

THE SUMMONS OF THE LORD OF HOSTS

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

Introduction by the Universal House of Justice 2002

The years following Bahá'u'lláh's arrival in Adrianople witnessed His Revelation's attainment, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, of "its meridian glory" through the proclamation of its Founder's message to the kings and rulers of the world. During this relatively brief but turbulent period of the Faith's history, and in the early years of His subsequent exile in 1868 to the fortress town of 'Akká, He summoned the monarchs of East and West collectively, and some among them individually, to recognize the Day of God and to acknowledge the One promised in the scriptures of the religions professed by the recipients of His summons. "Never since the beginning of the world," Bahá'u'lláh declares, "hath the Message been so openly proclaimed."

The present volume brings together the first full, authorized English translation of these major writings. Among them is the complete Súriy-i-Haykal, the Súrih of the Temple, one of Bahá'u'lláh's most challenging works. It was originally revealed during His banishment to Adrianople and later recast after His arrival in 'Akká. In this version He incorporated His messages addressed to individual potentates—Pope Pius IX, Napoleon III, Czar Alexander II, Queen Victoria, and Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh.

It was this composite work which, shortly after its completion, Bahá'u'lláh instructed be written in the form of a pentacle, symbolizing the human temple. To it He added, as a conclusion, what Shoghi Effendi has described as "words which reveal the importance He attached to those Messages, and indicate their direct association with the prophecies of the Old Testament":

Thus have We built the Temple with the hands of power and might, could ye but know it. This is the Temple promised unto you in the Book. Draw ye nigh unto it. This is that which

profiteth you, could ye but comprehend it. Be fair, O peoples of the earth! Which is preferable, this, or a temple which is built of clay? Set your faces towards it. Thus have ye been commanded by God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

During the last years of His ministry Bahá'u'lláh Himself arranged for the publication for the first time of definitive versions of some of His principal works, and the Súriy-i-Haykal was awarded a prominent position among them.

Of the various writings that make up the Súriy-i-Haykal, one requires particular mention. The Lawḥ-i-Sultán, the Tablet to Náṣirí'd-Dín Sháh, Bahá'u'lláh's lengthiest epistle to any single sovereign, was revealed in the weeks immediately preceding His final banishment to 'Akká. It was eventually delivered to the monarch by Badî', a youth of seventeen, who had entreated Bahá'u'lláh for the honour of rendering some service. His efforts won him the crown of martyrdom and immortalized his name. The Tablet contains the celebrated passage describing the circumstances in which the divine call was communicated to Bahá'u'lláh and the effect it produced. Here, too, we find His unequivocal offer to meet with the Muslim clergy, in the presence of the Sháh, and to provide whatever proofs of the new Revelation they might consider to be definitive, a test of spiritual integrity significantly failed by those who claimed to be the authoritative trustees of the message of the Qur'án.

Included in this collection, as well, is the first full translation of the Súriy-i-Mulúk or Súrih of the Kings, which Shoghi Effendi described as "the most momentous Tablet revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in which He, for the first time, directs His words collectively to the entire company of the monarchs of East and West." It sets forth both the character of His mission and the standard of justice that must govern the exercise of their rule in this Day of God:

Lay not aside the fear of God, O kings of the earth, and beware that ye transgress not the bounds which the Almighty hath fixed. Observe the injunctions laid upon you in His Book,

and take good heed not to overstep their limits. Be vigilant, that ye may not do injustice to anyone, be it to the extent of a grain of mustard seed. Tread ye the path of justice, for this, verily, is the straight path.

The Tablet introduces some of the great themes that were to figure prominently in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh over the next two and a half decades: the obligation of those into whose hands God has entrusted civil authority to institute the reign of justice, the necessity for the reduction of armaments and the resolution of conflicts among nations, and an end to the excessive expenditures that were impoverishing these rulers' subjects.

Surveying the principal contents of Bahá'u'lláh's majestic call to the kings and rulers of the world, Shoghi Effendi has written:

The magnitude and diversity of the theme, the cogency of the argument, the sublimity and audacity of the language, arrest our attention and astound our minds. Emperors, kings and princes, chancellors and ministers, the Pope himself, priests, monks and philosophers, the exponents of learning, parliamentarians and deputies, the rich ones of the earth, the followers of all religions, and the people of Bahá—all are brought within the purview of the Author of these Messages, and receive, each according to their merits, the counsels and admonitions they deserve. No less amazing is the diversity of the subjects touched upon in these Tablets. The transcendent majesty and unity of an unknowable and unapproachable God is extolled, and the oneness of His Messengers proclaimed and emphasized. The uniqueness, the universality and potentialities of the Bahá'í Faith are stressed, and the purpose and character of the Bábí Revelation unfolded.

The summary draws attention to Bahá'u'lláh's uncompromising indictment of the conditions of human society for which its leadership is held primarily responsible:

Episodes, at once moving and marvellous, at various stages of His ministry, are recounted, and the transitoriness of worldly pomp, fame, riches, and sovereignty, repeatedly and categorically asserted. Appeals for the application of the highest principles in human and international relations are forcibly and insistently made, and the abandonment of discreditable practices and conventions, detrimental to the happiness, the growth, the prosperity and the unity of the human race, enjoined. Kings are censured, ecclesiastical dignitaries arraigned, ministers and plenipotentiaries condemned, and the identification of His advent with the coming of the Father Himself unequivocally admitted and repeatedly announced. The violent downfall of a few of these kings and emperors is prophesied, two of them are definitely challenged, most are warned, all are appealed to and exhorted.

In a Tablet, the original of which has been lost, Bahá'u'lláh had already condemned, in the severest terms, the misrule of the Ottoman Sultán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz. The present volume includes, however, three other Tablets which address two ministers of the Sultán, whose selfish and unprincipled influence played an important role in Bahá'u'lláh's successive banishments. The Súriy-i-Ra'ís, which addresses 'ÁlÍ Páshá, the Ottoman Prime Minister, was revealed in August 1868 as the exiles were being moved from Adrianople to Gallipoli, and exposes unsparingly the abuse of civil power the minister had perpetrated. The Lawḥ-i-Ra'ís, which also contains passages directed to 'ÁlÍ Páshá, was revealed shortly after Bahá'u'lláh's incarceration in the citadel of 'Akká and includes a chilling denunciation of the character of the minister. The third Tablet, the Lawḥ-i-Fu'ád, revealed in 1869 shortly after the death of Fu'ád Páshá, the Ottoman minister to whose machinations it refers, describes the spiritual consequences of the abuse of power, and foretells the imminent downfall of his colleague, 'ÁlÍ Páshá, and the overthrow of the Sultán himself—prophecies that were widely

circulated and whose dramatic fulfilment added greatly to the prestige of their Author.

It seems especially appropriate, as Bahá'u'lláh's influence penetrates ever more deeply the life of the larger society throughout the world, that the full texts of these great Tablets should now be available for a broad readership. We express to the committees who were commissioned to undertake and review these translations the deep gratitude we feel for the care and sensitivity they have brought to the task. Bahá'ís will recognize key passages from several of the Tablets that were introduced to the West by Shoghi Effendi. His translations into English of the Bahá'í Holy Texts provide an enduring standard for the efforts of those who rise to the challenge of preparing appropriate renderings into English of these treasures of the Faith.

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