

the names during these blessed, mighty, and sublime days.

Strive to act uprightly in the Cause of your Lord and wholly for the sake of His love that He may appoint you among His most beautiful names in the kingdom of creation. This, indeed, is a great bounty.

I swear by my life! Were the hands of all created things to be lifted in this day, free of any evil suggestions, toward the court of hope of the King of Names, and ask Him for the treasures of the heavens and the earth, He would grant their wish, by His all-pervasive grace, before they lowered their hands. Thus does His mercy encompass all things.

Say: O people![2] Do not withhold yourselves from the grace of God and His mercy. Whoever withholds himself from it is indeed in great loss. Say: O people! Do you worship the dust and forsake your Lord, the Gracious, the Bountiful? Fear God, and be not of those who have gone astray. Say: The Book of God has now appeared in the temple of this youth. Blessed, therefore, be God, the most excellent of makers! Flee not from him, O peoples of the world; rather, hasten to attain his presence and be of those who have returned. Repent, O people, for having abandoned God and for having transgressed against His Cause. Do not be heedless. It is He who has created you, who has provided for you by His command and acquainted you with himself—the Mighty, the Exalted, the Knowing—and who has unveiled to you the treasures of His knowledge and caused you to ascend to the heaven of certainty in His incorruptible, resistless, and transcendent Faith. Take care that you do not deprive yourselves of the grace of God, invalidate your works, and disavow Him in this most manifest, most exalted, shining, and glorious Revelation. Judge, then, the Cause of God, your maker, with justice, examine what He has sent down from the throne on high, and meditate on it with pure and faultless hearts. In this way, the truth of this Cause will appear to you as clearly as the midday sun and you will be assured.

Say: His first evidence is His own self, and following that is His revelation.[3] But for whoever is unable to recognize these two evidences, He has made His verses His proof by His grace to all the worlds. He has endowed every soul with the capacity to recognize the signs of God. If human beings did not have this capacity, He could not complete His proof to them, were you to reflect on His Cause. He will never deal unjustly with anyone, nor will He task a soul beyond its power. He, verily, is the Compassionate, the Merciful.

Say: The Cause of God has become manifested in such a manner that even the blind can perceive it, how much more those whose vision is sharp and pure. Although the blind cannot see the light of the sun, they can feel its continual heat. The blind in heart, however, among the people of the Bayan—and to this God is my witness—are powerless, no matter how long the Sun may shine on them, either to perceive the radiance of its glory or to appreciate the warmth of its rays.

Say: O people of the Bayan! We have singled you out from among humankind to recognize us. We have caused you to draw near to the right side of

Paradise—the place from which the undying Fire[4] proclaims in every melody: “There is no God besides Me, the Powerful, the Most High!” Take care not to veil yourselves from this Sun that is shining above the horizon of the Will of your Lord, the All-Merciful, with a radiance that has encompassed all things, small and great. Open your eyes that you may behold it with your own vision, without depending on the vision of anyone else, for God does not burden a soul beyond its ability. Thus has it been revealed in all the scriptures to the prophets and messengers of the past.

Enter, O people, into this vast expanse for which neither a beginning nor an end has been decreed, in which the call of God has been raised and the breezes of His transcendent sanctity are wafting. Remove not from yourselves the robe of glory; neither let your hearts be deprived of remembering your Lord nor your ears from hearing His wondrous, sublime, compelling, and most eloquent melodies.[5]

O Ashraf! Give thanks to God inasmuch as He has honored you with meeting Him and permitted you to enter His presence, the seat of sublime glory. Blessed are your eyes, for they have beheld the beauty of God, your Lord and the Lord of the entire creation. Blessed are your ears, for they have heard the melody of God, the Powerful, the Knowing, the Wise.

Know that the time has come for your sojourn before the throne to end. Arise, and go forth with the tablet of God to His faithful servants, who have consumed the veils with the fire of their attraction and ascended to God, the King, the Mighty, the Praised. Tell them what has happened to us at the hands of those who were created by our command, then announce to them the glad tidings of the Paradise of God that they may rejoice. Recount to them one of the stories of this youth that they may be informed and give praise to God.

Say: O loved ones of God! Arise and assist Him. Pay no attention to those who contend with the Self of God and who repudiate the evidence that God has made the proof of His Cause between the heavens and the earth. They have wronged God by arising in opposition against Him, and they do not feel ashamed before God, who created them by His command. This is what has befallen the Ancient Beauty at the hands of these oppressors. So severe did their opposition become that they attempted to kill me through a plan that Satan cast into their breasts. God knows and is a witness to this. When they found themselves impotent before the sovereignty of God and His power, they devised a new plot. This is what befell us at the hands of those who were created by our command, yet we are well able to achieve our purpose.

O loved ones of God! Be clouds of bounty to those who believe in God and in His verses, and a sure torment to those who disbelieve in Him and His Cause and who join partners with God.

Say: O people! Do not listen to the words of those who are unfaithful to God and the Manifestation of Himself. Be mindful of the day when each will be asked about his deeds in the presence of his Lord, the Exalted, the Great, and will receive either reward or punishment for what he has done during this vain life.

This is what has been ordained in God's mighty and guarded tablets. Do not be like those who habitually adhere to something as it suits them and at another moment reject it. Fear God, O concourse of believers. Hold fast to what has been sent down to you from the throne on high, forsake all else, and remain steadfast in His Cause.

If you see Muhammad ?Ali,[6] give him our greetings and deliver to him that with which you have been entrusted that he may arise to serve the Cause and be so steadfast that his steps will not slip from the path of God, the Almighty, the Praised.

Say: O servant! I swear by God! All you have heard and perceived has been manifested by us, and all besides me has been created by my command, if you apprehend. All that we have mentioned is due to a wisdom on our part, of which no one is apprised save for those whom we have acquainted with the repositories of divine revelation and aided with the Faithful Spirit. Tear away the veils of idle fancies that the daystar of certainty may shine on you from the dawning place of my name, the All-Merciful, and He may appoint you among the sincere. Arise to serve your Lord, and turn away from those who have disbelieved in God and have denied Him. Summon the people to remembrance with wisdom and heavenly counsel, and do not dispute idly with anyone concerning the Cause of your Lord that His proof may be fulfilled to the entire creation. Be united with the loved ones of God, and gather them into the haven of security under the shade of the name of your Lord, the Almighty, the Knowing. Shield His servants so that the temptations of Satan do not cause them to falter when he arrives in your land with a great deception, by which he intends to deprive all of you of the love of this youth. Thus do we inform you with a message from the Unseen that you may be aware and remain steadfast.

Be detached from all things, then set your face toward the sanctuary that is the seat of the throne of your Lord, the Forgiving, the Merciful. Know that we have admonished you in other tablets, and we found you lacking in what is worthy of you. Beware that you do not deprive yourself of what we have ordained for you in our holy and preserved tablets. Cleanse yourself of everything that stands between you and God, then commune with Him with a humble and radiant heart. You should be so steadfast in the Cause that were all in the heavens and on earth to conspire against you, they would be unable to turn you aside from it and would find themselves powerless. This is what is worthy of those who consider themselves followers of God, in these days when most of the servants are submerged in a deluge of doubts and vain imaginings and set on the path of perdition.

If you see Aba Basir,[7] bring him this tablet so that he can read it and be of those who know. Convey my greetings to him that he may rejoice in the glad tidings of the spirit coming from the Almighty, the All-Wise.

Say: O servant! We have sent down the verses to you and delivered them to you as a mercy from us so that those who dwell in your land may be admonished, awaken from their slumber, and turn with their hearts toward the object of the

adoration of the world, at whose appearance the inmates of the concourse on high fall prostrate. Call then to remembrance the loved ones of God, whom no obstacles have prevented from entering the depths of the ocean of the mercy of your Lord, the All-Bountiful, the Most Generous. Thus, do we bid and direct you that you may be thankful to God, your Lord, at all times.

Peace, honor and glory rest upon you, O people of Baha, and upon those who have desired God's countenance and turned toward Him.

Notes to translation

[1] Siyyid Ashraf-i-Zanjani. In Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah, section LXIX, Baha'u'llah tells the story of Siyyid Ashraf's mother, who was brought to the scene her son's imminent death so she could urge him to recant, but instead she urged him not to. An outline of Siyyid Ashraf's life can be found in Adib Taherzadeh: *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah*. Adrianople 1863-68, vol. 2, pp. 223-30

[2] The section of the Tablet to Ashraf commencing here has also been translated by Shoghi Effendi and can be found in *Gleanings*, section LII.

[3] Or ...His "manifestation" (zuhur).

[4] This is a reference to the Fire in the Burning Bush from which Moses heard the voice of God proclaiming "I am God, the Lord of the universe..." (Qur'an 28:30; cf. Exodus 3:1-15).

[5] The section of this tablet that Shoghi Effendi has also translated ends here.

[6] Probably a reference to Aqa Mirza Muhammad-'Aliy-i-Tabib, who was also from Zanjan and died a martyr. Baha'u'llah wrote a tablet of visitation jointly for him, Siyyid Ashraf and Aba Basir. See *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah*, vol. 2, p. 229.

[7] Aqa Naqd-'Ali, who was blind and given the title 'Basir' (Seeing) by Baha'u'llah. He was Siyyid Ashraf's close friend and was beheaded just before Ashraf was killed. See *The Revelation of Baha'u'llah*, vol. 2, pp. 226-7. The sacrifice of the pair is mentioned by Baha'u'llah in *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, pp. 73-74.

Introduction, by Alison Marshall

Siyyid Ashraf-i Zanjani was born during the siege of Zanjan, Iran, in 1850, where 2000 Babis held a section of the town against the forces of the town's governor. Ashraf's father was killed there and his mother, subsequently, raised him and his two sisters alone. When Ashraf was a young man, he twice made the long journey from Zanjan, Iran, to Edirne, Turkey, to visit Bahá'u'lláh. On the second occasion, Bahá'u'lláh wrote this tablet for him.

Taherzadeh gives the details of Ashraf's life in the second volume of his *Revelation of Baha'u'llah* series.[1] He says that Ashraf's visit with Bahá'u'lláh was cut short suddenly when Bahá'u'lláh instructed Ashraf to

return home. A reference to this can be found about halfway through the tablet, where Baha'u'llah says to Ashraf: "Know that the time has come for your sojourn before the throne to end". The explanation Taherzadeh gives for this is that, at the time of the visit, Ashraf's mother was being subjected to huge pressure back home from relatives about her raising her children as Bahá'ís. She became so upset by this that she begged Bahá'u'lláh in prayer to send her children (Ashraf and his sister) home, which he did. Ashraf was reportedly so angry about this that he likened the action of his mother to the sin of Adam.

Not long after Ashraf returned home, he was martyred, along with his best friend Aba Basir. The scene of his martyrdom is described in a passage in Gleanings (LXIX) where Bahá'u'lláh recounts the story of "Ashraf's mother", who was called to the scene of her son's imminent martyrdom in the hope that she would convince him to recant. Instead, she insisted that he give up his life.

Tablet to Ashraf falls roughly into two sections.[2] The first section runs from the beginning through to the paragraph, about halfway through, starting "O Ashraf! Give thanks to God inasmuch as He has honored you with meeting Him..." In the first section, Baha'u'llah outlines some of the extraordinary and unique characteristics of his revelation, with the seeming intention of showing how great is the measure of bounty that the revelation has showered on creation. Early on, Baha'u'llah explains that, with this revelation, God has appeared to all things in the splendour of all the names and attributes of God and anything can attain to the Greatest Name if it is completely detached from creation. Again, if all things begged the Lord, in a spirit of complete detachment, for the treasures of heaven and earth, this would be instantly granted to them.

Baha'u'llah explains that the Book (of revelation) has been sent down in the person of Baha'u'llah ("this youth"[3]) and counsels people not to run away from him. He makes the crucial point that his first proof is his own self - that is, the person of the youth. He himself is the first proof of the station he claims to have. His second proof is what he reveals or manifests, and then in third place are his verses. He likens himself, his greatest proof, to the sun and points out that even the blind can recognise it, just as a blind person can feel the warmth of the sun's rays. He says that the Sun of his self is the same reality as the Fire that Moses saw on Sinai, which is always declaring "There is no God besides Me, the Powerful, the Most High!"

It is instructive to compare Baha'u'llah's explanations about his self in this tablet with his comments in Lawh-i Tawhid (Tablet of Divine Unity), where he presents the same idea in a different, but related, way.[4] For example, in Lawh-i Tawhid, Baha'u'llah likens his teaching that people should recognise his self to the process of recognising any other person. If we recognise that person by their clothes, we will not recognise them again when they put on different clothes. Therefore, we must recognise Baha'u'llah by his self and not by what issues from him, because that may change and is not really him anyway.

Finally, in the first section of the Tablet to Ashraf, Baha'u'llah makes the point that, in order to see the Sun of his self, a person must look with their own eyes. God has created every person in such a way that they can do this of their own accord. This faculty in each person ensures that everyone is in a position to understand God's proof and accept it if they choose to. Baha'u'llah states that God is not unjust and so does not ask a person to do something they cannot do. Again, this theme is discussed in Lawh-i Tawhid. In that tablet, Baha'u'llah emphasises the responsibility each person has of examining Baha'u'llah's claim for themselves and makes the very important point that a person's acceptance or denial of the revelation cannot be based on the opinions of others.

“In like manner, every servant must take it upon himself to recognize that Orb of Unity. Therefore, the denial or acceptance of His servants hath never been, nor will it ever be, sufficient proof for any one to embrace or reject Him.”[4]

The second section of Tablet to Ashraf starts at “O Ashraf! Give thanks to God inasmuch as He has honored you with meeting Him and permitted you to enter His presence, the seat of sublime glory.” With these words, Baha'u'llah begins his personal address to Ashraf, which runs to the end. This section also contains messages for two other named individuals: Muhammad 'Ali and Aba Basir. In both cases, Baha'u'llah gives them similar advice to what he gives to Ashraf. Aba Basir is known to be Aqa Naqd-'Ali, who was blind. Baha'u'llah gave him the title “Basir”, meaning “Seeing”. He was Ashraf's close friend and was beheaded just before Ashraf was killed. The name Muhammad 'Ali probably refers to Aqa Mirza Muhammad 'Aliy-i-Tabib, who was also from Zanjan and died a martyr. Baha'u'llah wrote a tablet of visitation jointly for these three men - Siyyid Ashraf, Aba Basir and Muhammad 'Ali.[5]

The second section of the tablet begins with Baha'u'llah telling Ashraf that it is time to leave and instructing him on what to do. He is to take the tablet and visit the believers in Iran. He is to tell them what has happened to Baha'u'llah and give them the glad tidings of the revelation. Baha'u'llah is particularly concerned that Ashraf tell the believers back home about the difficulties Bahá'u'lláh faced while living in Edirne. He does not mention his half-brother, Azal, by name, but states explicitly that Ashraf is to tell the believers about the attempt to kill him and the subsequent scheming against him, which was carried out by Azal and his sympathisers. At this time, the believers in Iran were confused about Azal, who was reportedly the leader of the Babis, but were unaware of his cruelty towards Bahá'u'lláh. Baha'u'llah counsels the believers not to listen to the words of those who have been unfaithful to him and have schemed against him. He reminds them of the inevitable moment when they will stand before him and face the consequences of their actions. He warns them not to be the sort of people who believe in something and then give it away. He repeatedly emphasises the need for everyone to be detached from all things, focus on what he has told them and remember

their Lord.

Notes to introduction

[1] See Adib Taherzadeh: The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Adrianople 1863-68, vol 2, pp 223-230.

[2] Further details about the tablet can be found in Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, vol 2, pp 230-232.

[3] "Say: O people! The Book of God has now appeared in the person of this youth. Blessed, therefore, be God, the most excellent of makers!"

[4] Lawh-i Tawhid (Tablet of Divine Unity), translated by Shoghi Effendi and Adib Masumian <https://adibmasumian.com/translations/lawh-i-tawhid/>

[5] The details about Aqa Naqd-'Ali (Aba Basir) and Aqa Mirza Muhammad 'Aliy-i Tabib come from Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, vol 2, pp 226-7 and 229. Baha'u'llah also mentions Aba Basir, and his martyrdom with Ashraf, in Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pp 73-4.

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