

Notes on some aspects of The Book of Certitude (*Kitáb-i-Íqán*) **

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Introduction

After His return from Kurdistan in March 1856, Bahá'u'lláh produced a large number of writings. The ability to write intuitively and incessantly, over a long period of time, using aesthetic language, was regarded by the Bábís (and not only by them), as a proof of inspiration. It was said that Bahá'u'lláh (as well as the Báb) could write six thousand verses in 24 hours, a book as big as the whole Qur'án. It should be remembered that in the cultures of the East, people were, and still are, enchanted by a display of an ability to use language artistically. The Arab poets from the times before Islam were regarded as no less heroes than the great warriors on the battlefield. The Prophet Muḥammad based His claim to prophecy solely on the eloquence and magnificent style of the Qur'án, which was His major (and traditionally, only) miracle. The great Iranian poets and writers were a source of veneration because of the display of their dexterity in the use of language.

The Bábís were no less enchanted by the language, which they regarded as a living entity, and by the Báb's great ability to use language unhindered. The fact that both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh showed their mastery of the pen in Persian as well as in Arabic, the latter being a foreign tongue for both of them, was regarded as an incontestable proof of Their Divine inspiration. This public conviction was consolidated by the contents of the Writings.

The early post-Kurdistan period can be characterized by two types of literary style. The first is the bursting poetic style, which many believe cannot be translated. It is the style in which Bahá'u'lláh chose to describe His religious experiences with the Maiden of Heaven, with the Names of God that became almost personified, with His own spiritual position, His suffering and His readiness for martyrdom. Special prayers that can be chanted belong to the same style, such as the Great Healing Prayer. Bahá'u'lláh made use of rhyme, rhythm and repeated verse. When His compositions, charged with mystical experience, enthusiasm and excitement, are read in the proper rhythm and melody, their influence on the listeners is overwhelming, almost hypnotic.

In the eyes of the Bahá'ís the beauty of these writings is beyond the apprehension of ordinary mortals and their chanting produces "an atmosphere of ecstasy and joy. It moves the

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heart and awakens a feeling of awe and excitement within the soul. No wonder that the companions of Bahá'u'lláh who chanted it [= Bahá'u'lláh's ode *az bagh-i-lláhá'í*, "From the Divine Garden"] in their gatherings were carried away into the realms of the spirit, completely oblivious of this world and all its people." (Taherzade 1996(1):219) *The Hidden Words*, written around 1858, represents this style of Bahá'u'lláh's poetic writing. (Ma'lúf 1997:37f.)

Bahá'u'lláh's other style is the non-ecstatic one. This is the style of most of His writings in Arabic as well as in Persian, though in these writings too there are parts with clear mystical character, and many expressions with hidden meanings, but understandable also to readers who are unfamiliar with 'ulamá' or Súfí terminology. Yet the easy flow of the words and sentences in *Kitáb-i-Iqán* represented something revolutionary within the Bábí community (turning Bahá'í) at the end of the 1850s and beginning of the 1860s. Here they met a religious literature, which was not only exciting but also clear and informative, expressing distinct, meaningful and complete teachings on fundamental issues of the Faith.

To the above a more general observation should be added regarding His writings: Before 1866, the year in which Bahá'u'lláh announced *publicly* that He Whom God shall make manifest was none else but He himself, His writings in general had a mystical nature, in which He proved His familiarity with the world of Súfí terms, thus in the *Qasídah warqá'iyah* (The poem of the dove) and *Haft wádí* (The Seven Valleys).

In this period, He made His attitude to some Súfí ideas clear, rejecting for instance the possibility of a human's complete disappearance or loss in God (*faná'*). On the contrary, He insisted on the inability of Man to achieve any direct knowledge of the Divine Essence, not to speak of the actual unity with the Divine Entity as the Súfís taught. (Goldziher 1925:153-157, esp. 155f.) Moreover, Bahá'u'lláh, unlike some of the Súfís who were ready to be somewhat lax in keeping some of the religious laws in favour of achieving the mystical "truth" (*haqiqah*), insisted on the obligation to keep the divine laws as taught by the successive prophets.

In the *Kitáb-i-Iqán* it is possible to observe the transformation in Bahá'u'lláh's writing from mysticism to moral and ethical issues. In this Book He describes the characteristics of the true seeker. These are not only "mystical inclinations and religious excitement," but more worldly things – moral behaviour such as practicing benevolence and charity, kindness (also to animals and even to the enemy) and refraining from holding any kind of weapon. It may be concluded that the issue of actual moral behaviour, that is closely connected to the spiritual search, is cardinal in Bahá'u'lláh's independent teachings, Later in *al-Kitáb al-Aqdas*, His great doctrinal work, the close relation between the spiritual search and the conduct of life in accordance with a prescribed set of laws, is regarded as the real goal of life. As we find in the Báb's teachings, so also in Bahá'u'lláh's works, beneath the

exterior words of the law there is always the deep true divine meaning, which can be reached if one is able to clear away the “veils” which prevent one from reaching the sources of the “crystal waters of the living fountain.” (*Aqdas*, 50) This idea and its implication in the history of religion and its centrality in the New Dispensation of the Báb is the major theme of *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, as will be discussed in some detail in what follows.

The Names

The name *Iqán*, for this book, the first detailed, programmatic manifesto of the new dispensation of the Báb to be completed by the author, Bahá'u'lláh, has a clear meaning and a clear message and a definite intention behind the word. Many other abstract nouns, both in Arabic and in Persian, no doubt could have expressed the word “certitude”. Bahá'u'lláh chose this particular word, so it seems, because of its Qur'anic connotation and context, as well as because of the use of derivations of the root y-q-n in traditional and mystical literature.

That this name for the Book was carefully chosen by its Author is a well-known fact. “In the early days this book was known as *Risáliy-i-khál* (Epistle to the Uncle) but later Bahá'u'lláh designated it as *Kitáb-i-Iqán*.” (Taherzade 1996(1):158)

“Epistle to the Uncle” (*Risáliy-i-khál*) is an obvious name for the book. Initially it was written as an answer to several questions directed by one of the Báb's maternal uncles to Bahá'u'lláh, concerning the Báb's claim. The Báb had three uncles. Hájjí Mírzá Sayyid 'Alí was the one who cared for the Báb after the death of His father, and was the first to recognize Him and to embrace His Faith. He dedicated his life to supporting his nephew and was martyred for his faith in Tihrán, becoming one of the Seven Martyrs of Tihrán executed publicly a few months before the martyrdom of the Báb. Hájjí Mírzá Sayyid 'Alí is known by the title of *Khál-i-A'zam* (the greatest uncle). The remaining two uncles were Hájjí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad, the eldest one, and his brother Hájjí Mírzá Hasan-'Alí. Sayyid Muḥammad recognized his nephew's special qualities, but was not convinced to accept Him as the centre of a new Dispensation. It was only after he had received the answers to his questions from Bahá'u'lláh in the form of the *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, that he was fully converted to the new faith and remained a faithful in the Báb's and later Bahá'u'lláh's message all his life.

It was in 1278/1862 that Hájjí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad and his brother Mírzá Hasan-'Alí arrived in Baghdád to meet Bahá'u'lláh, who had arrived there about a decade earlier, after release from His imprisonment in the Siyáh Elál and banishment to 'Iráq, then under Ottoman rule. The actual meeting took place only between Bahá'u'lláh and the older of the two uncles, Hájjí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad. The younger one, Mírzá Hasan-'Alí, refused to attend the meeting with Bahá'u'lláh and departed immediately for Yazd, leaving his

brother behind. Only many years later did he too accept the new Faith and remained a believer all his life. Meeting Bahá'u'lláh, Hájjí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad directed to him several questions concerning the nature and contents of the Báb's message. The most pronounced question related to the fact that the known traditions about the Promised One, the Qá'im of Islam, describe signs and circumstances, which seem to be missing in the case of the Báb. Bahá'u'lláh asked the Báb's uncle to prepare a list of questions that troubled him. Having received the list, Bahá'u'lláh in a span of two days and two nights wrote a book of some two hundred pages, which is far more than just answers to questions. It is a systematic doctrinal work, a major theological opus which puts the Báb's revelation, and basically Bahá'u'lláh's own Dispensation, in the historical context of the system of the Universal Divine Revelation, formalizing the concept of Progressive Revelation and elucidating the idea of the true meaning behind the external appearance of the Scriptures (mainly the Qur'án) and tradition.

Formally, so to speak, the title of *Risáliy-i-khál* is fitting for this book, but such a name does not convey the real nature of the work, which the Bahá'ís rightly regard as second only to *al-Kitáb al-Aqdas*. It is no wonder that later, "Bahá'u'lláh designated it as the *Kitáb-i-Iqán*."

As hinted above, the word *iqán* (or its derivatives) has a special meaning in Arabic, in Qur'anic literature and in tradition. In the Qur'án we find verbs of the same root as *iqán* used to denote deep conviction. Thus, in *súrah* 2, verses 1-3, when Muḥammad speaks about His Book, He describes it as "the Book in which there is no doubt ... guidance for those who act piously ... who believe in what has been sent down to thee, and what has been sent down before thy time, and in the Hereafter are *convinced* (*yúqínún*)."¹ (Bell's translation; cf. Q, 27:3, 31:4, 43:3, 20)

The word for "certainty" in the Qur'án and elsewhere is the word *yaqín*. It denotes something that suffers no doubt whatsoever. Thus the Prophet is encouraged to continue His work in spite of the difficulties that face Him: "And serve thy Lord until there comes to thee the certainty." (Q, 15:99) In other verses the Qur'án speaks about "the truth of the certainty" (*ḥaqq al-yaqín*. Q, 56:95) to denote a faith which is beyond any question and doubt. In one verse in particular the Prophet refers to His Revelation as "the truth of the certainty," saying that "it is a reminder to those who show pity ... verily it is grief to the unbelievers. But it is the Truth of the Certainty." (Q, 69:48-51)

A very famous Islamic tradition records a meeting that allegedly took place between Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor, and Abú Sufyán, the leader of Mecca before Islam, in which the former questions the latter about the Prophet Muḥammad, of whom the emperor had already heard. The tradition belongs to the repertoire of stories about the Prophet aiming at proving that all the signs about His appearance had been known to all adherents of the

former monotheistic religions, namely the Jews and the Christians, and that these signs were recorded in the Bible. According to this tradition, Heraclius, who is presented as being well acquainted with the Scriptures as well as a great astrologer, having been satisfied with Abú Sufyán's answers, confirmed that Muḥammad was indeed the Promised One of the Bible. Abú Sufyán, upon hearing the emperor's verdict, said: "I remained certain (*muqín*) that the cause of the Messenger of God shall be manifest (*yazhar*), until God imbued me with Islam." (Muslim, *Jihád*, 26 = Siddiqi's translation, 1972:971; Bukhári, *Sahih, Bad' al-Wahí*, 6) It is hardly possible that Bahá'u'lláh was unaware of this very famous *hadith*, and many other similar traditions, which had the sole aim of showing that the "People of the Book" and their ancient scriptures contained the clear signs which confirmed Muḥammad's mission and His being the true Messenger of God.

It is, therefore, not a coincidence that in the *Iqán* this is probably the major theme of at least the first part of the book, in which Bahá'u'lláh explains the nature of the proof of any new Dispensation, emphasizing the need to recognize such proofs and signs by proper understanding and interpretation.

The abstract noun *yaqín* and its verbal derivations refer in the texts to deep convictions, certainty or certitude. Its connection with the word *haqq*, the truth, strengthens this meaning. A story relating to Abraham, which contains the expression *haqq al-yaqín*, the true certainty or the absolute certitude, is recorded by the Jerusalemite geographer al-Muqaddasí (c. 985). Speaking about a place to the south of Hebron, from where Abraham could see Sodom and Gomorrah – "the cities of Lot" – destroyed, Muqaddasí writes: "It is related that when Abraham first saw from here the cities of Lot in the air, he lay himself down, saying: 'Verily, now bear witness, for the Word of the Lord is certain.'" (Muqaddasí 1906:173; translation: Le Strange 1890:552, Ranking and Azoo 1897:283)

The choice of the name *Kitáb-i-Iqán* – *The Book of Certitude* – for *Risáliy-i-khál*, written with the aim of establishing certainty and invoking certitude was therefore most appropriate, especially when one bears in mind that the book was written, after all, by a Muslim to a Muslim, or more exactly to *Muslims*. This fact is not only reflected by the name chosen for the book, but also by its entire contents.

Kitáb-i-Iqán in context, an overview

Let us now turn to examine the position that *Kitáb-i-Iqán* occupies in relation to the other literary works of Bahá'u'lláh, and in the context of Bahá'í theological thought. A related question involves the dialogue that this book conducts with the former scriptures; in other words, what is the scriptural past that Bahá'u'lláh invokes as a reference during the development of His doctrinal structure?

Let us begin by stating that for the Bahá'í Faithful, "The *Kitáb-i-Iqán* is like an ocean. It contains the innermost reality of religion, and its depths are unfathomable. One may read it many times, yet each time new truths and new visions manifest themselves before the eye." (Taherzade 1996(1): 197) For the non-Bahá'í, this may look like an exaggerated conclusion stemming from deep conviction and enthusiastic devotion. A Jew or a Christian may question the whole idea of progressive revelation. (A Jew may question the initial idea of universal revelation altogether.) The fact that most of the proofs are quoted from the Qur'án means a great deal to the Muslim, but has no value whatsoever in the eyes of the Christian or the Jew. Bahá'u'lláh's system of introspective, symbolic and even esoteric interpretation of scriptural texts would not necessarily be accepted unreservedly by the non-believer. The eye of the believer and the heart of the Faithful are needed to appreciate the *Iqán* properly. It is in this context that the words of Bahá'u'lláh in the *Iqán* acquire their full meaning:

"The heart must need therefore be cleansed from the idle sayings of man, and sanctified from every earthly reflection, so that it may discover the hidden meaning of divine inspiration, and become the treasury of the mysteries of divine knowledge." (*Iqán*, para. 77, in Dunbar 1998:4)

When these are the conditions, it is not surprising to read the following statement:

"The eminent Bahá'í scholar Mírzá Abú 'l-Fadl recounted to 'Alí Kulí Khan that he had read the *Iqán* 'with the eye of the intellect' seventeen times through, and it had seemed to him a meaningless string of words. That later, he had read it with the 'eye of faith,' and had found the key with which he could unlock the secrets of all the sacred books of past religions." (Dunbar, *loc. cit.*)

With respect, there is much exaggeration in both parts of Abú 'l-Fadl's statement. First, because even with the "eye of the intellect" and even for a non-believing scholar, the *Iqán* is far from being "a meaningless string of words." The trained eye cannot miss its value for understanding the doctrines developed by its Writer. Second, "all" the sacred books of the past were surely beyond the "unlocking" ability of Gulpaygání, if only for the simple reason that most of them were unknown and inaccessible to him.

At this junction one point must be made clear: The *Kitáb-i-Iqán* is written in clear prose, and on the whole is not difficult to understand, with the "eye of the intellect." The non-Bahá'í reader might not share the Bahá'í enthusiasm, but this is not the point at all. The aim of the student of any religion is not to criticise the contents of the religion, but to learn about it and understand its teachings. And it is with this aim in mind that we should approach the *Kitáb-i-Iqán*.

Following this guideline, the description of the *Iqán* by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, acquires a special significance, particularly because it comes from the

pen of the translator and the authoritative interpreter of writing of his grand-father and great-grandfather. It was only natural that Huper Dunbar began his *Companion to the Study of the Kitáb-i-Iqán* with the Guardian's description of the book.

Shoghi Effendi's description

After mentioning in a few sentences the historical circumstances of the composition of the *Iqán*, Shoghi Effendi describes its form and its contents. Beginning with analysing the literary style of the book, he wrote that it was "A model of Persian prose, of a style at once original, chaste and vigorous, and remarkably lucid, both cogent in argument and matchless in its irresistible eloquence."

From here the Guardian moves to describing the contents of the book, presenting it without doubt as a major doctrinal document of the Bábí-Bahá'í Faith. The book should be regarded as "setting forth in outline the Grand Redemptive scheme of God," being second only to *al-Kitáb al-Aqdas* within the range of the whole literary product of Bahá'u'lláh. After these introductory remarks, Shoghi Effendi proceeds to analyse in a concise yet very clear fashion the various themes of the book forming the core of Bahá'u'lláh's theological structure. These are as follows:

1. The concept of the Divine Being.
 - (i) God exists, He is One, He is a personal god.
 - (ii) He is Unknowable, inaccessible, omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent.
 - (iii) He is the source of Revelation.
2. The unity of religions and Prophetic Messages.
 - (i) The book asserts the relativity of religious truth.
 - (ii) Proves the continuity of Divine Revelation.
 - (iii) "Affirms the unity of the Prophets, and the universality of their message, the identity of their fundamental teachings, the sanctity of their scriptures and the twofold character of their station."
3. Attitude to the religious divines.

It denounces the blindness and perversity of the divines and doctors of every age, who insisted on holding to the dead letter and remained blind to the true and symbolic meaning of the word of God.
4. Elucidation of former Revelations.

Cites and explains the allegorical meanings of passages in the New Testament and verses from the Qur'án, as well as cryptic Muslim traditions “which have bred those long-age misunderstandings, doubts and animosities that have sundered and kept apart the world’s leading religious systems.”

5. The Báb’s Revelation.

The book “demonstrates the validity and the sublimity of the Báb’s Revelation, showing that it was preceded by the same signs which had preceded the former true Revelations ... foreshadows and prophesies the world-wide triumph of the Revelation promised to the people of the Bayán.”

6. The Báb’s disciples.

The heroism and detachment of the Báb’s disciples are acclaimed.

7. The Virgin Mary and the Imáms.

Similarly to the Islamic tradition and the Qur'án, the *Iqán* too “upholds the purity and innocence of the Virgin Mary and glorifies the Imáms,” emphasizing especially the greatness of the martyrdom of the Imám Husayn and lauding his spiritual sovereignty.

8. Symbolism.

It teaches the true meaning of such symbolic terms as “Return,” “Resurrection,” “Seal of the Prophets” and “Day of Judgment.”

9. The Divine Revelation.

It establishes and explains the three stages of the divine revelations:

- (i) The universal revelation of God, namely the manifestation of the attributes and Names of God in the whole creation and in every single part of it: “every atom enshrines the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that most great light.” (*Iqán*, para. 107, quoted by Dunbar 1998:182)
- (ii) The Specific Revelation (*tajallí kháss*): “This revelation is confined to the innermost essence, unto which no man can attain.” (*Iqán*, para. 150; Dunbar, *loc. cit.*)
- (iii) The Secondary Revelation of God (*tajallí thání* lit. “second revelation”): “Such revelation is confined to His prophets and Chosen Ones, inasmuch that none mightier than they hath come to exist in the world of being.” (*Iqán*, para. 151; Dunbar, *loc. cit.*)

It is clear that man can be aware of the two types of revelation: The Universal one which he can *understand* and admire by just watching creation, and the second or secondary ones, which are the Manifestations of God and the outpouring of the Divine Grace through them. (Rationally, only the impossibility of attaining to the second type of manifestation can be understood.)

10. The City of God.

The book “expatiates, in glowing terms, upon the glories and wonders of the ‘City of God,’ renewed at fixed intervals, by the dispensation of Providence, for the guidance, the benefit and salvation of all mankind.” The “City of God” is the term that Bahá’u’lláh uses to describe the Manifestation and the Manifestation period. Each Manifestation constitutes the renewal of the “City of God.” Bahá’u’lláh fixed in more than one place the approximate period of a thousand years between one “City of God” and the other. (cf. Dunbar 1998:166)

The Iqán and previous scriptures

As mentioned above, the Iqán was written by a Muslim to a Muslim. The major aim of the book, to prove the truth, validity, revelation and Divine origin of the New Revelation of the Báb and His Divine Station is reached by constant reference to former scriptural evidences. Both He and the recipients of His book are familiar with the Qur’án, and even if Bahá’u’llah were equally familiar with both the Old and the New Testament, too many references to these two pre- Qur’anic scriptures would have a much smaller impact than the quotations from the Qur’án and the Islamic tradition as well as the sayings of the Imám’s, especially the Imám `Ali, and the Sixth Imám as-Sādiq.(died AD 765(

It was not only because Hajjí Mírzá Sayyid Muḥammad was a Shí’ite Muslim, but because as a Muslim he would regard the Qur’án as possessing a much higher authority than the Old and New Testaments. In the eyes of a Muslim, Muḥammad’s message is after all the most perfect of all revelations, and if one has the original, he may say, why would one need the imperfect copies? .

Quotations from former revelations and references to the former prophets as proofs for later revelations is an accepted practice in both Christianity and Islam. The heart of the New Testament arguments about the Messianic station of Jesus, as well as about His Sonship and the Virgin Birth are based on the interpretation of verses from the Old Testament. The texts of the Old Testament are the solid foundation on which the whole superstructure of Christianity stands. In other words, there is no New Testament without the Old Testament.

The Qur'án is full of references to the Tawrát (Old Testament) and the Injíl (New Testament) as the uncontested proofs for Muhammad's Prophecy. Islamic tradition even made a great effort to prove that Muhammad's name is indicated in these pre-Islamic scriptures, and His Mission upheld by Jewish Rabbis as well as by Christian Monks, (The Life of Muhammad 1968:90-95; cf. Lamden, 1997:76 cf.) It is therefore, not surprising that Bahá'u'lláh uses the same method of proof in the Iqán. Bahá'u'lláh however, used a different method in His interpretation of the former scriptures than the one used by His predecessors. The texts of the New Testament and the Qur'án are not taken literally, but rather given new a meaning by an elaborate symbolic interpretation which give them relevance and reasonable meaning.

To cite one example which reflects this system of interpretation and relates to the whole doctrine of Bahá'u'lláh, let us see how He deals with Q,5:67. The verse is an attack of Muhammad on the Jews :“The hand of God, say the Jews, is chained-up. Chained up be their own hands! And for that which they have said, they were accursed. Nay outstretched are both His hands.” Unlike Muslim commentators, who understood the verse only according to the literal meaning of the words, Bahá'u'lláh gives it a completely new meaning. The Jews meant to say that after Moses there can be no other Prophet and no other revelation. This is what they meant by “the hand of God is chained-up.” Bahá'u'lláh asks :“How can He be conceived as powerless to raise up yet another Messenger after Moses? Behold the absurdity of their saying; how far it hath strayed from the path of knowledge and understanding!” Then immediately Bahá'u'lláh reaches His real intention in quoting the verse. His debate is not with the Jews but with the Muslim divines of His time or rather with all those Muslims who for more than a thousand years were accusing the Jews of something which they themselves were doing all the time, saying that God cannot send any prophet after Muhammad.

For over a thousand years, they have been citing this verse, and unwittingly pronouncing their censure against the Jews, utterly unaware that they themselves openly and privily, are voicing sentiments and beliefs of the Jewish People! Thou art surely aware of their contention, that all Revelation is ended, that the portals of Divine mercy are closed, that from the Day-spring of eternal holiness no sun shall rise again ...and that out of the tabernacle of ancient glory the Messenger of God have ceased to be made manifest. Such is the measure of understanding of these small-minded, contemptible people.”

It is clear that Bahá'u'lláh means the divines of His time, who not only believed in the inability of God to send Messengers after Muhammad, but also were active in fighting against the new Manifestation. “From every side they have risen and girded up the loins of tyranny and exerted the utmost endeavour to quench with the bitter waters of their vain fancy the flame of God's Burning Bush.” By following this path they prevented themselves from enjoying the bounties of the New Manifestation:

“The utter destitution into which these people have fallen doth surely suffice them,

inasmuch as they have been deprived of the recognition of the essential purpose and the knowledge of the Mystery and substance of the Cause of God. For the highest and the most excelling grace bestowed upon men is the grace of ‘Attaining unto the Presence of God’ and His recognition, which has been promised unto all people.” (All quotations, Iqán, par. 147, 1983:135-138)

In following this line of interpretation throughout the whole Kitáb-i-Iqán, the Qur’án and the New Testament are intergrated into the Báb dispensation. It is still interesting to point out the scriptural material used by Bahá’u’lláh. There is no reference to Old Testament texts at all. Even the one reference which Shoghi Effendi regards as a quotation from Isaiah 65:25, is actually not a quotation; and Bahá’u’lláh in the Iqán refers to it in these words : “This is the meaning of the famous hadith which says that a wolf and a sheep will eat and drink from one place.”

The verse in Isaiah reads: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together” (Isiah 65:25). Bahá’u’lláh most probably refers to a Muslim hadith. (Ibn Hanbal, Musnad (2), 406, 437, 483 – I wish to thank Mrs. Leigh Chipman for this reference).

In the Kitáb-i-Iqán therefore, there is not even one reference to an Old Testament text; there are some 13 quotations from the New Testament, 6 from Matthew one from Mark, 2 from Luke, and 3 from John. Nothing is quoted from Acts or from the Books outside the four Gospels, this in comparison to 140 quotations from the Qur’án.

It is interesting however, that Bahá’u’lláh dealt in great length with one quotation from the New Testament, Matthew 24: 29-31. The verses speak about the circumstances surrounding the appearance of the “Son of Man” in heaven “coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory,” when the sun shall be darkened, “and the stars shall fall from the heaven,” These verses, which seem to speak about a series of miracles and change in the order of nature, enable Bahá’u’lláh to use to the utmost His system of interpretation .

He puts these verses not in the far future, as they appear in the Gospel, but in the past referring to the Manifestation of Jesus. He shows that all the vivid descriptions have a symbolic meaning, which are accessible only to those who clean their heart and mind “of all that is earthly,” and “from vain imaginings.” (Iqán para. 1, p.3). Only then they will be able to grasp the true message of the Gospel’s verses. Only then all the supposedly physical appearances which are described in the text will gain their true spiritual meaning. The interpretation of Matthew’s verses occupy no less than 5 long paragraphs in the Iqán and are in fact the main theme of the first part of the Book.

The Qur’án is, however, the real hero of the Iqán and Muhammad is the venerated predecessor of the New Dispensation. After all, it was against the firm Islamic belief in the idea of the “Seal of the Prophets” that Bahá’u’lláh had to fight. By beautifully developing the

theme of “the first being last” and “last being first” Bahá’u’lláh shows that the idea of the “seal of prophets” is applicable to all the prophets, who are all one and the same. All the prophets are the same Manifestation and each one of them is the first and the last in His own time. This includes the New Manifestation whose cause Bahá’u’lláh was to uphold. “Hath not Muhammad Himself declared: “I am all the Prophets?” (Iqán, 1985:162)

Summary

Throughout the whole Kitáb-i-Iqán Bahá’u’lláh follows one major theme: the Manifestations of God appear in such circumstances which can easily be detected if one can read properly the former prophecies, and apply them to the time of the appearance of the Manifestation. Unfortunately, in all ages, the divines, under whichever name they appeared, were blinded, or veiled away from attaining to the truth by the external appearances of traditions, and interpretations of verses. These are “veils of glory,” the verbal covers, the literary meanings which prevented the divines, and through them their adherents, from enjoying the flow of the Divine grace which was offered through the ministry of every New Manifestation.

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