

The Style of the  
**Kitáb-i-Aqdas**

ASPECTS OF THE SUBLIME

by  
Suheil Bushrui

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Dedicated to the memory of  
Muḥammad ‘Ali Faiẓí  
Distinguished Bahá’í teacher and scholar

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## FOREWORD\*

LIKE MOST OF the world's major religions, the Bahá'í Faith has at its centre a sacred text which enjoins upon the believer a code of laws regulating his relationship to the world around him, to his fellow human beings, and to God. That text is the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book. Among the unique features of the Bahá'í Faith is that reliable transcriptions of its sacred texts were produced under the supervision of their Author, rendering their authenticity beyond doubt. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas is no exception, having been transcribed on several occasions during the lifetime of Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

To understand the Kitáb-i-Aqdas fully, it is necessary to consider the historical and cultural background to its revelation, especially the events of the decade beginning in 1863. In this year Bahá'u'lláh, the Founder of the Bahá'í Faith, declared Himself to be the latest Messenger of God to humankind, the Promised One of all ages, Whose advent had been proclaimed by His Predecessor, the Báb, and dramatically depicted in the Holy Scriptures of earlier religions. This momentous declaration, made before a group of His most intimate associates in the Riqdán Garden on an island in the River Tigris, is today celebrated by

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\* For definitions of Arabic terms cited, I have relied on the following dictionaries: Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisán al-'Arab* (Beirut, 1956); Al-Fayrúẓ-ábádí, *Al-Qámús al-Muḥíṭ* (Cairo, 1954); Al-Zabídí, *Táj al-'Arús min Jawáhir al-Qámús* (Kuwait, 1965); Buṭros al-Bustání, *Muḥíṭ al-Muḥíṭ* (Beirut, 1870); Ḥasan al-Karmi, *al-Hádí* (Beirut, 1991).

Bahá'ís around the world in the most important of Bahá'í festivals, the Feast of Riḍván, extending from April 21 to May 2.

In 1867, Bahá'u'lláh inaugurated the public world-wide proclamation of His message by despatching the first in a series of Epistles to the kings and rulers of the world. Among the most majestic and commanding sections of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, revealed barely a decade after the Riḍván declaration, is an extended passage also addressed to the crowned heads of the world. In it, Bahá'u'lláh declares Himself to be the "King of Kings," the "sovereign Lord of all," and the "Desire of all nations," and bids those who are but the "emblems of His sovereignty" to "forsake [their] palaces" and hasten "to gain admittance into His Kingdom." His mission is not to "lay hands on [their] kingdoms" but rather to "seize and possess the hearts of men."<sup>1</sup>

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh proclaims in ringing tones both the advent of the "Day of God" and the revelation of the "Most Great Law." Near the beginning of the book, He affirms the paramount importance of His laws and ordinances, "the lamps of My loving providence among my servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures," to His grand redemptive purpose for humankind. It is to the task of delineating the salient features of this "Most Great Law," this "unique [and] wondrous System," this "new World Order" that the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is primarily devoted.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1992), K82, p. 49; K103, p. 57; K82, p. 49; K83, p. 50; K83, p. 49. All translated quotations are taken from the above text, which is numbered throughout by paragraph ('K' refers in each case to the appropriate paragraph number).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, K81, p. 49; K88, p. 52; K3, p. 20; K183, p. 86; K181, p. 85.

Throughout the history of human civilization, the enactment of laws has been recognized as fundamental to the organization of a just and humane society. From the Code of Hammurabi to Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois*, laws have been regarded as enshrining the most cherished values and beliefs of those who frame them, serving to protect the rights and prescribe the responsibilities of the citizen, and to facilitate the relationship between the individual and the state. Even Plato, having depicted the ideal polity in his *Republic*, felt constrained to write a more detailed account of its actual judicial structures in order to ensure its workability. The Norsemen of the ninth and tenth centuries, far from being the lawless freebooters of the popular imagination, had such respect for the law that the proceedings of the 'Thing' (assembly) always opened with an obligatory recital of their code of law from start to finish. Many of the most influential writers during the period of the French Revolution, as well as those who tried to put their ideas into practice, had a legal training, as did Goethe, whose polymathic interests ranged across the breadth of western culture and science to Persian poetry and eastern religion and philosophy.

Law not only furnishes a society with concrete guidance on daily life and dealings with others, but also provides a core for the development in that society of a rich and humane scholarly tradition built around the exposition of the law. The same is true in religions, where the importance of law is greatly reinforced by the belief that it represents an expression of God's will for His creatures, while its observance is accounted a mark of righteousness in the believer. With or without this directly religious sanction, however, laws provide fixed points of reference and a source of underlying stability for

communities during periods of social and political upheaval.

It was during just such a period in history that the Kitáb-i-Aqdas was revealed. By the second half of the nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire, which included the prison city of 'Akká where Bahá'u'lláh was for long confined, had entered upon a period of rapid decline. A major factor in this decline was the ethnic and religious conflict in European territories such as Greece, Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria, where new states were asserting their independence and struggling to break away from Ottoman hegemony. The storm clouds were gathering that would eventually engulf the world in the tempest of the Great War, precipitating the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in the process. It was a moment of stern crisis in human affairs that, paradoxically, provided the setting for the revelation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh's Charter for a new civilization.

Bahá'u'lláh's ministry is marked by a progression of interweaving calamities and triumphs, culminating in the final ascendancy of His Faith and teachings over the combined destructive forces of His persecutors and opponents. It was in a dark and pestilential prison, surrounded by convicted felons and under almost unbearably oppressive conditions, that He received the first intimations of His world-redeeming mission some twenty years before the revelation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. "During the days I lay in the prison of Tīhrán," He records, "though the galling weight of the chains and the stench-filled air allowed Me but little sleep, still in those infrequent moments of slumber I felt as if something flowed from the crown of My head over My breast, even as a mighty torrent that precipitateth itself upon the earth from the summit of a lofty mountain. Every limb of My body would, as a result,

be set afire. At such moments My tongue recited what no man could bear to hear."<sup>3</sup>

Several months later Bahá'u'lláh was exiled from His homeland to Baghdád where, in spite of the inauspicious circumstances of His arrival, He gradually attracted the notice of the local clergymen, government officials and eventually townspeople, winning through the regal dignity of His demeanour, the innate radiance of His character, the seemingly inexhaustible fund of His knowledge, and the love He lavished on all He met, their heartfelt loyalty, respect and admiration. After ten years in Baghdád, on the eve of His declaration in the Riḍván Garden prior to leaving that city, He was surrounded by a grieving multitude of well-wishers who would scarcely consent to let him go. This period in Baghdád also witnessed the revelation of some of the most significant of His Works, especially notable among which are *The Hidden Words*, a series of aphoristic utterances epitomizing the 'inner essence' of the ethical teachings of past religions, and the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (The Book of Certitude), described by its translator as "of unsurpassed pre-eminence among the writings of the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation."<sup>4</sup> In the latter book, Bahá'u'lláh propounds the concept of the continuity of Divine Revelation, affirming that the Divine Manifestations such as Abraham, Jesus and Muḥammad are one in essence, and demonstrating how the eschatological passages of previous scriptures may be accorded metaphorical interpretations.

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<sup>3</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988), p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990), p. 3; Preface by Shoghi Effendi in Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), p. 2.

During this same period He also succeeded in substantially restoring the fortunes and unity of the scattered and demoralized Bábí community, of which He was at that time the leading member, if not the titular head. Nevertheless, the growing tide of respect and veneration for Bahá'u'lláh caused consternation in the Persian government, whose representations at the Sublime Porte resulted in further exiles, first to Constantinople and then, in December 1863, to Adrianople (Edirne).

By now Bahá'u'lláh had won the acceptance of the majority of the Bábí community as the Promised One Whose advent had been foretold by the Báb. This done, He addressed Himself, towards the end of the period of His sojourn in Adrianople, to the task of proclaiming His mission to the world at large, thereby inaugurating the next major phase in the progressive unfoldment of His mission. His chosen medium was, as noted, a series of weighty Epistles addressed both collectively and individually to the kings and rulers of the earth, including Napoleon III, Queen Victoria, Kaiser Wilhelm I, Tsar Alexander II, the Austrian Emperor Franz Josef, the Ottoman Sultan 'Abdu'l-'Azíz and the Qájár Monarch Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh. In majestic and commanding tones, yet with all due decorum and respect befitting the rank of kingship, He called upon them to set aside their differences, to work towards peace and unity, to establish practical mechanisms for the resolution of disputes amongst nations, and to do all in their power to facilitate fruitful interchange between peoples. Bahá'u'lláh addressed similar messages to the ecclesiastics of both Christendom and Islám, challenging them to consider dispassionately His claims, and urging them to rise to the challenge of the hour and accept their full measure of responsibility as spiritual mentors of their communities. Again, the calam-

ity of banishment had proved but the harbinger of a fresh triumph for Bahá'u'lláh—the proclamation of His infant Faith on a heretofore unprecedented scale. With the passage of time these messages, largely rejected by their recipients, have proved but too true in their prophetic admonitions and warnings, notably those foreshadowing the fall from power of Napoleon III in France and the occurrence of widespread bloodshed in Germany.

Even as this mighty proclamation was being blazoned to the world, plots were being hatched to bring about the third and final banishment in Bahá'u'lláh's ministry, this time to the "Most Great Prison" of 'Akká. For a number of years He and His followers were kept there in strict confinement, subjected to galling deprivations, and exposed to the contempt and mockery of the guards and populace alike. Yet this new and seemingly crippling adversity, compounded in its early stages by the tragic death of Bahá'u'lláh's second son, was once again the prelude to a period of marvellous fecundity. As the rigours of His confinement lessened, Bahá'u'lláh was progressively able to devote Himself to the elaboration of the true nature of His mission, a task He fulfilled in a ceaseless stream of Tablets, pre-eminent among which stands the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, revealed approximately five years after His arrival in 'Akká.

The revelation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas may thus be seen as marking the inauguration of the third and final phase in the unfoldment of Bahá'u'lláh's mission. His identity as the Promised One of the Bayán and of all past religions had been disclosed and accepted by the greater part of the Bábí community; the tidings of His mission had been publicly proclaimed far beyond the confines of that community to those whose exalted rank best qualified them to convey it to humanity at large; and now the warp



and woof of His newborn Cause, its practical implications for the individual believer, for society, and for the world at large, were elaborated in a document constituting the blueprint of a revolutionary new world order, designed to usher in a golden age of human civilization and to herald the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

In general terms, the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas may be said to fall within five different categories: those prescribing religious and personal observances and duties such as prayer, fasting and pilgrimage; those regulating matters of personal status such as marriage, divorce and death; those prohibiting certain wrongful actions and defining penalties for their commission; those providing for the new social structures of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order through the establishment of such institutions as the House of Justice and the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*; and those imparting general spiritual counsels such as may be found in the sacred Scriptures of the other great world religions. Within this broad categorization there is inevitably a degree of overlap; although the marriage laws, for instance, are centred on the bride and groom, they have a broader social impact in that they aim to preserve unity both within and between families. The rules of intestate succession, likewise, have a clear bearing on social organization since they contain certain stipulations for the replenishment of the public treasury from the shares of 'absent heirs'.

Although the Kitáb-i-Aqdas clearly addresses in the first instance a particular set of cultural circumstances, presuming the reader to possess a sound command of Arabic and to be intimately familiar with the Qur'án, the Islamic Shari'ah, and the Writings of the Báb, its scope is plainly and avowedly universal, as may be gathered from such provisions as that enjoining the establishment of a

House of Justice in every city, and that calling upon the "members of parliaments throughout the world" to select a single language and a single script "for the use of all on earth."<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly the rationale behind certain enactments may be better apprehended when viewed against the background of the particular practices they are intended to address, but such specific references and associations no more affect the ultimately global relevance of the Book than do the many references in the Gospel to Jewish scripture and observances. The abrogation of slavery in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, though it may profitably be contrasted with the situation existing under the Islamic and other religious traditions, nevertheless stands on its own as constituting an authoritative and universal declaration of the sacred and inviolable right to individual liberty and the preservation of human dignity: "It is not for him who is himself a servant to buy another of God's servants."<sup>6</sup>

A comparative study of the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and those of the Bayán offers illuminating insights into the nature of the complex and mysterious interrelation between the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and elsewhere, Bahá'u'lláh explains that the laws of the Bayán were revealed with the specific intention of relieving the Promised One of the need Himself to elaborate a code of laws, albeit they were made subject to, and contingent upon, His sanction and approval. Accordingly, some of these laws were adopted by Bahá'u'lláh, some accepted with modification, others rejected outright. For example, the Báb's law requiring the consent of both parties to a marriage has been accepted with the additional require-

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<sup>5</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K189, p. 88.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, K72, p. 45.

ment of the consent of the couple's parents. On the other hand, the fine of 19 *mithqáls* of gold for "anyone who was the cause of sadness to another" has been explicitly abrogated in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.<sup>7</sup> At one point in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Báb is even represented as calling upon the Promised One to modify a particular facet of a law that had been previously prescribed in the Bayán. Throughout the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, in fact, an impression is conveyed of its laws having emerged as the result of a kind of dialectic process between the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas was first published during the lifetime of Bahá'u'lláh in a lithographed edition as part of a larger compilation of His Writings (Bombay 1890-91), and again during the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a printed version of this same edition (Bombay 1896-97). However, despite the appearance of various manuscript transcriptions and non-Bahá'í editions of the Work since 1873, it has not hitherto been freely and generally available to Bahá'ís. This was not out of any desire or purpose to conceal its contents from either the Bahá'í community or the world at large, but in keeping with Bahá'u'lláh's own counsel that the provisions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas should be implemented only with discretion and when prevailing conditions permitted. For many years those who succeeded Bahá'u'lláh as Head of the Bahá'í Faith—'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of the Covenant, and later Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Cause—felt that the embryonic state of the Bahá'í community's development did not as yet warrant the formal release of the book in its entirety to the believers. Nevertheless, extensive passages from it were available in both hemispheres

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, K148, p. 73.

for many years, and the complete text was always easily obtainable from a variety of sources.

It was not until the year 1953 that Shoghi Effendi took the first step towards producing a full translation of the Book, announcing his intention to prepare a synopsis and codification of its provisions as one of the goals of his worldwide Ten-Year Crusade spanning the years 1953-63. His passing in 1957 supervened before he was able to complete this task, but work on the project was resumed by the newly-elected Universal House of Justice as part of its Nine-Year Plan (1964-73). With the aid of the substantial body of notes Shoghi Effendi had left, the Universal House of Justice published in 1973 a volume comprising not only the synopsis and codification itself, but also a selection of passages from the Kitáb-i-Aqdas translated by the Guardian, together with a preface, an introduction, and some explanatory notes and references. Finally, a full English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, accompanied by copious annotations, a number of supplementary texts, a brief glossary, and the previously published synopsis and codification, as well as a preface, introduction, and description of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas taken from Shoghi Effendi's *God Passes By*, was published in 1992, in fulfillment of one of the goals of the Six-Year Plan spanning the years 1986-92.

Schematic in character, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is a summary of "matters which constitute the foundation of the law of God."<sup>8</sup> Tablets subsequently revealed by Bahá'u'lláh flesh out these laws in some respects, but during His lifetime He made it clear that an element of flexibility was desirable in their formulation. The task both of elaborating the legislative principles established in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

and elsewhere, and of determining precisely how they should be applied in practice, He explained, would in time devolve upon the Universal House of Justice, which would be empowered to modify or rescind its own legislation in accordance with the particular exigencies of each age. The seminal and thematic approach of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and its terse encapsulation of whole areas of jurisprudential inquiry, defining the spirit rather than the letter of the law, are guarantees of its flexibility and will ensure the enduring applicability of its provisions far into the future. In view of its character as sacred sculpture, however, the actual text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is not open to modification, for Bahá'ís believe that the Divine Law brought by a Manifestation of God may be rescinded only by another Manifestation of God. By ruling out the possibility of this occurring before the expiry of a full thousand years, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas reaffirms by implication the basic Bahá'í belief in progressive Revelation.

Quite apart from its unique position in Bahá'í literature, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is also noteworthy from a purely secular point of view for the prodigious eloquence of its language. Much of it is composed in a species of rhymed prose—a highly regarded literary form marked by rhythmic cadences and the frequent use of terminal rhymes—that recalls, but is quite distinct from, the language of the Qur'án. It is a superb example of that polished style of writing characterized by the Arabs as 'easy yet unattainable': a style, in other words, whose effortless flow belies the consummate mastery that has gone into its composition. A feature of this style is the extraordinary concision of many of its utterances. Faced with the almost impossible challenge not only of faithfully reproducing the sense and meaning of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, but also of conveying something of its matchless eloquence, the translators

were fortunate in having before them the example of Shoghi Effendi. As the introduction tells us, he opted in his renderings for a form of expression "reminiscent of the style used by the seventeenth-century translators of the Bible," enabling him to capture the elevated mode of Bahá'u'lláh's Arabic in a form accessible to the contemporary reader.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the problem of "striking the right balance between beauty and clarity of expression on the one hand, and literalness on the other," the introduction continues, "is one of the major issues with which the translators have had to grapple and which has caused repeated reconsideration of the rendering of certain passages."<sup>10</sup>

It is now the task of teams of translators in different countries around the world to render the Kitáb-i-Aqdas into their own native tongues, basing their renderings upon the authorized English translation but referring as need arises to the text of the original. The special difficulties encountered by the English translators are no less likely to pose a challenge to these other translators. Their daunting task is to convey in a foreign language the unique qualities of a book concerned not only with mapping out a new way of life for the individual and society, but with bringing about a future state of "true understanding in a spirit of love and tolerance" throughout the world. Even now, work is continuing on these translations, which are expected to start becoming available in the very near future. Also undergoing preparation at the present time is an Arabic edition of the 1993 English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, comprising all its separate sections. A feature of this latter will be an aesthetic and partially illuminated

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

transcription of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas executed in a beautiful calligraphic hand, in conformity with a long-standing Arabic and Islamic tradition of calligraphic excellence in the production of scriptural works.

Intended for a wide readership and not merely for believers, the publication of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas stands out for Bahá'ís as a truly epoch-making occurrence, the single most significant event since the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963. Since the Book was released to the English-speaking world nearly two years ago, the Bahá'í community is still in the process of absorbing its initial impact, of familiarizing itself with its contents, and of coming to terms with some of its more immediate and striking implications. Naturally, the release of each previously untranslated Work in the Bahá'í canon affects Bahá'ís deeply and refashions their overall conception of their Faith. In all probability no book, however, will entail so intense a learning process as the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, insofar as it is simultaneously an epitome of the tenets of Bahá'u'lláh's Cause, a digest of His Law, and the Charter of His New World Order.

## Introduction

O leaders of religion! Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men. In this most perfect Balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it.<sup>11</sup>

THESE RESOUNDING WORDS from the Kitáb-i-Aqdas represent a warning, not only to 'leaders of religion', but to anyone who would attempt to judge by worldly standards that which is wholly beyond measure. Accordingly, no analysis of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas can be undertaken without reference to this passage. We must recognize that what we are dealing with is not a book like other books to which conventional critical criteria can be applied. No Bahá'í scholar can afford to ignore the numerous warnings in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas that relate to scholarship. For example:

Beware lest ye be hindered by the veils of glory from partaking of the crystal waters of this living Fountain.<sup>12</sup>

Take heed that ye dispute not idly concerning the Almighty and His Cause...<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K99, p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, K50, p. 38.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, K177, p. 84.



...among the people is he who layeth claim to inner knowledge, and still deeper knowledge concealed within this knowledge. Say: Thou speakest false!<sup>14</sup>

We have permitted you to read such sciences as are profitable unto you, not such as end in idle disputation...<sup>15</sup>

Whoso interpreteth what hath been sent down from the heaven of Revelation, and altereth its evident meaning, he, verily, is of them that have perverted the Sublime Word of God, and is of the lost ones in the Lucid Book.<sup>16</sup>

Scholars are also required to pay due heed to the comprehensive notes that supplement the text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, including one of particular relevance in this context:

Individual interpretations based on a person's understanding of the Teachings constitute the fruit of man's rational power and may well contribute to a greater comprehension of the Faith. Such views, nevertheless, lack authority. In presenting their personal ideas, individuals are cautioned not to discard the authority of the revealed words, not to deny or contend with the authoritative interpretation, and not to engage in controversy; rather they should offer their thoughts as a contribution to knowledge, making it clear that their views are merely their own.<sup>17</sup>

This passage, in my view, effectively sounds the keynote of Bahá'í scholarship.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, K36, p. 31.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, K77, p. 48.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, K105, p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, n130, pp. 221-2.

The fact that this field has of late been largely dominated by Western scholars has placed a certain restriction and limitation on understanding, preventing a more profound appreciation of the aims and purposes of Bahá'í scholarship. If indeed Bahá'í scholars wish to render the greatest service to the Faith, the rich legacy of research in Arabic and Persian must surely be translated into English and other languages. The work of Bahá'í scholars throughout the world should likewise become accessible, and recognition be accorded to the fact that it is not only people with academic training who are capable of conducting meaningful research: "The understanding of His words and the comprehension of the utterances of the Birds of Heaven are in no wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit."<sup>18</sup>

The time has come for Bahá'í scholars everywhere to examine their consciences and determine how best they can render service in accordance with the dictates of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the language of which, however lofty, never strays into the realm of inaccessibility insofar as our attempts in this contingent world to apprehend<sup>19</sup> the Divine Revelation are concerned; for the meaning of its exhortations is clear and unequivocal.

The purpose of this essay is to comment in general terms on the sublime style of the original Arabic text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, with reference to the Qur'án and, to a lesser extent, the Bible. Naturally, any attempt to render

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<sup>18</sup> *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 135.

<sup>19</sup> In the *Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* (see *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* [Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991], p. 100), Shoghi Effendi lays down the distinction between 'comprehending' the Bahá'í Revelation and 'apprehending' the same. He says the former is impossible and the latter should be the object of our constant endeavour.

the Divine Writ into another tongue, even if it captures the meaning, can convey but little of the style and sublimity of the original language. Unlike Islám, however, the Bahá'í Faith was blessed with an authorized and divinely-assisted interpreter and an inspired translator in the person of Shoghi Effendi, who was able to put at least one third of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas into a suitably dignified and elevated English style. No other religion has had its scriptural treasures translated into a universal language, as has the Bahá'í Faith, within so very short a period of time since the inception of the Dispensation. It should be noted, however, that this same divinely-appointed interpreter, Shoghi Effendi, wrote the following in the preface to his translation of the Kitáb-i-Íqán:

This is one more attempt to introduce to the West, in language however inadequate, this book of unsurpassed pre-eminence among the writings of the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation. The hope is that it may assist others in their efforts to approach what must always be regarded as the unattainable goal—a befitting rendering of Bahá'u'lláh's matchless utterance.<sup>20</sup>

We now have a complete English rendering of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, published by the Bahá'í World Centre, Haifa, under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. Not only is it an accurate rendering of the meaning and words of the Book, but the spirit flows through it with such abundance that both heart and mind are profoundly touched. However, it must never be forgotten that Bahá'u'lláh's own words remain immutable and matchless, and in translating them we must be scrupulous, like Shoghi Effendi, not to allow the cumbersome

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<sup>20</sup> *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 2.

apparatus of academic pedantry to impede the flow of their spiritual bounty.

With this in mind, and in the light of the warnings I have quoted, I feel I must acknowledge that my approach here may well be defective in many ways. Born as we are so near to the time of the revelation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, we will continue to be the "generation of the half-light," as Shoghi Effendi has described us. I must therefore stress that my remarks constitute no more than a personal assessment which can never purport to be a guide for others to follow. Above all, I intend to let the Kitáb-i-Aqdas speak for itself. If I can impart a small glimpse of the richness of the Arabic original, I feel that I shall have accomplished my goal. For example, writing about the sublimity of the Bahá'í Revelation, Shoghi Effendi says, "Such testimonies bearing on this theme are *impregnated with such power and reveal such beauty as only those who are versed in the languages in which they were originally revealed* can claim to have sufficiently appreciated."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 103 (my italics).

# I

THAT WHICH WE call 'sublime' in religious literature can be conveyed only in a very special kind of language which may be characterized as 'sacred language', and which is virtually indefinable in nature. It is distinguished, however, by the fact that, unlike any other kind of language, it encompasses all three modes of cognition: analysis, intuition, and revelation. If poetry reveals the passions of the human heart, then sacred language reveals those passions of the heart and soul. It embodies a universal message that transcends form, melody and rhythm, and ultimately transcends even language itself.

Among all the languages of the world, Arabic is unique in being a sacred language, the repository of a great religious tradition, which has been preserved intact as a 'living language' over many centuries up to the present day. The great Semitic family of languages to which Arabic belongs includes such ancient languages as Aramaic, Syriac, Ethiopic, Phoenician and Hebrew. Yet if we contrast the course of these various tongues to Arabic, we find that Phoenician has disappeared altogether; of Aramaic and Syriac barely anything remains; Ethiopic never progressed beyond the confines of Ethiopia; while for centuries Hebrew maintained only a flicker of life within the confines of Jewish communities before being resuscitated and considerably expanded as the language of modern-day Israel.

As for the great representatives of other venerable families of languages, such as Latin, Greek and Sanskrit, none of these is used colloquially today. Arabic is the only language belonging to a formerly great and multi-national civilization that survives to this day as a living language. Classical Arabic is still used in every Arab country for all formal and literary purposes, as well as representing that which is holy and sacred to many millions of Muslims, Arab and non-Arab alike throughout the world.

Furthermore, although the literature of India, China, Persia, Ancient Egypt and indeed modern Europe is replete with numerous instances of what may be termed 'sacred language', Arabic has an inherent quality which—as I shall now attempt briefly to demonstrate—lends extra power to the expression of the religious vision. The same vision can indeed be expressed in various ways in other languages. But for those who are acquainted at firsthand with the treasures of Arabic religious literature, it is difficult to conceive how anything could rival the subtlety, eloquence, range, versatility, incisive truthfulness, and poignant beauty of Arabic as a means of expressing the profoundest spiritual truths. Hence the unique status of Arabic as the language of the revealed Word in both the Qur'án and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

Why, then, is Arabic so special? What gives it its particular genius? Arabic, like other Semitic languages, derives words from roots composed usually of three letters. However, to a greater degree than other Semitic languages, Arabic modifies these roots through the addition of further letters either before, after or within the roots. This feature of the language invests individual words with a highly derivative and associative character that adds to them whole layers of meaning and innuendo in

a manner not normally found in other languages. In particular, it makes Arabic the perfect vehicle for the symbolic and the metaphorical.

Perhaps no language has a greater capacity for variety and richness of expression than does Arabic. It contains, for example, a wealth of synonyms, and an extraordinary breadth of vocabulary expressive of multitudinous and subtle differentiations of sense in the realms of both feeling and action.

The Arabist Hamilton Gibb observes that "Arabic is unique in having carried over its superluxuriant vocabulary to play an important part in the literature of a highly developed civilization."<sup>22</sup> Eloquence was always highly prized by the Arabs: the traditional Arabic maxim, 'The beauty of a man is at the tip of his tongue', emphasizes the importance they attach to chaste and beautiful expression. Similarly, when the Prophet Muḥammad was asked "Where does beauty lie?" He replied, "Upon the tongue." The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh are themselves replete with references to the power of 'utterance', a subject to which I shall return.

Arabic words frequently contain many levels and areas of meaning which cannot be fully conveyed in translation by means of single-word equivalents. For example, the Arabic term for poetry is *shi'r*, signifying both 'feeling' and things related to the spirit, the soul, and the inner being. The word for literature, *adab*, also means 'courtesy', indicating that it is not merely a vehicle of expression, but a reflection of the values that inform it. In origin, the term was coined to denote a body of writings, composed in a

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<sup>22</sup> Gibb, H.A.R., *Arabic Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 4.

variety of styles, that defined the correct conduct and behaviour of princes, administrators and others.

When one speaks Arabic, one is not merely engaging in communication. Rather, it is a spiritual experience. The Arabic language is synonymous with a devotion to the manner of expression, a delight in the rhythm and music of speech, and a sensuous revelling in the texture of words. The Arabs call its effect on those who hear it 'lawful magic' (*al-siḥr al-ḥalāl*), which is the same as the 'sorcery' described in the following verse of the Qur'án:

And so, when the truth came to them from Us,  
they said, "Behold, this is clearly nothing but  
sorcery!"<sup>23</sup>

In fact, 'enchantment' is closer to the real meaning of the Arabic word *siḥr*, but in the context of the quoted passage 'sorcery' serves to convey the pejorative flavour of the word used as a description of the Truth. The same word occurs in the following *Ḥadīth*, or saying, of the Prophet Muḥammad:

And some forms of utterance have the power of  
magic. [my translation]

Arabic has been described by one of the most eminent English scholars in the field of oriental studies, Sir Edward Denison-Ross, as "one of the noblest products of the human brain."<sup>24</sup> It is a remarkably musical tongue, and

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<sup>23</sup> Qur'án, X:76. All translated quotations are taken from *The Message of the Qur'án*, translated and explained by Muḥammad Asad (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1984, reprinted 1993). This, the most recent English rendering of the Qur'án, is in the author's view the most accurate of all the translations available. All square brackets in quotations from Asad's translation are his.

<sup>24</sup> Denison-Ross, E., *Eastern Art and Literature* (London: Earnest Benn, 1928), p. 53.



even its prose has qualities of poetry. It is highly onomatopoeic, many of its words suggesting their own meaning. Notwithstanding its great written body of literature, Arabic is primarily a language for the ear—and indeed, early Arabic poetry and the Qur'án itself were originally meant for listeners rather than readers. The possibilities for rhyming are infinite, and until very recently a feature of Arabic verse was that the rhyme (*al-qáfiyah*) was expected to remain the same throughout even the longest poems.

These are just some of the features that made Arabic the ideal vehicle for divine revelation. The Arabic term denoting the acme of linguistic excellence and achievement is *i'jáz*, which literally signifies 'language defying imitation'. It is applied exclusively to the Qur'án, which contains a number of significant references to the language in which it was revealed:

These are messages of a revelation clear in itself and clearly showing the truth: behold, We have bestowed it from on high as a discourse in the Arabic tongue, so that you might encompass it with your reason.

...this is Arabic speech, clear [in itself] and clearly showing the truth [of its source].

Thus, then, have We bestowed from on high this [divine writ] as an ordinance in the Arabic tongue.

...thus have We bestowed from on high this [divine writ] as a discourse in the Arabic tongue...

...a discourse in the Arabic tongue, free of all deviousness...

...in the clear Arabic tongue.

...a divine writ...in the Arabic tongue...

...a divine writ, the messages whereof have been clearly spelled out as a discourse in the Arabic tongue...

...We have revealed unto thee a discourse in the Arabic tongue...

Consider this divine writ, clear in itself and clearly showing the truth: behold, We have caused it to be a discourse in the Arabic tongue, so that you might encompass it with your reason.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, the complexities of the Arabic language and the immense problems involved in translating the revealed Word have made it practically impossible for Western scholars to "encompass the Qur'án with their reason." And although the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is in many ways more readily approachable than the Qur'án, no Western scholar can hope to achieve a profound appreciation of it purely through the acquisition of academic skills. Clearly an extra quality is called for, a quality of spiritual receptivity, perceptiveness and intuition. Otherwise there is a danger of falling into the same trap as did those who, in the early years of Islám, attempted to evaluate the Qur'án in terms largely of its outward form, oblivious of that mystical "fragrance of inner meanings"<sup>26</sup> spoken of by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

Having attained the distinction of being chosen as the language of Revelation in the Muḥammadan Dispensation, the special position of the Arabic language has been further consolidated and enhanced in our time through its having been singled out for the place of honour in the

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<sup>25</sup> Qur'án, XII:1-2, XVI:103, XIII:37, XX:113, XXXIX:28, XXVI:195, XLVI:12, XLI:3, XLII:7, and XLIII:2-3. The word 'discourse' in the first Qur'anic passage refers to the Qur'án itself.

<sup>26</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K158, p. 76.

Bahá'í Revelation. The introduction to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas elaborates this theme:

Bahá'u'lláh enjoyed a superb mastery of Arabic, and preferred to use it in those Tablets and other Writings where its precision of meaning was particularly appropriate to the exposition of basic principle. Beyond the choice of language itself, however, the style employed is of an exalted and emotive character, immensely compelling, particularly to those familiar with the great literary tradition out of which it arose.<sup>27</sup>

In point of fact, no less than approximately sixty percent of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets and other Writings were revealed in "the perspicuous Arabic tongue," as He designates it, in contradistinction to the "luminous Persian tongue" in which the remainder of His Writings was revealed. Bahá'u'lláh further emphasized the pre-eminence of Arabic in the following hitherto untranslated Tablet, which I paraphrase as follows:

It is beloved of God that all should speak in Arabic, which is the richest and vastest of all languages. Were anyone to be aware of the richness and vastness of this perspicuous tongue, he would choose it as a universal language of communication. The Persian tongue is a beautiful language, and in this Dispensation God hath chosen to speak in two languages: Arabic and Persian. However, Persian is not as rich as Arabic; in fact all the languages of the earth seem limited when compared to the Arabic language. What We have mentioned here is merely what is preferable. However, Our purpose is that the peoples of the earth should choose a universal language from amongst the languages spoken by all mankind.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. 9.

This is what God hath ordained, and this is what will benefit all mankind, did they but know.<sup>28</sup>

This emphasis on the importance of Arabic was reiterated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. A Tablet He addressed to one of the believers includes the following:

O beloved servant of God, at one time you were studying Arabic. This indeed is very useful, and you should undoubtedly continue to do so in order to acquire the skills and ability to communicate with eloquence and clarity in the Arabic language. Most certainly exert every effort to learn the Arabic language so that you can attain complete competence and proficiency enabling you to read and write it with equal facility.<sup>29</sup>

Shoghi Effendi for his part continued to lay emphasis on the significance of Arabic in the Bahá'í Dispensation, and on its importance as a key affording access, once mastered, to the sacred texts in their original form. In a letter written on his behalf, he sent the following exhortation to the Bahá'ís of Iran, encouraging them to make provision for the instruction of their children in Arabic:

Make sure that Bahá'í schoolchildren in their early years learn Arabic. For this is in accordance with the words of the Ancient Beauty in which He considers Arabic as the perspicuous tongue and through it He revealed the majority of His holy verses, laws and ordinances, prayers

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Persian by Ali Akbar Furutan, *Lughat-i-Fuṣṣḥá va Lughat-i-Nawrá* (Dundas, Ontario: Persian Institute for Bahá'í Studies, 1992), pp. 22-3. With regard to the Persian language, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states: "The Persian language shall become noteworthy in this cycle; nay, rather, the people shall study it in all the world" (*Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Vol. II [Chicago, Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1915], p. 307).

<sup>29</sup> Furutan, *Lughat-i-Fuṣṣḥá va Lughat-i-Nawrá*, pp. 23-4 (my paraphrase).

and scientific tablets. The rewards for accomplishing this are abundant in the estimation of God, and its results will be of great benefit to the entire community.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5 (my paraphrase).

## II

THERE ARE THREE basic characteristics which distinguish every Divine Revelation. Firstly, it explains truths such as the nature of God, the human condition and the world around us; secondly, it directs us towards right conduct and warns us to eschew evil; and thirdly, to those who have faith and accept its guidance, it imparts the good news of forgiveness, purification and salvation, and provides a fresh impetus to the march of human progress and civilization. Underpinning all of these is the ability of the Divine Revelation both to create and to transform.

The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it? Is it within human power, O Ḥakīm, to effect in the constituent elements of any of the minute and indivisible particles of matter so complete a transformation as to transmute it into purest gold? Perplexing and difficult as this may appear, the still greater task of converting satanic strength into heavenly power is one that We have been empowered to accomplish. The Force capable of such a transformation transcendeth the potency of the Elixir itself. The Word of God, alone, can claim the distinction of being endowed

with the capacity required for so great and far-reaching a change.<sup>31</sup>

The idea of revelation, in the sense of the revealed Word of God, is an ancient one that predates Islám by many centuries and is illustrated in a variety of cultures. Although little tangible evidence survives, scholars cite examples as old as the Code of Hammurabi from the 18th century B.C.; the revealed texts of Abraham which are mentioned in the Qur'án<sup>32</sup>; the Deuteronomic text of King Hezekiah, also known as the law book of Josiah, Hilkiah and Huldah<sup>33</sup>; the "word of the Lord" revealed to Jeremiah<sup>34</sup>; and the law book of Ezra.<sup>35</sup> By the time of the Council of Jamnia in 100 A.D., to the idea of revelation had been added that of the inviolable sanctity of the revealed Word, which previously had been characterized by Jeremiah as a flame of fire that cannot be imitated, stolen or misrepresented, and whose truth cannot but be revealed to the world.<sup>36</sup> This notion of the integrity of revelation leads naturally to that of the integrity, or essential unity, of the religions with which each particular outpouring of revelation is associated, and to the concept that these outpourings constitute the cumulative spiritual heritage of mankind, bequeathed down the ages from Dispensation to Dispensation in ever more liberal measures.

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<sup>31</sup> *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982), XCIX, p. 200.

<sup>32</sup> Qur'án, LXXXVII:18-19. For material concerning the history of Revelation and the style of the Qur'án, I am indebted to Isma'íl R. and Lois Lamyá' al Fárúqí, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (New York: Macmillan, 1986).

<sup>33</sup> II Kings, XXII:8-20.

<sup>34</sup> Jeremiah, XXXVI:20ff.

<sup>35</sup> Ezra, VII:14.

<sup>36</sup> Jeremiah, XXIII:29.

As the most recent in this series of successive outpourings of Divine guidance to humanity before the advent of the Bábí and Bahá'í Dispensations, Islám occupies an especially revered station in the eyes of Bahá'ís. In Shoghi Effendi's words:

As to Muḥammad, the Apostle of God, let none among His followers who read these pages, think for a moment that either Islám, or its Prophet, or His Book, or His appointed Successors, or any of His authentic teachings, have been, or are to be in any way, or to however slight a degree, disparaged.

They [the Bahá'í teachers] must strive to obtain, from sources that are authoritative and unbiased, a sound knowledge of the history and tenets of Islám—the source and background of their Faith—and approach reverently and with a mind purged from pre-conceived ideas the study of the Qur'án which, apart from the sacred scriptures of the Bábí and Bahá'í Revelations, constitutes the only Book which can be regarded as an absolutely authenticated Repository of the Word of God.<sup>37</sup>

Such a degree of integrity is found exemplified in the Scriptures of the Bahá'í Revelation. But whereas in the Islamic Dispensation the authenticated Repository of the Word of God comprised a single volume—the Qur'án; in the Bahá'í Dispensation it comprises the whole body of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, embracing the equivalent of no less than one hundred volumes. Of this vast corpus of Writings, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, although pre-eminent among Bahá'u'lláh's other Writings as the 'Most Holy Book' of His Dispensation, and the Work in which the basic laws

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<sup>37</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *Guidance for Today and Tomorrow* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1953), pp. 119, 226.



and ordinances of His Revelation are propounded, constitutes but a single element. It would, however, be misleading to refer to it merely as a book of laws; more accurately it is the charter of a future civilization, establishing the spirit rather than the letter of its constitutional, social, and legal framework. Yet even such a characterization as this falls short of doing justice to the Book, as the following Words of Bahá'u'lláh reveal:

Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power. To this beareth witness that which the Pen of Revelation hath revealed.<sup>38</sup>

The use in this passage of the significant Qur'anic term *raḥīq makhtúm* (here rendered 'choice Wine'), suggests that Bahá'u'lláh is identifying the Kitáb-i-Aqdas as the 'pure wine' promised to the truly virtuous in the eighty-third *súrah* of the Qur'án:

Behold, [in the life to come] the truly virtuous will indeed be in bliss: [resting] on couches, they will look up [to God]: upon their faces thou wilt see the brightness of bliss.

They will be given a drink of pure wine whereon the seal [of God] will have been set, pouring forth with a fragrance of musk.

To that [wine of paradise], then, let all such aspire as [are willing to] aspire to things of high account: for it is composed of all that is most exalting—a source [of bliss] whereof those who are drawn close unto God shall drink.<sup>39</sup>

As the fulfillment of this promise, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

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<sup>38</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K5, p. 21.

<sup>39</sup> Qur'án, LXXXIII:22-28.

represents the epitome of the concept, first propounded by Jeremiah, of the Divine *Ipsissima Verba*, or the Very Word of God. And as such, the Arabic of the original text is sacred language of the very highest order, sublime in form and content.

### FORM

Let us first consider the sublime form of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Concise in form, yet rich in meaning and sense, it contains the elements of both *shī'r* (poetry) and *saj'* (rhymed prose) but transcends the limitations of each. Its expressions possess an integrity and absolute precision that lie beyond the bounds of literary analysis. Vivid use is made of similes, metaphors, metonymy, and other linguistic embellishments, exemplifying that form of consummate skill in the use of Arabic which is termed *badī'*, signifying 'the art of sublime and innovative expression'. The hallmarks of this form of writing are its matchless precision, its graceful but compelling flow, its chaste economy of diction, its inimitable craftsmanship and its prodigious mastery of the language in all its multifarious ramifications. Majesty is combined with grace, refinement with simplicity, strength with delicacy, power with beauty, and authority with compassion. And the text is unimpaired by—indeed all the more effective for—its lack of a conventional literary structure.

### CONTENT

The sublime content of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, on the other hand, is evident in its palpable embodiment of the important Bahá'í principle of the conformity of faith and reason; its view of man as a rational and noble being whose true destiny on earth can be realized only through recognizing His Creator and obeying His commandments. It upholds

a pattern of moral living consecrated to, and sustained by, the establishment of justice, the pursuit of righteousness, and the practice of refinement. Over and above the edification and redemption of the individual, it lays special emphasis on the harmonious relationship between individuals, on the one hand, and between the individual and society on the other. The fundamental values it inculcates are therefore unity, equity and moderation, all of which it regards as spiritual in essence, and not merely of social significance alone. Its message is unific in character, universal in scope, and ecumenical in spirit. It invites mankind to accept it with both heart and mind. It creates a New World Order and a peerless legislative system, centering around the institution of the House of Justice, in which is vested responsibility both for guaranteeing the welfare and for promoting the development of the society and the community over which it presides.

The sublime congruence of form and content in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas produces an effect, such as can generate a radical transformation in those who receive the Word and reverently peruse it.

#### STYLE

In the *Súriy-i-Haykal* (Súrah of the Temple) Bahá'u'lláh states the following (which I again paraphrase from the Arabic):

Say: We have revealed Our verses in nine different styles, each style signifying the sovereignty of God, the Ever-Living, Who determineth what is true or false. One single style would certainly be sufficient proof for all that are in Heaven and all that are on earth. But most people are heedless. Had We so wished, We would have revealed verses in other styles too numerous to reckon.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá*, Vol. I (Tíhrán: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1963), p. 19.

Although no elucidation of these “nine different styles” was forthcoming from the Pen of Bahá’u’lláh Himself (at least, so far as is at the present known), they have been tentatively identified by the distinguished Bahá’í scholar Jináb-i-Fáḍil-i-Mázindarání as follows:

1. Tablets with the tone of command and authority.
2. Those with the tone of servitude, meekness and supplication.
3. Writings dealing with interpretation of the old Scriptures, religious beliefs and doctrines of the past.
4. Writings in which laws and ordinances have been enjoined for this age and laws of the past abrogated.
5. Mystical Writings.
6. Tablets concerning matters of government and world order, and those addressed to the kings.
7. Tablets dealing with subjects of learning and knowledge, divine philosophy, mysteries of creation, medicine, alchemy, etc.
8. Tablets exhorting men to education, goodly character and divine virtues.
9. Tablets dealing with social teachings.<sup>41</sup>

For Bahá’ís no less than for Muslims, it is a basic tenet of belief that the very form in which the Word is cast represents one of the major signs or proofs of a Divine Revelation. In other words, the revealed Word proves

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted by Adib Taherzadeh, *The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh*, Vol. I (Oxford: George Ronald, 1976), p. 43.

itself by its own transcendent and inimitable quality, as is in fact stated in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas:

This is the Most Great Testimony, by which the validity of every proof throughout the ages hath been established...<sup>42</sup>

Many other such pronouncements in the text confirm the sublimity of its station in this respect:

...My commandments are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures. Thus hath it been sent down from the heaven of the Will of your Lord, the Lord of Revelation.<sup>43</sup>

Take heed lest the word "Prophet" withhold you from this Most Great Announcement, or any reference to "Vicegerency" debar you from the sovereignty of Him Who is the Vicegerent of God, which overshadoweth all the worlds.<sup>44</sup>

Give ear unto the verses of God which He Who is the sacred Lote-Tree reciteth unto you. They are assuredly the infallible balance, established by God, the Lord of this world and the next. Through them the soul of man is caused to wing its flight towards the Dayspring of Revelation, and the heart of every true believer is suffused with light.<sup>45</sup>

The Lote-Tree (*Sadratu'l-Muntahá*), here signifying Bahá'u'lláh Himself, is an Islamic image symbolizing the heavenly limit beyond which neither man nor angels can pass in their attempts to attain to the presence of the Almighty or to comprehend the nature of the Great Beyond.

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<sup>42</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K183, p. 86.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, K3, p. 20.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, K167, p. 80.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, K148, p. 73.

The style of passages like those cited above is deliberately compressed and allusive rather than discursive and explicit, and the imagery and symbolism they contain are so deployed as to open up before the listener or reader whole new realms of meaning, and to fire the imagination through their vividly evocative power.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas contains, of course, innumerable other signs and tokens of its Divine origin, in much the same way as, in the Qur'án, the "book of the world" is described as replete with signs and wonders, all eloquently testifying to the Divine providence which has brought them into being:

And among his wonders is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your tongues and colours: for in this, behold, there are messages indeed for all who are possessed of [innate] knowledge!<sup>46</sup>

Enumerating various signs of the truth of His Father's Revelation, 'Abdu'l-Bahá cites in one of His Epistles the eloquence and profundity of Bahá'u'lláh's words and the speed with which they are revealed:

Among His signs are: the excellence of His utterance, the eloquence of His elucidation, the ceaseless flow of His Revelation, in words, in wise sayings, in [holy] verses, in sermons, in communion and prayer, and in His explanation of clear verses and interpretation of figurative verses.<sup>47</sup>

The greatest of all His signs, however, is the majestic person of Bahá'u'lláh Himself. He is the proof beyond which no other proof is needed; He stands transcendent,

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<sup>46</sup> Qur'án, XXX:22.

<sup>47</sup> *Min Makátib 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Vol. I (Rio de Janeiro: Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Brazil, 1982), p. 100. Paraphrased from the original Arabic.

majestic and sublime, holding sovereign sway over all. In the Islamic Dispensation, the Qur'án had challenged critics and detractors of the new Revelation to produce a single *súrah*, or chapter, comparable to those of the Qur'án:

And if you doubt any part of what We have bestowed from on high, step by step, upon Our servant [Muḥammad], then produce a *súrah* of similar merit, and call upon any other than God to bear witness for you—if what you say is true!<sup>48</sup>

Now, in the Bahá'í Dispensation, Bahá'u'lláh confronts His critics with their inability to match not simply His words, but His own August Being in all its aspects:

O ye leaders of religion! Who is the man amongst you that can rival Me in vision or insight? Where is he to be found that dareth to claim to be My equal in utterance or wisdom? No, by My Lord, the All-Merciful!<sup>49</sup>

The implication of the rhetorical question in which these challenging words are framed is, of course, that Bahá'u'lláh is peerless and inimitable in His capacities and accomplishments. History records that all who attempted to set themselves up as equals of Bahá'u'lláh were ultimately discomfited and met with ignominious failure. For Bahá'u'lláh spoke with the Tongue of God, and in the pure mirror of His Being was reflected the light of Divine and unfading glory.

The vocative as exemplified, for instance, by the words prefacing His address to the clergy—"O ye leaders of religion" (*Yá ma'shar al-'Ulamá'*)—is a linguistic device of peculiar force and efficacy in Arabic. Again and again it is

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<sup>48</sup> Qur'án, II:23.

<sup>49</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K101, pp. 56-7.

resorted to by Bahá'u'lláh. In this way He apostrophizes specific groups of people as a means of investing His admonitions to them with great potency and directness.

The device is clearly effective in lending force and poignancy to Bahá'u'lláh's rhetorical challenge to the '*Ulamá*' referred to above. Naturally, this challenge to recognize Bahá'u'lláh's unassailable pre-eminence is addressed in the first instance to the '*Ulamá*', since it was they who had arrogated to themselves the position of sole guardians of God's Faith and exclusive arbiters of Divine Truth for humankind. In a very real sense, they held the spiritual destinies of their followers in their hands, as is affirmed elsewhere in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* by the statement: "Had ye believed in God when He revealed Himself, the people would not have turned aside from Him, nor would the things ye witness today have befallen Us."<sup>50</sup> Their abject inability to rival Bahá'u'lláh in vision or insight, or to equal Him in utterance and wisdom, if not already clearly implicit in the sense of incredulity conveyed by the rhetorical question in which Bahá'u'lláh frames His challenge to them, is then emphatically asserted by the witheringly dismissive quality of the following negation: "No, by My Lord, the All-Merciful." The utter insignificance of their arrogant pretensions when brought face to face with the supernal splendour of the Ancient of Days is then vividly expressed by the assertion:

All on the earth shall pass away; and this is the  
face of your Lord, the Almighty, the Well-  
Beloved,<sup>51</sup>

itself an echo of the Qur'anic words:

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, K166, pp. 79-80.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, K101, p. 57.



All that lives on earth or in the heavens is bound  
to pass away: but forever will abide thy  
Sustainer's Self, full of majesty and glory.<sup>52</sup>

Asad's phrase, "thy Sustainer's Self," is a translation of *wajhu Rabbi-ka*, meaning "Face of thy Lord," as rendered more accurately in this case by Arberry:

All that dwells upon the earth is perishing, yet  
still / abides the Face of thy Lord, majestic,  
splendid.<sup>53</sup>

This apparent allusion to the Qur'án provides a particularly good illustration of the way Bahá'u'lláh's language invests Qur'anic phrases or expressions with various whole new dimensions of meaning. In the present case, the Qur'anic "Face of thy Lord," which becomes in a sense the face of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, reminds us that in His Dispensation, as in preceding Dispensations, mankind has the privilege, so long as He is alive, of gazing on the Face of God Himself, and of entering as nearly into His presence as is possible on this earthly plane.

Not only is God's Messenger for this day and age peerless in His knowledge, understanding and insight, but He is also "the Dawning-place of God's Cause" and the sole exemplar of the "Most Great Infallibility." He is, moreover, "the infallible Balance" (*Qisṭás al-Hudá*)<sup>54</sup> an expression in which again the word *Qisṭás*, used in the Qur'án merely in its concrete meaning,<sup>55</sup> is here invested with a new dimension of figurative meaning, as it becomes

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<sup>52</sup> Qur'án, LV:26-7.

<sup>53</sup> Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 252.

<sup>54</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K47, p. 36 and K183, p. 86.

<sup>55</sup> Qur'án, XVII:35 and XXVI:182.

a symbol for the Manifestation of God, the Judge and Arbitrator of what is true and what is false.

#### LITERARY DEVICES

Just as the style of the Qur'án was totally new to the Arabs of the Prophet's time, albeit embodying the quintessential soul and spirit of their language, so too the Kitáb-i-Aqdas constitutes a veritable miracle of innovation. It is divided into several hundred verses, which in the English version have been grouped into numbered paragraphs. They adhere to no specific literary form in Arabic, being richer than prose but without the elaborateness and mannerisms of poetry. The style is therefore a delicate blend of features belonging to both prose and poetry, of music tempered by the discipline of precise and unequivocal expression. There is alliteration, assonance, repetition, and onomatopoeia. The timbre of the music differs from subject to subject, but remains integrally associated with the dignified sonority, the stirring rhythms and the lilting cadences of the Arabic language in which it is framed. Witness the mounting crescendo and final satisfying resolution evident in the structure of the following verse:

They who eschew iniquity and error, who  
adhere to virtue, are, in the sight of the one true  
God, among the choicest of His creatures; their  
names are extolled by the Concourse of the  
realms above, and by those who dwell in this  
Tabernacle which hath been raised in the name  
of God.<sup>56</sup>

The linguistic subtleties of Arabic are infinite, and place at the disposal of the skilled craftsman a host of rhetorical figures and devices which he may deploy to

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<sup>56</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K71, p. 45.

brilliant effect. The following provides an example of alliteration, the repetition of a certain consonant (in this case 'j') throughout successive words (*ijlál, jalál, jamál*):

Thus hath the decree been inscribed with  
majesty [*ijlál*] in this glorious [*jalál*] Tablet by  
Him Who is the Dawning-place of Beauty  
[*jamál*].<sup>57</sup>

As previously noted, Arabic offers abundant possibilities for assonance, the reiteration of certain vowel sounds throughout successive words. The contrast of *quṣūr* (palaces) with *qubūr* (graves), in the context of Bahá'u'lláh's stern reminder to the King of Prussia that:

The All-Merciful brought them down from their  
palaces to their graves<sup>58</sup>

is dramatically heightened by their similarity in sound, a similarity which adds piquancy and a certain aphoristic quality to the antithesis they express.

An outstanding feature of the rhythm of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is its use of different repetitive beats—double, triple, or quadruple—in a manner which can only imperfectly be reproduced in English. A double beat, for instance, is heard running throughout the following series of contrasting couplets:

Truly, the Lord loveth union and harmony and  
abhorreth separation and divorce. Live ye one  
with another, O people, in radiance and joy.<sup>59</sup>

A triple beat, by contrast, is found in the following eloquent passage, whose latter portion reinforces the central proposition of its earlier portion by means of three

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, K68, p. 44.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, K86, p. 51.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, K70, p. 44.

structurally similar sentences which serve cumulatively to create an effect of great emphasis.

Let none, in this Day, hold fast to aught save that which hath been manifested in this Revelation. Such is the decree of God, aforetime and hereafter—a decree wherewith the Scriptures of the Messengers of old have been adorned. Such is the admonition of the Lord, aforetime and hereafter—an admonition wherewith the preamble to the Book of Life hath been embellished, did ye but perceive it. Such is the commandment of the Lord, aforetime and hereafter; beware lest ye choose instead the part of ignominy and abasement.<sup>60</sup>

These passages exemplify the power of rhythmic repetition, used to maximum effect in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

Another richly expressive device in Arabic is that of juxtaposition and antithesis, as in the following example:

Know ye that the embodiment of liberty and its symbol is the animal. That which beseemeth man is submission unto such restraints as will protect him from his own ignorance, and guard him against the harm of the mischief-maker.<sup>61</sup>

By placing the word *ḥayawán* (animal) immediately before *insán* (man), the Arabic original of this passage effectively emphasizes the demarcation and distinction between animality and humanity—a distinction which can so easily be lost or blurred if man's behaviour is not restricted by certain limitations and constraints. With the removal of such constraints, the distance, figuratively speaking, between humanity and animality is perhaps no greater than the difference in sound between *insán* and *ḥayawán*.

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, K138, pp. 68-9.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, K123, p. 63.

*Metaphor*

Another important rhetorical device of which ample use is made in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is metaphor, by means of which abstract concepts are expressed in concrete terms:

...We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power.<sup>62</sup>

...My chosen servants...are the stars of the heaven of My loving providence and the lamps of My guidance unto all mankind.<sup>63</sup>

The eye of His loving-kindness shall everlastingly be directed towards thee ...<sup>64</sup>

The eye of My loving-kindness weepeth sore over you...<sup>65</sup>

Cast away that which ye possess, and, on the wings of detachment, soar beyond all created things.<sup>66</sup>

In this last extract, the metaphor of 'wings', symbolizing freedom and detachment, is further developed by the verb 'soar', converting the metaphor into an analogy whereby a person who has achieved detachment from the world is likened to a bird soaring in the heavens.

Another noteworthy feature of the language of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is the frequent use it makes of the names and attributes of Almighty God, which constitute an important element of both Qur'anic and Bahá'í diction, and are expressed throughout the text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas by both allusion and explicit mention. Among the

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, K5, p. 21.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, K117, p. 61.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, K93, p. 54.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, K100, p. 56.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, K54, p. 39.

most frequently occurring of these names and attributes are, for instance, those illustrated in the following formulae:

He, verily, is Almighty and Omniscient<sup>67</sup>

The All-Possessing, the Most High<sup>68</sup>

The Mighty, the Pardoner<sup>69</sup>

Combinations of these attributes frequently serve to round off the verses of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, and in this capacity provide a recurrent musical refrain, or closing cadence, which sounds throughout the length of its text.

Another designation for the Almighty is He "Who ruleth over all mankind,"<sup>70</sup> the Arabic original of which *Málik al-Riqáb*, signifies literally "the possessor of the necks." Clearly, 'necks' is here used metonymically for 'mankind', implying that man stands in the same relation to God as a vassal to his lord. The term *Málik* (Lord), despite the paramount importance of the Divine attribute it expresses, occurs on only two or three occasions in the *Qur'án*,<sup>71</sup> whereas in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, by contrast, it has developed into one of the central appellations of the Divinity. Followings are some of the combinations in which it is used:

The Lord of all mankind<sup>72</sup>

The Lord of Names<sup>73</sup>

The Lord of all Religions<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, K6, p. 21.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, K2, p. 20.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, K8, p. 22.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, K8, p. 22.

<sup>71</sup> *Qur'án*, I:4 and III:26.

<sup>72</sup> *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, K16, p. 25; K26, p. 28 and K154, p. 75.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, K49, p. 37.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, K36, p. 32.

The Lord of all worlds<sup>75</sup>

The Lord of the beginning and the end<sup>76</sup>

The Lord of being<sup>77</sup>

The Lord of all creation<sup>78</sup>

The Lord of...Grace<sup>79</sup>

The Lord of Judgement<sup>80</sup>

The Lord of...Majesty<sup>81</sup>

The Lord of the seen and the unseen<sup>82</sup>

The Lord of Splendour<sup>83</sup>

The Lord of the Throne above and of the earth  
below<sup>84</sup>

The Lord of Utterance<sup>85</sup>

### *Alternation of Person*

A linguistic device of untold significance in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is its alternation between the third person singular and the first persons singular and plural in referring to the authoritative source whence various prescriptions and exhortations have flowed—a feature whose evident pur-

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, K10, p. 23; K44, p. 35; K85, p. 50; K98, p. 56 and K138, p. 69.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, K16, p. 25 and K28, p. 28.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, K139, p. 69.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, K73, p. 45.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, K14, p. 24.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, K18, p. 26 and K56, p. 40.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, K14, p. 24.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, K11, p. 23 and K98, p. 56.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, K13, pp. 23-4.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, K86, p. 51.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, K88, p. 52.

pose is to give forcible expression to the almost indistinguishable identity of God and the Manifestation of His Cause.

### *Personification*

Personification, the device by which an inanimate object or corporate entity, such as a place or group of people, is invested with a human character, is another striking feature of the text. For example:

Consort with all religions with amity and  
concord...<sup>86</sup>

The device is especially powerful in some of the prophetic passages of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, as for example:

...We hear the lamentations of Berlin...<sup>87</sup>

and in reference to the land of Țá, present-day Țihrán:

Let nothing grieve thee, O Land of Țá... Rejoice  
with great joy, for God hath made thee "the  
Dayspring of His light"...<sup>88</sup>

The feature naturally occurs often in conjunction with apostrophe, which was considered briefly in the foregoing.

### KEYWORDS

One of Bahá'u'lláh's Tablets contains a particularly striking reference to the symbolic language of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas:

Blessed the palate that savoureth its sweetness,  
and the perceiving eye that recognizeth that  
which is treasured therein, and the understand-

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, K144, p. 72.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, K90, p. 53.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, K91-2, pp. 53-4.



ing heart that comprehendeth its allusions and mysteries. By God! Such is the majesty of what hath been revealed therein, and so tremendous the revelation of its veiled allusions that the loins of utterance shake when attempting their description.<sup>89</sup>

Among the important symbols and keywords running through the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is that used in the very designation of the work, Kitáb-i-Aqdas, to denote its literary form, viz. *kitáb*, the Arabic word for 'book'. Although indisputably the word 'book' provides the standard English rendering of *kitáb*, it is equally the case that *kitáb* has various resonances and layers of meaning absent from its stock English equivalent. The word originates from the root *kataba* which, as most Arabic lexicographers agree, means 'to assemble' or 'to put together a number of elements in order to express clear and complete meaning'.

In addition to *kitáb*, a host of other words derive from *kataba*. When its constituent letters are reversed in order, *kataba* becomes *bataka*, which means 'to cut' or 'to cut off', as in the threat recorded of Satan in the Qur'án, that he would mislead mankind and order them to cut off the ears of their cattle:

...they will cut off the ears of cattle...<sup>90</sup>

*Kuttáb*, on the other hand, is a place where young students or pupils come together, while *katibah* is a battalion or division of soldiers; both words denote types of gathering or grouping, the former with a peaceable, the latter with a warlike purpose. *Maktab*, further, is an educational foundation, a place where, in the broadest sense,

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<sup>89</sup> *A Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1973), p. 3.

<sup>90</sup> Qur'án, IV:119.

associations and connections are established between the elements of knowledge and of the world at large. This expansive sense of *maktab* is elevated to a truly cosmic level in a passage occurring towards the end of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas where mention is made of the "School of God," or, more fully, the "School of Transcendent Oneness," which, as Bahá'u'lláh affirms, He entered "ere [God] created heaven and earth" and "before the letters B and E were joined and knit together."

We, indeed, set foot within the School of inner meaning and explanation when all created things were unaware... We, verily, set foot within the School of God when ye lay slumbering...<sup>91</sup>

Having graduated from this primordial and cosmic seminary, Bahá'u'lláh was of course in no need of the formal schooling offered by any earthly academy; indeed, as He states in an earlier passage of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas:

We have not entered any school, nor read any of your dissertations. Incline your ears to the words of this unlettered One, wherewith He summoneth you unto God, the Ever-Abiding.<sup>92</sup>

Here there is another echo from the Qur'án, for the term used by Bahá'u'lláh, in describing Himself as "this unlettered One," is precisely that used by Muḥammad in describing Himself as the "unlettered Prophet." Clearly, however, it is in only a very limited sense that either of them was 'unlettered', and the expression may thus be accounted for on the grounds that the learning evinced by both Muḥammad and Bahá'u'lláh was Divine in origin and not to be gauged by human standards. When one of

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<sup>91</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K175-7, p. 83.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, K104, p. 57.

His Arabic Tablets was impugned by a critic objecting to the particular use Bahá'u'lláh had therein assigned to the word *qiná'* (veil), Bahá'u'lláh composed in reply an extensive disquisition on the use of this word in Arabic, demonstrating an astonishing command of the language and a dazzling erudition in its literature. The *Láwḥ-i-Qiná'* (Tablet of the Veil), which is the name of the Tablet in which this disquisition occurs, constitutes in its entirety an abiding testimony to the prodigious innate knowledge possessed by Bahá'u'lláh despite His lack of formal schooling.

All these words, then—*maktab*, *bataka*, *kuttáb*, *kátib*, and *kataba*—are direct cognates of *kitáb*, and as such add to its meaning extra resonances and echoes in a cumulative manner which cannot be either paralleled or imitated in the English language. Such is the versatility and almost universal quality of the word *kitáb* in Arabic that practically every activity of a human being can in some manner be subsumed under the heading 'book': hence, for example, it is perfectly in order to speak of 'the book of walking', 'the book of sleeping', 'the book of marriage', and so forth. The various categories of religious observances, pursuits, and interests may likewise each be characterized generically as a book: 'the book of prayers', 'the book of pilgrimage', 'the book of creation', of 'life', of 'death', of 'victory', of 'defeat', of 'animals', of 'agriculture', and so on. Length or size is also immaterial in judging whether something qualifies for the designation 'book': a weighty tome, a flimsy fascicle, a single broadsheet—all these may aptly and correctly be described in Arabic as *kitáb*, or 'book'. Accordingly it is applied equally in Bahá'í terminology to lengthy works such as the *Kitáb-i-Badí'* (The Wondrous Book) or the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* (The Book of Certitude), and to very short ones such as the *Kitáb-i-'Ahd* (The Book of the Covenant).

Interestingly, the grammatically definite form of *kitáb*—*al-kitáb*—is much more nearly rendered by its grammatically definite English equivalent—‘the Book’—than is the grammatically indefinite *kitáb* by grammatically indefinite ‘book’, for now a clear sense of Divine or Holy Writ enters into the word in both languages. Thus, almost at its outset the Qur’án describes itself as the ‘Divine Writ’ or ‘the Book’ *par excellence*.<sup>93</sup>

Yet more portentous and far-reaching than the concept of ‘the Book’ is that of the ‘Mother Book’, a Qur’anic concept which is again taken up and amplified in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in the following words:

This, verily, is the heaven in which the Mother Book is treasured...<sup>94</sup>

The term ‘Mother Book’ generally signifies the central book of a religious Dispensation, as for example the Qur’án for Muslims, the Bayán for Babís, and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas for Bahá’ís. According to Shoghi Effendi, it is also a “collective term indicating the body of the Teachings revealed by Bahá’u’lláh.” In a looser sense, ‘Mother Book’ is also the Divine Repository of Revelation.<sup>95</sup>

In line with this latter sense, one of the most significant uses of the word *kitáb* in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is as a designation of the Manifestation of God Himself. The ‘Book’ in the Qur’án is the Divine Message revealed through the Prophet Muḥammad; but in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, following the Bayán, it has become Bahá’u’lláh Himself, Who, in contrast to the ‘Silent Book’ of Revelation, is characterized as ‘the Living Book’:

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<sup>93</sup> Qur’án, II:2.

<sup>94</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K103, p. 57.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, n129, pp. 220-1.

Take heed lest ye be prevented by aught that hath been recorded in the Book from hearken-  
ing unto this, the Living Book...<sup>96</sup>

...neither the Scriptures of the world, nor all the books and writings in existence, shall, in this Day, avail you aught without this, the Living Book, Who proclaimeth in the midmost heart of creation: "Verily, there is none other God but Me, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise."<sup>97</sup>

Corollary to the concept of the 'Book' is that of the *Logos*: *kalimah* in Arabic, the 'Word' in English—that same mystic Word made familiar to the English-speaking world by a particularly striking and majestic passage of the King James Bible:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.<sup>98</sup>

The Word is in a sense the epitome, the supreme and quintessential symbol, of the message promulgated by each Manifestation of God. It signifies at once His teachings, His authority, and His creative power to revitalize and make all things new:

Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men.<sup>99</sup>

Your spirits would be so transported by His Word as to throw into commotion the Greater World—how much more this small and petty one!<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, K134, p. 67.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, K168, p. 81.

<sup>98</sup> John, I:1.

<sup>99</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K38, pp. 32-3.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, K55, p. 39.

Another keyword, appearing in the very opening words of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, is *Ḥákim*, the 'Supreme Ruler'. It can also mean 'judge' or 'one who decrees laws or ordinances'. *Hukm*, a word expressing both the quality and function of a *Ḥákim*, and also a particular 'ordinance', 'decree' or 'judgement' such as a *Ḥákim* would be entitled to pass, is applied in a general sense in the Qur'án to the book as a whole:

Thus, then, have We bestowed from on high this [divine writ] as an ordinance in the Arabic tongue.<sup>101</sup>

But it might be applied with equal propriety to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, replete as it is with particular instances of *ḥukm* in the more restricted sense provided above. "Thus hath the sun of Our commandment [*ḥukm*] shone forth above the horizon of Our utterance," Bahá'u'lláh states at one point in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, "Blessed, then, be those who do Our bidding."<sup>102</sup>

Another very important Arabic word related to *Ḥákim* is *ḥikmah* which, although customarily rendered into English simply as 'wisdom', retains many elements of its cognate *ḥukm*, described above, as it signifies primarily 'what prevents or restrains from ignorant behaviour', and has thus come to denote a form of practical wisdom in which perfect understanding is given tangible expression through nobility of conduct and excellence of deed. Further, *ḥikmah* may even signify that perfect blend of 'knowledge and the doing of good things' exemplified by the 'gift of prophecy' or the 'prophetic office', and it is in this sense that the word occurs in the following Qur'anic passage:

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<sup>101</sup> Qur'án, XIII:37. See also VII:87 and X:109.

<sup>102</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K108, p. 59.

And [He] will impart unto thy son revelation,  
and wisdom, and the Torah, and the Gospel  
...<sup>103</sup>

Again and again throughout His Writings, Bahá'u'lláh impresses upon His followers the importance of evincing this quality of practical wisdom, often using it in such a sense as to make it virtually equivalent to the English 'prudence' or 'caution'. The peoples of the world are still largely immature, Bahá'u'lláh advises us, and if we are to demonstrate the wisdom He enjoins upon us, we must offer the new healing Message humbly and lovingly, tempered and rendered palatable with the milk of mildness, moderation, clemency and compassion.

Some of these senses of 'wisdom' are suggested in the following extract from Bahá'u'lláh's *Tablet of Wisdom*:

The beginning of Wisdom and the origin thereof is to acknowledge whatsoever God hath clearly set forth...<sup>104</sup>

and also in the following excerpt from His *Words of Wisdom*:

The essence of wisdom is the fear of God, the dread of His scourge and punishment, and the apprehension of His justice and decree.<sup>105</sup>

By its own testimony, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas constitutes a repository and embodiment of Divine Wisdom, and the intimate connection of such 'wisdom' with the concept of the 'Law', or *ḥukm*, is illustrated by its assertion that "We school you with the rod of wisdom and laws..."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Qur'án, III:48.

<sup>104</sup> *Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, A Compilation*, (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1986), p. 246.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 248.

<sup>106</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K45, p. 36.

A word with which *ḥikmah* is frequently coupled, and which is associated with it in more than one passage of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, is *bayán*, signifying 'the gift of intelligent speech, power of expression, capacity to grasp the relationships between things and explain them clearly'. Like *ḥikmah* it is no less a quality of Divine Revelation than an attribute which we are all called upon to acquire and exemplify to the best of our abilities:

Thus hath it been decreed in this Tablet from whose horizon hath shone the day-star of wisdom and utterance.<sup>107</sup>

Assist ye the Lord of all creation with works of righteousness, and also through wisdom and utterance.<sup>108</sup>

Where is he to be found that dareth to claim to be My equal in utterance or wisdom?<sup>109</sup>

The incalculable potency of human utterance for good and redemption is emphasized in a particularly striking analogy set forth in the latter portion of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, according to which the human tongue is accredited with the same capacity metaphorically to 'build up'—that is, to revive and rehabilitate—the human heart as that possessed by the human hand in rearing physical structures:

In truth, the hearts of men are edified through the power of the tongue, even as houses and cities are built up by the hand and other means.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, K33, p. 30.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, K73, p. 45.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, K101, pp. 56-7.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, K160, p. 77.



Closely affiliated to the word *bayán* is its near cognate *tibyán*. Although some doubt exists as to the precise distinction in sense between these twin forms, it has been suggested that the former denotes 'perspicuity of meaning', the latter 'clarity of exposition'. Both words feature in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, though not in such a way as to contrast the one with the other, or to indicate the precise respects in which they differ in meaning from each other. That Bahá'u'lláh was nevertheless using them with exactness and precision is surely indicated by a statement made by Him in the *Súriy-i-Haykal*, in which, by drawing a direct comparison between *tibyán* and *bayán*, He signified His full awareness of the nice semantic distinction between the two words:

Rally ye to the Cause of your Compassionate Lord. For the blade of the sword of elucidation [*tibyán*] is sharper than that of utterance [*bayán*], and much more elevated, if ye but ponder the Words of My Lord.<sup>111</sup>

Another metaphor used extensively by Bahá'u'lláh throughout His Writings, and of particular significance in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, is that of water. In a peculiarly sententious and evocative statement, Bahá'u'lláh reminds us that:

Ye are all created out of water, and unto dust shall ye return.<sup>112</sup>

Inevitably our minds turn to the familiar and hallowed formula enunciated in the Bible: "All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again,"<sup>113</sup> yet we pause questioningly at the initial substitution of 'water' for

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<sup>111</sup> Quoted in Arabic in *Athár-i-Qalam-i-A'lá*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>112</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K148, p. 73.

<sup>113</sup> Ecclesiastes, III:20.

'dust'. Our puzzlement is dispelled, however, when we set the statement in its Qur'anic as well as its Biblical context, for the Qur'án informs us in corroboration of the Biblical tradition, not only that:

We have created [every one of] you out of dust...

but also that:

...We made out of water every living thing...<sup>114</sup>

A wonderful marriage is thus effected between two contrasting religious traditions, and a synthesis attained which constitutes at once a penetrating and poignant *memento mori*, and a scientifically accurate epitome of the generation and extinction of human life. Water images generally—of rain and showers, streams and rivers, but above all of seas and oceans—form an especially prominent and suggestive motif running throughout the whole corpus of Bahá'u'lláh's Works. The ocean also appears in the Qur'án, but generally speaking, with one or two exceptions, such as the following celebrated analogy, its presence is a physical and a concrete one:

If all the sea were ink for my Sustainer's words,  
the sea would indeed be exhausted ere my  
Sustainer's words are exhausted! And [thus it  
would be] if we were to add to it sea upon  
sea.<sup>115</sup>

In the Bahá'í Revelation, by contrast, and in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in particular, the ocean has become a potent and all-pervasive metaphor for the Revelation itself, as witnessed by the following stirring and evocative extracts:

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<sup>114</sup> Qur'án, XXII:5 and XXI:30.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, XVIII:109.

Thus have the billows of the Ocean of Utterance surged, casting forth the pearls of the laws decreed by the Lord of all mankind.<sup>116</sup>

Ponder ye this verse, and judge equitably before God, that haply ye may glean the pearls of mysteries from the ocean that surgeth in My Name, the All-Glorious, the Most High.<sup>117</sup>

Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths.<sup>118</sup>

So deeply pervasive and powerful is this image of the ocean throughout the Kitáb-i-Aqdas that it is as if the very language of the Book has assumed something of the character of the ocean, paralleling its ebb and flow, its rise and fall, its restless surging energy. Perhaps, in contemplating this analogy, we may go far in understanding why the Kitáb-i-Aqdas has assumed the form it has, in which concrete legislative provisions intermingle with lofty, abstract spiritual utterances; for if its legislative ordinances are to be considered as showers of pearls cast forth by the Most Mighty Ocean, then it is only natural that after each such discharge, the onrushing waters should have time to recede, to recoup their forces, and once more to rush forth laden with fresh treasures to cast forth over mankind.

Another basic symbol of which only scant use is made in the Qur'án, but which is further developed by Bahá'u'lláh in His Writings, is that of the 'Key' (*miftáh*). In the Qur'án the keys of the knowledge of things unseen were stated to be in the possession of God:

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<sup>116</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K26, p. 28.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, K137, p. 68.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, K182, p. 85.

For, with Him are the keys to the things that are beyond the reach of a created being's perception...<sup>119</sup>

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, however, we are provided with the following remarkable intimation in a passage alluding to a celebrated Islamic *Ḥadīth*. It identifies the purpose of creation, stating that a metaphorical key—that of God's love—may now be available to us, affording some faint inkling of the ineffable mystery of the Hidden Treasure:

God hath made My hidden love the key to the Treasure; would that ye might perceive it! But for the key, the Treasure would to all eternity have remained concealed; would that ye might believe it!<sup>120</sup>

Arguably, the image in Bahá'u'lláh's Writings which most potently symbolizes His creative role as the Author of a new religious canon is that of the Pen (*qalam*)—the central instrument of revelation. The "Pen of the Most High"<sup>121</sup> is the term by which the Source of Revelation, whether in the Bahá'í or preceding Dispensations, is customarily designated in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, and while it is clear that the term can, in a sense, refer to none other than the Manifestation Himself, it is still remarkable how frequently in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh His Pen is assigned an individual personality of its own, accredited with human emotions, and apostrophized, exhorted, reproached, cajoled, and otherwise dealt with as if it were an entirely independent and sentient being. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself contains more than one example

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<sup>119</sup> Qur'án, VI:59.

<sup>120</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K15, p. 24.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, K2, p. 20; K16, p. 24; K24, p. 27; K86, p. 51; K136, p. 68; K142, p. 71 and K175, p. 83.

of this conception of a living, 'self-willed' pen, as in Bahá'u'lláh's statement that "We...in Our wisdom, withheld Our Pen,"<sup>122</sup> or in His exhortation to the Pen of the Most High to "Move Thou upon the Tablet at the bidding of Thy Lord."<sup>123</sup> The enormous metaphorical significance that would come, in the Bahá'í Dispensation, to be invested in the image of the Pen, is only dimly foreshadowed in the Qur'án, notably in the following passage, considered to embody the very first outpouring of Revelation to the Prophet Muḥammad:

Read—for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful  
One who has taught [man] the use of the pen—  
taught man what he did not know!<sup>124</sup>

The importance of the image of the 'Pen' throughout the Kitáb-i-Aqdas may be gauged from the following assemblage of extracts in which it features:

Hear ye not the shrill voice of My Most Exalted  
Pen?<sup>125</sup>

These are the ordinances of God that have been  
set down in the Books and Tablets by His Most  
Exalted Pen.<sup>126</sup>

Turn ye, O people, unto that which hath pro-  
ceeded from My Most Exalted Pen.<sup>127</sup>

Thus biddeth you the Lord of creation, the  
movement of Whose Pen hath revolutionized  
the soul of mankind.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, K98, p. 56.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, K175, p. 83.

<sup>124</sup> Qur'án XCVI:3-5. See also LXVIII:1, XXXI:27 and III:44.

<sup>125</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas K41, p. 34.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, K17, p. 25.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, K179, p. 85.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, K54, p. 39.

Think ye that ye have recognized the Pen where-  
with your Lord, the Lord of all names, comman-  
deth you?<sup>129</sup>

Thus, by His mercy, hath the commandment  
been recorded by the Pen of justice.<sup>130</sup>

The following is one of the most eloquently expressive  
passages in the entire Book:

Blessed is the one who discovereth the fragrance  
of inner meanings from the traces of this Pen  
through whose movement the breezes of God  
are wafted over the entire creation, and through  
whose stillness the very essence of tranquillity  
appeareth in the realm of being.<sup>131</sup>

A singularly beautiful and captivating symbol of the  
Manifestation found throughout the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,  
but for which there is no Qur'anic precedent, is that of the  
songbird, variously represented as a dove and as a night-  
ingale. The implication, of course, is that the words  
uttered by the Manifestation have the same intoxicating,  
soul-entrancing quality as do the ethereal accents of these  
two songsters, so celebrated in Persian and Arabic poetry.  
Following are some extracts from the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in  
which these images are employed:

Hearken ye...unto that which the Dove is  
warbling on the Branch of Eternity...<sup>132</sup>

When the Mystic Dove will have winged its  
flight from its Sanctuary of Praise...<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, K55, p. 39.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, K72, p. 45.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, K158, p. 76.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, K88, p. 52.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, K174, p. 82.

Thus hath the Nightingale sung with sweet  
melody upon the celestial bough, in praise of its  
Lord, the All-Merciful.<sup>134</sup>

Equally intoxicating, but this time to the sense of taste, figuratively speaking, is the 'Choice Wine' alluded to in the Qur'án as the beverage of the righteous in Paradise, but now for the first time unsealed and proffered to the denizens of this mortal realm. Not only is it our senses of taste and hearing that are ravished in this new Revelation, however, for Bahá'u'lláh has also repeatedly enjoined upon us to inhale the inebriating fragrances which have been diffused by His Revelation and which are now wafting abroad, and to gaze upon the sublimely beautiful spectacle of the Beloved arrayed in His new attire.<sup>135</sup> It is as if all the choicest and most refined sensations the world has to offer have here been marshalled and combined to convey a sense of supernal and ineffable delight at the blissful consummation of the advent of the Promised Day.

#### THE MYSTIC REALM

Part of the lyrical, rhapsodic, ethereally uplifting quality of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas surely resides in the tantalizing glimpses it provides us into that realm of supreme felicity beyond our ken, to which all our paltry actions on this worldly plain are tending—a realm so bright, so pure, so sanctified, so radiant with love and joy, that if we could but gain some glimpse of it we would surely yield up our lives in longing to attain it. This supernal realm must remain largely veiled from our mortal perceptions, but at least the Kitáb-i-Aqdas clearly intimates to us its exist-

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, K139, p. 70.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, K4, p. 20; K7, pp. 21-2 and K136, pp. 67-8. See also K4, pp. 20-1; K38, pp. 32-3; K116, p. 61; K137, p. 68 and K142, p. 71.

ence, extending the promise that if we abide by its prescriptions then we too may be able to taste of its felicity. Indeed, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas even offers us the promise of a foretaste of this mystic realm—a foretaste which is afforded, significantly, by the Divine verses themselves, in which those who recite them in the most melodious of tones will perceive “that with which the sovereignty of earth and heaven can never be compared.”<sup>136</sup>

The concept of a mystic realm inaccessible to human understanding is expressed in both the Qur’án and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas by the word *ghayb*, which signifies in one sense “all those sectors or phases of reality which lie beyond the range of human perception and cannot, therefore, be proved or disproved by scientific observation or even adequately comprised within the accepted categories of speculative thought.”<sup>137</sup> The Qur’án informs us, as already noted, that the keys to this hidden realm are in the Hand of God, and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas expands upon this by telling us further that the source of God’s knowledge of things unseen is “a Tablet which the eye of creation hath not seen, and which is revealed to none except His own Self.”<sup>138</sup>

In the Qur’án the concept of a heavenly Tablet is limited to that of the ‘Preserved Tablet’ (*al-Lawḥ al-Mahfúz*) in which is recorded the original of the Qur’án. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, however, reference is made to this same Qur’anic ‘Preserved Tablet’, which is at once the source of God’s knowledge of things unseen and the record wherein is preserved an account of our actions on earth. The essentially static Qur’anic concept is thus broadened and imbued with a new dynamic quality, awakening us to the fact that

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, K116, p. 61.

<sup>137</sup> Asad, *op. cit.*, n3, p. 4.

<sup>138</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K39, p. 33.



the purpose of the 'Preserved Tablet' is not to crystallize for all time the text of the Qur'án in the precise form in which it was revealed; and that whatever suggestion of permanence or safeguarding is conveyed by the expression, is perhaps to be attributed to the enduring nature of the truths it enshrines, or else interpreted as referring to the quality of the Divine Writ, which is eternal and incorruptible—hence the reference in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas to the "changeless Faith of God."<sup>139</sup>

That the Qur'án is not the final and immutable expression of God's will for men is in fact intimated in that Book itself by the veiled promise it contains that one day its 'elucidation' or 'interpretation' will come:

[And God will say] "...for indeed, We did convey unto them a divine writ which We clearly, and wisely, spelled out—a guidance and a grace unto people who will believe."

Are [the unbelievers] but waiting for the final meaning of that [Day of Judgment] to unfold? [But] on the Day when its final meaning is unfolded, those who aforetime had been oblivious thereof will say: "Our Sustainer's apostles have indeed told us the truth! Have we, then, any intercessors who could intercede in our behalf? Or could we be brought back [to life] so that we might act otherwise than we were wont to act?"

Indeed, they will have squandered their own selves, and all their false imagery will have forsaken them.<sup>140</sup>

Needless to say, no such explanation as is promised here was forthcoming from the Prophet Himself, from His

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, K182, p. 85.

<sup>140</sup> Qur'án, VII:52-3. See also LXXV:16-9.

successors, or from subsequent generations of believers. Clearly, since the Qur'án was in a certain sense a vehicle conveying insights into that unseen realm whose keys are held by God, it would be impossible for this promise ever to be fulfilled by any mortal agency; and this promise, therefore, can hardly be considered otherwise than as a prophecy of a future Revelation vouchsafing yet clearer insights into that same unseen realm as yet indistinctly disclosed in the Qur'án. Further confirmation of the progressive nature of Divine Revelation is provided by the Qur'anic statement that:

Every age has had its revelation: God annuls or confirms whatever He wills [of His earlier messages]—for with Him is the source of all revelation.<sup>141</sup>

Each age, then, is blessed with a Dispensation appropriate to its own particular exigencies, and each Revelation constitutes at once an affirmation and a continuation of that which it succeeds. As the Holy Book of the Dispensation immediately preceding that inaugurated by the Báb, it is not surprising that there should exist so close a relationship between the Qur'án and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and that the wording of the latter should so frequently reflect that of the former, although invariably investing it with a fresh dimension of meaning. This process of elaborating and expounding the meaning of an earlier scripture is evident in other holy books too, for the Qur'án retells stories from the Old and New Testaments, while Christ in the Bible makes reference to the Ten Commandments given to Moses and the whole corpus of Jewish Law. It is especially notable that, in contrast to the Bible and the Qur'án, no use is made in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas of the parable for the exposition

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, XIII:38-9.

of religious truth; rather, it communicates its message directly through the pure medium of the Word itself.

The essential oneness of the Manifestations of God necessitated by this conception of the progressive unfolding and cumulative exposition of religious truth is unequivocally affirmed in the following extract from one of the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh:

Beware, O believers in the Unity of God, lest ye be tempted to make any distinction between any of the Manifestations of His Cause, or to discriminate against the signs that have accompanied and proclaimed their Revelation. This indeed is the true meaning of Divine Unity, if ye be of them that apprehend and believe this truth. Be ye assured, moreover, that the works and acts of each and every one of these Manifestations of God, nay whatever pertaineth unto them, and whatsoever they may manifest in the future, are all ordained by God, and are a reflection of His Will and Purpose.<sup>142</sup>

Here is the same thought expressed in a passage from the Kitáb-i-Íqán:

...behold them all as the bearers of one Name, the exponents of one Cause, the manifestations of one Self, and the revealers of one Truth...<sup>143</sup>

In conformity with this conception of the essential oneness of the Manifestations of God, and of the progressively developing and expanding nature of the message They bring to mankind, Bahá'u'lláh advances no claim to the finality of His own Revelation, and indeed, by His assertion in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas that, "Whoso layeth claim to a Revelation direct from God, ere the expiration of a full

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<sup>142</sup> *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXIV, p. 59.

<sup>143</sup> *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, p. 102.

thousand years, such a man is assuredly a lying impostor,"<sup>144</sup> He positively forewarns us to anticipate the coming of a new Revelation once the first millennium of the Bahá'í Era has expired.

Here, then, we are confronted by another aspect of the omniscience of the Manifestation of God, for, according to Bahá'í belief, not only is He uniquely qualified to unravel the mysteries of the preceding Revelation, but He is also endowed with a preternatural ability to probe the future and to discern the course of coming events; even as the Báb had done with respect to the Revelation of "Him Whom God shall make manifest" in prophesying, for instance, that, "He is the One Who will under all conditions proclaim: 'Verily, there is none other God besides Me, the One, the Incomparable, the Omniscient, the All-Informed',"<sup>145</sup> a prophecy which receives literal fulfillment in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

This mysterious and unique capacity of the Manifestation, both to elucidate the Message of His Precursors and to presage the advent of His Successors in the prophetic office, is of course fully in harmony with the Bahá'í conception of the Manifestations of God as one and the same in spirit, but distinguished from each other in respect of their physical appearance, of the circumstances and exigencies of the age in which they live, and of the comparative fullness and intensity of the message with which they have been charged. It is this understanding which lies at the very heart of the Bahá'í belief in progressive Revelation, that forever-renewing process of growth, development and change. Each successive outpouring of Divine guidance leads to a heightening of spiritual aware-

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<sup>144</sup> Kitáb-i-Aqdas, K37, p. 32.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, K143, p. 71.

ness; the changeless essence is revealed to us in a multitude of different forms, but behind and beyond them all the reality of that essence remains inviolable, its continuity reflected in the world of nature, the world of matter, and the world of spirit.

The perspicuous and inimitable language of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas moves us by its tender grandeur, its sublime compassion, self-defining and dazzlingly universal; it combines the power of the mysterious with that of the direct and the specific. It has an ethereal atmosphere all its own, an ineffable pervasive harmony, a majestic surging rhythm reminiscent of its depth and power. A kind of inevitable relation exists between its component parts, and its words and phrases are redolent of thoughts that live and breathe. Its language is productive of a host of feelings and evokes a myriad of sensations. It addresses pre-eminently the human heart, as befits that which is the throne and emblem of the Divine in man. The Book in its entirety constitutes a supreme outpouring of heavenly bounty, a treasury of unfailing sustenance and guidance, and a token of God's boundless mercy to mankind. Awesome and exalted as are its themes and purposes, the passion and sublimity of the language in which the Book is cast are nevertheless fully capable of sustaining its lofty tenor—nay, of enhancing those themes and purposes and setting them off to their fullest advantage.

Notwithstanding that the foregoing remarks have concentrated on particular features and individual passages, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas must be taken as a whole. There can be no partial analysis, fragmentation or dissection of the Word that has infinite meaning, and that can never be comprehended by the finite mind. Indeed, no amount of analysis or explanation is capable of probing the secret of this miraculous creation.