

Drawing upon and interpreting Islamic traditions (see, for example, Majlisi, Bihar. 11:68) about the GN both the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh spoke of "letters" or forms of it being communicated by past Manifestations of God in previous religious dispensations. In his Commentary on the Sura of the "Night of Power" (Tafsir laylat al-qadr; Qur'an 97) the Bab refers to 3, 4, and 5 portions of one of the forms of the "Greatest Name", existing in the Pentateuch (tawrat), Gospel[s] (injil) and Qur'an (respectively; see INBAMC 69:17). Similarly, in a Tablet commenting on the Qur'anic Sura of the Pen (Sura 68), Bahá'u'lláh mentions that God divulged something (a "letter"/ "word" harf an) of the "Greatest Name" Baha' in every dispensation. In the Islamic dispensation, He states, it is alluded to through the letter "B" (ba'; the first letter of the basmala see below) and in the Gospels (injil) through the word Ab (= "Father") -- which, in the Arabic Bible, contains two of the letters of Baha ("A" & "B"). Baha is clearly intimated in Babi Scripture, the Bayan. It is representative of the Self (nafs) of God in this, the Bahá'í dispensation (see INBAMC 56:25).

The word Baha does not occur in the Qur'an and is not among the traditional ninety-nine "most beautiful names" of God (al-asma' al-husna; see Qur'an 7:179); it is thus considered "secret" or "hidden" though it was not totally unknown prior to the advent of Bahá'u'lláh. Its explicit identification with the "Greatest Name" however, despite Islamic traditions to this effect, was not widely recognized.

There are a great number of traditions about the "Greatest Name" in Islamic literatures. A few, deriving from the Twelver Imams, notably Imam Ja`far (d.765 CE) and Imam Rida (d. 818 CE.), clearly point to Baha being the "Greatest Name". Among the most important occurrences of the word Baha' in Shi`i Islamic prayers is that of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (677--732 CE) the fifth of the Twelver Shi`i Imams. It is a prayer to be recited at dawn during Ramadan (Du`a Sahar), the Muslim month of fasting. The word baha or a derivative of the same root is contained some five times within its opening words: "O my God! I beseech Thee by thy baha' ("glory") in its supreme splendour (bi abha'hu), for all Thy baha' ("glory") is truly luminous (al-bahiyy). I verily, O my God, beseech Thee by the fullness of Thy baha' ("glory") (baha'ika)!" (Qummi, Mafatih, 238-9)

Partly as a result of this opening line, a certain Safavid theologian and mystagogue, Baha' al-Din Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Amili (b. Baalbeck c., 1547 d. Isfahan 1622 CE), adopted the pen-name (takhallus) Shaykh-i-Bahá'í.

Both the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh frequently quote or allude to this prayer. Bahá'u'lláh reckoned it a protection against being veiled from that Name (Baha') which is the "ornament" of God's "Self". (see AQA, Majmu`a-yi munajat pp.45-46). In a Persian Tablet to Mirza `Abbas of Astarabad, sometimes referred to as the "Tablet of the Greatest Name" (Lawh ism-i-a`zam), Bahá'u'lláh quotes from the beginning of this prayer and observes that the "people of al-furqan" (= Muslims) have not heeded the fact that the "greatest

name" was said to be contained within it; indeed, at its very beginning! (refer MA 4:22-23)

The Bab used the word Baha or its derivatives quite frequently in his writings. From his Qayyumu'l-Asma (mid. 1844; the word Baha occurs here about 14 times) until his very late Haykalu'l-Din (summer 1850) it occurs in a variety of contexts. A number of these scriptural texts are related to "Him Whom God will make manifest" or are viewed as prophetic of Bahá'u'lláh. i.e. "All the Baha of the Bayan is man yuhiruhu'llah" (Per. Bayan III:14). In the Kitab-i Panj Sha'an, ("Book of the Five Grades"), a section of which is dedicated to Bahá'u'lláh, the Bab several times uses the phrase Bahá'u'lláh as well as various derivatives of Baha (cf. GPB:28).

`Abdu'l-Bahá, Nabil-i-Zarandi and other Bahá'í historians, have recorded that the Bab, before his departure from Chihriq to Tabriz and subsequent martyrdom (1850), penned 360 derivatives of the word baha in fine shikastih ("broken script"), in the form of a calligraphic pentacle. This he arranged to be delivered to Bahá'u'lláh (see DB: 370+fn. `Abdu'l-Bahá, Traveller's Narrative, 26).

It was during the latter part of the Adrianople period of his ministry (c.1867 CE) that the greeting Allah-u-Abha ("God is All-Glorious") superseded the Islamic salutation Allah-u-Akbar ("God is Great; refer GPB:176) and devotees of Bahá'u'lláh became widely internally known as "the people of Baha"

-- a phrase used by the Bab in his Qayyumu'l-Asma (LVII; cited ESW:139). There are thousands of occurrences of the word Baha' in Bahá'í sacred scripture and many theologically weighty statements about the GN. Bahá'u'lláh has stated that

all the Divine Names, relative to both the seen and the unseen spheres, are dependent upon the GN Baha (see MA 8:24). The use of the GN is, in a sense, the alpha and the omega of Bahá'í existence. It is nine times repeated in the Bahá'í "Long Obligatory Prayer", can be recited at the commencement of meals (Law-i-Tibb), has a healing and protective potency, and is recited six times during Bahá'u'lláh's communal Prayer for the Dead (P&M No. 167).

In his Most Holy Book (Kitab-i-Aqdas) Bahá'u'lláh made the repetition of the "Greatest Name" ninety five times ($95 = 5 \times 19$) each day, a regenerating religious activity -- Shoghi Effendi interpreted this directive as a matter of individual choice rather than an obligatory duty (see Aqdas para. 26; LG:905).

`Abdu'l-Bahá often gloried in the majesty of the "greatest name" (Baha) of his Divine Father. He designed (?) a theologically significant calligraphic representation of it consisting of two Letter "B"s and 4 letter "H"s -- which spell the word Baha in four directions -- flanked by two five-pointed stars representing the Bab and Bahá'u'lláh. (For details see MA 2:100-103, summarized

in Faizi, 13ff). Too sacred to be used on gravestones, this and other calligraphic representations of the GN are hung in Bahá'í homes or engraved on ringstones. The Guardian's viewpoint regarding the centrality of the symbol of the "greatest name" is expressed in the words, "...The Greatest Name is a distinctive mark of the Cause and a symbol of our Faith" (LG:895).

Bibliography

`Abdu'l-Bahá. A Traveller's Narrative. (Translated by E.G. Browne, A New and Corrected Edition) Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980; Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas, (Albert R. Windust [Comp.] = TAB) Vol. III Chicago: Bahai Publishing Society, 1919.

The Bab. Bayan-i farsi n.p. n.d.; al-Bayan al-`arabi n.p. n.d.; Kitab-i panj sha'n n.p.n.d. Haykal al-din n.p. n.d.

Bahá'u'lláh. Athar-i-Qalam-i-A`la [= AQA] Majmu`a-yi Munajat n.p. [Tehran]: BPT., 128 Badi` ; The Kitab-i-Aqdas, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1993; Epistle to the Son of the Wolf (trans Shoghi Effendi), Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971 [= ESW] Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978.

BSB = Stephen Lambden ed., Bahá'í Studies Bulletin, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1982>

The Dawnbreakers [Tarikh-i Zarandi Pt.1] [= DB, Shoghi Effendi trans.] London:BPT., 1953.

Fananapazir, Khazeh & Lambden, S. The Tablet of Medicine (Law-i Tibb) of Baha'u'll h: A Provisional Translation with Occasional Notes, BSB 6:4-7:2 pp.18-65.

Fayzi, Symbol of the Greatest Name, New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, n.d.

Garrida, Gertrude (Comp.). Directives from the Guardian. [=DG] New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1973.

Hornby, H. (Comp.). Lights of Guidance, A Bahá'í Reference File 2 [=LG] New Delhi, India: BPT, 1988.

Khadim, Zikrullah. Bahá'u'lláh and His Most Holy Shrine in Bahá'í News, No 540 (March 1976) pp.1-16 n.p. [Wilmette, Illinois]: NSA of the Bahá'ís of the United States, 1976.

INBMC = Iran National Bahá'í Archives Manuscript Collection.

`Ishraq Khavari (ed.). Ma'ida-yi Asmani 10 Vols Tehran:BPT 129 Badi` / 1972-3 CE.

Lambden, Stephen, `The word Baha, Quintessence of the Greatest Name of God' in Bahá'í Studies Review 3:1 (1993) 19-42; `The Arabic word Baha' and the Mysteries of the Greatest Name of God (al-ism al-a`zam)' BSB 8:1-2

(forthcoming).

Majlisi, Muammad Baqir. Bihar al-Anwar 2 [110 Vols] Beirut: Mu'assat al-Wafa', 1403/1983. Qummi, Shaykh `Abbas. Mafati al-Jannan 3 Beirut: Dar al-Awa', 1409 AH/ 1989 CE.

Shoghi Effendi. God Passes By [=GPB] Wilmette, Illinois: BPT, 1974.

METADATA

Views38505 views since posted 1999; last edit 2024-04-03 02:46 UTC;

previous at archive.org.../lambden_encyclopedia_greatest_name;

URLs changed in 2010, see archive.org.../bahai-library.org

Language

English

Permission

author

Share

Shortlink: bahai-library.com/435

Citation: ris/435

select Collection:

Archives

Articles

Articles-unpublished

Audio

Bibliographies

BIC

Biographies

Books

Chronologies

Compilations

Compilations-NSA

Compilations-personal

Documents

East-asia

Encyclopedia

Essays

Etc

Excerpts

Fiction

Glossaries

Guardian

Histories

Introductory

Letters

Maps

Music

Newspapers
NSA-documents
NSA-letters
Personal
Pilgrims
Poetry
Presentations
Resources
Reviews
Scripts
Software
Statistics
Study
Talks
Theses
Transcripts
Translations
UHJ-documents
UHJ-letters
Video
Visual
Writings

home

sitemap

series

chronology

search:
author

title

date

tags

adv. search
languages

inventory

bibliography

abbreviations

links

about

contact

RSS

new

— Greatest Name, The (al-Isim al-A'zam) (Used by permission of the curator)