

1-12-97 Humor

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HUMOR

M E M O R A N D U M

To: The Universal House of Justice

Date: 12 January 1997

From: Research Department

The "Humourist"

In his electronic mail message of 21 November 1996 to the Universal House of Justice, Mr. xxxx enquires about the existence of a Tablet of Baha'u'llah in which God is referred to as the "All-Humorous", and he requests passages from the Writings regarding humour or laughter. We provide the following response.

Tablet of Baha'u'llah

As to the existence of a Tablet revealed by Baha'u'llah in which "He refers to God as the All-Humorous", and tells a funny story", the following extract from a letter dated 19 February 1981, written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, addresses the question raised by Mr. xxxx:

Through your letter to the Universal House of Justice of 14 January you requested a copy of a purported Tablet of Baha'u'llah on the subject of humour, and we are instructed to inform you that no Tablet by the Blessed Beauty on this subject is known. However, in a Tablet Baha'u'llah states that one of the Names of God is the "Humourist."

The Tablet mentioned above is revealed in the Arabic language. It has not to date been translated into English. Though it begins with the words, "In My Name, the Humourist" [provisional translation], the Tablet does not contain a humorous anecdote. Rather, it is a serious mystical poem, revealed in the form of a prayer. The text does not illuminate the reference to the "Humourist". It is, however, interesting to note that, while dealing with an exalted theme, the language of expression is, unexpectedly, that of the common people--light, simple, and even colloquial.

Although the Research Department has not been able to locate any statement in the Baha'i teachings which provides an authoritative interpretation of the term "Humourist" or, indeed, of the Tablet in question, we wish to observe that the word "Humourist" does not necessarily have the connotation of "joker", of being a comical person, or engaged in frivolity. There is a range of meanings associated with this word in the English language, including, for example, the now little-used definition of "one given to humouring or indulging". So, too, there are shades of meaning attached to the Arabic word "mazzah", which has been translated as "Humourist". One possible connotation is "playful".

To obtain a deeper understanding of the concept in the Baha'i Scriptures, it

might well be helpful to go beyond the literal translation and to examine some of the connotations associated with the meaning and use of humour in Qur'anic literature with a view to finding possible parallels to the use of humour in the Baha'i Writings. For example, it is interesting to note that recent scholars have identified geniality and amusement as the essential ingredients of humour, and playfulness and amusement as the essence of what is comical. They further assert that, within the Qur'an itself, the form of humour most prevalent is irony--the perception of a clash between appearance and reality, between the ideal and what actually is.

The Research Department regrets that, due to the pressure of other assignments, it is not possible to undertake a detailed study of the subject of the use of humour in the Baha'i Writings. No doubt, at some time in the future, this task will be undertaken and the results of the research will be made available.

References to Humour

While there are many statements in the Baha'i Writings concerning happiness and joy, there are relatively few direct references to humour and laughter. For Mr. xxx's interest, we attach a short compilation¹ of extracts relating to these subjects.

1. The compilation referred to can be found in the compilations section of archive under the title "Humor."—ARCHIVE Editor