

A Hymn to Love

(*Sáqí, bi-dih ábí*)*†

Julio Savi

O Cup-Bearer, give me a drop

He is the Glorious

O Cup-Bearer, give me a drop of the mystic Flame, [1]

That it may wash my soul from the whispers of the flesh,

A drop of water revealing the form of Fire,

A sparkle of fire manifesting the celestial Fount.

A glimmer of His image fell on the page of the Soul,

A hundred Hellenic wisdoms were confounded.

A spark of that Flame hit the Tree of Sinai,

A hundred Imranite Moseses were astounded.

A flame of that Fire turned into Love and pitched [5]

Its tents in man's water and clay and in his heart.

Who art Thou, O Love, that 'cause of Thee the world

Is in turmoil and Luqman's wisdom is envious?

* For a general introduction to this and other poems by Bahá'u'lláh see Julio Savi, "Bahá'u'lláh's Persian poems written before 1863," in *Lights of Irfan* 13 (2012): 317-361.

† This provisional translation has been done with the precious assistance of Ms. Faezeh Mardani Mazzoli, lecturer of Persian language at the University of Bologna, translated by Julio Savi.

Now Thou boastest: "I'm the Beloved's splendour in the world."

Now Thou proclaimest: "I'm Myself that Divine Countenance."

Since Thou breathest the Beloved's fragrance upon the soul,

Whatever claim Thou advancest, one might say Thou art much better.

Thou art the Companion of the soul, the Sign of the Beloved,

From Thee tranquility of spirit cometh, from Thee distress.

If a ray from Thy Face shineth on the Divine realms, [10]

Thou wilt see a hundred Cananaean Josephs put up for sale.

From Thee Joseph's fragrance bloweth; from Thee the Messianic Spirit;

Thou art the white-handed Moses, Thou, the flame on Mount Paran.

Bound are the heads by Thy locks, pierced the hearts

By Thine anguish, be they of insane laymen or of Divine sages.

I'm drunk of Thee, 'cause of Thee I'm notorious, whether

Thou offerest me a hundred lives, or Thou slayest me.

If Thou art the Angel of death, how come that Thou revivest me?

If Thou art the Reviver of bodies, how is it that Thou attest as a snake?

If Thou graciously movest in the court of a king, Thou changest [15]

The king into a servant and the servant into a king.

A spark of Thy Face fell upon the rose-bush of the soul,

And lit its beauty as a crimson tulip.

O! What a breeze wafted announcing to the soul the glad tidings

That from the East of the Spirit that Divine Face hath
appeared.

Souls soared with yearning, hearts were enraptured in ecstasy,

Love fell in love with Him, and so did the essence of
creation.

Through His wisdom, the coincidence of opposites is made
manifest,

Now Love becometh a servant, now the Intellect a porter.

Stop tearing asunder the veil of mystery, O Dervish:

A cry riseth from the city of men and the world of brutes. [20]

A hymn to love: a poem revealed by Bahá'u'lláh

Sáqí, bi-dih ábí is a 20 one rhymed (-*ání*) distiches poem. It is one among eight Persian poems, composed by Bahá'u'lláh, signed “Dervish,” and published by the Iranian Bahá'í scholar ‘Abdu’l-Ḥamíd Ishráq Khávarí (1902–1972) in his multi-volume anthology of the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith *Má'idíy-i-Asmání* (4:176-211). The eight Persian poems quoted by Ishráq Khávarí are as follows:¹

1. *Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí*, that may be paraphrased as “Come back and proffer a chalice” (qtd. in Ishráq Khávarí 186-7; see also Majmú'iy-i-Áthár 30:158-59);²
2. *Sáqí az Ghayb-i-Baqá*, that may be paraphrased as “The Cup-bearer of the hidden Realm” (qtd. in Ishráq Khávarí 209-11; see also Majmú'iy-i-Áthár 30:157-58);³
3. *'Ishq az Sidriy-i-A'lá ámad*, that may be paraphrased as “Love came from the loftiest Tree” (qtd. in Ishráq Khávarí 179-80; see also Majmú'iy-i-Áthár 30:172-74);
4. *Bi-Jánán ján hamí dar-yáft rah*, that may be paraphrased as “The soul hath found its way to the Beloved” (qtd. in Ishráq Khávarí 176-8; see also Majmú'iy-i-Áthár 30:167-69);

5. *Sáqí, bi-dih ábí zán shu'iy-i-rúḥání*, that may be paraphrased as “O Cup-bearer, give me a drop of the mystic flame” (qtd. In *Ishrâq Khávarí* 192-4; see also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:171-72);
6. *Mast-and bulbulán*, that may be paraphrased as “Nightingales get inebriated” (qtd. in *Ishrâq Khávarí* 194-6; see also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:169-71);⁴
7. *Saḥar ámad bi bistar-am yár*, that may be paraphrased as “At dawn the Friend came to my bed” (qtd. in *Ishrâq Khávarí* 181-84; see also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:163-65);
8. *But-i-má ámad bá baṭṭí-u bádiḥ*, that may be paraphrased as “Our Charmer came with a glass and wine” (qtd. in *Ishrâq Khávarí* 188-92; see also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:159-63).

These eight poems are also quoted in *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 30:157-74. Excerpts from a few of them are included, together with excerpts from other poems by Bahá'u'lláh, by the Iranian Bahá'í scholar Mírzá Asadu'lláh Fáḍíl Mázarání (ca.1880-1957), in volume 4 of his *Tárikh Zuhúru'l-Ḥaqq* (History of the Manifestation of Truth), a nine volume history of the Bábí and Bahá'í religions (141-2). Two of them are mentioned in the *Bahá'í World* volumes among “Bahá'u'lláh Best Known Works.” They are *Báz Áv-u Bi-Dih Jámí* and *Sáqí az Ghayb-i-Baqá*. Franklin D. Lewis, an expert in Persian Language and Literature, has offered three different translations of *Sáqí az Ghayb-i-Baqá* (“Short Poem” 86-9). Three of these poems are mentioned, and a few verses translated, by Stephen N. Lambden, an English Bahá'í scholar focusing on Shí'í Islam and Qajar Persia, early Shaykhism, the Writings of the Báb, the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, in his “Sinaitic Mysteries” (116-7): *Bí jánán ján hamí daryaft, Sáqí bidih ábí, Mast-and bulbulán*.

Historical hints

These eight poems were most probably written in Kurdistan, where Bahá'u'lláh remained from 10 April 1854 to 19 March 1856 and, in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words, "*lived in poverty*," wearing the "*garments . . . of the poor and needy*" and eating the "*food . . . of the indigent and lowly . . .*" (qtd. in GPB124, sec.7, para.42). Lewis writes about them:

The information in *God Passes By*⁵ seems to suggest that these poems signed "Dervish" date to the earlier phase of Bahá'u'lláh's residence at Sar-Galú, probably some time between the Spring of 1854 and the Winter of 1854-55. However, we cannot yet completely rule out the possibility that they were composed later, while at the Khálidí lodge in Sulaymáníyyih, or perhaps even in the period shortly after his return to Baghdad. ("Short Poem" 84)

The attribution of their drafting to the years of Bahá'u'lláh's stay in Kurdistan (1854-1856), during which He was in touch with the local Sufi communities, is also upheld by Mázandarání in his *Tárikh-i-Zuhúru'l-Haqq* (4:139). Moreover, this attribution seems confirmed by their *takhalluṣ*, "Dervish," the nom de plume introduced into the final verse of these eight poems according to the use of Persian lyrics. In that period Bahá'u'lláh had adopted the surname of Dervísh Muḥammad (see Lewis, "Short Poem" 84). In this paper, we will comment only upon the poem which begins *Sáqí, bi-dih ábí*.

Literary aspects

As to its form, this specific composition may be defined a poem in the light of the following definition of poetry, given by Lewis as to Nineteenth century Persia: "rhymed speech (*moqafâ*) composed in lines (*bayt* / *abyât*) following one of the established quantitative meters (*bahr* / *bohur*) and arranged

according to a particular form” (“Poetry as Revelation” 102). Specifically, *Sáqí*, *bi-dih ábí* seems a *ghazal*.

As to the *ghazal*, the French Orientalist Régis Blachère (1900–1973), a profound interpreter of the Koran, which he translated into French (1947), writes in the Encyclopaedia of Islam that *ghazal* means “‘song, elegy of love,’ often also ‘the erotico-elegiac genre.’ The term is Arabic, but passed into Persian, Turkish and Urdu and acquired a special sense in these languages.”

The term *ghazal* comes from the Arabic root *ghazala*:

He talked, and acted in an amatory and enticing manner, with a woman, or with women; he practised . . . the talk, and actions, and circumstances, occurring between the lover and the object of love. (Lane 6:39)

And thus the Lane Arabic-English Lexicon defines the word *ghazal* as

The talks, and actions, and circumstances, occurring between the lover and the object of love . . . an inclining to foolish and youthful conduct, or a manifesting of passionate love, and becoming notorious for affections to women . . . talk, and amatory and enticing conduct, with women; or play, sport, dalliance, or wanton conduct, and amorous talk, with women . . . play, sport, or diversion, with women . . . or the talk of young men and [or with] young women: . . . praise of what are apparent of the members of the object of love: or the mention of the days of union and of disunion: or the like thereof. (Lane 6:39)

Blachère explains:

the *ghazal* was . . . a man’s song addressed to a girl; contamination by the noun *ghazál* “gazelle,” from the images and comparisons associated with it, is not perhaps to be excluded (cf. “to make sheep’s eyes”).

Whatever the reason, the idea evoked by the term *ghazal*, like the English “gallantry” and particularly the noun “gallant,” now fallen into disuse, became elaborated in a realm of ideas where there mingle the notions of flirtation, compliments made to a lady, complaints at her coldness or inaccessibility and the description of effeminate languishing attitudes on the part of the lover . . .

As to Persian *ghazals*, Alessandro Bausani (1921-1988), a well-known Italian Islamicist and a deep knower of Persian religiosity, says that

A widely accepted opinion is that the *ghazal*, an unknown genre in the ancient Arabic poetry, derived from an extrapolation and an autonomous use of the *tashbīb* [first part] of the *qaṣīdè*. However it also may be that, without excluding the former hypothesis, the *ghazal* may have derived from some form of oral, popular autochthonous poetry. (“Letteratura neopersiana” 176)

Bausani also writes that the *ghazal* is “the primary instrument of Persian lyrics” (ibid.). He explains that *qaṣīdihs* and *ghazals* are technically different from one another only for their different “length and different subjects” (ibid.). The former was mainly used in Persia as “an instrument of panegyric or philosophic and moralizing poetry” (ibid.). The latter dealt with “wine, love, springtime and mystics” (ibid. 176). Edward G. Browne (1862-1926), the renowned British Orientalist, also explains: “The *ghazal* differs from the *qaṣīda* mainly in subject and length. The former is generally erotic or mystical, and seldom exceeds ten or a dozen *bayts*; the latter may be a panegyric, or a satire, or it may be didactic, philosophical, religious” (27). While speaking about Persian *ghazals* of the 10th-13th centuries, Bausani also explains that in those centuries the *ghazal* has “as its object the *ma‘shūk* ‘the Beloved,’ whereas the *qaṣīda* has as its object the *mamdūh*, ‘the Praised’

(Prince or patron).” However, he adds, in the period from the 13th to the 16th century “the chief object of the *ghazal*, the *ma‘shúk*, the (earthly) Beloved, becomes inextricably connected not only with the *ma‘búd* [literally, the Adored One], the divine Beloved (God, or better His representative on earth, the mystical Initiator) but even with the *mamdúh* [literally, the Celebrated One], the traditional object of the *kaşída*” (“*Ghazal*. ii. In Persian literature”).

The features of the Persian *ghazals*, as explained by Bausani in the Encyclopaedia of Islam,⁶ may be summarized as follows:

1. Length: “it consists of a few *bayts* (verses, or distiches), generally not less than five and no more than twelve” (Bausani). Other authors consider up to 15 verses as acceptable for a *ghazal* (Rossi, *Grammatica* 92). This is true for Khájiḥ Shamsu’d-Dín Muḥammad Háfiḻ-*i-Shíráz* (ca.1318-1390), for example, whose *Díván* comprises only two *ghazals* longer than 15 verses. But Mawláná Jalál ad-Dín Rúmí (1207-1273), one of the greatest Persian poets, wrote some *ghazals* that have more than 15 verses, up to 29 couplets. However, all scholars agree that a *ghazal* should be short. It has been defined as “an older Iranian cousin to European sonnets and short odes” (Hilman, “Háfez and the Persian ghazal” G).

2. Rhyme: “It has a single rhyme (often accompanied by a *radíf*); in the first *bayt*, called *maṭla‘*, both hemistichs too rhyme together” (Bausani).

3. Nom de plume: “the last *bayt*, called *maḵṭa‘*, contains the nom-de-plume (*takhalluṣ*) of the author” (Bausani).

4. Contents: “the contents of the *ghazal* are descriptions of the emotions of the poet in front of love, spring, wine, God, etc., often inextricably connected” (Bausani).

5. “In classical *ghazal* each verse forms a closed unit, only slightly interconnected with the others. To explain this feature of the *ghazal*, some modern scholars have invoked the ‘psychology of depth’ to show that in the *ghazal* there is unity,

but an unconscious one. However this may be, external incongruity would seem to be a real rule in classic Persian poetry. We are in the presence of a bunch of motifs only lightly tied together" (Bausani). This rule admits exceptions: "If two or more verses belong in sense to each other, they are called *muḳaṭṭa*" (Wilberforce-Clarke xiv).

Finally Wilberforce-Clark remarks about *ghazal*:

The poem must be finished, without defects in rhyme, and pure in language, all obsolete words, or vulgar expressions being avoided. Each verse must convey a complete thought. The verses are strung like pearls on a thread, which makes them a necklace, the value whereof lies in the value of each pearl, not in the thread. (ibid.)

As to the features of the *ghazal* in the times immediately before Bahá'u'lláh, Bausani writes:

The fourth period [of Persian *ghazal*], that of the so-called Indian style (10th/16th to 12th/18th centuries) . . . sees an intellectual reflection on the accepted symbols of the classical *ghazal*, which becomes an arena for a quasi-philosophical exercise of the mind. The *ghazal* finds a renewed congruity of meaning, and its protagonist, instead of the *ma'shúk/mamdúh/ma'búd* [that is, the Beloved, the Adored One, the Celebrated One] seems to be the Mind of its Author, creating ever new purely intellectual combinations of the old worn-out symbols. (Bausani)

Sáqí bi-dih ábí seems to meet all these requirements, the most important exception being its length: 20 verses. However, as has been said above, both Ḥáfiz and Rúmí wrote some *ghazals* with more than 20 verses. The main reason why this poem can be seen as a *ghazal* is that its central theme is Love. In fact, it may be considered as a hymn to Love, its protagonist. Like the other seven poems which have been mentioned at the beginning

of this paper, *Sáqí bi-dih ábí* seemingly alludes to Bahá'u'lláh's mystic encounter with the Most Great Spirit in the Síyáh-Chál, the subterranean dungeon in Teheran where He was confined from middle August to December 1852, also mentioned in several biographical passages of His Writings. In this poem the Most Great Spirit is described first as Water and Fire, and then as Love itself. Many verses are devoted to a description of Love and of its impact on human hearts and on the world.

A slow reading of the poem

The following thoughts are offered only as personal reflections on the verses revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, whose perusal may evoke remembrances of His own Writings as well as of verses of earlier poets.

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*Huva'l-'Azíz*⁷

He is the Glorious

The invocation of one of the names of God, usually the name Allah, at the beginning of a script is very frequent in the Islamic world. The invocation *Huv'Alláh* means He is God. Francis Joseph Steingass (1825–1903), the German linguist expert on Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit who authored a well-known Persian-English dictionary, writes about *Huva*, in Arabic *huwa*, and in Persian also *hú*:

He; he is; a name of God;—also *hú'í náma*, The name of God, generally accompanied by one or more of his attributes, written in front of a letter or book as an auspicious omen . . . (Steingass 1516)

As to *Alláh*, Steingass writes: “God: The God, by way of eminence (being compounded of the article *al*, The, and *iláh*, a God)” (Steingass 95). The invocation appears at the beginning of a

few of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, both in poetry, as for example in *Báz áv-u bi-dih jámí*, and *'Ishq az Sidriy-i-A'lá ámad*, and in prose. The Tablets translated into English which begin with this invocation comprise *Ishráqát*, *Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd*, a Tablet quoted by Bahá'u'lláh in *Súriy-i-Haykal: Lawḥ-i-Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh* (108-11, paras.210-4), a Tablet quoted in *Fire and Light* (16, no. VII), the Tablet to Badí' (qtd. in Balyuzi, *King of Glory* 299), a prayer (qtd. in BP43-5) and section 106 of "*Questions and Answers*" (139-40).

About the invocation "*He is God*," 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote:

Thou hast asked regarding the phrase, "He is God!" written above the Tablets. By this word it is intended that no one hath any access to the Invisible Essence. The way is barred and the road is impassable. In this world all men must turn their faces toward "Him-whom God-shall-Manifest." He is the "Dawning-place of Divinity" and the "Manifestation of Deity." He is the "Ultimate Goal," the "Adored One" of all and the "Worshipped One" of all. Otherwise, whatever flashes through the mind is not that Essence of essences and the Reality of realities; nay, rather it is pure imagination woven by man and is surrounded, not the surrounding. Consequently, it returns finally to the realm of supposition and conjectures. (TAB3:485)

Taherzadeh wrote in this regard, that whenever Bahá'u'lláh quotes the Koranic verse: "*There is none other God but God*" at the beginning of a Tablet, He:

proclaims in majestic and powerful language that in this day He has removed the letter of negation which had been placed before that of affirmation. This phrase, which the Prophet of Islam regarded as the cornerstone of His Faith, is now in the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh symbolically replaced by the affirmative phrase "*He is God*." This signifies that the Author of this Faith holds within His own hands the reins of authority, and, unlike

the Dispensations of the past, no one will have the power to wrest it from Him. Hence the assurance in His Writings that this is “the Day which shall not be followed by night.” (160)

In this poem Bahá'u'lláh mentions God's attribute *al-'Azíz*, “Excellent; precious, dear, valuable, rare, choice; magnificent, glorious, powerful; venerable, pious, holy; a king, ruler, prime minister (especially in Egypt)” (Steingass 848). This adjective has been translated “the Glorious.” It is the ninth among the ninety-nine beautiful Names of God that Moslem theologians have found in the Koran. In the Bahá'í Writings it has been translated the “*Mightiest*” (Bahá'u'lláh, qtd. in BP92, Long Healing Prayer; Nafahat-i Faql 2:17, Lawḥ-i-Anta'l-Káfi).

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Sáqí, bi-dih ábí zán shu'liy-i-rúḥání,

Tá kih bi-shúyad ján-rá az vasvasiy-i-nafsání,

O Cup-bearer, give me a drop of the mystic Flame,

That it may wash my soul from the whispers of the flesh,

Bahá'u'lláh here addresses His Beloved, perhaps the Most Great Spirit, Whom He had seen as a Maid, calling Him Cup-Bearer. This familiar personage of Persian mystic poetry has his origin in the Koran and in the Traditions. Bausani explains that Sufis relate the cup-bearer to “the ancient mystic legend wherefore at the beginning of the Divine Love, the cup-bearer (*sáqí*), as God-the Beloved, poured the wine for God-the Lover during forty successive dawns and thus he created the world” (“Letteratura neopersiana” 162; see *Religion in Iran* 277). According to the German Orientalist Annemarie Schimmel (1922–2003), Sufis

saw this moment in poetical imagery as a spiritual banquet in which the wine of Love was distributed to humanity so that everyone received the share which he or she will have in this life. Here, the imagery of wine is

used not for the final goal of the mystic's unification with God and his being filled with Him, but rather as the starting point of the flow of Divine grace at the beginning of time. (*Deciphering* 109)

It is the *rúz-i-alast*, the metahistorical morning when human souls entered into the eternal Covenant with their Creator, which is the basis of their life on earth and of the development of human civilization (see HW, Persian, no.19). Carlo Saccone, an expert in and a translator of Persian poetry into Italian, comprising the whole *Díván* by Ḥáfiz, writes in this regard that

the wine which he [the cup-bearer], incessantly invoked and implored, pours into the cup of the lover\poet clearly reveals its sacred *imprinting*, i.e., it is a transposition of the “mysterious” wine which the youthful cup-bearers of Muslim paradise offer to the blessed spirits. (44)

According to Saccone, the cup-bearer sometimes symbolizes the beloved himself, as

an initiator, i.e., he who . . . initiates the poet . . . into the mysteries of wine and love for him [God]. [And the poet's] initiation . . . is essentially a summon to folly, to disarm one's intellect and its analytic processes, because the lover will attain unto the reunion with his friend . . . only in the condition of “sacred folly,” fostered by his drunkenness. (ibid. 49, 50)

A poem by Rúmí also begins with an invocation to the *sáqí* and a request of wine:

Happy-cheeked *sáqí* of mine, give the cup (*jám*) like the pomegranate blossom (*gulnár*); if for my sake you will not give for the sake of the heart of the Beloved (*Yár*). (*Mystical Poems* 2:70, no.290, v.1; *Díván*, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.2283)

In *Sáqí*, *bi-dih ábí*, the lover asks the Cup-Bearer to give him a drop of the Mystic flame, combining three images: water, *ábí*, here translated “drop,” wine (the Cup-Bearer), and fire, *shu‘lîh*, “Light, splendour, lustre, shining, flashing, coruscation; blaze, flash, fire, flame” (Steingass 747). These three images are often associated in Persian mystical poetry. Bausani writes that in Persian literature “the wine is also fire, and in this it is similar to the alchemists’ water, which is also fire . . . In fact in traditional lyric poetry the Wine is often called ‘water’ and compared to the ‘Water of Life’ (*âb-i haivân*)” (*Religion in Iran* 272).

In the second hemistich the lover explains why he wants a drop of the mystical flame: he wants to cleanse his soul from the whispers of the flesh. Bahá’u’lláh uses two images: the whispers and the flesh. As to the Koranic image of the whispers, *vasvasih*, “Inspiring, suggesting (one’s own mind or Satan); a suggestion; instinct; fear, anxiety; conscience; temptation” (Steingass 1468), translated by Shoghi Effendi as “*whisper*” (*Lawḥ-i-Dhabîh* 246, para.13; *Muntakhabátí* 157), the image of “the whispers of the flesh (*vasvasiy-i-nafsání*)” comes from the Koran:

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.
Say: I betake me for refuge to the Lord of Men, The
King of men, The God of men, Against the mischief of
the stealthily withdrawing whisperer (al-waswási), Who
whispereth in man’s breast—Against djinn and men.
(114:1-6, Rodwell)*

This image is also used by mystical poets. Ḥáfiz writes:

In love’s path (*râh-i-‘ishq*) Ahriman’s⁸ temptations (*vasvasiy-i-Ahriman*) are many:

Sense keep; and to Surúsh’s⁹ message the ear of the heart
put. (*Díván* 744, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.444, v.6; *Divan* 411, no.398,
v.2)

Bahá’u’lláh uses the same image in other passages, as for example:

*Keep us safe, then, through Thine unfailing protection,
O Thou the Beloved of the entire creation and the
Desire of the whole universe, from them whom Thou
hast made to be the manifestations of the Evil
Whisperer, who whispers (yuwaswisúna) in men's breasts
(ṣudúru'n-nás). (PM233, sec.144, para.2; Munáját 156)*

*Know verily that Knowledge is of two kinds: Divine and
Satanic. The one welletth out from the fountain of
divine inspiration; the other is but a reflection of vain
and obscure thoughts. The source of the former is God
Himself; the motive-force of the latter the whisperings
of selfish desire (vasávas-i-nafsání). (K169, para.76; KMI53)*

*Sharp must be thy sight, O Dhabíḥ, and adamant thy
soul, and brass-like thy feet, if thou wishest to be
unshaken by the assaults of the selfish desires that
whisper (vasávis) in men's breasts. (GWB245-6, sec. CXV,
para.13)*

*. . . in whose soul (nafs) Satan (Shayṭán) hath whispered
(waswasa) (qtd. in GPB141, sec.8, para.30)¹⁰*

The Evil Whisperer, mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh and in the Koran (*al-waswásí*) and related by Bahá'u'lláh to Satan (*shayṭán*), seems to be the human lower nature personified as Satan, a nature to which Bahá'u'lláh refers as “*the Satan of self (shayṭán-i-nafs)*” (KI112; KMI84). This lower nature is our ego, that is proud of itself and pretends to be self-sufficient. It is the “serpent” that seduced Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Bible says: “*Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made*” (Genesis 3:1 KJB). The Hebrew word used to refer to the serpent in this verse is *nâchâsh*, from the verb *nâchash*, “to hiss, i.e. whisper” (Strong, “A Concise Dictionary” 78, no.5172). In one of His talks ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained that “*the evil spirit, Satan or whatever is interpreted as evil, refers to the lower nature in man*” (PUP294). He explained the same concept in a Letter in which He

mentions certain friends that had asked Him advice on material aspects of their lives. He is reported to have answered:

Tell them they should do as they think best in these matters. Should they marry, divorce, leave their homes, move to other places, etc.,—all these matters pertaining to their material affairs—Abdul Baha says:

“They must do as they wish; they must solve their own problems; they are grown-ups. We do not like to tell people what they should do in these matters. My work is universal; my time and thoughts are for the whole world on the most important problems relating to affairs that concern the spiritual welfare of nations and individuals. When the believers are insistent, Abdul Baha must give them answers, and it is their wish always that Abdul Baha grants them. He knows what their wish in reality is. They must make mistakes to learn, and to unfold the higher which is within themselves. The initial wish does not come from Abdul Baha. It comes from them. It is generally clothed with such words as these: ‘We only wish to do that which Abdul Baha wishes us to do.’ And they are sincere in this, for they do not know the subtlety of the ego of man. It is the Tempter (the subtle serpent of the mind), and the poor soul not entirely emancipated from its suggestions is deceived until entirely severed from all save God.” (qtd. in *Baha’i Scriptures* 487, sec.936)

As to the flesh, the adjective *nafsání*, “Lewd, sensual; spiritual, vital” (Steingass 1416), derives from *nafs*, that sometimes in Persian corresponds to that which we call flesh, in the sense of the weak side of man, that side which indulges to sin. Muṣliḥ ad-Dín Sa’dí (ca.1184–1291) writes.

How will know the truth of love (*ḥaqíqat-i-‘ishq*) he who is subjected to the passions of the flesh (*haváy-i-nafsání*)? (“*Ghazalyát*,” no.610, v.8)

Bahá'u'lláh writes in His Lawh-i-Laylatu'l-Quds: “*Burn away, wholly for the sake of the Well-Beloved (al-Maḥbúb), the veil of self (ḥujubát-i-nafsániyyih)*” (316, para.1; Muntakhabátí 203). In the Seven Valleys He mentions “*the veils of the Satanic self (ḥijáb-háy-i-nafs-i-shayṭaní)*” (SV7; Haft Vádí 102) that must be burnt by the fire of love so that the mystical seeker may enter the Valley of Knowledge (SV12). This is one of the main functions of the mystic wine, the Word of God, assisting the soul to proceed from the stage of the *nafs-i-ammariḥ*, the commanding soul, or the insistent self, to higher stages of her spiritual evolution.

2

Zán áb kaz-ú shud śúrat-i-átash paydá,

Zán nár kaz-ú záhir án Kawthar-i-Rúḥání.

A drop of water revealing the form of Fire,

A sparkle of fire manifesting the celestial Fount.

The combination of wine, fire and water continues in the second distich. The first hemistich identifies wine, here called water, *áb*, and fire—*átash*, in the first hemistich and *nár* in the second. Wine is fire, because it is conducive to the intoxication of love that burns away, as a fire, the veils of the Satanic self. The fire of wine also is the celestial Fount (*kawthar-i-rúḥání*), because wine also is water of life, that is the Word of God. The word *Kawthar* (literally, abundance) is mentioned in Súra 108, “*Truly we have given thee an abundance*” (108:1, Rodwell). Edward William Lane (1801–1876), the leading British Arabicist scholar who authored the monumental *Arabic-English Lexicon*, describes *Kawthar* as “A certain river in paradise . . . from which flow all the [other] river thereof . . . pertaining specially to the Prophet, described as being whiter than milk and sweeter than honey and as having its margin composed of pavilions of hollowed pearls” (Lane 7:122). The word has a connotation of abundance, because it derives from the Arabic root *kithara*, “It

was, or became, much, copious, abundant, many, numerous, great in number or quantity; it multiplied; it accumulated” (Lane 7:121). It is the Water of Life, a recurrent motif of both Sufi literature and Bahá’í Writings. In the first case it has mythical and legendary connotations, in the second it is a poetic image to describe mostly the Words of the Manifestation of God and their regenerating power.

3

*Yik jilvih¹¹ zi¹² ‘aks-ash bar şafhiy-i-Ján uftád,
Válih shud¹³ az án jilvih şad hikmat-i-Yúnání.*

*A glimmer of His image fell on the page of the Soul,
A hundred Hellenic wisdoms were confounded.*

The “glimmer (*jilvih*) of His image” is the unveiling of the Beloved. This is one of the meanings of the word *jilvih*, “Presenting a bride to her husband adorned and unveiled; the meeting of the bride and bridegroom; the nuptial bed; the bridal ornaments; splendour, lustre, effulgence, transfiguration” (Steingass 369). However here it has been translated “glimmer” following the example of Shoghi Effendi who translated it as “splendour” (SWAB32, sec.15).

The “page of the Soul (*şafhiy-i-Ján*)” is another typical image of Sufi poetry. Rûmí mentions in his *Mathnaví* an equivalent locution, “the leaf (surface) of the heart (*varaq-i-dil*).” *Varaq* means “A leaf of a tree or of paper; paper cut out into any shape” (Steingass 1464). He writes:

God hath given thee the polishing instrument (*şayqal*),
Reason (*‘aqıl*), to the end thereby the leaf (surface) of the
heart (*varaq-i-dil*) may be made resplendent. (4:2475)

It is the soul, here compared to a page, reflecting the Beauty of the Beloved. This verse by Rûmí also mentions a “polishing instrument (*şayqal*), Reason (*‘aqıl*).” A “polishing instrument” is

also mentioned in the Valley of Love: “*A pure heart is as a mirror; cleanse it with the burnish of love (şayqal-i-ḥubb) and severance from all save God, that the true sun may shine within it and the eternal morning dawn*” (SV21; Haft Vâdī 113). This first hemistich is reminiscent of the words of Genesis:

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. (Genesis 1:26)

It also is reminiscent of the following Tradition:

God created Adam in His image (*khalaqa Allāh ādama ‘alā ṣūratihī*). (qtd. in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions* 188; Furúzānfār no.595)

It finally reminds us of the Aristotelian “*tabula rasa*,” the *unscribed tablet*.¹⁴ The soul is seemingly described as a page upon which the beauteous features of the Face of the Lord can be drawn.

The second hemistich hints at the impotence of philosophy, the “hundred Hellenic wisdoms,” and thus of the human intellect, when it is not assisted by Revelation. This concept was later on developed by Bahá’u’lláh in His *Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat*, in which He states that Greece was “a Seat of Wisdom for a prolonged period” (149-50). Then He adds:

Although it is recognized that the contemporary men of learning are highly qualified in philosophy, arts and crafts, yet were anyone to observe with a discriminating eye he would readily comprehend that most of this knowledge hath been acquired from the sages of the past [i.e. the Greek philosophers], for it is they who have laid the foundation of philosophy, reared its structure and reinforced its pillars . . . The sages aforetime acquired their knowledge from the Prophets, inasmuch as the latter were the Exponents of divine philosophy and the Revelers of heavenly mysteries. Men quaffed the

crystal, living waters of Their utterance, while others satisfied themselves with the dregs. Everyone receiveth a portion according to his measure . . . The essence and the fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets. That the people differ concerning the inner meanings and mysteries thereof is to be attributed to the divergence of their views and minds. (144-5, comment in brackets added)

4

*Yik jadhvih az án shu'lih bar Sidriy-i-Síná zad,
Madhúsh az án jadhvih şad Músíy-i-Imrání.*

*A spark of that flame hit the Tree of Sinai,
A hundred Imranite Moseses were astounded.*

This distich refers to the story of Moses, the Burning Bush and Moses's swoon when God showed Himself to Him. Fire seems here identified with the Most Great Spirit. Lambden comments upon this verse as follows:

So powerful is the fiery "water" of the stunning Divine Cupbearer (*sáqí*) that but a "firebrand" (*jadhwa*) ignited from its flame in the Sinaitic Lote-Tree would suffice to throw one hundred Imranite Moseses into a state of bewildered astonishment. (116)

Moses is called Imranite from the name, Imran, which Muslim tradition ascribes to His father, called Amran in the Bible (Exodus 6:20).

5

*Yik shu'lih az án átaşh shud, 'Ishq¹⁵ bi-zad khar-gáh
Dar áb-u gil-i-ádam ham dar dil-i-insání.*

A flame burst out from that fire and Love pitched

Its tent in man's water and clay and in his heart.

This distich refers to the legend that man is moulded of water and clay, mentioned by many Persian poets. For example Rûmî writes in this vein in his Mathnavî:

Where were we when the Judge of Judgement (Day) was sowing reason ('aql) in the water and clay ('ab-u tîn) of Adam? (6:3134)

Bahá'u'lláh also uses this image in later Writings:

He must purge his breast, which is the sanctuary of the abiding love of the Beloved, of every defilement, and sanctify his soul from all that pertaineth to water and clay (áb-u-gil), from all shadowy and ephemeral attachments. (KI192; KMI149)

Ye are even as the bird which soareth, with the full force of its mighty wings and with complete and joyous confidence, through the immensity of the heavens, until, impelled to satisfy its hunger, it turneth longingly to the water and clay (áb-u-gil) of the earth below it, and, having been entrapped in the mesh of its desire, findeth itself impotent to resume its flight to the realms whence it came. (Lawḥ-i-Aḥmad bi-Fársí 327, para.6; Muntakhabátí 210)

I fear lest, bereft of the melody of the dove of heaven, ye will sink back to the shades of utter loss, and, never having gazed upon the beauty of the rose, return to water and clay (áb-u gil). (HW, Persian, no.13; Ad'íyyih 428)

Elsewhere Bahá'u'lláh uses the Arabic word *má'*, water, in the place of the Persian *áb*, and the word *turáb*, "ground, earth, dust" (Steingass 291), in the place of *gil*:

Magnified be Thy name, O Lord my God! I know not what the water (má') is with which Thou hast created

*me, or what the fire (nár) Thou hast kindled within me,
or the clay (turáb) wherewith Thou hast kneaded me.*
(PM12, sec.9, para.1, Munáját 12)

This distich seemingly explains that the bestowal of Spirit (Fire) introduces love into the nature of man (his water and clay), and his heart. In this regard, it seems that spirit is the same as love. In this vein, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states: “*love is the cause of the existence of all phenomena*” (PUP255) and also: “*The greatest power in the realm and range of human existence is spirit—the divine breath which animates and pervades all things*” (PUP58). Love and spirit are described as two similar powers, on which the whole existence has its foundations. Indeed, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reportedly said:

the first principle of God, Love, is the creative principle. Love is an outpour from God, and is pure spirit. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, qtd. in *Bahá’í Scriptures* 300, no.609)

This distich seemingly says that love permeates both the water and clay of man, and his heart. The locution “water and clay” seems an image denoting human flesh, the element whereby man is a weak creature. As to the heart, in the Sufi world, the heart is, first, the organ of the inner knowledge of transcendent reality that Sufis call *ma‘rifa*. Second, it is the seat of the divine presence. And, third, it is the organ that is attracted towards what is other than it (see Savi, 51-3). Therefore this distich could denote that through the bestowals of Spirit love takes possession of man as a whole. This distich is reminiscent of a *ghazal* by Ḥafiz that says:

(O true beloved!) in eternity without beginning (the day of
miṣák),¹⁶ of glory, the splendour-ray of Thy beauty
boasted.

Revealed became love; and, upon all the world, fire dashed.

(O absolute existence!) Thy face displayed splendour; (and)
 beheld (that) the angel had no (capacity for) love:

From this (exceeding) jealousy, it became the essence of
 fire; and upon Ādam dashed.

From that torch (of love), reason wished to kindle its lamp,
 Jealousy's lightning flashed; and in confusion, the world
 dashed.

The adversary (Shaiṭán)¹⁷ sought to come to the spectacle-
 place of the mystery (of love):

The invisible hand (of God) came, and, at the heart of the
 excluded one (Shaiṭán), dashed.

Others, all on ease, dashed the dice of partition (fate):

Our grief-experienced heart it was that also, on grief (the
 dice of fate) cast.

The desire of thy chin's dimple (thy mysteries) possessed the
 lofty soul:

At the ring of that tress, curt with curl, (his) hand, he
 dashed.

The joy-book of love for Thee, Ḥáfiz wrote on that day,

When, on the head of the chattels of his joyous heart, the
 reed (of cancellation), he dashed. (*Díván* 354-55,
 "Ghazalyát," no.186; *Divan* 158-9, no.152)

6

Ay 'Ishq, chih í Tú, kaz Tú jahán pur áshúb,

Ham az Tú dar ámad ḥasrat¹⁸ dar ḥikmat-i-Luqmání.

*Who art Thou, O Love, that 'cause of Thee the world,
 Is in turmoil and Luqman's wisdom is envious?*

The world of love is the world of paradoxes. No wonder that love throws the word into turmoil, *áshúb*, “Terror, dread, fear; grief, affliction, misfortune; confusion, discord, disturbance, tumult, riot, sedition” (Steingass 67). Bahá’u’lláh writes in the Seven Valleys:

Love setteth a world aflame at every turn, and he wasteth every land where he carrieth his banner. Being hath no existence in his kingdom; the wise wield no command within his realm. The leviathan of love swalloweth the master of reason and destroyeth the lord of knowledge. He drinketh the seven seas, but his heart’s thirst is still unquenched, and he saith, “Is there yet any more?” He shunneth himself and draweth away from all on earth. (SV10)

In the world of love many things turn upside down. It is this reversal that arises the feeling of wonderment in the lovers. Bahá’u’lláh says about wonderment: “*How many a mystic tree hath this whirlwind of wonderment (ḥayrat) snatched by the roots, how many a soul hath it exhausted*” (SV31; Haft Vádí 124).

As to turmoil, one remembers at this point the tumultuous events, whose protagonist or spectator Bahá’u’lláh had just been: the Conference of Badasht in June 1848, the Mázindarán upheaval, with the battle of the Fort of *Shaykh* Ṭabarsí, that began in late summer of 1848 and ended in the spring of 1849, the slaughter of the Sevens Martyrs of Teheran in February 1850, the upheaval of Nayríz, in the late spring of 1850, the massacre that followed the attempt on the life of the Shah on 15 August 1852 . . . Iran had really been in turmoil.

And yet the folly of love conceals a great wisdom, a wisdom for which even Luqman, the legendary sage mentioned in the Koran (31:11-8), that in post-Koranic literature is described as a fabulist, a Muslim Aesop (see Savi 202-3), becomes full of envy. The folly of love is the wisdom of the person that has become detached from the water and clay of the world and has placed

all his affections on the eternal world, wherefrom his soul comes and whereto she is returning. While so doing, this person gives a meaning to each instant of her life, that she does not live in the superficiality of its contingent and ephemeral meanings, but in the inner depth of the Absolute that transpires thereof. All this, as poetical and mystic as it is, is taught by Bahá'u'lláh in an extremely rational and practical way. This transparency of absolute appears in the actions of a human beings, whenever he is prompted by the sincere intention of serving humankind to promote its ever-advancing civilization.

7

Gáh kuní da 'ví kih Man-am jilviy-i-Maḥbúb bi 'álam.

Gáh gúy kih Man-am khúd án Ṭal'at-i-Subḥání.

Now Thou boastest: "I am the Beloved's splendour in the world."

Now Thou proclaimest: "I'm Myself that Divine Countenance."

In this verse begins a description of Love, in its various aspects, each of which conveys a mystical meaning.

Love is "the Beloved's splendour in the world (*jilviy-i-Maḥbúb bi 'álam*).²" This sentence is reminiscent of words written and uttered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Know thou of a certainty that Love is the secret of God's holy Dispensation, the manifestation of the All-Merciful, the fountain of spiritual outpourings. Love is heaven's kindly light, the Holy Spirit's eternal breath that vivifieth the human soul. Love is the cause of God's revelation unto man, the vital bond inherent, in accordance with the divine creation, in the realities of things. (SWAB27, sec.12)

Know thou, the first bounty from the True One is love, unity and harmony, and without these all the deeds pass in vain and give no result. Love is the result of the Manifestation and the glorious purpose of the rising of Light on the Mount, in the Sinai of the Forgiving Lord. (TAB1:183-4)

Love is the first effulgence of Divinity . . . (PUP338)

Love is, in reality, the first effulgence of Divinity and the greatest splendor of God. (PUP397)

Love is the breath of the Holy Spirit in the heart of Man. (PT20, sec.6, para.12)

Love is the “*Divine Countenance* (Ṭal‘at-i-Subḥání).” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes about the word “face:”

The word “face” (vajh) hath many meanings, among which there is submissiveness to the Will of God (riḍá), as God, exalted be He, says: “Seeking His Face” [Koran 6:52], and also: “We feed you for the sake of God alone” [Koran 76:9], and moreover His good-pleasure (riḍá). And the face also means the Essence (dhát). God, exalted be He, says: “Everything . . . will perish except His own Face” [Koran 28:88]. And the face (vajh) also means the unveiling (jilwat). God, exalted be He, says: “whithersoever ye turn, there is the Presence of God” [Koran 2:115]. And the face (vajh) hath various interpretations and allusions, beside what hath been said. However, due to lack of time, it hath been chosen not to expatiate on the subject. On the basis of all this, submission (taslím) of the face [of the believer] is one of the special virtues of the righteous and of the greatest gifts of the free. Whosoever is so aided is graciously favored with absolute faith in the highest level of certitude and assurance. (Makátib 1:396)¹⁹

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has repeatedly stated that “*God is Love*” (PUP158), and has explained that “*Christ has said God is Love*” (PT192, sec.58, para.2), possibly referring to the following verses:

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. (1 John 4:8, KJV)

God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. (1 John 4:16, KJV)

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has also hinted at this concept in various other contexts. He is quoted as stating:

God is Love and Peace. God is Truth. God is Omniscience. God is without beginning and without end. God is uncreated and uncreating, yet the Source, the Causeless Cause. God is pure Essence, and cannot be said to be anywhere or in any place. (qtd. in Bahá’í Scriptures 300, no.609)

God is love; God seeketh fellowship, purity, sanctity and long-suffering; these are the attributes of Divinity. (PUP290)

For God is love, and all phenomena find source and emanation in that divine current of creation. The love of God haloes all created things. Were it not for the love of God, no animate being would exist. (PUP315)

8

Chún az Tú vazad bar ján rá’ihiy-i-Jánán,

Bar har chih kuní da ‘ví gúyaḏ²⁰ kih bih az ání.

*Since Thou breathest the Beloved’s fragrance upon the soul,
Whatever claim Thou advancest, one might say Thou art
much greater.*

Love sheds “*the Beloved’s fragrance upon the soul* (bar ján rá’ihiy-i-Jánán).” The image of perfume is widely used in Sufi literature. We remember here that the fragrance of the Beloved is a symbol of His bounties. Love brings the bounties of the Beloved. Whatever bounty He bestows, it is but a reflection of the Beauty of God. In this vein Bahá’u’lláh writes:

O My Well-Beloved! Thou hast breathed Thy Breath into Me, and divorced Me from Mine own Self. Thou didst, subsequently, decree that no more than a faint reflection, a mere emblem of Thy Reality within Me be left among the perverse and envious. (GWB89, sec. XL, para.1)

These sanctified Mirrors, these Day-springs of ancient glory are one and all the Exponents on earth of Him Who is the central Orb of the universe, its Essence and ultimate Purpose. From Him proceed their knowledge and power; from Him is derived their sovereignty. The beauty of their countenance is but a reflection of His image, and their revelation a sign of His deathless glory. (KI99-100, para.106)

The Manifestation of God, the apex of the spiritual hierarchy in the world, is Himself but a reflection of the Beauty of God. And yet, the Manifestation of God is “*the Supreme Goal* (maqṣad-aqṣá) *and Most Sublime Summit* (ḏhurviy-i-‘ulyá)” (ESW147; Lawḥ-i Mubárák-i-khaṭáb 96), “*the world’s Ultimate Desire* (gháyat-i-quṣvá), *the Summit* (ḏhurviy-i-‘ulyá) *and Day Spring of Glory* (ufuq-i-a‘lá)” (GWB345, sec. CLXIV, para.7; Muntakhabátí 221).

9

Ham Mú’nis-i-jání, ham Áiy²¹-i-Jánání,

Ham jam’iyat-i-ján-há az Tú,²² ham az Tú paríshání.

Thou art the Companion of the soul, the Sign of the Beloved,

From Thee tranquillity of spirit cometh, from Thee distress.

Love is “*the Companion (mú’nis) of the soul.*” *Mú’nis* means “A companion, intimate friend; a solacer, comforter” (Steingass 1349). Bahá’u’lláh turns to God using this Name in many prayers, as for example:

I implore Thee, O Thou Who art the beloved Companion (mú’nis) of Bahá . . . (PM15, sec.13, para.2; Munáját 16)

I beseech Thee, O Thou Who art my Companion (mú’nisi) in my lowliness . . . (PM16, sec.14, par. 2; Munáját 16)

Let Thine everlasting melodies breathe tranquillity on me, O my Companion (mú’nisi) . . . (PM248, sec.155, para.1; Munáját 167)

Love is “*the Sign of the Beloved (Áyiy-i-Jánání).*” *Áyih* means “A mark, a sign; a miracle; a verse of the Qur’án; (met.) an accomplished master” (Steingass 128). Bahá’u’lláh writes in His Lawḥ-i-Hadí:

From the exalted source, and out of the essence of His favor and bounty He hath entrusted every created thing with a sign (áyih) of His knowledge (‘irfán), so that none of His creatures may be deprived of its share in expressing, each according to its capacity and rank, this knowledge. This sign (áyih) is the mirror of His beauty in the world of creation. The greater the effort exerted for the refinement of this sublime and noble mirror, the more faithfully will it be made to reflect the glory of the names and attributes of God, and reveal the wonders of His signs and knowledge. Every created thing will be enabled (so great is this reflecting power) to reveal the potentialities of its pre-ordained station, will recognize

its capacity and limitations, and will testify to the truth that “He, verily, is God; there is none other God besides Him.” . . . (262, para.2; Muntakhabátí 168)

And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains:

. . . all the divine Manifestations suffered, offered their lives and blood, sacrificed their existence, comfort and all they possessed for the sake of mankind. Therefore consider how much they love. Were it not for their love for humanity, spiritual love would be mere nomenclature. Were it not for their illumination, human souls would not be radiant. How effective is their love! This is a sign of the love of God; a ray of the Sun of Reality. (PUP257)

Love brings tranquillity and distress. It is another of the many paradoxes characterizing the condition of love. A lover achieves tranquillity because he discovered “*the Beloved (al-Maḥbúb) of his heart, and the Object of his desire (al-Madhkúr)*” (PM108, sec.66, para.9; Munáját 78). However, his heart also is distressed, because the lover is aware of his ideal remoteness from the Beloved, and of his meanness, and also because he longs for spiritual growth and self-sacrifice. As Bahá’u’lláh writes:

Though my body be pained by the trials that befall me from Thee, though it be afflicted by the revelations of Thy Decree, yet my soul rejoiceth at having partaken of the waters of Thy Beauty, and at having attained the shores of the ocean of Thine eternity. Doth it beseem a lover²³ to flee from his beloved (al-maḥbúb), or to desert the object of his heart’s desire (ma‘ashúq)? Nay, we all believe in Thee, and eagerly hope to enter Thy presence. (PM96, sec.60, para.3; Munáját 70)

10

*Gar partawí az Rúy-at dar Mişr-i-Ilah²⁴ árand,
Bíní bi-kharídárí şad Yúsuf-i-Kan'ání.*

*If a ray from Thy Face shineth on the Divine realms,²⁵
Thou wilt see a hundred Cananaean Josephs put up for
sale.*

This distich refers to the story of Joseph, son of Jacob, sold as a slave by his brothers and, after many vicissitudes, become viceroy of Egypt. Here the Face of the Beloved matches the beautiful Joseph. Whenever a ray of the face of the Beloved shines in the realm of love, it is as if a hundred Josephs were put up for sale.

11

*Ham búy-i-qamís az Tú, ham Rúh-i-Masíh az Tú,
Ham Musíy-i-bayḍá'í, ham şu'liy-i-Farání.*

*From Thee Joseph's fragrance²⁶ bloweth; from Thee the
Messianic Spirit;*

*Thou art the white-handed Moses, Thou, the flame on
Mount Paran.*

Love is successively identified with Joseph, described through the image of the scent of his garment (*qamís*); with Jesus, described through two among His attributes known in the Moslem world, Spirit and His Messianic Station; and Moses, described through the image of His white hand and of the Burning Bush. In later Writings Bahá'u'lláh identified Himself with all these three Personages. As to Joseph, Bahá'u'lláh describes Him as a “*Prophet (nabí)*” together with “*Jesus, Moses . . . and Muḥammad*” (KI254, para.282; KMI197), and writes about Him:

Dust fill your mouths, and ashes blind your eyes, for having bartered away the Divine Joseph for the most paltry of prices. (GWB208, sec. CIII, para.4)

As to Moses, He writes in His Súriy-i-Damm:

Praise be to Thee, O Lord My God, for the wondrous revelations of Thy inscrutable decree and the manifold woes and trials Thou hast destined for Myself. At one time Thou didst deliver Me into the hands of Nimrod [Abraham]; at another Thou hast allowed Pharaoh's rod to persecute Me [Moses] . . . (88, para.1, added terms in brackets)

As to Jesus, He writes:

Again I was crucified for having unveiled to men's eyes the hidden gems of Thy glorious unity, for having revealed to them the wondrous signs of Thy sovereign and everlasting power [Jesus]. (Súriy-i-Damm 88, para.1, added terms in brackets)

O Jews! If ye be intent on crucifying once again Jesus, the Spirit of God, put Me to death, for He hath once more, in My person, been made manifest unto you. (GWB101, sec. XLVII, para.1)

This distich seems to foreshadow the concept of the “essential unity” of the Messengers of God later on explained in greater details:

These Manifestations of God have each a twofold station. One is the station of pure abstraction and essential unity. In this respect, if thou callest them all by one name, and dost ascribe to them the same attribute, thou hast not erred from the truth. Even as He hath revealed: “No distinction do We make between any of His Messengers!” For they one and all summon the

people of the earth to acknowledge the Unity of God, and herald unto them the Kawthar of an infinite grace and bounty. They are all invested with the robe of Prophethood, and honoured with the mantle of glory. Thus hath Muḥammad, the Point of the Qur'án, revealed: "I am all the Prophets." Likewise, He saith: "I am the first Adam, Noah, Moses, and Jesus." Similar statements have been made by 'Alí. Sayings such as this, which indicate the essential unity of those Exponents of Oneness, have also emanated from the Channels of God's immortal utterance, and the Treasuries of the gems of divine knowledge, and have been recorded in the scriptures. These Countenances are the recipients of the Divine Command, and the day-springs of His Revelation. This Revelation is exalted above the veils of plurality and the exigencies of number. Thus He saith: "Our Cause is but one." Inasmuch as the Cause is one and the same, the Exponents thereof also must needs be one and the same. (KI152-3, para.161)

12

*Sar-há bi-kamand-at bastih, dil-há az²⁷ gham-at khastih,
Ham 'ámíy-i-shaydá'í, ham 'álim-i-Rabbání.*

*Bound are the heads by Thy locks, pierced the hearts
by Thine anguish, be they of insane laymen or of Divine
sages.*

The first hemistich presents the image of the hair of the Beloved—*kamand*, "A halter, noose, snare, lasso; slip-knot; a scaling-ladder . . . a lock of hair" (Steingass 1051)—that tie the lovers. Bausani writes that "the most common mystical explanation" of the hair of the Beloved is that it "symbolizes the 'plurality of the phenomenal world that veils the face of God's unity'" (*Religion in Iran* 280-1). It also presents the image of the anguish of the lovers—*gham*, "Being cloudy (day); being

intensely hot and suffocating; making sad; muzzling; covering; grief, sadness, anxiety, trouble, care; a source of regret; remorse; mourning, lamentation; loss” (Steingass 894). The second hemistich describes the universal effects of the love for the Beloved on all lovers, “*Be they of insane laymen* (‘ámí-i-shaydá’i) *or of Divine sages* (‘álim-i-Rabbání).” ‘Ámí means “Blind, ignorant” (Steingass 868); shaydá’, “mad, insane, in love” (Steingass 772); ‘álim, “Learned, intelligent, wise” (Steingass 831); and rabbání, “Divine, godly” (Steingass 567). The two categories of seekers mentioned in this verse could be the same as the “*men of mind* (muṭáli’ín) *and heart* (muṣhtáqín)” of the Four Valleys (FV63; Chihár Vádí 154). It is the ancient division between those who preferred the path of sobriety of asceticism and those who preferred the inebriation of the way of love.

13

Man khúd zi Tú-am makhmúr, ham az Tú shudam mashhúr,
Kih²⁸ dahí-am şad ján, ham²⁹ kih kuní-am qurbání.

I’m drunk of Thee, ‘cause of Thee I’m notorious, whether
Thou offerest me a hundred lives, or Thou slayest me.

The lover proclaims his love for the Beloved. This love made him commit such foolish acts that now everyone talks about him and he has become mashhúr, that is, “public, notorious, well-known; published, divulged, conspicuous; celebrated, illustrious, noted, famous” (Steingass 1250). This is another trope of Sufi poetry, belonging to the *malámatí* strand. Marcello Perego, an Italian expert on Sufism, defines the *malámatí* Sufis as “persons who observe a perfect religious conduct, but carefully hide any ecstatic state (*Aḥwál*) and grace (*Wáridát*) which the One Being bestows upon them; they dissemble their good deeds, so that none but God may know them” (151). A number of Sufis of the *malámatíyya* tried to appear blameworthy in the eyes of common people. The second

hemistich restates the concept of the faithfulness of the lover, independently of the attitude of the Beloved.

14

Gar Qábíd-i-arvâhí, az chih kuní-am zindih?

Var Muḥiy-i-abdání, az chih kuní thu 'bání.

If Thou art the Angel of death, how come that Thou revivest me?

And if Thou art the Reviver of bodies, how is it that Thou actest as a snake?

This distich presents another oxymoron. So cruel is the Beloved that the lover compares Him to the Angel of death, *Qábíd-i-arvâhí*, literally the sequestrator of spirits. And yet from Him life comes. And if He gives life, why does He act as cruelly as a *thu'bání*, that is, “A large male serpent, a dragon, cockatrice, basilisk” (Steingass 345)? It seems the human reaction of a person when faced by the “*onrushing winds of . . . [God's] decree (qaḏá)*” (PM12, sec.9, para.2. Munáját 13). Bahá'u'lláh wrote in His *Súriy-i-Haykal*:

Should We choose, at one time, to shed the radiance of Our loving providence upon the mirrors of all things, and, at another, to withhold from them the splendours of Our light, this verily lieth within Our power, and none hath the right to ask “why” or “wherefore.” For We are potent indeed to achieve Our purpose, and render no account for that which We bring to pass. (35, para.68)

And yet many “whys” and “wherefores” are voiced in the Tablet which Western Bahá'is know as the “Fire Tablet,” which expresses concepts similar to those conveyed by this distich:

Indeed the hearts of the sincere are consumed in the fire of separation: Where is the gleaming of the light of Thy Countenance, O Beloved of the worlds?

Those who are near unto Thee have been abandoned in the darkness of desolation: Where is the shining of the morn of Thy reunion, O Desire of the worlds?

The bodies of Thy chosen ones lie quivering on distant sands: Where is the ocean of Thy presence, O Enchanter of the worlds?

Longing hands are uplifted to the heaven of Thy grace and generosity: Where are the rains of Thy bestowal, O Answerer of the worlds?

The infidels have arisen in tyranny on every hand: Where is the compelling power of Thine ordaining pen, O Conqueror of the worlds?

The barking of dogs is loud on every side: Where is the lion of the forest of Thy might, O Chastiser of the worlds? (212-4)

These words are reminiscent, to Christian ears, of the words uttered by Jesus on the cross a few moments before dying after many hours of agony:

Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (Matthew 27:46, KJV)

15

*Dar khar-gáh-i-sulţán yik bár agar bi-kharámí,
Sulţán kuní-ash bandih, ham bandih kuní sulţání.*

*If Thou graciously movest in the court of a king, Thou
changest*

The king into a servant and the servant into a king.

The gracious pace of the Beloved is a Sufi motif of Persian mystical poetry. Ḥáfiz writes in this vein:

If, like the (lofty) cypress (*sarv*), a moment thou move in a
rose-garden (*gulzár*)

In envy of thy face (*rúy*), every rose (*gul*) suffereth a
thorn. (*Díván* 901, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.552, v.1; *Divan* 456,
“*Ghazalyát*,” no.443, v.1)

This distich by Bahá’u’lláh exalts the power of the Beloved, Who can change a king into His humble vassal and bestow royal greatness upon a servant. As to the capacity to subdue a sovereign, Bahá’u’lláh writes about Muhammad in the Kitáb-i-Íqán: “*Behold, how many are the Sovereigns who bow the knee before His name!*” (KI110, para.117). And the Báb reportedly said to His disciples:

Heed not your weaknesses and frailty; fix your gaze upon the invincible power of the Lord, your God, the Almighty. Has He not, in past days, caused Abraham, in spite of His seeming helplessness, to triumph over the forces of Nimrod? Has He not enabled Moses, whose staff was His only companion, to vanquish Pharaoh and his hosts? Has He not established the ascendancy of Jesus, poor and lowly as He was in the eyes of men, over the combined forces of the Jewish people? Has He not subjected the barbarous and militant tribes of Arabia to the holy and transforming discipline of Muhammad, His Prophet? (qtd. in Nabíl 94)

As to the capacity to change a servant into a king, the Báb reportedly said to His disciples:

You are the lowly, of whom God has thus spoken in His Book: “And We desire to show favour to those who were brought low in the land, and to make them

spiritual leaders among men, and to make them Our heirs.” You have been called to this station; you will attain to it, only if you arise to trample beneath your feet every earthly desire, and endeavour to become those “honoured servants of His who speak not till He hath spoken, and who do His bidding.” (qtd. ibid. 93)

And ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote about Jesus:

Peter was a fisherman and Mary Magdalene a peasant, but as they were specially favoured with the blessings of Christ, the horizon of their faith became illumined, and down to the present day they are shining from the horizon of everlasting glory. (SWAB105, sec.68)

16

*Yik shu‘lih³⁰ zi³¹ rúy-at dar gul-bun-i-Ján ámad,
Afrúkht jamál-i-ján chún láliy-i-nu‘mání.*

*A spark of Thy face fell upon the rose-bush of the soul,
And lit its beauty as a crimson tulip.*

This distich uses many images typical of Persian mystical literature: the “*spark (shu‘lih)*” of the face (*rúy*), “*the rose-bush of the soul (gul-bun-i-Ján)*,” the “*crimson tulip (láliy-i-nu‘mání)*.” The image of the face has been explained above (see above verse 7). This verse seems to use the image of the Face of the Beloved to hint at the Beauty of the Beloved, at His influence on the lover and at the unveiling of His Beauty. As to the rose (*gul*), in the Sufi world it “is the supreme manifestation of Divine beauty or the symbol of the beloved cheek” (Schimmel, *Deciphering* 26). As to the tulip (*lálíh*), “poets have tended to compare the red tulip that looks indeed like a flame to the fire on the sacred mountain [Sinai]” (ibid. 10). Ḥāfīz uses the image of the tulip in the following verse:

In the garden (*bágh*) (of the existence), renew the usage's of the faith (*dín*) of Zardusht.

Now that the (red) tulip (*lálíh*) hath kindled the fire (*átash*) of Nimrod. (*Díván* 253, "*Ghazalyát*," no.121, v.8; *Divan* 229, "*Ghazalyát*," no.219, v.8)

Ḥáfiz associates the tulip to the fire of Nimrod, because God has transformed the fire of the furnace, into which Abraham had been thrown, into a garden. Likewise, Bahá'u'lláh associates the tulip to the fire lit by the Beloved in the spiritual worlds, a fire that is as sweet as a garden for the lovers. The tulip described by Bahá'u'lláh is crimson (*nu'mání*). In the Muslim world

red is connected with life, health, and blood; it is the colour of the bridal veil that seems to guarantee fertility; and it is used as an apotropaic colour. Red wine, as well as fire (in its positive aspects) and the red rose, all point to the Divine Glory, as it is said that the *ridá al-kibriyá*, "the cloak of Divine Glory," is radiant red. (*Deciphering* 16)

This distich seems to describe how the Beauty of the Beloved (the spark of His face) changes the hearts of His lovers ("*the rose-bush of the soul*"), where He raises the vermilion tulip of knowledge and good deeds. 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke diffusely of the transforming power of the Manifestations of God. For example He said:

The holy Manifestations of God come into the world to dispel the darkness of the animal, or physical, nature of man, to purify him from his imperfections in order that his heavenly and spiritual nature may become quickened, his divine qualities awakened, his perfections visible, his potential powers revealed and all the virtues of the world of humanity latent within him may come to life. These holy Manifestations of God are the Educators and

Trainers of the world of existence, the Teachers of the world of humanity. They liberate man from the darkness of the world of nature, deliver him from despair, error, ignorance, imperfections and all evil qualities. They clothe him in the garment of perfections and exalted virtues. Men are ignorant; the Manifestations of God make them wise. They are animalistic; the Manifestations make them human. They are savage and cruel; the Manifestations lead them into kingdoms of light and love. They are unjust; the Manifestations cause them to become just. Man is selfish; They sever him from self and desire. Man is haughty; They make him meek, humble and friendly. He is earthly; They make him heavenly. Men are material; the Manifestations transform them into divine semblance. They are immature children; the Manifestations develop them into maturity. Man is poor; They endow him with wealth. Man is base, treacherous and mean; the Manifestations of God uplift him into dignity, nobility and loftiness. (PUP 465-6)

17

*Vah vah, chih nasím ámad, bá muzhdiy-i-ján ámad,*³²

Kaz Mashriq-i-Ján ámad án Ṭal‘at-i-Yazdání.

O! What a breeze wafted announcing to the soul the glad tiding

That from the East of the Spirit that Divine Face hath appeared.

This distich poetically announces the new Revelation. This announcement is brought by the breeze, a reminiscence of the morning breeze that, according to the tradition, brought to Muhammad the scent of the holiness of Uways al-Qaraní who lived in Yemen. This breeze comes from the East, the place whence the sun rises. Rúdí writes:

Finally from the Orient of the spirit (*mashriq-i-ján*), like the sun, arose

He Whom the soul (*ján*) was searching in private and in public (*Díván*, “*Ghazalyát*,” no.142, v.2)

These verses are reminiscent of the following words written by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

From the beginning of time until the present day the light of Divine Revelation hath risen in the East and shed its radiance upon the West. The illumination thus shed hath, however, acquired in the West an extraordinary brilliancy. Consider the Faith proclaimed by Jesus. Though it first appeared in the East, yet not until its light had been shed upon the West did the full measure of its potentialities become manifest . . . In the books of the Prophets certain glad-tidings are recorded which are absolutely true and free from doubt. The East hath ever been the dawning-place of the Sun of Truth. In the East all the Prophets of God have appeared . . . The West hath acquired illumination from the East but in some respects the reflection of the light hath been greater in the Occident. This is specially true of Christianity. Jesus Christ appeared in Palestine and His teachings were founded in that country. Although the doors of the Kingdom were first opened in that land and the bestowals of God were spread broadcast from its center, the people of the West have embraced and promulgated Christianity more fully than the people of the East. (qtd. in WOB 74-5)³³

The good news is that the Face of God has appeared.

18

*Ján-há bi-paríd az shawq, dil-há bi-ramíd az dhawq,
Ham ‘Ishq shud-ash ‘áshiq ham jawhar-i-imkání.*

*Souls soared with yearning, hearts were enraptured in
ecstasy,*

*Love fell in love with Him, and so did the essence of
creation.*

This distich describes the impact of the advent of the new Revelation. The whole creation falls in love with the Beloved, even Love. Outwardly, when the Manifestation of God appears in the world, nothing happens. On the contrary, an inward process starts that slowly but steadily moves towards the birth of a new civilization. Bahá'u'lláh has often described His Own advent in triumphant words. He wrote for example in His *Lawḥ-i-Riḍván*:

*This is the Day whereon the unseen world crieth out:
“Great is thy blessedness, O earth, for thou hast been
made the foot-stool of thy God, and been chosen as the
seat of His mighty throne.” The realm of glory
exclaimeth: “Would that my life could be sacrificed for
thee, for He Who is the Beloved of the All-Merciful
hath established His sovereignty upon thee, through the
power of His Name that hath been promised unto all
things, whether of the past or of the future.” This is the
Day whereon every sweet smelling thing hath derived its
fragrance from the smell of My garment—a garment that
hath shed its perfume upon the whole of creation. This
is the Day whereon the rushing waters of everlasting life
have gushed out of the Will of the All-Merciful. Haste
ye, with your hearts and souls, and quaff your fill, O
Concourse of the realms above! (29, para.6)*

Another example are the words whereby He foresees His arrival to the prison of ‘Akká:

*Upon Our arrival, We were welcomed with banners of
light, whereupon the Voice of the Spirit cried out*

saying: "Soon will all that dwell on earth be enlisted under these banners." (qtd. in GPB 184, sec.11, para.4)

In the dimensions of the human world His arrival in ‘Akká is described by Shoghi Effendi as follows:

Having, after a miserable voyage, disembarked at ‘Akká, all the exiles, men, women and children, were, under the eyes of a curious and callous population that had assembled at the port to behold the "God of the Persians," conducted to the army barracks, where they were locked in, and sentinels detailed to guard them. "*The first night*," Bahá'u'lláh testifies in the Lawḥ-i-Ra'ís,³⁴ "*all were deprived of either food or drink . . . They even begged for water, and were refused.*" So filthy and brackish was the water in the pool of the courtyard that no one could drink it. Three loaves of black and salty bread were assigned to each, which they were later permitted to exchange, when escorted by guards to the market, for two of better quality. (GPB 186-7, sec.11, para.10)

Evidently in the spiritual words, which are not subject to the rules of time and space, things appear in a different perspective than in the earthly world.

19

Az ḥikmat-i-ú ulfat-i-má-bayin-i-dú ḍidd zāhir,

Ham ‘Ishq shudih bandih, ham ‘Aql kunad darbání.

Through His wisdom, the coincidence of opposites is made manifest,

Now love becometh a slave, now the Intellect a porter.

In the Manifestation of God the opposites coincide. Bahá'u'lláh wrote in later Writings: "*I bear witness that in His*

person solidity and fluidity have been joined and combined" (PM48, sec.38, para.3). Bahá'u'lláh explained moreover:

These Prophets and chosen Ones of God are the recipients and revealers of all the unchangeable attributes and names of God. They are the mirrors that truly and faithfully reflect the light of God. Whatsoever is applicable to them is in reality applicable to God, Himself, Who is both the Visible and the Invisible (ẓáhir-i-mastúr) . . . Through the manifold attributes of these Essences of Detachment, Who are both the first and the last, the seen and the hidden, it is made evident that He Who is the Sun of Truth is "the First and the Last, the Seen, and the Hidden [Koran 57:3]." (KI142-3; KMI110)

An aspect of this coincidence is the harmonious balance between elements that human beings often see as conflicting with one another, as for example mercy and justice, love and reason, religion and science. This distich explains that, on the one hand, love becomes a slave, possibly of the "*divine, universal mind, whose sovereignty enlighteneth all created things*" (Four Valleys 52), and, on the other, the Intellect becomes a porter, that is, it submits to Revelation. Rúmí writes in this vein:

O perfect full moon (*máh*), the house of the heart belongs to Thee,

Intellect that was a lord is wholly submitted to Thee.

(*Díván*, "*Ġhazalyát*," no.2243, v.2)

20

Darvish, ma-dar zín *bísh* ín *pardiy-i-asrár*,

Kaz *shahr faghán khí*zad vaz '*á*lam-i-*hayvání*.

Stop tearing asunder the veil of mystery, O Dervish:

A cry riseth from the city of men and the world of brutes.

This poem, as a few others, ends with a call to silence. The clamour that rises “*from the city of men and the world of brutes*” could be due to the fact that the city of men is not prepared to receive the Beloved. This verse is reminiscent of the following words by Bahá’u’lláh in His Riḍvānu’l-‘Adl:

The fears and agitation which the revelation of this law provokes in men’s hearts should indeed be likened to the cries of the suckling babe weaned from his mother’s milk, if ye be of them that perceive. (175, para.1)

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NOTES

- ¹ The poems are listed according to their growing length.
- ² See also excerpts in Mázandarání 142-43.
- ³ See also *Majmú'iy-i-Áthár* 36:455; and excerpts in Mázandarání 141-42.
- ⁴ See Julio Savi, "The Inebriation of His Enrapturing Call," in *Lights of 'Irfán* 15 (2014):311-54.
- ⁵ See GPB120, sec.7, para.35.
- ⁶ "Ghazal. ii. In Persian literature," from now on in this section Bausani.
- ⁷ *Majmú'ih* 30 omits this invocation.

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- ⁸ “Ahriman, the principle of Evil, opposed to Ormuzd, the principle of Good; the devil; a seducer; a demon” (Steingass 124).
- ⁹ *Surúsh* means “An angel; Gabriel” (Steingass 680).
- ¹⁰ Referred to “a certain *Shaykh* ‘Abdu’l-Ḥusayn, a crafty and obstinate priest, whose consuming jealousy of Bahá’u’lláh was surpassed only by his capacity to stir up mischief both among those of high degree and also amongst the lowest of the low, Arab or Persian, who thronged the streets and markets of Kazimayn, Karbilá and Baghdad” (GPB141, sec.8, para.30).
- ¹¹ *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *jilvihí*.
- ¹² *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *az*.
- ¹³ *Majmú‘ih* 30 omits *shud*.
- ¹⁴ See Aristotle, *De Anima* [On the soul], 3:4, 430-31.
- ¹⁵ *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *‘ishq-u*.
- ¹⁶ *Mítháq* means “A promise, agreement, bargain, compact, confederacy, alliance, league” (Steingass 1359).
- ¹⁷ *Shaytán* means “Satan” (Steingass 776).
- ¹⁸ *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *hayrat*.
- ¹⁹ Personal provisional translation by the author with Ms. Faezeh Mardani, added terms in brackets.
- ²⁰ *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *gúyam*.
- ²¹ *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *ayat*.
- ²² *Majmú‘ih* 30 omits *az-Tú*.
- ²³ The word “lover” translates both *al-ḥabíb* and *al-áshiq*.
- ²⁴ *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *Miṣr-i-bahar*, that is the city of springtime.
- ²⁵ In Persian *Miṣr-i-Iláhi*, “Divine Egypt.”
- ²⁶ In Persian *qamíṣ*, literally, shirt.
- ²⁷ *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *zi*.
- ²⁸ *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *gah*.
- ²⁹ *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *gah*.
- ³⁰ *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *shu‘lihí*.
- ³¹ *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *az*.
- ³² *Majmú‘ih* 30 writes *ján-bakhsh*, that is soul-refreshing.
- ³³ See moreover GPB253-54; CF30; PT23, sec.8, para.3; PUP289.
- ³⁴ A Tablet by Bahá’u’lláh, revealed in the early ‘Akká period and addressed to ‘Alí Páshá, the Grand Vizir of Turkey. See SLH159-73.