

Tablet of Wisdom: Tablet study outline

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Name of Tablet in Arabic or Persian:

Lawh-i-Hikmat

Translation into English:

Tablet of Wisdom (could also be translated as "The Tablet of Philosophy")

The entire Tablet has been translated and published in Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh pp. 137-152. There is

a full definition in the article by Juan Cole "Lawh-i Hikmat (The Tablet of Wisdom)" available online at

Baháí-library.org/encyclopedia/wisdom.html; Robert Stockman discusses the nature of revelation as

described in this Tablet in "Revelation, Interpretation, and Elucidation in the Bahá'í Writings" in

Scripture and Revelation (Bahá'í Studies vol.3) 58-61; there is a discussion of Tablet's literary style

and thematic structure in John S. Hatcher The Ocean of His Words 114-16 and 234-47; Keven

Brown discusses the pre-Bahá'í texts and symbols Bahá'u'lláh was quoting or alluding to in

"Hermes Trismegistus and Apollonius of Tyana in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh," in Revisioning the

Sacred: Studies in the Bábí and Bahá'í Religions vol. 8, 168-179; finally, there is a detailed discussion

of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on early Greek and Hebrew history in Juan Cole "Problems of Chronology in

Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom" in World Order 13:3 (1979) 24-39, also available online at

h-net.msu.edu/~Baháí/diglib/articles/A-E/cole/chrono/chrono.htm.

Significance of Name:

Presumably it is called the Tablet of "Wisdom" because, in Taherzadeh's words, it "stands out

amongst the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh for its philosophical terminology and its references to ancient

Greek philosophers, as well as profound explanations of the influence of the Word of God, the cause

and origin of creation, the mysterious workings of nature, and many other weighty topics."

(Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh vol. 4, 33)

Tablet was revealed in:

Arabic, possibly chosen because Arabic is, as Taherzadeh says, the "language of an intellectual

philosopher." (ibid. 34)

Name of Recipient:

His full name was Mullá Áqá Muhammad-`Alí of Qa'in, surnamed Nabíl-i-Akbar (also known as Fadil-i-

Qa'ini "the learned one of Qa'in"). The short form of his name appears to have been Áqá

Muhammad, or at least Balyuzi refers to him as such in Bahá'u'lláh: King of Glory 382. Interestingly,

in the abjad notation the name Nabíl has the same numerical value as Muhammad, which could be

why Bahá'u'lláh writes "O Muhammad! Hearken unto the Voice proceeding out of the Realm of

Glory..." (This isn't the same Nabíl who wrote the Dawnbreakers — that was Nabíl-i-Zarandi, also

known as Nabíl-i-A`zam.)

The Tablet is also addressed to the "peoples of the world," whom Bahá'u'lláh exhorts to "Forsake

all evil, hold fast that which is good. Strive to be shining examples unto all mankind..." and a number

of other counsels.

Reason for Revelation of the Tablet:

It was revealed in honor of Nabíl's pilgrimage to Akká and to answer some of his questions about

philosophy.

Questions asked that are answered in Tablet:

It would appear that Nabíl had asked a number of questions or raised specific points, because

Bahá'u'lláh says "As regards thine assertions about the beginning of creation..." As well, Bahá'u'lláh

had earlier elucidated these topics to Nabíl, for He says "During Our sojourn in 'Iraq when We were

at the house of one named Majid, We set forth clearly for thee the mysteries of creation and the

origin, the culmination and the cause thereof..."

Date of Revelation:

Nabíl's pilgrimage to Akká took place around AH 1290 (AD 1873-74), so it would have been

revealed around this time.

Place of Revelation:

Akká, while in the house of `Abbud, shortly before Bahá'u'lláh's move to Mazra'ih.

Other Tablets revealed at about the same time:

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas was completed in 1873, presumably before this Tablet (that is, because this

Tablet is included as one of the "Tablets revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas").

The Tablet of Medicine

was also completed in the early 1870s.

Style, subject, and genre of the Tablet: [?]I. Tone of Tablet

1. Tablets with the tone of command and authority (though it concludes with a supplicatory prayer).

II. Subject Covered by Tablet

3. Mystical Writings (a couple of passages, at least, have a mystical tone).

5. Tablets dealing with subjects of learning and knowledge, divine philosophy, mysteries of creation, medicine, alchemy, etc.

7. Tablets dealing with social teachings (or, in Taherzadeh's words, "Teachings for the Spiritualization of Humanity")

III. Literary Genre of Tablet:

While this is a "Letter to an individual," it could easily be seen as constituting an "Essay or book revealed as a letter to an individual" because of its coherent structure and the complexity of its subject.

Voice of Tablet: [?]

Bahá'u'lláh

Outline Contents of Tablet:

Taherzadeh summarizes this Tablet briefly as follows:

"In the Tablet of Hikmat Bahá'u'lláh dwells at length on the work and beliefs of ancient Greek philosophers and sages. He asserts that 'the essence and fundamentals of philosophy have emanated from the Prophets', names some of the Greek philosophers who 'acquired wisdom' from the Prophets of Israel, affirms that the philosophers of old believed in God, praises the work of Socrates and refers to him as 'the most distinguished of all philosophers' who was 'highly versed in wisdom', and gives details of the work and aspirations of several sages of Greece." (ibid.

46)

As Cole summarizes it in his encyclopedia article, the Tablet begins with ethical exhortations directed at the people of the world, continues with praise of down-to-earth virtues such as diligence, generosity and service to humankind, then addresses a question posed to him by Nabíl-i

Akbar, about the beginning of creation, and ends with a discussion of the Logos, exhortations to Nabíl to not grieve, and a supplication to God.

Principal themes of the Tablet:

Major themes include: 1. The decadence and lack of moral value in the world

2. Teachings which are conducive to the spiritualization of the individual and mankind in general

3. The origin of creation, with specific reference to the instrumental role of nature in creation

4. The teachings of past philosophers, particularly those who believed in the divine influence of God in the world of existence

5. The importance of teaching the Cause with wisdom, and a counsel to Nabíl to extol the Name of God among the servants.

Tablet's relationship to other tablets:

I've listed here a few different items:

1) Taherzadeh writes that "in one of His Tablets [Athar-i-Qalam-i-Ala, vol. 7, p. 113], Bahá'u'lláh states that "in each verse of the Tablet of Hikmat an ocean is concealed." (Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh vol. 4, 39)

2) The subject of creation appears in many other Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and also in some Tablets and talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Notable among Abdu'l-Bahá's are the discussions in Some Answered Questions. Taherzadeh also mentions that another valuable source of information on this subject is Amr va Khalq vol. 1, a compilation of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Persian.

3) Also of interest is one way in which the Tablet of Wisdom doesn't relate to any other Tablets or writings. That is, Bahá'u'lláh says that His knowledge is independent of any other sources of information. He writes: "Thou knowest full well that We perused not the books which men possess and We acquired not the learning current amongst them, and yet whenever We desire to quote the sayings of the learned and of the wise, presently

there will appear before the face of thy Lord in the form of a tablet all that which hath appeared in the world and is revealed in the Holy Books and Scriptures."

4) Bahá'u'lláh also refers to an Islamic hadith on the "hidden treasure," which He here says "...is a station that can never be described nor even alluded to." This can be related to Abdu'l-Bahá's first major Tablet, written when He was but a teenager: his "Commentary on 'I Was a Hidden Treasure'" (see Balyuzi, Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh 14). This Tablet has been translated and published by Moojan Momen in the Bahá'í Studies Bulletin.

5) There has been much discussion on Bahá'u'lláh's references to early history, starting with Cole's article "Problems of Chronology in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom" and summarized in Stockman's "Revelation, Interpretation, and Elucidation..." (both cited above). Regarding discrepancies between Bahá'u'lláh's accounting of Greek history and that of current historical theories, the Universal House of Justice has explained "The fact that Bahá'u'lláh makes such statements, for the sake of illustrating the spiritual principles that He wishes to convey, does not necessarily mean that He is endorsing their historical accuracy." (quoted in Keven Brown, "Hermes Trismegistus...", 178)

Biography or bio note of the recipient of the Tablet:
Abdu'l-Bahá provides a biography of the Nabíl-i-Akbar in Memorials of the Faithful 1-5, where He describes Nabíl as being "of wide learning, at once a mujtahid, a philosopher, a mystic, and gifted with intuitive sight," and says that "he was also an accomplished man of letters and an orator without a peer. He had a great and universal mind..." He called Nabíl a 'Hand of the Cause of God,' and Shoghi Effendi designated him an 'Apostle of Bahá'u'lláh.' He was an eminent mujtahid (a high position in the Muslim ecclesiastical hierarchy) who became a Bábí and later a Bahá'í. He died in 1892 after having spent his life teaching the Faith widely.

There are also a couple of references to others in this Tablet. Bahá'u'lláh alludes to Nasiri'd-Din Sháh when he says "We revealed unto one of the rulers that which overpowereth all the dwellers of

the earth," and elsewhere He alludes to the martyrdom of Badí when he refers to the lamentations of the "inmates of the cities of justice and equity." (Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh vol. 4, 38-39)

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