

Bahá'u'lláh's Symbolic Use of the Veiled Ḥuríyyih

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Abstract

“Ḥuríyyih,” a term whose roots can be found in the Qur’án (44–54, 52:20, 56–22, and 55:72), refers to angelic female figures that reside in paradise and accompany the believers. In the Bahá’í Writings, the word has often been translated as “the Maid of Heaven,” a symbolic personification of the divine reality of Bahá’u’lláh. In this article we explore how Bahá’u’lláh employs this figurative device to portray the forces at work in the context of His appearance as a Manifestation of God. In particular, we wish to examine the crucial symbolic role the unveiling of the Ḥuríyyih plays in relation to Bahá’u’lláh’s gradual unfolding of His mission. While some readers might believe the portrayal of this figure to be a literal depiction of the Holy Spirit appearing to Bahá’u’lláh, we hope to demonstrate that Bahá’u’lláh has, instead, created a figurative or symbolic portrayal of how He gradually reveals His guidance for this long-awaited era in human history—the “Day of Days,” the culmination of all previous revelations. Put simply, we feel that the image of the Ḥuríyyih does not represent a force separate from Bahá’u’lláh, but rather an expression of the Holy Spirit operating through the inherent spiritual capacity unique to a Manifestation of God.

Résumé

« Ḥuríyyih », terme tirant son origine du Coran (44-54, 52:20, 56-22 et 55:72), fait référence aux figures féminines angéliques qui résident au paradis et accompagnent les croyants. Dans les Écrits bahá’ís, ce mot a souvent été traduit par « la céleste Houri », une personnification symbolique de la réalité divine de Bahá’u’lláh. Dans cet article, les auteurs explorent comment Bahá’u’lláh utilise ce procédé métaphorique pour illustrer les forces à l’œuvre dans le contexte de son apparition comme Manifestation de Dieu. En particulier, ils examinent le rôle symbolique crucial que le dévoilement de la céleste Houri joue par rapport au dévoilement progressif de la mission de Bahá’u’lláh. Alors que certains lecteurs pourraient croire que cette figure est une représentation littérale de l’Esprit Saint apparaissant à Bahá’u’lláh, les auteurs espèrent démontrer que Bahá’u’lláh a plutôt créé une représentation figurative ou symbolique de la façon dont Il révèle progressivement ses instructions pour cette époque tant attendue de l’histoire humaine, ce « jour des jours », le point culminant de toutes les révélations précédentes. En termes simples, les auteurs sont d’avis que l’image de la céleste Houri ne représente pas une force distincte de Bahá’u’lláh, mais constitue plutôt une expression de l’Esprit Saint agissant par l’intermédiaire de la capacité spirituelle inhérente propre à une Manifestation de Dieu.

Resumen

“Ḥuríyyih,” a un término cuyas raíces se pueden encontrar en el Qur’án (44–54, 52:20, 56–22, and 55:72), se refiere a figuras femeninas angelicales que residen en el paraíso y acompañan a los creyentes. En los Escritos de la Fe Bahá’í, la palabra a menudo se ha traducido como “la Doncella

del Cielo,” una personificación simbólica de la realidad divina de Bahá'u'lláh. En este artículo exploramos cómo Bahá'u'lláh emplea este dispositivo figurativo para retratar las fuerzas en el trabajo en el contexto de su aparición como una Manifestación de Dios. En particular, deseamos examinar el papel simbólico crucial que la revelación del Húríyyih juega en relación con el desarrollo gradual de Su misión por parte de Bahá'u'lláh. Aunque algunos lectores podrían creer que la representación de esta figura es una representación literal del Espíritu Santo apareciendo a Bahá'u'lláh, esperamos demostrar que Bahá'u'lláh, en cambio, ha creado una representación figurativa o simbólica de cómo Él revela gradualmente Su guía para esta era tan esperada en la historia humana: el “Día de los Días”, la culminación de todas las revelaciones anteriores. En pocas palabras, sentimos que la imagen del Húríyyih no representa una fuerza separada de Bahá'u'lláh, sino más bien una expresión del Espíritu Santo que opera a través de la capacidad espiritual inherente única de una Manifestación de Dios.

THE HÚRÍYYIH AS PERSONIFICATION OF “THE MOST GREAT SPIRIT”¹

In *God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi, quoting from the Súriy-i-Haykal, renders the Arabic word *húríyyih* as “Maiden” and states that this character

1 We wish to express our gratitude to the Bahá'í World Centre for providing the authorized translation of the Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá (Tablet of the Vision) in advance of its publication, as well as our thanks to Dr. Vahid Rafati for introducing us to additional sources, and to Dr. Sasha Dehghani for sharing his thoughts on this topic.

personifies the Holy Spirit emanating through Bahá'u'lláh:

the “Most Great Spirit,” as designated by Himself, and symbolized in the Zoroastrian, the Mosaic, the Christian, and Muhammadan Dispensations by the Sacred Fire, the Burning Bush, the Dove and the Angel Gabriel respectively, descended upon, and revealed itself, personated by a “Maiden,” to the agonized soul of Bahá'u'lláh. (100)

Let us examine how this figurative device is developed by Bahá'u'lláh in the unfolding of His revealed works as it is employed in the chronology of His ministry.

THE INITIAL APPEARANCE OF THE HÚRÍYYIH

From the perspective of the Bahá'í authoritative texts, the Maid of Heaven is a symbolic or allegorical mystical concept intended to convey various levels of meaning. Consequently, this trope is open to multiple interpretations. For while the principal “intended” meaning, according to Shoghi Effendi, is the Holy Spirit being channeled through Bahá'u'lláh, we can hardly pretend to decipher in any comprehensive manner the totality of what it represents. Indeed, the depth and breadth of its meaning call to mind Bahá'u'lláh's observation, “How great the multitude of truths which the garment of words can never contain! How vast the number of

such verities as no expression can adequately describe, whose significance can never be unfolded, and to which not even the remotest allusions can be made!" (*Gleanings* 89:3).

Perhaps the most illuminating explanation of the term is Shoghi Effendi's statement that the Maid of Heaven as portrayed by Bahá'u'lláh in His description of the dream vision He experienced in the *Siyáh-Chál*² "personified the Spirit of God within Him [Bahá'u'lláh]" (*God Passes By* 121). Accordingly, in various of the works by Bahá'u'lláh, the Húriyyih represents an intermediary figure who imparts to the Manifestations of God that which the Creator wishes to convey to humankind for a specific era or dispensation.

Bahá'u'lláh Himself writes in the *Kitáb-i-Badí'* (1867) that "the Holy Spirit spoke in My heart and the Most Great Spirit³ uttered through My tongue. This is not from me, but from that Powerful One whose power encompasses all things."⁴

2 "The Black Pit," an infamous subterranean dungeon in which Bahá'u'lláh was imprisoned in 1852.

3 A definitive distinction between these two spiritual realities is not possible, but the "Most Great Spirit" can be thought of as an allusion to the essential reality of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, and the "Holy Spirit" represents the spiritual influence emanating from that reality, like rays emanating from the sun.

4 This and all other provisional translations in this article are by the authors—John S. Hatcher, Amrollah Hemmat, and Ehsanollah Hemmat.

This description parallels what Bahá'u'lláh depicts in His epistle to Násiri'd-Dín *Sháh* when He says, "O King! I was but a man like others, asleep upon My couch, when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been. This thing is not from Me, but from One Who is Almighty and All-Knowing" (*Summons* 1:192).

Thus, while the intermediary reality of the Maid of Heaven is personified in the form of an immanent corporeal image, Bahá'u'lláh emphasizes that this appearance is a means whereby He can provide His followers with a sense of the experience He undergoes as His revelation is conveyed to Him, something we can understand solely by metaphorical or allegorical representations. Consequently, the image is replete with symbolic detail and actions, and in His recounting of this experience, He treats this allegorical personification with utmost respect, inasmuch as She is assigned a station belonging to the loftiest realm, the transcendent domain of the Divine.

Using as a starting point the appearance of the Húriyyih in the Writings, let us examine the distinction between accepting the Maid of Heaven as an actual being and viewing Her as a symbolic figure that Bahá'u'lláh has devised for our benefit—that we might understand in simpler terms a most ephemeral, mystical, and spiritual process. For example, in Judaism, Moses claims that God speaks to Him through the burning bush; after this experience, His words

are considered to have divine authority. In Christian scripture, the appearance of the figure of the dove as a simile for the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus when He is anointed by John the Baptist signals the beginning of Christ's ministry, but the dove does not continue to represent the Holy Spirit or an intermediary between God and Christ. From that moment forward, instead, He frequently alludes to Himself as the intermediary between God and humankind: "For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John 12:49). However, in Islam, the Angel Gabriel as intermediary is much more significant. Gabriel is understood by most Muslims to be a literal intermediary between Allah and Muḥammad, the untutored recipient of the revelation.⁵ As we can observe, the beginning of every Dispensation is depicted as an "announcement" by the Holy Spirit informing the Prophet that He is the Chosen One to carry out that particular stage in God's plan for the education of humankind. The act of revelation itself (as in Muḥammad's example) is often portrayed as the simple transmission of the Word of God by means of

5 Quite possibly because Muḥammad appeared among unlearned warring tribes, He employed this sort of benign artifice to maintain their belief, something He seemed to confirm and perpetuate by going into a form of trance or seizure when revealing what became the suras of the Qur'án. In other words, the presumption by those present was that Gabriel was speaking to Him with Divine Authority.

an otherwise "uninformed" Messenger. Such depictions, however, are allegorical and—like many other similar uses of metaphorical imagery in the scriptures of all religions—are intended to illustrate realities that cannot be adequately expressed in a literal form.⁶

Bahá'u'lláh, in fact, states unequivocally that everything the Manifestations say or do is of Their own devising, has authority, is carrying out the will of God, and is explicitly for our benefit: "The essence of belief in Divine unity consisteth in regarding Him Who is the Manifestation of God and Him Who is the invisible, the inaccessible, the unknowable Essence as one and the same. By this is meant that whatever pertaineth to the former, all His acts and doings, whatever He ordaineth or forbiddeth, should be considered, in all their aspects, and under all circumstances, and without any reservation, as identical with the Will of God Himself" (*Gleanings* 84:166).

Let us keep this relationship in mind as we expand our research into Bahá'u'lláh's utilization of the figure of the Ḥúríyyih as a representation of the spiritual force and impact of the Holy Spirit being communicated to us through the Manifestation, even as was the figure of Gabriel for Muḥammad:

Wrapped in its stygian gloom,
breathing its fetid air, numbed by
its humid and icy atmosphere, His

6 For an ampler discussion of this theme—which is outside the purview of this article—please see Hatcher, *The Face of God among Us*, especially chapter 7.

feet in stocks, His neck weighed down by a mighty chain, surrounded by criminals and miscreants of the worst order, oppressed by the consciousness of the terrible blot that had stained the fair name of His beloved Faith, painfully aware of the dire distress that had overtaken its champions, and of the grave dangers that faced the remnant of its followers—at so critical an hour and under such appalling circumstances the “Most Great Spirit,” as designated by Himself, and symbolized in the Zoroastrian, the Mosaic, the Christian, and Muhammadan Dispensations by the Sacred Fire, the Burning Bush, the Dove and the Angel Gabriel respectively, descended upon, and revealed itself, personated by a “Maiden,” to the agonized soul of Bahá'u'lláh. (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 100)

SOME FURTHER APPEARANCES OF THE HÚRÍYYIH

The exalted station of the Húríyyih is clearly evident in Bahá'u'lláh's observation that the “Holy Spirit Itself hath been generated through the agency of a single letter revealed by this Most Great Spirit, if ye be of them that comprehend” (*Summons* ¶150). The transcendent nature of the Húríyyih is thus an essential characteristic of this personification, and Her importance symbolically is demonstrated in a number of works of Bahá'u'lláh where She is mentioned or discussed.

Bahá'u'lláh's initial references to the Húríyyih are found principally in the works He revealed in Baghdad and Sulaymáníyyih. For example, we encounter allegorical references to a heavenly, chaste, and luminous female figure in the Qaṣídiy-i-Izz-i-Varqá'íyyih (“Ode of the Dove”), the Hidden Words, the Lawḥ-i-Húríyyih, the Lawḥ-i-Húr-i-'Ujáb,⁷ the Lawḥ-i-Subḥana Rabbíu'l A'lá, the Lawḥ-i-Hili Hili Yá Biṣḥárat, the Lawḥ-i-Malláhu'l-Quds (Tablet of the Holy Mariner), the Lawḥ-i-Bulbul-i-Firáq, and the Lawḥ-i-Ghulámu'l-Khuld, all of which except for the “Ode of the Dove” were revealed in Baghdad after Bahá'u'lláh's return from His two-year retreat to the mountains of Sulaymáníyyih.

The Maid of Heaven continues to appear in some of the tablets revealed after the Baghdad period. For example, She appears in the Súriy-i-Qalam and in the Ishráqát, the Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá, and most importantly in the Súriy-i-Haykal⁸ in which Bahá'u'lláh's experience and conversation with Her in the Siyáh-Chál is described in its totality.

As we will discuss later, in these works the figurative images of the Húríyyih and the hurís can assume different meanings in different contexts. Yet the allusions to these personifications are not entirely limited to these works, nor are they limited to the works of Bahá'u'lláh. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to the “maid of

7 Khávání, *Risáliy-i-Ayyám-i-Tis`ih* 251–54.

8 Originally revealed in Adrianople, as we will explain later.

heaven” as representing the “new Jerusalem,” and the “angelic company” as figures announcing to the universe the news that the prophecies in the book of Revelations regarding the advent of the kingdom of God on earth have actually been fulfilled:

O ye beloved of God! O ye children of His Kingdom! Verily, verily, the new heaven and the new earth are come. The holy City, new Jerusalem, hath come down from on high in the form of a maid of heaven, veiled, beautiful, and unique, and prepared for reunion with Her lovers on earth. The angelic company of the Celestial Concourse hath joined in a call that hath run throughout the universe, all loudly and mightily acclaiming: “This is the City of God and His abode, wherein shall dwell the pure and holy among His servants. He shall live with them, for they are His people and He is their Lord.” (*Selections* 3:1)

Here, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains the Húriyyih’s appearance in the Book of Revelation—a reference He elucidates more fully in *Some Answered Questions*—as the new Law revealed by Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: “Clearly, the New Jerusalem which descends from heaven is not a city of stone and lime, of brick and mortar, but is rather the religion of God which descends from heaven and is described as new.” He continues, “For it is obvious that the Jerusalem which is built

of stone and mortar does not descend from heaven and is not renewed, but that what is renewed is the religion of God” (*Some Answered Questions* 13:3).

THE PERSIAN AND ARABIC LITERARY TRADITION OF THE HÚRÍYYIH

As most students of the literary traditions of Persian and Arabic mystical poetry are aware, portrayals of love relationships are frequently employed to symbolize the overwhelming longing of a seeker or wayfarer to attain the presence of the Beloved, the Friend, or the Divine—each of which represents some form of the love of God. With Rumi, for example, his adoration of “the Friend” is often captured in what seems to be his portrayal of the affection, adoration, respect, and obeisance he expresses for his spiritual teacher, Shams of Tabriz. On a symbolic level, however, the “Friend” in his poems represents not a literal personal relationship, however powerful and important this was for his spiritual edification, but rather his awareness of and longing to attain union, or reunion, with “the Beloved”—the “Perfect Man,” One who, like Muḥammad, manifests as perfectly as is possible in human form the attributes or “names” of Allah, or of the transcendental Divine reality that is the spiritual realm.

Similarly, in His mystical work *The Seven Valleys*, Bahá’u’lláh represents the seeker’s longing for the Beloved through the symbolic story of Majnun (the “insane one”) and his tireless quest

to attain the presence of the hidden or concealed Layli. This traditional story from Persian and Arabian lore—celebrated most famously by Nizámí⁹—is a good example of the Súfi use of an intense and all-consuming human love to symbolize the intensity of the wayfarer's quest for divine love in a relationship with “the Friend.” The tragedy of Shirin and Farhad is a similarly symbolic love story that represents the intense, unrelenting desire of the lover or seeker to attain the presence of his beloved—the same longing portrayed by Bahá'u'lláh in His description of the “Valley of Love” in *The Seven Valleys*.

It is worthwhile to note that in these symbolic or allegorical stories the Beloved (the One who is sought) is female and the wayfarer or seeker is male, even though the Deity (God or Allah) is always alluded to in terms of a male identity. The feminization of the Divine or the Beloved doubtless derives from passionate human love being the most immediately evocative trope or analogical experience to which we can relate such intense love, longing, and passion. In most romantic literature, the beautiful woman is portrayed as the object of love (the Beloved), and the male is portrayed as the lover seeking the object of his affection.

Consequently, because the Beloved has a female persona in these and numerous other poetic works, great

attention is paid to the detailed portrayal of Her beauty, focusing on a variety of specific physical attributes relevant to what was considered evocative in the cultural context in which the poem was composed. More specifically, each of the physical attributes of beauty in the portrayal of the feminized Divine most often represents a corresponding spiritual virtue or power.

Thus, in His own utilization of these traditions, Bahá'u'lláh employs images of the beauty and glory of the Húriyyih to dwell on those physical attributes that are most emblematic of Her beauty—Her form, a beauty mark, Her brow, the grace of Her movements and gestures. Likewise, these portraits of female allure and sensuality are often accompanied by stark and dramatic emotional scenes characterized by immense sorrow, joy, and affection. What becomes unmistakably apparent when one studies Bahá'u'lláh's use of this figurative imagery is that He utilizes it to convey spiritual and metaphysical attributes—His objective is never to create sensational or sensual imagery for its own sake. The ecstatic longing, and the even more ecstatic sensation of attaining the presence of the Beloved are never meant to be ends in themselves—they are *not* the attainment of ecstasy for its own sake. This distinction is extremely important in light of the emphasis that some contemporary translators of Rumi have placed on the literal story, even going so far as to attribute some literal or physical love relationship to the poet/persona and his

9 Nizámí Ganjaví (12th century CE) is considered by the generality of scholars to be the greatest Persian poet to write in the tradition of the romantic epic (Sajjádi).

friend Shams of Tabriz.¹⁰

Clearly, Bahá'u'lláh's utilization of these figurative images has a spiritual intent. Therefore, in Bahá'í texts, when the reader encounters allusions from traditional mystic Persian literature regarding the body of the Ḥúríyyih (for example, locks and ringlets of hair, the hair's enthralling fragrance, and the entrancing beauty of the face, forehead, eyebrows, beauty marks, hands, and breasts) and the various attributes commonly associated with the portrayal of the feminine "Beloved," we are assured that our job is to discern their underlying or veiled meaning.

THE SYMBOLIC IMPORTANCE OF THE VEIL

There are countless other important images in mystical Persian and Arabic literature—particularly allusions to certain affective behaviors, such as smiling, crying, weeping, graceful movements, coyness, and amorous glances in the poetry of the Sufi tradition. However, important as these images are in understanding the various intended meanings of the Bahá'í Writings, for the purposes of this present study, it is most essential that we focus on the symbolism latent in Bahá'u'lláh's reference to the veil as

10 See, for example, Barks, *The Soul of Rumi*, and Lewis, *Rumi*. Barks tends to read this relationship in literal terms—Shams himself is the "Friend" or the "Beloved" to whom Rumi alludes, whereas Lewis explains these allusions as being poetic or allegorical portrayals of Rumi's adoration of Allah.

it pertains to the appearance of the Ḥúríyyih.

Perhaps the most obvious and yet surely one of the most important allusions to the veil is the relationship between the Ḥúríyyih being veiled and subsequently becoming unveiled. This important action—though possibly barely noticeable to most—plays a central role, both in symbolizing the appearance of the Manifestation, and in the subtle and often gradual stages by which Bahá'u'lláh reveals His station, His essential nature, and His purpose in revealing Himself to humankind.

Other imagery that also assumes importance in the portrayal of the Ḥúríyyih concerns Her attire. For example, in the Commentary on the Sura of Joseph, the Báb refers to various qualities of Her veil and attire as being beautiful, or coarse, or of silk (*Qa-yyúmu'l-Asmá'* 126–27). Or, as we will discuss later, in the Sura of the Pen, Bahá'u'lláh addresses Her by these words: "Come forth as thou willest, and array thyself as thou pleasest with the broidered robe of names and the silken vesture of immortality" (*Days of Remembrance* 23:14). However, one can hardly address the image of the Ḥúríyyih without also addressing other images that, on the surface, seem to be portraying an intense physical love relationship—an embrace, the separation of the lover (Bahá'u'lláh) from His Beloved (the Ḥúríyyih), and the sorrow caused by the lover's constant pursuit of the seemingly unattainable presence of the Beloved.

THE VEIL AND
AN UNFOLDING DRAMA

The tablets of Bahá'u'lláh that include references to the Húriyyih and the hurís (the plural form of the word), while clearly allegorical in nature, might be likened to mystical or spiritual dramas—something like the English morality plays of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the Western literary tradition. With this in mind, one may well find it useful and enlightening to approach the appearance—and particularly the unveiling—of the Húriyyih by examining the chronology of these images as if they were three successive acts in the unfolding drama that represents three successive stages in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

However, in considering such an approach, one must be careful not to confuse these “acts” with the more obvious and commonly recognized divisions of the Baghdad period, the Adrianople period, and the ‘Akká period. Neither are these equivalent to the three Declarations of Bahá'u'lláh—first in the *Siyáh-Chál*, secondly in the Garden of Ridván, and thirdly in His letters from Adrianople announcing His station to the world’s kings and rulers. Instead, the three parts in this drama, portraying the gradual symbolic unveiling of the Húriyyih, correspond to the progressive unfolding of the station and power of Bahá'u'lláh and His Revelation.

In brief, the acts begin with the earliest appearances of the Húriyyih, in which She is veiled, remote, and ostensibly aloof from the narrator/persona.

These appearances are powerful poetic renderings of the Manifestation’s emotionally charged experiences with the Holy Spirit, despite Bahá'u'lláh’s transcendent station and foreknowledge of all He must endure. In particular, this first act symbolizes the agony He will experience in concealing Himself, His powers, authority, and message until such time as His followers are ready to receive His unfolding of the Word.

The appearances of the Húriyyih in those tablets we designate as “the second act” are a mixture of the heights of joy and the depths of foreboding and even sorrow. The lover is no longer disdained by the Beloved and experiences a taste of nearness and a closer relationship to the Holy Spirit. At the same time, in several tablets, Bahá'u'lláh reveals to the reader the trials, betrayals, physical hardships, and pain He must endure.

The concluding act, the complete unveiling of the Húriyyih, is, in a figurative sense, accomplished as Her true identity and purpose are made plain, even as is the mission of Bahá'u'lláh. The most prominent portrayal of this final act occurs in ‘Akká when Bahá'u'lláh has the *Súriy-i-Haykal* combined with five of His letters to rulers into a calligraphic pentangle. As we will demonstrate, this added symbolic gesture gives us the opportunity to appreciate in full the story behind the metaphorical devices that have, until this point, characterized the Húriyyih. What has heretofore been only hinted at in such works as the Tablet to Nasíri'd-Dín *Sháh* is unleashed in

the Súriy-i-Haykal's narrative of the Ḥúríyyih's dialogue with Bahá'u'lláh in the dream vision experienced in the Siyáh-Chál. Thus, the trope comes full circle, ending where it begins, with Bahá'u'lláh's first intimations of His ministry.

ACT ONE:
THE EARLIEST APPEARANCES
OF THE ḤÚRÍYYIH

The poem Qaṣídiy-i-Izz-i-Varqá'íyyih ("Ode of the Dove")¹¹ was revealed during Bahá'u'lláh's sojourn in the mountains of Kurdistan (1854–56). Since He had left Baghdad to avoid becoming the cause of further contention among the Bábís,¹² the tone of this poem alludes to the deep sorrow He has experienced, as well as the further difficulties He will be made to endure. It is also valuable to note that

11 Bahá'u'lláh, *Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 321–39. A provisional translation by John S. Hatcher, Amrollah Hemmat and Ehsanollah Hemmat of this poem is published in this issue of the *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*.

12 Though Mírzá Yahyá had been appointed by the Báb to help conduct the affairs of the Bábí community, he never fulfilled this duty. Instead, he hid and disguised himself so that authorities might not associate him with the Bábís or, later, with the Bahá'ís. However, whenever Bahá'u'lláh made an effort to assist the believers by explaining the teachings or texts of the Báb, Mírzá Yahyá would complain and characterize these actions as an attempt by Bahá'u'lláh to usurp his authority, even though he himself never lifted a finger to assist the bewildered and disorganized community of believers.

Bahá'u'lláh revealed these verses in response to a request by local Sufis who had come to revere Him and His remarkable and unfathomable knowledge. They thus exhorted Bahá'u'lláh to compose a poem in the style of the famous Qaṣídiḥ Ṭá'íyyih Kubrá of Ibn-i-Fárid, reputed to be one of the greatest Súfi poets the Arab world had produced.¹³ To their amazement, Bahá'u'lláh proceeded to compose a poem of two thousand couplets in that identical style, though He allowed only 127 of these to be preserved.

We must take into account Bahá'u'lláh's self-imposed exile from His family and from the Bábí community in Baghdad, alongside the style and language appropriate to the mystical tenor of the Súfi verse He was emulating. Then, we can appreciate both the sorrowful tone of the poem and the mystical and philosophical themes so prevalent throughout the work. These themes allude to the fact that, ontologically, the spiritual or transcendent reality is essentially unknowable and likewise unattainable by those abiding in the realm of creation—the physical

13 Though little acknowledged in the West, Ibn-i-Fárid is considered to be on par with Rumi as a writer of Súfi mystical verse. His most famous works are "The Poem of the Súfi Way" and "The Wine Ode." The former explains at great length the mystical experience as an arduous and demanding spiritual journey, while the latter employs the metaphor of the intoxication of wine to represent the ecstasy of being in the presence of the divine, a figurative device also used prominently by Táhirih, the Báb, and Bahá'u'lláh.

realm or the “Kingdom of Names.”

It is in this sense that the sorrow expressed would seem to allude to the intrinsic distance between the immanent and the transcendent. This spiritual distance is demonstrated with particular power when the Maid of Heaven compares Her own lofty and sublime station to the highest degree of illumination possible in the realm of creation (the material world):

“In My sight the most glorious
glory of Túr is abject,
and to Me the most luminous
beam of light is but darkness.”
 (“Ode of the Dove” line 100)

The transcendent divine has been eternally and intrinsically sanctified from any conceptions that can be formed in the mind of existent beings, even as the Húríyyih relates:

“And certainly I have eternally
existed in an immaculate state,
and certainly I have been infinitely
stainless.” (line 102)

Because this essential separation of the world of creation from its Creator (the transcendent Beloved) necessarily leads to sorrow, Bahá'u'lláh—in the persona of the seeker or lover—recounts His despair at His remoteness from the Maid of Heaven:

And whenever I rushed toward
reunion with Her light, after at-
taining nearness, I was wounded

by the arrow of remoteness.

And if I stretched forth my be-
seeching hands for reunion with
Her, with a sword She replied,
“This shall be the recompense for
My lovers!”

And my sole yearning hath been
but to hold fast, while Her relent-
less intent remaineth but to sever
my grasp! (lines 14–16)

It is in the portrayal of this relationship that, in mystic literature, the symbolic veil comes into play by further representing the ontological separation or distance between humankind and the divine source. At the beginning of the wayfarer's search, for example, the ability of the seeker or lover to behold in any complete way the beauty of the Beloved is absent—the Beloved is veiled or concealed. But more importantly, in the context of the revealed works of Bahá'u'lláh—Himself a transcendent Being—the analogy of the veil assumes another more specialized meaning, implying an ever more complete revelation (or manifestation) of the station and powers of Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

Therefore, while in the “Ode of the Dove” the Maiden of Heaven is distant, aloof, and unreachable, in the later stages of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, the Húríyyih is portrayed in His works as appearing without veil, hence representing to the reader how the Holy Spirit is becoming more fully revealed in the divine station of Bahá'u'lláh. The unveiling also alludes to the

completeness with which the Holy Spirit will be revealed in this dispensation, the “Day of God,” the period of fruition and fulfillment of all previous revelations. Or stated with an equally relevant symbol, the resurrection of the body politic foretold in all of the previously revealed religions will come to pass.

However, in the final verses of the “The Ode of the Dove,” written in the early stages of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, we find the Maiden reminding Bahá'u'lláh that He should not reveal the complete reality about Himself—that the time for Him to begin His ministry (unveiling the countenance of the Ḥuríyyih) has not yet begun. And the Maid of Heaven informs Him that if He does reveal Himself prematurely, the totality of existence will vanish, and His objective to unite the peoples of the world will thereby falter or fail.

“And within thee have I concealed a truth that transcends all knowledge.

Even every enlightened mind is unable to comprehend it!

“Relish the companionship of that holy mystery concealed within thee!

If thou art trustworthy, then disclose it not.

“If thou removest the veil from the countenance of what thou hast observed, all existence will vanish in the twinkling of an eye.”¹⁴

In these verses, the countenance which Bahá'u'lláh has observed—the face of the Ḥuríyyih—is, in truth, naught but His own divine aspect or station. But even as the Báb requested that “Him Whom God shall make manifest” (*Selections* 7) withhold revealing His station until the year nineteen (1863), Bahá'u'lláh is being cautioned—in reality, explaining what He already knows to the attentive reader—that the people of the world (particularly the Bábís, who are His most immediate audience) are not yet ready to be exposed to the magnitude of His station nor to comprehend the totality of His revelation.

To those familiar with Bahá'í history, the wisdom in this caution is obvious—the Bábís still needed to be better prepared for the advent of Him Whom God would make manifest, something Bahá'u'lláh would assist them in accomplishing when He returned to Baghdad. In a related matter, this gradual disclosure of station and purpose is very much akin to the approach the Báb Himself employed. At the outset of His declaration, the time for revealing His full station to the public had not yet arrived. Therefore, we see in the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*¹⁵

Bahá'u'lláh in one of His tablets: “If the veil were lifted, and the full glory of the station of those that have turned wholly towards God, and have, in their love for Him, renounced the world, were made manifest, the entire creation would be dumbfounded” (*Gleanings* 93:15).

¹⁵ The same work He commenced to reveal for His first believer, Mullá Ḥusayn, the day they met in Shiraz.

¹⁴ Though in a different context, a similar effect on the whole of creation by an untimely “unveiling” is mentioned by

that the Húríyyih is first permitted to adorn Herself with beautiful attire, veil Her face, and come out of Her palace (126). Subsequently, She is told to return to Her abode. The command to return would seem to be an allusion to the fact that the Báb would reveal His station by degrees and that the time for a public declaration of His station and mission was not yet at hand, even as He advised Mullá Husayn that first night, "It is incumbent upon you not to divulge, either to your companions or to any other soul, that which you have seen and heard" (qtd. in Nabil 63).

THE LAWH-I-HÚRÍYYIH (TABLET OF THE MAIDEN)

After His two-year sojourn to Sulaymáníyyih, Bahá'u'lláh returned to Baghdad where He revealed the Tablet of the Maiden,¹⁶ which is composed in a sublime Arabic style. According to Shoghi Effendi, in this work "events of a far remoter future are foreshadowed" (*God Passes By* 140). Relevant to our analysis of the symbol of the Maiden is Shoghi Effendi's explanation that in this work, the Húríyyih "symbolizes the divine reality in Bahá'u'lláh." He continues, "In this Tablet He alludes to His passing, and most of it is in the nature of a communion with His own Spirit" (letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, 6 May 1939).

It is important to note that in the Tablet of the Maiden, as is the case

with many other works of Bahá'u'lláh, there is an abundant use of terminology and imagery common to Persian and Arabic mystical texts, such as those of Ibn-i-'Arabi and the Persian poets and authors who succeeded him (such as Jami). In this connection, the Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice has observed the following about the imagery in this work:

The subject matter of this Tablet is that of the relationship between the Divine Youth and the Maiden. In the past, as you are well aware, it has not been uncommon to use human love, passion and longing as an allegory of the divine love between God and His creatures. One has only to think of the Song of Songs in the Old Testament, the writings of some of the Christian saints and much of Persian mystical poetry. The tradition represented by such literature was used by Bahá'u'lláh in aspects of His Revelation. (Letter dated 27 August 1998)

The terms used in the first parts of this tablet would seem to portray the Húríyyih variously as belonging to the essential reality of the Creator, as representing the divine station of the Manifestation—the sole representative of God on Earth—and as a sublime Reality loftier than the world of creation.

The tablet begins by praising God for His creation of a paradise that reflects His Essence and for His sending down from that paradise a Húríyyih

16 The original Arabic can be found in *Áthar-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 647–53.

that manifests God's glory in the world of creation. Bahá'u'lláh's description of paradise is very elaborate, depicting it with mystical terminology that refers to the various realms of God: to the realms of *láhút* (the Heavenly Court) and *ahadiyyah* (Divine Unity), which principally denote God's ineffable and transcendent Essence, and to the realms of *jabarút* (the Celestial Dominion) and *malakút* (the Divine Kingdom), which represent the World of Command, the intermediary reality between God and His creation (*Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 647).¹⁷ Therefore, in this context the reader understands how the Húríyyih descends from the realms of paradise as a herald of the transcendent Divine so that, operating through Bahá'u'lláh, She may (metaphorically speaking) serve as an intermediary between God and His creation.

SYMBOLS OF PURITY AND CHASTITY

Representing the transcendent divine, the concept of the Húríyyih cannot be adequately comprehended nor be described through the medium of ordinary language; therefore, Bahá'u'lláh employs various allegories and metaphors to depict Her reality in corporeal terms. He ascribes to Her the attributes of purity and chastity (*'iṣmat*), and He asserts that the Húríyyih has been eternally preserved in the tabernacles of inviolability and glory: "The Húríyyih appeared, She who had dwelled from

time immemorial in the tabernacle of holiness, security, and splendor, and in the sanctuary of chastity, honor, and glory."¹⁸ Bahá'u'lláh then continues, "In crimson ink the Most Exalted Pen hath writ upon Her snow-white brow: 'By God, None hath been aware of this Húríyyih save God, the Inaccessible, the Most High. God hath, in the realm of eternity, sanctified the hem of Her chastity from the allusion of the people of names, and Her countenance from the gaze of all who inhabit the world of being'" (*Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 647–48).

The Húríyyih then emerges from Her pavilion adorned with a robe so beautiful and dazzling that the inhabitants of the heavenly realm are rendered unconscious, and the dominion of creation becomes illumined by Her beauty (*Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 648). In another tablet Bahá'u'lláh describes Her announcement of Her inaccessibly lofty station in the most eloquent terms: "Cry out before the gaze of the dwellers of heaven and of earth: I am the Maid of Heaven, the Offspring begotten by the Spirit of Bahá. My habitation is the Mansion of His Name, the All-Glorious. Before the Concourse on high I was adorned with the ornament of His names. I was wrapped within the veil of an inviolable security, and lay hidden from the eyes of men" (*Gleanings* 129:10).

In light of these verses, we can better understand the meanings intended by the metaphors of purity and chastity in the Tablet of the Maiden as a

¹⁷ The realms of *láhút*, *jabarút*, and *malakút* are also mentioned in Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys* 25.

¹⁸ Original text in *Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 647.

reference to the fact that She personifies a transcendent divine reality that cannot be understood in the realm of creation. Metaphorically, then, She has been protected from the eyes of and the grasp of creation. In the aforementioned quote (“God hath, in the realm of eternity, sanctified the hem of Her chastity from the allusion of the people of names, and Her countenance from the gaze of all who inhabit the world of being”), the attribute of chastity can be understood as referring to the transcendent aspect of the Húríyyih—namely, that She is cleansed from the impurity of names and attributes. Because She does not dwell in the world of creation, the kingdom of names and attributes cannot fully or adequately portray Her ineffable reality.

Yet names and attributes still play an important role in this portrayal. The above passage indeed refers to the fact that the habitation of the Húríyyih is “the mansion of God’s Name,” and She has been “adorned with the ornaments of [God’s] names” or divine attributes. Furthermore, inasmuch as She has been preserved in the tabernacle of glory, the word “Name” could be understood to represent “the Greatest Name” (Bahá), a Name that is likewise beyond any complete or final comprehension by those dwelling in the realm of creation.

Thus, though adorned with the ornament of *all* God’s names and attributes, the Húríyyih cannot reveal Her *essential* reality. That aspect of Her nature must needs remain forever concealed because it represents the reality of God Himself and His transcendent Essence.

Even when the Húríyyih steps out of Her pavilion, She is still concealed by Her veil from the eyes of creation.

Reflecting on what we have thus far examined, the image of the Maid of Heaven is employed by Bahá'u'lláh to represent the transcendent and divine aspects of that intermediary level of reality—between divine and human—occupied by the Manifestation of God. Furthermore, accompanying the image of the Húríyyih are a variety of symbols appropriate to Her transcendent station: Her veil, Her garment, and the pavilion, palaces, tabernacles, and chambers in which She abides, thereby concealed in chastity and purity from the eyes of all in heaven and on earth.

UNVEILING THE HÚRÍYYIH

This same metaphor of the veil, together with the related metaphors of Her garment, Her actions of removing or changing the garment, and Her becoming adorned with a new garment, occurs on other occasions in the Tablet of the Maiden, as well as in other works of Bahá'u'lláh. These portrayals provide additional insight into His strategic use of this imagery.

Further in this tablet, Bahá'u'lláh continues with the following description of the Maid of Heaven as She appears before Him: “She descended and approached until She stood before Me. I was perplexed by the subtleties of Her creation and the marvels of Her form. I found Myself in an ecstasy of longing and a rapture of love for Her. I lifted My hand toward Her and raised

the hem of the veil from Her shoulder” (*Athár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 648).

Reflecting on what we have previously noted, the veil can assume other symbolic values. It can represent an obstacle that *should* be removed, an obstacle that is *inappropriate* to remove, or an obstacle that is intrinsic and therefore *impossible* to remove. The use of the veil in the first instance simply denotes an obstacle that impedes our recognition of the Manifestation of God, or that conceals from us His glory and perfections. When employed in this manner, the veil obviously should be removed, or at least partially lifted so that we can glimpse the divine attributes of the Holy Spirit, though, as the Bahá'í Writings repeatedly assert, humankind is prevented from ever entirely comprehending the station and attributes of the Manifestations of God. Thus we find the following verse in Bahá'u'lláh's *Mathnaví*:

Like the Valiant One,¹⁹ tear asunder
all the veils that thou mightest
behold the resplendence of the
All-Bounteous!²⁰ (line 295)

Yet, removing the veil is a reciprocal process. At times, the *Húríyyih* unveils Herself, as in the *Lawḥ-i-Húr-i-Ujáb*; at times, She is unveiled, as in the *Lawḥ-i-Húríyyih*. Extending this analogy to the relationship between God and humankind, we can conclude that along with the desire of the Beloved to unveil

Himself, there should be yearning, capacity, and readiness for receiving the bounties of His perfections. Therefore, in addition to the seeker's longing and striving to recognize God—through recognizing His Manifestation—God will also reveal Himself through the reality of the Manifestation. With such Revelation, the Beloved appears again, and a new spiritual era is commenced. So in the *Mathnaví* of Bahá'u'lláh we read in His elucidation of the “spiritual spring” (*bahár-i-rawḥání*):

When our King casts aside the veil
from His face,
this spring will pitch its tent upon
the universe.
When our Friend casts aside the
veil from His face,
the bright spring will become em-
blazoned. (lines 49–50)

And on another occasion, Bahá'u'lláh, speaking as the Manifestation of God, proclaims:

Thus might I ignite in the uni-
verse such a fire
that I could consume the veils of
the holy ones!
Thus would I disclose the *húrí* of
inner meaning from behind Her
veil,
cast aside the cloak of the con-
cealed light! (lines 23–24)

Furthermore, He addresses the Great Spirit operating through His own Self:

19 Also an allusion to 'Álí.

20 Original in *Athár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 189.

O Countenance of God, emerge
from behind the veil
so that the sun will dawn from the
West. (line 80)

. . . that I may appear in the world
unveiled
and disclose a portion of the mys-
tery about Your loving kindness.
(line 93)

Thus in this mutual process of Revela-
tion and of search, advancement, and
acceptance by the people, the veils
between God and His creation will be
lifted.

Next we need to address another
allegorical meaning of the unveiling:
when the unveiling is not appropriate
since there is lack of capacity and read-
iness on the side of people. Bahá'u'lláh
revealed His station as the Manifesta-
tion of God—"Him Whom God shall
make manifest"—to the Bábís short-
ly before He moved from Baghdad
to Constantinople. The *Mathnaví* of
Bahá'u'lláh was revealed in Constan-
tinople when the majority of the Bábís
were still unaware of His station and
a clear separation between Him and
Yahyá had not taken place. Yet in Con-
stantinople the time for the emphatic
separation—what would take place
in Adrianople—was getting close.
So perhaps the following verse in the
Mathnaví refers to this process:

O Countenance of God, emerge
from behind the veil
so that the sun will dawn from the
West.

Open the musk of divine
knowledge!
Disclose the treasure of the hid-
den mysteries. (lines 80–81)

Yet, as we know, there has been a rea-
son for Bahá'u'lláh's essential concern
with revealing His true station. It would
be inappropriate to remove the veil if
the act itself becomes an obstacle to the
recognition of the glory of the Beloved.
For that reason, Bahá'u'lláh says that
if the glory and beauty of the Húriyyih
become fully manifest, the whole of
creation will be rendered unconscious,
as the recognition of the true station of
the Manifestations of God would be
beyond the capacity of the generality
of humankind: "If you remove the veil
from the countenance of what you have
observed, all existence will vanish in
the twinkling of an eye" ("Ode of the
Dove" line 123). In fact, we discover in
the Bahá'í Writings that even the Man-
ifestations of the past were not able
to fully comprehend the magnitude
of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation: "None
among the Manifestations of old, ex-
cept to a prescribed degree, hath ever
completely apprehended the nature of
this Revelation" (Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in
Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 99).

Thus, as we have noted, the Báb also
gradually "unveiled" His true station.
At first, He alluded to Himself as the
Gate to the Hidden Imam; after some
years, He revealed Himself as the
Hidden Imam, and, subsequently, as a
Prophet with a station equal to that of
Muḥammad. Finally, He unveiled His
station of Lordship (*rubúbíyyah*). This

process is represented analogically by the act of gradually removing a veil in accordance with the capacity or preparedness of the people to accept, by degrees, the ultimate loftiness of the station of the Báb as the Primal Point. The same revelatory methodology is repeated in Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. We can appropriately infer that in the Tablet of the Maiden, the lifting of the hem of the veil from the shoulder of the Húríyyih most probably alludes to the initial and careful disclosure of the true station of Bahá'u'lláh while He was in Baghdad, during the period when this tablet was revealed.

Occasionally, in Bahá'u'lláh's writings, the meaning of the veil and of the unveiling becomes more complicated and intricate, thereby necessitating that we acquire knowledge about the philosophical context of these images. An example of this complexity occurs when the veil is used as a positive symbol of something that cannot be removed. For example, a well-known Islamic *ḥadīth* portrays God as being hidden behind seventy-thousand veils of light,²¹ a metaphor or conceit intended to convey the notion that God's glory and splendor are so powerful and overwhelming as to prevent any created being from beholding Him, in the same way the brightness of the sun prevents

21 The "Ḥadīth of the Veils" has been variously recorded and translated, but all versions allude to the inaccessibility of any complete knowledge of God. One of the better explications of the *ḥadīth* is in *Science in the Qur'án* by Sayyid Rami Al Rifai, where he compares this *ḥadīth* to the "verse of light" in the Qur'án 24:35 (16).

us from being able to stare directly at it with the naked eye or to discern its essential reality. In brief, the transcendence of God and His unknowable Essence are eternally beyond any exact or complete human comprehension.

REVELATION

Bahá'ís believe that the attributes of the unknowable Essence that is the Creator become revealed through the intermediation of the Manifestations—progressively and in accord with the capacity and preparedness of humankind at a given point in history. In light of this belief, we can appreciate that the revelatory process requires the timeliness or gradualness with which the successive revelations educate humankind about spiritual truth and how that truth can best become manifest in human action and governance.

In the same vein, in this tablet the beauty of the Húríyyih—symbolizing the names and attributes of God—is gradually unveiled. First Bahá'u'lláh removes the hem of the veil from the shoulder of the Húríyyih; later He further reveals Her beauty by exposing Her breast. This gradual unveiling, we might thus presume, signifies that while the time for full revelation of the exalted beauty and glory of the Most Great Spirit had not yet arrived, it was gradually approaching.

In this sense, the unveiling of the Húríyyih would seem to represent something akin to Bahá'u'lláh's announcement of His revelation: first, to the near ones in Baghdad in the Garden

of Riḍván; a few years later, more openly and forcefully in Adrianople to the kings and rulers of the world; and, finally, in 'Akká, with the Kitáb-i-Aqdas disclosing the full splendor of a blueprint for a world commonwealth—the New Jerusalem made manifest on earth in the plentitude of its glory and its redemptive powers for humankind.

ACT TWO:
THE HEIGHTS OF JOY AND
DEPTHS OF SORROW

In the second act of the dramatic appearances of the Húríyyih—in those tablets revealed around 1863—we witness intense heights of joy, as well as the depths of despair. On the one hand, there is a clear atmosphere of jubilation, a reversal of the tragic crisis evident in the previous stage. On the other hand, a number of tablets express intense feelings of foreboding and sorrow.

In this second period, the Húríyyih appears in the Lawḥ-i-Húr-i-'Ujáb, the Lawḥ-i-Subḥána Rabbí-al-A'lá, the Hili Hili Yá Bishárat, the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, the Bulbul-i-Firáq, the Lawḥ-i-Ghulámu'l-Khuld, and the Súriy-i-Qalam. Even though two of these tablets—the Tablet of the Holy Mariner and the Bulbul-i-Firáq—foretell the difficulties that will afflict Bahá'u'lláh in the near future,²²

22 The “supreme crisis Bahá'u'lláh Himself designated as the Ayyám-i-Shidad (Days of Stress), during which ‘the most grievous veil’ was torn asunder, and the ‘most great separation’ was irrevocably effected” (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 163).

the hallmark of the other tablets is the festivity and joy emanating from the announcement of Bahá'u'lláh's station and the exalted tenor and jubilation that prevail in the Garden of Riḍván.

In these tablets, there is the playing of music (in the Húr-i-'Ujáb) and the offering of wine and dances of joy (in the Lawḥ-i-Subḥána Rabbí-al-A'lá). In the poetic Hili Hili Yá Bishárat, each of the verses ends with the phrase, “Hasten, hasten, hasten, O Glad Tidings!” Similarly, in the Lawḥ-i-Ghulámu'l-Khuld, the appearance of the Youth of Paradise and the Maid of Heaven is celebrated with the greeting “Glad Tidings!” echoed more than thirty times.

But returning to our central theme, let us examine a few of these joyous and blissful tablets, as they inform us further about the image of the Húríyyih, especially as this figure personifies “the Most Great Spirit.” In discussing the impact of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, Adib Taherzadeh makes the following comments concerning the significance of the image of the Most Great Spirit, or the Húríyyih:

The Most Great Spirit is therefore the begetter of the Holy Spirit and the Revealer of God's attributes to man. Through It all Revelations have been sent down and all created things called into being. The “Most Great Spirit” which has existed from eternity and which will exist for eternity had never before revealed Itself directly to mankind. God had waited for millions of years for man to

develop spiritually and intellectually to a point where he could receive this Most Great Revelation. Bahá'u'lláh has declared that this was indeed God's purpose in creating man. (*Revelation*, vol. 4, 133)

THE LAWH-I-SUBHÁNA RABBÍ-AL-A'LÁ AND THE LAWH-I-ĤÚR-I-'UJÁB: FORESHADOWING A JOYFUL FUTURE

In the Lawḥ-i-Subḥána Rabbí-al-A'lá,²³ the sorrows of tribulation and separation expressed in the Tablet of the Holy Mariner and in the Bulbul-i-Firáq are overshadowed by the glad tidings of the new revelation. One senses from the outset that this tablet may well mark the commencement of a time of felicity and celebration, a dominant theme in other tablets of this period.

The tablet begins with the divine voice consoling the "Letter of Eternity" (Bahá'u'lláh), exhorting Him not to be disturbed by the trials and difficulties of the world, but, instead, to put on the sandals of detachment and step onto the summit on high. If He were to do this, He is told, He would hear clearly the call of God announcing that the Ĥúríyyih of Eternity has once more descended. In wonderfully poetic and imaginative language, the tablet describes the process of spiritual regeneration brought about through the periodic reappearance of

the reality of the Manifestation of God after its disappearance.

The disappearance of the Manifestation of God—the decline in the efficacy of an Era or Dispensation—can be likened to the veiling of the Ĥúríyyih after She has been unveiled. Indeed, in the Bahá'í Writings, we come across instances where the Ĥúríyyih becomes veiled again after She has unveiled Herself, or where the decline of religion is represented by Her return to the heavenly realm after Her descent to earth. For example, in the tablets of Ĥúríyyih and Ru'yá, Bahá'u'lláh portrays the return of the unconscious or lifeless Ĥúríyyih to the celestial realm from which She had descended.²⁴ We can infer that most probably these conceits allude to the cyclical appearances of the Manifestations of God.

In contrast, in the Tablet of the Wondrous Maiden (Lawḥ-i-Ĥúr-i-'Ujáb), revealed in Baghdad, the Ĥúríyyih appears on earth and removes Her veil. With a "lightning glance," She turns Her gaze to "the dwellers of the realm of dust," lets them behold "a raven lock," and passes round in "cups and chalices" the "wine of life." She then sings a song "in praise of Her Beloved" with "harp and lute," causing the hearts to melt in consuming flames. Then She smiles, causing "the hearts of them who know" to cry and weep. But when the doubters and those who "boast of self" deny Her truth, She sorrowfully "repair[s] to Her abode,"

23 For the original version, see Ish-ráj-i-Khávárí, *Ghanj-i-Sháyigán* 61–64.

24 See Kamálí in *Safíniy-i 'Irfán*, vol. 18, p. 159.

anguished, uttering words of rebuke, warning that the mysteries of God's scriptures will be concealed until the Promised One appears:

"Why do ye gainsay Me, O people of the Book?" How astounding is this, how astounding indeed!

"Claim ye to be the guided and the loved ones of the Lord?" By God! How astounding a lie, how astounding indeed!

"O my friends," She said, "We shall not come again,"—how wondrous a return, how wondrous indeed!—

"But will conceal God's secrets in His Scriptures and His Books," as bidden by One mighty and bounteous indeed!

"Nor shall ye find Me till the Promised One appear on Judgment Day." By My life! How astounding an abasement, how astounding indeed! (Bahá'u'lláh, *Days of Remembrance* 60)

Another possible interpretation derives from the applicability of these allusions to the history of the Bahá'í Dispensation—the veiling or disappearance of the Húríyyih might represent the period between the martyrdom of the Báb in 1850 and the subsequent unveiling of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh in 1863.

In addition, inasmuch as the Bahá'í Writings assert that each appearance of a new Manifestation of God leads to the resurrection of humankind,²⁵ in

²⁵ For example, see Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* 32–34.

the Lawḥ-i-Subḥána Rabbí-al-A'lá, Bahá'u'lláh associates the appearance of the Húríyyih with the Qur'ánic sura appropriately titled "The Resurrection," particularly with the verse regarding creation: "Then he was a clot; so He created [him], then made [him] perfect" (75:38).²⁶ Similarly, each verse of this poetic tablet (Lawḥ-i-Subḥána Rabbí-al-A'lá) ends with a phrase from this same Qur'ánic verse: "created and made perfect." A few examples demonstrate how Bahá'u'lláh has incorporated this idea into the tablet as He alludes to the recurring pattern of the appearance and subsequent disappearance of the Húríyyih in terms of Her veiling and unveiling:

And hear the call of God with a manifest melody from the concealed [realm], Praised be my Exalted Lord. Say: the Húríyyih of Eternity descended once again to face this luminous most sweet Moon: praised be the One Who created [Her] and made perfect . . .

Once [more] She disclosed Her face and once again She covered it: praised be the One Who created [Her] and made [Her] perfect.

Then did the essences of spirit in their eternal bodies dance by virtue of what appeared and yet again became concealed

²⁶ This and all citations of the Qur'án are from *The Holy Qur'án*, translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, as modified by Hatcher, Hemmat, and Hemmat.

. . . and the minds of holy ones were entranced by what descended and [then] ascended. (Provisional translation)

In this tablet, the theme of the cyclical appearance and disappearance of the Ḥúríyyih clearly represents the advent of the Manifestations of God. In the Sura of the Pen, as we will see in the next section, Bahá'u'lláh captures the joyous occasion of the reappearance of the Maiden of Heaven, especially at this specific point in history, the Day of God prophesied in all previous revelations and fulfilled by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

THE SÚRIY-I-QALAM

In the Súriy-i-Qalam (Sura of the Pen),²⁷ revealed in Adrianople around 1865 on the occasion of the celebration of Riḍván, the Ḥúríyyih is informed that the time for Her return has arrived:

O Pen! Announce unto the Maid of Paradise: “By God! This day is thy day. Come forth as thou willest, and array thyself as thou pleasest with the brodered robe of names and the silken vesture of immortality. Emerge then from thine eternal habitation even as the sun that dawneth from the countenance of Bahá. Descend from thy lofty heights and, standing betwixt earth and heaven, lift the veil of

concealment from thy luminous face and shine forth above the horizon of creation as the black-eyed Damsel, that haply the most great veil may be torn away from the eyes of these people and they may behold the Scene of transcendent glory, the Beauty of God, the Most Holy, the Most Powerful, the Best-Beloved. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Days of Remembrance* 133)

This is a metaphorical description of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of His station and mission in the garden of Riḍván immediately prior to His departure from Baghdad, surely one of the most momentous events in the history of the Faith. Yet at that time, not many were capable of appreciating the true station of Bahá'u'lláh and the ultimate significance of this event.

Once in Adrianople, the time had arrived for a forthright and unambiguous public proclamation of the station of Bahá'u'lláh, not only to the Bábís, but to the world at large as He penned informative, enlightening, and prophetic epistles to the kings and rulers of the world. Therefore, as opposed to the Tablet of the Maiden in which only partial disclosure or unveiling of the beauty of the Ḥúríyyih takes place, in this tablet He calls upon Her to disclose Her full glory.

As the Sura of the Pen continues, Bahá'u'lláh thus instructs the Ḥúríyyih of Bahá to depart from the abode of Eternity—leaving the kingdom of names on Her right and the dominion of attributes on Her left—and, by His

²⁷ Original published in *Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá* 570–77.

permission, to arise like the dawn from the east of His inviolability, disrobed of all that was created in the realm of Command and divested of all that existed in the kingdom of Creation, so that, by disclosing Her ravishing beauty, the wondrous visage of God would appear to all creation. He then advises the Húríyyih to rise from the dawning place of paradise with the beauty of the Most Merciful: “[L]et thy fragrant locks flow upon thy bosom,” He enjoins Her, “that the perfume of the garment of thy most gracious Lord may be diffused throughout the world” (*Days of Remembrance* 114).

He thus cautions Her not to cover or veil the ornaments of Her beauty; then, He advises Her in more detail how to adorn Her beauteous form and commands Her to offer in white cups the red wine of God’s Beauty to the concourse of Eternity:

Present thyself, then, before the Throne with thy locks flowing, thine arms bejewelled, thy countenance blushing, thy cheeks aglow, and thine eyes adorned, and take hold of the snow-white chalice in My most exalted Name. Proffer then to the denizens of the realm of eternity the crimson wine of Mine all-glorious Beauty, that haply the concourse of Revelation may sanctify their souls in this most august Festival by virtue of this pure draught, and that they may emerge from behind the veil of concealment through the power of Mine almighty and all-powerful, Mine

all-subduing and self-subsisting sovereignty. (*Days of Remembrance* 114)

We thus observe in this sequence of events how the Húríyyih is advised to emerge and to ascend beyond the realms of names and attributes and above the dominions of Creation and Command. Bahá'u'lláh, the Pen, thus exhorts the Húríyyih—the Most Great Spirit—to appear in the most sublime station because “the Beloved of the Worlds is come!” (*Days of Remembrance* 114).

This command doubtless alludes to the unique station of this Day, the Day of Days, the turning point in human history and the culmination of all previous revelations, a period of transformation and fulfillment, the magnificence of which the Prophets of old could not fully comprehend, even though They longed for its advent. The implication is that had humanity, in the past, experienced the bounty of attaining the presence of the Prophets or Messengers of God to the same extent as in this promised Day of God, when the Most Great Spirit Itself is appearing to them unveiled, they would not have found it bearable, let alone comprehensible.

As Bahá'u'lláh explains, the divine rationale for the gradual nature of progressive revelation is to prevent the kind of cataclysm that would result if the sun were to appear of a sudden in its full midday splendor, causing the world to be “dismayed and overpowered” rather than enlightened and assisted:

Know of a certainty that in every Dispensation the light of Divine Revelation hath been vouchsafed unto men in direct proportion to their spiritual capacity. Consider the sun. How feeble its rays the moment it appeareth above the horizon. How gradually its warmth and potency increase as it approacheth its zenith, enabling meanwhile all created things to adapt themselves to the growing intensity of its light. How steadily it declineth until it reacheth its setting point. Were it, all of a sudden, to manifest the energies latent within it, it would, no doubt, cause injury to all created things. . . . In like manner, if the Sun of Truth were suddenly to reveal, at the earliest stages of its manifestation, the full measure of the potencies which the providence of the Almighty hath bestowed upon it, the earth of human understanding would waste away and be consumed; for men's hearts would neither sustain the intensity of its revelation, nor be able to mirror forth the radiance of its light. Dismayed and overpowered, they would cease to exist. (*Gleanings* 38:1)

Probably the most important revelation in this tablet occurs when Bahá'u'lláh declares that He Himself is the Húríyyih, that no eye in existence hath witnessed Him as He has been eternally hidden behind the veil of inviolability (*išmat*). At this point, He hears the sweet voice of His Lord

and witnesses paradise itself and all created within it in motion and eager to attain the presence of God. Then another call is raised announcing that indeed the Beloved of the world has appeared:

By God! I am the Maid of Heaven, abiding in the midmost heart of Paradise, hidden behind the veil of the All-Merciful and concealed from the eyes of men. From time immemorial I remained shrouded in the veil of sanctity beneath the Tabernacle of Grandeur. I heard a most sweet call from the right hand of the throne of my Lord, the Most Exalted, and I saw Paradise itself set in motion and all its inhabitants stirred up in their longing to attain the presence of God, the All-Glorious. Whereupon another call was raised: "By God! The Beloved of the worlds is come! Blessed be the one who attaineth His presence, and beholdeth His face, and giveth ear to His most holy, His most glorious and beloved utterance." (*Days of Remembrance* 114–15)

In this proclamation, reminiscent of a passage in the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* where the Báb declares Himself to be the Húríyyih (*Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* 126), the Húríyyih would seem to symbolize the eternal Reality of the Manifestations of God in Their station of "essential unity."

In the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Bahá'u'lláh discusses at length this station of unity, the same Reality that recurrently appears in the world of creation with

each successive dispensation or era. Bahá'u'lláh asserts,

These Manifestations of God have each a twofold station. One is the station of pure abstraction and essential unity. In this respect, if thou callest them all by one name, and dost ascribe to them the same attribute, thou hast not erred from the truth. Even as He hath revealed: “No distinction do We make between any of His Messengers!” For they one and all summon the people of the earth to acknowledge the Unity of God, and herald unto them the Kawthar of an infinite grace and bounty. They are all invested with the robe of Prophethood, and honoured with the mantle of glory. . . . These Countenances are the recipients of the Divine Command, and the day-springs of His Revelation. This Revelation is exalted above the veils of plurality and the exigencies of number. (Kitáb-i-Íqán ¶161)

It is in this sense that the appearance of each of the Manifestations of God can be symbolized by the appearance and subsequent unveiling of the Ḥuríyyih, Their eternal divine aspect.

From the perspective of progressive revelation as articulated in the Kitáb-i-Íqán by Bahá'u'lláh, the current era is designated as the long-promised Day of God, the Day of Resurrection when people stand in God's presence and, figuratively speaking, behold God directly (*liqá'u'lláh*). Consequently,

compared to bygone ages, humanity will, in this Day, develop the capacity and preparedness to witness the unveiled glory of God. Or stated in symbolic terms, this is the time when the unveiled beauty of the Ḥuríyyih will be displayed for all to behold.

In this same context, we can also appreciate allusions in the Writings to replacing the garment or covering the hurís with a new one. For example, in one tablet, Bahá'u'lláh speaks of clothing the hurís with His words. Metaphorically, we can infer that He is adorning spiritual attributes with new meanings, understandings appropriate to the enlightenment of people of this day and age: “I have summoned the Maids of Heaven (hurís) to emerge from behind the veil of concealment, and have clothed them with these words of Mine—words of consummate power and wisdom” (*Gleanings* 153:7).

In still another tablet, the Ḥuríyyih is summoned to appear in any type of garment She wishes, but is cautioned not to divest Herself of the robe of glory, a garment that infuses the grace of God in the plentitude of its power into the whole of creation:

Say: Step out of Thy holy chamber, O Maid of Heaven, inmate of the Exalted Paradise! Drape thyself in whatever manner pleaseth Thee in the silken Vesture of Immortality, and put on, in the name of the All-Glorious, the broided Robe of Light. Hear, then, the sweet, the wondrous accent of the

Voice that cometh from the Throne of Thy Lord, the Inaccessible, the Most High. Unveil Thy face, and manifest the beauty of the black-eyed Damsel, and suffer not the servants of God to be deprived of the light of Thy shining countenance. . . . Beware that Thou divest not Thyself, Thou Who art the Essence of Purity, of Thy robe of effulgent glory. Nay, enrich Thyself increasingly, in the kingdom of creation, with the incorruptible vestures of Thy God, that the beauteous image of the Almighty may be reflected through Thee in all created things and the grace of Thy Lord be infused in the plenitude of its power into the entire creation. (*Gleanings* 129:8)

In the *Lawḥ-i-Ghulámu'l-Khuld*,²⁸ we similarly read the following regarding the appearance of the Ḥuríyyih with special splendor and beauty in this Day of God: “The Ḥuríyyih of beauty shone like the dawning of the sun from the dawning place of the manifest morn! Praised be God! This is the Ḥuríyyih of Bahá! She hath arrived with wondrous beauty and appeared with an adoration that hath dumbfounded and enthralled the minds of the near ones!”

ACT THREE:

A TRIUMPHANT RESOLUTION

In this third and final stage, we note how the weight of Bahá'u'lláh's sorrow

is lifted by the power and authority of the new Revelation as unequivocal messages of fulfillment and victory are clearly heard. In this phase of the dramatic appearances of the Ḥuríyyih, there is a further departure from Her veiled appearance as the relationship between Her and Bahá'u'lláh unfolds more completely. Indeed, this final stage concludes with a triumphant and joyous resolution to all the turmoil, tumult, and tragedy of the first two stages. In the “Ode of the Dove,” we felt Bahá'u'lláh's sorrow as a result of the separation from the Ḥuríyyih. In the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, the hurís “bared their heads, rent their garments asunder, beat upon their faces, forgot their joy, shed tears and smote with their hands upon their cheeks” in their grief because of the people's inability to recognize Bahá'u'lláh (*Bahá'í Prayers* 327). In both the Tablet of the Maiden and the Tablet of the Holy Mariner, we witness the death of the Ḥuríyyih as She “fell upon the dust and gave up the spirit” (*Bahá'í Prayers* 326). The *Bulbul-i-Firáq* foreshadows Bahá'u'lláh's exile from Baghdad and makes various other allusions to the unrelenting and egregious opposition by His enemies.

But the principal tablets relating to the Ḥuríyyih in this final stage of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry—the *Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá* and the *Súriy-i-Haykal*—are quite different in tone and portray the authority and triumph of Bahá'u'lláh, as we will see in the following brief assessment of how such changes play out in these two works.

28 *Khávári, Risáliy-i-Ayyám-i-Tis`ih* 92–99.

THE LAWH-I-RU'YÁ

The predominant theme in the Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá (Tablet of the Vision)²⁹ is the climax of the revelation and manifestation of the names and attributes of God. Revealed in 1873 on the anniversary of the birth of the Báb, the Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá portrays the unveiled appearance of the Húríyyih as Bahá'u'lláh comments on the splendor of the names and attributes of God that Her beauty and comportment make manifest.

In this tablet, Bahá'u'lláh powerfully emphasizes the greatness of His Revelation, the intensity and grandeur of which are symbolized by the appearance of the Húríyyih in the fullness of Her splendor. She is dressed in a long white gown, “Her countenance as bright as the full moon shining in the midmost heaven” (Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá ¶2). She then removes Her veil, whereupon creation is “flooded with light”:

No sooner had She removed Her veil than the heavens and the earth were flooded with light, as though the ancient Essence had cast the full splendor of His radiance upon Her. Exalted be the Lord Who fashioned Her; no mortal eye hath ever seen Her like! (Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá ¶3)

Bahá'u'lláh then describes, one at a time, certain features of Her body, together with Her movements and emotional disposition, with His description

of each one of these symbolic attributes concluding with the phrase, “no mortal eye hath ever seen Her like!” Perhaps most revealing in this vision of the Húríyyih is that the disdain She formerly expressed in the “Ode of the Dove” in response to the yearnings of the seeker (Bahá'u'lláh) has now been replaced by complete and total affection.

She places Her arm around the neck of “Her Lord” and gives Him an embrace, which He returns. A theme of union—or, more aptly, reunion—with the Maid of Heaven is clear. At this stage, Bahá'u'lláh as Revelator has assumed His full stature and revealed the loftiness of His station—His place upon the Throne of Revelation. Whereas once He was subordinate, He and the Most Great Spirit are now united as one. Or stated in another way, He has become fully imbued with and inseparable from the Most Great Spirit. Not coincidentally, Bahá'u'lláh reveals this work shortly after—or possibly around the same time as—He reveals the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book and “the Mother Book of His Dispensation.” Its revelation can be taken to symbolize—or to represent quite literally—the plenitude of the powers unleashed by Bahá'u'lláh to bring about the reformation of humankind.

So it is that, in exquisite and joyous metaphoric language, Bahá'u'lláh portrays the smile of the Húríyyih while She encircles Him with no will of Her own, orbiting Him as “glory itself wait[s] upon Her, whilst the kingdom of beauty follow[s] in Her

29 *Khávári, Risáliy-i-Ayyám-i-Tis`ih* 16–20.

wake” (Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá ¶6). And in this context, it is well worth noting that “glory” (*jalál*) and “beauty” (*jamál*) are two of the central attributes of God portrayed in Sufi literature, the former indicating divine attributes such as grandeur, might, and power, and the latter referring to attributes like mercy, beauty, and kindness. As such, the simultaneous association of the Ḥúríyyih with the attributes of both majesty and beauty is yet another indication of the fullness of the manifestation of God’s names and attributes in the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh. Note, for example, how the following verses allude at once to Her physical beauty—Her “winsome ways,” “comely form,” and “jet black hair” on Her “snow-white neck”—and to the “magnet of that Beauty” (Bahá’u’lláh) that is the “true north” towards which “love’s needle” points through no will of its own:

With no will or purpose of Her own, She moved and circled about, as though love’s needle was drawn by the magnet of that Beauty that shone resplendent before Her. Exalted be the Lord Who fashioned Her; no mortal eye hath ever seen Her like!

She stepped forth, and glory itself waited upon Her, whilst the kingdom of beauty followed in Her wake, acclaiming Her wondrous grace, Her winsome ways and Her comely form. Exalted be the Lord Who fashioned Her; no mortal eye hath ever seen Her like!

We beheld then Her jet-black

hair cascading round Her snow-white neck, as though night and day had embraced in this glorious spot, this goal of all desire. Exalted be the Lord Who fashioned Her; no mortal eye hath ever seen Her like! (Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá ¶5–7)

In this tablet Bahá’u’lláh also alludes to the image of the veil: “Gazing upon Her face, We beheld a spot concealed beneath the veil of Unity, shining above the horizon of Her brow.” Here we discover the usage of a mystical term that needs particular attention. “Unity” (*waḥidiyyah*), in Islamic mystical philosophy, alludes to the manifestation of God’s names and attributes, so, in the sense of this tradition, the veil of Unity implies the veil of names and attributes.³⁰ Furthermore, the “spot” or beauty mark can be taken to represent the “Primal Point,” inasmuch as the tablet is revealed on “the anniversary of the birth of My Herald, He Who extolled My praise, celebrated My sovereignty, and informed the people of the heaven of My Will, the ocean of My Purpose, and the daystar of My Revelation. We exalted this Day through the advent of that other Day whereon was revealed the hidden Secret, the treasured Mystery, and the well-guarded Symbol” (Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá ¶17).

Elucidated in another way, the “spot concealed beneath the veil of Unity” is the Point or transcendent source of the

30 See Kamálí in *Safíniy-i-‘Irfán*, vol. 20, p. 122, for further discussion of this subject.

Revelation which is hidden behind the veil of names and attributes and thus obscured from the comprehension of humankind. Indeed, the names and attributes of God—which we can observe and appreciate—are only allusions to that ineffable Essence expressed in a limited manner—namely, by images and language we can comprehend. The transcendent Reality of the Ancient of Days will forever be concealed beyond the capacity or power of words, signs, and symbols.

Finally, even though in this tablet the Ḥuríyyih's extreme joy is momentarily halted by Her sympathy for Bahá'u'lláh's tribulations while imprisoned in 'Akká, She does not tragically de cease, leave this world, or return back to the realm from which She descended. With compassion She asks Bahá'u'lláh to leave 'Akká and move to regions that the people of names have never observed: "May all creation be a ransom for Thine afflictions, O King of earth and heaven! How long wilt Thou commit Thyself into the hands of these people in the city of 'Akká? Hasten unto Thine other dominions—realms whereon the eyes of the people of names have never fallen.' Whereat We smiled" (*Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá* ¶15). According to Shoghi Effendi, this statement foreshadows Bahá'u'lláh's ascension (*God Passes By* 221).

THE SÚRIY-I-HAYKAL

We conclude our concise but hopefully informative examination of the complex and sometimes abstruse

symbolism underlying Bahá'u'lláh's use of the imagery of the Ḥuríyyih with what is, for our purposes, the climactic work—the Súriy-i-Haykal (Sura of the Temple). The word *haykal* means "structure" or "temple"—in this case, the "human temple," or, in the context of this work, the Most Great Spirit manifest to humankind through a human form or persona.

Though Bahá'u'lláh originally revealed the Súriy-i-Haykal in Adrianople, later in 'Akká He had it transcribed into the calligraphic form of a pentacle, symbolic of the human body. In this configuration were included epistles He had formerly sent to five prominent figures: Pope Pius IX, Napoleon III, Czar Alexander II, Queen Victoria, and Násiri'd-Dín Sháh.

Regarding the Maid of Heaven's appearance in the Súriy-i-Haykal, Shoghi Effendi has explained that in this work Bahá'u'lláh is recounting how the Maiden appeared to Him in a dream vision while He was imprisoned in the Siyáh-Chál. Thus, we observe that in this tablet the Ḥuríyyih's tidings focus on Her announcement about the station of Bahá'u'lláh and Her admonition to the world of creation that all must recognize His station.

The language of this tablet is characterized by a tone of majesty and power, sanguinity and victory. The sorrowful moments observed in several of the previous tablets are replaced by the joyous announcement of Bahá'u'lláh's station and mission, together with the emphatic assurance of the ultimate victory of His Cause. This triumph is symbolized,

we may conclude, by the perfect manifestation of divine attributes in the human temple of Bahá'u'lláh. His inclusion in this calligraphic design of His exhortation to the kings and rulers of the world to manifest in their own personage and governance these same divine attributes may well represent the goal of transforming the body politic of the world of humanity.

As we read this tablet, we can appreciate that while the human aspect of Bahá'u'lláh feels pain, whether physical or emotional or spiritual, He also can wield immense power where-with to change the hearts and minds of humankind. Taherzadeh notes, "This Tablet is replete with glad-tidings of the appearance of a band of devoted believers whom Bahá'u'lláh refers to as the new race of men" (*Revelation* vol. 3, 135). Consequently, in this tablet we read the announcement to the world of the astounding transformation of the human body politic "this Youth" (Bahá'u'lláh) is going to bring about:

Erelong shall God draw forth, out of the bosom of power, the hands of ascendancy and might, and shall raise up a people who will arise to win victory for this Youth and who will purge mankind from the defilement of the outcast and the ungodly. These hands will gird up their loins to champion the Faith of God, and will, in My name the Self-Subsistent, the Mighty, subdue the peoples and kindreds of the earth. (*Summons* ¶34)

In terms of our examination of the three stages of the appearance of the Húríyyih, the Súriy-i-Haykal can be understood to represent the climax of Her function as the personification of the Most Great Spirit in the works of Bahá'u'lláh.

Most students of the Bahá'í writings are aware of the appearance of the Húríyyih to Bahá'u'lláh in the Siyáh-Chál. During a dream vision, He receives the first intimation of His Revelation through the appearance and announcement of the Húríyyih. This vision signals that the time has come for Bahá'u'lláh to assume His inherent station, though He will conceal this fact until revelation is timely—first in the Garden of Ridván and later to the world at large in the epistles He begins sending to the kings and rulers while He abides in Adrianople. We can read His description of this vision in the Súriy-i-Haykal as translated by Shoghi Effendi:

While engulfed in tribulations
I heard a most wondrous, a most
sweet voice, calling above My
head. Turning My face, I beheld
a Maiden—the embodiment of
the remembrance of the name of
My Lord—suspended in the air
before Me. So rejoiced was She
in Her very soul that Her counte-
nance shone with the ornament of
the good pleasure of God, and Her
cheeks glowed with the brightness
of the All-Merciful. Betwixt earth
and heaven She was raising a call
which captivated the hearts and

minds of men. She was imparting to both My inward and outer being tidings which rejoiced My soul, and the souls of God's honoured servants (Bahá'u'lláh, *Summons* ¶6).

Bahá'u'lláh continues by describing how the Húriyyih points a finger at His head and announces His advent to the whole of creation in such exalted and glorious language that it is well worth recounting here:

Pointing with Her finger unto My head, She addressed all who are in heaven and all who are on earth, saying: By God! This is the Best-Beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within you, could ye but understand. This is the Mystery of God and His Treasure, the Cause of God and His glory unto all who are in the kingdoms of Revelation and of creation, if ye be of them that perceive. This is He Whose Presence is the ardent desire of the denizens of the Realm of eternity, and of them that dwell within the Tabernacle of glory, and yet from His Beauty do ye turn aside. (*Summons* ¶7)

In the Súriy-i-Haykal, the process of progressive revelation of the station and mission of Bahá'u'lláh symbolized by the appearance of the Húriyyih and the manifestation of Her own glory is

complete. The Maid of Heaven is summoned to become unconcealed: "O Maid of Heaven! Step forth from the chambers of paradise and announce unto the people of the world: By the righteousness of God! He Who is the Best-Beloved of the world—He Who hath ever been the Desire of every perceiving heart, the Object of the adoration of all that are in heaven and on earth, and the Cynosure of the former and the latter generation—is now come!" (*Summons* ¶100).

So it is that in this tablet Bahá'u'lláh invites the Maiden to appear with the adornment of the celestial Realm (*láhút*) and offer the wine of the heavenly Dominion (*jabarút*). And if She meets with no response, She should not be sorrowful, but rather return to Her tabernacles of grandeur where She will find a tribe whose faces shine like the sun and who praise God with joy. Such sanguine and joyous reversal in the drama of the Maid of Heaven denotes a turning point in human history: this is a Day that will not be followed by night.

This hope-filled assurance thus marks the conclusion to our examination of this entrancing figure, the symbolism of Her appearance, and the relevance of understanding Her function in the works of Bahá'u'lláh. While there is so much more to learn from studying the allegorical nature of the entire tablet as it portrays the dialogue between the Húriyyih and Bahá'u'lláh, especially as She informs Him what powers and capacities He must employ if He is to succeed in His arduous mission, it will suffice our objective to conclude with

a passage from the Súriy-i-Haykal in which Bahá'u'lláh calls for the Maiden of Heaven to reveal Herself and announce the glad tidings of the appearance of the Beloved of the World:

O Maid of inner meanings! Step out of the chamber of utterance by the leave of God, the Lord of the heavens and the earth. Reveal, then, thyself adorned with the raiment of the celestial Realm, and proffer with thy ruby fingers the wine of the heavenly Dominion, that haply the denizens of this world may perceive the light that shone forth from the Kingdom of God when the Daystar of eternity appeared above the horizon of glory. Perchance they may arise before the dwellers of earth and heaven to extol and magnify this Youth Who hath established Himself in the midmost heart of Paradise upon the throne of His name, the All-Sufficing Helper—He from Whose countenance shineth the brightness of the All-Merciful, from Whose gaze appear the glances of the All-Glorious, and in Whose ways are revealed the tokens and evidences of God, the omnipotent Protector, the Almighty, the All-Loving. (*Summons* ¶22)

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