

Tablet of the Temple

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The Mystical Temple: Súratu'l-Haykal

The 'Tablet of the Temple' is a major Arabic Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh containing a mystical interpretation of the body (haykal) of the Manifestation of God. Súrah, the term used for chapters of the Qur'an, is used for many of Bahá'u'lláh's Arabic writings, especially those written in the style of the Qur'an. Haykal is a loan word in Arabic. Its Hebrew cognate hek'l means 'temple', particularly the Jerusalem temple. In Arabic, in addition to meaning a Jewish or Christian temple, it means the body or form of something, particularly the human body or something large. In the Báb's usage, a haykal is a talisman, particularly one in the form of a five-pointed star, which traditions represents the human body. In the Súratu'l-Haykal the primary sense of haykal is the human body, particularly the body of the Manifestation of God, but the meaning 'temple' is also present.

Another Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh states that the Súratu'l-Haykal was first written in Edirne but was revised in 'Akká, probably in 1869. Thus it contains no obvious allusions to Bahá'u'lláh's exile to 'Akká. The numerous passages criticizing the AzAlí Bábís confirm its dating to the late Edirne or early 'Akká periods. The existence of two editions probably explains the numerous variations between the two published texts. It was not written for a particular individual; when asked about the matter Bahá'u'lláh said that He Himself was both the addresser and addressee.

The Súratu'l-Haykal was one of the earliest works of Bahá'u'lláh to be translated into English. However, the translation was poor and its recondite mystical symbolism was difficult for Western Bahá'ís to comprehend. The translation went out of circulation and the Tablet is today little known to Western Bahá'ís apart from some passages translated by Shoghi Effendi.

Content

The Súratu'l-Haykal begins with an invocation and a prayer in which Bahá'u'lláh praises God as the author of revelation and thanks Him for the affliction He has undergone for His sake. He describes how in His greatest affliction, the Maiden (huriyah) appeared to Him calling joyfully, 'This is the Best-Beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not.' She then addresses the Bábís who had not accepted Bahá'u'lláh, warning them that God would raise up another people in their place if they did not aid Bahá'u'lláh. The Bábís, she says, are the blindest of people, since they deny the like of that by which they prove the truth of their own religion - presumably a reference to Bahá'u'lláh's claim that His own writings too are divinely inspired. She

calls on 'this temple' to arise since all contingent beings are resurrected by Him. She addresses the eye, the ear and the tongue of Bahá'u'lláh, calling on His eye, for example, to look only at the beauty of God, not at the heavens or the earth.

Bahá'u'lláh replies to the maiden, telling her how Azal, the brother whom He had raised, had tried to kill Him. He tells her that when this act became known, Azal had written to the Bábís saying that Bahá'u'lláh had tried to kill him. (The context suggests that Bahá'u'lláh's discovery of Azal's plot was the occasion of writing this Tablet but it is not certain.)

Bahá'u'lláh now moves to the central theme of the Tablet, the exposition of the metaphysical significance of the haykal. The four Arabic letters of the word are each associated with an attribute of God whose Arabic name contains that letter and with an aspect of God's relation with the universe:

ha: huwiyih (essence): God's will

ya: qadir (power, which is spelled QDYR in Arabic): God's sovereignty

kaf.- karam (generosity): God's bounteousness

lam.-fadl (grace): God's grace

Elsewhere in the Tablet Bahá'u'lláh meditates on the spiritual significance of various parts of the body of the Manifestation: the hem of His robe, which purifies by its touch; the foot, Created from the steel of might to be steadfast in the path of God; His breast, which reflects the lights of God upon all things; and the heart, the repository of all knowledge and from which new and wondrous sciences will come forth. Bahá'u'lláh is told that His temple has been made the fountainhead of each of God's names and attributes. He has thus been given the power to recreate all things, bringing forth suns from motes of dust. He is called the 'Self of God', for the saying 'there is no God but I' applies to Bahá'u'lláh.

The Tablet returns often to the theme of the disbelief of the Bábís, criticizing Bábí leaders for priding themselves on such titles as 'mirror' and 'letter... while it is Bahá'u'lláh who is the creator of the letters and mirrors. God's acceptance of their pious deeds is, He warns, dependent on their belief He warns that their unbelief will lead the mass of believers astray. He criticizes those who accepted the new faith but came to Him with questions about the Shi'i Imáms and Bábís, in the end losing their faith. These, He says, are like the Jewish leaders with Jesus. Finally, He insists that it was He who was prophesied by the Báb in His writings. He calls Himself the Primal Point, a title of the Báb, thus identifying Himself with the Báb.

The Súratu'l-Haykal defies easy summary, for it is a dense tapestry of mystical imagery drawn from esoteric Shi'ism, the Qur'an, the writings of the Báb and even the Bible.

Relation to other texts

At Bahá'u'lláh's orders, the Súratu'l-Haykal was written as one point of a five-pointed star, with the Tablets to the Kings forming the other points. To judge by the first publication of this Tablet, these other Tablets were those

addressed to the Pope, Napoleon III, the Czar of Russia, Queen Victoria and the Sháh of Iran. Of this combined Tablet Bahá'u'lláh says, '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', evidently an allusion to Rev. 21:22-3, which in early Arabic translations of the Bible evidently said, 'the glory of God [Bahá'u'lláh] is its light', a passage quoted by Bahá'u'lláh elsewhere. Shoghi Effendi identifies an allusion to 'the temple of the Lord' that will be built by 'the man whose name is the Branch' foretold in Zachariah 6:12-13. 14 In addition to the Bible there is the famous tradition of Kumayl, a well-known mystical tradition of Shi'ism, which identifies one of the five stages of reality as 'a light that shines from the morn of eternity and illumines the temples of unity (hayakilu't-Tawhíd). Shi'i commentators identify the 'temples of unity' as the prophets and Imáms. Elsewhere the Imám Husayn is called 'the temple of revelation' (haykalu'l-wahy wa't-tanzil).

— Tablet of the Temple (Used by permission of the curator)