishrâq Khávarí* 188-92; see also *Majmú’iy-i-Áthár* 30:159-63).

These eight poems are also quoted in *Majmú’iy-i-Áthár* 30:157-74. Excerpts from a few of them are included, together with excerpts from other poems by Bahá’u’lláh, by the Iranian Bahá’í scholar Mírzá Asadu’lláh Fáḍil Mázarání (ca.1880–1957), in volume 4 of his *Tárikh Zuhuru’l-Haqq* (History of the Manifestation of Truth), a nine-volume history of the Bábí and Bahá’í religions (141-2). Two of them are mentioned in the *Bahá’í World* volumes among “Bahá’u’lláh Best Known Works.” They are *Báz Áv-u Bi-Dih Jámi* and *Sáqí az Ghayb-i-Baqá*. Franklin D. Lewis, an expert in Persian Language and Literature, has offered three different translations of *Sáqí az Ghayb-i-Baqá* (“Short Poem” 86-9). Three of these poems are mentioned, and a few verses translated, by Stephen N. Lambden, an English Bahá’í scholar focusing on Shi’i Islam and Qajar Persia, early Shaykhism, the Writings of the Báb, the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, in his “Sinaitic Mysteries” (116-7): *Bí jánán ján hamí daryaft, Sáqí bidih ábí, Mast-and bulbulán*.

Historical hints

These eight poems have been most probably written in Kurdistan, where Bahá’u’lláh remained from 10 April 1854 to 19 March 1856 and, in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words, “lived in poverty,” wearing the “garments . . . of the poor and needy” and eating the “food . . . of the indigent and lowly . . .” (qtd. in GPB124, sec.7, para.42). Lewis writes about them (“Short Poem” 84):

The information in *God Passes By*⁶ seems to suggest that these poems signed “Dervish” date to the earlier phase of Bahá’ulláh’s residence at Sar-Galú, probably some time between the Spring of 1854 and the Winter of

⁵ See Julio Savi, “The Inebriation of His Enrapturing Call,” in *Lights of ‘Irfán* 15 (2014):311-54.

⁶ See GPB120, sec.7, para.35.

1854–55. However, we cannot yet completely rule out the possibility that they were composed later, while at the Khálidí lodge in Sulaymáníyyih, or perhaps even in the period shortly after his return to Baghdad.

The attribution of their drafting to the years of Bahá'ulláh's stay in Kurdistan (1854–1856), during which He was in touch with the local Sufi communities, is also upheld by Mázarání in his *Tárikh-i-Zuhúru'l-Haqq* (4:139). Moreover, this attribution seems confirmed by their *takhalluṣ*, “Dervish,” the nom de plume, introduced into the final verse of these eight poems according to the use of Persian lyrics. In that period, Bahá'u'lláh had adopted the surname of Dervish Muḥammad (see Lewis, “Short Poem” 84). In this paper, we will comment only upon the poem which begins *Sáqí, bi-dih ábí*.

Literary aspects

As to its form, this specific composition may be defined as a poem in the light of the following definition of poetry, given by Lewis as to Nineteenth century Persia: “rhymed speech (*moqafâ*) composed in lines (*bayt* / *abyât*) following one of the established quantitative meters (*bahr* / *bohur*) and arranged according to a particular form” (“Poetry as Revelation” 102). Specifically, *Sáqí, bi-dih ábí* seems a *ghazal*.

As to the *ghazal*, the French Orientalist Régis Blachère (1900–1973), a profound interpreter of the Koran, which he translated into French (1947), writes in the Encyclopaedia of Islam that *ghazal* means “‘song, elegy of love,’ often also ‘the erotico-elegiac genre.’ The term is Arabic, but passed into Persian, Turkish and Urdu and acquired a special sense in these languages.”

The term *ghazal* comes from the Arabic root *ghazala*:

He talked and acted in an amatory and enticing manner, with a woman, or with women; he practised . . . the talk, and actions, and circumstances, occurring between the lover and the object of love. (Lane 6:39)

And thus, the Lane Arabic-English Lexicon defines the word *ghazal* as

The talks, and actions, and circumstances occurring between the lover and the object of love . . . an inclining to foolish and youthful conduct, or a manifesting of passionate love, and becoming notorious for affections to women . . . talk, and amatory and enticing conduct, with women; or play, sport, dalliance, or wanton conduct, and amorous talk, with women . . . play, sport, or diversion, with women . . . or the talk of young men and [or

with] young women: . . . praise of what are apparent of the members of the object of love: or the mention of the days of union and of disunion: or the like thereof. (Lane 6:39)

Blachère explains:

the *ghazal* was . . . a man's song addressed to a girl; contamination by the noun *ghazāl* "gazelle," from the images and comparisons associated with it, is not perhaps to be excluded (cf. "to make sheep's eyes"). Whatever the reason, the idea evoked by the term *ghazal*, like the English "gallantry" and particularly the noun "gallant," now fallen into disuse, became elaborated in a realm of ideas where there mingle the notions of flirtation, compliments made to a lady, complaints at her coldness or inaccessibility and the description of effeminate languishing attitudes on the part of the lover . . .

As to Persian *ghazals*, Alessandro Bausani (1921–1988), a well-known Italian Islamicist and a profound knower of Persian religiosity, says that

A widely accepted opinion is that the ghazal, an unknown genre in ancient Arabic poetry, derived from an extrapolation and autonomous use of the *tashbīb* [first part] of the *qaṣīdè*. However, it also may be that, without excluding the former hypothesis, the ghazal may have derived from some form of oral, popular autochthonous poetry. ("Letteratura neopersiana" 176)

Bausani also writes that the *ghazal* is "the primary instrument of Persian lyrics" (ibid.). He explains that *qaṣīdihs* and *ghazals* are technically different from one another only for their different "length and different subjects" (ibid.). Persia mainly used the former as "an instrument of panegyric or philosophic and moralising poetry" (ibid.). The latter dealt with "wine, love, springtime and mystics" (ibid. 176). Edward G. Browne (1862–1926), the renowned British Orientalist, also explains: "The *ghazal* differs from the *qaṣīda* mainly in subject and length. The former is generally erotic or mystical, and seldom exceeds ten or a dozen *bayts*; the latter may be a panegyric or a satire, or it may be didactic, philosophical, religious" (27). While speaking about Persian *ghazals* of the 10th–13th centuries, Bausani also explains that in those centuries the *ghazal* has "as its object the *ma* 'shūk 'the Beloved,' whereas the *qaṣīda* has as its object the *mamdūh*, 'the Praised' (Prince or patron)." However, he adds, in the period from the 13th to the 16th century "the chief object of the *ghazal*, the *ma* 'shūk, the (earthly) Beloved, becomes inextricably connected not only with the *ma* 'būd [literally, the Adored

One], the divine Beloved (God, or better His representative on earth, the mystical Initiator) but even with the *mamdūh* [literally, the Celebrated One], the traditional object of the *kaṣīda*” (“Ghazal. ii. In Persian literature”).

The features of the Persian *ghazals*, as explained by Bausani in the Encyclopaedia of Islam,⁷ may be summarised as follows:

1. Length: “it consists of a few *bayts* (verses, or couplets), generally not less than five and no more than twelve” (Bausani). Other authors consider up to 15 verses acceptable for a *ghazal* (Rossi, *Grammatica* 92). This is true for *Khājih Shamsu’ d-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāfiẓ-i-Shīrāzī* (ca.1318–1390), for example, whose *Divān* comprises only two *ghazals* longer than 15 verses. But Mawlānā Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī (1207–1273), one of the greatest Persian poets, wrote some *ghazals* that have more than 15 verses, up to 29 couplets. However, all scholars agree that a *ghazal* should be short. It has been defined as “an older Iranian cousin to European sonnets and short odes” (Hilmann, “Hāfez and the Persian ghazal” G).
2. Rhyme: “It has a single rhyme (often accompanied by a *radīf*); in the first *bayt*, called *maṭla*’, both hemistichs too rhyme together” (Bausani).
3. Nom de plume: “the last *bayt*, called *maḳṭa*’, contains the nom-de-plume (*ta-khalluṣ*) of the author” (Bausani).
4. Contents: “the contents of the *ghazal* are descriptions of the poet’s emotions in front of love, spring, wine, God, etc., often inextricably connected” (Bausani).
5. “In classical *ghazal* each verse forms a closed unit, only slightly interconnected with the others. To explain this feature of the *ghazal*, some modern scholars have invoked the ‘psychology of depth’ to show that in the *ghazal* there is unity, but an unconscious one. However this may be, external incongruity would seem to be a real rule in classic Persian poetry. We are in the presence of a bunch of motifs only lightly tied together” (Bausani). This rule admits exceptions: “If two or more verses belong in sense to each other, they are called *muḳaṭṭa*” (Wilberforce-Clarke xiv).

Finally, Wilberforce-Clark remarks about *ghazal*:

The poem must be finished, without defects in rhyme, and pure in language, all obsolete words, or vulgar expressions being avoided. Each verse must convey a complete thought. The verses are strung like pearls on a thread,

⁷ “*Ghazal*. ii. In Persian literature,” from now on in this section, Bausani.

which makes them a necklace, the value whereof lies in the value of each pearl, not in the thread. (ibid.)

As to the features of the *ghazal* in the times immediately before Bahá'u'lláh, Bausani writes:

The fourth period [of Persian *ghazal*], that of the so-called Indian style (10th/16th to 12th/18th centuries) . . . sees an intellectual reflection on the accepted symbols of the classical *ghazal*, which becomes an arena for a quasi-philosophical exercise of the mind. The *ghazal* finds a renewed congruity of meaning, and its protagonist, instead of the *ma 'shūk/mamdūh/ma 'būd* [that is, the Beloved, the Adored One, the Celebrated One] seems to be the Mind of its Author, creating ever new purely intellectual combinations of the old worn-out symbols. (Bausani)

Sáqí bi-dih ábí seems to meet all these requirements, the most important exception being its length: 20 verses. However, as has been said above, both Ḥáfiz and Rúmí wrote some *ghazals* with more than 20 verses. The main reason why this poem can be seen as a *ghazal* is that its central theme is Love. In fact, it may be considered as a hymn to Love, its protagonist. Like the other seven poems which have been mentioned at the beginning of this paper, *Sáqí bi-dih ábí* seemingly alludes to Bahá'u'lláh's mystic encounter with the Most Great Spirit in the Síyáh-Chál, the subterranean dungeon in Teheran where He was confined from middle August to December 1852, also mentioned in several biographical passages of His Writings. In this poem, the Most Great Spirit is described first as Water and Fire and then as Love itself. Many verses are devoted to describing Love and its impact on human hearts and the world.

A slow reading of the poem

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*Huva 'l- 'Azíz*⁸

He is the Glorious

The invocation of one of the names of God, usually the name Allah, at the beginning of a script is very frequent in the Islamic world. The invocation *Huv'Alláh* means He is God. Francis Joseph Steingass (1825–1903), the German linguist

⁸ *Majmú'ih* 30 omits this invocation.

expert on Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit who authored a well-known Persian–English dictionary, writes about *Huwa*, in Arabic *huwa*, and in Persian also *hú*:

He; he is; a name of God;—also *hū’i nāma*, The name of God, generally accompanied by one or more of his attributes, written in front of a letter or book as an auspicious omen . . . (Steingass 1516)

As to *Alláh*, Steingass writes: “God: The God, by way of eminence (being compounded of the article *al*, The, and *ilāh*, a God)” (Steingass 95). The invocation appears at the beginning of a few of Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings, both in poetry, for example, in *Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí*, and *‘Ishq az Sidriy-i-A’lá ámad*, and in prose. The Tablets translated into English which begin with this invocation comprise *Ishráqát*, *Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd*, a Tablet quoted by Bahá’u’lláh in *Súriy-i-Haykal: Lawḥ-i-Náṣiri’d-Dín Sháh* (108-11, paras.210-4), a Tablet quoted in *Fire and Light* (16, no. VII), the Tablet to Badí‘ (qtd. in Balyuzi, *King of Glory* 299), a prayer (qtd. in BP43-5) and section 106 of “*Questions and Answers*” (139-40).

About the invocation “He is God,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote:

Thou hast asked regarding the phrase, “He is God!” written above the Tablets. By this word it is intended that no one hath any access to the Invisible Essence. The way is barred and the road is impassable. In this world all men must turn their faces toward “Him-whom God-shall-Manifest.” He is the “Dawning-place of Divinity” and the “Manifestation of Deity.” He is the “Ultimate Goal,” the “Adored One” of all and the “Worshipped One” of all. Otherwise, whatever flashes through the mind is not that Essence of essences and the Reality of realities; nay, rather it is pure imagination woven by man and is surrounded, not the surrounding. Consequently, it returns finally to the realm and conjectures. (TAB3:485)

Taherzadeh wrote in this regard, that whenever Bahá’u’lláh quotes the Koranic verse: “There is none other God but God” at the beginning of a Tablet, He:

proclaims in majestic and powerful language that in this day He has removed the letter of negation which had been placed before that of affirmation. This phrase, which the Prophet of Islam regarded as the cornerstone of His Faith, is now in the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh symbolically replaced by the affirmative phrase “He is God.” This signifies that the Author of this Faith holds within His own hands the reins of authority, and, unlike the Dispensations of the past, no one will have the power to wrest it from

Him. Hence the assurance in His Writings that this is “the Day which shall not be followed by night.” (160)

In this poem, Bahá'u'lláh mentions God's attribute *al-'Azíz*, “Excellent; precious, dear, valuable, rare, choice; magnificent, glorious, powerful; venerable, pious, holy; a king, ruler, prime minister (especially in Egypt)” (Steingass 848). This adjective has been translated as “the Glorious.” It is the ninth among the ninety-nine beautiful Names of God that Muslim theologians have found in the Koran. In the Bahá'í Writings, it has been translated as the “*Mightiest*” (Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in BP92, Long Healing Prayer; *Nafahat-i Faḍl* 2:17, *Lawḥ-i-Anta 'l-Káfi*).

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Sáqí, bi-dih ábí zán shu 'liy-i-rúḥání,

Tá kih bi-shúyad ján-rá az vasvasiy-i-nafsání,

O Cup-bearer, give me a drop of the mystic Flame,

That it may wash my soul from the whispers of the flesh,

Bahá'u'lláh addresses His Beloved, perhaps the Most Great Spirit, Whom He had seen as a Maid, calling Him Cupbearer. This familiar personage of Persian mystic poetry originates in the Koran and the Traditions. Bausani explains that Sufis relate the cupbearer to “the ancient mystic legend wherefore at the beginning of the Divine Love, the cupbearer (sāqī), as God-the Beloved, poured the wine for God-the Lover during forty successive dawns and thus he created the world” (“Letteratura neopersiana” 162; see *Religion in Iran* 277). According to the German Orientalist Annemarie Schimmel (1922–2003), Sufis

saw this moment in poetical imagery as a spiritual banquet in which the wine of Love was distributed to humanity so that everyone received the share which he or she will have in this life. Here, the imagery of wine is used not for the final goal of the mystic's unification with God and his being filled with Him, but rather as the starting point of the flow of Divine grace at the beginning of time. (*Deciphering* 109)

It is the *rúz-i-alast*, the metahistorical morning when human souls entered into the eternal Covenant with their Creator, which is the basis of their life on earth and of the development of human civilisation (see HW, Persian, no.19). Carlo Saccone, an expert in and a translator of Persian poetry into Italian, comprising the whole *Díván* by Ḥáfiẓ, writes in this regard that

the wine which he [the cupbearer], incessantly invoked and implored, pours into the cup of the lover\poet reveals its sacred *imprinting*, i.e., it is a transposition of the “mysterious” wine which the youthful cupbearers of Muslim paradise offer to the blessed spirits. (44)

According to Saccone, the cupbearer sometimes symbolises the beloved himself as an initiator, i.e., he who . . . initiates the poet . . . into the mysteries of wine and love for him [God]. [And the poet’s] initiation . . . is essentially a summon to folly, to disarm one’s intellect and its analytic processes, because the lover will attain unto the reunion with his friend . . . only in the condition of “sacred folly,” fostered by his drunkenness. (ibid. 49, 50)

A poem by Rûmî also begins with an invocation to the *sâqî* and a request for wine:

Happy-cheeked sâqî of mine, give the cup (*jâm*) like the pomegranate blossom (*gulnâr*); if for my sake you will not give for the sake of the heart of the Beloved (*Yâr*). (*Mystical Poems* 2:70, no.290, v.1; *Dívân*, “*Ghazalyât*,” no.2283)

In *Sâqî, bi-dih âbí*, the lover asks the Cupbearer to give him a drop of the Mystic flame, combining three images: water, *âbí*, here translated “drop,” wine (the Cupbearer), and fire, *shu‘lih*, “Light, splendour, lustre, shining, flashing, coruscation; blaze, flash, fire, flame” (Steingass 747). In Persian mystical poetry, these three images are often associated. Bausani writes that in Persian literature, “the wine is also fire, and in this it is similar to the alchemists’ water, which is also fire . . . In fact in traditional lyric poetry the Wine is often called ‘water’ and compared to the ‘Water of Life’ (*âb-i haivân*)” (*Religion in Iran* 272).

In the second hemistich, the lover explains why he wants a drop of the mystical flame: he wants to cleanse his soul from the whispers of the flesh. Bahá’u’lláh uses two images: the whispers and the flesh. As to the Koranic image of the whispers, *vasvasih*, “Inspiring, suggesting (one’s own mind or Satan); a suggestion; instinct; fear, anxiety; conscience; temptation” (Steingass 1468), translated by Shoghi Effendi as “whisper” (Lawḥ-i-Dhabíh 246, para.13; *Muntakhabátí* 157), the image of “the whispers of the flesh (*vasvasiy-i-nafsáni*)” comes from the Koran:

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Say: I betake me for refuge to the Lord of Men, The King of men, The God of men, Against the mischief of the stealthily withdrawing whisperer (*al-waswási*), Who

whispereth in man's breast—Against djinn and men. (114:1-6, Rodwell)

Mystical poets also use this image. Ḥāfiẓ writes:

In love's path (*rāh-i- 'ishq*) Ahriman's⁹ temptations (*vasvasiy-i-Ahriman*) are many:

Sense keep; and to Surūsh's¹⁰ message the ear of the heart put.
(*Dīvān* 744, "Ghazalyát," no.444, v.6; *Divan* 411, no.398, v.2)

Bahá'u'lláh uses the same image in other passages, as:

Keep us safe, then, through Thine unfailing protection, O Thou the Beloved of the entire creation and the Desire of the whole universe, from them whom Thou hast made to be the manifestations of the Evil Whisperer, who whispers (*yuwaswisúna*) in men's breasts (*ṣudúru 'n-nás*). (PM233, sec.144, para.2; *Munáját* 156)

Know verily that Knowledge is of two kinds: Divine and Satanic. The one welleteth out from the fountain of divine inspiration; the other is but a reflection of vain and obscure thoughts. The source of the former is God Himself; the motive-force of the latter the whisperings of selfish desire (*vasávas-i-nafsání*). (KI69, para.76; KMI53)

Sharp must be thy sight, O Dhabíḥ, and adamant thy soul, and brass-like thy feet, if thou wishest to be unshaken by the assaults of the selfish desires that whisper (*vasávis*) in men's breasts. (GWB245-6, sec. CXV, para.13)

. . . in whose soul (*nafs*) Satan (*Shayṭán*) hath whispered (*waswasa*) (qtd. in GPB141, sec.8, para.30)¹¹

The Evil Whisperer, mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh and in the Koran (*al-waswási*) and related by Bahá'u'lláh to Satan (*shayṭán*), seems to be the human lower nature personified as Satan, a nature to which Bahá'u'lláh refers as "the Satan of self (*shayṭán-i-nafs*)" (KI112; KMI84). This lower nature is our ego,

⁹ "Ahriman, the principle of Evil, opposed to Ormuzd, the principle of Good; the devil; a seducer; a demon" (Steingass 124).

¹⁰ *Surúsh* means "An angel; Gabriel" (Steingass 680).

¹¹ Referred to "a certain Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Ḥusayn, a crafty and obstinate priest, whose consuming jealousy of Bahá'u'lláh was surpassed only by his capacity to stir up mischief both among those of high degree and also amongst the lowest of the low, Arab or Persian, who thronged the streets and markets of Kazimayn, Karbilá and Baghdad" (GPB141, sec.8, para.30).

which is proud of itself and pretends to be self-sufficient. It is the “serpent” that seduced Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Bible says: “Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made” (Genesis 3:1 KJB). The Hebrew word used to refer to the serpent in this verse is *nâchâsh*, from the verb *nâchash*, “to hiss, i.e. whisper” (Strong, “A Concise Dictionary” 78, no.5172). In one of His talks ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained that “the evil spirit, Satan or whatever is interpreted as evil, refers to the lower nature in man” (PUP294). He explained the same concept in a Letter in which He mentions certain friends who had asked Him for advice on material aspects of their lives. He answered:

Tell them they should do as they think best in these matters. Should they marry, divorce, leave their homes, move to other places, etc.,—all these matters pertaining to their material affairs—Abdul Baha says:

“They must do as they wish; they must solve their own problems; they are grown-ups. We do not like to tell people what they should do in these matters. My work is universal; my time and thoughts are for the whole world on the most important problems relating to affairs that concern the spiritual welfare of nations and individuals. When the believers are insistent, Abdul Baha must give them answers, and it is their wish always that Abdul Baha grants them. He knows what their wish in reality is. They must make mistakes to learn, and to unfold the higher which is within themselves. The initial wish does not come from Abdul Baha. It comes from them. It is generally clothed with such words as these: ‘We only wish to do that which Abdul Baha wishes us to do.’ And they are sincere in this, for they do not know the subtlety of the ego of man. It is the Tempter (the subtle serpent of the mind), and the poor soul not entirely emancipated from its suggestions is deceived until entirely severed from all save God.” (qtd. in *Bahá’í Scriptures* 487, sec.936)

As to the flesh, the adjective *nafsání*, “Lewd, sensual; spiritual, vital” (Steingass 1416), derives from *nafs*, which sometimes in Persian corresponds to that which we call flesh, in the sense of the weak side of man, that side which indulges in sin. Muşlih ad-Dín Sa’dí (ca.1184–1291) writes.

How will know the truth of love (*haqíqat-i-‘ishq*) he who is subjected to the passions of the flesh (*haváy-i-nafsání*)? (“Ghazalyát,” no.610, v.8)

Bahá'u'lláh writes in His Lawh-i-Laylatu'l-Quds: “Burn away, wholly for the sake of the Well-Beloved (*al-Mahbúb*), the veil of self (*hujubát-i-nafsániyyih*)” (316, para.1; *Muntakhabátí* 203). In the Seven Valleys, He mentions “the veils of the Satanic self (*hijáb-háy-i-nafs-i-shayṭání*)” (SV7; Haft Vádí 102) that must be burnt by the fire of love so that the mystical seeker may enter the Valley of Knowledge (SV12). This is one of the main functions of the mystic wine, the Word of God, assisting the soul to proceed from the stage of the *nafs-i-ammariḥ*, the commanding soul, or the insistent self, to higher stages of her spiritual evolution.

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*Zán áb kaz-ú shud şúrat-i-átash paydá,
Zán nár kaz-ú zâhir án Kawthar-i-Rúḥání.*

A drop of water revealing the form of Fire,

A sparkle of fire manifesting the celestial Fount.

The combination of wine, fire and water continues in the second couplet. The first hemistich identifies wine, here called water, *áb*, and fire—*átash*, in the first hemistich and *nár* in the second. Wine is fire because it is conducive to the intoxication of love that burns away, as a fire, the veils of the Satanic self. The fire of wine is also the celestial Fount (*kawthar-i-rúḥání*), because wine is also the water of life, that is the Word of God. The word *Kawthar* (literally, abundance) is mentioned in Súra 108, “*Truly we have given thee an abundance*” (108:1, Rodwell). Edward William Lane (1801–1876), the leading British Arabicist scholar who authored the monumental *Arabic-English Lexicon*, describes *Kawthar* as “A certain river in paradise . . . from which flow all the [other] river thereof . . . pertaining specially to the Prophet, described as being whiter than milk and sweeter than honey and as having its margin composed of pavilions of hollowed pearls” (Lane 7:122). The word has a connotation of abundance because it derives from the Arabic root *kithara*, “It was, or became, much, copious, abundant, many, numerous, great in number or quantity; it multiplied; it accumulated” (Lane 7:121). It is the Water of Life, a recurrent motif of both Sufi literature and Bahá'í Writings. In the first case, it has mythical and legendary connotations; in the second, it is a poetic image that mainly describes the Words of the Manifestation of God and their regenerating power.

*Yik jilvih*¹² *zi*¹³ ‘*aks-ash* bar *şafhiy-i-Ján uftád*,
*Válih shud*¹⁴ *az án jilvih şad hikmat-i-Yúnání*.
 A glimmer of His image fell on the page of the Soul,
 A hundred Hellenic wisdoms were confounded.

The “glimmer (*jilvih*) of His image” is the unveiling of the Beloved. This is one of the meanings of the world *jilvih*, “Presenting a bride to her husband adorned and unveiled; the meeting of the bride and bridegroom; the nuptial bed; the bridal ornaments; splendour, lustre, effulgence, transfiguration” (Steingass 369). However, here, it has been translated as “glimmer,” following the example of Shoghi Effendi, who translated it as “*splendour*” (SWAB32, sec.15).

The “page of the Soul (*şafhiy-i-Ján*)” is another typical image of Sufi poetry. Rûmî mentions in his *Mathnaví* an equivalent locution, “the leaf (surface) of the heart (*varaq-i-dil*).” *Varaq* means “A leaf of a tree or of paper; paper cut out into any shape” (Steingass 1464). He writes:

God hath given thee the polishing instrument (*şayqal*), Reason (‘*aql*), to
 the end thereby the leaf (surface) of the heart (*varaq-i-dil*) may be
 made resplendent. (4:2475)

It is the soul, here compared to a page, reflecting the Beauty of the Beloved. This verse by Rûmî also mentions a “polishing instrument (*şayqal*), Reason (‘*aql*).” A “polishing instrument” is also mentioned in the Valley of Love: “A pure heart is as a mirror; cleanse it with the burnish of love (*şayqal-i-ḥubb*) and severance from all save God, that the true sun may shine within it and the eternal morning dawn” (SV21; Haft Vádí 113). This first hemistich is reminiscent of the words of Genesis 1:26: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” It also is reminiscent of the following Tradition:

God created Adam in His image (*khalaqa Alláh ádama ‘alá şúratihí*). (qtd.
 in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions* 188; Furúzánfar no.595)

¹² *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *jilvihí*.

¹³ *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *az*.

¹⁴ *Majmú‘ih* 30 omits *shud*.

It finally reminds us of the Aristotelian “tabula rasa,” the unscribed tablet.¹⁵ The soul is seemingly described as a page upon which the beauteous features of the Face of the Lord can be drawn.

The second hemistich hints at the impotence of philosophy, the “hundred Hellenic wisdoms,” and thus of the human intellect when Revelation does not assist it. Bahá’u’lláh later on developed this concept in His Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat, in which He states that Greece was “a Seat of Wisdom for a prolonged period” (149-50). Then He adds:

Although it is recognised that the contemporary men of learning are highly qualified in philosophy, arts and crafts, yet were anyone to observe with a discriminating eye he would readily comprehend that most of this knowledge hath been acquired from the sages of the past [i.e. the Greek philosophers], for it is they who have laid the foundation of philosophy, reared its structure and reinforced its pillars . . . The sages aforetime acquired their knowledge from the Prophets, inasmuch as the latter were the Exponents of divine philosophy and the Revealers of heavenly mysteries. Men quaffed the crystal, living waters of Their utterance, while others satisfied themselves with the dregs. Everyone receiveth a portion according to his measure . . . The essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets. That the people differ concerning the inner meanings and mysteries thereof is to be attributed to the divergence of their views and minds. (144-5)

4

*Yik jadḥvīh az án shu’līh bar Sidriy-i-Síná zad,
Madhúsh az án jadḥvīh ṣad Músíy-i-‘Imrání.*

A spark of that flame hit the Tree of Sinai,
A hundred Imranite Moseses were astounded.

This couplet refers to the story of Moses, the Burning Bush and Moses’s swoon when God showed Himself to Him. Fire seems to be identified here with the Most Great Spirit. Lambden comments upon this verse as follows:

So powerful is the fiery “water” of the stunning Divine Cupbearer (*sáqī*) that but a “firebrand” (*jadhwa*) ignited from its flame in the Sinaitic Lote-

¹⁵ See Aristotle, *De Anima* [On the soul], 3:4, 430-31.

Tree would suffice to throw one hundred Imranite Moseses into a state of bewildered astonishment. (116)

Moses is called Imranite from the name Imran, which Muslim tradition ascribes to His father, called Amran in the Bible (Exodus 6:20).

5

*Yik shu 'lih az án átash shud, 'Ishq¹⁶ bi-zad khar-gáh
Dar áb-u gil-i-ádam ham dar dil-i-insání.*

A flame burst out from that fire and Love pitched
Its tent in man's water and clay and in his heart.

This couplet refers to the legend that man is moulded of water and clay, which many Persian poets mention. For example, Rúmi writes in this vein in his Mathnaví:

Where were we when the Judge of Judgement (Day) was sowing reason
(*'aql*) in the water and clay (*'ab-u tín*) of Adam? (6:3134)

Bahá'u'lláh also uses this image in later Writings:

He must purge his breast, which is the sanctuary of the abiding love of the Beloved, of every defilement, and sanctify his soul from all that pertaineth to water and clay (*áb-u-gil*), from all shadowy and ephemeral attachments. (KII192; KMI149)

Ye are even as the bird which soareth, with the full force of its mighty wings and with complete and joyous confidence, through the immensity of the heavens, until, impelled to satisfy its hunger, it turneth longingly to the water and clay (*áb-u-gil*) of the earth below it, and, having been entrapped in the mesh of its desire, findeth itself impotent to resume its flight to the realms whence it came. (Lawḥ-i-Aḥmad bi-Fársí 327, para.6; Muntakhabátí 210)

I fear lest, bereft of the melody of the dove of heaven, ye will sink back to the shades of utter loss, and, never having gazed upon the beauty of the rose, return to water and clay (*áb-u gil*). (HW, Persian, no.13; *Ad'ityih* 428)

Elsewhere, Bahá'u'lláh uses the Arabic word *má'*, water, in the place of the Persian *áb*, and the word *turáb*, "ground, earth, dust" (Steingass 291), in the place of *gil*:

¹⁶ *Majmú'ih* 30 writes '*ishq-u*.

Magnified be Thy name, O Lord my God! I know not what the water (*má'*) is with which Thou hast created me, or what the fire (*nár*) Thou hast kindled within me, or the clay (*turáb*) wherewith Thou hast kneaded me. (PM12, sec.9, para.1, *Munáját* 12)

This couplet seemingly explains that the bestowal of Spirit (Fire) introduces love into the nature of man (his water and clay), and his heart. In this regard, it seems that spirit is the same as love. In this vein, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states: “love is the cause of the existence of all phenomena” (PUP255) and also: “The greatest power in the realm and range of human existence is spirit—the divine breath which animates and pervades all things” (PUP58). Love and spirit are described as two similar powers on which existence has its foundations. Indeed:

the first principle of God, Love, is the creative principle. Love is an outpour from God, and is pure spirit. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, qtd. in *Bahá’í Scriptures* 300, no.609)

This verse seemingly says that love permeates the water and clay of man and his heart. The locution “water and clay” seems to be an image denoting human flesh, the element whereby man is a weak creature. As to the heart, in the Sufi world, the heart is, first, the organ of the inner knowledge of transcendent reality that Sufis call *ma‘rifa*. Second, it is the seat of the divine presence. Third, it is the organ attracted towards what is other than it (see Savi, 51-3). Therefore, this couplet could denote that through the bestowals of Spirit, love takes possession of man as a whole. This couplet is reminiscent of a *ghazal* by Ḥafīẓ that says:

(O true beloved!) in eternity without beginning (the day of miṣāk),¹⁷ of glory, the splendour-ray of Thy beauty boasted.

Revealed became love; and, upon all the world, fire dashed.

(O absolute existence!) Thy face displayed splendour; (and) beheld (that) the angel had no (capacity for) love:

From this (exceeding) jealousy, it became the essence of fire; and upon Ādam dashed.

From that torch (of love), reason wished to kindle its lamp,

Jealousy’s lightning flashed; and in confusion, the world dashed.

¹⁷ *Mitháq* means “A promise, agreement, bargain, compact, confederacy, alliance, league” (Steingass 1359).

The adversary (Shaiṭān)¹⁸ sought to come to the spectacle-place of the mystery (of love):

The invisible hand (of God) came, and, at the heart of the excluded one (Shaiṭān), dashed.

Others, all on ease, dashed the dice of partition (fate):

Our grief-experienced heart it was that also, on grief (the dice of fate) cast.

The desire of thy chin's dimple (thy mysteries) possessed the lofty soul:

At the ring of that tress, curt within curl, (his) hand, he dashed.

The joy-book of love for Thee, Ḥāfiẓ wrote on that day,

When, on the head of the chattels of his joyous heart, the reed (of cancellation), he dashed. (*Dīvān* 354-55, "Ghazalyát," no.186; *Divan* 158-9, no.152)

6

Ay 'Ishq, chih í Tú, kaz Tú jahán pur áshúb,

Ham az Tú dar ámad ḥasrat¹⁹ dar ḥikmat-i-Luqmání.

Who art Thou, O Love, that 'cause of Thee the world,

Is in turmoil and Luqman's wisdom is envious?

The world of love is the world of paradoxes. No wonder love throws the word into turmoil, *áshúb*, "Terror, dread, fear; grief, affliction, misfortune; confusion, discord, disturbance, tumult, riot, sedition" (Steingass 67). Bahá'u'lláh writes in the Seven Valleys (SV10):

Love setteth a world aflame at every turn, and he wasteth every land where he carrieth his banner. Being hath no existence in his kingdom; the wise wield no command within his realm. The leviathan of love swalloweth the master of reason and destroyeth the lord of knowledge. He drinketh the seven seas, but his heart's thirst is still unquenched, and he saith, "Is there yet any more?" He shunneth himself and draweth away from all on earth.

In the world of love, many things turn upside down. It is this reversal that creates a feeling of wonderment in the lovers. Bahá'u'lláh says about wonderment: "How

¹⁸ *Shayṭán* means "Satan" (Steingass 776).

¹⁹ *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *ḥayrat*.

many a mystic tree hath this whirlwind of wonderment (*ḥayrat*) snatched by the roots, how many a soul hath it exhausted” (SV31; Haft Vádí 124).

As to turmoil, one remembers at this point the tumultuous events whose protagonist or spectator Bahá’u’lláh had just been: the Badasht Conference in June 1848, the Mázindarán upheaval, with the battle of the Fort of *Shaykh* Ṭabarsí, that began in late summer of 1848 and ended in the spring of 1849, the slaughter of the Sevens Martyrs of Teheran in February 1850, the upheaval of Nayríz, in the late spring of 1850, the massacre that followed the attempt on the life of the Shah on 15 August 1852. Iran had really been in turmoil.

However, the folly of love conceals a great wisdom, a wisdom for which even Luqman, the legendary sage mentioned in the Koran (31:11-8), that in post-Koranic literature is described as a fabulist, a Muslim Aesop (see Savi 202-3), becomes full of envy. The folly of love is the wisdom of the person who has become detached from the water and clay of the world and has placed all his affections on the eternal world, wherefrom her soul comes and whereto she is returning. While so doing, this person gives a meaning to each instant of her life, that she does not live in the superficiality of its contingent and ephemeral meanings but in the inner depth of the Absolute that transpires thereof. As poetical and mystic as it is, all this is taught by Bahá’u’lláh in a highly rational and practical way. This transparency of absolute appears in the actions of a human being whenever she is prompted by the sincere intention of serving humankind to promote its ever-advancing civilisation.

7

Gáh kuní da ‘ví kih Man-am jilviy-i-Maḥbúb bi ‘álam.

Gáh gúy kih Man-am khúḍ án Ṭal‘at-i-Subḥání.

Now Thou boastest: “I am the Beloved’s splendour in the world.”

Now Thou proclaimest: “I’m Myself that Divine Countenance.”

In this verse, a description of Love in its various aspects begins, each conveying a mystical meaning.

Love is “the Beloved’s splendour in the world (*jilviy-i-Maḥbúb bi ‘álam*).” This sentence is reminiscent of words written and uttered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

Know thou of a certainty that Love is the secret of God’s holy Dispensation, the manifestation of the All-Merciful, the fountain of spiritual outpourings. Love is heaven’s kindly light, the Holy Spirit’s eternal breath that vivifieth

the human soul. Love is the cause of God's revelation unto man, the vital bond inherent, in accordance with the divine creation, in the realities of things. (SWAB27, sec.12)

Know thou, the first bounty from the True One is love, unity and harmony, and without these all the deeds pass in vain and give no result. Love is the result of the Manifestation and the glorious purpose of the rising of Light on the Mount, in the Sinai of the Forgiving Lord. (TAB1:183-4)

Love is the first effulgence of Divinity . . . (PUP338)

Love is, in reality, the first effulgence of Divinity and the greatest splendor of God. (PUP397)

Love is the breath of the Holy Spirit in the heart of Man. (PT20, sec.6, para.12)

Love is the "Divine Countenance (*Tal'at-i-Subḥání*).” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes about the word “face:”

The word “face” (*vajh*) hath many meanings, among which there is submissiveness to the Will of God (*riḍá*), as God, exalted be He, says: “Seeking His Face” [Koran 6:52], and also: “We feed you for the sake of God alone” [Koran 76:9], and, moreover, His good-pleasure (*riḍá*). And the face also means the Essence (*dhát*). God, exalted be He, says: “Everything . . . will perish except His own Face” [Koran 28:88]. And the face (*vajh*) also means the unveiling (*jilwat*). God, exalted be He, says: “whithersoever ye turn, there is the Presence of God” [Koran 2:115]. And the face (*vajh*) hath various interpretations and allusions besides what hath been said. However, due to lack of time, it hath been chosen not to expatiate on the subject. On the ground of all this, submission (*taslím*) of the face is one thing of the special virtues of the righteous and of the greatest gifts of the free. Whosoever is so aided is graciously favoured with absolute faith in the highest level of certitude and assurance. (*Makátíb* 1:396)²⁰

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has repeatedly stated that “God is Love” (PUP158) and has explained that “Christ has said God is Love” (PT192, sec.58, para.2), possibly referring to the following verses:

²⁰ Personal translation by the author with Ms. Faezeh Mardani.

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. (1 John 4:8, KJV)

God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.
(1 John 4:16, KJV)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has also hinted at this concept in various other contexts:

God is Love and Peace. God is Truth. God is Omniscience. God is without beginning and without end. God is uncreated and uncreating, yet the Source, the Causeless Cause. God is pure Essence, and cannot be said to be anywhere or in any place. (qtd. in *Bahá’í Scriptures* 300, no.609)

God is love; God seeketh fellowship, purity, sanctity and long-suffering; these are the attributes of Divinity. (PUP290)

For God is love, and all phenomena find source and emanation in that divine current of creation. The love of God haloes all created things. Were it not for the love of God, no animate being would exist. (PUP315)

8

Chún az Tú vazad bar ján rá’ihiy-i-Jánán,

Bar har chih kuni da ‘ví gúyad²¹ kih bih az án í.

Since Thou breathest the Beloved’s fragrance upon the soul,

Whatever claim Thou advancest, one might say Thou art much better.

Love sheds “the Beloved’s fragrance upon the soul (*bar ján rá’ihiy-i-Jánán*).” The image of perfume is widely used in Sufi literature. We remember here that the fragrance of the Beloved is a symbol of His bounties. Love brings the bounties of the Beloved. Whatever bounty He bestows, it is but a reflection of the Beauty of God. In this vein, Bahá’u’lláh writes:

O My Well-Beloved! Thou hast breathed Thy Breath into Me, and divorced Me from Mine own Self. Thou didst, subsequently, decree that no more than a faint reflection, a mere emblem of Thy Reality within Me be left among the perverse and envious. (GWB89, sec. XL, para.1)

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

²¹ *Majmú’ih* 30 writes *gúyam*.

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. (KI99-100, para.106)

The Manifestation of God, the apex of the spiritual hierarchy in the world, is Himself but a reflection of the Beauty of God. And yet, the Manifestation of God is “the Supreme Goal (maqṣad-aqṣá) and Most Sublime Summit (*dhurviy-i-‘ulyá*)” (ESW147; Lawḥ-i Mubárák-i-khaṭáb 96), “the world’s Ultimate Desire (*gháyat-i-quṣvá*), the Summit (*dhurviy-i-‘ulyá*) and Day Spring of Glory (*ufuq-i-a‘lá*)” (GWB345, sec. CLXIV, para.7; *Muntakhabátí* 221).

9

Ham Mú’nis-i-jání, ham Áiyi²²-i-Jánání,

Ham jam ‘iyat-i-ján-há az Tú,²³ ham az Tú paríshání.

Thou art the Companion of the soul, the Sign of the Beloved,

From Thee tranquillity of spirit cometh, from Thee distress.

Love is “the Companion (*mú’nis*) of the soul.” *Mú’nis* means “A companion, intimate friend; a solacer, comforter” (Steingass 1349). Bahá’u’lláh turns to God using this Name in many prayers, for example:

I implore Thee, O Thou Who art the beloved Companion (*mú’nis*) of Bahá . . . (PM15, sec.13, para.2; *Munáját* 16)

I beseech Thee, O Thou Who art my Companion (*mú’nisí*) in my lowliness . . . (PM16, sec.14, par. 2; *Munáját* 16)

Let Thine everlasting melodies breathe tranquillity on me, O my Companion (*mú’nisí*) . . . (PM248, sec.155, para.1; *Munáját* 167)

Love is “the Sign of the Beloved (*Áiyi-i-Jánání*).” *Áyih* means “A mark, a sign; a miracle; a verse of the Qur’ān; (met.) an accomplished master” (Steingass 128). Bahá’u’lláh writes in His Lawḥ-i-Hadí:

From the exalted source, and out of the essence of His favor and bounty He hath entrusted every created thing with a sign (*áyih*) of His knowledge (*‘irfán*), so that none of His creatures may be deprived of its share in expressing, each according to its capacity and rank, this knowledge. This sign

²² *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *ayat*.

²³ *Majmú‘ih* 30 omits *az-Tú*.

(*áyih*) is the mirror of His beauty in the world of creation. The greater the effort exerted for the refinement of this sublime and noble mirror, the more faithfully will it be made to reflect the glory of the names and attributes of God, and reveal the wonders of His signs and knowledge. Every created thing will be enabled (so great is this reflecting power) to reveal the potentialities of its pre-ordained station, will recognise its capacity and limitations, and will testify to the truth that “He, verily, is God; there is none other God besides Him.” . . . (262, para.2; *Muntakhabátí* 168)

And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains:

. . . all the divine Manifestations suffered, offered their lives and blood, sacrificed their existence, comfort and all they possessed for the sake of mankind. Therefore consider how much they love. Were it not for their love for humanity, spiritual love would be mere nomenclature. Were it not for their illumination, human souls would not be radiant. How effective is their love! This is a sign of the love of God; a ray of the Sun of Reality. (PUP257)

Love brings tranquillity and distress. It is another of the many oxymorons characterising the condition of love. A lover achieves tranquillity because he discovered “the Beloved (*al-Maḥbúb*) of his heart, and the Object of his desire (*al-Madhkúr*)” (PM108, sec.66, para.9; *Munáját* 78). However, his heart is also distressed because the lover is aware of his ideal remoteness from the Beloved and meanness, and he longs for spiritual growth and self-sacrifice. As Bahá’u’lláh writes:

Though my body be pained by the trials that befall me from Thee, though it be afflicted by the revelations of Thy Decree, yet my soul rejoiceth at having partaken of the waters of Thy Beauty, and at having attained the shores of the ocean of Thine eternity. Doth it beseem a lover²⁴ to flee from his beloved (*al-maḥbúb*), or to desert the object of his heart’s desire (*ma‘ashúq*)? Nay, we all believe in Thee, and eagerly hope to enter Thy presence. (PM96, sec.60, para.3; *Munáját* 70)

²⁴ The word “lover” translates both *al-ḥabíb* and *al-áshiq*.

*Gar partawí az Rúy-at dar Mişr-i-Ilahí²⁵ árand,
Bíní bi-kharídári şad Yúsuf-i-Kan'ání.*

If a ray from Thy Face shineth on the Divine realms,²⁶

Thou wilt see a hundred Cananaean Josephs put up for sale.

This couplet refers to the story of Joseph, son of Jacob, who was sold as a slave by his brothers and, after many vicissitudes, became viceroy of Egypt. Here, the Face of the Beloved matches the beautiful Joseph. Whenever a ray of the face of the Beloved shines in the realm of love, it is as if a hundred Josephs were put up for sale.

*Ham búy-i-qamış az Tú, ham Rúh-i-Masîh az Tú,
Ham Musîy-i-baydâ'í, ham şhu'liy-i-Farání.*

From Thee Joseph's fragrance²⁷ bloweth; from Thee the Messianic Spirit;

Thou art the white-handed Moses, Thou, the flame on Mount Paran.

Love is successively identified with Joseph, described through the image of the scent of his garment (*qamış*); with Jesus, described through two among His attributes known in the Muslim world, Spirit and His Messianic Station; and Moses, described through the image of His white hand and the Burning Bush. In later Writings, Bahá'u'lláh identified Himself with all these three Personages. As to Joseph, Bahá'u'lláh describes Him as a "Prophet (*nabí*)" together with "Jesus, Moses . . . and Muḥammad" (KI254, para.282; KMI197), and writes about Him:

Dust fill your mouths, and ashes blind your eyes, for having bartered away the Divine Joseph for the most paltry of prices. (GWB208, sec. CIII, para.4)

As to Moses, He writes in His Súriy-i-Damm (88, para.1):

Praise be to Thee, O Lord My God, for the wondrous revelations of Thy inscrutable decree and the manifold woes and trials Thou hast destined for Myself. At one time Thou didst deliver Me into the hands of Nimrod [Abraham]; at another Thou hast allowed Pharaoh's rod to persecute Me [Moses] . . .

²⁵ *Majmú'ih* 30 writes *Mişr-i-bahar*, that is the Egypt of springtime.

²⁶ In Persian *Mişr-i-Iláhí*, "Divine Egypt."

²⁷ In Persian *qamış*, literally, shirt.

As to Jesus, He writes:

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 [Jesus]. (Súriy-i-Damm 88, para.1)

O Jews! If ye be intent on crucifying once again Jesus, the Spirit of God, put Me to death, for He hath once more, in My person, been made manifest unto you. (GWB101, sec. XLVII, para.1)

This couplet seems to foreshadow the concept of the “essential unity” of the Messengers of God, later on, explained in greater details:

These Manifestations of God have each a twofold station. One is the station of pure abstraction and essential unity. In this respect, if thou callest them all by one name, and dost ascribe to them the same attribute, thou hast not erred from the truth. Even as He hath revealed: “No distinction do We make between any of His Messengers!” For they one and all summon the people of the earth to acknowledge the Unity of God, and herald unto them the Kawthar of an infinite grace and bounty. They are all invested with the robe of Prophethood, and honoured with the mantle of glory. Thus hath Muḥammad, the Point of the Qur’án, revealed: “I am all the Prophets.” Likewise, He saith: “I am the first Adam, Noah, Moses, and Jesus.” Similar statements have been made by ‘Alí. Sayings such as this, which indicate the essential unity of those Exponents of Oneness, have also emanated from the Channels of God’s immortal utterance, and the Treasuries of the gems of divine knowledge, and have been recorded in the scriptures. These Countenances are the recipients of the Divine Command, and the day-springs of His Revelation. This Revelation is exalted above the veils of plurality and the exigencies of number. Thus He saith: “Our Cause is but one.” Inasmuch as the Cause is one and the same, the Exponents thereof also must needs be one and the same. (KI152-3, para.161)

*Sar-há bi-kamand-at bastih, dil-há az²⁸ gham-at khastih,
Ham 'ámíy-i-shaydá'i, ham 'álim-i-Rabbání.*

Bound are the heads by Thy locks, pierced the hearts

by Thine anguish, be they of insane laymen or of Divine sages.

The first hemistich presents the image of the hair of the Beloved—*kamand*, “A halter, noose, snare, lasso; slip-knot; a scaling-ladder . . . a lock of hair” (Steingass 1051)—that tie the lovers. Bausani writes that “the most common mystical explanation” of the hair of the Beloved is that it “symbolises the ‘plurality of the phenomenal world that veils the face of God’s unity’” (*Religion in Iran* 280-1). It also presents the image of the anguish of the lovers—*gham*, “Being cloudy (day); being intensely hot and suffocating; making sad; muzzling; covering; grief, sadness, anxiety, trouble, care; a source of regret; remorse; mourning, lamentation; loss” (Steingass 894). The second hemistich describes the universal effects of the love for the Beloved on all lovers, “Be they of insane laymen (‘ámíy-i-shaydá’i) or of Divine sages (‘álim-i-Rabbání).” ‘Ámí means “Blind, ignorant” (Steingass 868); shaydá’, “mad, insane, in love” (Steingass 772); ‘álim, “Learned, intelligent, wise” (Steingass 831); and *rabbání*, “Divine, godly” (Steingass 567). The two categories of seekers mentioned in this verse could be the same as the “men of mind (*mu’táli’in*) and heart (*mushtáqín*)” of the Four Valleys (FV63; *Chihár Vádí* 154). It is the ancient division between those who preferred the path of sobriety of asceticism and those who preferred the inebriation of the way of love.

*Man khúd zi Tú-am makhmúr, ham az Tú shudam mashhúr,
Kih²⁹ dahí-am *şad ján*, ham³⁰ kih kuni-am qurbání.*

I’m drunk of Thee, ’cause of Thee I’m notorious, whether

Thou offerest me a hundred lives, or Thou slayest me.

The lover proclaims his love for the Beloved. This love made him commit such foolish acts that now everyone talks about him, and he has become *mashhúr*, that is, “public, notorious, well-known; published, divulged, conspicuous; celebrated,

²⁸ *Majmú’ih* 30 writes *zi*.

²⁹ *Majmú’ih* 30 writes *gah*.

³⁰ *Majmú’ih* 30 writes *gah*.

illustrious, noted, famous” (Steingass 1250). This image is another trope of Sufi poetry, belonging to the *malámatí* strand. Marcello Perego, an Italian expert on Sufism, defines the *malámatí* Sufis as “persons who observe a perfect religious conduct, but carefully hide any ecstatic state (*Aḥwāl*) and grace (*Wāridāt*) which the One Being bestows upon them; they dissemble their good deeds, so that none but God may know them” (151). Several Sufis of the *malámatiyya* tried to appear blameworthy in the eyes of ordinary people. The second hemistich restates the concept of the lover’s faithfulness, independently of the attitude of the Beloved.

14

Gar Qábiḍ-i-arváḥí, az chih kuní-am zindih?

Var Muḥiy-i-abdání, az chih kuní thu ‘bání.

If Thou art the Angel of death, how come that Thou revivest me?

And if Thou art the Reviver of bodies, how is it that Thou actest as a snake?

This couplet presents another oxymoron. So cruel is the Beloved that the lover compares Him to the Angel of death, *Qábiḍ-i-arváḥí*, literally the sequestrator of spirits. However, from Him, life comes. And if He gives life, why does He act as cruelly as a *thu* ‘bání, “A large male serpent, a dragon, cockatrice, basilisk” (Steingass 345)? It seems the human reaction of a person when faced with the “onrushing winds of . . . [God’s] decree (*qaḍá*)” (PM12, sec.9, para.2. *Munáját* 13). Bahá’ulláh wrote in His *Súriy-i-Haykal*:

Should We choose, at one time, to shed the radiance of Our loving providence upon the mirrors of all things, and, at another, to withhold from them the splendours of Our light, this verily lieth within Our power, and none hath the right to ask “why” or “wherefore.” For We are potent indeed to achieve Our purpose, and render no account for that which We bring to pass. (35, para.68)

Nevertheless, many “whys” and “wherefores” are voiced in the Tablet, which Western Bahá’ís know as the “Fire Tablet,” which expresses concepts similar to those conveyed by this couplet:

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?

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?

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

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

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

The barking of dogs is loud on every side: Where is the lion of the forest of Thy might, O Chastiser of the worlds? (212-4)

These words are reminiscent, to Christian ears, of the words uttered by Jesus on the cross a few moments before dying after many hours of agony:

Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (Matthew 27:46, KJV)

15

*Dar khar-gáh-i-sultán yik bár agar bi-kharámi,
Sultán kuní-ash bandih, ham bandih kuní sultání.*

If Thou graciously movest in the court of a king, Thou changest
The king into a servant and the servant into a king.

The gracious pace of the Beloved is a Sufi motif of Persian mystical poetry. Háfiz writes in this vein:

If, like the (lofty) cypress (*sarv*), a moment thou move in a rose-garden
(*gulzár*)

In envy of thy face (*rúy*), every rose (*gul*) suffereth a thorn. (*Dīvān* 901, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.552, v.1; *Divan* 456, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.443, v.1)

This couplet by Bahá’u’lláh exalts the power of the Beloved, Who can change a king into His humble vassal and bestow royal greatness upon a servant. As to the capacity to subdue a sovereign, Bahá’u’lláh writes about Muhammad in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*: “Behold, how many are the Sovereigns who bow the knee before His name!” (KI110, para.117). And the Báb reportedly said to His disciples:

Heed not your weaknesses and frailty; fix your gaze upon the invincible power of the Lord, your God, the Almighty. Has He not, in past days, caused Abraham, in spite of His seeming helplessness, to triumph over the forces of Nimrod? Has He not enabled Moses, whose staff was His only companion, to vanquish Pharaoh and his hosts? Has He not established the ascendancy of Jesus, poor and lowly as He was in the eyes of men, over the combined forces of the Jewish people? Has He not subjected the barbarous and militant tribes of Arabia to the holy and transforming discipline of Muhammad, His Prophet? (qtd. in Nabíl 94)

As to the capacity to change a servant into a king, the Báb reportedly said to His disciples:

You are the lowly, of whom God has thus spoken in His Book: “And We desire to show favour to those who were brought low in the land, and to make them spiritual leaders among men, and to make them Our heirs.” You have been called to this station; you will attain to it, only if you arise to trample beneath your feet every earthly desire, and endeavour to become those “honoured servants of His who speak not till He hath spoken, and who do His bidding.” (qtd. *ibid.* 93)

And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote about Jesus:

Peter was a fisherman and Mary Magdalene a peasant, but as they were specially favoured with the blessings of Christ, the horizon of their faith became illumined, and down to the present day they are shining from the horizon of everlasting glory. (SWAB105, sec.68)

16

*Yik shu ‘lih³¹ zi³² rúy-at dar gul-bun-i-Ján ámad,
Afrúkht jamál-i-ján chún láliy-i-nu ‘mání.*

A spark of Thy face fell upon the rose-bush of the soul,
And lit its beauty as a crimson tulip.

This couplet uses many images typical of Persian mystical literature: the “spark (shu ‘lih)” of the face (*rúy*), “the rose-bush of the soul (*gul-bun-i-Ján*),” the

³¹ *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes shu ‘lihí.

³² *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *az*.

“crimson tulip (*láliy-i-nu ‘mání*).” The image of the face has been explained above (see above verse 7). This verse seems to use the image of the Face of the Beloved to hint at the Beauty of the Beloved, at His influence on the lover and at the unveiling of His Beauty. As to the rose (*gul*), in the Sufi world, it “is the supreme manifestation of Divine beauty or the symbol of the beloved cheek” (Schimmel, *Deciphering* 26). As to the tulip (*lálíh*), “poets have tended to compare the red tulip that looks indeed like a flame to the fire on the sacred mountain [Sinai]” (ibid. 10). Ḥáfiz uses the image of the tulip in the following verse:

In the garden (*bágh*) (of the existence), renew the usage’s of the faith (*dín*)
of Zardusht.

Now that the (red) tulip (*lálíh*) hath kindled the fire (*átash*) of Nimrod. (*Dīvān* 253, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.121, v.8; *Divan* 229, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.219, v.8)

Ḥáfiz associates the tulip with the fire of Nimrod because God has transformed the fire of the furnace, into which Abraham had been thrown, into a garden. Likewise, Bahá’u’lláh associates the tulip with the fire lit by the Beloved in the spiritual worlds, a fire that is as sweet as a garden for the lovers. The tulip described by Bahá’u’lláh is crimson (*nu ‘mání*). In the Muslim world,

red is connected with life, health, and blood; it is the colour of the bridal veil that seems to guarantee fertility; and it is used as an apotropaic colour. Red wine, as well as fire (in its positive aspects) and the red rose, all point to the Divine Glory, as it is said that the *ridā al-kibriyā*, “the cloak of Divine Glory,” is radiant red. (Schimmel, *Deciphering* 16)

This couplet seems to describe how the Beauty of the Beloved (the spark of His face) changes the hearts of His lovers (“*the rose-bush of the soul*”), where He raises the vermilion tulip of knowledge and good deeds. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá spoke diffusely of the transforming power of the Manifestations of God. For example, He said:

The holy Manifestations of God come into the world to dispel the darkness of the animal, or physical, nature of man, to purify him from his imperfections in order that his heavenly and spiritual nature may become quickened, his divine qualities awakened, his perfections visible, his potential powers revealed and all the virtues of the world of humanity latent within him may come to life. These holy Manifestations of God are the Educators and Trainers of the world of existence, the Teachers of the world of humanity. They

liberate man from the darkness of the world of nature, deliver him from despair, error, ignorance, imperfections and all evil qualities. They clothe him in the garment of perfections and exalted virtues. Men are ignorant; the Manifestations of God make them wise. They are animalistic; the Manifestations make them human. They are savage and cruel; the Manifestations lead them into kingdoms of light and love. They are unjust; the Manifestations cause them to become just. Man is selfish; They sever him from self and desire. Man is haughty; They make him meek, humble and friendly. He is earthly; They make him heavenly. Men are material; the Manifestations transform them into divine semblance. They are immature children; the Manifestations develop them into maturity. Man is poor; They endow him with wealth. Man is base, treacherous and mean; the Manifestations of God uplift him into dignity, nobility and loftiness. (PUP465-6)

17

*Vah vah, chih nasím ámad, bá muzhdiy-i-ján ámad,*³³

Kaz Mashhriq-i-Ján ámad án Tal‘at-i-Yazdání.

O! What a breeze wafted announcing to the soul the glad tidings

That from the East of the Spirit that Divine Face hath appeared.

This couplet poetically announces the new Revelation. This announcement is brought by the breeze, a reminiscence of the morning breeze that, according to the tradition, brought to Muhammad the scent of the holiness of Uways al-Qaraní, who lived in Yemen. This breeze comes from the East, the place whence the sun rises. Rúmí writes:

Finally from the Orient of the spirit (*mashhriq-i-ján*), like the sun, arose
He Whom the soul (*ján*) was searching in private and in public (*Dí-
ván*, “Ghazalyát,” no.142, v.2)

These verses are reminiscent of the following words written by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

From the beginning of time until the present day the light of Divine Revelation hath risen in the East and shed its radiance upon the West. The illumination thus shed hath, however, acquired in the West an extraordinary brilliancy. Consider the Faith proclaimed by Jesus. Though it first appeared in the East, yet not until its light had been shed upon the West did the full

³³ *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *ján-bakhsh*, that is soul-refreshing.

measure of its potentialities become manifest . . . In the books of the Prophets certain glad-tidings are recorded which are absolutely true and free from doubt. The East hath ever been the dawning-place of the Sun of Truth. In the East all the Prophets of God have appeared . . . The West hath acquired illumination from the East but in some respects the reflection of the light hath been greater in the Occident. This is specially true of Christianity. Jesus Christ appeared in Palestine and His teachings were founded in that country. Although the doors of the Kingdom were first opened in that land and the bestowals of God were spread broadcast from its center, the people of the West have embraced and promulgated Christianity more fully than the people of the East. (qtd. in WOB74-5)³⁴

The good news is that the Face of God has appeared.

18

*Ján-há bi-paríð az shawq, dil-há bi-ramíð az dhawq,
Ham ‘Ishq shud-ash ‘áshiq ham jawhar-i-imkání.*

Souls soared with yearning, hearts were enraptured in ecstasy,

Love fell in love with Him, and so did the essence of creation.

This couplet describes the impact of the advent of the new Revelation. The whole creation falls in love with the Beloved, even Love. Outwardly, when the Manifestation of God appears in the world, nothing happens. On the contrary, an inward process starts that slowly but steadily moves towards the birth of a new civilisation. Bahá’u’lláh has often described His advent in triumphant words. He wrote, for example, in His Lawḥ-i-Riḍván:

This is the Day whereon the unseen world crieth out: “Great is thy blessedness, O earth, for thou hast been made the foot-stool of thy God, and been chosen as the seat of His mighty throne.” The realm of glory exclaimeth: “Would that my life could be sacrificed for thee, for He Who is the Beloved of the All-Merciful hath established His sovereignty upon thee, through the power of His Name that hath been promised unto all things, whether of the past or of the future.” This is the Day whereon every sweet smelling thing hath derived its fragrance from the smell of My garment—a garment that hath shed its perfume upon the whole of creation. This is the

³⁴ See moreover GPB253-54; CF30; PT23, sec.8, para.3; PUP289.

Day whereon the rushing waters of everlasting life have gushed out of the Will of the All-Merciful. Haste ye, with your hearts and souls, and quaff your fill, O Concourse of the realms above! (29, para.6)

Another example is the words whereby He foresees His arrival to the prison of ‘Akká:

Upon Our arrival, We were welcomed with banners of light, whereupon the Voice of the Spirit cried out saying: “Soon will all that dwell on earth be enlisted under these banners.” (qtd. in GPB184, sec.11, para.4)

In the dimensions of the human world, His arrival in ‘Akká is described by Shoghi Effendi as follows:

Having, after a miserable voyage, disembarked at ‘Akká, all the exiles, men, women and children, were, under the eyes of a curious and callous population that had assembled at the port to behold the “God of the Persians,” conducted to the army barracks, where they were locked in, and sentinels detailed to guard them. “*The first night*,” Bahá’u’lláh testifies in the Lawḥ-i-Ra’ís,³⁵ “*all were deprived of either food or drink . . . They even begged for water, and were refused.*” So filthy and brackish was the water in the pool of the courtyard that no one could drink it. Three loaves of black and salty bread were assigned to each, which they were later permitted to exchange, when escorted by guards to the market, for two of better quality. (GPB186-7, sec.11, para.10)

Evidently, in the spiritual worlds, which are not subject to the rules of time and space, things appear in a different perspective than in the earthly world.

19

Az hikmat-i-ú ulfat-i-má-bayin-i-dú didd zâhir,

Ham ‘Ishq shudih bandih, ham ‘Aql kunad darbáni.

Through His wisdom, the coincidence of opposites is made manifest,

Now love becometh a slave, now the Intellect a porter.

³⁵ A Tablet by Bahá’u’lláh, revealed in the early ‘Akká period and addressed to ‘Alí Páshá, the Grand Vizir of Turkey. See SLH159-73.

In the Manifestation of God the opposites coincide. Bahá'u'lláh wrote in later Writings: “I bear witness that in His person solidity and fluidity have been joined and combined” (PM48, sec.38, para.3). Bahá'u'lláh explained moreover:

These Prophets and chosen Ones of God are the recipients and revealers of all the unchangeable attributes and names of God. They are the mirrors that truly and faithfully reflect the light of God. Whatsoever is applicable to them is in reality applicable to God, Himself, Who is both the Visible and the Invisible (*ẓáhir-i-mastúr*) . . . Through the manifold attributes of these Essences of Detachment, Who are both the first and the last, the seen and the hidden, it is made evident that He Who is the Sun of Truth is “the First and the Last, the Seen, and the Hidden [Koran 57:3].” (KI142-3; KMI110)

An aspect of this coincidence is the harmonious balance between elements that human beings often see as conflicting with one another, for example, mercy and justice, love and reason, religion and science. This couplet explains that, on the one hand, love becomes a slave, possibly of the “divine, universal mind, whose sovereignty enlighteneth all created things” (FV52), and, on the other, the Intellect becomes a porter, that is, it submits to Revelation. Rúmí writes in this vein

O perfect full moon (*máh*), the house of the heart belongs to Thee,
Intellect that was a lord is wholly submitted to Thee. (*Díván*,
“Ghazalyát,” no.2243, v.2)

20

*Darvish, ma-dar zín bish in pardiy-i-asrár,
Kaz shahr faghán khízád vaz ‘álam-i-hayvání.*

Stop tearing asunder the veil of mystery, O Dervish:

A cry riseth from the city of men and the world of brutes.

Like a few others, this poem ends with a call to silence. The clamour that rises “from the city of men and the world of brutes” could be because the city of men is unprepared to receive the Beloved. This verse is reminiscent of the following words by Bahá'u'lláh in His Ridvánu'l-‘Adl:

The fears and agitation which the revelation of this law provokes in men’s hearts should indeed be likened to the cries of the suckling babe weaned from his mother’s milk, if ye be of them that perceive. (175, para.1)

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