

The Station of the Kitab-i-Iqan

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The Station of the Kitab-i-Iqan

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published in Bahá'í Studies Review 3:1

London: Association for Bahá'í Studies English-Speaking Europe, 1993

It is the intention of this paper to present a review of the rank and station of the Kitáb-i-Íqán according to the primary Bahá'í literature - the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi - and to provide a study outline of its contents.(1)

Bahá'u'lláh on the Íqán

In a number of texts Bahá'u'lláh emphasises the importance of the Íqán. For instance, Bahá'u'lláh states in a Tablet to Mírzá Abú'l-Fadl concerning questions of Manakji Limji Hataria, probably revealed between 1877 and 1882, that the Kitáb-i-Íqán is "the Lord of Books [Sayyid-i-Kutub]"(2) (Má'idíy-i-Ásmání 157, provisional translation). Furthermore in the Kitáb-i-Íqán itself, Bahá'u'lláh states that, "all the Scriptures, and the mysteries thereof are condensed into this brief account," (Íqán 237) and that it can unfold "all the allusions and the implications of the utterances of the Manifestations of Holiness" (Íqán 28). The following are a selection of such quotations:

... the things We have already mentioned suffice the world and all that is therein. In fact, all the Scriptures, and the mysteries thereof are condensed into this brief account. So much so that were a person to ponder it a while in his heart, he would discover from all that hath been said the mysteries of the Words of God, and would apprehend the meaning of whatever hath been manifested by that ideal King. (Íqán 237, emphasis added)

Were you to ponder, but for a while, these utterances
in your heart, you would surely find the portals of understanding unlocked
before your face, and would behold all knowledge and mysteries thereof

unveiled before your eyes. (ibid. 52, emphasis added, cf. 19)

This servant will now share with thee a dewdrop out of the fathomless ocean of the truths treasured in these holy words, that haply discerning hearts may comprehend all the allusions and the implications of the utterances of the Manifestations of Holiness, so that the overpowering majesty of the Word of God may not prevent them from attaining unto the ocean of His names and attributes, nor deprive them of recognising the Lamp of God which is the seat of the revelation of His glorified Essence. (ibid. 28, emphasis added)

Briefly, there hath been revealed in the Kitáb-i-Íqán (Book of Certitude) concerning the Presence and Revelation of God that which will suffice the fair-minded. (Epistle to the Son of the Wolf 119, cf. 97, 168)

As to thy question that in the Religion of Zoroaster it is stated: "This (Zoroastrianism) is superior and better than the religions of the past." By this is meant superiority relative to the past. These sanctified Beings in one station are all one. Their first is the last and Their last is the first. All have come from God; all have summoned mankind to God, and all have returned to Him. These matters are revealed in the Kitáb-i-Íqán, which is in truth the Lord of Books [Sayyid-i-Kutub], the Book that has flowed from the Pen of the Most High. Blessed is the one who hath seen it and been a witness to its testimony and hath pondered its contents for the love of God, the Lord of mankind. (Má'idíy-i-Ásmání 157, provisional translation, emphasis added)

As to thy question on 'resurrection', in the Kitáb-i-Íqán is revealed that which is all-sufficing. (Majmú'ih 166, provisional translation)

Peruse thou the Kitáb-i-Íqán (Book of Certitude) . . . that thou mayest be made aware of the things that have happened in the past, and be persuaded that We have not sought to spread disorder in the land after it had been well-ordered. (Epistle 97, and Tablets 210, emphasis added)
'Abdu'l-Bahá on the Íqán

'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to the Íqán on a number of occasions in explaining the concept of 'return'. For instance, in an explanation of the meaning of the "Second Coming of Christ and the Day of Judgement", he says: "Bahá'u'lláh has explained these verses in the Kitáb-i-Íqán. There is no need of repetition, refer to it, and you will understand these sayings" (Some Answered Questions 110). Other references include: The "return" which is mentioned in the bygone Scriptures is . . . fully explained by the Supreme Pen in the Kitáb-i-Íqán. Refer to it, so that you may be informed of the truth of the divine mysteries.

(ibid. 289)

In the book of the Íqán we can read the Word of God concerning the true Reincarnation, which is the Return of the Spiritual Qualities in the Servants of God. (qtd. in Grundy, Ten Days 45)(3)

Howard Colby Ives describes how 'Abdu'l-Bahá answers a question of his on the relationship of Christianity to the Bahá'í Faith by referring to the Íqán:

. . . men have entirely forgotten the pure teachings of this "Essence of Severance" [Christ]. He ['Abdu'l-Bahá] remarked that His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh speaks of this in the Book of Certitude and that I should study it carefully. In that book is explained how these stars of the Heaven of Christ's Revelation have fallen to the earth of worldly desires. On their tongues the mention of God has often become an empty name; in their midst His Holy Word a dead letter. This condition is that to which Christ refers, He said, when He speaks of "oppression or affliction of the Last Days." (Ives, Portals 125)

Also, in a talk at the home of the Kinneys in New York in 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in describing the contents of Bahá'u'lláh's writings, says of the Íqán:

In the Kitáb-i-Íqán He has given expositions of the meanings of the Gospel and other heavenly Books. ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation 155)

Shoghi Effendi on the Íqán

Shoghi Effendi has written that the Íqán is "the most fundamental book on the Bahá'í Revelation"(4) and the "most important book written on the spiritual significance of the Cause" (The Light of Divine Guidance, 37). It is a "book of unsurpassed pre-eminence among the writings of the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation" (Íqán, foreword), and "from a Bahá'í point of view [it is] far more important and significant than any other Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, with the exception of the Aqdas."(5) On many occasions Shoghi Effendi directed Bahá'ís to "read and read over again" the Íqán in their attempts to deepen in the Cause,(6) and he writes to George Townshend that "the book is so important that the most minute detail is worthy of consideration".(7)

The significance of the Íqán, he states, lies in the fact that it "is the most important book wherein Bahá'u'lláh explains the basic beliefs of the Faith", (8) and "contains the basic tenets of Faith"(9) and "the very essence of the Teachings, and because of its clarity and relative simplicity can greatly appeal to every thoughtful reader".(10) In it "the entire religious philosophy of the Cause is clearly sketched

and every thoughtful student of religion cannot but be interested in it", (11) and it "explains the attitude of the Cause to the Prophets of God and their mission in the history of society," (12)

describes "the mystic unity of God and His Manifestations" (World Order 137, cf. Íqán 4) and "deepens the knowledge of the reader by acquainting him with some of the basic theological problems of the Faith. It is therefore indispensable for every student of the Movement". (13)

It is "Bahá'u'lláh's masterful exposition of the one unifying truth underlying all the Revelations of the past" (World Order 61-2), and can lead the reader to "obtain a clear insight into the old scriptures and appreciate the true mission of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh". (14)

In relation to the Báb's revelation, the Guardian states that "Nowhere but in the Kitáb-i-Íqán . . . can we obtain a clearer apprehension of the potency of those forces inherent in that Preliminary Manifestation . . ." (World Order 61-2). Shoghi Effendi emphasises the significance of the Íqán in the history of religions in the following way:

Well may it be claimed that of all the books revealed by the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation, this Book alone, by sweeping away the age-long barriers that have so insurmountably separated the great religions of the world, has laid down a broad and unassailable foundation for the complete and permanent reconciliation of their followers. (God Passes By 139, emphasis added)

Moreover Shoghi Effendi hoped that studying the Íqán would "infinitely enhance the teaching work in the West" (15) and that the "faith [of the Bahá'ís] would be re-inforced by a true intellectual understanding" (16) and "their comprehension of the essentials of the Faith" would be deepened. (17)

In an untranslated letter of Shoghi Effendi to the Persian Bahá'ís, he stated that despite the virtual extinction of Bábí support after the many horrendous persecutions, Bahá'u'lláh enunciated that the Cause of God will be victorious in the subsequent Dispensation which he inaugurated:

After the establishment of the throne of the Lord of mankind in the City 'Abode of Peace', in His most excellent [mustatáb] Kitáb-i-Íqán, He describes the future of the unbelievers (18) . . . (Shoghi Effendi, Má'idíy-i-Ásmání 163-4, provisional translation)

God Passes By explains the relationship of the Íqán to the other volumes of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. It may be possible, in one perspective, to rank the following three works - the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Kitáb-i-Íqán and The Hidden Words:

Foremost among the priceless treasures cast forth from the billowing ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation ranks the

Kitáb-i-Íqán (Book of Certitude). . . This Book, setting forth in outline the Grand Redemptive Scheme of God, occupies a position unequalled by any work in the entire range of Bahá'í literature, except the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy Book. (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, 138-139)

Next to this unique repository of inestimable treasures [Kitáb-i-Íqán] must rank that marvellous collection of gem-like utterances, the Hidden Words. . . (ibid. 139-140)

Furthermore, Shoghi Effendi indicates that there are three volumes of Bahá'u'lláh's writings that can be considered the most important in their category: the Kitáb-i-Íqán as the pre-eminent "doctrinal" work, The Hidden Words as the foremost of his "ethical" writings, and the Seven Valleys as his "greatest mystical composition":

To these two outstanding contributions to the world's religious literature [Kitáb-i-Íqán and The Hidden Words], occupying respectively, positions of unsurpassed pre-eminence among the doctrinal and ethical writings of the Author of the Bahá'í Dispensation, was added, during that same period, a treatise that may well be regarded as His greatest mystical composition, designated as the "Seven Valleys," . . . (ibid. 139-140)

At a time when the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is reaching the Bahá'í world through its first authoritative translation with "its world-shaking significance" (Universal House of Justice, Ridván 1992 message), it is noteworthy that the Universal House of Justice refers to "the incomparable Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh" and directs our attention to "all that has flowed from His prodigious, truth-bearing pen" (letter to the Bahá'ís of the world, 5 March 1993).

Discussion

Although the primary Bahá'í literature reiterates the importance of the Kitáb-i-Íqán, it is possible to see that these writings have also placed complementary emphases on the subject matter of the work. Bahá'u'lláh, in the Íqán itself, primarily discusses its potential to elucidate and interpret Scripture. 'Abdu'l-Bahá focuses on its Christian relevance, relating it to the North American culture in which he was living and teaching at the time. Shoghi Effendi, however, emphasises its importance in clarifying basic Bahá'í tenets and the essence of Bahá'í belief.

The beloved Guardian also makes the bold claim that it provides the means to reconcile the theological barriers between religions.

It is interesting that Bahá'í writers in the West have focused on the Íqán as explaining the Bahá'í approach to other religions. Three examples are worthy of mention. Hippolyte Dreyfus' introduction to his 1908 translation of the Íqán

into French, presents it as a work which "examines the writings of Moses, of Muhammad and Jesus, analyses certain passages of Scripture, . . . and demonstrates the Unity that connects all the divine Manifestations"

(Introduction

xi). George Townshend, who is perhaps the first Western Bahá'í to apply the Íqán in a scholarly manner to his work, says, in a letter to Shoghi Effendi, that The Heart of the Gospel "applies the principles of the Ighan [sic] to the Bible; and the introduction [to The Heart of the Gospel] makes this statement" (qtd. in Hofman, Townshend 281). His analysis, in the introduction to the 1939 edition, emphasises that the Íqán is a work explaining the concept of the progressiveness of Divine revelation, and expands and elaborates this principle of the Bible "in a more modern manner and with more of philosophic detail" (qtd. in *ibid.* 272). Helen Reed Bishop's introduction to the 1950 English edition makes the observation that the Íqán argues against the Christian rejection of Islam, and consequently the work illustrates to "Westerners . . . how vital was Islám's part in the unity of religion" (Introduction, xx).

Few writers, however, have stressed the spiritual experience and rewards of reading the Íqán. The only description of this that the authors have been able to find was Arthur Agnew's back in 1907: At times when reading the Book of Ighan . . . the spirit of light, joy and gladness has come over me, which I have not been able to ascribe to any word or sentence or to any one idea or thought. It seemed like a radiance arising from the Book, from the Certainty of Truth. (Agnew, *Wonderland* 81)

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Appendix 1: An Index

The present editions of the Íqán do not contain an outline to its contents. The following one is suggested in an article in The American Bahá'í (January 1965, p.7):

Part One

1. To attain the knowledge of God one must put one's trust in Him and disregard the standards of men (3-14).
2. The reasons for failure to recognise and accept the Manifestations of God (14-89).
3. In this age the story of past Dispensations is being repeated (13-83).
4. The people of the Bayán should take warning not to forget the wishes and admonitions of their own Book lest they inflict on the Manifestation of God what was inflicted before (92-93).

Part Two

1. The Manifestations reveal an all-compelling power (97-139).
2. The greatest of blessings is to attain the presence of the Manifestation of God in the Day of the Resurrection (139-147).
3. In each Dispensation there occurs a return of the qualities exhibited in earlier Dispensations (148-161).
4. All the Divine Manifestations are at the same time the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End (161-175).
5. The Manifestations of God each have a twofold station: the Station of Unity and the Station of Distinction (152-154, 176-181).
6. The Seeker must turn to the Prophets (182-191).
7. The Seeker and his requirements (192-195).
8. The Seeker will be transformed (196-199).
9. By the "City of Certitude" is meant the Word of God which is the greatest testimony and proof of the Manifestation (199-211).
10. The peoples of every age at the end of their Dispensation, afflicted with the same spiritual disease, believe their Manifestation to be the Final One (135-137, 213-221).
11. Proofs of the Revelation of God in this age (221-257).

Appendix 2: Thematic Guide

Shoghi Effendi in *God Passes By* (139) sets forth the major themes of the Kitáb-i-Íqán. The following is a list, reproduced from *Aids for the Study of the Kitáb-i-Íqán*. (Section IV), with suggested page references to the text opposite:

1. Proclaims unequivocally:
the existence and oneness of a personal God (91, 99, 176)

Unknowable (52, 90, 98-99, 142)

Inaccessible (53, 98-99, 141)

the source of all Revelation (99, 100)

Eternal (9, 16, 17, 135)

Omniscient (98, 170)

Omnipresent (55, 67, 97, 125, 126)

Almighty (170, 176, 206, 219, 243)

2. Asserts:

a) the relativity of religious truth (98-99)

b) the continuity of Divine Revelation (14, 23)

3. Affirms:

a) the unity of the Prophets (20-22, 99, 103-104, 107, 152-154, 161-164, 176-177)

b) the universality of their Message (210, 240)

c) the identity of their fundamental teachings (21, 38-39, 177)

d) the sanctity of their scriptures (197-200, 205-206)

e) the twofold character of their stations (21, 150, 152-154, 176-181)

4. Denounces the blindness and perversity (15-16, 36, 81-83, 108)

of the divines and doctors of every age (122, 164-166, 182-184, 210, 214, 247)

5. Cites and elucidates:

a) the allegorical passages of the New Testament (24-80)

b) the abstruse verses of the Qur'án (255)

c) and the cryptic Muhammadan traditions which have bred those age-long misunderstandings, doubts, and animosities that have sundered and kept apart the followers of the world's leading religious systems (162, 184-188, 201, 238)

6. Enumerates the essential pre-requisites for the attainment (3, 70, 120, 192-196)

by every true seeker of the object of his quest (211)

7. Demonstrates the validity, the sublimity and significance of the Báb's Revelation (229-234)

8. Acclaims the heroism and detachment of His disciples (222, 235-236)

9. Foreshadows and prophecies the world-wide triumph of the Revelation promised to the people of the Bayán (77-78, 93)

10. Upholds the purity and innocence of the Virgin Mary (56-57)

11. Glorifies the Imáms of the Faith of Muhammad (35, 39, 106, 144, 153)
12. Celebrates the martyrdom and lauds the spiritual sovereignty of the Imám Husayn 126-129
13. Unfolds the meaning of such symbolic terms as:
 - a) "Return" 151-161
 - b) "Resurrection" 116, 118, 144, 170
 - c) "Seal of the Prophets" 162, 169, 179, 213
 - d) "Day of Judgement" 116
14. Adumbrates and distinguishes between 100-102, 139-142 the three stages of Divine Revelation 169, 201
15. Expatiates in glorious terms upon the glories and wonders of the "City of God", renewed at fixed intervals, by the dispensation of Providence, for the guidance, the benefit and salvation of all mankind 196-200

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End Notes (Press "Back" to return to article.)

1. For background historical information on the Íqán, see Balyuzi, Bahá'u'lláh 163-5, and Taherzadeh, Revelation (Vol. 1) 153-9.
2. The word 'sayyid' in this verse can also be translated as 'prince' and 'sovereign'.
3. This reference and the next one from Portals to Freedom are not authenticated statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.
4. Appended in his own handwriting to a letter written on his behalf dated 9 June 1932.
5. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated 2 December 1936.
6. For instance, the following letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi state:

"He fully approves the idea of holding study classes, for the deeper the friends go in their understanding of their teachings the more firm and steadfast they will become and the more unwavering in their support of the institutions of the Faith. Books such as the Íqán, "Some Answered Questions" and the "Dawn-Breakers" should be mastered by every Bahá'í. They should read these books over and over again. The first two Books will reveal to them the significance of this divine revelation as well as the unity of all the Prophets of Old."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated 9 June 1932, qtd. in Deepening no. 106).

"Books such as the *Íqán*, *Some Answered Questions*, the *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, *Nabíl's Narrative*, and Dr. Esslemont's *Book* should be read and read over again by every soul who desires to serve the Movement or considers himself an active member of the group." (From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated 9 November 1932, qtd. in Deepening no. 109).

7. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to George Townshend [n.d.], qtd. in Hofman, Townshend 73.

8. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly dated 28 June 1930.

9. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated 14 January 1933 to the Bahá'í youth in London.

10. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated 1 October 1933.

11. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated 2 December 1933.

12. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated 9 February 1932.

13. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated 1 October 1933.

14. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a Local Spiritual Assembly dated 27 March 1931, qtd. in Deepening no. 97.

15. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a National Spiritual Assembly dated 28 June 1930. It noteworthy that in the *Íqán*, Bahá'u'lláh exemplifies the teaching method on pages 40 and 173.

16. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated 31 December 1932.

17. From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer dated 7 August 1934.

18. Shoghi Effendi then quotes the following from the *Íqán*: "The more they are told that this wondrous Cause of God, this Revelation from the Most High, hath been made manifest to all mankind, and is waxing greater and stronger every day,

the fiercer groweth the blaze of the fire in their hearts. The more they observe the indomitable strength, the sublime renunciation, the unwavering constancy of God's holy companions, who, by the aid of God, are growing nobler and more glorious every day, the deeper the dismay which ravageth their souls. In these days, praise be to God, the power of His Word hath obtained such ascendancy over men, that they dare breathe no word... Ere long, thine eyes will behold the standards of divine power unfurled throughout all regions, and the signs of His triumphant might and sovereignty manifest in every land." (Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-Íqán 77-78)

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