

\$3.95 U.S.

# Deepen

No. 3 / Vol. 2.2 Summer, 1994

magazine

## THE REALMS OF GOD

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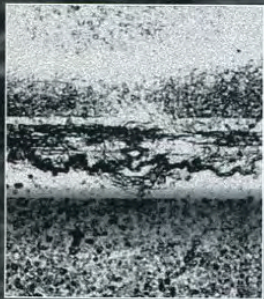
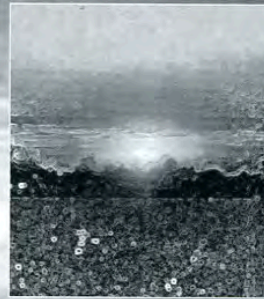
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The Realms of Divine Existence as Described in

# *The Tablet of All Food*



by

*Bijan Ma'sumián, PhD.*

*Editor's Note: The following article was adapted from the as-yet unpublished paper by Dr. Bijan Ma'sumián entitled "The Tablet of All Food," a work which employs more detailed usage of Arabic terminology and which includes a more elaborate history of the surrounding events. For an enhanced understanding of these events, the reader may refer to Dr. Ma'sumián's article, "Bahá'u'lláh's Seclusion in Kurdistan" in the Fall issue of Deepen.*

## Historical Background

The rampant political, religious, and social corruption of the 19th century Persia provided fertile grounds for the revolutionary ideology and messianic claims of the young Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad of Shiraz (1817-1850), known as the Báb (Gate). Persians of all social strata quickly began to respond to the prophetic call of the young messenger of Shiraz, which was raised in 1844.

Rapid proliferation of the Báb's teachings throughout the country alarmed the Persian government officials and

the country's ecclesiastics to the extent that the two decided to join forces in suppressing the nascent Bábí community at all costs. Beginning in summer of 1848, the Persian government orchestrated a series of military campaigns against the Bábís which eventually culminated in public execution of the Báb Himself on July 9th, 1850.

Prior to this, the Báb, who knew His days were numbered, appointed Mírzá Yahyá (c. 1830-1912) as His nominal successor. Referred to by the Báb as Subh al-Azal (Morn of Eternity), Yahyá was the younger half-brother of

(Morn of Eternity), Yahyá was the younger half-brother of Bahá'u'lláh. As attested to by Bahá'u'lláh's full-brother Mírzá Musá (Aqáy-i-Kalím) and a certain Mullá Abdu'l-Karím-i-Qazvíní, this appointment was suggested by Bahá'u'lláh, apparently to divert the attention of the enemy from Himself who, in absence of the Báb, was becoming the focal point among many Bábís.

After the martyrdom of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, accompanied by His family, was exiled to Baghdad, where He was later joined by Azal and a number of other Bábís. Although Azal's seclusive nature began to frustrate many Bábís, Bahá'u'lláh continued to support Azal's sagging leadership. Nevertheless, many well-known Bábís of Persia and Iraq began to question Azal's authority and his writings, which they found uninspiring and inadequate. Some went as far as making counter-claims and distributing their own materials. Yet, through all this, Bahá'u'lláh continued to lend His support to Azal both publicly and in His Writings.

As early as 1852, Bahá'u'lláh had begun to have messianic experiences and occasionally expressed these, albeit in veiled language, in some of His correspondence to the Bábís. The Tablet of All Food (*Lawh-i Kull al-Ta'ám*), which was revealed in late 1853 or early 1854, clearly demonstrated the superior insight of Bahá'u'lláh, while providing clear evidence of how He, despite growing factionalism within the Bábí community of Persia and knowledge of His own station, was continuing to support Azal.

### The Context of Revelation

The recipient of the Tablet of All Food was a certain Hajj Mírzá Kamál al-Dín Naráqí (died c. 1881). He had traveled to Iraq in the hope of meeting Azal and receiving a commentary from him on the Qur'anic verse 3: 87, which states:

*All food was lawful to the children of Israel (Jacob) save what Israel made unlawful to himself (or itself) before the Torah was sent down. Say: Bring you the Torah now, and recite it, if you are truthful.*

فاتلوها ان كنتم صدقين كل الطعام كان حلا لبني

اسرايل الاماحرم اسرايل على نفسه من قبل ان تنزل التوراة قل فاتوا بالتوراة

Azal prepared a commentary for Naráqí, which is evidently not extant today. Naráqí, however, was not impressed with this commentary and he proposed the same task to Bahá'u'lláh. In response, the latter revealed the Tablet of All Food. Upon reading this work, Naráqí became a devoted admirer of Bahá'u'lláh and, in later years, received many Tablets from Him.

This verse, which might have biblical roots (see Genesis 32: 32)\*, was revealed to establish Islam's desire to do away with the plethora of Jewish food prohibitions which, as stated by Muhammad, were not divine in origin. In asking for a commentary on Qur'án 3: 87, Naráqí was perhaps attempting to get official clarification from a recognized Bábí leader regarding an issue which was causing much friction among the Persian Bábís.† In all likelihood, the issue at hand was whether, as certain gnostic‡ and elitist Bábís in Persia were claiming, the followers of the Báb could interpret Qur'án 3: 87 figuratively to mean that they, as "true Israelites" for this age, could allow themselves "all food" (freedoms).<sup>3</sup>

The tendency toward "liberation" from divine laws likely came from those Bábí leaders who were at the time making exalted claims for themselves to fill the leadership vacuum left by the absence of the Báb and Azal's seclusive nature. These elements probably found themselves in the dilemma of having to live with the pain of the Báb's absence and want of leadership which was destroying the Bábí community, yet they had to continue to follow the Báb's strict legalistic pronouncements. In the Tablet of All Food, Bahá'u'lláh shows His concern about the rising tide of antinomian\*\* tendencies among certain Bábí factions by denouncing the libertine elements and their attempts to "free" the Báb's community from the "bondage" of divine law. He invites all the faithful to demonstrate unity and the strict observance of the Báb's ordinances, directs the community to follow Azal, claims nothing but servitude and lowliness for Himself, rejects and laments about the accusations by certain Bábís that He is attempting to usurp Azal's leadership, and expresses His desire to withdraw.<sup>4</sup>

\* "Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank." The text preceding this verse refers to a possibly allegorical struggle between Jacob and another individual, presumably an angel, who after being defeated by Jacob, gave him the name *Israel* (lit. "God Strives"). The sinew referred to in the above verse is where the angel touched and healed Jacob, who had won despite having a hip that was out of joint. The prohibition against eating sinew was conceived by the Israelites and not by the command of God. —Ed. † In the Bayán, the Báb included certain dietary prohibitions which were subject to alteration or recension by "*Him Who God Shall Make Manifest*". —Ed. ‡ = gnosticism - a belief that exalts the intellect above spirituality 3) Lambden, Stephen. "A Tablet of Mírzá Husayn 'Alí Bahá'u'lláh of the Early Iraq period: The Tablet of All Food," *Bahá'i Studies Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 1 (June 1984), p. 7 \*\* = The belief that salvation is determined by the degree of one's faith, rather than the adherence to moral laws. —Ed. 4) *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10

## References to Three Terms Used in the Tablet of All Food

“Food”	“Israel”	“Children of Israel”	
The essence of knowledge	The Primal Point (the Báb)	He whom God...made a proof unto the people in these days (Mírzá Yahyá)(?)	
The bearer of the Cause (Mírzá Yahyá)(?)	The Primal Will	All Bábís captivated by the light of the (Primal Will) from 1844 until the eschatological “meeting with God”	
The (Islamic) Guardianship	The Point of the Furqán (Muhammad)	God’s trustees (the <u>Shí’ih</u> Imáms who succeeded Muhammad)	
The Báb	A) the “Last Objective” / the “Mystery of Endless Duration” (Quddús)(?) B) the “Countenance of Light”/ the “Isolated Manifestation”/ the “Temple of Divine Oneness”/ Mírzá Yahyá	“food” ( <i>ta’ám</i> ) refer to a hierarchy of existence that ranges from absolute existence which is the sole property of God’s inner essence (realm of <i>Háhút</i> ) to subsistence which characterizes the transitory life of physical beings in the material realm ( <i>Násút</i> ). While the roots of this hierarchy can be traced back to the cosmology of neo-platonic philosophers such as Plotinus, it closely resembles similar hierarchies of metaphysical realms found in the works of Jewish, Christian, and particularly Muslim mystics such as Ibnul ‘Arabí and al-Jili, a student of his writings. Interestingly, the Báb’s Writings also identify certain esoteric correspondences between various colors, precious stones, elements of creation, human life, and terrestrial existence which might be associated with Bahá’u’lláh’s hierarchy of metaphysical realms. This hierarchy might eventually serve as a foundation for developing an elaborate Bahá’í theology in the future.	
The ocean of the unseen (the power of the Bábí revelation or scriptures)(?)	the manifestation of the command in these days (Mírzá Yahyá)(?)		
The realm of the “unmanifested essence of God” or “God without attributes” (Háhút)	<b>The Style and Content of the Tablet</b>		
The realm of the “manifested essence of God” or “God with attributes” (Láhút)	In revealing His commentary, Bahá’u’lláh does not take the traditional Muslim approach of focusing on the actual circumstances of the revelation of Qur’án 3: 87. Instead, He follows a methodology similar to earlier commentaries revealed by the Báb which is reminiscent of the style of certain Muslim sufis such as the renowned Ibnul ‘Arabí (1165-1240 AD). A particular characteristic of this style is the conviction that the meanings of the Word of God revealed in holy scriptures can never be exhausted. Thus, every key word or phrase contained in Qur’án 3: 87 has an infinity of meanings in different levels or stations ( <i>maqámát</i> ) of existence for Bahá’u’lláh. Many of these meanings can apply to past historical figures, events, and circumstances. In elaborating on the significance of this verse, Bahá’u’lláh chooses two key terms—		
The realm of “divine power” (Jabarút)	“Food” in the Realm of the <b>Háhút</b>		
The realm of “divine sovereignty” (Malakút)	While Bahá’u’lláh confirms that the worlds of God are countless in their number and infinite in their range, He only identifies five of these realms in the Tablet of All of Food and gives distinct meanings for the term “food” in each of these realms.		
The realm of “physical beings” (Násút)	He begins by elucidating the meaning of “food” at the highest level of His hierarchy—the Throne ( <i>arsh</i> ) of Háhút. Háhút is the realm of “Divine Oneness” where, from time immemorial, God’s <i>unmanifested essence</i> has been in a perfect, changeless, formless, and		

“food” (*ta’ám*) and “Israel”, and one key phrase—“the Children of Israel”, and gives each of these multiple meanings in different stations. (See chart)

### Foundation for a Bahá’í Theology?

Five of the nine interpretations that Bahá’u’lláh provides for the term

5) Ibid., pp. 11-12

absolute state of existence. The word Háhút is formed according to the same pattern as similar Arabic words with spiritual connotations such as "Láhút" (*Divinity*). Its meaning is probably based on the first letter *Ha*, which stands for "*Huwiyyah*" or God's self-identity.<sup>6</sup>

The realm of Háhút is the realm of the "Absolute Unknown," where God's essence has been hidden from time immemorial and will continue to remain so for eternity. Háhút is the realm of "HE" (*huwa* . هو) where "the Mystery of Mysteries" enjoys the one and only type of absolute existence. "*The way (to this realm) is barred and to seek (entry to or any knowledge of it) is impiety.*"<sup>7</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá likens this realm to a black spot of ink—the divine darkness on paper which potentially contains all the letters and words (His creation), although no trace of these letters and words can be seen in the black spot, nor can they be differentiated from the spot in this state of potentiality.<sup>8</sup> \*

Háhút is the realm of *God without attributes*, the realm of *God unrevealed*.<sup>9</sup> From time immemorial, He, the Divine Being, hath been veiled in the ineffable sanctity of His exalted Self, and will everlastingly continue to be wrapt in the impenetrable mystery of His unknowable Essence...<sup>10</sup> No part of His creation, including His most exalted creatures—the supreme Manifestations—can ever hope to attain to even an infinitesimal knowledge of this realm.

Thus, all statements about God can only refer to His attributes as embodied by His Manifestation (*Mazhar-i-Iláhi*) or Prophet (*nabí* or *rasúl*). It cannot refer to the Essence of God because God at the Háhút level is a *hidden* God who transcends everything and is, thus, sanctified from any mention, knowledge, or attribution by any part of His creation. "*Consequently, with reference to this plane of existence (Háhút), every statement and elucidation is defective, all praise and all description are unworthy, every conception is vain, and every meditation is futile.*"<sup>11</sup> Even the names, attributes, and perfections that we ascribe to God such as "merciful," "forgiving," "loving," "just," "all-powerful," and so forth can only refer to the Prophet, as God's Essence is unknowable and no one but He Himself has any knowledge of His own innermost Essence.

As stated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "...all that the human reality knows, discovers and understands of the names and attributes and the perfections of God refer to these Holy Manifestations."<sup>12</sup> Why, then do we give such appellations to God? 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that we give God positive names and attributes to simply deny any imperfections in Him:

"We affirm these names and attributes not to prove the perfections of God, but to deny that He is capable of imperfections."<sup>13</sup>

Here, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is following the well-established tradition of negative theology (or *apophasis*), which Buddha took to the extreme by adopting virtual silence about God. While many have interpreted this silence as atheism, others such as the comparative religionist Reimundo Pannikar view it as a, "sublime sign of the Buddhá's reverence for the mysterious and the ineffable."<sup>14</sup>

This negative theology also resembles a teaching of the Hindú mystic Sankará (788-820 AD) who pointed to an impersonal God *without* definable attributes as a higher order of being and a God *with* definable attributes as the Personal Lord *Ishvara* who was of a lower order of being.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, in regard to the unknowable nature of the hidden God (Háhút), the Bahá'í concept could be said to agree with certain Buddhist and Hindú traditions which adopt an apophatic position bordering on agnosticism.

### "Food" in the Realm of Láhút

Bahá'u'lláh then proceeds to explain the meaning of the term "food" in the next lower realm, the realm of Láhút (*Divinity*). Láhút, He notes, is the realm of *God revealed*, or *God manifest*. God's knowledge of His own perfections and His love for sharing these perfections with others results in the manifestation of Divine Essence to Himself. Thus, the attributes and perfections of God which were concealed and in a stage of unrevealed potential in the realm of Háhút find existence in the realm of Láhút as God the Absolute reveals His inner Self to Himself.<sup>16</sup> The result is the emanation of "the archetypal forms and essences of all created beings."<sup>17</sup>

Yet, since this event is entirely mystical and takes place

(Continues)

6) Cole, Juan R. "Bahá'u'lláh and the Naqshbandi Sufis in Iraq." In Cole, Juan R. & Moojan Momen. From *Iran East & West: Studies in Bábí & Bahá'í History*. Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1984, pp. 12-13 7) McLean, J. A. "Prolegomena to a Bahá'í Theology." *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1 (March-June 1992), p. 58. 8) Momen, Moojan. "Relativism: A Basis for Bahá'í Metaphysics." In Momen, Moojan (Editor), *Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions* (Volume Five). Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1988, p. 190. \* This analogy is also used in the Biblical account of the creation of the world from a black void. As described in Genesis 1:2, "...the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." —Ed. 9) McLean, pp. 55-56. 10) Táhirzádéh, Adíb. *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Vol. I. Oxford: George Ronald, Publisher, 1974, p. 58. 11) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*. Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981, p. 147. 12) *Ibid.*, p. 148. 13) *Ibid.* 14) McLean, p. 54. 15) *Ibid.*, p. 55. 16) Momen, p. 191 17) *Ibid.*

# The Realms of Divine Existence

	Divine Realm	Manifestation of	Station / Plane of
Unknowable Realm	<p><b>Háhút</b> <i>Divine Oneness</i> (The Divine Essence)</p>		<p>The Transcendent Realm of God the Father The Inaccessible Realm of the Divine Essence The Unapproachable Realm of "He" The Realm of God's Unmanifested Essence</p>
Knowable Realms	<p><b>Láhút</b> <i>Divinity</i> (The First Emanation)</p>	<p>The Agent of Creation "There is no God but Him" (Muslim obligatory prayer) The "only begotten Son" (John 3:16) God at the level of names and attributes</p>	<p>The Word of God The Primal Will The Holy Spirit The Most Exalted Pen</p>
	<p><b>Jabarút</b> <i>Divine Power</i> (The All-Highest Paradise)</p>	<p>Divine Command and Power "There is no God but Me" (Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 43) "The Father is in Me and I in Him." (John 10:37-38) "I and My Father are one." (John 10:30)</p>	<p>The Son as the Eternal Spiritual Guide Exalted Beings Who Act Only at God's Bidding</p>
	<p><b>Malakút</b> <i>Divine Sovereignty</i> (The Abhá Paradise)</p>	<p>Divine Justice Divine Execution The Kingdom of God</p>	<p>Angels (Detached Souls) The Concourse on High The Companions of the Light Humanity's True Plane of Existence</p>
	<p><b>Násút</b> <i>Divine Creation</i> (The Physical Universe)</p>	<p>Divine Bounty The Physical Creation</p>	<p>Matter in Diverse Forms and Levels: minerals, vegetation, animals and humans</p>

within the Godhead, these archetypal forms and essences cannot be said to have yet achieved *external* existence. Thus, even in Láhút, the one and only form of existence is that of God *manifest* or God *revealed to Himself*. In the station of Láhút, manifestations can claim identity with God beyond duality. In other words, they are allowed to identify their higher nature with all the names and attributes of God (God manifest) but they are unable to claim any independent existence for themselves before the throne of God (the hidden God). Perhaps the following Islamic tradition best describes the relationship between the realms of Háhút and Láhút:

"Thou [Hidden God] art He [God Manifest] and He [God Manifest] is Thou [the Hidden God]."

(انت هو و هو انت)

Háhút and Láhút are the most elevated spiritual heights. However, while Háhút is totally unknowable, Láhút is the highest "knowable realm" in which only God is disclosed to Himself and all other beings and stations are subsumed in Him.

Láhút or the realm of *God manifest* can also be imagined as the lofty sphere of the reality of divine Manifestations and chosen ones. This reality is God's first emanation. Following the Shaykhí-Bábí tradition, Bahá'u'lláh calls this emanation the Primal Will (*al mashiyya al-awaliya*). The Primal Will is the first and only direct creation of the hidden God (God at the Háhút level). Everything else including the physical universe and all of its beings were generated through the Primal Will (*God manifest*). 'Abdu'l-Bahá attributes the act of creation to the "Primal Will."<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere, Bahá'u'lláh Himself affirms that the agent of creation was the Manifestation or Word of God.<sup>19</sup>

In the words of one scholar, "It would appear, therefore, that the Primal Will originates with or is present in the Manifestation of God, and in this sense they are identical."<sup>20</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá's cosmology\* identifies only three stations of existence: God, Kingdom (Manifestation/Revelation), and Creation.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the Primal Will can not be classified above or be thought of as independent of the Manifestation.<sup>22</sup>

18) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 203. 19) Bahá'u'lláh. *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*. Haifa, Israel: Bahá'í World Center, 1978, p. 141. \* = Cosmology - description or concept of the universe 20) McLean, p. 59. 21) 'Abdu'l-Bahá, p. 295. 22) McLean, p. 59.

Therefore, “food” at the Láhút level refers to the God *manifest* or the Primal Will and His critical role as the agent of physical creation.

From a Bábí-Bahá’í perspective, one can find a plethora of terms used in both philosophy and religion throughout history which applies to the Primal Will—this first emanation who forever remains the one and only direct creation of God’s Essence. Some of these terms are the Logos, the Only Begotten (directly generated) Son, the Word, the Word of God, the Speech of God, the Command of God, Jehovah or Yahwah, the First Mind, the First Will, the Universal Intellect, the Throne, the Most Mighty Spirit, Sophia, the Origin of the Universe, the Prime Matter, the Absolute Reality, the Simple Reality, the Holy Emanation, the Manifestation of God, the Manifestation of the Self of God, the Perfect Man, the Lord of Lords, and the Holy Spirit. The Báb and Bahá’u’lláh have also used more poetic appellations for the “Primal Will” such as “the Tongue of Grandeur,” “the Speaker on Sinai,” “the Ancient (Preexistent) Beauty,” “Pen of the Most High,” and the “Maid of Heaven.”

Another well-known term that Bahá’u’lláh employs throughout His ministry to refer to the Primal Will as the agent of revelations to Him is the “Most Exalted Pen” (*al Qalamu’l A’lá*)—a term He borrowed from the Muslim mystic Ibnul ‘Arabí.<sup>23</sup> A number of Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings contain dialogues between the Primal Will (whom He frequently images as the “Maid of Heaven,” which is simply a reference to His higher Self) and His lower, human self. A well-known example of this is the *Fire Tablet*.\*

### “Food” in the Realm of Jabarút

The next lower world that Bahá’u’lláh identifies is the realm of Jabarút (*Divine Power*). Whereas in the realm of Láhút, the Manifestation is seen as the agent of creation, in the realm of Jabarút He takes on a transhistorical† role and becomes the agent of spiritual sustenance (food) and salvation to man. Also at this level, as God’s Vicegerent (*al Khalífih*), the Manifestation who enjoys a unique relationship with God is allowed to use theophanic language and identify Himself with God on the level of His attributes. Whereas in the realm of Láhút, the Manifestation does not claim any existence for Himself (by using the pronoun “I”), in the realm of Jabarút, He occupies the lofty station of the Godhead and can make the exalted claim to divinity for Himself before the world of creation:

*“When I contemplate, O my God, the relationship that*

*bindeth me to Thee, I am moved to proclaim to all created things verily I am God!”<sup>24</sup>*

Certain Islamic traditions affirm this type of relationship between God and the Manifestation at the Jabarút level. For instance:

*“I (God manifest) verily am He (the hidden God) and He (the hidden God) is I (God manifest).”*

(انا هو و هو انا)

*“I (God manifest) verily am He (the hidden God) and He (the hidden God) is I Myself (God manifest), except that He is what He is and I am what I am.”*

(انا هو و هو انا الا انه هو و انا انا)

In another tradition, the Prophet Muhammad affirms a unique tie between Himself and the unknowable God which presumably applies to the station of Jabarút:

*“Manifold is Our (the Prophet Muhammad’s) relationship with God. At one time We are He Himself, and He is We Ourselves. At another, He is that He is, and We are that We are.”*

(لنا مع الله حالات نحن فيها هو و هو نحن وهو هو و نحن نحن)

The realm of Jabarút is then the, “*realm of the affirmation of Divinity on the part of exalted beings one level below that of the realm of the claim of identity with God beyond duality (Láhút).*”<sup>25</sup> The Bábí and Bahá’í writings, however, confirm that this affirmation of divinity on the part of prophets should not be viewed as a claim of identify with God at the Háhút level or the incarnation of God’s unknowable essence in the mortal temples of prophets and chosen ones:

*“These Manifestations have each a two-fold 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 attributes, thou hast not erred from the truth. Even as He hath revealed: “No distinction do We make between any of His Messengers.” (Qur’án 2: 285)*

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.<sup>26</sup> The first station of the manifestations—the station of pure abstraction and essential unity—would thus refer to their transhistorical roles as our saviors. To highlight this essential unity among the prophets at the Jabarút level, we can use the term Manifestation (with a capital *M*) to refer collectively to the founders of all the divine religions.

\* See Bahá’í Prayers, pp. 214-220 —Ed. † = transhistorical - beyond or spanning history 23) Afifi, A. E. *The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Dín-Ibnul ‘Arabí*. New York: AMS Press, Inc. 1974, p. 66. 24) Táherzádéh, p. 59. 25) Lambden, p. 44. 26) Momen, P. 193.

## “Food” in the Realm of Malakút

While Jabarút accentuates the essential unity of the prophets, Malakút points to the distinctions among them. The transhistorical role of the Manifestation in Jabarút transforms into a historical role in the lower realm of Malakút. The Manifestation (with a capital *M*) now projects distinct personalities, receives specific missions, and brings a particular set of teachings to predetermined places at fixed times.

*“The other station (of prophets) is the station of distinction, and pertaineth to the world of creation, and to the limitations thereof. In this respect, each Manifestation of God hath a distinct individuality, a definitely prescribed mission, a predestined revelation, and specially designated limitations. Each one of them is known by a different name, and is characterized by a special attribute, fulfills a definite mission, and is entrusted with a particular Revelation.”*<sup>27</sup>

The esoteric food (spiritual guidance) that these prophets bring to mankind nourishes and sustains man’s soul and prepares him for life on his true plane of existence, which is *Malakút* or the Abhá Paradise; the paradise of “justice.” It is called the paradise of “justice” because God’s justice necessitates that in all but a few cases (such as that of unborn children) only those who have willfully chosen to receive the spiritual food and lived a holy life can enter this abode or attain this station.

## “Food” in the Realm of Násút

Whereas in the realm of Malakút God’s “justice” rules, in the realm of Násút His “bounty” is the cause of the creation and sustenance of the physical beings. Physical life in the realm of Násút has been given to diverse forms of matter through the grace of God. Although no part of this creation has done anything to deserve this life, God, through His bounty and the instrumentality of the Primal Will, has given the physical beings undeserved life. Yet, for man, this form of life is inherently inferior to the life of the spirit in Malakút, as the former would assuredly be followed by death and decomposition while the latter is everlasting.

Man exists between the realms of Malakút and Násút. While his physical body lingers in the realm of Násút (on earth), the true plane of existence for his soul is in the Malakút. The realms of Malakút and Násút are also indicative of the dual natures of man—angelic and animal. A life of attachment to the world and its vainglories would strengthen man’s animal nature and result in his failure to achieve his lofty station. A chaste and holy life, on the other hand, would reinforce his

angelic side, enabling him to experience life in the Malakút while still on earth:

Those souls that in this day, enter the divine kingdom and attain everlasting life, although materially dwelling on earth, yet in reality soar in the realm of heaven. Their bodies may linger on earth but their spirits travel in the immensity of transcendent space. For as thoughts widen and become illumined, they acquire the power of flight and transport man to the Kingdom of God.<sup>28</sup>

## The Aftermath

Bahá’u’lláh read this commentary to Naráqí, but did not give it to him. While it is not precisely known why He did so, His purpose may have been to avoid further hostilities between Himself and Azal and greater divisions among the Bábís. This, however, did not dishearten Naráqí. Evidently, he was so impressed with Bahá’u’lláh’s commentary that he immediately pledged allegiance to Him. The news of this event further damaged Azal’s credibility and increased Bahá’u’lláh’s popularity.

Azal, who was alarmed by the rising prestige of his half-brother, aided by a close companion—Siyyid Muhammad-i-Isfahání—initiated an organized campaign to regain his credibility and to portray Bahá’u’lláh as a “usurper.” In His turn, Bahá’u’lláh who wanted to prevent further hostilities abruptly left Baghdad for the mountains of Sulaymáníyyih on April 10, 1854.\*

## Conclusion

For a number of reasons, the Tablet of All Food occupies a special place among Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings. Beyond its obvious purpose, it played a distinct role in defining the leadership of the Bábí community during the first year of Bahá’u’lláh’s stay in Iraq and its perusal sheds light on a number of events.

First, this Tablet further enhanced Bahá’u’lláh’s credibility as an alternative Bábí leader.

Second, it provided a vehicle by which Bahá’u’lláh underscored, albeit in veiled language, His own leadership role without necessarily challenging Azal’s position. This countered the growing opposition from other leading Bábís who had begun to accuse Him of attempting to usurp what was rightfully Azal’s, and thereby prevented further divisions among the Bábís.

Third, it provided contextual insights into why  
*(Continued on page 27)*

27) Momen, P. 194. 28) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *Selections From the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*. Haifa, Israel: Bahá’í World Center, 1978, p. 202. \* See Bijan Ma’sumián, *Bahá’u’lláh’s Seclusion in Kurdistan*, *Deepen* magazine, Fall, 1993 —Ed. 29) Lambden, pp. 64-65.



the twenty-first. Bahá'ís too abstain from food and drink during the daylight hours of the fast.

### Hajj

Each male Muslim is to make a pilgrimage, or *Hajj*, once during his lifetime. There are a number of important sites in Medina and Mecca that the pilgrims visit and perform certain rituals. After successfully performing all these duties one may add the title *Háj* or *Hájí* (haw-gee) to one's name. Bahá'ís currently visit holy places in Haifa and 'Akká in Israel. In the future—when one may travel in perfect freedom—Bahá'í pilgrims may choose to visit Bahá'u'lláh's Most Great House<sup>75</sup> in Baghdad or the House of the Báb in Shíráz.<sup>76</sup> Bahá'í pilgrims do not earn a special title like *Hájí*.

### Zakát

The specified payment, or *Zakát*, is like a tax on one's

possessions. "It may be paid directly to the poor as alms, or to travelers, or to the state."<sup>77</sup> *Zakát*\* very closely resembles the Bahá'í institution of *Huqúqu'lláh* (ho-coo-ko-law), the literal meaning of which is, "The Right of God". The law of *Huqúqu'lláh* is now binding on the Bahá'ís of the West.

*Jihád* ("struggle") is sometimes referred to as a sixth pillar. The concept of *Jihad* has also been interpreted in terms of "holy war." Although not obligatory, holy war was permitted up until the time of Bahá'u'lláh. It was not, as commonly supposed, the way Islam was spread. As mentioned earlier, in the Holy Qur'án Muhammad revealed: "Let there be no compulsion in Religion." (2:257) Bahá'u'lláh forbade holy war in His Dispensation. "We have abolished the law to wage holy war against each other."<sup>78</sup>

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House in Baghdad, is, "regarded as a center of pilgrimage second to none except the city of 'Akká...." —*God Passes By*, p. 110. 76) See Notes #54 (p.191) and #154 (pp. 230-231) and Question #29 (p. 116) in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, 1992. 77) *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, p. 430. \* = As seen in paragraph 146 of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh also made provisions for *zakát* —Ed. 78) *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 25

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## The Tablet of All Food

(Continued from page 17)

fully Azal's, and thereby prevented further divisions among the Bábís.

Third, it provided contextual insights into why Bahá'u'lláh chose to remove Himself from Baghdad and withdraw to the mountains of Kurdistan.<sup>29</sup>

Also, Bahá'u'lláh's denunciation in this Tablet of extremist Bábís who were seeking "liberation" from divine law points to growing factionalism among the Bábís in early 1850s.

Furthermore, this work provides valuable insights into Bahá'u'lláh's state of mind in the turbulent decade of the 1850s. For instance, in one place, Bahá'u'lláh expresses his longing for Quddús,\* his companionship, and the comfort his presence would have given Him had he been alive. His anguish was perhaps due to the intense pressure resulting from the martyrdom of the Báb and His heroes and heroines; the rise of factionalism among the Bábís, Azal's failure to unify the faithful and accusations leveled against Him; and a life of exile in a foreign land. Lastly, though no authoritative translation of this Tablet is yet available, it must be classified among the richest theological works of Bahá'u'lláh and will no doubt be an invaluable resource to future Bahá'í scholars who will help define a clear Bahá'í theology.

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\* The greatest member of the initial band of eighteen followers, each of whom, unaided, sought out and recognized the Báb before His public declaration and who, along with the Báb, constitute the nineteen *Letters of the Living*. —Ed.

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### About the Authors

**Dr. Duake K. Troxel** is an associate professor of instructional technology at the University of Colorado, a former international pioneer to Nigeria and is the C.E.O. of

Diversity press.

**Dr. Bijan Ma'sumián** is a designer of instructional systems for the Texas Department of M.H.M.R. and a founding member of the Central Texas Assoc. for Bahá'í Studies.

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### A Matter of Fact

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá undertook His historic journey to Europe and America in 1911, His passage from Italy to England was aboard the steamship *S.S. Cedric*. Many of His fellow passengers opted to change ships upon their arrival in England and booked their transatlantic crossing on the highly publicized maiden voyage of what was the most luxurious oceanliner of the time.

The American believers sent Him funds so that He could take a berth on the same ship, but the Master graciously thanked the American friends, returned the money and remained aboard the *Cedric*.

And what was the name of the ship not taken? The *S.S. Titanic*.

(See 'Abdu'l-Bahá by H.M. Balyuzi, p. 79)