



Bahá'u'lláh's Persian poems written before 1863¹

Abstract. A provisional list of Bahá'u'lláh's Persian poems written before 1863 is provided. These poems are described as an early fruit of the mystical experiences Bahá'u'lláh had in the Síyáh-Chál of Teheran in October 1852. Those experiences produced an irresistible 'fire of love' in Him that He sang in those poems. Bahá'u'lláh's love was not ordinary; it was 'that spiritual attraction and that ecstatic love of the lovers of the Beauteous One for the beauty within their own self', which later on 'Abdu'l-Bahá described in His 'Commentary to the Tradition of the Hidden Treasure'. In these compositions, Bahá'u'lláh uses the language of the ancient Persian mystical poets but introduces new perspectives. An incurable feeling of separation, remoteness, and consequent pain mostly pervades Persian ancient mystical poems. Bahá'u'lláh also mentions the pains of the lover. They are the pains the lover should be ready to accept if he wants to come closer to his Beloved. The Beloved says to his lover: 'If thine aim be to cherish thy life, approach not our court; / But if sacrifice be thy heart's desire, come and let others come with thee'. However, whereas the pains of the lover in ancient Persian poetry were hopeless, Bahá'u'lláh's poems also speak of the joys of nearness and reunion, which are made possible by the presence of the Beloved Himself Who 'Like unto Joseph in Egypt, moves now through alleys and bazaars' and 'hath renewed the world through His Cause, / And quickened the spirit of Jesus by His breath'.

Bahá'u'lláh produced many Writings, 'a hundred volumes' writes Shoghi Effendi (PDC 6). They are the core of Bahá'í Scripture. Most of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings are in prose, and only a few are in poetry. All these poetic works were seemingly written in the Iraqi period. Only one of them may have been completed in Adrianople.

Scripture and poetry

All religions have sacred Texts written in poetry. Some poetic passages of the Scriptures of the various faiths have become popular even outside the circles of their respective followers. Hindu Scriptures are very rich in poems. The Rig Veda and the Mahabharata (ca.500 BC) are written in poetry. The well-known

¹ *Lights of 'Irfán*, vol. 13 (2012), pp. 317-61 (revised). All translations from Persian were done with the precious assistance of Ms. Faezeh Mardani Mazzoli, lecturer of Persian language at the University of Bologna.

Bhagavad Gita (Song of God), a part of the Mahabharata, is a poem comprising 700 verses. As to Buddhism, the Dhammapada, the Theravada Jatakas, and the Buddhacharita ('Acts of the Buddha') are poems. As to Zoroastrianism, many scholars think that Zarathustra was a poet-priest. The five Gathas, a word variously rendered as 'Hymns', 'poems', or 'psalms', supposedly composed by Zarathustra Himself (see Boyce, *Textual Sources* 2), and the 24 (Boyd, 'Zoroastrianism' 110) or 21 (Gnoli, 'La religione zoroastriana' 504) Yashts are poems. As to the Old Testament, three books of the Ketuvim, also known as Hagiographa, that is, Psalms, Lamentations and Song of Songs, are grouped by the Jews under the name of 'Poetry Books'. As to the New Testament, although verses are not included in its canonical texts, there are several passages of poetical beauty, for example, the so-called 'Song of Mary', also known as *Magnificat*, from the incipit of its Latin version (Luke 1:46-54, KJV), one of the eight most ancient Christian hymns. As to Islam, the Koran is not versified, but some of its pages sound, to our ears, highly poetical. The poems written by Imam 'Alí are also part of the religious Islamic tradition. The Bahá'ís are familiar with two verses by Imam 'Alí because they are quoted at the beginning of *The Secret of Divine Civilization*: 'Dost thou think thyself only a puny form, when the universe is folded up within thee?' (SDC 19).

Poetical Writings by Bahá'u'lláh

The poems written by Bahá'u'lláh, which the present writer has found in the foremost collections of Bahá'u'lláh's Arabic and Persian Writings available to the general public or whose existence is mentioned in public documents, are as follows.

1. *Rashh-i-'Amá'*:² Shoghi Effendi writes that this poem, composed of twenty-one-rhymed couplets, was 'revealed in Tíhrán,' and is among 'the first fruits of . . . [Bahá'u'lláh's] Divine Pen' (GPB 121). Therefore, it may date back to His incarceration in the Síyáh-Chál. *Rashh-i-'Amá'* was translated by Stephen N. Lambden, an English Bahá'í scholar focusing on Shi'í Islam and Qajar Persia, early Shaykhism, the Writings of the Báb, the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, under the tile

² Quoted in Ráfatí, 'Áthár-i-munzilih' 59; *Ishráq Khávárí, Má'idíy-i-Asmání* 4:184-6 (from now on MA 4); *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 36: 460-1 (from now on INBA 36).

of ‘Sprinkling of the Cloud of Unknowing’.³ Ramin Neshati, who also translated other Bahá’í Writings, wrote an introduction and translation of this poem, which he called ‘Tablet of the Mist of the Unknown’.⁴ Juan R. Cole, an American historian of the modern Middle East and South Asia, translated it as ‘Sprinkling of the Cloud Beyond Being’.⁵ John Wiegley, a former philosophy student at George Mason University, a poet, and a student of mysticism and the Seven Valleys (2003), also translated it as ‘The pre-eternal Reality poureth forth from Our ecstasy’.⁶

2-10. Eight poems, 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’idiy-i-Asmání* (4:176-211). Ishráq Khávarí, in reality, quotes the text of ten poems because he also gives the texts of the above-mentioned Rashḥ-i-‘Amá and of Qaṣídiy-i-Varqá’íyyih, a 127 verses ode written in Arabic. Excerpts from these and other poems of Bahá’u’lláh are also included by the Iranian Bahá’í scholar Mírzá Asadu’lláh Fáḍil Mázandaránī (ca.1880–1957) in his *Taríkh Zuhúru’l-Ḥaqq* (History of the Manifestation of Truth), a nine-volume history of the Bábí and Bahá’í religions (4:141-42). These 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’ (Quoted in GPB 124). The attribution of the drafting of these poems to the years of His stay in Kurdistan, during which He

³ See Lambden, “‘Rashḥ-i-‘Amá’, Sprinkling of the Cloud of Unknowing’, *Baha’i Studies Bulletin* 3.2 (1984): 2-10. A revised translation of this poem by Lambden himself may be found in the Internet. See Lambden, ‘Translation of the Rashḥ-i ‘Amā’ of Bahā’-Allāh. Translation Stephen Lambden from the text cited by Vahid Rafati from a mss. of Muhammad Nabil-i Zarandī (d. 1892) printed in *Lights of Irfan*’, <http://www.hurqalya.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/BAHA'-ALLAH/rashh-i-%20%60ama'/Rashh3.htm> (accessed 2 July 2011).

⁴ See Neshati, ‘Tablet of the Mist of the Unknown by Bahá’u’lláh. Translated by Ramin Neshati. Originally written as “Rashh-i-Amá”’, http://bahai-library.com/?file=bahauallah_rashh_ama_neshati (accessed 31 December 2010).

⁵ See Cole, ‘Sprinkling of the Cloud Beyond Being’, http://whoisbahauallah.com/explore/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16&Itemid=50 (accessed 31 December 2010).

⁶ Published on Tarjuman-List, Friday, 3 June 2011, 20:51.

was in touch with the local Sufi communities, seems confirmed by their *takhallus*, the nom de plume introduced in the final verse of the poems according to the use of Persian lyrics. All these poems are signed ‘dervish,’ and in that period, Bahá’u’lláh had adopted the surname of Darvish Muḥammad. Three of these poems are mentioned in the *Bahá’i World* volumes among ‘Bahá’u’lláh Best Known Writings’: Báẓ áv-u bi-dih jámí, Qaṣídiy-i-Varqá’íyyih, and Sáqí az Ghayb-i-Baqá. A provisional rhyming translation of Qaṣídiy-i-Varqá’íyyih has been undertaken by Cole, with the title ‘Ode of the Dove’.⁷ Brian Miller has published an unrhymed poetic version of this Ode in his Ph.D. dissertation (U.C. Berkeley, 2000). Franklin D. Lewis, an expert in Persian Language and Literature, especially Rúmí, has offered three different translations of Sáqí az Ghayb-i-Baqá (‘Short Poem’ 86-9). Some of these poems – that is Bí jánán ján hamí daryaft, Sáqí bidih ábí, Mast-and bulbulán – are mentioned, and a few of their verses translated by Lambden in his ‘Sinaitic Mysteries’ (116-7).

11. Ay Bulbulán:⁸ this eleven verses poem, without *takhallus*, is ascribed by Fáḍil-i Mazandarání to the Kurd period (*Taríkh Zuhúru’l-Ḥaqq* 4:142). Cole authors a partial translation of this poem.⁹

12. Mathnavíy-i-Mubáarak:¹⁰ according to Lewis, this 318-verse poem ‘was evidently composed over a period of time, beginning perhaps as early as his retreat to Iraqi Kurdistan, and certainly by his time in Baghdad, but completed only after his arrival in Istanbul’ (‘Short Poem’ 83). He suggests that this work ‘is apparently the longest work he composed in verse, and perhaps also one of the last, though the dating of many of his books, tablets, poems and his voluminous

⁷ See Cole, ‘Ode of the Dove (Qaṣídiy-i-Varqá’íyyih)’, <http://bahai-library.org/provisionals/ode.dove.html> (accessed 31 December 2010) and ‘Ode of the Dove’, http://whoisbahauallah.com/explore/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=37&Itemid=50 (accessed 31 December 2010).

⁸ Quoted in Fáḍil-i Mazandarání, *Asráru’l-Áthar* 4:200-1 (from now on AA 4); Fáḍil-i Mazandarání, *Zuhúru’l-Ḥaqq* 4:142 (only seven verses).

⁹ See Cole, ‘O Nightingales by Bahá’u’lláh’, *Arts Dialogue*, no. 40 (June 1997), p.14; see also Cole, ‘Ay Bulbulan Ay Bulbulan (Poem)’, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/17569405/Ay-Bulbulan-Ay-Bulbulan-Poem> (accessed 31 December 2010).

¹⁰ Quoted in *Áthar* 3:160-192; INBA 30:*; excerpts in MA 4:139-41; etc. See Lewis, ‘Bahá’u’lláh’s Mathnaví’ 118-9.

correspondence remains rather tentative' ('Poetry as Revelation' 103). A provisional verse translation with annotations of this poem made by the same Lewis and accompanied by an introduction was published in 2000.¹¹

13. The Research Department of the Universal House of Justice mentions in one of its letters a Tablet by Bahá'u'lláh that begins with the words, 'In My Name, the Humourist [*al-mazzah*] [provisional translation]'. The Research Department clarifies that this Tablet

is a serious mystical poem, revealed in the form of a prayer. The text does not illuminate the reference to the 'Humourist'. It is, however, interesting to note that, while dealing with an exalted theme, the language of expression is, unexpectedly, that of the common people – light, simple, and even colloquial.¹²

This Tablet has been recently published by Vahid Rafati, director of the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre, in his book *Yádnámiy-i-Baydáy-i-Núrá* (171).

14. A poem beginning with the words Sáqí, bi-dih án jám-i-Huva Hú (Quoted in Rafatí, *Yádnámih* 170)

In conclusion, we have found 14 poems written by Bahá'u'lláh. Only one of these poems is in Arabic, Qaṣídiy-i-Varqá'íyyih. Only *Mathnavíy-i-Mubárák* was completed when Bahá'u'lláh had already left Iraq.¹³

As to the Writings by Bahá'u'lláh listed by Lewis among those, which 'observe some, but not all, of the rules of classical metrics and prosody [and] . . . transcend the category of rhymed prose (*nathr-i musajjá*) and exhibit litany-like

¹¹ See Lewis, 'Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnavíy-i-Mubárák*: introduction and provisional verse translation', *Bahá'í Studies Review* 9 (1999-2000): 101-57.

¹² To The Universal House of Justice, 12 January 1997, see <http://bahai-library.com/uhj/humourist.html> (accessed 31 December 2010).

¹³ None of these poems has been translated authoritatively into English. All of the translations cited in this paper are provisional.

features that might be classed as a form of versification (*nazm*) or quasi-verse' ('Short Poem' 83)', they comprise:¹⁴

1. Subḥana Rabbiya'l-A'lá:¹⁵ this 45-verses Tablet, written in Arabic, part in prose and part in poetry, was composed in Baghdad and translated by Cole as 'Praised be My Lord, the Most High'.¹⁶ Taherzadeh writes about it:

He portrays in dramatic terms the appearance before Him of the 'Maid of Heaven', personifying the 'Most Great Spirit', and alludes to His own Revelation in such terms as no pen can describe. The whole Tablet conveys in symbolic language the joyous tidings of the advent of the Day of God, at the same time warning the faithful to beware of tests which will befall them, causing many to be deprived of attaining to His glory and grace. (*Revelation* 1:212)

2. Lawḥ-i-Ghulámu'l-Kḥuld:¹⁷ This Tablet, written partly in Arabic and partly in Persian, was written in the early 1860s in Baghdad 'to celebrate the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb' (Taherzadeh 1:213) and translated by John Walbridge, an expert of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, as the 'Tablet of the Deathless Youth'.¹⁸

3. Ḥúr-i-'Ujáb:¹⁹ This Tablet, written in Arabic, was composed in Baghdad 'as the year 1863 drew closer' (Taherzadeh 1:210). It was translated by Cole as the 'Houri of Wonder'²⁰ and by Denis MacEoin, a novelist and a former lecturer in

¹⁴ This list comprises only Tablets that have been provisionally or authoritatively (three cases), wholly or partially, translated into English.

¹⁵ Quoted in Ishráq Khávarí, *Ganj-i-Shayigán* 61-64.

¹⁶ See Cole, 'Praised be my Lord, the Most High', http://whoisbahauallah.com/explore/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=38&Itemid=50 (accessed 31 December 2010).

¹⁷ Quoted in Ishráq Khávarí, *Ayyám Tis'ih* 92-99.

¹⁸ Walbridge, 'Baha'u'llah's "Tablet of the Deathless Youth"', <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/trans/vol11/deathls2.htm> (accessed 31 December 2010).

¹⁹ Quoted in Ishráq Khávarí, *Ganj-i-Sháyigán* 61-4; *Adí'iy-i-Haḍrat-i-Maḥbúb* 153-8.

²⁰ See Cole, 'Houri of Wonder (Hur-i 'Ujab)', <http://www.whoisbahauallah.com/Alison/wonder.html> and 'Houri of Wonder', http://whoisbahauallah.com/explore/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=15 (accessed 31 December 2010).

Islamic studies, as ‘Litany by Baha’Allah’ (*Rituals* 132-3), and commented upon by Walbridge (*Sacred Acts* 239) and Taherzadeh (*Revelation* 1:218).

4. Lawḥ-i-Malláhu’l-Quds, ‘The Tablet of the Holy Mariner’:²¹ This Tablet divided into two parts, one in Arabic and the other in Persian, was revealed in Baghdad just before Naw Rúz 1863 (see GPB 147). The Arabic part has been translated into English by Shoghi Effendi and initially published in *Star of the West*,²² with the following note, ‘received in America in April 1922’. Michael W. Sours, who has authored several books on the Bahá’í Faith and Christianity, has published a study of this Tablet.²³

5. Lawḥ-i-Bulbulu’l-Firáq:²⁴ This Tablet, written in Arabic and Persian, was composed, according to Ishráq Khávarí and Taherzadeh (*Revelation* 1:244-5), in the late period of Baghdad and, according to Cole, in Istanbul. Cole has translated it as ‘Nightingale of Separation’.²⁵ Taherzadeh writes about it: ‘Bahá’u’lláh reminds His loved ones that the period of union has come to an end, that the Nightingale of Paradise has taken its flight from one branch and is now about to establish its nest on another’ (*Revelation* 1:244-5).

6. Az Bágh-i-Ilahí:²⁶ According to Taherzadeh, this ode, composed of 31 couples of verses, one in Persian and one in Arabic, was ‘revealed not long before the Declaration of Bahá’u’lláh’ (*Revelation* 1:218).

7. Lawḥ-i-Halih, Halih, Halih, Yá Bishárat:²⁷ This 26-verses poem was presumably revealed in the spring of 1863 in Baghdad, just a short time before Bahá’u’lláh’s declaration in the Garden of Riḍván.²⁸ Lambden offered a

²¹ Quoted in *Áthár* 4:335-41; MA 4:335-41.

²² ‘The Song of the Holy Mariner’, *Star of the West* 13.4 (17 May 1922):75-7.

²³ See *The Tablet of the Holy Mariner: An illustrated Guide to Bahá’u’lláh’s Mystical Writing in the Sufi Tradition*. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 2002.

²⁴ Quoted in Ishráq Khávarí, *Ganj-i-Sháyigán* 42-5.

²⁵ See Cole, ‘Nightingale of Separation’, http://whoisbahauallah.com/explore/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=28&Itemid=50 (accessed 31 December 2010).

²⁶ Quoted in INBA 36: 457-60.

²⁷ Quoted in Ishráq Khávarí, *Ganj-i-Shayigan* 33-35; *Andalib* 5.18:3-4; INBA 35:455-6; e-text at <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/arabic/baharepr/halih/halih.gif> (accessed 31 December 2010).

²⁸ See *Tarikh-i-Nabil-i-Zarandí* [Pt II], quoted in Ishráq Khávarí, *Ayyam-i-Tis’ih* 332f.

provisional translation of this poem in 1983.²⁹ Another more metrical version was made by Sen McGlinn, the author of the so-called Leiden list of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets.³⁰ Lewis lists this Tablet among some Writings by Bahá'u'lláh, which 'observe some, but not all, of the rules of classical metrics and prosody. As such, they transcend the category of rhymed prose (*nathr-i musajjá*) and exhibit litany-like features that might be classed as a form of versification (*nazm*) or quasi-verse' ('Short Poem' 83).

8. A 'Tablet of the Feast of Ridván':³¹ It is an Arabic Tablet translated by Ali Quli Khan (ca.1879–1966), an eminent Iranian Bahá'í and the first to translate into English some of the most important works of Baha'u'llah, and his daughter Marzieh Gail (1908–1993), an eminent Bahá'í writer and translator, who wrote the following note: 'This tablet was revealed by Bahá'u'lláh when He Declared Himself to be recited at the Feast of Ridwan'.³²

9. Subhánika-Yá-Hú, known as Lawḥ-i-Náqús:³³ It is an Arabic Tablet 'revealed in Constantinople on the eve of the 5th of Jamádíyu'l-Avval 1280 A.H. (19 October 1863), the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb' (Taherzadeh, *Revelation* 2:18). MacEoin translated it as the 'Tablet of the Bell' (*Rituals* 169-72) and Lambden as the 'Tablet of the Bell'.³⁴

10. Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá:³⁵ Described by Shoghi Effendi as the 'Tablet of the Vision' (GPB 221), it was revealed in Arabic on the eve of 1 March 1873, in the House

²⁹ See Lambden, 'A Tablet of Baha'u'llah of the Late Baghdad Period: Lawh-i-Halih Halih Halih, Ya Bisharat', *Baha'i Studies Bulletin* 2.3 (December 1983): 105-112. A revised version of this translation now appears at <http://www.bahai-library.org/provisionals/hallelujah.html> (accessed 31 December 2010).

³⁰ See Mc Glinn, 'The Halih Halih Halih in rhythmic verse', <http://bahai-library.com/provisionals/hallelujah.html> (accessed 31 December 2010).

³¹ Quoted in *Ad'iyiy-i-Hadrat-i-Mahbúb* 141-53.

³² See 'A Tablet of the Feast of Ridvan, by Bahá'u'lláh. Translated by Ali Kuli Khan. Translated by Marzieh Gail', http://bahai-library.com/bahauallah_lawh_ridvan_khan (accessed 31 December 2010).

³³ Quoted in Ishráq Khávarí, *Ayyám-i-Tis'ih* 100-6.

³⁴ See Lambden, 'Tablet of the Bell (Lawh-i-Náqús) of Bahá'u'lláh', *Lights of 'Irfán* 4:111-21.

³⁵ Quoted in Ishráq-Khávarí, *Ayyám-i-Tis'ih* 16-20; *Áthár*¹³¹⁴ 2:174-6.

of ‘Údí Khammár in ‘Ákká, translated by Lambden³⁶ and Cole.³⁷ An earlier translation of this Tablet appeared in *Bahá’í Scriptures* under the title ‘The Tablet of the Virgin’ (249-51, sec. 525). Taherzadeh writes about it:

In the Lawḥ-i-Ru’yá Bahá’u’lláh describes His vision of a Maiden dressed in white and illumined with the light of God. She entered the room in which Bahá’u’lláh was seated upon His throne of Lordship. She displayed an indescribable enthusiasm and devotion, circled around Him, was enraptured by the inebriation of His Presence, was thunderstruck at His Glory. And when she recovered, she remained in a state of bewilderment. She longed to offer up her life for her Beloved and finding Him captive in the hands of the unfaithful, she bade Him leave ‘Ákká to its inhabitants and repair to His other dominions ‘whereon the eyes of the people of names have never fallen’, words which found their fulfilment nineteen years later with the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh. In the absence of a translation it is not possible to convey the beauty of the verses and the mystery of the subject revealed in the Lawḥ-i-Ru’yá. The theme of this Tablet is as enchanting as it is unfathomable and mysterious. (*Revelation* 3:223)

Walbridge summarizes the contents of this Tablet as prophesizing ‘Bahá’u’lláh’s death’ (*Sacred* 161).

11. Lawḥ-i Anta’l-Káfi, literally, Tablet of ‘Thou the Sufficing’, known as the Long Healing Prayer:³⁸ The authorized English translation from the original Arabic of this Tablet was published on 13 August 1980.³⁹

³⁶ See Lambden, ‘Lawḥ-i-Ru’yá (Tablet of Vision), by Stephen Lambden, Presented at the Irfan Colloquia Session #22 (English) London, England, August 27-29, 1999’, http://irfancolloquia.org/22/lambden_ruya (accessed 31 December 2010); see also Lambden, ‘Lawḥ-i-Ru’yá (Tablet of Vision). Trans. Stephen Lambden’, <http://bahai-library.com/provisionals/lawh.ruya.lambden.html> (accessed 15 February 2011).

³⁷ See Cole, ‘Tablet of Vision by Bahá’u’lláh. Translated by Juan Cole. Originally written as “Lawḥ-i-Ru’yá”’, http://bahai-library.com/bahauallah_lawh_ruya_cole (accessed 31 December 2010).

³⁸ Quoted in *Risáliy-i-Taṣbīḥ va Tahlíl* 207-15; *Ad’iyyih-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-Maḥbúb* 183-93; *Nafahat-i Faḍl* 2:17-22; *Lawḥ-i mubárak-i Anta’l-Káfi*.

³⁹ See The Universal House of Justice, *Messages 1963-1986* 455, sec. 258. See *Bahá’í Prayers* 91-8.

12. Lawḥ-i-Qad-Iḥtaraqa'l-Mukḥliṣún, known as 'The Fire Tablet' (Quoted in *Risáliy-i-Taṣbīḥ va Tahlíl* 219-24; *Adi'iy-i-Ḥaḍrat-i-Maḥbúb* 169-79; INBA 30; *Nafahat-i Faḍl* 2): The authorized English translation from the original Arabic of this Tablet was published on 13 August 1980.⁴⁰ It is discussed in Taherzadeh, *Revelation* 3:226-30; Balyuzi, *King* 321-22; Cole, 'Modernity' 94.

13. A poetic composition beginning with the words Shams-i-jamál-i-iláhi (Quoted in INBA 32:31-4): This Arabic composition in rhyming prose is described by Lambden, who translated a part of it, as possibly 'written by Bahá'u'lláh for His disciple Darvish Šidq- 'Alí Qazvíní' ('Sinaitic mysteries' 125) in the Iraqi period. McGlinn mentions it as 'Lawh-i Shajara (Tablet of the Burning Bush)' ('Leiden List', no.270), possibly because it refers to the 'Sinaitic Lote-Tree' (quoted in Lambden 'Sinaitic mysteries' 126). It has been provisionally translated by Necati Alkan, an expert in Turkish Bahá'í Studies, in 2003-2007, as 'Tablet on the Daystar of Divine Beauty'.⁴¹

Possible reasons why Bahá'u'lláh composed His poems

It is challenging for us to understand why Bahá'u'lláh has decided to compose these poems because we cannot enter into a Mind so deep and incomparable. 'Abdu'l-Bahá said about it: 'This universal mind is divine; it embraces existing realities, and it receives the light of the mysteries of God' (SAQ 218, sec. 58, para.4). The following reflections are purely personal and exploratory.

First of all, it seems that Bahá'u'lláh loved poetry very much. We can deduce it from the numerous quotations from ancient poets He introduced into His Works, especially the Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys: Faríd ad-Dín 'Aṭṭár (1117–1290), whose model of the Seven Valleys He decided to reproduce and whose verses He quoted in the Seven Valleys (SV8) and the Four Valleys (FV64); Khájih Shamsu'd-Dín Muḥammad Ḥáfiz-i-Shirází (ca.1318–1390), whose famous *ghazal*, 'Sugar-shattering . . . have become all the parrots . . . of Hindustan' (*Dīvān* 310, no.158, v.3), He quoted at the beginning of His Tablet known as Lawḥ-i-Shikar, Shikan, Shikand; Siyyid Aḥmad Hátif (unknown–1783), whose verses He quoted in the Seven Valleys (SV12, 38); 'Umar Ibn al-Fárid (1182–

⁴⁰ See The Universal House of Justice, *Messages 1963-1986* 455, sec. 258. See *Bahá'í Prayers* 214-20.

⁴¹ See http://www.bahai-library.com/bahaullah_shams_jamal_ilahi, accessed 22 July 2011.

1235), whose verses He quoted in the Seven Valleys (SV30, 42) and Jawáhiru'l-Asrár (JA67 and 69); Mawláná Jalál ad-Dín Rúmí (1207–1273); Muşlih ad-Dín Sa'dí (ca.1184–1291), whose verses He quoted in the Seven Valleys (SV24) and the Four Valleys (, 48, 48-9, 55-6, and 65) and upon whose verse, 'Wonder not, if my Best-Beloved be closer to me than mine own self; wonder at this, that I, despite such nearness, should still be so far from Him', He commented in a Tablet;⁴² Majdúd Saná'í (ca.1045–ca.1141), whose verses He quoted in the Four Valleys (FV52, 60) and in Lawḥ-i-Ra'ís (SLH 170). It seems that Bahá'u'lláh loved especially Rúmí, considering that He quoted him more often than all the others. Perhaps this love moved Him to write His Own *Mathnaví*, a poem that 'in addition to the title and the trope of the reed pipe which opens Rumi's *Mathnaví* and closes Bahá'u'lláh's, shares the same metre' (Lewis, 'Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví*' 116). Besides, He devoted part of His Lawḥ-i-Salmán (see GWB, sec. XXI, CXLVIII, CLIV) to a comment upon a verse by Rúmí (*Mathnaví* 1:2466):

When the colourless became enmeshed in colours / a Moses came in conflict with a Moses.⁴³

Moreover 'Abdu'l-Bahá narrates, in His description of the life of Ustád Ismá'íl, one of the companions who followed Bahá'u'lláh in the Holy Land, that:

At one time, Bahá'u'lláh had written down an ode of Rúmí's for him, and had told him to turn his face toward the Báb and sing the words, set to a melody. And so as he wandered through the long dark nights, Ustád would sing these lines:

I am lost, O Love, possessed and dazed (*Ay 'ishq man-am az tú sar-gashtih-u sawdá'í*),
Love's fool am I, in all the earth. (*va andar hamiy-i-'álam mashhúr bi shaydá'í*)

⁴² Later quoted in another Tablet translated by Shoghi Effendi in GWB 184-92, sec. XCIII.

⁴³ Tr. Franklin Lewis, see Lewis, 'Rumi's Masnavi, part 7: God's grace', guardian.co.uk, Monday 11 January 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2010/jan/11/islam-rumi-grace-poetry> (accessed 31 December 2011). Nicholson translates: 'Since colourlessness (pure Unity) became the captive of colour (manifestation in the phenomenal world), a Moses came into conflict with a Moses'

They call me first among the crazed (*dar námiy-i-majnúnán az nám-i-man ágházand*),

Though I once came first for wit and worth (*zín pish agar búd-am sar daftar-i-dáná'i*).

O Love, who sellest me this wine, (*Ay bádiḥ furúsh-i-man*)

O Love, for whom I burn and bleed, (*sar máyiy-i-júsh-i-man*)

Love, for whom I cry and pine – (*Ay az tú khurúsh-i-man*)

Thou the Piper, I the reed. (*man náyam-u tú náyy*)

If Thou wishest me to live, (*Gar zindigí-am khwáhi*)

Through me blow Thy holy breath. (*dar man nafasí dar dam*)

The touch of Jesus Thou wilt give (*man murdiy-i-ṣad sálih*)

To me, who've lain an age in death. (*tú ján-i-masíhá'i*)

Thou, both End and Origin, (*Avval-i-tú-vu ákhir tú*)

Thou without and Thou within – (*ẓáhir-i-tú-vu báṭin tú*)

From every eye Thou hidest well, (*mastúr zi har chashmí*)

And yet in every eye dost dwell (*dar 'ayn-i-huvyadá'i*). (MF 30-1)⁴⁴

Thus, Bahá'u'lláh may have written His poems because of His love for poetry.

Two other practical reasons could be that Bahá'u'lláh mainly addressed Sufi audiences familiar with mystical poetry in those early years. Moreover, poetry is very easy to memorize.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote about poetry in His Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd:

Every word of thy poetry is indeed like unto a mirror in which the evidences of the devotion and love thou cherishest for God and His chosen ones are reflected (TB175-6, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd)

He describes poetry as a mirror of the feelings of the heart. We could, therefore, think that His mystical experiences in the Síyáh-Chál aroused in Him the urgency to speak about them to others, as it happens to whoever has a mystical experience, as different as the level of such experience may be for them when compared with the level of that of the Manifestation of God. However, since He perceived that

⁴⁴ Quoted in 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tadhkirat* 54-5. This *ghazal* does not appear in the collections of Rúmi's *ghazals* recorded on the Internet.

human beings were not yet ready to receive His open Declaration, He preferred to adopt the veiled language of mystical poetry. For the same reason, He seemingly stopped writing poems in later years when He had declared and proclaimed His Mission. In this sense, the invitation to keep silence that recurs at the end of a number of His poems could be not much a mere rhetorical device but the reflection of an inner tension between the impulse to reveal the secret of the Intimation received in the *Síyáh-Chál*, even at the cost of His life (see *Báz áv-u bi-dih*, v. 12, quoted in MA 4:187), an impulse generated by a great compassion for the world that ‘is consumed by the flame of the burning Divine flame (*súkht az ín shu’liy-i-ján-súz ilahî*)’ (*Sáqí az Ghayb-i-Baqá*, v. 15, quoted in MA 4:211), and the awareness of the immaturity of the times (see *Saḥar ámad bi bistar-am yár*, v. 34, quoted in MA 4:184).

In this respect, His poems are as windows opened on His heart and His recent mystical experiences. We can thus expect them to reveal the human aspects of His nature. This expectation is seemingly confirmed by the words of Shoghi Effendi, who describes

the odes He revealed, whilst wrapped in His devotions during those days of utter seclusion, and . . . the prayers and soliloquies which, in verse and prose, both in Arabic and Persian, poured from His sorrow-laden soul. . . [as] initial and impassioned outpourings of a Soul struggling to unburden itself, in the solitude of a self-imposed exile (many of them, alas lost to posterity). (GPB 120, 121, sec. 7, para.36)

His intimist verses, that is, His verses that deal “chiefly with intimate and private especially psychological experiences”,⁴⁵ are many indeed:

Through the window of the soul, I behold the cheek of the Beloved (*Az rawzan-i-ján bínám rukhsáriy-i-Jánán-rá*). (*Báz áv-u bi-dih*, v. 2, Quoted in MA 4:186)

I have lost the way and Thou art a brilliant Flame (*Man gum-shudih ráham, Tú Shu’liy-i-núrání*). (*‘Ishq az Sidriy-i-A‘lá ámad*, v. 8, quoted in MA 4:179)

⁴⁵ *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, p.1184, s.v. “intimist”.

I am drunk of Thee, 'cause of Thee I am on everyone's lips (*Man khúd zi Tú am makhmúr, ham az Tú shudam mashhúr*). (Sáqí, bi-dih ábí, v. 13, quoted in MA 4:193)

The poem Saḥar ámad bi bistar-am yár, especially verses 19 e 29, is a confession where Bahá'u'lláh lays bare His heart:

In my love for Thee I have received many an arrow of cruelty, / And I have fallen into the hands of the infidels. (*Gar chih zi 'ishq-at basí tír-i-jafá khúrdam / Ham gashtih asír-i-dast-i-kuffár*). (Saḥar ámad bi bistar-am yár, v. 19, quoted in MA 4:182)

The Birds of Eternity have returned to their nest, / We have remained down-trodden and abject here on earth (*Atyár-i-Baqá bi-áshyán bar-gashtand, / Má mándih dar ín turáb basí dhalíl u khwár*). (Saḥar ámad bi bistar-am yár, v. 29, quoted in MA 4:183)

The same thing is true for the poem But-i-má ámad, which, from verse 22 on, describes a mystical vision of great beauty. Verse 32 is especially intimist:

My mind did not find its way. / My thought stepped back (*Dhihn-am na-burdih ráh bi-já'í, / Fikrat-am az sayr basí vámandih*). (Quoted in MA 4:191)

One gets the impression that Bahá'u'lláh really wanted to show His hidden thoughts. This feature makes those poems especially precious for all of them who are eager to become more familiar with the figure of Bahá'u'lláh and with the human aspect of a Personage Who is known especially through Works that He wrote with the majesty and the authority of the 'divine teacher' (SAQ 11, sec. 3, para.13).

As to a didactic intent, many passages convey helpful advice for whoever wants to tread the mystical path, which in Bahá'í terms is the path of spirituality, that is, pursuing the development of the spiritual quality potentially present in each soul. Sáqí az Ghayb-i-Baqá, from distich 4 to distich 9, is an invitation to detachment, in its various forms, from the things of the world, from the self, from anything but Him. There are suggestions for the mystic path in the poem But-i-má ámad as well:

First, watch your language. / Then, curb and calm down your fancy (*Avval tu dahán bar-band zi guftár, / Ham zi khayál-at shú sákin u ásúdiḥ*). Set thy heart free from exteriority. / Be inwardly pure and excellent (*Ham tu bi-shú dil-rá zán-chih buvad zāhir, / Van-gáh zi bāṭin shú pák u guzidiḥ*). (But-i-má ámad, v. 11-2, quoted in MA 4:189)

An echo of these words sounds in the Kitáb-i-Íqán:

He must never seek to exalt himself above any one, must wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vainglory, must cling unto patience and resignation, observe silence, and refrain from idle talk. For the tongue is a smouldering fire, and excess of speech a deadly poison. Material fire consumeth the body, whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart and soul. The force of the former lasteth but for a time, whilst the effects of the latter endure a century. (KI 192)

We could finally suppose that Bahá'u'lláh, 'the True Educator, and the Spiritual Teacher' (ESW 143), indulged His poetical vein, conscious that future poets and artists may have taken them as models from which they may draw inspiration. His poems are not many, but they present a great variety of highly inspiring metaphors. His language, enriched by the best images of ancient Persian mystical poetry, is free from that cloyingness which Persian lyric poetry sometimes conveys in its excessive uses of stereotypes. His images are not lifeless rhetorical devices but living and transparent instruments indispensable to express mystical meanings, which cannot be described with the usual language of doctrinal prose. These images, rich in visual suggestions as they are, will inflame the imagination of future artists, not only of the pen but also of the paintbrush and the chisel.

The 'dewdrops of the Realms Above (*Rashḥ-i- 'Amá*)', the 'Ocean of purity (*Baḥr-i-ṣafá*),' and the 'billow of His Presence (*mawj-i-liqá*)' of *Rashḥ-i- 'Amá* (v.1 and 1.4, quoted in Rafati, 'Áṯhár' 59); 'God's crimson flame that sets the world on fire (*Nára'llah-i-ḥamrá'i kátash zadi imkán-rá*)' of *Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí* (v. 4, quoted in MA 4:187); 'the expanses of the Placeless beneath the shade of the Lord of power (*faḍá'i-lá-makán dar zill-i-Ṣáhib-i-Iqtidár*)' of *Sáqí az Ghayb-i-Baqá* (v. 14, quoted in MA 4:211); 'the rose-garden of eternity (*gulshan-i-báqí*)' and the 'breeze of forgiveness (*Bád-i-ghaffári*)', the mysterious 'Lote of the nearness of

God (*Sidriy-i-Qurb-i-Ilah*)’ and the ‘running herd of His gazelles in the desert of Oneness (*davad dar barr-i-Vahdat galliy-i-áhúy-i-ú*)’ of Bi-Jánán ján hamí dar-yáft (v. 9, 17 and 19, quoted in MA 4:177-78); the ‘spark of . . . [His] face (*shu’lih zi rúy-at*)’ that falls on ‘the rose-bush of the spirit (*gul-bun-i-ján*)’ lighting its beauty ‘as a vermilion tulip (*chún láliy-i-nu’mání*)’ of Sáqí, bi-dih ábí (v. 16, quoted in MA 4:193); the sky that fills a ‘skirt with pearls (*dámán-i-gawhar*)’ of Saḥar ámad bi bistar-am yár (v. 16, quoted in MA 4:186); the ‘season of flowers and roses (*Faṣl-i-gul-u gulzár*)’, the Beloved that moves ‘through alleys and bazaars (*kúchih-u bázár*)’, the ‘stores of all lovers (*bázár jumlih ‘áshiqán*)’ turned ‘into spice shops (*dakkiy-i-‘aṭṭár*)’ of Ay bulbulán (1, 4 and 6, quoted in AA 4:200) – these are but a few examples of images that can stimulate the imagination of an artist and inspire him to express the feelings aroused in his heart through the instruments of his art.

Love Poems

The mystical experiences that Bahá’u’lláh had in the Síyáh-Chál of Teheran in October 1852 kindled in Him an irresistible ‘fire of love (*nár-i-‘ishqí*)’ (Sáqí az *Ghayb-i-Baqá*, v. 4) that He sang in the poems He wrote in Iraq. This love that Bahá’u’lláh had conceived in that obscure prison was not ordinary; it was that ‘essence of love’, which He later on described in His Words of Wisdom:

The essence of love is for man to turn his heart to the Beloved One, and sever himself from all else but Him, and desire naught save that which is the desire of his Lord. (TB 155, *Aṣl-i-Kullu’l-Khayr*)

We may find a doctrinal explanation of this ‘essence of love’ born in the heart of Bahá’u’lláh in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ‘Commentary to the Tradition of the Hidden Treasure (*Sharḥ-i-Ḥadīth-i-Kuntu Kanzan Makḥfiyan*)’.⁴⁶ In that treatise, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions five stages of love. The fifth stage, as described by Him, is not mentioned in the Sufi classical works. He describes this stage as

that spiritual attraction and that ecstatic love of the lovers of the Beauteous One for the beauty within their own self.

⁴⁶ The authorized translation of a short part of the Commentary is published in ‘Preface and Notes’ 177-78n23. A provisional translation of the complete work has been made by Momen; see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: ‘Commentary’.

It

is to be counted as a station and a stage of Affection from the state of unification towards unification.

In this stage, the traveller

leaves the wilderness of annihilation and perplexed wandering . . . sees the glimmering of the effulgences of the Beauteous One shining from the dawn of his own beauty . . . [and] sees his own beauty annihilated in the Beauty of the True One and finds the Beauty of the True One enduring in the beauty of his self. ('Commentary' 18-19, provisional translation)

'Abdu'l-Bahá makes clear that the fifth stage of love pertains to the Manifestations of God. However, He explains,

the effulgences of this station shine forth from these Suns onto the mirrors of the realities of the wayfarers and seekers. Thus if the mirrors of the heart be freed from the dust of the worlds of plurality and limitations then the effulgences of this station will be imprinted upon it. And if the window of the soul and the lamp of the heart become purified and refined through the power of holy souls, the light of Divine Bounty will be kindled within it. ('Commentary' 19-20, provisional translation)

The possibility of catching a glimpse of this special love, 'that ecstatic love of the lovers of the Beauteous One for the beauty within their own self', makes these poems very precious because they may be a source of inspiration for any person who is striving to arise towards His supernal Worlds through her daily actions of service.

The 'beauty within . . . [His] own self' that Bahá'u'lláh loved so much is variously described in His poems. In *Sáqí az Ghayb-i-Baqá*, it is the Cup-Bearer (*Sáqí*) Who offers the 'Wine of Eternal Life (*Khamr-i-Báqí*)' (v. 1, quoted in MA 4:209). In '*Ishq az Sidriy-A'lá*, it is Love itself (*'Ishq*) that offers 'the cup of affliction (*jám-i-balá*)' (v. 1, quoted in MA 4:179). In *Bi-Jánán ján hamí dar-yáft*, it is the Beloved (*Janán*) Who draws to Himself the lover through the effluvia of His perfume (v. 1, quoted in MA 4:176). In *Sáqí, bi-dih ábí*, it is again the Cup-Bearer (*Sáqí*), Who offers a Wine that is of water and fire (v. 1-2, quoted in MA 4:192). In *Mast-and bulbulán*, it is once more the Beloved (*Janán*) Who sends his

lover into rapture with the song of His *Yá Hú* (v. 1-2, quoted in MA 4:194). In *Saḥar ámad bi bistar-am*, it is the Friend (*Yár*), Who goes to the bedside of the Lover, thin and pale because of the love sickness that consumes him and comforts him with His sweet words (v. 1, quoted in MA 4:181). In *But-i-má ámad*, it is the Idol or Charmer (*But*), Who is so handsome and comes and gives His wise advice (v. 1f, quoted in MA 4:188f). In *Ay bulbulán*, it is ‘He Who was invisible (*Ghayb*)’, come to bring a new springtime (v. 1, quoted in AA 4:200).

Verse after verse, Bahá’u’lláh strings the pearls of His images, creating oneiric atmospheres resounding of angelical voices, like ‘the warbling of *Tīhrán* (*ghunniy-i-Ṭá*)’ (*Rashḥ-i-‘amá*, v. 10, quoted in Rafati, ‘*Áthár*’ 59); drawing dreamy landscapes like ‘the garden’s ecstasy (*ḥálat-i-bustán*)’ and ‘the rapture of creation (*jadhbiy-i-hastán*)’ (*Rashḥ-i-‘amá*, v. 18, quoted in Rafati, ‘*Áthár*’ 59). These sceneries are rich in colours, as ‘the eye of twilight . . . turned pomegranate (*chashm-i-shafaq gulnár*)’ (*Saḥar ámad bi bistar-am yár*, v. 9, quoted in MA 4:181), and soaked with perfumes, like the ‘stores of all lovers . . . turned into spice shops (*shikkar-i-la ‘l-ash*, ‘*iyán chún dakkiy-i-‘aṭṭár shud*)’ (*Ay bulbulán*, v. 6, quoted in AA 4:200). They offer a glimpse of a nature translucent with infinite, like the ‘running herd of His gazelles in the desert of Oneness (*davad dar barr-i-Vaḥdat galliy-i-áhúy-i-ú*)’ (*Bi-Jánán ján hamí dar-yáft*, v. 19, quoted in MA 4:178) or the sky that ‘has filled its skirt with pearls, / To lay it down at the feet (*dámán-i-gawhar zán girift*, / *Tá kunad bar maqdam-i-‘izzat nithár*)’ (*Saḥar ámad bi bistar-am yár*, v. 16 MA 4:182) of the Beloved. At the same time, His verses give important lessons of life:

If thou art not annihilated to the qualities of existence, O man of the path,
/ How wilt thou sip the wine of eternal life from that sweet Idol’s
ruby lips (*Tá na-gardí fání az vaṣf-i-vujúd*, *ay mard-i-ráh*, / *Kí chashí*
khamr-i-Baqá az la ‘l-i-núshín-i-Nigár)? (*Sáqí az Ghayb-i-Baqá*, v.
5, quoted in MA 4:210))

or

Purify thyself in the crucible of oneness / And I will give thee two or three
glasses of this wine (*Chún kih shudí kháli? az bútiy-i-vaḥdat*, / *Ángah dú sih paymáníh daham-at zín bádi*). (*But-i-má ámad*, v. 13,
quoted in MA 4:189)

Bahá'u'lláh draws from the entire repertoire of ancient Persian poetry, mixing the Anacreontic, love, spring and mystical motifs of the *ghazal* and the didactic themes of the *qasídi*. The result is a phantasmagoria of images, colours, sounds, and scents that hush the mind and touch the heart. Therefore, these poems, even if read in a paraphrase and not in an adequate translation, seem an excellent instrument to create that attitude of meditation and prayer which the Bahá'í Writings highly recommend because, in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words

Remembrance of God is like the rain and dew which bestow freshness and grace on flowers and hyacinths, revive them and cause them to acquire fragrance, redolence and renewed charm. 'And thou hast seen the earth dried up and barren: but when We send down the rain upon it, it stirreth and swelleth, and groweth every kind of luxuriant herb'. Strive thou, then, to praise and glorify God by night and by day, that thou mayest attain infinite freshness and beauty. (Quoted in CC 2:232, sec. 1745)

Love in Persian mystical poetry and these poems by Bahá'u'lláh

'That ecstatic love of the lovers of the Beauteous One for the beauty within their own self' ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 'Commentary' 18-19, provisional translation), that is Bahá'u'lláh's love for the Most Great Spirit, is described in these poems according to the stylistic of Persian mystic poetry. However, there are great conceptual differences. In the Works He wrote in the Iraqi period, Bahá'u'lláh adopted the cyphers of Sufism, and, at first sight, He seems to share its concepts. In reality, He immediately opened the door to many changes. He already did it in these early poetical compositions. He did it more completely in His two Epistles, the Seven Valleys (*Haft Vádí*) and the Four Valleys (*Chihar Vádí*) which He wrote sometime after His return to Baghdad from Kurdistan in 1856. He did it in the Hidden Words that He composed in 1858 and the Kitáb-i-Íqán 'revealed within the space of two days and two nights, in the closing years of that period (1278 A.H. – 1862 A.D.)' (GPB 138, sec. 8, para.25). We will thus briefly illustrate the concepts of love of God, as well as of the Beloved and the lover, in the Sufi literature and Bahá'u'lláh's Writings. We will try to highlight their similitude and differences.

The concept of love

The concept of love for God was introduced into the Islamic world as early as the second century of the Hegira by the Iraqi Sufi poet Rábi'a al-'Adawiyya (ca.714–

801). In the beginning, this concept of the love of God was opposed in the Muslim world because people thought it to imply an excessive intimacy between human beings, mean creatures, and their Creator, Absolute and Unknowable Essence. However, the resemblance between mystical love and human love is such that, finally, this concept took off, and many poets sang this feeling. The descriptions of a number of these poets became over time so realistic that, as Schimmel puts it, ‘one of the questions that has been discussed frequently in connection with Persian lyrical poetry is whether this literature should be interpreted as mystical or as erotic’ (*Mystical Dimensions* 288). Bausani maintains says these two positions can be acceptable depending on the poet (see *Religion in Iran* 273).

These disquisitions do not apply to the poems by Bahá’u’lláh. It seems very clear today that the Beloved of those poems is the Most Great Spirit. It seems difficult today not to consider Rashh-i-‘Amá as a joyous announcement of the encounter with the Spirit in an extraordinary ‘divine rapture (*jadhbiy-i-lahúti*)’ (v. 7, quoted in Rafati, ‘Áthár’ 59), that draws the Poet to proclaim:

The Era of ‘I am He’ shone forth from Our Countenance. / The Cycle of
‘He is He’ rolls out from the effusion of Bahá [Bá] (*Dawr-i-‘Aná Hú’*
az Chihriy-i-Má kardih burúz, / *Kawr-i-‘Huva Hú’ az tafhiy-i-Bá mí-*
rízad). (v. 8, quoted in Rafati, ‘Áthár’ 59)

The same is true in the case of the poem Mast-and bulbulán (see MA 4:194-6), with its significant *radíf*, *yá Húy-i-ú*. The description of the Beloved in verses 6-19 of the poem Sáqí, bi-dih abí also suggests that the Beloved is a sublime Entity (see MA 4:192-3). Other verses that also seem to announce the descent of the Most Great Spirit are:

Thou art Jesus’ breath. Thou art Moses’ bush. / Thou art God’s crimson
flame that sets the world on fire (*Ham nafkhiy-i-‘Ísá’i, ham sidriy-i-*
Músá’i. / Nára’llah-i-ḥamrá’i kátash zadí imkán-rá). (Báz áv-u bi-
dih jámí, v. 4, quoted in MA 4:187)

Marvel not that the lover fell into His snare, / The necks of the Monarchs
of the spirit are caught in His curly locks (*Ín ‘ajab níst kih ‘áshiq bih*
kamand-ash uftádih. / Gardan-i-Sháhán-i-ján andar kham-i-gísúy-i-
ú).

Out of love for His cheek Moses hastened to the Sinai of the inner meaning,
/ The Jesus of the Spirit was risen by His cheering breath (*Músi az*
‘ishq-i-Rukh-ash dar Túr-i-ma ‘ní mí-shitáft, / ‘Ístý-i-ján zindih ámad
az dam-i-dil-júy-i-ú). (Bi-Jánán ján hamí dar-yáft, v. 6-7, quoted in
MA 4:177)

The image of the Beloved

In Sufi poems, the lover yearns to go closer to the Beloved. However, the Beloved is the Absolute, and thus, He is described as aloof, unapproachable, and indifferent to the lover’s proffer of love. Therefore, the lover laments His cruelty, which makes him suffer. Háfiz, for example, asks the Beloved:

O my soul! From stone-heartedness, why shatterest thou / The feeble heart
which, through feebleness, is (fragile) like crystal. (*Dīvān* 233,
no.111, v. 6; Persian: *Díván*, ‘*Ghazalyát*’, no. 97, v. 6)

The lover also laments the Beloved’s changeableness. Rúmí writes in this vein:

One moment you brand me, the next you draw me into the garden (*bágh*).
(*Mystical Poems* 2:16, no. 221, v. 8; *Díván*, ‘*Ghazalyát*’, no. 1786,
v.8)

This is *náz*, the coquetry ‘of the Beloved who pretends to surrender, but never yields, who responds with his whims, his unfaithfulness, his arrogance, and his cruelty to the mercy invoked by his lovers ’ (Saccone, ‘Introduzione’ 41).

Bah’u’lláh also adopts the language of the Beloved’s remoteness and cruelty. The Beloved is erratic and plays with the lover, whom He sometimes binds to Himself and sometimes ignores. The Beloved tortures the lover (‘*áshiq*): the snake of His tresses sucks the blood of his heart and soul (see *Báz áv-u bi-dih jámi*, v. 10, quoted in MA 4:187). With His ‘blood-shedding eyebrow (*abrúy-i-khún-ríz*)’ (*Báz áv-u bi-dih jámi*, v. 9, quoted in MA 4:187) He kills the lover and asks him to throw his head at His feet:

If thine aim be to cherish thy life, approach not our court; / But if sacrifice
be thy heart’s desire, come and let others come with thee (*Gar*
khayál-i-ján hamí hast-at bi-dil, injá ma-yá, / Gar nithár ján va dil
dárí, bí-á va ham bí-ár). (Sáqi az *Ghayb-i-Baqá*, v. 7-8, quoted in
MA 4:210)

In the poems written by Bahá'u'lláh, however, the Beloved seems more indulgent. The pains He causes to His lover have mystical, rather than earthly, features. His cruelty is but a poetic device. The Beloved Who wants the sacrifice of the lover in reality wants him to renounce the inferior qualities of his material nature, those qualities which in the Bahá'í Writings are described as 'the insistent self (*nafs-i-ammariḥ*), the evil promptings of the human heart' (SWAB 256, sec. 206, *Muntakhabátí* 247). It is what Madame Jeanne Marie Bouvier de La Motte Guyon (1648–1717) called 'mystical death'. In her words:

Death has various names, according to our different manner of expression or conception. It is called a *departure*, that is, a separation from Self in order that we may pass into God; a *loss*, total and entire, of the Will of the creature, which causes the Soul to be wanting to itself, that it may exist only in God. ('Concise View', para.43)

Mystical death is the price that should be paid to come closer to the Beloved. Therefore, the lover's pains are the unavoidable consequence of the intoxication of love that draws the lover to accept any agony so that he may come closer to his Beloved. It is the pain of one's struggle against the emotions of the natal self in order to master them and bend them towards the direction recommended by the Beloved so that one may fulfil in one's life 'His trust, and in the realm of spirit obtain the gem of Divine virtue' (AHW).

The image of the lover

In Sufi poems, the lover, in his unremitting longing for the Beloved, unapproachable and cruel as He is, is unavoidably overpowered by feelings of remoteness and pain. The Algerian anthropologist and psychoanalyst Malek Chebel, an archaeologist of the world of the Arabian and Islamic imagination, writes that for those poets, love

is experienced as a consuming passion, as remoteness and pain. These three elements pervade the mythology of the chaste love of Platonists (*al-Ḥubb al-'Udhri*), a bitter love, conducive to anguish, nourished by waiting, gnawed by torments of the soul and tortures of the body. (Chebel 204-5)

Ḥáfiz devoted an entire *ghazal* to the leitmotiv of separation:

The reed's tongue hath no desire for the explanation of separation (*faráq*)
 / If not, to thee, I give the explanation of the tale of separation.
 Alas! Life's span, in hope of union / Hath reached to an end; and to an end,
 hath not come the time of separation (*Dīvān* 603, no. 351, vv.1-2;
 Persian: *Díván*, 'Ghazalyát', no. 297, vv. 1-2).

As to pain, Ḥáfiz wrote in one of his *ghazals*:

For our pain (*dard*), is no remedy (*darmán*), Justice! / For our separation
 (*hijr*) is no end, Justice!
 Religion and the heart, they ravish; and make design upon our life: / Justice!
 against the tyranny of lovely ones (*khúbán*), Justice!
 As the price of a kiss, the demand of a life, / These heart-ravishers (*dil-
 sitánán*) make, Justice!
 These of Kafir-heart drink our blood: / O Muslims! what remedy? Justice!...
 Day and night, self-less, like Hafiz / Weeping and consuming (with grief),
 I have gone, Justice! (*Dīvān* 231, no.110, v. 1-4, 7; Persian: *Díván*,
 'Ghazalyát', no. 96, v.1-4, 7)

The words more frequently used to describe the pains of the lover's remoteness (*hijrán*) from the Beloved are *ghamm* and *dard*. As to *ghamm*, according to Carlo Saccone, an expert in and a translator of Persian poetry, this word usually denotes 'the pain because of a separation or detachment from the beloved, a classical figure of the condition of the mystic' ('Note' 219n14). As to *dard*, the same Saccone writes:

Persian language makes an interesting distinctions of words, whereby the more usual term – 'eshq', from an Arabic root – is paralleled by another, strictly Iranian, word, 'dard', which means love seen in the perspective of its 'pain' (which is the etymological meaning of 'dard'), more properly 'pain because of an absence' or because of remoteness from the beloved. This is the reason why 'Attâr said that angels have an experience of "eshq" (the love typical of one who attains the union with his beloved), but only man knows 'dard' (and *ahl-e dard*, 'people of pain' for love, or sorrowful, usually denotes the mystic lovers). ('La "via degli amanti"' 34)

These qualities of the lover are mentioned also in Bahá'u'lláh's poems. The lover wants to be united (*vaşl*) with his Beloved and therefore yearns after annihilation (*faná*), the one condition that, together with the inevitable pain (*dard*) it implies, enables the lover to be united with His Beloved and to enjoy the vision of His quickening (*jánbak^hsh*) splendour (*jilvih*). The lover yearns for pain and death because, for him, existence means remoteness from his Beloved. 'Turn my ease into pain (*dard-am dih az ásáyish*)' (Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí, v. 3, quoted in MA 4:187), he invokes. He also says:

In Thy pathway I have offered up this world and the world to come. / Come back, that I may lay down my heart and soul for Thee (*Dunyá-u 'uqbá-rá jumlih bi-rah-at dádam / Báz á bi-rah-at rízam ham ján-u raván-rá*). (Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí, v. 6, quoted in MA 4:187)

He asks the Beloved: 'Consume this vanishing temple and go away in laughter (*Ín haykal-i-fání-rá bar-súz-u bu-rú khandán*)' (Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí, v. 2, quoted *ibid.*). And moreover:

Thou didst come with a sword in Thy hand, O Love, / Here is my head, here is my heart, strike, strike hard this lifeless lover (*Shamshír bi-kaff ámadí, ay 'Ishq, ínak sar-u ínak dil / Zakhmí zan, u muhkam zan ín 'áshiq-i-bí-ján-rá*).

With Thy blood-shedding eyebrow shed the blood of this heart-bereft . . . (*Bá abrúy-i-khún-ríz-at khún-i-man-i-bí-dil ríz . . .*) (Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí, v. 8-9, quoted in MA 4:187)

The lover is derelict because he is nothing, and the Beloved is all. Therefore, he invokes:

Deliver me from perpetuity. Release me from eternity. / Shelter this poor headless one 'neath the shadow of evanescence (*Az abad-am bi-rahán, vaz qidam-am bi-jahán / Dar zill-i-faná dih já ín bí-sar-u sámán-rá*). (Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí, v. 5, quoted in MA 4:187)

The lover is eager because he is looking forward to being united with the Beloved. He invites the Beloved to lift up 'the veil from . . . [His] cheek (*burqa* . . . *az 'idhár*)' (Sáqí az Ghayb-i-Baqá, v. 1, quoted in MA 4:209). He asks Him 'a drop of the mystic flame (*ábí zán shu 'liy-i-rúhání*)' (Sáqí, bi-dih ábí, v. 1, quoted in MA

4:192). He wishes ‘to become informed of the mysteries of love (*kih gardí váqif az asrár-i-‘ishq*)’ (Sáqí az *Ghayb-i-Baqá*, v. 9, quoted in MA 4:219). He is a ‘drunkard of the Lord (*makhmúr-i-rabbání*)’ (Sáqí az *Ghayb-i-Baqá*, v. 3).

Beyond the pain of the lover

Besides all these feelings that repeat the classical models of Persian mystic poetry, in the poems of Bahá’u’lláh, there is a strong presence of the joy for the splendour or unveiling (*jilviah*) of the Beloved, perhaps a reference to what He perceived during His mystical experiences in the *Síyáh-Chál*, which He now wants to share with His readers. The description of this reunion suggests to the mystic seekers the certain possibility of definitively closing the ‘the scroll of remoteness (*daftar-i-hijrán*)’ (Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí, v. 3, quoted in MA 4:186) from the Beloved.

The concept of reunion is clearly explained in a Tablet, known as *Lawḥ-i-‘Áshiq va Ma‘shúq*, that is, the Tablet of the lover and the Beloved, that could have been written in Edirne in ca.1866–1867 (see Taherzadeh 2:241-5):

Release yourselves, O nightingales of God, from the thorns and brambles of wretchedness and misery, and wing your flight to the rose-garden of unfading splendor. O My friends that dwell upon the dust! Haste forth unto your celestial habitation. Announce unto yourselves the joyful tidings: ‘He Who is the Best-Beloved is come! He hath crowned Himself with the glory of God’s Revelation, and hath unlocked to the face of men the doors of His ancient Paradise.’ Let all eyes rejoice, and let every ear be gladdened, for now is the time to gaze on His beauty, now is the fit time to hearken to His voice. Proclaim unto every longing lover: ‘Behold, your Well-Beloved hath come among men!’ and to the messengers of the Monarch of love impart the tidings: ‘Lo, the Adored One hath appeared arrayed in the fullness of His glory!’ O lovers of His beauty! Turn the anguish of your separation from Him into the joy of an everlasting reunion, and let the sweetness of His presence dissolve the bitterness of your remoteness from His court.

Behold how the manifold grace of God, which is being showered from the clouds of Divine glory, hath, in this day, encompassed the world. For whereas in days past every lover besought and searched after his Beloved, it is the Beloved Himself Who now is calling His lovers and is

inviting them to attain His presence. (GWB 319-20, sec. CLI, paras1-2, Lawḥ-i-‘Áshiq va Ma‘shúq)

In light of this explanation, the feeling of remoteness is no longer a desperate feeling but a conscious longing for a possible fulfilment.

This changed atmosphere due to the lover’s approach to the Beloved, finds an explanation in many aspects of the new mystical vision brought by Bahá’u’lláh. Bahá’u’lláh confirms the concept of Islamic orthodoxy whereby God is absolutely unknowable, and thus whosoever tries to approach His Essence exerts useless endeavours. He writes:

No tie of direct intercourse can possibly bind Him to His creatures. He standeth exalted beyond and above all separation and union, all proximity and remoteness. No sign can indicate His presence or His absence; inasmuch as by a word of His command all that are in heaven and on earth have come to exist, and by His wish, which is the Primal Will itself, all have stepped out of utter nothingness into the realm of being, the world of the visible. (KI 97, para.105)

Unlike certain Sufis, who thought the direct relation with the Divinity accessible to those few chosen ones who attained the most advanced stages of the mystical quest, Bahá’u’lláh teaches that this direct relation is barred to everyone. The lover can, however, enter into a relationship with Them Whom God sends to the world as His Vicars,

sanctified Mirrors . . . Day-springs of ancient glory . . . Exponents on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose (KI 99-100, para.106)

They are the Prophet as Lawgivers (*shári’*), the revealers of Scriptures (*kitáb*), as Abraham, Moses, Christ, Muhammad, and now He Himself. He writes that

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 . . . By attaining, therefore, to the presence of these holy

Luminaries, the ‘Presence of God (*laqá’u’lláh*)’ Himself is attained. (KI 141 para.152, KMI 110)

The reunion with the Beloved is realized on earth in the meeting with the Prophet, personally for a few human beings who live in His days and who have the capacity of recognizing the Beauty of the Beloved in Him, or through His Writings for all the others: ‘Through the window of the soul (*rawzan-i-ján*)’ the lover beholds ‘the cheek of the Beloved (*rukhsáriy-i-Jánán*)’ (Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí, v. 2, quoted in MA 4:186). This is the actual meeting with the Beloved, which brings infinite joy, because He breathes, with His ‘soul-stirring lips . . . a breath of spirit into . . . [one’s] breast (*bá lab-i-ján-bakhsh-at rúhí bi-dam arkán-rá*)’ (Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí, v. 9, quoted in MA 4:187). The meeting with God is now possible through Him, Bahá’u’lláh, ‘the Beloved of the hearts which long for Thee (*ḥabíba qulúbi’l-mushtaḥín*)’ (PM 209, sec. 124, para.3, *Munáját* 142), He Himself the bearer of sublime attributes and thus the supreme Object of love. He is ‘Jesus’ breath . . . Moses’ bush . . . God’s crimson flame that sets the world on fire (*naḥkhiy-i-‘Ísá’í . . . sidriy-i-Músá’í . . . Nára’llah-i-ḥamrá’í kátash zadí imkán-rá*)’ (Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí, v. 4, quoted in MA 4:187):

A glimmer of His image fell on the page of the spirit, / A hundred Hellenic wisdoms were thereby confounded (*Yik jilvīh zi ‘aks-ash bar ṣafḥiy-i-ján uftád, / Válih shud az án jilvīh ṣad ḥikmat-i-yúnání*).

A spark of that flame touched the Sinaitic tree, / A hundred Imranite Moses fell into a swoon (*Yik jadḥvīh az án shu’lih bar Sidriy-i-Síná zad, / Madhúsh az án jadḥvīh ṣad Músíy-i-‘Imrání*).

A flame burst out from that fire and Love pitched / Its tent in the water and clay of man and in his heart (*Yik shu’lih az án ádash shud, ‘ishq bi-zad khar-gáh / Dar áb u gil-i-ádam ham dar dil-i-insání*). (Sáqí, bi-dih ábí, v. 3-5, quoted in MA 4:192)

The lover can only yield to Him, against any logic – ‘Love becomes a slave and the Intellect a porter (*ham ‘Ishq shudih bandih, ham ‘Aql kunad darbání*)’ (Sáqí, bi-dih ábí, v. 19, quoted in MA 4:194) – in a total amorous commitment which has no other aim than finding a shelter ‘neath the shadow of evanescence (*dar ṣill-i-faná*)’ (Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí, v. 5, quoted in MA 4:187).

These poems make clear that for the lover to attain the reunion with his Beloved, he must follow Him. The mystical reunion with the Beloved is attained through forgetting oneself and putting one's life at His service to fulfill His vision of the future world civilization. Such is the joy of reunion: the joy of pursuing the ideal in action. This concept is explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as follows:

Until a being setteth his foot in the plane of sacrifice, he is bereft of every favour and grace; and this plane of sacrifice is the realm of dying to the self, that the radiance of the living God may then shine forth. The martyr's field is the place of detachment from self, that the anthems of eternity may be upraised. Do all ye can to become wholly weary of self, and bind yourselves to that Countenance of Splendours; and once ye have reached such heights of servitude, ye will find, gathered within your shadow, all created things. This is boundless grace; this is the highest sovereignty; this is the life that dieth not. All else save this is at the last but manifest perdition and great loss. (SWAB 76-7, sec. 36)

It is Faust's '*Verweile doch! du bist so schön!* Beautiful moment, do not pass away' (Faust, line 1699).

Besides their doctrinal meaning, which is not the place to discuss, Bahá'u'lláh's words justify the joyous atmosphere prevailing on the feelings of anguish and pain. The inebriation, the folly, the longing for annihilation of the lover do not evoke only the pain of a fire that burns away 'all things (*jumliy-i-hastî*)' (Sáqí az *Ghayb-i-Baqá*, v. 4, quoted in MA 4:210), consumes 'the world (*jahán*)' (Sáqí az *Ghayb-i-Baqá*, v. 15, quoted in MA 4:211), 'sets the world on fire (*kátash zadí imkán-rá*)' (Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí, v. 4, quoted in MA 4:187) and destroys 'this vanishing temple (*haykal-i-fání*)' (Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí, v. 2, quoted in MA 4:186). That same fire also is light that enlightens; it is 'water of the spirit (*kawthar-i-rúhání*)' (Sáqí, bi-dih ábí, v. 2, quoted in MA 4:192) that nourishes and refreshes; it is a glimmer that falls 'on the page of the spirit (*ṣafhiy-i-ján*)' and confounds 'a hundred Hellenic wisdoms (*ṣad hikmat-i-yúnání*)' (Sáqí, bi-dih ábí, v. 3, quoted in MA 4:192), a spark whereby 'a hundred Imranite Moses (*ṣad Músíy-i-Imrání*)' fall into a swoon (Sáqí, bi-dih ábí, v. 4, quoted in MA 4:192), that kindles a 'flame (*Yik shu 'lih*)' of love that pitches 'its tent in the water and clay of man and in his heart (*Dar áb u gil-i-ádam ham dar dil-i-insání*)' (Sáqí, bi-

dih ábí, v. 5, quoted in MA 4:192), that falls ‘upon the rose-bush of the spirit (*gul-bun-i-ján*)’ and lits ‘its beauty as a vermilion tulip (*chún láliy-i-nu ‘mání*)» (Sáqí, bi-dih ábí, v. 16, quoted in MA 4:193); it is the theophanic ‘fire on Mount Paran (*shu ‘liy-i-Farání*)’ (Sáqí, bi-dih ábí, v. 11, quoted in MA 4:193). The lover’s moan is a ‘melody (*naghmih*)’ that can bring the world to life (Sáqí az *Ghayb-i-Baqá*, v. 15, quoted in MA 4:211). The ‘wine of the spirit (*sharáb-i-ma ‘naví*)’ (Sáqí az *Ghayb-i-Baqá*, v. 2, quoted in MA 4:209) first intoxicates him and then shakes off ‘his languor (*khumár*)’ (Sáqí az *Ghayb-i-Baqá*, v. 3, quoted in MA 4:210). That Wine is ‘the wine of joy (*khamr-i-farah*)’ (Sáqí az *Ghayb-i-Baqá*, v. 12, quoted in MA 4:210) that is offered in ‘the vessel of immortal life (*sághar-i-báqí*)’ (Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí, v. 1, quoted in MA 4:186) and washes the ‘soul from the whisperings of the flesh (*vasvasiy-i-nafsání*)’ (Sáqí, bi-dih ábí, v. 1, quoted in MA 4:192). The lover is annihilated ‘to the qualities of existence (*vasf-i-vujúd*)’ (Sáqí az *Ghayb-i-Baqá*, v. 5, quoted in MA 4:210), but immediately after he quaffs ‘the wine of eternal life from that sweet Idol’s ruby lips (*khamr-i-Baqá az la ‘l-i-núshín-i-Nigár*)’ (Sáqí az *Ghayb-i-Baqá*, v. 5, quoted in MA 4:210). He tramples upon ‘the world (*mulk*)’ and enters ‘beneath the shade of Poverty (*zill-i-faqr*)’, but he soon beholds ‘the immortal World on every side (*Mulk-i-báqí-rá kunún az har kinár*)’ (Sáqí az *Ghayb-i-Baqá*, v. 6, quoted in MA 4:210).

The Beloved has come. The traditional relation between the Beloved and His lovers is overturned. Whoever has recognized His Blessed Beauty ‘steppeth into the sanctuary of the Friend, and shareth as an intimate the pavilion of the Loved One’ (SV 17) and thus rejoices in the bliss of reunion, in this Day when

. . . the people of Bahá have entered the blissful abode of the Divine Presence, and quaffed the wine of reunion, from the chalice of the beauty of their Lord, the All-Possessing, the Most High. (GWB 32, sec. XIV, para.13, *Lawh-i-Ridván*)

As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said: ‘The most great, peerless gift of God to the world of humanity is happiness born of love – they are the twin sisters of the superman; one is the complement of the other’ (Quoted in ‘A Fortune’ 103).

From these poems and the entire Work by Bahá’u’lláh, a concept of mysticism emerges that is very far from the philosophizing and aesthetic, always

theoretical, abstractions of certain ancient types of mysticism. Bausani writes that Bahá'í mysticism is a 'preparation to a renewed active life on the earth, whose realities once again acquire a new *value* as if they were translucent with the absolute' (*Saggi* 152). The meeting with the Beloved is accessible to everyone here on earth. There is but one prerequisite: annihilation. Annihilation is renouncing the seductions of the self and the world and entering the path of service to humankind to create a new civilization, the only path that leads to the reunion with the Beloved and, thus, the only source of genuine joy.

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