

Translations

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'Abdu'l-Baha's First Thousand-Verse Tablet: History and Provisional Translation

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Abstract

From the onset of his ministry, 'Abdu'l-Baha faced significant family opposition to his authority and position. These family members, led by Mirza Muhammad-'Ali, a younger half-brother of 'Abdu'l-Baha to whom Baha'u'llah had given a rank subordinate to 'Abdu'l-Baha, colluded in spreading false allegations against 'Abdu'l-Baha who was seeking to spread the Baha'i Faith to Europe and North America. For several years, 'Abdu'l-Baha worked hard to contain these deflections and to prevent news of them from reaching other Baha'i communities.

By 1896–7, the Baha'is of Egypt had heard enough of the details that when Mirza Ḥabību'llāh Afnān was going on a visit to 'Akka, they asked him to learn as much of the details as he could. To his great shock, while in 'Akka, the Afnan learned that indeed 'Abdu'l-Baha's brothers and the majority of his family had arisen against him in rebellion. As instructed by 'Abdu'l-Baha, the young pilgrim on his return to Egypt informed the Baha'i community of the occurrences in 'Akka and the opposition to 'Abdu'l-Baha. The celebrated Mirza Abū'l-Faḍl found this hard to accept. Therefore, he wrote to 'Abdu'l-Baha inquiring about the veracity of this news, and received in response a lengthy tablet dated 26 March 1897, which we propose to be called the First Thousand-Verse Tablet. This paper will provide historical background and a provisional translation of this momentous tablet.'

Historical background

The passing of Baha'u'llah was a great shock to the renowned Mīrzā Abū'l-Faḍl Gulpāyḡānī (1844–1914), who had served with great distinction in Iran and Russia, but never had a chance to visit Baha'u'llah.² For a while, his able pen was dormant. 'Abdu'l-Baha encouraged him to set aside his concerns and resume his activities. Shortly after that, he invited Mirza Abu'l-Fadl to come to 'Akka – a journey that he took in the summer of 1894. While in 'Akka in September of that year, 'Abdu'l-Baha urged him to settle in Egypt and teach the Baha'i Faith to men of letters, such as students and teachers

1. The present writers are deeply grateful to Rūḥu'llāh Mihrābkhānī, Phillip Tussing and Sen McGlenn, who kindly read this paper and suggested a number of improvements. This study also benefited from valuable inputs given by participants

on the Tarikh discussion list in November and December 2007.

2. On a historic service that Mirza Abu'l-Fadl rendered in Russia, which won from Baha'u'llah considerable praise, see Ahang Rabbani, *Ponder Thou upon the Martyrdom of Hāji Muhammad-Ridā: Nineteen Historical Accounts*, 2007: eBook, Witnesses to Bābī and Bahā'ī History, vol. 5; <http://ahang.rabbani.googlepages.com/>.
3. Based on his interviews with Mirza Habibu'llah Afnan in Shiraz, Ruhu'llah Mihrabkhani, a biographer of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, notes that students would gather in the Mirza's room above the office used by the Afnans, and that sometimes Mirza Habib and other Baha'is would go there to see what Mirza Abu'l-Fadl taught.
4. He published the first series of Baha'i books in Egypt, including the first compilation of 'Abdu'l-Baha's tablets, which 'Abdu'l-Baha entitled *Makātīb-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā*.
5. Mīrzā Ḥabību'llāh Afnān, *Memories of the Bāb, Bahā'u'llāh and 'Abdu'l-Bahā* (trans. Ahang Rabbani), eBook, Witnesses to Bābī and Bahā'ī History, vol. 4; chap 3, 2007: http://bahaistudies.net/bahaiworks/Mirza_Habib_Afnan_Memoirs-Rabbani_translation.pdf. This fascinating memoir is also published at: Ahang Rabbani, 'Memories of My Life', *Online Journal of Bahā'ī Studies*,

associated with Al-Azhar University, while not disclosing his Baha'i identity so he could be more effective.

In Egypt, it must have been a remarkable feat for a relatively unknown Shi'i cleric – which is how the general population must have initially viewed Mirza Abu'l-Fadl – to have established himself in the intellectual environment associated with a renowned Sunni centre like Al-Azhar. Towards this objective, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl frequently visited the university, had discussions with teachers and students and gradually became known as a man of extraordinary knowledge. Soon, students started coming to him and studying '*ilm-i kalām* (speculative theology) and other subjects with him.

Mirza Ḥabību'llāh Afnān, who was a close associate of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl during much of his years in Egypt, records the following:

In 1311 AH [1894], in accordance with 'Abdu'l-Bahā's bidding, Mīrzā Abū'l-Faḍl came to Cairo. The Master instructed the prominent Bahā'īs not to associate openly with him so that he would not attract undue attention and notice. After he arrived, he moved into an apartment with two furnished rooms, situated above my father's business in Sarāy Jawāhirī.³ He began teaching philosophy and logic at Al-Azhar University, meeting and associating with the learned and accomplished men of his time. He organized and taught classes in various branches of knowledge and philosophy. Among his students were Shaykh Farajū'llāh Zakīyy Kurdī,⁴ [and his brothers] Shaykh Muḥyī'd-Dīn and Shaykh Badru'd-Dīn [Ghazzī].⁵

Overall, Mirza Abu'l-Fadl was not treated favourably by the professors of Al-Azhar and he sometimes complained of their ignorance.

After two years, in 1896, the assassination of Nasiru'd-Din Shah occurred. When news of this reached Egypt, Za'īmu'd-Dawlih, an enemy of the Baha'is, decided to use the rumour that the assassination had been carried out by a 'Babi' as a pretext to instigate a general massacre of the Baha'is. Subsequent events led to Mirza Abu'l-Fadl speaking openly in defence of the Baha'i Faith and as such announcing his allegiance to it.

A year later, Mirza Habibu'llah Afnan, who had been a close associate of Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, received permission to go on pilgrimage to 'Akka.

In Cairo, there had been some talk of the faithlessness of Mīrzā Muhammad-'Alī and his collusion with the Holy Family and the widow of Bahā'u'llāh against [the provisions of] the *Kitāb-i 'Ahd* and 'Abdu'l-Bahā. However, since 'Abdu'l-Bahā had not yet disclosed this secret, none of the believers was sure it was true or knew any of the details. Those who had gone on pilgrimage were told by the Master, 'When you return, leave whatever you have heard or seen by the sea.' As such, the friends heard fragmentary things about the events [in the Holy Land], but did not dare repeat them. In particular, this subject was discussed by the elders of the [Bahā'ī] community in Cairo. They would say things like, 'If 'Abdu'l-Bahā is in debt and has not been able to pay the expenses incurred during the days of the Blessed Perfection or associated with the funeral of the Ancient Beauty, why are the Aghsān living so luxuriously and lavishly?' Others would say, 'Why do the Aghsān have excessive expenses, such as maintaining carriages, horses, and multiple servants, and incur the exorbitant cost of entertaining

government officials, nobles, and influential citizens, especially at this time of terrible widespread financial recession when the Bahā'īs have very little means? Beyond the expenses [in the Holy Land], the critical obligations of the Cause in Iran must also be met! The actions of the Aghsān directly conflict with the interests of the Faith!' In short, there were talks like this about the news and events in the Holy Land.

Shortly before we left Cairo, I attained the presence of the honored Mīrzā Abū'l-Faḍl. After graciously welcoming me, he stated, 'Surely, you are familiar with some of the concerns expressed by the pilgrims returning from the Holy Land. When you have attained the presence of the beloved Master, reverently relate [this] on my behalf: 'The fragrances of love and fellowship are not evident in the comments of some pilgrims returning through Cairo. Some say that 'Abdu'l-Bahā's sanctified heart is not happy with the actions and activities of certain individuals. The illustrious Aghsān do not attain the august presence of the Master, and in turn His blessed Person does not visit the Mansion. Others say that the sacred Figure of 'Abdu'l-Bahā has not been able to repay loans incurred during the period of Bahā'u'llāh's illness, nor have the expenses associated with His ascension been paid. However, we are told that the honored Aghsān spend excessively and live in great luxury. And yet, 'Abdu'l-Bahā is obliged to pay for all of this. Inevitably, when the pilgrims say such things here, they will repeat them elsewhere as well. Consequently, the Master's sufferings will surely multiply. If the blessed Person of 'Abdu'l-Bahā considers it wise to announce these issues openly, perhaps the apprehension the friends experience when they hear such hearsay would be alleviated.' Mīrzā Abū'l-Faḍl particularly emphasized, 'Open your ears well and find out all that you can [about what transpires in the Holy Land]. Pass on these things when no one besides yourself is in the presence of the beloved Master.'⁶

In early part of 1897, Mirza Habib and his brother arrived in 'Akka. Abdu'l-Baha had just recently returned from the Cave of Elijah, where he had stayed for two months. When he met the young pilgrims, he warned them, 'This region is beset with turmoil. The gale of tests from the Blessed Beauty blows in every direction. Calamity's tempest has agitated the sea of the world of being. You must exert yourself and be vigilant lest, God forbid, the dust of rancor, enmity, and infidelity to the divine Covenant should sully your pure hearts.'

The beloved Master's utterance left me very sad and pensive, as I thought about the subject that had been discussed in Cairo. I was certain that something ominous was stirring. Some of the resident believers, whom I had known during the time of the Blessed Beauty and who had served with great humility and sincerity, were no longer radiating the same spirituality and reverence ...

What the Master said to us had profoundly saddened my heart, withered my spirit, and paralyzed my whole being. I asked myself: What has happened that the one designated by both the *Kitāb-i Aqdas* and the *Kitāb-i 'Ahd*, and who is the focus of adoration for the people of Bahā, must now warn the pilgrims in this way? I remembered vividly that every day during our pilgrimage at the time of the Ancient Beauty, we attained the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahā [and, as such, I knew his personality well]. Now I wondered: What had robbed him of his strength and vitality? What had diminished his radiance and those

vol. 1, 2007, http://oj.bahaistudies.net/OJBS_1_Rabbani_Afnan_Khatirat.pdf.

6. Afnan, *Memories*, chap 4.

7. Afnan, *Memories*, chap 4.
8. He had married Rūhā Khānum, 'Abdu'l-Bahā's third daughter. This marriage produced two sons, Munīb and Ḥasan, and three daughters, Maryam, Duḥā, and Zahrā. The family name was Shahīd [martyr]. Mīrzā Jalāl and his family eventually broke the Covenant.
9. Afnan, *Memories*, chap 4.
10. That is, Baha'u'llah.

heavenly smiles? His hair and beard had turned white; his luminous cheeks were now full of lines; and his blessed eyes, which at the time of the Ancient Beauty were full of life and brilliance, now looked bitterly tired. He seemed very sad and grief-stricken.⁷

Mirza Habib approached two old friends, Āqā Riḍā Qannād Shīrāzī and Mīrzā Jalāl,⁸ the son of the Sultānu'sh-Shuhadā [the King of Martyrs]. However, the former did not divulge anything, and the latter had only shared, 'Such speculations will harm you, and it is best to disregard them. Focus your thoughts instead on the Threshold of the Ancient Beauty. Such affairs are not worthy of mention or your consideration.' Mirza Habib insisted and reports:

He made me take an oath on the hair of the Master that I would not divulge to another soul what he was about to share, not even to my brother. Then he proceeded to recount all that had transpired since the night of the ascension, when 'Abdu'l-Bahā had noticed that the Aghsān were busy searching the papers and Tablets [of Bahā'u'llāh]. From beginning to end, he described to me everything he had seen or heard. At the end, he emphasized, 'It is 'Abdu'l-Bahā's wish that the believers not know these things, and you should pretend to be ignorant of them as well.'⁹

This was a great shock to the young Afnan, who only a few years earlier had spent nine months with Baha'u'llah and his family. He writes, 'All strength and confidence seemed to have been drained from me. I was very frightened and consumed with the thought that the talk circulating in Cairo would become a divine test for this unworthy soul as well.' And he continues:

The world turned dark before my eyes. Uncontrollably, I went by the sea-shore and, facing the Shrine of Bahā'u'llāh, began to weep and supplicate: 'Yā Bahā'u'l-Abhā [O Thou Glory of the All-Glorious]! Is it possible that your religion, planted so firmly through the Covenant that you have established with each of your servants, is now divided and fragmented? Is it possible that different sects will now appear in it? And if so, what was the good in the sacred blood of the Bāb being spilt or the sufferings endured by the resplendent person of "Him Whom God shall make manifest"?¹⁰ How is it that the blood of the martyrs of the Cause has come to naught so quickly?' I would say such things and shed bitter tears. After several days of anguish, my sobbing and tears calmed my heart and stilled the storm that raged in my soul. I was afraid to speak with anyone or associate with any of the old friends ...

The day after Mīrzā Jalāl told me the details and, to some degree, clarified the situation for me, I was thinking that the friends were unaware of these events. They did not know that the Aghsān had broken the Covenant of the Cause of God and were raising a rebellion against the wronged-one of the world ['Abdu'l-Bahā]. Further, despite the emphatic injunction [of 'Abdu'l-Bahā], the pilgrims leaving the Holy Land would, sooner or later, tell others what they had found out, and this would sprout seeds of doubt in all hearts. I further reflected that perhaps an inner agitation, similar to what had engulfed me during these few days, might overwhelm others as well. I thought that perhaps it would be better if his blessed person allowed the friends to be

generally acquainted with the details. At the least, the kind of rumor that was current among the believers in Cairo would subside. They would know how the Master was suffering daily at the hands of his jealous brothers and other enemies inside and outside the Cause, and how he bore the enormous expenses of the Mansion, which had become the center of sedition and the headquarters of his hereditary enemies. Each day, a long list of food and other necessities – from hay and barley, to meat and poultry – was sent from the Mansion to be bought. Āqā Riḍā [Qannād Shīrāzī] was in charge of the expenditures and knew better than anyone else about the unwarranted expenses demanded by the Aghsān. Each day he had to borrow a sum to administer the affairs, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahā concealed all these activities.

I did not sleep the whole of that night. Early in the morning, without telling any of my companions my intended destination, I set out directly for his blessed house.¹¹ En route, on a street corner, I saw his sacred figure coming towards me. I bowed down and kissed his feet. He raised me from the ground and showered me with his infinite kindness, stating, ‘Were you coming to visit me? I too was coming to see you. Today, I want to visit the poor and needy. Come, so we may be together.’

I began to follow behind his blessed temple. I knew that he was fully aware of one’s inner thoughts and, therefore, knew my condition as well. The resident believers were enjoined not to disclose what had transpired [regarding the Covenant-breaking], and the pilgrims were instructed to leave behind by the seashore whatever they had heard or seen before returning home. Surely, [I thought,] he was well aware that Mīrzā Jalāl had described all the details for me and that I had heard some other things from Āqā Riḍā and Mishkīn-Qalam. He must certainly know the kind of whispers that circulated among the believers in Cairo and the thoughts they commonly had.

He asked after the honored [Mīrzā] Abū’l-Faḍl, ‘How is Jināb-i Mīrzā, and how is his health?’ He continued with the same theme and asked about the friends in Cairo and their ways and thoughts. Characteristically, he showered me with so much kindness that I found the courage to say, ‘My Master, it has been rather difficult for some of the friends in Cairo to accept that your blessed person should be under the burden of so much debt, and yet the Aghsān live luxuriously, spending their time merrymaking.’ Before I could continue, his countenance was filled with rage, and he exclaimed, ‘How is that!’ and proceeded to walk on. I no longer had the strength to follow him and started to tremble uncontrollably. It was as if my soul had left my body. All I could do was lean against a wall. He had taken about twenty steps before he realized that I was not following behind. Seeing my condition, he returned, touching this servant on the shoulders. He said, ‘Tell me what has happened?’ He poured out so much kindness and offered such favor and cheer that I gradually came to myself and began to follow him.

At his bidding, I explained all that I knew and had heard. I also gave my own assessment about the sort of talk that was circulating among the friends and what the Jināb-i Mīrzā [Abū’l-Faḍl] had said, namely, ‘If the believers were to know the details, such concerns would surely be alleviated.’ The beloved Master exclaimed several times, ‘Well said!’ He then added, ‘Until now, I had not wanted these talks to go beyond ‘Akkā. But now it is clear that it is already too late and that the foul odor of Covenant-breaking has reached the nostrils of the entire world. What you see or hear, you are to share with the friends,

11. At the time, ‘Abdu’l-Baha and his family lived in the house of ‘Abdu’llah Pasha in ‘Akka.

12. Afnan, *Memories*, chap 4.
13. The two injunctions of the *Kitāb-i 'Ahd* are: 'It is incumbent upon everyone to show courtesy to, and have regard for the Aghsān ...' and 'Ye are bidden moreover to respect [My wife,] members of the Holy Household, the Afnān and the kindred' (*Tablets of Bahā'u'llāh*, pp. 222–3).
14. Reference here is to a second tablet of about the same length and style, which will be discussed further in this paper as the Second Thousand-Verse Tablet.

but descriptively, not complainingly.' He then explained many things about the Covenant-breaking of Mīrzā Muhammad-'Alī and the sufferings that He had been forced to endure, adding, 'Recently, a Commission of Inquiry has arrived from Istanbul. Each day, I go to the government office and they interrogate me. My brother has filed an official complaint. If I were to tell you the details, you would be grieved. Surely, you have heard and seen certain things here, or will hear of them. You must never complain. Tell the friends about them, but descriptively, not complainingly.'

The agitation of the past few days had now completely evaporated. My heart was assured. I had no worries. I would converse, laugh, and not avoid my companions, knowing that if I divulged anything [about Mīrzā Muhammad-'Alī and his followers], I had the permission of the beloved Master and that I need not feel repentant about it.¹²

Mirza Habib tells of various activities of opponents of 'Abdu'l-Baha at that time, the details of which are beyond the scope of the present paper.

After his return to Cairo, he shared what he had learned with other Baha'is:

As mentioned earlier, the veil concealing the deeds of the violators of the divine Covenant was not yet lifted and they continued to associate with some of the friends. Through various means, they sought to spread their polemics and tried to undermine the believers' confidence and confuse their thinking. 'Abdu'l-Bahā had instructed me to share [with the community] all I had heard [while on pilgrimage] in a descriptive way.

In Cairo, the same rumors and speculation as before were still circulating. When this servant arrived, the friends gathered at our house, and Mīrzā Abū'l-Faḍl came as well. [During our discussion,] the subject of the Holy Land and the afflictions surrounding the beloved Master came up. I explained all that I had seen or heard and the sufferings that beset 'Abdu'l-Bahā. I called the Ghusnu'llāh Akbar [the Greater Branch of God] by his given name Mīrzā Muhammad-'Alī. Similarly, I referred to Mīrzā Badī'u'llāh and Mīrzā Diyā'u'llāh by their names only and did not refer to them as the Aghsān of the Tree of Holiness. Suddenly, quite angrily and with fury, Mīrzā Abū'l-Faḍl addressed me, 'How dare a youngster like you be so presumptuous towards the Branches of the Tree of Sanctity and insult the text of the *Kitāb-i Aqdas*! The spirit of the Prophets and Messengers circle in adoration around these sacred figures, and no one in the world is permitted to belittle them. The explicit text of the *Kitāb-i 'Ahd*, the Will and Testament of the Blessed Beauty, states that the entire world must respect Bahā'u'llāh's widows, the [members of the] Holy Household, and the Aghsān.'¹³ He voiced his views with such passion and indignation that I felt paralyzed. The more I repeated, 'I saw and heard 'Abdu'l-Bahā relate these things and do not share them on my own accord,' the more he roared back that, 'I do not accept *ḥadīth* [oral reporting].' Finally, I was forced to say, 'Write to his sacred threshold. What he favors with a reply is verily the essence of truth.' He replied, 'Of course I shall write!'

Mīrzā Abū'l-Faḍl immediately sent a supplication to the Holy Land. In response to his letter, a Tablet similar to the *Lawh Hizār Bayīrī*¹⁴ was revealed in sixteen pages in 'Abdu'l-Bahā's own hand. It started with these sweet words: 'He is the All-Glorious. O one who has devoted his life to the exaltation of the Word of God!' This Tablet detailed the deeds of the Covenant-breakers and the jealousy and enmity of the people of rancor.

In short, this is how the efforts of the Covenant-breakers [to subvert the Cause] became known to the friends throughout Egypt. [The believers] immediately severed all connection with them.

After receiving this Tablet, Mīrzā Abū'l-Faḍl showered this servant with the greatest kindness. He apologized so profusely that to this day, some fifty years later, I am embarrassed [by his extreme generosity]. Later, he gave that Tablet to Āqā 'Abdu'l-Ḥusayn Samandarī,¹⁵ who was in Egypt at the time, to make a copy for him and gave me the original text as a memento. That Tablet is currently in a safe place.¹⁶

This tablet became known as a counterpart of the Lawḥ-i Hizār Baytī (The Thousand-Verse Tablet).¹⁷ The only known record of the date of its composition is recorded at the conclusion of a transcribed copy that appears in the Iranian National Baha'i Manuscript Collection [INBMC], discussed below, as 22 Shavvāl 1314 AH (26 March 1897).

Some time later, in 1315 AH (which commenced on 2 June 1897), a similar tablet was composed by 'Abdu'l-Baha for Mirza Jalīl Khu'ī, which was delivered by Mīrzā Maḥmūd Zaraqānī, though apparently the text was read to Khu'ī but a copy not given to him at 'Abdu'l-Bahā's instruction. This communication is also known as the Lawḥ-i Hizār Baytī.¹⁸

Since in terms of similarity of their contents, the time of composition and length, Bahā'ī historians have often referred to both as Lawḥ-i Hizār Baytī, we propose to distinguish these two tablets from each other (following the lead of Muhammad-'Alī Fayḍī) by referring to the tablet to Mirza Abu'l-Faḍl as the First Thousand-Verse Tablet, since it was revealed some months before the letter to Jalil Khu'ī.

Manuscript copies

Three copies of the First Thousand-Verse Tablet are known to the present writers, which henceforth will be referred to in this study as Codex 1, 2 and 3, respectively:

1. The original text of 'Abdu'l-Baha's tablet which reached Mirza Abu'l-Faḍl remains among the sacred writings and other holy relics in the archives of the house of the Bab. Mirza Habibu'llah left instructions with his sons to publish the text of this tablet with his memoirs. We are grateful to the late Abu'l-Qasim Afnan for providing a photocopy of the original text in 'Abdu'l-Baha's hand. This copy was the basis of the present translation and the beginning of each page is marked in the text below in angle brackets, thus <p. 2>.¹⁹ Variations from other manuscripts against this copy are noted in footnotes.
2. The tablet is also available in *Majmū'ih Makātīb-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā*, INBMC vol. 59, pp. 311–41, transcribed by Aqa Shaykh Muhammad 'Alī Qā'inī in 1318 AH [1900].²⁰ It appears that this compilation was transcribed while Qa'inī was in the Holy Land, which may suggest that he had access to another copy (possibly the rough copy) of the original tablet. It is the only source of this text, which at the end of the tablet gives the date of its composition as 22 Shavvāl 1314 AH (26 March 1897). For this reason, it may be considered a primary source, though of a lesser status than Codex 1, referred above. This compilation was published privately by the

15. The older brother of Tarāzu'llāh Samandarī (1874–1968).
16. Afnan, *Memories*, chap 5.
17. To our knowledge, the first mention of this tablet in print is by Ruhu'llah Mihrabkhani, *Zindigāni Mīrzā Abū'l-Faḍl*, p. 362. In that source, the author suggests that this Tablet is similar to (*shabīh bih*) the better known Lawḥ-i Hizār Baytī (Thousand-Verse Tablet) composed some time later for Jalil Khu'ī. However, in a later publication, which happens to be a biography of 'Abdu'l-Baha, the historian Muhammad 'Alī Fayḍī (*Hayāt-i Ḥaḍrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā*, Germany: Bahā'ī-Verlag, 1986, p. 78) refers to it as the First Thousand-Verse Tablet. In this monograph, we have followed Fayḍī's lead.
18. The text of this tablet is found in, *Muntakhabātī az Makātīb-i Ḥaḍrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā*, vol. 4, pp. 259–300; and INBMC, vol. 52, pp. 548–605. A translation is under preparation by the present writers.
19. For the full text in 'Abdu'l-Bahā's hand, see: <http://ahang.rabbani.googlepages.com/4>.
20. He was a nephew of Nabīl Akbar and is not to be confused with Muhammad 'Alī Qā'inī, surnamed Nabīl Qā'inī, who lived in 'Akkā for some time and passed away during Baha'u'llah's time. A biography of Shaykh Muhammad

- 'Alī Qā'inī is provided in 'Azīzu'llāh Sulaymānī, *Masābih Hidāyat*, vol. 6, pp. 344–96.
21. Qur'an 48:11.
 22. Qur'an 41:30.
 23. This sentence begins with *wa* [and] in Codex 3, missing in other copies.
 24. Codex 3 has *nigārad*, but the other two documents have *binigārd*.
 25. Presumably 'Abdu'l-Baha had to black out the unwanted text with ink. It is said that when using old pens, sometimes one had to put the tip on one's tongue to moisten the nib and to get the right ink consistency. Therefore, it is very likely that 'Abdu'l-Baha consumed a good quantity of ink just blacking out some of the ill-advised texts.
 26. Codex 3 is missing *rā* before the word *dasih* [bundles] but it appears in other two documents.

Iran National Baha'i Archives, circa 1978; reprinted, 2000: <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/areprint/ab/G-L/I/inba59/inba59%20pp301-344.pdf>.

3. The first official publication appeared in the compilation: *Muntakhabāt az Makātib-i Ḥadrat-i 'Abdu'l-Bahā*, vol. 4, no. 188, pp. 232–59, though the recipient and no other identifier were included. This text can be accessed at: <http://reference.bahai.org/fa/t/ab/SWA4/swa4-235.html>.

Surprisingly, there are several somewhat notable differences between Codex 1 and 2, but only minor differences between Codex 1 and 3. In highlighting these differences, it should be noted, however, that our objective was not to produce a critical edition of this tablet, but rather to note some of differences that we readily identified as an aid to researchers who will set out to produce a critical edition. In fact, there were a number of minor differences (e.g. *ay* [alef and ye], in place of *hamzeh* on *ye*), which we decided not to highlight so that the paper is not belaboured.

'Abdu'l-Baha's First Thousand-Verse Tablet: a provisional translation

<p. 1> He is the All-Glorious!

O you who have devoted your life to the exaltation of the Word of God!

What you have written has been perused, and in accordance with your urgency, its contents were noted with the utmost attention. It was read time and time again, until the taste buds were utterly sweetened with its purport, like tasting twice-refined sugar, because it was written with the best of intentions.

You had written, 'All confess belief in the Kitāb-i Aqdas and the Kitāb-i 'Ahd and there are no deniers. What are these differences, and from where do they come?'

It is evident unto your honoured self that 'They say with their tongues what is not in their hearts.'²¹ Moreover, steadfastness is necessary; mere words are not sufficient. 'In the case of those who say, "Our Lord is God," and further, stand straight and steadfast, the angels descend on them.'²² For those who acknowledge and swear allegiance to the Kitāb-i Aqdas and the Kitāb-i 'Ahd, opposition is unseemly, whatever the circumstances. For example, some of the friends in the Holy Land affirm their firmness and loyalty to the Covenant and Testament with fine words and elegant phrases yet, despite the strictest admonitions of this servant that, in accordance with divine wisdom, no one should write abroad without my knowledge, they secretly and continuously send letters in every direction, so that by every means possible they may cast doubt in the hearts. Their affirmations are far removed from such persistence in instilling doubt. This is one example of the clear discrepancies; there are many more like it.²³

Concerned lest anyone from this direction should write²⁴ something that would have contrary fragrances, this servant, despite his endless duties, has taken upon himself the toil of reading all communications and erasing anything that by implication or allusion is inappropriate. By your dear life! For four years now every day – in blotting out certain statements – I would imbibe a measure of ink, in the hope that the matter might remain confidential, so far as possible.²⁵

Then suddenly I noticed that from all directions bundles of surreptitious letters²⁶ were being returned [to me]. When their contents were observed, it

was evident that all these letters were replete with attempts to cast doubts. Now reflect on the sorrows of this servant. I am immersed in a sea of calamities, all the enemies are on the attack from every side, difficulties are endless and troubles and hardships are limitless; under these conditions, I am nevertheless engaged day and night in exalting the Word of God. I am single, alone and powerless among the [diverse] factions of the world.

<p. 2> And yet the friends too devote all their time and resources to the destruction of this servant. They pass their days and nights in the utmost comfort, bounty and ease, but all the time,²⁷ they do nothing but destroy the edifice of the Covenant and Testament. Is this the fruit of the Kitāb-i Aqdas? Is this the outcome of the Kitāb-i ‘Ahd? Is this the essence of the divine counsels? Is this²⁸ behaviour consonant with the divine texts? ‘Be fair, O you who are endowed with equity.’ It is evident that should the reins of affairs leave the hands of this servant, indubitably all affairs would be neglected and every person would move in accordance with his own ideas. His Holiness the Spirit [Jesus] said to his disciples,²⁹ ‘Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt has lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?’³⁰

You wrote, ‘What and who are the causes of these differences?’ By observation and deduction your honour is thoroughly aware of the basis, reason and cause. ‘Fear the discernment of the believer, for he sees with the Light of God.’³¹

However, I swear by the Desired One, this servant has no dispute with anyone and will not quarrel. Nor have I referred to anyone by hints or innuendo as the ‘chief of polytheists’, or called them the ‘abominable Shi’ah’, ‘birds of night’, or ‘a prattler’. Nor have I ever condemned or excommunicated anyone. I refer to all as the ‘divine friends’ and the ‘friends of the Blessed Beauty’. The most that I say is, ‘Do not vacillate in the divine Covenant and do not bring about dissension in God’s Cause. Do not barter away lasting glory for transitory ideas. Do not strike this edifice with an axe. Do not uproot everything. Recall the bounties and favours of the Blessed Beauty – may my life be a sacrifice unto his friends! Contemplate his sufferings, tribulations and difficulties, chains and imprisonments, and be moved by them. Do not squander the sacrifice of the sacred blood of His Holiness the Exalted One [the Bab] – may my life be a ransom to his dust. Myriad sanctified souls have sacrificed their lives in the path of the divine Cause and with the utmost joy and ecstasy they have hastened to the field of heavenly martyrdom. They have forfeited their homes, allowed their possessions and belongings to be pillaged, their infants to be enchained, their families to live without sustenance and support. But you, who are in the utmost honour and enjoy the highest comfort, and know no sorrow, no sadness, no trial, no difficulty, and are more comfortable than the whole world, and are even unaware of the problems, troubles and constraints imposed by the government, at least do not waste the sacrifices of all those martyrs and do not accept supreme humiliation for God’s Cause and yourselves.’ However, ‘There is no life left in him whom you summon.’³² Despite this, praised be God, thus far I have not condemned any of the friends, much less excommunicated them: in writing or verbally, by allusions, insinuations, or even implicitly. I shall serve everyone day and night, and God willing, I shall continue to do so; and will never look at the faults of anyone.³³ Rather, I will sacrifice myself entirely in servitude to the Sanctified Threshold.

27. Codex 2 is missing *rā* after *uqāt* [all time].
28. Codex 2 is missing *in* [this].
29. Codex 2 has the same words, but in a different sequence; namely, it states: *Ḥadrat Rūḥ bi ashāb khatāb ...* Further, Codex 3 has *mīfarmāyad* [said], but the other two documents have *mīfarmāyand*.
30. Matthew 5:13.
31. According to Wensinck, this can be found in the Sunni Hadith collection of Tirmidhi, Tafsir of Sura 15, 6.
32. This is a common Arabic saying and usually used when one means to say, ‘It is hopeless to cry for help, because there will be no chance of a rescue regardless of how much you shout!’
33. Codex 2 is missing *kard* [will].

34. Mihrabkhani (private correspondence, 23 March 2008) has raised the possibility that *fulān*, rendered in the above translation as a reference to 'Abdu'l-Baha, 'in this instance is not necessarily referring to 'Abdu'l-Baha, but rather to the finger-pointing that was going on within the community at the time'. In light of this reading, Mihrabkhani has suggested an alternative rendering: 'A few days ago news was received from Iran that the followers of Yahyā have celebrated and danced, and have praised God that certain residents of the Holy Land have written polemics against such and such, have made certain proclamations, have become of two factions, have considered such and such the chief of the infidels or a member of the abominable sect of Shi'ah.'
35. In Persian, the liver is the seat of emotions, but in English, it would be the heart.
36. *Sadratu'l-Muntahā* means 'lote-tree beyond which there is no passing'; it signifies the station of the Manifestation of God (cf. Qur'an 58:10–18).
37. Codex 2 is missing *al-fadā'* [sacrifice].
38. Qur'an 30:40.

Consider: a few days ago news was received from Iran that the followers of Yahya [Azal] have celebrated and danced, saying, 'Praised be God, some residents of the Holy Land have written polemics against that person ['Abdu'l-Baha] and proclaimed that they [the Baha'is] are now of two factions. That person ['Abdu'l-Baha] is now considered the 'chief of polytheists' while they are accounted as the contemptible sect of the Shi'ah.'³⁴ This servant was so saddened [by this news] that the entire night until dawn I was immersed in lamentation and prayer, and such was the burning in my heart <p. 3> that in the morning a strange effect appeared in my face. It was evident that my liver³⁵ was so affected that the impact was manifested in my face. Nevertheless, I did not mention anything, nor complained. However, some of the friends were not grieved at all by this news, but rather heard it all with smiles. 'O the regret that awaits them!'

Should the consequence of the Covenant and Testament of the Luminary of Horizons be that the true friends like unto your honoured self shed tears of blood while enemies dance and celebrate? If the laxity and lassitude of the divine friends in the Covenant of the All-Merciful should persist, I swear by the Sanctified Threshold – may my spirit be a sacrifice to its dust – the matter would become worse still and the divine foundation would tremble and all of us would become ensnared in the dark pit of everlasting regret. Night and day, the hope and supplication that this servant offers at the Threshold of Oneness is that, God willing, soon I may be delivered from this captivity and hasten to the next world so that in that world I may be unaware of the praise of friends or of the stones of insinuation from the deniers by either allusions or hints.

But you inquired about the remedy for this situation. As long as the friends have hope that through machinations and false rumours this upwelling of the life of the Covenant could be diverted from its natural channel and this effulgent star may be shifted from its heavenly orbit to another course, never shall these seditions end nor will these dark clouds be dissipated off the horizon of God's Cause.

But if the friends should truly rise as is incumbent on them in accordance with the Covenant and Testament, and manifest steadfastness and influence, then others will despair of changing and perverting the Centre of the Covenant, and will give up their provocations and deliberations. Gradually the radiant horizon of the Lord's Cause will be cleansed and sanctified of these dense clouds and the true friends and the sincere supporters, like your kind self, will be cheered and inspired and the enemies of God will be despondent, disappointed and lost in the wilderness of regret, and all members will be protected and safeguarded from every calamity under the shade of the Divine Lote-Tree.³⁶

After the ascension [of Bahā'u'llāh], through the power of reliance on God and the influence of confirmations from the Ancient Beauty – may my spirit be a sacrifice³⁷ to his friends – the banner of the Word of God was hoisted so loftily over all horizons that the enemies shed tears of blood and the friends gained confidence and were greatly cheered and gladdened. But now because of these unpleasant fragrances, just the opposite has happened. Erelong the evil effects and everlasting regret will appear and be evident. 'Verily, Destruction hath appeared by land and by sea.'³⁸ This servant has no companion but tearful eyes and a

seared heart. The world is immersed in joy and merrymaking, but here we are with our tearful eyes. 'I only complain of my grief and my sorrow to God.'³⁹

You had also written about the enduring animosity among the friends and how this has resulted in laxity in the Covenant. Firstly, in regard to the waverers, its basis is evident and well known. Before the ascension [of Bahā'u'llāh] and the reading of the Kitāb-i 'Ahd, there was absolutely no enmity between the two sides. Nay, the majority were in complete harmony, and as for the few who had minor disputes with one another, they were persuaded to harmony.

But among others who enjoyed friendship, because of the steadfastness of one and the wavering of the other, the reverse occurred and differences appeared. Among the friends who were weak [in the Covenant], such animosity crept in that they would write documents against one another, <p. 4> condemning each other as unrighteous, ignorant and degraded, accusing that such and such has precipitated the spoiling of the Cause of God and, because of his extreme timidity, has dishonoured the Baha'is in the eyes of people high and low; so that [in making these assertions], he has borne complete allegiance that he is a true Shi'ah devoted to Murtiḍā-'Alī⁴⁰ and loathes every religion except the Ithnā-'Asharī.⁴¹ One would write about the other, 'This person is so steeped in sin and depravity that it cannot be described; and has brought us the enemies' censure and reprimand.' There was much like this.⁴²

This servant would cast aside all these papers to be forgotten, considering them to be unworthy pages and charge all to respect, unity, consideration and service.⁴³ However, now because of their weakness in the Covenant they have become utterly united.

So it is established that the primary cause of dissension or unity among the friends is firmness or wavering in the Covenant: the steadfast [in the Covenant] are united and the waverers are also united. Therefore we must trust in the aid and bounties of the Blessed Beauty and pray for this servant so that, God willing, I may befittingly arise in the servitude of the Ancient Beauty, and also pray for the waverers that God may bestow on them some measure of logic, perspective or fairness; 'by their own hands they demolished their houses!'⁴⁴ They may claim that they do not need prayers, but this servant has the utmost need; and apart from the sincere supplications emanating from the innermost hearts of the friends and their entreaties and implorations in this nether world, I know of no other means for attracting confirmations and divine aid.

Furthermore, the waverers are pursuing this unworthy servant, and for four years now this servant has endured every manner of oppression, denial, calumny, false rumour, betrayal, humiliation and even excommunication. If you were to consider certain papers and letters,⁴⁵ you would observe that they all refer to 'Beware, O neighbour'⁴⁶ and in the course of descriptions are slanderous [towards me]. Sometimes the steadfast [Baha'is] are counted as infidels and polytheists. The point is that those who have strayed themselves are boldly implying that I am the chief infidel, and thus you can comprehend the rest by this example.

However, this servant has placed all his reliance on the bounty and favour of the Blessed Beauty and is not offended by these imputations.

39. Qur'an 12:86.
40. A reference to Imam 'Ali, the son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad and the first Shi'i Imam.
41. Lit. Twelve, it is a reference to a sect of Shi'i who believe in the successorship of twelve Imams, namely, 'Ali and his descendants. By making these protestations to 'Abdu'l-Baha, they were claiming to be as loyal to him, as the first Shi'is were to 'Ali.
42. This paragraph describes the internal disputes of the Covenant-breakers.
43. Codex 2 has an extra *amr* in this sentence, which would change the meaning to 'service of the Cause'.
44. Qur'an 59:2.
45. Words *va makātib* [and letters] are missing in Codex 2.
46. Meaning, they contain hinted accusations towards 'Abdu'l-Baha. Codex 2 has the extra *fāsam'i* before *yā jā*.

47. Codex 2 is missing *bā* [with].
48. Codex 2 is missing *khūd* [themselves].
49. Codex 2 has *namā* in place of *namā'id*.
50. This is from the Ghazals of Hafiz; Ghazal no. 455, Husayn 'Alī Haravī, *Sharḥ-i Ghazal-hā-yi Hāfiz*, 2nd edn., 4 vols., [Tehran]: Katībih, 1367/1988, 3:1872. The first half of the couplet is in Persian and the second half in Arabic.
51. Qur'an 11:16.
52. Codex 2 is missing *makrahām* [their plots].
53. Qur'an 14:46.
54. Words *mahrūm va* [deprive and] are missing in Codex 2.
55. Rumī, *Mathnavī*, book 1, section 12.
56. Codex 2 has *hastīm* [are].
57. Qur'an 3:128.
58. Qur'an 88:22.

Despite this, I treat all with⁴⁷ the utmost affection and wish everyone well. Night and day I bear the utmost burden for everyone's comfort. I taste the poison of torment and become the target of arrows of persecution, yet I do not raise a sigh – nor do I groan or moan. However, every hour the waverers issue a thousand complaints and objections. They create a tale and disseminate it⁴⁸ and then express sadness and affection, so that hearts may be lenient to them and people may commiserate with them, so that by this means a grudge against this servant may appear in people's souls.

Consider:⁴⁹ there was no calumny that was not hurled at the Blessed Beauty – may my life be sacrifice to his friends. Everyone was recumbent on the couch of ease and with the utmost comfort they reclined on the bed of laxity while the Perspicuous Beauty was the target of the darts of all enemies and the impregnable citadel of all believers. Despite this, they tacitly complained of the tyranny of the Blessed Beauty and would raise their cries, moan and groan.

<p. 5> Sanctified be God! This servant has not voiced complaints of attacks upon the Covenant, assaults on the Testament, harassment of my person, and creation of all these calamities and troubles. Nevertheless, the waverers are not content. They have raised their cry to high heaven. How well is it said, 'how odd the events and how strange the incidents: I am the one laying slain; and yet it is my slayer who claims grievance!'⁵⁰

From one direction, the lax friends pour the poison of repression into the heart of this servant, and from yet another direction raise their cry and moan, so that through this means they would instil doubts in [believers'] hearts. 'Vain are the designs they frame therein'⁵¹ and 'they plotted,⁵² and God plotted, and God is the best of plotters.'⁵³

Sanctified is God! Can one hide the light of truth behind the clouds of doubts, or cover the sun of reality behind the veil of fabrications? Nay, by God! Unless spitefulness should entirely blind discernment and deprive⁵⁴ and eliminate all sight. In this case, no need for clouds or veils shall remain either.

When the judge allows bribes to himself;
how can he discern the wrongdoer from the wretched wronged one,
When malice comes, virtue is covered;
from the heart ascend a hundred veils to cover the eyes.⁵⁵

At all events, the purpose is this: the wavering party is continually hunting in pursuit of these birds, and not for a moment do they put aside their shameful activities and posturing, and immediately they raise the cry that they are being pursued and attacked!

Night and day, though, this servant is engaged in admonishing and counselling the friends, 'O illustrious gentlemen! We were⁵⁶ all lovers of the Blessed Beauty and beneath the canopy of life. If method and direction is different now, do not condemn and do not persist. Everyone may move as he wishes. "Not for thee, but for God, is the decision";⁵⁷ and "Thou art not one to manage men's affairs."⁵⁸ Do not meddle in peoples' doings. It is a pity if the tongue is engaged in anything other than God's mention. Be accustomed to mentioning the Lord. In your assemblies and gatherings recite divine verses and prayers, and be

engaged in exposition of proofs, testimonies and evidences. Reiterate the blessed counsels [of Baha'u'llah], speak of his disposition and character, recount his ways and actions, and share the glad tidings of his favours and bounties. In this wise will the meeting of friends become a rose-garden of mysteries and the assembly of lovers will become the horizon of illumination.'

Each of the friends [from here] writes letters to diverse places. Despite immense duties, to the extent possible I read these letters, so that if there is a word regarding a specific person, it is eliminated. What else can I do? It is now two years since from a certain town the intense fragrance of torpor has been inhaled, so much so that with all their might they have arisen to obliterate the Covenant. Until now I have not disclosed it and have kept the matter concealed. When they revised [their attitudes] in certain matters, without hesitation I encouraged them. What else can I do?

But these people [in 'Akka] will not be stilled by [my] silence, nor will they be calmed⁵⁹ by [my] insistence. Only two things will bring about their tranquillity: one is to change the centre of the Covenant and to divert the flow of the Covenant's celestial river into another channel; the other is to become utterly disappointed in their own deliberate efforts. <p. 6> In short, until they have fully devoted all their energies to confusing the minds, to deranging the thoughts, to destroying the foundation of the Cause of the Merciful,⁶⁰ and to dispersing the gathering of the friends, they will never be at peace. Your honoured person is aware of some of these matters, since you have learned of some minor occurrences, and this issue is not unknown to you.

However, they are negligent and oblivious to the fact that this dust and debris will not obscure the sun of the Covenant. These schemes will not conceal the radiance of [God's] decree. These barriers will not impede the waves of this sea. These whirlwinds will not uproot and displace the Tree of Life. Through the bounties of the Abhā Kingdom, erelong souls⁶¹ will be appointed who will adorn the temple of existence with the conquering sword of the Testament, and from whose brows will shine forth the light of the pre-existent Covenant, who will unfurl the banner of the Testament in the midmost heart of the planet. 'On that day believers will rejoice.'⁶²

But this servant will not object to anyone's station nor will I forfeit anyone's rights. Under all conditions, I shall show consideration to all and serve everyone, since all were beneath the Divine Lote-Tree, and are esteemed, honoured, dignified and praiseworthy. None may object to another one, nor himself raise an excuse.

And now regarding the claim of Divinity and Lordship alleged of this servant: praise be unto God, my dust since conception has been moistened with the water of servitude and my essence has grown and developed through the life-giving breeze of thralldom. Thus, three years ago the following was penned for the friends of Iraq:

Know ye in truth that servitude unto His exalted threshold⁶³ is my glorious crown, my shining diadem. And with it I glory betwixt all the heavens and the earth.

59. The second *sākin* [silenced or calmed] is missing in Codex 2.
60. Codex 2 uses the alternative spelling, *rahīmān* [merciful].
61. In Codex 2, the word *nufūsi* [souls] comes after *Malakūt Abhā*, which does not change the meaning.
62. Slight modification of Qur'an 30:4.
63. Codex 2 has *la'atibatih*, which does not change the meaning.

64. Slight modification of Qur'an 6:6.

65. Slight modification of Qur'an 78:14.

66. Similar to Qur'an 7:58.

67. Qur'an 22:5 and 41:39.

68. A reference to an extensive commentary by Quddus composed during the siege of Shaykh Tabarsi on the word *šamad* (lit. eternal), which appears in Qur'an 112:2: 'In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Say: He is God alone; God the eternal! He begetteth not, and He is not begotten; And there is none like unto Him.'

69. Adapted from translation (no. 110) by Juan Cole, 'Ode of the Dove', <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jrcole/ode.htm>.

70. The original is plural. However, since it appears to be self-referential, it has been rendered in singular. Codex 2 has the singular form of this verb, *bikhāham*.

71. *The Kitāb-i Aqdas*, p. 145.

And some time ago, a query was made and an answer was offered, and it is deemed necessary to include that text in this letter:

He is the All-Glorious!

O admired Khalīl! I recited your verses of gratitude to the Lord of heaven and earth, Who lifted darkness and bestowed His bounties. And from heaven He poured forth most generously,⁶⁴ and from His clouds of life He sent water in abundance⁶⁵ and caused the rich soil to be vivified and bring forth plants with the consent of its Lord,⁶⁶ and to stir [to life], swell and grow every kind of luxuriant herb.⁶⁷

You must be thrilled with the divine tidings in these days, which have been bounteously received by the grace of your Lord, the Ancient of Days. I swear by the True God, his rays have shone forth brilliantly, and the breezes of the gardens of eternity have indeed been wafted. The seas of life have billowed forth, the fountains of wisdom have gushed forth and the lights of recognition have flashed. The stars of his guidance have been resplendent, the dawning-places of signs are luminous and the daysprings of evidence have become incandescent with a perspicuous light, and the portals of the Kingdom have been flung open unto all who are in heaven and on earth.

O thou who art clinging to the hem of the divine garment and adhering to the strong cord! Abandon the weak tremulous ones, those seeking to immerse themselves in the ocean of doubts, who are oblivious of the unique Authority, who has been appointed by an explicit text in accordance with the divine Covenant revealed by your All-Bountiful Lord. They have kept apart from the gracious bounties of your Lord and sought the great darkness of deprivation. I swear by the True God! You will soon see the banner of the Covenant waving upon the highest summits and the Luminary of the Testament so effulgent it will dazzle all eyes. <p. 7> It is then that you will witness the waverers in manifest loss, and the heedless ones in grievous remorse and severe despondency.

O Khalīl! The letter of your honoured self was received, and from the fragrance of the gardens of its meaning it was understood that some have asked what is the station sought and claimed by this servant.

I swear by the Ancient Beauty, I am repelled by the odour of claim to any station. Under all circumstances, I shall not barter away an atom of servitude for the oceans of divinity and lordship. Many have expressed their divinity and lordship. His holiness Quddūs – may my spirit by a sacrifice unto him – revealed a book of commentary on *Šamad* (the Eternal).⁶⁸ From that book's title until its end its purport is 'I am God.' And in Badasht, the honoured Tahīrīh raised the cry of 'I am God' to the pinnacle of heaven with a clarion voice. Similarly with other friends in Badasht. The Blessed Beauty in Qaṣṣīdih-yi Varqā'iyih states, 'My Cause pouring forth made deities divine; all lords have by my ample order thrived.'⁶⁹

However, he [Baha'u'llah] did not mention anyone who arose to be worthy of [the station of] servitude. And if – God forbid – I seek for myself any rank,⁷⁰ what station is greater than, 'a branch from the Ancient Root'.⁷¹ I swear by God, the True One, all men are humbled when face to face with this exalted station, and the necks of every position and station are brought low in the presence of this most great position.

'A. 'A.⁷²

He is God!

Qazvin. His honour 'Abdu'l-Husayn,⁷³ upon him be the Glory of God, the most Glorious!

Allāh'u'Abhā!

O 'Abdu'l-Husayn! May my spirit be a sacrifice for your name! You and I are namesakes!⁷⁴ You are fortunate, but I am obscure. You have arisen to His servitude, while I remain aghast in this vale of transgressions and the meads of oblivion. Since you have become successful in His servitude, pray also on my behalf. Perchance through the supplications, entreaty and the pure breaths of the friends this servant may also make a movement in the field of His thralldom.

'A. 'A.

At all events, this servant will not exchange the prayer-mat of thralldom for the throne of lordship, nor will I barter servitude unto the threshold of the Blessed Beauty⁷⁵ for sovereignty over all the worlds. Those who seek pretext should look for another excuse [to attack me], and should look for other false rumours in order to confuse the minds and perplex the thoughts of the wavering friends, for this [previous] arrow did not have any penetrative power, and the poison of that dagger did not harm the heart.

In the *Sūrih-yi Ḥaykal*, the Blessed Beauty states, 'I have created dawning-places for Godhood and day-springs for Lordship.' And he states in the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf:

Gracious God! Such references as have been made to Divinity and Godhead by the holy ones and chosen ones of God have been made a cause for denial⁷⁶ and repudiation. The Imām ṣādiq hath said: 'Servitude is a substance, the essence of which is Divinity.' The Commander of the Faithful⁷⁷ (Imām 'Alī) answered an Arab, who had questioned him concerning the soul, as follows: 'The third is the soul which is divine and celestial. It is a divine energy, a substance, simple, and self-subsistent.' And further He – peace be upon him – said: 'Therefore it is the Most Sublime Essence of God, the Tree of Blessedness, the Lote-Tree beyond which there is no passing, the Garden of Repose.'⁷⁸

<p. 8> In that same Epistle revealed by the tongue of the True God it is stated:

The Commander of the Faithful (Imām 'Alī) hath said: 'I am He Who can neither be named, nor described.' And likewise He hath said: 'Outwardly I am an Imām; inwardly I am the Unseen, the Unknowable.'⁷⁹

Again of Abī 'Abdi'llāh [Ṣādiq], he [Baha'u'llah] quotes him thus:

We are the Ka'aba of God, and We are the Qiblih of God, and We are the Face of God.⁸⁰

Again he states:

Jābir hath said that Abū-Ja'far – peace be upon him – spoke to him as follows: 'O Jābir! Give heed unto the Bayān (Exposition) and the Ma'ānī (Significances).'

72. 'A. 'A. stands for 'Abdu'l-Baha 'Abbās and was 'Abdu'l-Baha's usual signature. Khalīl Khūṭī, the recipient of this tablet, was a supporter of Mirza Muhammad-'Alī.
73. Most likely, the same 'Abdu'l-Husayn Samandari referred to earlier in this paper.
74. Codex 2 has *hamnāmnīm* in place of *hamnāmnīm*.
75. Codex 2 has *rā* after *Jamāl Mubārak*.
76. Codex 3 has *i'tirād*, but the other two documents have *i'rād*.
77. Codex 3 is missing *Amīr*, a title of Imām 'Alī.
78. Bahā'u'llāh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette, IL: Bahā'ī Publishing Trust, 1988) 111–12.
79. Bahā'u'llāh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 112.
80. Bahā'u'llāh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 112.

81. Bahā'u'llāh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* 112.
82. The Treatise of the Uncle; a reference to the Kitāb-i Īqān, which was composed by Baha'u'llah in response to questions put to him by a maternal uncle of the Bab; for details, see Habību'llāh Afnān, *Genesis of the Bābī-Bahā'ī Faiths in Shiraz and Fars* (trans. Ahang Rabbani, Leiden: Brill, 2008) 67–70.
83. Codex 2 is missing *ān* [that].
84. In Codex 2, the word *nigāh* [kept] appears after *bayt* [house].
85. Bahā'u'llāh, *The Kitāb-i Iqān* 127.
86. Codex 2 is missing *ḥizb* [party].

He – peace be upon him – added: ‘As to the Bayān, it consisteth in thy recognition of God – glorified be He – as the One Who hath no equal, and in thy adoration of Him, and in thy refusal to join partners with Him. As to the Ma’ānī, We are its meaning, and its side, and its hand, and its tongue, and its cause, and its command, and its knowledge, and its right. If We wish for something, it is God Who wisheth it, and He desireth that which We desire.’⁸¹

Now consider what melodies have been uttered by the tongue of the near ones and what songs have been raised by them, and how the Greatest Name [Baha'u'llah] – may my soul be a sacrifice to his loved ones – employed these [statements] to establish proof and testimony among the gainsayers. And yet, this servant, neither in writing nor verbally, has mentioned anything save utter evanescence and absolute self-effacement. Despite this, I am the target of a myriad objections and repudiations. Woe betide me if, God forbid, I should have uttered a word like the above! Then what inferno would be witnessed and what revolt would be raised by the party of the waverers.

O friends of God and truly just ones! Consider for a moment the Risālih-yi Khāl⁸² and what has been stated regarding the pure dust of the Prince of Martyrs [Imam Husayn], may my spirit be a sacrifice unto him. Sweet is his utterance:

For instance, consider the pervading power of those drops of the blood of Ḥusayn which besprinkled the earth. What ascendancy and influence hath the dust itself, through the sacredness and potency of that blood, exercised over the bodies and souls of men! So much so, that he who sought deliverance from his ills, was healed by touching the dust of that⁸³ holy ground, and whosoever, wishing to protect his property, treasured with absolute faith and understanding, a little of that holy earth within his house,⁸⁴ safeguarded all his possessions. These are the outward manifestations of its potency. And were We to recount its hidden virtues they would assuredly say: ‘He verily hath considered the dust to be the Lord of Lords, and hath utterly forsaken the Faith of God.’⁸⁵

Consider now such descriptions and attributes he ascribes to the fragrant dust of one Letter of the Qur’anic Letters [Imams]! If the wavering party⁸⁶ has understood this to be polytheism, then that sanctified person [Baha'u'llah] is exposed to objections!

In the Visitation Tablet of the Prince of the Martyrs [Imam Husayn] – may my soul be his sacrifice – the Ancient Beauty – may my spirit be a sacrifice to his sacred dust – has spoken such praise and glorification that from the inception of time till now these attributes of Godhead and aspects of Lordship have not been used for any of the Sanctified Manifestations. For instance, he states:

Ah! Ah! At the injustice which hath inflamed the realities of existence, and hath befallen the King of the visible and invisible from those who broke God’s Covenant and Testament, and denied His proof, and gainsaid His bounty, and disputed His signs!

Ah! Ah! May the spirits of the Concourse on High be a sacrifice for thy calamity! O son of the Lote-Tree beyond which there is no passing! O thou mystery enshrined in the most exalted word!

<p. 9> And similarly, he states:

But for thee the command of B and E⁸⁷ would not have appeared and the sealed Choice Wine would not have been unsealed. But for thee the dove of clear testimony would not have sung on the branch of my exposition nor would the Tongue⁸⁸ of Grandeur have spoken at the concourse of religions. Because of thy sorrows separation and division occurred between H and E.⁸⁹

Likewise, he [Baha'u'llah] has stated:

Through thee the Omnipotence of God and His Command and the Mysteries of God and His behests came to be. But for thee, the Hidden Treasure and His strong and irrevocable decree would not have been manifested. But for thee, His Call would not have been raised on the Most Exalted Horizon, and the pearls of His wisdom and exposition would not have been manifested from the treasury of the Most Glorious Pen.

Also, he has revealed [in the same tablet]:

Thou art he by turning unto whom all faces have turned unto the King of existence, and the Divine Lote-Tree hath proclaimed: The Kingdom is God's, the Sovereign of all things visible and invisible.

He also states:

May all existence be a sacrifice unto thy being, O thou the Dawning-Place of Divine Revelation and the Dayspring of His Great Sign! And may all souls be a sacrifice unto thy calamities, O thou the Revealer of the Unseen in the world of the visible!

And he also states:

Because of thee, the Sun of Revelation hath been made manifest and the Speaker of Sinai hath spoken and a decree of forgiveness and grace has appeared in the world of creation. I testify that thou art the Path of God and His Balance the Dawning-Place of His Signs and the Dayspring of His Might and the Source of His commands and His pervasive instructions.

And he also states:

I testify that thou art the Treasury of the pearls of His Knowledge and the Repository of the jewels of His utterance and His wisdom. Because of thy calamity the point left its Most Exalted Habitation and sought a station for itself beneath *Bā*.⁹⁰ Thou art that Most Great Tablet on which the mysteries of the past and of the future are inscribed, as well the knowledge of what hath been and what will be. Thou art the Supreme Pen through whose movement earth and heaven move.

And then he says:

Sanctified art Thou, O My God and the Lord of Revelation and the One resplendent on the Branch of the Tree [of Sinai]. I beseech Thee by this light

87. The original *kāf* and *nūn*, make up the word *kūn*, meaning 'be', meaning that God uttered 'Be!' and creation came into being.
88. Codex 2 is missing *lisān* [tongue].
89. In Arabic, *h* and *w* form the word *huwa*, meaning 'he is'. In Baha'i scripture, 'He is' signifies the divine referential pronoun.
90. The Persian letter *Bā* [b] has a point beneath it, and also the Bab adopted the title of the Point. However, it should be noted that the 'Point' that the Bab adopted did not refer to the point under the *Bā*. The Bab was the 'Primal Point' and this title came from the idea that just as in the world of *tadvīn* (composition) all letters, words and sentences start from the very point – or moment – that the pen is placed on paper and letters and words come to existence through the movement of that first (primal) point, so is the case in the world of *takvīn* (creation) and all that is created starts from the 'Primal Point'. This is one reason why the Bab styled his first believers as the 'Letters'. That is, these 'Letters' came into existence through the movement of the Primal Point on the tablet of creation.

91. Codex 1 and 2 have *samā'* [heaven], which is missing in Codex 3.
92. Codex 2 has *la'atibatih*, which does not change the meaning.
93. In Codex 2, the two verbs *nimūdand* and *kardand*, are given as *nimūdih* and *kardih*.
94. Codex 2 has *nāmī*.
95. Codex 2 is missing *ast* [is or are].
96. Lit, His servant 'Abbās.

that shines above the Horizon of the heaven⁹¹ of detachment and by whom the command of trust and resignation were established.

There are many such utterances and they are unnumbered in the divine books and scrolls. I have recorded a compendium in these pages that it may lead to discernment of understanding hearts, and that footsteps may not deviate from the path of God whenever ears hear eulogy and acclaim about a dust⁹² that pertains to the Sublime Threshold in the worlds of exposition and being. These were praises of the Greatest Name [Baha'u'llah] – may my life be a sacrifice to his loved ones – for one of the holy essences of the Qur'anic guides. Let that be a lesson to you, O ye endowed with discernment!

And God forbid that in citing these divine verses one may presume that this servant claims one word of these stations. I take refuge with God! I am a servant who hath believed in God and His evidences. I have no rank but lowliness, humility, weakness, evanescence under all conditions and situations. I entertain no aspiration but absolute servitude to the True God, the Mighty, the All-Subduing.

<p. 10> At all events, the waves of doubt have arisen from the ocean of fabrications and the promulgation of ambiguities that have enveloped the East and the West. This servant's hope was that all the friends of God should be as wings for this wronged bird that I might spread my wings in the atmosphere of service of the divine Cause and withstand the assaults of the enemy. Now, however, some of the friends have girded the loins of endeavour and with the stones of invective have utterly broken the wings of this homeless bird. Unsatisfied with this, they have raised the shouts of being wronged and maltreated and commenced a hue and cry.⁹³ All of this despite the fact that they have continuously spread secret instructions and promulgated clandestine communications, all intended to destroy the foundation of the constant and clear Covenant.

But this wronged bird is aided and supported by the Eagle of life eternal, the Self-Subsisting, and this broken-winged bird is helped and assisted by the Falcon of the Dayspring of Oneness. Therefore, I will offer my breast as a shield for the arrows of assaults, and my soul and heart as targets of rebellious attacks. I accept every tribulation in his path and welcome every calamity with all my heart and life. I thank all for their deeds, and close my eyes to everyone's conduct. Night and day, alone I will serve God's Cause, and wish no name or title, nor seek any recognition⁹⁴ or renown. I abhor all praise and set aside all acclaims.

The first name that the Blessed Beauty – may my spirit be a sacrifice unto his loved ones – bestowed upon me on the day of my birth was 'Abbās. After a while, in childhood, he summoned this servant and after expressing the greatest loving bounties and gracious favours, bestowed [upon me] seals of my venerable grandfather – may my spirit be a sacrifice unto him – which are⁹⁵ two illumined seals. On one of them "Abduhu 'Abbās'⁹⁶ is prominently embossed. This is the name, the title, the acclaim and the praise of this servant. Otherwise, I will not consent to any other attribute, adjective, name or appellation, except this ancient name. Otherwise, what the Supreme Pen has revealed in the Kitāb-i Aqdas, the Kitāb-i 'Ahd and other tablets are solely from his gracious favour and bestowal!

O friends of God! Attachment to names and affection for appellations cause distraction and resemble the wind in the wilderness. Gird the loins of service and seek to diffuse the divine fragrances and immolate yourselves to exalt the Word of God. Meditate awhile on the state of detachment of the illustrious Rūḥu'llāh,⁹⁷ and how that pure spirit and evident light, at the age of twelve, hastened unrestrained to the field of martyrdom and sacrificed himself with such fervour and joy.

There are only two possibilities: either we shall be confirmed in the service of the sacred Cause or we shall not. If we succeed in this mighty bounty, then all the beauteous names circumambulate us. And if we are disappointed and deprived, what benefit [can we derive] from names, titles, descriptions and attributes? Dispense therefore with every name and attribute beneath the shadow of your Lord, the Compassionate, the All-Merciful. By God, the True One! If ye observe the counsels of God, and stand fast in the Covenant of God, all His Most Excellent Names shall serve you, and all His Most Exalted Attributes shall glory in you. Cast aside, therefore, these vain imaginings; then expend your energies in that whereby your faces may be illumined in the Kingdom of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsistent that the holy angels may receive you, and the joyful tidings of attainment and prosperity may reach you from the Heaven of your Ancient Lord.

<p. 11> At all events, consider in what calamity and what anxiety is this servant immersed. From one direction comes the attack of the previous [Islamic] community;⁹⁸ from another side, the obsession of other enemies; from yet another way, the machinations of the followers of Yahya [Azal]; and from another route, the conspiracies of ill-wishers among the highly-placed;⁹⁹ and from yet another path, the administration of intricate affairs in 'Akka. And under all conditions, [this servant is involved in] correspondence and communication with all places, and responses to complex questions; and at times, in digressions about managing food provisions; or at some hours, in perplexity about how to pay debts; and at other times, night and day, in regret and remorse over the attack of an army of the suspicious and the spreading of fabrications [by the enemies].

Despite this, the friends are not satisfied with the difficulties of this servant and they, too, with utmost deliberation and in complete secrecy, send clandestine instructions to other places, publish falsehoods, seeking to undermine the foundation of the Covenant – never failing to cause debilitation. [They do] all of this even when they have no troubles, know no toil, have no distractions, and are neither responsible nor accountable for anything,¹⁰⁰ whether major or minor.

Tulips inebriated, daffodils intoxicated, and¹⁰¹ they call me wrongdoer
I ask for your judgment, Lord; whom should I judge?¹⁰²

O my God! Thou seest my loneliness, estrangement and anguish. Thou beholdest the wasting of my body, the distraction of my soul, the waning of my moon, the eclipse of my sun, the weakness of my members, the trembling of my limbs, the subversion of my being, the straitening of my breast, the beating of my heart, the fainting of my spirit, my lack of comfort, my

97. Killed in the Shah's prison in 1896 along with his father Varqā; see H.M. Balyuzi, *Eminent Bahā'īs in the time of Bahā'ullāh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1985) 80–97.

98. *Awlā* is a reference to 'those that have been there before or have come first'. Therefore, *millal-i awlā* is a reference to the religious community that came before, i.e. the Islamic community (and possibly also the Christian community, since *millal* is plural).

99. Presumably a reference to intense criticism of 'Abdu'l-Baha by certain government officials in Istanbul.

100. Codex 2 has *chīzī* in place of *chīz* [thing].

101. Codex 1 is missing *va* [and].

102. Ghazal of Hafiz, no. 346, Haravi, *Sharh-i Ghazal-ha-yi Ḥāfīz* 3:1422.

103. Codex 2 is missing *va* [and].

104. Qur'an 12:48.

105. Qur'an 2:156. This verse is typically recited on news of a death.

106. Mīhrabkhani has offered this explanation, 'That is, 'Abdu'l-Bahā is saying, "Nothing has happened; no claims have been made." Let someone else take responsibilities and let him rest in a lonely corner.'

107. Codex 2 is missing *zāhir* [evident].

sore affliction in Thy path, and the multitude of woes I suffer in Thy love. O Lord! Tempests have uprooted my flourishing trunk, and upheavals have unearthed my well-established root. Storms of trouble have beset me, and the throes of trials and tribulations have undone me. O Lord, they have grown tired of me; singled me out for every infamy; made me the target of their shafts; and wished upon me deprivation.

I swear by Thy might! I am alone and single in Thy kingdom and¹⁰³ I do not have an impregnable stronghold nor an inaccessible sanctuary but Thy All-Glorious Kingdom, nor do I have a sanctuary nor a support but the protection of Thy Great Mercy.

O my God! Raise me up to Thee, that this fire burning in my limbs and loins may be extinguished and that this perpetual storm and dust cloud which reaches the heavens may be rendered calm and tranquil. It is only then that my spirit will be comforted and my heart will be quickened and my essence will be gladdened by Thy Bounty and Thy Loving Providence. For Thy loved ones I am a burden unto them and Thy servants suffer because of my existence. Shortcomings have encompassed me and I have failed to achieve that to which I had aspired in this Day of Resurrection. O my forgiving God! Rescue me, rescue me! Free me, free me from these wastelands and save me from these grievous years!¹⁰⁴ Thou art the Saviour of every contrite servant.

As to the matter of exerting corporal punishment for certain incidents, it is known to your honoured self that the waverers and the party of rebellion and revolt are actively engaged in causing outrage and creating havoc and are not stilled through any means. If this servant would also fight the believers with mace and club, then no one will remain in the field and it is best to recite, 'To God we belong, and unto Him do we return'¹⁰⁵ and close our eyes to everything!

The moment this servant counsels anyone, immediately the party of the waverers surround him <p. 12> and divert him from the Covenant and Testament, as has been experienced many times in this land. Now this servant's hands and feet are completely tied and he sits in a corner, observing and watching events, wondering what path God will show and what decree He will command. One of the friends had said, 'Some are imaginary chiefs.' I replied, 'No, by God! An oppressed subordinate is, as you say, an imaginary leadership and such would be enviable. Woe unto me if it was evident leadership – then what would happen!' Although this is naught save tests and tribulations, it is the envy and desire of every gathering.

Oh! If only there was joy of heart or comfort of soul. But as of now a transfer [of leadership] has not occurred.¹⁰⁶ This servant swears by the Sanctified Shrine that he wishes to occupy a lonely corner and to accept no provisions and for someone else to carry this heavy burden for a time. What harm would there be? By God! It would bring light to the eyes of this servant and would comfort his life and rest his mind, and if anyone has a doubt about this assertion, let him try. What harm would there be? I swear by God, besides Whom there is none other God! That day will be a day of celebration for this servant! And if carried out with sincerity and truth, it would bestow lasting benefits, and I would support it with heart and soul. I would not send clandestine instructions anywhere, would not confuse thoughts, would not confound minds, and would not divide the Word of God. I would not institute [such stations as] 'revealer of inner truth' or 'revealer of evident'¹⁰⁷ truth'. I would conduct myself with the utmost honesty and absolute

truthfulness, and would resolve all of these difficulties. I would not claim to be wronged, and would not stigmatize anyone as the ‘raven’, with myself as the ‘nightingale’.¹⁰⁸ I would not wish anyone’s humiliation, and like the people of Europe would not conceive of a secret sect,¹⁰⁹ nor would I correspond surreptitiously with anyone. His Holiness the Spirit [Jesus] said, ‘Does anyone seek to cover his light under a bushel?’¹¹⁰ No, by God! Rather take the lamp and show it to every eye. Every secret affair is darkness and every whispering unseemly in the Mighty Book, the All-Knowing.¹¹¹

In short, during this period – I swear by your dear life! – the utmost consideration and forbearance was exercised. Let it not be deemed that this servant changed and altered his ways. Nay, this practice is the essence of this servant – if near ones deny, praise be unto God that all strangers will testify that this servant treats everyone, whether righteous or otherwise, with the utmost love and affection and never objects to anyone. If testimonials are needed, all the peoples of Syria will confirm it by signing and taking an oath. Sanctified is God! The ways, manners and all conditions of this servant are well known to strangers, but denied by our acquaintances! ‘Virtue is that which the enemy concedes!’

<p. 13> O divine friends! Think not that by this reference¹¹² specific persons were intended; rather my intention is the party of the waverers. I adjure you by the Ancient Beauty not to insult anyone or wish¹¹³ humiliation on any soul. Never repudiate anyone, who either specifically, or by allusion or by insinuation ascribes charges of heresy, blasphemy, atheism, loss, error or wickedness. Never charge anyone with impiety. Do not oppose and resist anyone, even if it is in defence.

Conduct yourself with the utmost gentleness, affection, friendliness, well-wishing and compassion. Seek to display a spiritual attitude and follow in the path of angels. Pray for all and implore God for everyone’s welfare. Mention every person with perfect courtesy. Do not anger anyone and treat all with kindness. And if with your own ears you hear, either by reference, or¹¹⁴ implication, or expressly, insults towards this servant, do not be perturbed.¹¹⁵ Like this servant, behave with the greatest forbearance and patience, and be accustomed to the holy fragrances.

However, do not be deceived by anyone, and do not lend ears to the flattery of some. Quickly discern the doubts of the doubtful. Be perspicacious. Do not be misled. Do not be attracted to the praise of the waverers. Fix your gaze on the Light of God and be the manifestation of, ‘Beware the discernment of the believer, for he sees with the Light of God.’¹¹⁶

These owls plotted a scheme
learnt the call of the white eagles
If the crow should learn the call of the lapwing,
from where would it learn the lapwing’s secret and Sheba’s news?¹¹⁷

O friends! I swear by God! This servant has never wished humiliation upon any soul, nor have I wronged anyone. Indeed all that has transpired is due to the rising of the sun of the Covenant upon the Horizons.¹¹⁸ ‘This thing is not of me, but from Him. God knows, when He sends His Manifestations, His most important bounty, we disturb their lives.’

His¹¹⁹ guilt is that he is but a falcon
Other than goodness, what was Joseph’s crime?¹²⁰

108. Codex 2 is missing the entire last part of this sentence, starting with ‘and would not stigmatize ...’

109. Probably a reference to such secret societies initiated in Europe as Freemasonry.

110. Matthew 5:16 states, ‘Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel.’

111. Echoing Qur’an 58:10, ‘Only of Satan is this clandestine talk, that he may bring the faithful to grief.’

112. Codex 2 is missing the phrase, *bayān maqṣūd*.

113. Codex 2 has *nakhāhid* [do not wish] in place of *makhāhid*.

114. Codex 2 has *va yā* [and if].

115. Codex 2 has *barāshufīh* [perturbed] in place of *āshufīh*.

116. An Islamic tradition. The entire second half of this sentence is missing in Codex 2.

117. Rūmī, *Mathnavī*, book 4. Sheba, the lapwing or hoopoe are Qur’anic references to the bird that brought a message for Solomon from the Queen of Sheba.

118. ‘Abdu’l-Baha indicates that it is natural for calamities to have appeared because of the rising of the sun of the Covenant – in the same way that there are always tests and tribulations when a new Manifestation appears.

119. Codex 1 is missing *ū* [his].

120. A verse of poem by Rūmī, *Mathnavī*, book 6.

121. Codex 3 has *dalīrī* [bravery] in place of *dilbarī* (as it appears in Codex 1 and 2).
122. The word used for Baghdad is *Zawrā'*, which also means a deep well.
123. Codex 2 is missing *hujūm* [onslaught].
124. A reference to Edirne. Following the dethroning of Sultan 'Abdu'l-'Azīz in 1876 and the Ottoman's disastrous war of 1877–8 with Russia and her Bulgarian allies, which brought the enemies to the gate of Istanbul, Edirne was occupied by Bulgaria.
125. Codex 2 spells *Suqlāb* [land of the Slavs] with *ṣād*.
126. The original 'night of Laylā' has been rendered as 'night of separation'. Laylā and Majnūn were the famous lover and beloved of the epic story of Niẓāmī.
127. Codex 3 is missing *ān* [that].
128. Codex 2 is missing the following phrase, *darāvat va laṭāfat bakhshad, murdigān rā*.
129. Codex 2 is missing *rā*.
130. Reference to Baha'u'llah's passing, which had occurred only a few years prior to this tablet.

O spiritual friends! The luminous beauty [Baha'u'llah], the merciful teacher, the sun of resplendent light of the divine realm – may my spirit be a sacrifice to his Shrine and may my soul be forfeited for his servants – endured arrows, chains and the threat of the sword, and under chains and fetters he spent his days. For some time he was imprisoned and was continually a companion of torment and pain. One day he was banished to Iraq, and in another instant he was accused of discord on the tongue of all peoples. During the day he held the chalice of tribulation at the feast of calamities, and at night he was intoxicated and inebriated by the cup of oppression at the banquet of fidelity.

One year, he broke down the gates of the marketplace of sorrows, and for love's¹²¹ sake became the prisoner of every tormenter. Another time, his household was pillaged and plundered and he was dispossessed and rendered homeless throughout every realm and nation. <p. 14> At another period, like unto a candle he burnt in the lamp of exile, and another time, single and alone, he dwelt on high mountains and in the caves of Kurdistan with no companion or friend. For some period in Baghdad,¹²² he made his breast the target of the arrows of the enemy.

For years, in the face of the onslaught¹²³ of the people of enmity, like an impregnable and unassailable fortress, he endured alone. For some time he was an exile in the East, and some other times was expelled to the West. At one time he was in Bulgaria,¹²⁴ at another in Slavia.¹²⁵ Until at last, he was incarcerated in the Most Great Prison and deep captivity till his days ended, the Day of God was concluded, the sun of his countenance disappeared and the night of separation enveloped.¹²⁶ The faithful friends burnt in the fire of remorse and ignited the flame of regret.

In short, that¹²⁷ sun of divine unity endured every mighty suffering in grievous calamities, so that an assemblage of the impoverished could receive their [spiritual] sustenance, the dispersed be gathered, the depressed made joyous, the withered be refreshed and refined, the dead¹²⁸ resuscitated, the dispossessed be¹²⁹ lodged and accommodated, the destitute led to the treasure-house of spirit, and knowledge bestowed on the ignorant.

During this extended period, with the utmost kindness and supreme gentleness these souls were nurtured in the bosom of loving providence through the outpouring of grace, so that on the day of separation, we could arise with true fidelity and loyalty, gird up the loins of service and with efforts of heart and soul, close our eyes to all things, and become the manifestations of, 'Make my supplications, entreaties, and communes one prayer, and that in Thy service.'

Now while his sanctified garment is still warm and spotless, and the tender cushion fresh and adorning,¹³⁰ should we forget all his counsels and remain silent? Should we discard all his bounties and embark on the path of disobedience? And when we move, should we provoke a storm of division, provoke a fight with everyone, and rest on the couch of feather and silk while raising a hue and cry? Should we repose in the comfort of our veranda and complain of the harassment of the wronged ones? Should we do and say as we please, spreading [our complaints] throughout the world while from another direction raising the cry, 'Help! Help!' to high heaven? Is it not enough that we have not rendered any service; why should we also insult the temple of his Cause? Does it not suffice that we have

not extended any assistance; why should we take an axe to the root of his blessed tree as well?

O Lord, awaken us from the slumber of negligence and lead us from ignorance to awareness. Grant light to our eyes and bestow hearing on our ears. Confer a sense of equity and confirm a measure of faithfulness. Perchance the axe may be softened and the storm may be stilled.

Thou art the Powerful and the Almighty, and Thou art the Knower and the Wise.

'A. 'A.¹³¹

131. Codex 2 is missing 'Abdu'l-Baha's signature.

132. Codex 2 is missing *va* [and] connecting this sentence to the next.

133. Codex 2 has *chīzhāṭ* in place of *chīzhā*.

134. Codex 2 has *mīnimūdand* in place of *nimūdand*.

<p. 15> At all events, the point is that the intention of the party of the waverers is to portray certain shortcomings of this servant to others and to the public, thereby concealing the sins of their own wavering [in the Covenant], to divert all from the Straight Path and, assembling them around themselves, to raise the standard of dispute and establish the foundation of division.

For instance, consider from India what false accusations and heretical and blasphemous documents were attributed to Haji Muhammad Husayn, about which they wrote to Egypt until they made even your honoured self profoundly offended by him and you complained according to what you had heard in your first letters [to me].¹³² But then when, solely because of divine bounties, the aforementioned wronged Haji reached Egypt, you observed that [those talks about him] were calumnies, since in your recent letter, you wrote:

The honoured Haji Muhammad Husayn Isfahani arrived in Egypt from Bombay. With utmost attention I listened to his remarks. Not a single contrary word was heard from him. Why have some believers made their vocation writing exaggerations?

This servant of God has no desire but the unity of all believers upon the singular Word of God, steadfastness and constancy of all in the divine Covenant, and wishes no one's reputation to be degraded.

God, blessed and exalted is He, knows they have written things¹³³ that on hearing them, the mind is astonished and the heart is perturbed. Now contemplate their purpose in these fabrications. The falsehoods from India imitated the lies from 'Akka, and you realize that their intent was not to disparage the Haji; rather [their target] was this servant. Consider this as the basis and the truth of the events will become apparent. I only wish that they would have been satisfied with this!¹³⁴

I swear by the One True God! My breast is riddled with the arrows of fabrications and my heart is shredded in pieces by what is narrated [of me], such that if more arrows were to befall me, the subsequent arrows will break on their impact with the previous darts!

Consider: this servant [is prepared to] sacrifice himself for every one of the servants of the Blessed Beauty, and states and writes, 'May my spirit, my being, my essence, and my soul be sacrificed!' Despite this, they spread on tongues that this servant has laid claim to the highest ranks and positions – descriptions of which the pen refuses to convey. Nevertheless, the majority of the wavering souls have taken as a pretext and vehicle of their fickleness the expressions of humility, despondency, renunciation,

135. Codex 2 has *tazalzul* in place of *tanazzul*.
136. The two terms, *takfir* and *tafsiq*, mean to declare a person having heretical belief [*kufir*] or seditious intentions [*ffisq*].
137. Codex 2 has '*adab* after *mavārid*.

imploring, retrocession¹³⁵ and poverty of this servant, saying, 'He writes, "May my spirit be a sacrifice to the friends and to the dust of their feet!" and consequently how could he ['Abdu'l-Baha] be superior to anyone or be the Centre of the Covenant – an appointed Centre upon which the execution of the Kitāb-i Aqdas and the Kitāb-i 'Ahd are placed? Therefore, everyone is a peer and companion [to him], nay, indeed ranks above him.' Despite this, this servant also considers this station <p. 16> greater than his own rank.

At all events, O divine friends! In the Cause of God there are not and never shall be excommunication or condemnation,¹³⁶ nor is it permissible to silence or humiliate others. Do not argue with anyone nor engage in disputation. Do not wish any person's degradation, nor mention their name in fault. Do not seek anybody's loss and do not loosen your tongue to an unkind description of any man. Never backbite about any soul and do not lift the veil from anyone's deeds. So long as a soul expresses steadfastness, do not protest and do not disgrace him.

These very words should not be used by anyone as an instrument of hostility or objection. With steadfastness and constancy, [we can] uproot the base of wavering and by adherence and upholding [the Covenant we will] strengthen the foundation of God's religion. Leave the party of the waverers to themselves and refer them to the Lord of the Covenant and Testament, as He is the Living, the Ancient, the All-Mighty, the All-Powerful, and the Destroyer of the foundation of all conniving and scheming.

The verses of the Kitāb-i Aqdas, the Preserved Divine Tablet, shall not be abrogated and the Centre of God's Covenant will not stumble. The perspicuous standard will not be subverted. The star of the luminous morn will not fade away. The ocean of existence will not be severed from [divine] confirmations. The renowned sun will not remain behind thick clouds. The breeze of bounty will not be stilled and the portals of mercy will not be shut. The favours of the Abhā Beauty will not be lost and the fountain of the cool¹³⁷ and refreshing water will not be impeded.

Ere long the star of the Covenant will shine over horizons, and the sun of the Testament will radiate over the East and the West. The waverers will become regretful and remorseful and the party of haste will be dispersed and scattered.

This promise shall not be broken.
'A. 'A.

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نفسی نمانید و پرده از کار کسی بر ندارد بد تا نفسی اظهار شود و میماند
 تفرض مکتب و او را رسوا نماند و همین کلمات را نفسی و سبیل نزاع
 و اعتراض کنند بشیوت در سوخ بنیان ترزل و از بنیاد براندازند
 و بتسک و تثبیت اساس بر آید و بحکم نماند خوب شود و اجمال
 خوبتر گذارید و حواله بصاحب عهد و میثاق نمانید آن حق قدیم تو
 قدی راست و هادوم بنیان هر مکر و تدبیر نصوص کتاب قدس لوح محفوظ
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 جمال الهی منقود نکرد و مزار و عذیب فرات سائغ بار در شراب منقطع
 نشود عنقریب کویک میثاق اشراق بر افاق نماید و اقیاب عهد بر شرف
 و غرب بتابد اهل نور نادم و پشیمان گردند و خوب عجز و منتها
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