

“Long Healing Prayer” (“Anta al-Kāfi”), by Bahá’u’lláh: Notes on Iterations / Recensions

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Two identified versions of the Arabic Long Healing Prayer have been published by Bahá’í book presses. The differences between them are quite negligible for such a long Tablet but can still be jarring to see a different version for a Bahá’í who is intimate with another version. Indeed, the variations in six or so places are distinctive enough to argue that there are indeed two versions. The slightly longer version, which is the only one I have been able to locate as being issued online and in Bahá’í prayer book apps, has been published in the prayer books *Tasbih va Tahلیل* and also in *Ad’iyyih Hadrat-i-Mahbub*.¹ This one was used for the first distributed translation into English of this Tablet, completed by ‘Ali Kuli Khan and Marzieh Gail, in 1945.² The other version, which was the basis for the 1980 authorized translation into English, under the auspices of the Universal House of Justice, was perhaps most recently published by the Persian Institute for Baha'i Studies in Canada in 1988 in a book called *Nafahāt-i-Faḍl* (“Fragrances of Divine Favors”).

Overall, the two versions contain substantive differences in five of the forty-one or so verses of invocation. The first difference is found in the very opening in which the longer version begins *Bismillah al-Amna’ al-Aqdas al-Arfa’ al-Abhā* (In the name of God, the Invincible, the Most Holy, the Sublime, the Most Glorious)³ while the shorter version begins *Huwa al-Shāfi al-Kāfi al-M’uīn al-Ghafūr al-Raḥīm* (He is the Healer, the Sufficer, the Helper, the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful). Due to this initial difference, from here on out the slightly longer version will be referred to as the “Bismi version” while the other will be called the “Huwa version,” taking the first word of each. The following is a summary of the other substantive differences. The Bahá’í authorized translation is placed over the Arabic

¹ Steven Phelps, email to author, ewu.edu email through outlook.office.com August 7, 2019.

² AdibM, discussion thread “Re: Long Healing Prayer,” Fri Mar 27, 2009 8:00 am, <https://bahai-library.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=3864>

³ Provisional translation by author. *Amna’* is translated as “Invincible” here but has the interconnected denotations of being Inaccessible and Forbidding but also Preventing (like a parent does for a child for their own safety and well-being) and Preserving.

verses on right, while over the Arabic of the left is the authorized translation when the Arabic word is the same as the right or my own provisional translation when the Arabic differs from the right. For convenience, I have bolded the exact words where the two versions differ:

BISMI VERSION	HUWA VERSION
Verse 17: I call on Thee O Beneficent One, O Interceding One, O Encouraging One!	Verse 17: I call on Thee O Beneficent One, O Withholding One, O Creating One!
Verse 17: Bika yā Nāfi'ū, bika yā Shāfi' , bika yā Dāfi' ...	Verse 17: Bika yā Nāfi'ū, bika yā Māni' , bika yā Ṣāni' ...
Verse 29: I call on Thee O Greatest Remembrance, O Most Ancient Name, O Noblest Way!	Verse 29: I call on Thee O Greatest Remembrance, O Noblest Name, O Most Ancient Way!
Verse 29: Bika yā Dhikra-l-'Azīm , bika yā Isma-l- Aqdam , bika yā Rasma-l- Akram	Verse 29: Bika yā Dhikra-l-'Azīm , bika yā Isma-l- Akram , bika yā Rasma-l- Aqdam ...
Verse 37: I call on Thee O Ready to Forgive, O Advocate, O Dissolver!	(This line does not exist in this version)
Verse 37: Bika yā Tā'ib, bika yā Nā'ib, bika yā Dhā'ib ...	
Verse 39: I call on Thee O Guardian , O All-Seeing God, O Lord of Utterance!	Verse 38: I call on Thee O Thou Who penetratest all things , O All-Seeing God, O Lord of Utterance!
Verse 39: Bika yā Hāfiz , bika yā Lāhiz, bika yā Lāfiz	Verse 38: Bika yā Nāfidh , bika yā Lāhiz, bika yā Lāfiz

In the final, long paragraph of the Tablet, there are only a few more very minor differences. For example, in the Bismi version there is a line *...da'aūta al-mimkināti 'alā khuwāni...* (...didst invite all created things **onto/unto** the table...), while the Huwa version has *ilā* (to/unto) instead of *'alā* (on/onto). One of the last phrases at the end reads *...an kulli balā'in wa **makrūhin** wa **āfatin** wa ḥuznin...* (“...from every tribulation and distress, from every loathsome affliction and sorry...”) in the Bismi version, while the Huwa version *āfatin* comes before *makrūhin*. Thus, overall, while having about five noteworthy differences in the main body, even with these minor ones of the final paragraph added on, the two versions are over 96% identical.⁴

I have not studied original copies, recorded at the time of Bahá'u'lláh, of the Tablet, but during this research I wrote a letter on July 29, 2019 to the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre.⁵ A response from the Research Department, dated September 23, 2019, was received by the author and said, “The most authentic version of the Long Healing

⁴ This percentage was calculated summing total words in the Huwa version minus those that are distinct from the Bismi version [822], divided by total number of words in the Bismi version [853] = 96.37%

⁵ This department's team of conscientious and highly capable scholars is located next to the main global Bahá'í archives and so easily and frequently consults and examines original copies of Tablets.

Prayer in Arabic that has been identified is in the handwriting of Zaynu'l-Muqarrabīn, and it is this version that served as the basis of the current authorized English translation.” This is the recension called the “Huwa version” here. We can also note that Zaynu'l-Muqarrabīn was a former doctor of Islamic law at the rank of *mujtahid* who was known for his excellent calligraphy and for reliably transcribing Tablets of Baha'u'llah, first from Mosul (Iraq), then from Akka itself.⁶

⁶ Hasan M. Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahá'ís in the Time of Bahá'u'lláh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985), 274-6; Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, vol. 3 (Oxford: George Ronald, 1996), 278.